Microhistory in early modern London: John Bedford (1601–1667)

JEREMY BOULTON*

ABSTRACT. This article represents an exercise in microhistory applied to early modern London. Deploying prosopographical methods, it reconstructs the life history of one John Bedford (1601–1667) from his birth in Huntingdon to his death in the West End of London. Much of his adult life was spent in the London parish of St Dionis Backchurch, with an interlude in the Irish town of Londonderry. Bedford fled from Ulster at the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion in 1641. His unusually detailed will provides the bedrock of this narrative, and his reconstructed life sheds important light on ties between London and Ulster, on debt and credit relations and on the methodological strengths and limitations of community studies that focus on a specific place.

‘What can we know about the peoples lost to history’? In the late 1970s, Italian historians suggested that a ‘new’ method of uncovering the past would be to pursue what would later come to be called ‘microhistory’. Such a history was not to be based on the large-scale quantitative studies then (but not now) fashionable, but would focus instead on the individual experience. Drawing from anthropological methods, the result would ‘create an ethnographic history of everyday life by devoting itself to extremely circumscribed phenomena such as a single community, a family, or an individual’. The method would in effect be ‘prosopography from below in which the relationships, decisions, restraints, and freedoms faced by real people in actual situations would emerge’. Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, proponents of this new method, argued that a ‘nominative methodology can be carried well beyond the strictly demographic sources’. This ‘science of real life’ would seek to allay their fear that historical methods then current risked ‘losing the complexity of the relationships

* School of Historical Studies, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne.
that connect any individual to a particular society’.

The idea, then, was to uncover the individual experience, using nominative techniques and as many sources as possible: ‘The lines that converge upon and diverge from the name, creating a kind of closely woven web, provide for the observer a graphic image of the network of social relationships into which the individual is inserted.’ Career reconstruction should also focus on ‘the lower strata of society’, to shed light on the history of those below the elite.

The purpose of this article is to apply this methodology of microhistory to uncover the social world of an individual who was during his life an inhabitant of the London parish of St Dionis Backchurch, a citizen of the City of London and also, for some time, of the Ulster Plantation town of Londonderry. It is not argued here that this is by any means the first such exercise. ‘Microhistory’ as a method of historical enquiry now has a more than respectable track record. To take some recent examples that focus on individual experience, Steve Hindle, using detailed church court records, has uncovered the thick historical context behind the ‘shaming of Margaret Knowsley’, and a generation of historians has been brought up on Alan Macfarlane’s brilliant anthropological dissection of *The family life of Ralph Josselin*. Focusing on the individual experience has been used recently by urban historians to great effect, as well. Robert Tittler has recently deployed detailed prosopography in his splendid series of biographies of (mostly) leading urban townsmen and women in early modern England. Analysis of individual social and economic networks has been carried out for the Colchester middling sort by Shani D’Cruze.

Londoners have likewise been placed under this historical microscope. Peter Lake, for example, has recently produced an outstanding piece of ‘microhistory that got big on me’ in *The boxmaker’s revenge*, in some senses a fascinating companion to Paul Seaver’s biography of Nehemiah Wallington, the radical Eastcheap turner. Bernard Capp, too, has deconstructed a church court case involving the poet Michael Drayton. Social-network analysis, based on detailed diaries or personal records has also been used by Ian Archer to reconstruct the social worlds of Samuel Pepys. Vanessa Harding has similarly looked at the social networks of Richard Smyth. Archer has noted that one particular strength of network analysis based on diaries and accounts is that the method uncovers ‘a more representative range of their social transactions’. Attempts to reconstruct individual loyalties to particular institutions of City Company or parish from the records generated by those very bodies ‘run the risk of their answers being archivally determined’. In the end, Archer’s study of Pepys’s social networks demonstrated how the different communities
within London might be linked together in the social networks of one individual. Approaches to metropolitan identity must therefore, he argued, transcend ‘institutionally bounded approaches’.12

One purpose of this article is to adopt a similar perspective. The life of John Bedford, parish clerk, serves as a valuable corrective to geographically bounded or institutional studies. Since the parish register record of Bedford’s burial provides no clue as to his then current residence, a historian researching the parish of St Dionis, taking the perspective of parish, or even City-based sources, would be most unlikely to have found Bedford’s will in the Archdeaconry of Middlesex.13 Without knowledge of his will, our humble parish clerk would have been labelled as perhaps something of a social oddity, a poor man occasionally in receipt of charity, yet who was at one time Master of a minor City Company and who was buried in his local parish church, a man married in the parish in the late 1620s but who otherwise only appears in its historical record from the late 1640s. Bedford’s earlier history – his abortive career in Ulster, his flight from the 1641 Rebellion and his revealing deathbed debt narrative – would have been missed.

It is therefore my intention in this article to deploy traditional microhistorical methods to the history of one humble Londoner. It will be traditional in the sense that it is a prosopographical analysis, a career reconstruction, based on fragmentary material. Unlike previous exercises, however, it is not based on a detailed church or criminal court case. It does not exploit a rich cache of personal papers. Our hero wrote nothing for public consumption, and was involved in no pamphlet debate or contemporary controversy. He was genuinely, even maddeningly, obscure. The principal source for what follows here is simply his last will and testament. The aim is to place the story related in his will in its historical context, and to suggest the larger lessons that his story teaches. Our hero, John Bedford, parish clerk, citizen and cloth worker, lived out the majority of his adult life in a single London parish, with an interlude in pre-Rebellion Londonderry. The article begins by setting out the geographical settings in which Bedford lived, goes on to reconstruct his biography and ends with a discussion of some wider implications. Bedford’s documentary legacy is presented in the appendix.

**THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTINGS**

*St Dionis Backchurch*

The first of the two places with which John Bedford was associated was the small parish (just 4.8 acres in size) where he spent the majority
of his adult life. Located north of London Bridge, adjacent to the wealthy Cornhill district of the City of London, the parish of St Dionis Backchurch was relatively well to do. In the 1638 tithe listing of the City it fell within the second most wealthy group of parishes, with 39 per cent of its estimated 242 householders paying £20 or more in rent per year.\textsuperscript{14} Hearth tax evidence from the early 1660s suggests that the average size of a dwelling in the parish exceeded six hearths per household, placing the parish amongst the wealthiest within the City walls.\textsuperscript{15} A guess at its population from burial totals would put the total population at around 800 people, reasonably large for an inner city parish.\textsuperscript{16}

In terms of occupational composition the parish has been described correctly as consisting of ‘a large number of substantial merchants and tradesmen’.\textsuperscript{17} Straddling the important thoroughfare of Fenchurch Street, the parish contained numbers of cellars and shops, and on Lime Street, Pewterers’ Company Hall.\textsuperscript{18} The occupations of over 200 individuals who died or who baptized children in the 1650s and 1660s reveal a very substantial merchant community (see Table 1). The presence of Pewterers’ Hall explains the presence of its Clerk and Beadles in the parish register, and at least five other pewterers lived in the parish in that same period. In other ways the parish’s occupational structure was similar to those of other intra mural London parishes, with substantial clothing and victualling sectors.\textsuperscript{19} It seems to have contained a few more professionals than the norm.

During the period of the English Revolution (1640–1660), which occupied much of Bedford’s stay in the parish, its social elite included a number of masters of city companies, such as the Apothecaries’, Merchant Tailors’, Clothworkers’ and Cordwainers’, as well as five city aldermen.\textsuperscript{20} This parochial elite appears to have been wholeheartedly behind Parliament during the first Civil War, and it has been argued that the parish was something of a Presbyterian stronghold. That said, it has been pointed out that, in fact, the parish was relatively slow both to take down its Laudian altar and to dispose of its vestments.\textsuperscript{21} It does seem likely, however, that after the first Civil War many people in the parish returned to less radical religious fashions. Its gifted Puritan minister, Nathaniel Hardy, is known to have dropped his adherence to Presbyterian beliefs in the 1640s, and indeed he was rewarded as a Royalist sympathiser at the Restoration.\textsuperscript{22} St Dionis, it has been claimed, was a ‘center of Royalists in the city’ by the middle of the 1650s.\textsuperscript{23} The entire parish, including the parish church, was destroyed in the 1666 Great Fire of London. The church was rebuilt subsequently, but was finally demolished in 1878.\textsuperscript{24}
Table 1

Occupations in the parish of St Dionis Backchurch in the 1650s and 1660s compared to wider City parishes (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>St Dionis Backchurch</th>
<th>City of London intra mural parishes (1641–1700)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decorating/furnishing</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentry</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leather</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalwork</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous production</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous services</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professions</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victualling</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of individuals</td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- Intra mural parishes were the parishes within the City walls, of which there were 97 in this period. The parishes used in Beier’s sample are listed in A. L. Beier, ‘Engine of manufacture: the trades of London’, in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay eds., London 1500–1700: the making of the metropolis (Harlow, 1986), 148.

Londonderry on the eve of the Irish Rebellion, 1641

Not surprisingly, the only place other than London with which the adult John Bedford may be definitely associated was the part of Ireland whose social and financial ties to London were uniquely close. The county of Londonderry had been thus named only twenty or so years before Bedford’s arrival, at the time of the ‘Ulster Plantation’. Originally the county of Coleraine, county Londonderry had been created only in 1613, when most of the land was divided up and allocated to the London Companies. At that point, the town of Derry was also renamed Londonderry. The City managed this property via a standing committee, which came later to be known as the Irish Society. The London Companies, albeit often grudgingly, invested heavily in their plantations, placing their daily management in the hands of agents. In 1635, however,
the City of London lost its rights over the Plantation and was fined heavily in Star Chamber, a prosecution that was driven primarily by Charles I’s need for money. The lands reverted to the Crown, then to a Commission that was set up in 1638. Shortly after the Irish Rebellion, in a bid to win the City of London’s support, Charles I hastily gave back the Londonderry lands. His gesture was, typically, far too late. The ‘Londonderry Business’ had already poisoned the City’s relationship with the Crown.26

Until 1640, Londonderry was the largest of the Ulster towns, but this is not saying very much. Most Ulster towns were relatively underdeveloped. On the eve of the Rebellion in 1641 it contained perhaps 500 adult males, making a total population of only 2,000 or so – not much more than twice as many people as in Bedford’s London parish. Other estimates put the population as low as 1,000.27 The majority of its inhabitants may, in fact, have been of Scottish origin. A report of 1637 noted that English there were ‘weak and few in number … the Scots being many in numbers, and twenty to one for the English’.28 Unfortunately, given the state of Irish records, there is little extant information about the town’s inhabitants before the 1641 Rebellion. It may be that many inhabitants treated it as a staging post en route to an agricultural holding in the surrounding county.29 Given their small size and demographic instability, too, ‘no stable merchant community developed in any Ulster town during the early seventeenth century’ and occupational specialization may have been similarly limited. Lacking a stable merchant community, it is said, Londonderry, in common with other Ulster towns, may also have lacked capable administrators, although this latter claim hardly squares with the fact that the town is said to have acted as an administrative centre for the county of Londonderry, with twice-yearly assizes and quarter sessions held in the town.30 It has also been argued that the local economy may have had relatively underdeveloped facilities for the provision of credit.31 The town, which contained Ulster’s most important port and was blessed with a good ‘store of shipping’ in 1637, saw significant imports of wine in the 1630s, perhaps to service the local gentry population. It also imported a wide range of manufactured goods and luxury foodstuffs.32 The town exported linen yarn to Lancashire and was otherwise a conduit for the products of Ulster’s pastoral agriculture.33 The Irish Society managed a significant local salmon fishery, the products of which were exported as far as Spain and the Mediterranean.34

John Bedford: A Reconstructed Life

Of the several thousand wills that I have read recently, as part of a study of London charity,35 Bedford’s is the only one that contains what is in
essence a partial autobiography, promising a particularly revealing exercise in microhistory. John Bedford’s will contains an extraordinary level of detail about the debts he owed, including a unique ‘debtor narrative’ of his time in Ireland. His will (reproduced in the appendix below, from which the quoted passages in this article are taken) gives us a few clues about the man. Supplementary documentary material fleshes out something more about his personal history. We know from the records of his apprenticeship and subsequent freedom, that he was the son of Thomas Bedford, yeoman, of King’s Ripton, Huntingdonshire. It is possible that his father died early in the 1630s. Bedford was apprenticed to Robert Jackson, clothworker, a long-time resident of St Dionis Backchurch, in 1619 and he became free of the Clothworkers’ Company in 1627. He never progressed to the livery and there is no evidence that he subsequently practised in any branch of the clothworking craft. Given that the average age of apprenticeship in London was about eighteen, we can assume that Bedford was born around the beginning of the seventeenth century. In fact he was almost certainly born in the year 1601. His master, Jackson (d. 1656), played a significant part in parish life, regularly attending the vestry in the 1640s and early 1650s and serving in a number of parish offices from the 1630s. We also know from an entry in the churchwardens’ accounts that Jackson, who himself served as churchwarden in 1630, had travelled outside the country. In the accounting year 1629/1630 the wardens paid 4s 4d to get absolution for a sentence of excommunication ‘for myselfe, Mr Jackson and the 3 sidesmen being upon Excommunication for not carrying in our presentment when Mr Jackson was out of England Notwithstanding the Judge gave respit until his returne’. It is also possible that Jackson served as Master of the Clothworkers’ Company in 1644.

John Bedford was married shortly after he achieved his freedom, to one Elizabeth Oldberry, in St Dionis Backchurch, 14 April 1628. Thereafter Bedford’s career is hidden from us. He is not named in a 1631 listing of the 80 parishioners who contributed to church repairs, and there is no one of that name in any London parish in the 1638 listing of householders, although a few returns are missing and the listing for St Dionis is defective. Bedford’s will mentions a daughter, Elizabeth, who, at the age of ‘30 or thereabouts’ married one Giles Diston, a pewterer, on 19 April 1663, again in the parish of St Dionis. There is no record of Elizabeth’s baptism in St Dionis, however, although there is a possible matching baptism for one Elizabeth Beedford to John and Elizabeth ‘Beedford’, in the neighbouring parish of St Gabriel, Fenchurch Street, in 1633.

Without his will, we would simply not know where John Bedford was, or what he was doing, between his marriage to his wife Elizabeth
in April 1628 and his re-appearance in St Dionis as parish clerk in the 1640s. From his will, however, it is clear that Bedford was, of all places, in Londonderry, Ulster, around the time of the Irish Rebellion in 1641. He thus must have moved to Ulster at some time between 1628 and 1640. He seems to have forged business links with Simon Amory (d. 1646), a merchant of Barnstaple,50 for whom he signed some bonds and with the Finch brothers, one of whom, Henry Finch, became Sheriff and then Mayor of Londonderry in 1640–1641.51 Bedford’s debts clearly indicate that he was involved in the tobacco and wine trades in some way; perhaps he was operating a tavern or victualling house in Londonderry. No record that I have yet consulted, however, lists Bedford in that town. He does not appear in any early listings and, unfortunately, there are very few surviving Irish parish registers, or wills, from before 1642. The names of a number of individuals mentioned in his 1667 will, however, can be found in the surviving fragmentary register of Templemore parish (now Derry Cathedral) between 1642 and 1643 which thus confirms Bedford’s links to the Londonderry community. Bedford’s deathbed worries thus related to Irish debts he had incurred more than a quarter of a century before he made his last will and testament (see the appendix below).

We do know from his will that Bedford, a refugee from the Irish Rebellion, like many of the refugees ‘came safe to Westchester [i.e. Chester]’, where he seems to have stored his personal papers.52 At some time between late 1641 and early 1647, then, Bedford returned to the parish of St Dionis. Consultation of the surviving vestry minutes and churchwardens’ accounts show that Bedford was serving as the parish clerk of St Dionis by April 1647, the date from which the extant records of the vestry survive. Bedford gained the additional post of vestry clerk in 1651.53 We do not know exactly when he became parish clerk, but the parish register records the burial of a previous clerk in the month of March, 1646. As parish and vestry clerk Bedford was fully involved with parish affairs, kept the parish accounts and was sometimes involved in collecting or dispensing funds on the parish’s behalf. In 1650 he fell out with the sexton, over fees taken by parish officers for opening pews during service time. It was recorded that there was a difference between John Bedford the Clarke, and Thomas Kensford, about the opening of pews in the Church, and the business being taken into Considderation, it was ordered that whereas formerly the clarke did from time to time allow unto the Sexton ten shillings quarterly & no more, It was ordered that hereafter the Clarke should pay unto Thomas Kensford fourteene shillings quarterly: that is to say during the time of Mr Hardyes abode in the parish & no longer. Except there were a full congregation, and withall it was ordered that the said sexton should not open any pue, but all allowed to the Clark for his Benefit.54
Bedford’s parish office thus gave him a key role in the often socially sensitive, and financially rewarding, task of managing the seating in the church. He was given a further duty that must have increased his local profile. The vestry, worried by tardy arrivals or non-attendance by parishioners at vestry meetings, ordered in 1652 that ‘the clarke shall give warning that the parishioners are desired to appeare by such an hour’. Bedford must have had the confidence of the vestry, for he was successful in the competition held by the parish to choose the new ‘Register’ under the 1653 Civil Registration Act. We know, too, that he made a journey to Romford on parish business in 1666 or thereabouts. He was present (since he signed the vestry minutes) during at least the early stages of the 1665 Plague but seems to have abandoned his parish offices after the Great Fire, since by April 1667 the vestry had resolved ‘that John Bedford late Clerke of the said parish shall deliver to the said John Alsop [his successor] the Register Booke of the said parish’. Bedford, in fact, had moved to St Martin in the Fields, where he became, according to his will, a deputy clerk.

Before he returned to St Dionis from Ulster his first wife, Elizabeth, had apparently died, because on 4 April 1648 Bedford married Phillip [i.e. Philippa] Austin in St Dionis. His second marriage, however, was seemingly childless and lasted just nine years, since ‘Phillip Bedford, wife of John Bedforde, parish clerk’, was buried on 21 July 1657. He was probably resident in the parish from at least 1647 until the entire area, including the church, was destroyed in the 1666 Fire. Where Bedford actually lived in the parish on his return from Londonderry is rather difficult to pin down. However, his inventory refers to ground sold to the Pewterers’ Company. Reference to that Company’s records indicates that Bedford moved into a house on Lime Street in St Dionis, at a rent of £4 per year, between 1655 and 1656, a year or so before his second wife’s death. He paid rent there until the entire street was destroyed in the 1666 Fire. The 1666 hearth tax records list him as inhabiting a house with four hearths on the west side of Lime Street, one dwelling down from Pewterers’ Hall. He is unlikely to have lived alone, so his daughter may have lived with him, and we do know that a servant of his, one Dorcas Burt, was buried in the parish on 5 June 1662.

As his will makes clear, Bedford’s principal social relationships were determined by his parish offices. The overseers of his will were regular attenders at the St Dionis vestry meetings, and other citizens living locally are mentioned. Daniel Rawlinson, ‘Citizen and vintner’, one of his ‘Cordiall Loveing friends’ and an overseer of his will, is a particularly interesting social connection. This is the same Rawlinson who was a friend of Samuel Pepys. Rawlinson, apparently a noted Royalist, kept the
Mitre Tavern in Fenchurch Street, ‘one of the busiest and most elegant of London taverns’, and was an occasional actor in Pepys’s social world. Pepys himself recorded visiting the church of St Dionis only twice, both in connection with Rawlinson. In 1660 he sat with ‘Mr Rawlinson and heard a good sermon’ in ‘Dr Hardy’s church’ on the occasion of the death of the Duke of Gloucester. Pepys later recorded attending a sermon at ‘Mr Rawlinson’s church’ on Christmas Day in 1664, noting, as was his wont, the ‘very great store of fine women there is in this church, more then I know anywhere else about us’.

John Bedford’s social status was ambiguous. At least at his death, he would hardly have qualified as a member of the ‘middling sort’ on his probated wealth alone. His ascribed status, however, seems to have derived from his offices, education and social contacts rather than from his property. He seems to have been, in effect, participating in middling culture without possessing the expected financial wherewithal. Nothing is more symptomatic of this than the fact that throughout the late 1640s and all through the 1650s, he was a regular recipient of charitable handouts made by parish benefactors. In 1647 he received a payment of 6s 8d from the gift of a Lady Harvie, and for the whole of his subsequent parish career he was a regular beneficiary of gifts from Harvie and equally regular payments from a charity established by Mr Nicholas Abdie. Bedford also received payments, sometimes explicitly stated to be ‘unto the poore of this parish’, from the charities endowed by Mr Henrie Brabourne, Thomas Turgis and Mr Nicholas Aylett. Bedford must, therefore, have been considered by his peers to be of little fortune. Parish clerks did not, of course, ‘serve God for nought’ but received ‘a Temporal Reward of Salary and Perquisites’.

It would be a difficult and uncertain exercise to estimate his income with any confidence, in the absence of personal accounts. He would have had a modest salary from the parish and a steady, but unquantifiable, extra income in fees for his attendance and duties in the church. One would guess, however, that Bedford could sustain an image of ‘respectability’ by the time of the Restoration. He was styled ‘Mr’ in 1666 and 1667 and he had the wherewithal to keep a servant in 1662. Moreover, as discussed below, he must have been able to bear the modest costs of the offices he held in the Parish Clerks’ Company between 1660 and 1667. He seems to have been able to make at least one loan in the late 1650s. Bedford himself was mentioned as a legatee in the will of John Bennett, a prominent local pewterer, vestryman and another friend of Daniel Rawlinson. Another sign of respectable status was that at his death he was granted his final wish to be buried in the parish church (or more properly in its ruins) next to the bones of his second wife, and surrounded by past generations of parish dignitaries. Precisely as requested
in his will, it is recorded: ‘24th September 1667, John Bedford, late Clarke of this parish: died 22 September: bur. in the Ruins of the Church, at the West part of the North isle’. 65

Bedford made his will in what must have been lodgings in St Martin’s in the Fields, in August 1667. His goods were inventoried by the Middlesex probate court three months after his burial in St Dionis, and probate was granted to his daughter Elizabeth Diston. His probated goods are what might be expected from a widower living alone. His total moveable goods were valued at only £34 1s 4d. A substantial chunk of this relatively meagre sum came from the leasehold property that he had occupied before the Fire: ‘ready money for ground sold to the pewterers Company’. 66

The proportion of his inventoried wealth devoted to clothing is not greatly out of line with what is found elsewhere, and confirms Peter Earle’s point that status-conscious Londoners spent a lot on clothes, perhaps a quarter of their total expenditure; the valuation attached to Bedford’s clothing also confirms Earle’s estimate that ‘it would cost a minimum of £6 or £7 to provide a complete ready-made outfit for a man of any quality at all’. 67

The inventory contains no mention at all of any of the debts about which Bedford agonized in his will. His total inventoried wealth would place him well below the level that Earle has suggested as appropriate for London’s ‘middle class’, although clearly such a calculation does not allow for the declining earnings and ante mortem property transfers that might have reduced the total estate of a man in his late sixties (presumably a dowry was provided to his daughter Elizabeth, who had married four years previously). 68

I can find no record of John Bedford at all in St Martin’s in the vestry minutes, in any surviving churchwardens’ or overseers’ accounts, or in the parish burial register. Parish clerks were allowed to appoint deputies under their Company Charter, 69 and this may have been the sort of post he took up. If so, Bedford was probably paid directly by the then St Martin’s parish clerk, Henry Warne, and would not therefore have appeared in the parish accounts. He seems to have taken up the post in 1666. How he came to be at St Martin’s is not known, but it may be significant that Nathaniel Hardy, the minister of St Dionis, a regular attender at the St Dionis vestry meetings, received the vicarage of St Martin-in-the-Fields at the Restoration in 1660. 70

Bedford’s reconstructed career thus far, however, completely omits another social world that he inhabited. That Bedford possessed a ‘standish’ at his death, 71 indicates a professional approach to writing and penmanship. In fact, he became a leading light in the London Parish Clerks’ Company. This Company was essentially a fellowship or association of all London’s parish clerks. It had no livery, and its members did not take on
apprentices. Membership of the Company did not confer the freedom of the City and many clerks must, like Bedford, have achieved the freedom of the City via membership of other London Companies. Bedford’s citizenship and livery-company membership were clearly important enough to be included in his occupational ascription in his will. There is no evidence, however, that he ever followed the craft of working cloth. His inventory contains no evidence of working tools, and his will no references to the sort of debts that a clothworker might have incurred. We should not be surprised by this. By the ‘custom of London’ those achieving the freedom of the City were free to practise any trade or to keep shop within the City. Membership of the Parish Clerks’ Company did confer some tangible benefits as well as duties. The Company possessed a Hall, which, during Bedford’s lifetime, lay in the parish of St Martin Vintry, in Vintners’ Lane, near the River Thames. Members of the Company were charged with the compilation of London’s Bills of Mortality, in addition to their parochial duties, which included leading the singing in church. London parish clerks were excused all other offices. Individual clerks were admitted to the brethren on oath, on the production of a licence from the Bishop of London or a certificate from the minister or churchwardens of his parish. The Company was, under its Charter of 1639, ruled by a single master and governed by a Court of Assistants. Bedford became an Assistant in 1660, and also served as both Under and Upper Warden, 1661–1663. Early in 1665 he was involved in the purchase of a new organ, for which he was repaid £20. In 1665 he was chosen Master of the Company, serving during the Plague. He remained an Assistant of the Company until his death in 1667.

Some implications

Microhistory is normally associated with the amassing of thick historical detail about a particular incident or series of incidents, shedding insights into a historical event or phenomenon. This exercise has been undertaken in the belief that the reconstruction of a humble individual’s life can uncover more general lessons.

To begin with some prosaic points. Once placed in a familial context it is clear that wills can mislead as to the health of the testator and his or her marital history and can be very poor guides to kinship networks. There is nothing in his will to indicate that Bedford had made a second marriage. There is also the fact that his inventory is a poor guide to the debts Bedford was clearly encumbered with. In reality it is not at first sight at all clear how these debts, his funeral expenses and his legacies could have been met from his meagre inventoried estate. The fact that Bedford’s
debts are not mentioned in the body of the inventory is technical: ‘Money owed by the deceased to other people was another item which did not have to be included, for such debts belonged not to the deceased but to the creditors.’Probate inventories, of course, are not necessarily reliable guides to total wealth, since they do not list real estate, and it was possible for goods to be removed by creditors before the inventory was compiled. The absence of any cash other than that deriving from Bedford’s property is slightly surprising, but perhaps cash was appropriated to pay outstanding liabilities before the inventory was drawn up. Lastly, of course, a probate inventory represented only a stage in, not the end of the process of probate. It may well have been the case that Bedford’s overseers and executors simply left unpaid the ‘desperate debts’ he owned up to in his will, especially given the long time interval which had elapsed since they were incurred and the great difficulty and trouble that would have been involved in contacting his creditors. Creditors, too, were often pessimistic that such desperate debts were recoverable. We cannot rule out the possibility, however, that Bedford’s debts might have caused problems for his daughter as she administered his estate.

Bedford’s will also provides extraordinary testimony to the varied nature of debt and credit relationships in early modern England. Much of his will is a narrative of the efforts he made to settle his Irish debts. His experience should be understood as taking place in a financial system in which written instruments were playing a more prominent role. The bond in particular is thought to have become more commonly used as an instrument of credit in the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding the ‘under-developed’ nature of the Ulster economy, Bedford’s experiences in the province, in fact, suggest that trading relationships there were underpinned by entirely conventional systems of credit. Bedford’s concern regarding his long standing Irish debts was particularly coloured by a disastrous decision to stand as one of the sureties for bonds for a West country merchant, Simon Amory. The risks associated with such bonds, which embroiled many in brittle networks of debt and credit, were well known to contemporaries. ‘It is impossible to give a Catalogue of all that have been Sufferers on this account, who have learned to know the force of Bonds, by the great Damages they have sustained’, wrote a cleric in 1688. Bedford recalled he owed £20 to Henry Finch for one Amory bond that had been called in. Bedford was, however, deeply concerned about the residue of another obligation he had incurred from Amory in Ireland. To Bedford’s evident horror, a Mr Chandler attempted to get him to pay the full amount on a bond that had already (mostly) been settled. Bedford repeatedly says in his will that he owed only a residue of 50s or so: ‘the truth is I have been full of feares which caused me to forbeare to
paye those debts formerly mentioned not knowing what straights I might have been put unto for I was resolved to have been a prisiner rather then to have paid that bond twice over’.

Bedford had, however, also benefited from such bonds, since in his will he recalled ‘I doe owe unto one Mr London a matter of sixteen pounds for which one Mr Hall an antient gentleman was bound for me and doubtlesse he paid the money.’ Such instruments clearly passed by sale or inheritance to third parties, as is suggested by Bedford’s re-collection that:

I doe owe to one Mr Marriott that was a Ship Master but he is dead Long Since but I am Informed that one Mr Harden or Harding a waxchandler that Lived in Crooked Lane hath some rite to that money and if he can produce the bond or give a sufficient discharge I desire he may be paid.

The market in such bonds clearly extended to Ulster, since the Amory–Bedford–Dollva bond in the will ‘was solde to one Goffe of London Derry for two Ireish naggs worth five pounds and as much stuffe to Goffs sister worth fifty shillings’. Bedford’s will, however, clearly indicates that such written obligations did not preclude oral engagements. The debt incurred to ‘an Inkeeper in the East end of that new towne a tall proper black man … for a gelding I bought of him’ seems to have been a verbal agreement. The settling of debts based on written instruments, moreover, still involved much face-to-face negotiation, and even tactical memory loss and evasion, if Bedford’s negotiations with ‘Mr Chandler … a habberdasher of small wares a wholesalesman’ over the outstanding portion of the Amory–Dollva bond are any guide. Bedford recalled that Chandler ‘did alsoe say that I was bound with him but that I did not acknowledge but this I did say to him that I did know something of the businesse’. Settlement of such debts and obligations, then, could be profitably delayed by negotiation, even when it involved a written legal instrument.

Bedford’s will indicates the morality implicit in debt–credit relations in other ways. That debts contracted should ultimately be settled was clearly a matter of personal honour, conscience and reputation. Bedford articulated this with unusual clarity in his will:

And now I know it will be objected and very much admired that I did not discharge these debts long since. To which I answer that as it was my duty soe to doe soe I did intend to have done above 10 yeares past and if you please to peruse my acquittances bills and bonds will finde that I indavored [i.e. endeavoured] to discharg a good consience …

He continued later, ‘if my books and accounts had not been Lost it might have appared to the world what I had done concerning my engagements’. Apart from such personal agonizing about the matter, and
the considerable personal effort and enquiries he had made to straighten the matter out, Bedford himself hoped his creditors would ‘make some abatement of what is owing unto them for some of them well knoweth that I was a great sufferer for the Aforesaid Amory for whome I was bound in severall bonds’. It should be emphasized that, in listing debts more than a quarter of a century old, Bedford’s will clearly provides a striking personal testimony as to the strength of the obligation to settle debts that early modern people felt, and on which the economy rested. It may, of course, also be the case that only a man with a relatively ambiguous, or perhaps fragile, social position would be so sensitive to the effects of ancient debts on his credit and reputation. Bedford’s anxious listing of his ancient debts certainly suggests great sensitivity regarding his post mortem reputation. In this respect Bedford’s ‘status anxiety’ should surely be understood against the buoyant culture of memorialization of benefactors and office-holders in early modern London.

Bedford’s financial affairs appear to have left few other traces in the historical record, but his urge to lend was clearly not snuffed out by his earlier misfortunes in Ulster. We know that he bequeathed his granddaughter £25 to ‘put forth to use and that she may have the profit of what that may amount unto’. More strikingly, and quite by chance, I have discovered that a certain ‘John Bedford, parish clerk’, was listed as a major creditor in a will made in 1657 by one Simon Bennyng. Bennyng, like Bedford’s son-in-law Giles Diston, was a pewterer, and made his will on the eve of a voyage to Barbados.

Historians have long appreciated the impact of the 1641 Irish Rebellion on England but this case study of Bedford raises further questions about that episode. The virulent propaganda, the intense media interest, the charitable collections and relief of Irish Protestant refugees are well known. Much work has been done too on the significant financial investment that London Companies made in Londonderry. Less has been uncovered, however, about the social and economic networks that might link Ireland’s Protestant settlers with the inhabitants of England’s capital. How many Londoners, such as Bedford, were persuaded or motivated to settle in parts of Ulster? How many returned to their place of origin, like Bedford, as refugees? His attempt to forge a career in Londonderry failed and, like many settlers, he fled the province at the outbreak of the Rebellion. Other London settlers were made of sterner stuff.

The town of Londonderry never in fact fell to the Catholic rebels. As a contemporary published account of the Rebellion in Londonderry made clear, Bedford’s friends and creditors Henry and Huit Finch raised companies of soldiers against the rebels. Huit died in 1642, but his elder
brother Henry established a successful dynasty. Both the Finch brothers were native Londoners.\textsuperscript{88} Henry, whom Bedford calls ‘that honest gentleman’ in his will, born in 1599 in the London parish of St Christopher le Stocks, was, as his will indicates, apparently still alive and resident in Londonderry in 1667. Henry’s activities fit nicely into what is known about the town’s trade. In addition to trading in ‘French wine’, we know, for example, that Henry was trading in salmon with other leading merchants in 1641.\textsuperscript{89} He is known to have been paid by Parliament for supplying arms, clothing and provisions during the early stages of the Rebellion, on a significant scale.\textsuperscript{90} As a civic official, Henry signed a number of petitions in the 1640s.\textsuperscript{91} Henry himself actually published a later account of a twenty-week siege of Londonderry by ‘the Scotch, Irish, and Dis-affected English’ in 1649. This account was related ‘in two letters from Captaine Henry Finch, one of the Captains of Londonderry, and one of the Aldermen of the City’ addressed ‘To His Friend in London’.\textsuperscript{92} Henry Finch ‘of Londonderry’ was listed as the Ulster branch of the Finch family in the Heraldic visitation of London in 1664. Henry’s son, William, must have returned to England, since he served as a Common Councilman of London after the Restoration. Henry’s widow returned to London, where she died in 1679.\textsuperscript{93}

John Bedford’s will also reveals something of the lively world of personal communication and letter writing amongst Londoners.\textsuperscript{94} Bedford kept his papers and accounts – ‘I receiveth a letter from one Capt Kilner\textsuperscript{95} in Ireland to whome I did write about that busines and his was as may appeare by his letter which is amongst my papers’ – and was an assiduous correspondent about his debts, writing letters to an individual in Ulster and several (unanswered) letters to a widow in Chester, as the will recounts. Oral messages were clearly still important, however, and news of the destruction of his Irish papers at Chester during the Civil War was transmitted to him by word of mouth, by the carrier of another letter to Chester.

Bedford’s life is suggestive in other ways. His daughter and son-in-law, who probably lived in St Dionis following their marriage, moved north to the extra mural parish of St Giles Cripplegate following the Fire. Rather than co-residing with his daughter and son-in-law, however, Bedford moved to be close to his new employment in the West End.\textsuperscript{96} His migration westwards, from a four-hearth house in Lime Street to what seems to have been a single-chamber lodging in St Martin in the Fields, following his displacement by the Great Fire, sheds a little light on one of the great untold stories of that catastrophe. The impact of the Fire on the metropolis has found its historian only recently.\textsuperscript{97} The Fire destroyed around 13,200 houses. At about six persons to a house, that would suggest
that as many as 80,000 people might have been made homeless, but little attention has been paid to how this vast displaced population was housed. An army of refugees seems to have lived in temporary camps in surviving open spaces outside the City walls, but many more must have become lodgers or householders in London’s suburbs. Bedford’s experience suggests that the Fire may have prompted a dramatic increase in lodging in the capital. Many householders must, for the first time, have experienced the financial advantages that came from meeting the urgent demand for accommodation. The provision of furnished lodgings, even for the poor, became commonplace in the eighteenth century, if not before. Here, however, since Bedford’s inventory contains reference to trunks and boxes and some personal effects, it suggests that he had managed to extract at least some of his property from his Lime Street house before its destruction. This would have been possible, since the Fire did not reach the parish of St Dionis until the second day of the outbreak. Given that the room furnishings were his property, we can also assume that this particular fire refugee rented his lodgings unfurnished, although he might well have eaten with his landlord.

Lastly, Bedford’s reconstructed life surely tells us something about the strength of parochial identity and belonging in the early modern capital. Following his abortive career in Ulster, Bedford chose to return to the same London parish where he had served his apprenticeship. He rebuilt his career there. This must surely explain why he was peculiarly insistent in his will that his corpse should be returned for burial in St Dionis parish church, rather than in the parish where he then lodged: ‘And my desire is and againe and againe my desire is that my body may be buried in the Church of St Dionis Back Church London in the same grave where my deare loveing wife was buried.’ It was surely a sense of belonging, as much as family sentiments, that prompted this request. Bedford was far from alone in specifying such post-mortem mobility. There was a considerable ‘traffic in corpses’ in early modern London, as bodies were trundled to their specified last resting places.

Reconstructed microhistories such as Bedford’s indicate both the strength and the inherent dangers of the local perspective. As I noted above, a historian focusing on the parish of St Dionis would have been highly unlikely to have found Bedford’s will, and would thus have missed his entire career in Ulster. Although reconstructions of past local social systems have enormous value (I have, after all, written one) we must always remain aware that the experiences of even apparently humble residents might often transcend, in quite spectacular ways, the bounds of street, neighbourhood, City Company, parish, county or even nation.
In the name of God Amen I John Bedford Citizen and Clothworker of London and at present deputy Clerke of the parish of St Martins in the fields being in good and perfect health and memory blessed be God, Doe make and ordaine this my last will and testament in manner and forme following vizt Imprimis I comend my Soule unto Almighty God the great Creator of all the world. And doe by the assistance of the holy Gost my comforter believe to have a joyfull resurrection through and for the merritts of my blessed Saviour Jesus Christ in whome alone I trust to have Salvation for my preuisous immortall Soule. And my desire is and againe and againe my desire is that my body may be buried in the Church of St Dionis Back Church London in the same grave where my deare loveing wife was buried which is in the North Ile of the Church close to the pue where she was placed. That is to say against the third and fourth pues towards the lower end of the north Ile. Item I give and bequeath unto my Grandaughter Mary Diston the sume of twent[y] and five pounds to put forth to use and that she may have the profit of what that may amount unto untill she come to the age of one and twenty yeares or at the day of her marriage which comes first and the said twenty and five pounds to be paid to the aforesaid Mary Diston. Item I give and bequeath unto my Daughter Elizabeth Diston all the rest of my estate whatsoever whether it be in money bills bonds Leases or mooveables and doe make ordaine and appoynt my Daughter Elizabeth Diston my full and sole Executrix of this my Last will and testament provided that she pay my debts Legacies and funerall charges. And so I pray God fitt us all for our dissolution Amen and Amen then my debtes are as followeth to Mr Henry Finch Alderman of London Derry in the North of Ireland twenty pounds which I was bound in two bonds for one Simon Amory a Merchant of Barnistable in the west of England and all was paid except twenty pounds. I doe owe more that honest gentleman foure pounds upon my own account for one hogshead of French wine. Item I doe owe unto Mr Huit Finch for tobacco a matter of fifteen pounds this gentleman was brother to the aforesaid Mr Henry Finch but I understand that Mr Huit Finch is dead many yeares past and his wife and Left noe Issue but doubtlesse he left his estate to some of his relations to whome it ought to be paid. Item I doe owe unto one Mr London a matter of sixteen pounds for which one Mr Hall an antient gentleman was bound for me and doubtlesse he paid the money and doe believe that his [sic] is dead long since but he having neare relations to whome this ought to be paid That is to such a one as hath power to receive it, but the party that is to receive it ought to produce the bond or to give a sufficient discharge. Item I doe owe to one Mr Marriott that was a Ship Master but he is dead Long Since but I am Informed that one Mr Harden or Harding a waxchandler that Lived in Crooked Lane hath some rite to thath [sic] money and if he can produce the bond or give a sufficient discharge I desire he may be paid. Item to one that Lived and yet it may be living at a place called new Towne in the North of Ireland which is a matter of six or eight miles Southerley from a towne called Lissenagarvey that partie his name I cannot remember but he was an Inkeeper in the East end of that new towne a tall proper black man that debt was five pounds for a gelding I bought of him. And now I know it will be objected and very much admired that I did not discharge these debts long since. To which I answer that as it was my duty soe to doe soe I did intend to have done above 10 yeares past and if you please to peruse my acquittances bills and bonds will finde that I indavored [ie. endeavoured] to discharg a good consience but there came to me one Mr Chandler in [ … ] neare Milkstreet a habler-dasher of small wares a wholesalesman and demanded of me one hundred & twenty pounds for which he said he had a bond it being the debt of one Mr Symon Amory a Merchant of Barnistable [in] the West of England and did alseoe say that I was bound with him but that I did not acknowledge but this I did say to him that I did know something of the businesse that
there was a bond from Amory to Mr Francis Dollva of London Derry for the said sume an hundred and twenty pounds but that there was paid one hundred and twenty pounds in money and above five pounds and ten shillings in Comodities That soe to my best remembrance there remained due to Mr Dollva forty three shillings and ten pence unpaid of that bond but I am sure not fifty shillings unpaid and this I could deliver upon oath with a safe Conscience but Mr Chandler seemed to me to be a very civil gentleman and soe hath continued and he hoped to receive the money «due to him» from his Chapman and I doubt not but it is done for I have not heard of Mr Chandler almost ten years past but the truth is I have been full of fears which caused me to forbear to paye those debts formerly mentioned not knowing what straightes I might have been put unto for I was resolved to have been a prisiner rather then to have paid that bond twice over but after that I received a Letter from one Capt Kilner in Ireland to whom I did write about that busines and his was as may appeare by his letter which is amongst my papers and that was that the said bond was solde to one Goffe of London Derry for two freish naggs worth five pounds and as much stuffe to Goffs sister worth fifty shillings. [marginal mark] I know you can not but remember the beginning of the great Rebellion in Ireland but by Gods grace mercy and providence I came safe to Westchester where I left my books and accounts with one John Smith a Pewterer but not long after he dyed after that I writt severall Letters to the widdow Smith but never could receive any answer after that there was one Mr Ash brother in law to Mr Adam Bowin in Fillpott Lane that was to go to Westchester who had a Letter from me to the widdow Smith about my books and accounts and Mr Ash his answer was to me that about the beginning of our warrs in England there was a great sicknes in Westchester at which time the souldiers plundered their houses and did take away their books and papers and accounts amongst which was mine soe that there is no hopes of ever having them againe but if my books and accounts had not been Lost it might have appeared to the world what I had done concerning my engagements and now soe it is that I Leaving my estate in this condition I doe earnestly beseech and desire my Cordiall loving friends Mr Daniell Rawlinson Citizen and vintner of London Mr Thomas Honylove Haberdasher and Mr Henry Beckingham Draper of London aforesaid to be my overseers of this my last will and testament to whom I doe give and bequeath to either of them a gould ring worth twenty shillings a piece and I doubt not but they will assist my daughter in directing her that these my debts may be speedily paid excepting that bond of one hundred and twenty pounds which was demanded by Mr Chandler in the behalfe of one Goffe or Dollva unless they will accept of fifty shillings which is more then is due the Lord of Heaven knoweth «I ly not» but have declared the truth as is formerly expressed and moreover I am perswaded that if my Creditors or whom it may concern were write unto them some of them will make some abatement of what is owing unto them for some of them well knoweth that I was a great sufferer for the Aforesaid Amory for whom I was bound in severall bonds to conclude I doe most humblly and earnestly desire my very loving friends and overseers to doe for me as they would have others doe for them in such a case. And soe I pray God fitt us all for our dissolucon that we may through Jesus Christ be received to everlasting happines Amen and Amen Dated this 19th of August 1667 Loving daughter Elizabeth Diston or who ever shall be possesst of my estate that I Leaue I pray God soe blesse them as they perfome this my Last Will and Testament by me John Bedford

[Probated 20 December 1667]

Note: Words in « » were added to the main text by the scribe as corrections. Italics indicate expanded abbreviations.

Probate inventory of John Bedford

A true and perfect Inventory of all & singular the goodes & chattells of John Bedford late Cittizen and Clothworker of London & late Deputy Clerke of the Parish of St Martin in the fields in the Countie of Middlesex deceaced appraised by John Caxey & Edmond Rozer the sixteenth day of December Anno Dm 1667 (vizt)

Imprimis one bedd & boulster one payre of blancketts one ould Wosted Rugge twoe pillowes

Item twoe payre of ould sheetes twoe payre of ould pillowes

Item three trunckes one spicebox & three other old boxes one ould Couch & one Chayre of the same twoe leather Chayres one joynct stoole & one table

Item the deceaseds weareinge apparell

Item three Curtaine & valence† of greene stuff Parpetuana and one striped Carpet

Item a parcell of ould bookes

Item one payre of small Grates fire shovell & tongues and one payre of Creepers

Item one standish§ one snapphatch** one brasse watch with some other small things

Item seaven Ounces of Plate

Item seaven small Ringes & one payre of Agatts††

Item twelve pound of pewter

Item in ready money for ground sould to the pewterers Company

Summa Totalis


Glossary (taken from The Oxford English Dictionary):

† Vallence – short window curtain or curtain border.

‡ Creepers – probably ‘a small iron dog, of which a pair were placed between the andirons’. Andirons were a pair of iron bars placed on each side of a hearth to support burning wood.

§ Standish – a stand containing ink, pens and other writing materials and accessories, otherwise an inkpot/stand.

** Snapphatch – presumably some sort of locking box or compartment.

†† Agatts – precious stones; the term was also used figuratively to refer to ‘a diminutive person, from the small figures cut in agates for seals’ (1599). It is possible, therefore, that these agates were being used as seals.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following scholars who have helped with advice, suggestions and references in my quest for John Bedford: John Black; Ian Archer; Jacob Field; Bob Hunter; Keith Lindley; Richard Wall; David Saunders; Chris Brooks; Donny Hamilton, Amy Erickson. Archivists who have also supplied references and help include David Whickham, Archivist of the Clothworkers’ Hall, and staff at the London Metropolitan Archives, the Westminster Archive Centre, the Guildhall Library and Huntingdon Record Office. The article has also benefited from the comments of two anonymous referees. All mistakes of fact or interpretation are my very own.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., ix–x.


7 R. Tittler, *Townspeople and nation: English urban experiences 1540–1640* (Stanford, 2001). Apart from a couple of London criminals, all of Tittler’s subjects ‘were reasonably well known in their own time and communities’; ibid., 36.


12 Archer, ‘Social networks’, 77, 90.

13 Wills proved for inhabitants of the City of London can be found in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, the Archdeaconry and Commissary Courts of London, the Peculiar Court of the Deanery of the Arches or the Peculiar Court of the Dean and Chapter of St Paul’s Cathedral. St Dionis lay in the Deanery of the Arches. The Archdeaconry of Middlesex covered a few parishes in London’s West End, and the south-western parishes of the county of Middlesex. See C. Humphery-Smith, *The Phillimore atlas and index of parish registers* (Chichester, 1984), maps for City of London and Middlesex, unpaginated.


16 There were on average 32.5 burials per year in the parish, 1657–1660. Assuming a burial rate of 40 per thousand, this would suggest a rough population estimate of just over 800. For annual burial totals, see Thomas Birch ed., *A collection of the yearly bills of Mortality, from 1657 to 1758 inclusive* (London, 1759), unpaginated.

18 T. C. Dale ed., *The inhabitants of London in 1638, ed. from MS. 272 in Lambeth Palace Library* (London, 1931), vol. 1, 47–8. The Hall was rated at a substantial £50 rent per year. The 1666 hearth tax listed the Hall with 12 hearths; TNA, E179/252/32, Part 19, fo. 3.

19 St Dionis’s register was in fact one of the eleven used by Beier in his occupational survey of the intra-mural City; see A. L. Beier, ‘Engine of manufacture: the trades of London’, in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay eds., *London 1500–1700: the making of the metropolis* (Harlow, 1986), 148, 162–3. Pewterers are classified as metalworkers in Table 1.


23 Liu, *Puritan London*, 142–3. A noted Royalist resident, Daniel Rawlinson, was one of Bedford’s overseers, and is discussed below.

24 St Dionis was an ecclesiastical peculiar (an ecclesiastical jurisdiction outside the authority of the diocese), and lay in the Deanery of the Arches. Following the church’s closure some of its monuments were transferred to All Hallows, Twickenham. The demolition of the church was part of the campaign led by Archbishop Tait (1811–1882) to improve London’s ecclesiastical finances. I owe this latter reference to the expertise of Dr Ben Weinstein.


31 Ibid., 23.
33 Clarke, ‘Irish economy’, 176.
35 See my ‘‘The charity of our life and healthful years’’? Approaches to *inter-vivos* charitable giving to the poor in the metropolis, 1600–1720’, in Steven King and Richard Smith eds., *Poverty, poor relief and welfare in England: from monasticism to modern welfare* (Woodbridge, forthcoming 2007).
36 Wills of professional writers can be literary works in their own right. For a splendid recent account of one such, see Helen Berry, ‘Crimes of conscience: the last will and testament of John Dunton’, in Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandlebrote eds., *Against the law: crime, sharp practice and the control of print* (London, 2004), 81–102.
37 I would like to thank Mr D. E. Wickham, Archivist of the Clothworkers’ Company, for tracking down John Bedford’s apprenticeship and freedom entries in the Company archives, held in the Clothworkers’ Hall. His apprenticeship commenced 12 July 1619. There is no record of John in later lists of liverymen.
38 King’s Ripton was a small low-lying parish, of 1,168 acres of mostly clay soil. It contained just 171 people even in 1801. The Manor of King’s Ripton belonged to the Cecil family in the early seventeenth century; *Victoria County History: Huntingdon*, vol. ii, 103, 207–10.
39 A Thomas Bedford is listed as having been buried in King’s Ripton, 3 January 1629/30. There is a will of a Thomas Bedford, yeoman, of Ripton regis, dated 19 October 1627, but the date of probate (17 January 1633) does not match the previous burial. The parish register of King’s Ripton has some gaps in this period, and its dating may be defective. This testator may have been John’s father, but there is no reference to John in the body of the will. Thomas mentions his wife, a daughter (Christian), some grandchildren named Smith and the main beneficiary and sole executor who was his son Robert. However, the will was made in the ‘presence’ of ‘John Bedford’. The baptism register indicates that a Robert Bedford served as churchwarden in the parish from 1625 to 1630. It is possible that John had received his portion of Thomas’s estate before the will was drawn up, perhaps at his freedom, given that both events took place in the same year.
40 Robert Jackson, clothworker, was buried in St Dionis on 8 August 1656. A person of that name is listed living in Fenchurch Street (then spelled Fanchurch) occupying a house at a rent of £40 in the 1638 inhabitants’ listing; Dale, *Inhabitants*, 47–8.
41 Acquiring the freedom of a City Company automatically conferred the right to the freedom of the City. Such citizenship conferred the right to participate fully in economic life and conferred a number of political rights and privileges. The ‘livery’ of a Company were those technically able to wear its livery; they were the ruling elite, who governed the Company. The livery also possessed important political rights in London. It was members of the livery who elected the City’s Mayor and some other officers, and Members of Parliament. For an excellent survey of the London Companies, their social and economic structures and the meaning of citizenship, see Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), 23–60, 188, 215–84.
‘John Beddford’ son of Thomas Bedford was baptized on 26 April 1601 according to the King’s Ripon parish register; see the transcript, *Kings Ripton (St Peter) 1597–1795*, Huntingtonshire Family History Society, D90. He was the second of that name born to Thomas; an earlier son of the same name was buried in the previous year.

Guildhall Library Ms 4215/1, fo. 26 for the year 1629/30. The accounts run from Easter to Easter.


J. L. Chester, ed., *The reiester booke of Saynte De’nis Backchurch parishe (City of London) for Maryages, Christenynges, and Buryalles Begynnynge in the Yeare of Our Lord God 1538* (London, 1878), Harleian Society Volume III, 22. Thomas Oldberry was a long time resident of the parish, who died in 1624.

Guildhall Library MS 4215/1, fo. 34.


This is a possible link, but it is as likely that this child was the daughter of John Beresford, an inhabitant of St Gabriel in 1638; see Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, 62.

An administration for the goods of Simon Amory, of Barnstaple, to his ‘relict’ Mary, was issued by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on 21 December 1646; see M. Fitch ed., *Index to administrations in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury*, vol. VI: 1631–1648, British Record Society (London, 1986), 6.


K. Lindley (‘The impact of the 1641 rebellion upon England and Wales, 1641–5’, *Irish Historical Studies* 18, 70 (1972), 148) notes that Chester, the ‘main port for Ireland, was flooded with refugees’ in 1641.

Guildhall Library MS 4216/1, fo. 60.

Guildhall Library MS 4216/1, fo. 44.


Guildhall Library MS 4215/1, fos. 77, 88, 145.

Guildhall Library MS 4216/1, fo. 221.

This marriage cannot have produced Elizabeth, since we know she was 30 years old or so at her marriage in 1663.

Guildhall Library MS 7086/3, fos. 547r, 553r, 557r, 561r, 566r, 572v, 577r, 581r and MS 7086/4, unfoliated. For Bedford’s hearth tax entry, see TNA E179/252/32, Part 19, fo. 3. Four hearths represented a relatively small house by the standards of the parish, since the average size of those listed in 1666 was 6.4. It is possible, however, that the list does not include those exempted on the grounds of poverty.

All of his overseers were listed in the 1666 hearth tax records as living in nearby Fenchurch Street: Daniel Rawlinson and Henry Beckingham lived on its north side, Beckingham in a six-hearth house; Thomas Honylove lived on the south side, in a seven-hearth house; TNA E179/252/32, Part 19, fos. 3, 4, 5.

Rawlinson (1614–1679), a native of Lancashire, became master of the Vintners’ Company in 1678; see R. Latham ed., *The diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. X: *Companion
His tavern contained 19 hearths in 1666; TNA E179/252/32, Part 19, fo. 4.


John Bennett was buried in the parish on 20 October 1656. His will included bequests to the minister who preached his funeral sermon, Nathaniel Hardy, ‘Master Bedford the Clarke’, like John’s rival the sexton Thomas Kensford, received 13s 4d. Daniel Rawlinson, a ‘loving friend’ was among those receiving a memorial ring valued at 20s; TNA PROB 11/258.

St Dionis Register; see note 45 above.

See the inventory in the appendix below. Guildhall Library MS 7086/4 (unfoliated) demonstrates that Bedford’s son-in-law Giles Diston, a pewterer, received £14 for the surrender of his lease in 1667/1668.

P. Earle, *The making of the English middle class: business, society and family life in London, 1660–1730* (London, 1989), 288–90. The relative value of Bedford’s clothing is proportionately relatively high at 17 per cent of his total inventoried wealth, which was a low total. Clothing made up a substantial component of the inventoried wealth tied up in consumer goods in the past; for some figures, see C. Shammas, *The pre-industrial consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990), 170.

Earle (*Making of the English middle class*, 14) suggests that personal wealth ‘of a few hundred pounds and an annual income of about £50 … provide a lower bound for the middle station’, although some might have rather less than this. It should be noted that Earle’s sample, based on Orphan’s inventories, contained very few old men; ibid., 394. Orphans’ inventories were made following a citizen’s death by the London Court of Orphans; on this type of court see Charles Carlton, *The Court of Orphans* (Leicester, 1974).


The *OED* describes a standish as ‘a stand containing ink, pens and other writing materials and accessories, otherwise an inkpot/stand’.

Earle, *Making of the English middle class*, 85. For Thomas Beedham (d. 1689), ‘citizen and barber surgeon’ and parish clerk of St Lawrence Jewry, see E. A. Ebblewhite, *The Parish Clerks’ Company and its charters: with a biographical calendar and an inventory of its property between 1610 and 1705* (London, 1932), 24. It would be possible to cite many other examples, such as Francis Grey (d. 1665/6), ‘Citizen and Dyer of London’ and parish clerk of St Andrew Holborn (TNA PROB 11/319), or John Frethorne (d. 1654/5), citizen and pewterer and parish clerk of St Dunstan in the East (TNA PROB 11/250). For one Londoner who earned his living by a combination of clerking ‘to a tabernacle in Pettycoate Lane’, tailoring and teaching the ‘art of singing’, see Peter Earle, *A city full of people: men and women of London 1650–1750* (London, 1994), 199.

Adams, *Parish clerks of London*, 46–7, 66, 94–5. The 1639 charter excused clerks ‘from all offices, unless they desire or yield themselves thereunto’; such offices would presumably have been both civic and parochial. The Parish Clerk’s Hall was listed as worth £25 ‘moderated’ rent in the 1638 tithe listing, Dale, *Inhabitants of London*, 132. The Hall was destroyed in the 1666 Fire. Most of the records of the Company, along with its
third Hall, were destroyed by enemy action in 1940. See also, Playford, The parish-clerk’s guide, 5–13.

74 J. Christie, Some account of parish clerks, more especially of the Ancient Fraternity (Bretherne and sisterne), of S. Nicholas, now know as the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks (London, 1893), 192.

75 Adams, Parish clerks of London, 129. Wardens were responsible for the financial and property affairs of their Company; see Rappaport, Worlds within worlds, 264–9. The offices held by Bedford are listed in Ebblewhite, Parish Clerks’ Company, 24.

76 In his will Bedford lists £62 10s of debts he was willing to have ‘speedily’ paid by his daughter, in addition to legacies to his granddaughter and to the overseers of the will totalling £28 (see the appendix below).


78 See Overton, ‘English probate inventories’, and also Craig Muldrew, The economy of obligation: the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England (Basingstoke, 1998), 109–14, 174–8; T. Arkell, ‘Interpreting probate Inventories’, in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose eds., When death do us part: understanding and interpreting the probate records of early modern England (Oxford, 2000), 72–102; A. Erickson, ‘Using probate accounts’, ibid., 103–19. Erickson’s article is a particularly important one for those interested in the process of probate. Probate accounts ‘showed the final financial summary of the estate after all debts had been paid’; ‘the account set forth the value of the personal estate, as it had appeared in the inventory … the account was the final stage in the process of administering an estate’, ibid., 103. Anne Tarver notes that the final total in the probate account ‘often showed a financial chasm between the cosy optimism of the inventory and the cold reality of the cash left in hand’; see her ‘Understanding probate accounts and their generation in the post-Restoration Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry to 1700’, ibid., 229. For the suggestion that Earle’s inventories ‘underestimate the real state of credit since inventories were often drawn up a long time after death so that executors had time to pay off some of the debts’, see Earle, Making of the English middle class, 118. Margaret Spufford has similar cautionary tales of the ways in which inventories can mislead; see her The great reclothing of rural England: petty chapmen and their wares in the seventeenth century (London, 1984), 37–41.


81 Ibid., 181.

82 Ibid., 181.

83 I. W. Archer, ‘The arts and acts of memorialization in early modern London’, in J. F. Merritt ed., Imagining early modern London: perceptions and portrayals of the city from Stow to Strype, 1598–1720 (Cambridge, 2001), 89–113. The Parish Clerks’ Company Hall displayed plenty of examples of such memorialization. A few of its masters after the Restoration (not, alas, Bedford) were commemorated in stained glass windows. Other members of the Company donated suitably inscribed and dated plate and a number of other items; see Adams, Parish clerks of London, 102–4. For a detailed inventory of property owned between 1610 and 1705, which describes such donations, see, Ebblewhite, Parish Clerks’ Company, 65–87.

84 This discovery was ‘quite by chance’ since Simon Bennyng’s will was posted on the Internet by the Port Royal Project, at http://nautarch.tamu.edu/portroyal/.
Bedford's name was originally detected via the Google search engine. The will is at TNA, PROB 11/314. Made on 19 February 1656/7 on the eve of Simon's voyage to Barbados, it was proved in 1664.

For some recent work on the impact of the Irish Rebellion on English politics, see Lindley, *Popular politics and religion*, 77; Joseph Cope, ‘Fashioning victims: Dr. Henry Jones and the plight of Irish Protestants, 1642’, *Historical Research* 74, 186 (2001), 370–91; Ethan Howard Shagan, ‘Constructing discord: ideology, propaganda, and English responses to the Irish Rebellion of 1641’, *Journal of British Studies* 36 (1997), 4–34; and David A. O'Hara, ‘English newsbooks and the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion of 1641’, *Media History* 9, 3 (2003), 179–93. Lindley (‘Impact of the 1641 rebellion’, 147) reports that the ‘major portion’ of the early refugees were women and children, as ‘able-bodied men tended to stay behind in Ireland to fight the rebels’. For the fate of some poor refugees, see ibid., 148–50.

*A True relation of severall acts, Passages and Proceedings, done, undertaken, suffered and performed, by Captaine Robert Lawson, now one of the Sheriffiges of the City and County of London-derry, upon and since the first beginning of the great and generall Rebellion in Ireland, in several parts and places within the Province of Ulster* (London, 1643), 13, 15. See also *The True state & condition of the seven foot Companies in the City of London-Derry, under the command of the severall Captains following, viz Robert Thornton, Simon Pitts, Henry Fynch, Henry Osborn, John Kilner, Robert Lawson, & William Patsall* (who now commandeth Company which was raised by Hewet Finch, deceased, and for some time commanded by Captain Henry Vaughan) is as followeth (London, 1644?). A captain commanded a company of troops.

Huit Finch was baptized in the London parish of St Christopher le Stocks in 1609, son of William and Ellen Finch. It is something of a stroke of luck that any record of Huit's burial record has survived. There are only two parish registers outside Dublin that survive before 1642. One is for Lisburn, and the other is that for the parish of Templemore, now Derry Cathedral. ‘Capten Huitt Finch’ was buried 28 June 1642. His son, another ‘Huett, the sonne of Mr Hewett Finch’ was buried 3 May 1643; see Richard Hayes ed., *The register of Derry cathedral* (S. Columb's), *parish of Templemore, Londonderry ... 1642–1703* (Dublin, 1910), 4, 7. There are gaps in the Templemore register (the surviving volume of which starts in 1642) for 1643–1649, 1650–1653, ibid., iv.

Henry Finch was a Sheriff of Derry and Coleraine in 1634, and Lord Mayor in 1640–1641: see Moody, *The Londonderry Plantation*, 449–50. Henry was baptized in the parish of St Christopher le Stocks in 1598/9, son of William and Ellen Finch. Henry Finch was described as ‘alderman’ in the parish register of Templemore, Derry Cathedral, at burials of his children Hellenor (20 October 1642) and Lettis (1 March 1643). Another son of Henry's, John, was buried on 8 June 1642. Henry (and Hewett, his brother) provide a possible direct link between the Ulster Plantation and London here, since a William Finch ‘and partners’ farmed the revenues for the Salters' Company Lands in Ireland; see Robinson, *Plantation of Ulster*, 209. (Such farmers collected the revenue, paying a fixed sum for the proceeds.)

*A True relation of severall acts*, 8.


139
92 *A true relation of the twenty weeks Siege of Londonderry, by the Scotch, Irish, and Dissaffected English, with the Daily Proceeding Passages thereof* … (London, 1649).


94 For communication in this period, see, Dagmar Freist, *Governed by opinion: politics, religion and the dynamics of communication in Stuart London*, 1637–45 (London, 1997), passim, esp. 239–98.

95 A Captain Kilner is mentioned in Henry Finch’s narrative of events surrounding the siege of Londonderry in 1649; see *A true relation of the twenty weeks Siege*, 14. John Kilner was also listed as a Londonderry Captain in the early years of the Rebellion, as noted in *The True state & condition of the seven foot Companies*.

96 Giles and Elizabeth baptized their daughter, Mary, in St Dionis on 24 July 1666; see Chester, *The reiester booke*, 119. Since Giles is not listed in the 1666 hearth tax roll, it is possible that they may have been living with Bedford. They baptized two sons, Jacob and Giles Diston, in St Giles Cripplegate in 1668/9. By 1671 the couple had moved from Cripplegate to the City parish of St Gregory by St Paul’s, where they baptized Elizabeth and Anthony between 1671 and 1675. For the latter entries, see the relevant International Genealogical Index entries, available online at www.familysearch.org. For Diston’s career in the Pewterers’ Company, see C. Ricketts ed., *Pewterers of London 1600–1900* (London, 2001), 85.

97 My talented PhD student Jacob Field is currently making the first modern study of the impact of the Great Fire on London. His early findings are already providing striking and original evidence regarding internal migration following the fire. For some preliminary remarks regarding post-Fire arrangements and residential mobility, see Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud, 1996), 80–6.

98 T. F. Reddaway, *The rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (London, 1951), 29–31, 244–6. An MP proposed that papists, sectarians and foreigners should be forced to leave the City so that refugees could be housed; see ibid., 245. See also W. G. Bell, *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (London, 1923), 188–9. Stephen Porter estimates that between 65,000 and ‘almost’ 80,000 people were burnt out; see Porter, *Great Fire*, 71.


100 Bell, *Great Fire of London*, map of Leake’s survey of the ruins, ‘with the area burnt by the fire on successive days added by the author’, between pp. 24 and 25.

101 Richard Wall points out that the absence of kitchen utensils might suggest that Bedford ate with his landlord’s family, although of course it might simply reflect the trivial value of such items. Lodgings often included an arrangement for the provision of meals by the landlord; see Sara Pennell, ‘“Great quantities of gooseberry pye and baked clod of beef”: victualling and eating out in early modern London’, in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner eds., *Londinopolis: essays in the cultural and social history of early modern London* (Manchester, 2000), 230–2.


103 Boulton, *Neighbourhood and society*. 
104 I. e. Lisagarvey, a town in county Antrim, founded by Sir Fulke Conway in 1622. The entire town was destroyed by fire during the 1641 Rebellion, but later rebuilt. By 1662 it was being called by its modern name, Lisburn. See R. Refausse ed., Register of the Church of St. Thomas, Lisnagarvey, co. Antrim, 1637–1646 (Dublin, 1996), 9–13.

105 There is a Francis Dollway, owning two houses, listed on the rent roll of Derry, 15 May 1628; see Moody and Simms, The Bishopric of Derry and the Irish Society, vol. 1, 159. A man of the same name was granted a lease for 30 years for 9 acres of land ‘near Derry’ in July 1641; ibid., 238, no. 108. Francis Dalway was Sheriff of Derry and Coleraine, 1636–1637; see Moody, Londonderry Plantation, 449–50.

106 A chapman was a trader, pedlar or dealer. They were often itinerant. In this case Mr Chandler was probably a wholesaler, supplying ‘his’ chapman. For such relationships between London wholesalers and their country chapmen, see Spufford, The great re-clothing of rural England, 78–83.

107 A Captain Kilner is mentioned in Henry Finch’s narrative of events surrounding the siege of Londonderry in 1649; see A true relation of the twenty weeks Siege, 14.

108 The parish register of Derry Cathedral, lists the burials of Mary, the wife of Mr William Goffe, on 1 June 1642, and of a daughter Elizabeth on 17 October 1642; see Hayes, The register of Derry Cathedral, 3, 6.

109 There were established trade links between Londonderry and Chester. A mariner, one Thomas Becke, of Chester was buried in Templemore on 23 May 1642; Hayes, The register of Derry Cathedral, 3. For Chester’s Irish trade see D. M. Woodward, ‘The overseas trade of Chester, 1600–1650’, Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire 122 (1970), 25–42. Chester’s principal overseas trade was with Ireland; ibid., 32.
William captured London and was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day, 1066. The Norman period in English history had begun. The Norman period. The successful Norman invasion of England in 1066 brought the country into the mainstream of western European culture. After the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London came the efforts of Sir Christopher Wren and the achievements of science made by I. Newton and other members of the Royal Society. By the end of the century Britain was becoming a prosperous country. The 18th century. This article represents an exercise in microhistory applied to early modern London. Deploying prosopographical methods, it reconstructs the life history of one John Bedford (1601–1667) from his birth in Huntingdon to his death in the West End of London. Much of his adult life was spent in the London parish of St Dionis Backchurch, with an interlude in the Irish town of Londonderry. Bedford fled from Ulster at the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion in 1641. His unusually detailed will provides the bedrock of this narrative, and his reconstructed life sheds important light on Early Anglo-Saxon London. London belonged to a people known as the Middle Saxons, from whom the name of the county of Middlesex is derived, but who probably also occupied the approximate area of modern Hertfordshire and Surrey. However, by the early 7th century the London area had been incorporated into the kingdom of the East Saxons.