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GEORGE VERNON AND THE BUILDING  
OF SUDBURY HALL, DERBYSHIRE

*Punching above his weight?*

**Covering document submitted as part of the requirement  
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**Cherry Ann Knott**

**Department of History  
University of Warwick**

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GEORGE VERNON AND THE BUILDING  
OF SUDBURY HALL, DERBYSHIRE

*Punching above his Weight?*

**Introduction**

My case study of the building of Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire, is a landmark volume within the fields of architectural and social history in the context of the development of houses of English landed gentry in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> It is based on extensive research involving close examination of primary archival data hitherto largely unexplored. The following review highlights its connections with scholarship in a number of fields, making an empirical and conceptual contribution to knowledge in relation to marriage alliances, gender and family relations, conspicuous consumption and architectural history – including influences on the development of design, the organisation of construction works and the relationships between public and private spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> Cherry Ann Knott, *George Vernon 1636–1702, 'Who built this House', Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire*, (Stroud, 2010); hereafter *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010). **Note:** George Vernon in footnotes as GV, his wives Margaret Vernon and Catherine Vernon as MV and CV.

## 1. Redating Sudbury Hall

Sudbury Hall, apart from its roof, appears Jacobean, yet internally it is the most richly decorated Restoration house surviving in England. My work firmly dates the initial works on its structure to the immediate post-Restoration years and has identified the sources for a significant number of elements in its design, thereby enabling an explanation for its Jacobean-style detailing and elements of its plan.

Conventional lines of enquiry, heavily dependent on stylistic aspects and attempts to make comparisons with other Derbyshire houses, have in the past resulted in unsatisfactory explanations including Sudbury's misdating by half a century.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the Hall has been largely ignored in the overviews of seventeenth-century country houses, and dismissed as not conforming to more classical designs.

The misdating and shifts in approach to writing architectural history through the twentieth century are well demonstrated by *Country Life's* several articles on Sudbury Hall. In the issue for 8 April 1905 it was featured with eleven high quality black-and-white photographs, seven being full-page.<sup>3</sup> The text makes no mention whatever of its builder, George Vernon: indeed, his great-grandmother, Dame Mary Vernon, is credited with the Hall's construction. An inaccurate date of about 1612 was suggested for its building. It was depicted enthusiastically as:

expressive externally in every line and detail, of the age in which it was built;  
and it will be noticed that in carvings, plaster-work, and other adornments

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel and Samuel Lysons, *Magna Britannia ... Derbyshire*, (London, 1817), p.269; James Dugdale, *The New British Traveller or Modern Panorama of England and Wales*, Vol.II, (1819), p.80; Samuel Bagshaw, *History Gazetteer and Directory of Derbyshire*, (Sheffield, 1846), p.336; N.E.S.A. Hamilton, *National Gazetteer of England and Wales*, Vol.11, (London, nd), p.581; *Country Life*, Vol.XVII, (8 Apr 1905), pp.486-96; J.B. Firth, *Highways and Byways of Derbyshire*, (London, 1905), p.51; Christopher Hussey, *Country Life*, Vol.LXXVII, (22 Jun 1935), p.650. Even thereafter into the 1980s and 1990s GV's great-grandmother, Dame Mary Vernon continued to be credited with the exterior of the Hall: as footnote 9.

<sup>3</sup> David Watkin, *The Rise of Architectural History*, (London, 1980), pp.94, 104; 'Sudbury Hall, Derby' [author not known], *Country Life*, Vol.XVII, (8 April 1905), pp.486-96.

within it rivals the best work of the age . . . In the grouping of its structural masses we discern a tendency to transition, the picturesqueness of the Jacobean style, to which it belongs, being, perhaps, less noticeable than the simplicity and symmetry of its forms, which seem as if they foreshadowed the later, more formal classic manner. . . the porch, erected in two stages, is a very remarkable piece of Jacobean architecture.<sup>4</sup>

Thirty years later Sudbury was covered in a fuller but more restrained manner, following the discovery of a volume of financial records that was mistakenly perceived as ‘a full set of building accounts’.<sup>5</sup> It was presumed that its lack of specific references to digging and foundations meant that they must already have been in place before George Vernon carried out any construction works himself. Hussey therefore concluded that:

Mistress Mary began building the house, circa 1613; at her death the walls were no more than half up, and so they remained till her grandson went on with the work after 1660.<sup>6</sup>

In 1966 Hill and Cornforth still expressed reservations in attributing Sudbury’s construction entirely to George Vernon.<sup>7</sup> However by 1971, when the Hall was opened to the public by the National Trust, Cornforth was more unequivocal.<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding, the fantasy of Dame Mary Vernon’s half-completed Hall was still

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.488.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Hussey, ‘Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire, the seat of Lord Vernon’, *Country Life*, Vol.LXXVII, (15, 22 and 29 June, 1935), pp.622-27, 650-56, 682-86; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), appendix A1, pp.693-94.

<sup>6</sup> Hussey (1935), pp.622-25. George was actually Dame Mary Vernon’s great-grandson: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), p.12 and appendix B1, p.699.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Hill and John Cornforth, *English Country Houses Caroline 1625–1685*, (London, 1966), p.163.

<sup>8</sup> John Cornforth, ‘Sudbury Hall Revisited’, *Country Life*, Vol.CXLIX, (10 June 1971), p.1428.

being aired close to the end of the century.<sup>9</sup>

Sudbury Hall's misattribution demonstrates how erroneous speculations can be when commentators fail to ask fundamental questions about the individuals credited with instigating and executing a building project. It also shows how fictions created to explain apparently irreconcilable factors can be perpetuated.

## 2. Revising approaches to seventeenth-century architectural history

In critically reviewing the various approaches to architectural history, Arnold has called the actual building (ie, the completed edifice, not the processes in its construction) the primary archive – fortunately Sudbury survives, largely unaltered. All associated documentation Arnold refers to as ‘the secondary archive’, although curiously she does not mention two fundamental types of document relating to building – specifications and contracts – both of which feature frequently among George Vernon's writings.<sup>10</sup> She focuses on the different approaches of individual historians, citing in particular the canonical writings of Summerson, Colvin, Girouard, and Pevsner, and notes the bias towards classical architecture, and a preoccupation with named architects.<sup>11</sup> These last are probably the reasons why Sudbury Hall and its non-architect builder almost always fall outside the frame: for example, Sudbury is not mentioned by Wilson and Mackley,

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<sup>9</sup> Eg – Maxwell Craven and Michael Stanley, *The Derbyshire Country House*, (Derby, 1982), p.66; W.H. Brighouse, *Exploring the River Dove*, (Burton-on-Trent, 1985), ch.6; Andor Gomme, ‘Pratt's Red-herring: Exploding the Double-pile Myth’, in Malcolm Airs, ed., *The Seventeenth Century Great House*, conference papers, University of Oxford, (Jan 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Dana Arnold, *Reading Architectural History*, (London and New York, 2002), p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp.42-49, 103-4; John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530 to 1830*, (London, 1953); Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1600–1840*, (London, 1954); ditto: *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600–1840*, (London, 1978, 1995 [and 2005]); Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, (London, 1978); ditto, *Robert Smythson & the Elizabethan Country House*, (New Haven and London, 1983); Nikolaus Pevsner, *Buildings of England*, series county by county (began 1945).

and it misses the span of Airs' detailed appraisal of Tudor and Jacobean houses.<sup>12</sup>

Arnold considers that Summerson's stylistic preoccupations and preferences for classicism have coloured views of country houses.<sup>13</sup> This may go some way to explaining why so often in texts that cover mid-seventeenth-century buildings, Sudbury Hall is referred to only cursorily and is rarely illustrated.<sup>14</sup> It does not comfortably fit in any particular stylistic category. Cooper stresses the restraint of mid-seventeenth-century houses; but Sudbury could never be described as restrained. The building aspirations it manifests belong more with the owners of sixteenth-century grand houses.<sup>15</sup>

Hunneyball, in his analysis of seventeenth-century architecture in Hertfordshire, acknowledges that 'patronage, the economic capacity of would-be builders, and motivation for acts of architectural display' are aspects to be considered.<sup>16</sup> He concludes that buildings (and also monuments) were 'in effect visual statements about the status, cultural outlook and financial capacity of their creators'.<sup>17</sup>

Taking Hunneyball's view a stage further, Lawrence, in her holistic approach towards the better understanding of buildings, sets out the key factors when considering 'Building as display': there needs to be concern not merely with

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House 1660–1880*, (London and New York, 2000); Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History*, (Godalming, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Arnold (2002), pp.89, 103-6; Summerson (1953).

<sup>14</sup> Eg – despite the end-date and thoroughness of Cooper's volume, Sudbury is not depicted and just mentioned in a single line, as an example of a double-pile central block: Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry 1480–1680*, (New Haven and London, 1999), p.242. Cliffe refers to Sudbury Hall as 'rebuilt' by GV, and only features it in connection with its gardens: J.T Cliffe, *The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England*, (New Haven and London, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Nicholas Cooper, 'Rank, Manners and Display: The Gentlemanly House, 1500–1750', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, Vol.12, (2002), p.293.

<sup>16</sup> Paul M. Hunneyball, *Architecture and Image-Building in Seventeenth-Century Hertfordshire*, (Oxford, 2004), p.6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.185.

appearance, but also function and use of space; the resulting houses evidence the owners' taste, discernments, aspirations and social standing. Her examples are mainly sixteenth century and from Scotland and the north of England, but these are exactly the questions which I believe my study of Sudbury Hall and its builder has addressed.<sup>18</sup>

Realising the shortcomings of traditional approaches to explaining Sudbury, my focus quickly shifted to its builder, George Vernon. Chew has rightly written that:

when architectural historians fail to ask questions about the people, reasons and motivations behind seventeenth-century buildings remaining outside the Jonesian canon, and when we furthermore dismiss such buildings as inferior, we miss rare opportunities to attempt to understand what the buildings meant to the people who used them.<sup>19</sup>

Having adopted exactly the same approach in relation to Vernon and the mansion he built, this case study firmly endorses Chew's proposition and extends it.

Airs has described the way a sixteenth-century landed gentlemen might initiate and supervise the building of his own country house, supplying all materials, arranging their transport, providing the necessary equipment and hiring workmen by the day. But he has concluded that by the early seventeenth century it had become normal for the builder (ie, the owner/client) to employ responsible officials to undertake the administration, and for work to be contracted out.<sup>20</sup> George Vernon was extraordinary in the extent to which he masterminded all his construction works at Sudbury. Indeed

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<sup>18</sup> Anne Lawrence, 'Using buildings to understand social history: Britain and Ireland in the seventeenth century' in Karen Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture*, (Abingdon, 2009), pp.115-16. Lawrence notes that the addition of coats of arms was 'a declaration of status and ancestry' – as on the entrance porch and turret at Sudbury: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.530, 532.

<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth V. Chew, "'A Mockery of the Surveyor's style"?: alternatives to Inigo Jones in seventeenth-century elite British architecture', in Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar, eds, *Articulating British Classicism: New approaches to eighteenth-century architecture*, (Aldershot, 2004), p.90.

Sudbury affords an exceptionally full account of such a large undertaking by an owner, paralleled in the sixteenth century (albeit on smaller-scale, less ambitious enterprises), but unique for the second half of the seventeenth century.

There are considerable quantities of seventeenth-century manuscripts relating to the Vernon family, including legal documents, correspondence and estate records. That particular volume found in 1935 has been drawn upon by architectural historians to identify the most well-known of the numerous craftsmen involved at Sudbury. But its nature and significance, mainly (but not entirely) as George Vernon's double-entry 'Creditor-Debtor Book', were not properly understood, while a great wealth of other financial material has been almost completely ignored.<sup>21</sup> Most notable are daybooks of expenditure and receipts, kept by George himself, his wives and stewards, spanning almost thirty years; these have been mined extensively during this research.<sup>22</sup>

George Vernon and his circumstances are key to understanding the genesis of Sudbury Hall. His life coincided with a very precise period in English history. Born in 1636, coming into his inheritance in 1659, making the first of his three marriages less than four months before the Restoration, settled in his splendid new Hall at Sudbury by the time of the Golden Revolution and dying a few weeks into the reign of Queen Anne, he is entirely a later-seventeenth-century man. His social position was in a specific stratum: landed (just over 10,000 acres), with an annual income of the order of £2,000, he unquestionably belonged to the 'greater gentry'.<sup>23</sup> Yet although coming from an ancient lineage, with ancestors who in earlier centuries had held high office, he was not in noble and Court circles. His official positions lay entirely within the shires where he

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<sup>20</sup> Airs (1995), pp.57-60.

<sup>21</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), appendix A1, pp.693-94.

<sup>22</sup> Total daybook entries 27,000, of which payments 20,000: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.20a, pp.644-48, appendix A2-7, pp.694-98.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, chs.4a, p.105; 20b-e, pp.648-63; Wilson and Mackley (2000), p.204.

held lands. His greatest public achievement was to become a member of Parliament for the borough of Derby.<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Influences and choices

Acknowledging George Vernon's central role in the building of Sudbury still leaves the major issue to be addressed: why did he choose to build it as he did? What influences can be traced in the Hall's design, construction and decoration? And how do its accurate dating and what we know of the Vernons' social world affect our answers?

Sudbury Hall's regressive 'old-fashioned' design has repeatedly been excused on geographic grounds – 'the remoteness of Derbyshire in the 1660s' from 'the centres of architectural fashion' (ie London).<sup>25</sup> However, Sudbury is not in the celebrated High Peak nor near the great houses of Derbyshire's northern areas (Chatsworth, Haddon, Hardwick, Bolsover); it is in the flat south-west corner of the county, on its Staffordshire border and comparatively accessible. Cooper has identified similarities between some of Derbyshire's smaller compact gentry houses built in the decades immediately before the Civil War, concluding that they exhibit a local taste.<sup>26</sup> But none of their features is manifest at Sudbury.

Hunneyball argues that 'stylistic innovation was the preserve of the elite, and dissemination the response of those who wished to adopt the same image'.<sup>27</sup> This applies to Sudbury Hall: its main elements were indeed imitative rather than

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<sup>24</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.6c, pp.205-15; 9b-e, pp.317-30; 10d-g, pp.351-84.

<sup>25</sup> Cornforth, (1971), p.1428; also Michael Hall, *The English Country House: from the Archives of Country Life 1897-1939*, (London, 1994), p.70. [It is curious how frequently GV is styled 'Sir George', as if it is hard to accept that the Hall was the creation of a mere esquire: eg, *ibid*, pp.70, 72, 74]; National Trust, *Sudbury Hall*, guide book (2005), p.36.

<sup>26</sup> Cooper (1999), pp.196-98.

innovative, the choices of a man striving to present himself, through the mansion he created, as of a more important, respected status.

Tinniswood opines that ‘at the outset George was simply unaware of what was going on in progressive architectural and artistic circles’.<sup>28</sup> To an extent I share his view, but propose a more purposeful intention. George was then still in his early twenties. Moving outside spheres where he might have encountered people in the forefront of architectural practice, he was very likely to do exactly what many would when contemplating building themselves a new house: draw on his personal experience and turn for inspiration and ways of tackling problems to houses already familiar to him, and in particular those owned by men he admired, or with which he had positive associations. He would also seek advice and exchange thoughts with people around him.

Unfortunately there are no documentary references indicating George’s use of the readily available writings on architecture and building. We cannot know whether he was aware of the works of Vitruvius, Serlio or Palladio. But it is not difficult to imagine the practically-orientated George consulting the published writings of Wotton or Gerbier.<sup>29</sup> He would surely have been attracted by Gerbier’s commendation to the three ‘Principles of Magnificent Building ... Solidity, Conveniency and Ornament’, and could almost have been acting upon his advocacy of ‘a large, magnificent, commodious, and well-set Staircase’.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, George might have been using

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<sup>27</sup> Hunneyball (2004), p.187.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Tinniswood, *Historic Houses of the National Trust*, (London, 1991), pp.135-41.

<sup>29</sup> Sir Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture .... from the Best Authors and Examples*, (London, 1624, EEBO edition); Balthazar Gerbier, *A Brief Discourse Concerning the Three Chief Principles of Magnificent Building*, (London, 1662, EEBO edition); ditto, *Counsel and Advice to all Builders for the Choice of their Surveyours, Clerks of their Works, Bricklayers, Masons, Carpenters, and other Work-men ... In respect of their Works, Materials and Rates thereof*, (London, 1663, EEBO edition).

<sup>30</sup> Vitruvius’s *firmitas, utilitas, venustas*, Wotton’s ‘Commoditie, Firmenes, and Delight’: Wotton (1624), p.1; Gerbier, 1662, p.11.

Gerbier's down-to-earth advice and information on the diverse building trades and components: Gerbier's details and many of the prices he gives – for example, for decorative plasterwork, plain plastering, painterwork and glazing – coincide closely with the specifications and measured rates in George's Sudbury records.<sup>31</sup>

Warren has shown that even when provincial seventeenth-century families, such as those from Worcestershire, spent time in London and the capital influenced their tastes, architectural styles tended to be conservative.<sup>32</sup> George Vernon's links with London, particularly as an MP from 1679 onwards, align well with Warren's picture of Worcestershire's gentry.

It is probable that the forceful Colonel Edward Vernon was at his nephew George's shoulder very soon after his father died. Moving frequently in the early 1660s between London, Dublin and parts of the West Midlands, and with his elite associations through the duke of Ormond, the colonel was in a strong position to convey information about architectural trends.<sup>33</sup> But initially he was as likely as George, possibly even more so, to have been eager for an architectural statement that suggested the family's illustrious ancestry.<sup>34</sup> As considered below, it was not until a decade later that the colonel was in a position to influence the decision to construct a more up-to-date style of roof.

Not every builder was inspired solely by precedents originating in the capital. Worsley, writing much more astutely about Sudbury Hall than most previous commentators, acknowledged as persuasive my arguments that Crewe Hall was an

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<sup>31</sup> Gerbier (1663), pp.81-84; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), eg: pp.539-41, 546-55, 577.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Warren, 'London's Cultural Impact on the English Gentry: The Case of Worcestershire, c.1580–1680', *Midland History*, Vol.33, No.2 (Autumn 2008), pp.156-178. Hunneyball's detailed research for Hertfordshire has shown that those properties within twenty miles of London were the most significantly affected by changing fashions: Hunneyball (2004), p.185.

<sup>33</sup> The colonel must have witnessed Ormond's building works of the 1660s in Dublin Castle and at Kilkenny: Rolf Loeber, *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Ireland 1600–1720*, (London, 1981), pp.45-6, 78, 83.

important source of ideas and detailing for Sudbury.<sup>35</sup> I agree with his proposition that George Vernon was making a consciously old-fashioned point, and that Sudbury's anachronisms were deliberate. Much of his childhood and early experiences were in the areas north and west of Sudbury, where his father too was based for the second half of his life; the architecture of Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire's great houses is likely to have appealed to them more than Inigo Jones's restrained classicism or the artisan mannerism apparent to the east and closer to London. A desire to emulate former Lord Chief Justice Sir Ranulph Crewe and to have a comparable mansion, which must have been familiar to George in the most impressionable years of his unsettled early life, could have exerted a deeply-rooted influence.<sup>36</sup>

It is easier to imagine the Vernons looking admiringly at Moreton Corbet (with its family connections on George's mother's side), Conover or the great houses of the Newports at High Ercall and Eyton-on-Severn (all in Shropshire), or closer to hand Ingestre, Staffordshire, than at, for example, Thorpe Hall or Wisbech (both then in Cambridgeshire) and other comparable houses in parts of the country they had not frequented and with which they had no apparent associations.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Sir Roger Townshend at Raynham in Norfolk, there was no Inigo Jones-designed building nearby to use as an instructive example.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.5f-g, pp.163-87, 194, 276, 536-37.

<sup>35</sup> Giles Worsley, 'Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire', *Country Life*, (17 June 2004), p.140; Cherry Ann Knott, 'Sudbury Hall – Crewe Hall: a Close Connexion', in Andor Gomme, ed., *Architectural History*, Vol.44, (2001), pp.322-31.

<sup>36</sup> Sir Ranulph Crewe (d 1646 aged 87) was publicly held in greater esteem than GV's maternal grandfather, the irascible old judge Sir George Vernon of neighbouring Haslington Hall: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.1i, pp.32-34; 2, p.37; 3a-c, pp.70-87; 4c, 126-30, 437-38; Knott (2001), p.423.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp.436-37; Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.102-10; Cooper (1999), pp.5, 230.

<sup>38</sup> Like the Prince's Lodgings at Newmarket a few miles down the road to London from Raynham: Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.57-60; J.C. Robertson, 'Caroline Culture: Bridging Court and Country?', *History*, Vol.75, no.245, (1990), p.407.

Regional examples may well have been influential by other means. The accomplished land surveyor, William Fowler, was still at Sudbury at the beginning of 1660, increasing the possibility that he assisted in the accurate setting out of the site; if he was also contributing ideas from his years of experience, he too would have been thinking of properties in the West Midlands and Welsh border counties.<sup>39</sup>

Closer to Sudbury, Wollaton Hall (built by Robert Smythson 1580–1588) has been proposed as one of the great Elizabethan houses that the young George Vernon had a good possibility of knowing, if only as a traveller on the road from Derby to Nottingham.<sup>40</sup> Far larger and grander than his own enterprise at Sudbury, it could nevertheless have spurred his ambitions. Friedman, in her study of the Willoughby family and the construction of Wollaton, points to an apparent neglect of buildings of the Elizabethan period and laments the little serious attention given to the forming of English architectural style, it being eclipsed by the ensuing era of Inigo Jones and his influence, acclaimed as a new age of classicism.<sup>41</sup> Gent underlines the point that art history has been grounded in classicism.<sup>42</sup> Arciszewska comments on the dissonance between the importation of foreign ideals, as embodied in antiquity and classical styles, and the aesthetic preferences of the English public ‘which traditionally sought in architecture complexity of effects, producing amazement and surprise rather than clarity, proportion and regularity’.<sup>43</sup> As already noted, Chew has similarly made the

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<sup>39</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.439-41. It has recently been realised that Fowler was not only at Sudbury in 1658 and 1659, but witnessed GV’s financial agreement with his brother prior to GV’s marriage, 10 Jan 1659/60: DRO 410/M box 34.1882.

<sup>40</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.435, 437; Pamela Marshall, *Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family*, (Nottingham, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Alice T. Friedman, *House and Household in Elizabethan England: Wollaton Hall and the Willoughby Family*, (Chicago and London, 1989), p.5.

<sup>42</sup> Lucy Gent, ed. *Albion’s Classicism, The Visual Arts in Britain, 1550–1660*, (New Haven and London, 1995), quoted in Chew (2004), p.59.

<sup>43</sup> Arciszewska also draws attention to the importance of artisan practices, ‘the neglected “other” of the celebrated elitist Jonesian classicism’: Barbara Arciszewska, ‘Classicism: constructing the paradigm in Continental Europe and Britain’, in Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar,

case for buildings that consciously eschewed the Jonesian trend. She associates those created in alternative modes by the highly sophisticated countesses of Arundel and Pembroke with the fact that they were women.<sup>44</sup> I suggest that their design preferences were not only due to their gender, but also reflect aspirations that included making their own independent architectural choices, and that that was what George Vernon was likewise doing. He appears to have been seizing the opportunity identified by Heal and Holmes, that a gentleman could ‘make effective statements about power and honour through his aesthetic choices’.<sup>45</sup> It seems he satisfied Roger North’s belief, ‘I can shew you a man’s character in his house’.<sup>46</sup>

Although the overall architectural impression of Sudbury Hall is anachronistic, its external detailings are subtle. They demonstrate a close understanding of how the modelling of a façade can be articulated.<sup>47</sup> Further, there is evidence of George’s increasing awareness of more up-to-date forms of detailing as the building progressed upwards. Thus the bases of the lower entrance columns and the intermediate entablature have patently Jacobean strapwork and low relief details (of the kind used at Crewe Hall), but the upper entablature and cornice are plain and of a more contemporary, classical design. The role of artisans in spreading knowledge and techniques could well have come into play here. It is very likely that George’s attention would have been drawn to current trends by some of the masons working for

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eds, *Articulating British Classicism: New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Architecture*, (Ashgate, 2004), pp.14-15.

<sup>44</sup> Both had been in close contact with metropolitan fashions and had experience of residing in exceptionally large sumptuous mansions (Longleat and Wilton respectively) before they undertook their own building enterprises in London and the north of England: Chew (2004), pp.57-95.

<sup>45</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.2 and 3, pp.37-99; J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England A Social History 1550–1760*, (London, 1987), pp.328-31; Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500–1700*, (Basingstoke, 1994), p.299.

<sup>46</sup> Howard Colvin and John Newman, eds, *Of Building, Roger North’s Writings on Architecture*, (Oxford, 1981), p.7.

<sup>47</sup> Eg, the use of flush, proud and chamfered masonry dressings: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.14f,

him. Stonecarver William Wilson may have had an influence in the later stages, although his presence at Sudbury was before his known career as a surveyor and designer of buildings, and his other works executed previously and around his Sudbury period were as a statuary.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, it is conceivable that he played some part in the design of the Hall's most idiosyncratic feature, the pairs of horizontal oval lights in the tracery of five large upper-floor windows.<sup>49</sup> These 'spectacles' have been associated with other unusual stonework in the vicinity, but visually there seems little likeness and any connection is at best tentative.<sup>50</sup>

Details could have been proposed by some of the master craftsmen on site, but George's high order of supervision will have been required to ensure consistent execution on all elevations over many years. Also clearly manifest is the basic decision that the entrance façade facing the road should be strikingly impressive, both in general impact and in the recognisable complexity of its detailing, while the other three less conspicuous elevations could be far plainer. Still reflecting this principle thirty years later, when commissioning two rows of stone balustrading to the front of the Hall, George specified that the rail and base of the row next to the house should have 'lesser moulding on the side towards the house'.<sup>51</sup>

The Hall's most overtly 'modern' element externally is of course its hipped roof, very probably a change from the original concept, likely to have been gabled.

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p.515; the strategic deployment of diapering in the brickwork: *ibid*, ch.14d, p.510.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, pp.440, 528-33; Colvin, *Dictionary* (1995), pp.1063-64.

<sup>49</sup> National Trust, *Sudbury Hall*, guide book (2005), p.7. Illustrated *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.446 **12.14**, 448 **12.15**, 452, **12.18**, 564 **16.26**. No directly comparable feature appears in Wilson's known buildings, but much later he was responsible for the unusual tracery of nave and aisle windows, St Mary's Warwick, rebuilt 1698: Colvin, *Dictionary* (1995), p.1064.

<sup>50</sup> Buildings cited by others include Shire Hall, Derby [*Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), p.443] and Locko Park chapel, 1669-73, both by George Eaton of Etwall: Maxwell Craven and Michael Stanley, *The Derbyshire Country House*, (Derby, 1991), p.201. The only example found of comparable oval lights was at Cophthall, but occurring singly in unusual, robust replacement windows c.1639, possibly by Nicholas Stone, likewise at each end of a long gallery; no link known between there and Sudbury: John Newman, 'Cophthall, Essex' in Howard Colvin and John Harris, eds, *The Country Seat: Studies in the History of the British Country House*, (London, 1970), pp.18-29.

The possibility of the direct transmission of this idea from London to Sudbury, through Colonel Vernon's associations and mobility, and George's own visits there, provides a good example of how such influences could spread across the country.<sup>52</sup>

From the mid-1670s through to the turn of the century George was commissioning and purchasing from the most respected practitioners in a number of fields. While he was in the capital he acquired significant and sophisticated items to enhance his Sudbury mansion's interiors and gardens, all from leading artists, makers and suppliers: well-established portrait and landscape painters, master carvers Grinling Gibbons and Edward Pearce, the foremost organ-builder of the day, and almost all the capital's established nurserymen.<sup>53</sup> However, for George, London had never been his only source of inspiration when it came to choices for Sudbury. In the last decade of the seventeenth century, when further adornments to his house were set in train, he turned not towards the capital but to the latest enterprise of Derbyshire's greatest magnate, the first duke of Devonshire, and enticed two top calibre men then employed at Chatsworth – carver Thomas Young and muralist Louis Laguerre – to come and work at Sudbury.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4. Implementation**

Hunneyball recognises building work as 'an interactive process between the practical aspects of construction, design, craftsmanship and expense, and the social framework of the activity'.<sup>55</sup> The building of Sudbury Hall demonstrates all these factors.

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<sup>51</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), p.640.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, chs.5f, pp.173-74; 15f, p.535.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, pp.212-14, 353-58, 376-78, 380-84, 414-19, 553-66, 570-74, 583-87.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, ch.18c-d, pp.609-18.

<sup>55</sup> Hunneyball (2004), p.6. Airs stresses the collaborative nature of design and building processes in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century: Malcolm Airs, *The Making of the English Country*

However, by the second half of the seventeenth century, at the level of upper gentry and above, if there was no architect or surveyor, then an agent or one of the master craftsmen would act as an intermediary between workforce and patron. For example, Edward Clarke of Chipley, Somerset, contracted in the early 1680s with a London carpenter, William Taylor, to build a new house at Chipley. Taylor engaged local workmen, and under his direction the way bricks, stone and other materials were obtained has many similarities with Sudbury, but with the crucial distinction that Clarke himself was not directly involved in the day-to-day operations. This contractual formula was repeated four years later, when Clarke recommended Taylor to Sir Walter Yonge, who was embarking on a new house at Escot in Devon.<sup>56</sup> Only at the levels of parish gentry and yeomen might detailed development and supervision of building continue to be undertaken by owners and viewed as essentially an artisan activity.<sup>57</sup> George Vernon was exceptional in taking entire responsibility for all aspects of his building operations (large and small), personally dealing with suppliers of materials, specifying qualities and determining quantities, employing direct labour and craftsmen on day-wages, also making agreements based on piece or measured rates.<sup>58</sup> Despite a few periods when a trusted steward made a proportion of the payments to craftsmen with whom George had contracted, throughout four decades his own grip and close involvement never abated.<sup>59</sup> There were even at least two days when he himself did practical 'hands on' glazing work, paying himself at a master

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*House, 1500–1640*, (London, 1975); ditto (1995), especially chs.4 and 5.

<sup>56</sup> Chipley was slightly smaller and more modest in every respect than Sudbury. Clarke's contacts with London and a wider world were facilitated by his close friendship with the philosopher John Locke: Bridget Clarke, *The life and correspondence of Edward Clarke of Chipley 1650–1710*, (2007), [www.nynehead.org/pdfs/clarke/clarke1.pdf](http://www.nynehead.org/pdfs/clarke/clarke1.pdf) accessed 15.1.2012.

<sup>57</sup> Hunneyball (2004), pp.57-58.

<sup>58</sup> Eg – *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.459, 483, 521, 525, 538.

<sup>59</sup> Eg – Ben Edbury, *Edward Greatricks, Edward Burton*: *ibid*, pp.292, 459, 468, 504, 511,642, 663, 695. They therefore also made the associated entries in GV's Creditor-Debtor book.

craftsman's rate.<sup>60</sup>

Other than Wilson and plasterers James Pettifer and Robert Bradbury, itinerant craftsmen were not brought to Sudbury.<sup>61</sup> Labourers and the majority of craftsmen employed there were comparatively local. Some were already, or became, tenants on the estate; many resided nearby.<sup>62</sup> Several master craftsmen came from the centre of Derby.<sup>63</sup> It was not until the 1670s, when he wanted more elaborate decorative works and the highest calibre of artists and craftsmen, that George looked towards London.<sup>64</sup>

The many instances where members of more than one generation of craftsmen in a family worked together at Sudbury through the 1660s, 1670s and 1680s, accord well with the information given by Airs in relation to some individual projects of the previous hundred years.<sup>65</sup> But the Sudbury examples cover longer time-spans; indeed, the records show that many craftsmen and labourers were employed there repeatedly over considerable numbers of years.<sup>66</sup>

Hunneyball regrets the non-existence of a comprehensive account of standard

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, ch.11b, pp.387-89.

<sup>61</sup> This contrasts with the extensive and wide range of examples of itinerant craftsmen across the spectrum of building trades for the periods before the mid-seventeenth century: Airs (1995), ch.12, pp.147-57; eg – father and son master masons Robert and John Smythson, their mobility largely steered by the courtly connections between their aristocratic employers: Girouard (1983); architect William Winde's protégé, the decorative plasterer Edward Goudge: Dianne Barre and R.A. Chaplin, eds, *William Winde: Advice on Fashionable Interior Decoration ... correspondence with Lady Bridgeman regarding ... Castle Bromwich Hall, Worcestershire, 1685–1703*, (Birmingham, 1983). [William Wilson supplied two statues for the main entrance porch].

<sup>62</sup> Eg – in Tutbury and Uttoxeter: eg, *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.13, especially pp.457-94, 499, 506, 514, 537.

<sup>63</sup> Eg – ibid, ch.12c, pp.444, 546.

<sup>64</sup> Eg – ibid, Ch.16c and 16d, pp.553–562.

<sup>65</sup> Eg – Bannisters, Coatons, Colbornes, Harlowes, Harrison's, Mortons, Normans, Stanleys, Walkers: ibid, pp.491-4, Chs.14, 15, 16. Airs' examples relate to Wollaton Hall (1584–85), Rushton (1595), Trentham Hall (1633–8): Airs (1995), pp.157-64.

<sup>66</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.13–15, pp. 490-94, 504, 506, 514, 521. Comparisons can also be made for the duration of employment of individual labourers, but again, Airs' examples are for much shorter periods than those known for Sudbury: Airs (1995), p.168; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.492-94, 543, 574.

costs of building works in those decades following the period covered by Airs.<sup>67</sup> Sir Roger Pratt's records provide the richest source of comparisons, particularly those relating to Pratt's own new, if rather smaller house, Ryston Hall, where much of the work was contemporaneous with Sudbury.<sup>68</sup> Rogers' examples for building materials in the later part of the seventeenth century are predominantly from the south of England.<sup>69</sup> His examples of craftsmen's day-rates for the same period are scant and show some bias.<sup>70</sup> Nichols' figures for Warwickshire give closer parallels with Sudbury.<sup>71</sup> The true significance of Sudbury in this respect lies in the wealth of information about building costs. George Vernon's building activities yield numerous examples of day-rates paid to labourers and to craftsmen in the various building trades, reflecting their different levels of skill. Moreover, they contribute information about the measured rates being paid for materials and many elements of building work in the rural north Midlands throughout the last four decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hunneyball, (2004), p.5; Airs (1995), pp.195-203.

<sup>68</sup> R.T. Gunther, ed., *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, (Oxford, 1928), pp.170-93.

<sup>69</sup> Oxford and Cambridge colleges dominating as sources, the prices seem inflated: James E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, Vol.VI, 1583–1702, (Oxford, 1887), pp. 449-521.

<sup>70</sup> The numbers given by Rogers for the second half of the century are few; derived mainly from Oxford, Cambridge, London, Winchester and Eton, they may be inflated: *ibid*, pp.643-51; E.H. Phelps Brown and Sheila V. Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of Building Wages' in E.M. Carus-Wilson, ed., *Essays In Economic History*, Vol.II, (London, 1962), pp.168-77.

<sup>71</sup> J. Nichols, 'The rates of wages of all manner of servants etc in Warwickshire, 36 Car II', *Archaeologia*, 1st series XI (1794), pp.208-11.

<sup>72</sup> Eg – *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.13k-m, pp.488-94, 520.

## 5. The plan – public and private spheres

Sudbury Hall's plan incorporates some traditional conventions which could be considered outmoded.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, it is highly practical – a model of well-understood functional design, unimpeded by strictures of symmetry.<sup>74</sup> It incorporates interesting, sometimes exceptionally dramatic sequences of spaces. The most formal areas are clearly distinct from the smaller-scaled family quarters, the axis of the Great Passage providing a well-defined division between the two halves of the house.<sup>75</sup> It does not, however, make any concessions to the symmetry adopted for the plans of some of the other gentry houses built close to the same date, with their arrangements based on a large central entrance hall.<sup>76</sup>

In stark contrast with Sudbury, Sir Roger Pratt's design for Coleshill House, Berkshire, is symmetrical both externally and in principle in its plan. Aesthetically Coleshill merits its accolades as an elegant, understated version of Palladian design for a double-pile English country house directly influenced by Inigo Jones.<sup>77</sup> I would argue

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<sup>73</sup> Eg – the incorporation of an impressively large long gallery; the retention of the relationship of entrance passage and great hall.

<sup>74</sup> Symmetry acknowledged by Bold as imposing limitations: John Bold, 'Privacy and the Plan', in John Bold and Edward Chaney, eds, *English Architecture Public and Private: essays for Kerry Downes*, (London, 1993), p.118. In Sudbury's non-symmetrical plan, no private rooms interconnected without there also being an alternative entry/exit from a public or circulation space.

<sup>75</sup> GV's own term; called the 'Entrance Passage' in National Trust guide books. Aligned on the axis of the pre-existing formal gardens: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.12d, pp.444-45, 12e, p.447. It equates with Maguire's 'glide': Alison Margaret Maguire, 'Country House Planning in England, from c.1660 to c.1700', (1989) unpublished PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, pp.462, 469, 480.

<sup>76</sup> Eg, plans given in Hill and Cornforth (1966) – Raynham Hall, Norfolk, 1622–32, p.59; Stoke Park, Northamptonshire, begun 1629, p.61; Coleshill, Berkshire, completed 1662, p.94; Eltham Lodge, Kent, 1663–65, p.150; Longnor Hall, Shropshire begun before 1670, completed by 1690, p.157; Ramsbury Manor, Wiltshire, begun c.1680, p.180; The Palace, Lichfield, 1685–89, p.186; Belton House, Lincolnshire, 1684–88, p.198

<sup>77</sup> Designed c.1650, built c.1659–1662, destroyed by fire 1953: Gunther, (1928), pp.92-97; Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.90-96; Girouard (1978), pp.122-25; Cooper (1999), pp.186-89; Colin Platt, *The Great Rebuilding of Tudor and Stuart England*, (London, 1994), pp.37-40; Giles Worsley, *England's Lost Houses*, (London, 2002), pp.112-15; Gunther's floor plans (basement, ground and first floors, dated 1670–1690), having been produced while the house still stood, are likely to be the most reliable. Some subsequent replications elsewhere omit one of the back stairs

that its plan has several functional deficiencies, none of which occur at Sudbury. For example, North, writing in the late 1690s, recommended a second or back entrance giving ready access to kitchen and servants' hall, while also being conveniently near the family's private rooms, thus suitable for their informal use, and affording easy entry for anyone arriving by carriage.<sup>78</sup> Sudbury's side entrance was at ground level and had all those advantages; the room positions and basement-level entrance at Coleshill failed to serve any of them.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, while supposedly affording the flexibility that Girouard states Pratt intended, Coleshill had very restricted options of room sizes.<sup>80</sup> At Sudbury, where rooms were of many different floor areas and ceiling heights, there would have been far more flexibility to meet the household's changing needs, both formal and informal.

More significant is the contrast in the staircase arrangements of Coleshill and Sudbury. Maguire, in her study of the plans of late seventeenth-century country houses, correctly identifies staircases as 'the most essential parts of the circulation pattern through a house', and recognises that it was important to incorporate different routes.<sup>81</sup> Much has been made of Pratt's Coleshill staircase with its paired-flights in the centrally positioned main entrance hall, although in functional terms it would have imposed

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on the upper main floor and some fail to indicate the essential basement level entrance at the south end of the central corridor, eg Hill and Cornforth (1966), p.94; Platt (1994), p.94. No architectural histories give an attic plan; a recent research enterprise, CART (Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team [www.coleshillhouse.com](http://www.coleshillhouse.com)) is now making more detail available. [I am grateful to CART's researchers for sight of their © plans produced in 2007.]. In Bold's view Coleshill's plan represents 'a perfect marriage of form and function', an opinion subsequently espoused by McKeon: Bold (1993), p.117; Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*, (Baltimore, 2005), pp.220-46.

<sup>78</sup> Colvin and Newman (1981), pp.128-29.

<sup>79</sup> None of the commentators on Coleshill has pointed out the crucial fact that there was an external entrance to the basement at the centre of the south end of the house (nor is it indicated on some of the published plans), yet the functioning and separation of all the service rooms depended upon it.

<sup>80</sup> Girouard (1978), pp.122-23.

<sup>81</sup> Maguire (1989), pp.462-63.

limitations.<sup>82</sup> Sudbury Hall's Great Staircase could hardly be more different.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, unlike the main staircases in several other comparable seventeenth-century gentry houses, it is not hidden from the great hall, nor fitted in between reception rooms confining scale, impact and natural light.<sup>84</sup> It occupies its own two-storey-high volume, taking up the whole of one projecting end bay on the entrance side of the house, thus having three external walls with large windows on two opposite sides.<sup>85</sup> No other double- or triple-pile seventeenth-century mansion about which evidence survives had its main staircase in such a position. Exemplifying Maguire's proposal that the fewer storeys a great staircase serves 'the more reserved and special it is', Sudbury's affords a dramatic vertical climax at the centre of the sequences of grand formal spaces on both principal floors on the 'public' side of the house.<sup>86</sup> Yet it was still in the traditional relationship to the great hall, from which it becomes readily visible – as Maguire says 'it would have been quite automatic to walk from the great hall through to the great stair'.<sup>87</sup> Bold highlights the increased separation between formal and informal areas of larger seventeenth-century dwellings – the public and the private family parts.<sup>88</sup> McKeon, takes this further, equating it with the man's outdoors,

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<sup>82</sup> The bottom of the two flights being immediately adjacent to the main entrance door could have caused circulation problems; the openness of the entrance hall and the staircase landing at the upper level would have precluded private movement from one side of the house to the other.

<sup>83</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.16c, pp.553-61, 611-14, appendices C2, C4, pp.715, 717.

<sup>84</sup> Eg – in Hill and Cornforth (1966): Raynham, Norfolk, p.59; Thorpe Hall, Northamptonshire, pp102-6; Longnor Hall, Shropshire, pp157-58; Eltham Lodge, Kent, pp.150-53; Denham Place, Buckinghamshire, p.210.

<sup>85</sup> Possibly also on the third for an initial 15 years: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), p.612.

<sup>86</sup> Maguire (1989), pp.462-63. Notwithstanding, to believe that only guests and family members ever trod the principal staircase is to forget other practicalities, such as cleaning; the timing of all domestic activities in relation to family and guests' use of parts of the house was critical, yet this factor rarely seems to be taken into account.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p.463; North also wanted great stairs to be visible from the hall: Colvin and Newman (1981), p.123.

<sup>88</sup> Bold (1993), pp.114-17.

public realm, and the woman's sphere of the household.<sup>89</sup> Girouard considers that two 'innovations' were crucial to achieving this separation, and making it possible to position the former 'great hall' centrally to create an imposing entrance hall that could also accommodate the principal staircase. First was provision of separate eating accommodation for servants, so that they no longer dined in the great hall – Sudbury's spacious Hinds' Hall, at semi-basement level at its kitchen end, is an excellent example;<sup>90</sup> second was the introduction of backstairs to stop servants using the main staircase. Girouard deems the former 'a momentous break with tradition', and the latter a 'revolutionary invention'.<sup>91</sup> Bold emphasises the importance of backstairs (also calling them service stairs), though acknowledging that Howard has identified such staircases and corridors in early Tudor country houses that 'were an essential part of the complicated arrangements for privacy and security'.<sup>92</sup>

Yet the accepted argument about the role of backstairs is flawed. The ones at either end of Coleshill's central sections of corridor on principal and upper floors would not in reality have achieved the separation that Girouard, Bold and McKeon have perceived, since they were the only option for the family and guests to use for access to the attic floor and thence to the central staircase of the cupola. In addition, the great staircase in the entrance hall would not have served well for the family's movements between their chambers and private parlours. Sharing those two smaller, winder staircases with all the servants going about their work would have been unavoidable.

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<sup>89</sup> McKeon (2005), 238-42.

<sup>90</sup> Another of North's 1690s recommendations: Colvin and Newman(1981), p.138; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.12e, p.450 and appendix C1, p.714.

<sup>91</sup> Girouard (1978), pp.122-23, 138. Girouard acknowledges that backstairs had existed in France since the sixteenth century, that they appeared in embryo in England in the first half of the seventeenth century, but credits Pratt with their systemisation.

<sup>92</sup> Bold (1993), p.115; Maurice Howard, *The Early Tudor Country House, Architecture and Politics 1490–1550*, (London, 1987), pp.83-88.

In contrast, Sudbury's hierarchy of staircases would have afforded far more potential for all the household's diverse activities to operate efficiently and discreetly. Crucial to the arrangements were George Vernon's 'Middle Stairs' – the equivalent of what Cooper identifies as 'secondary' staircases.<sup>93</sup> Maguire describes these as household stairs, also associating them with 'great backstairs'.<sup>94</sup> Pratt himself included 'Greate back staires' at Horseheath, Cambridgeshire.<sup>95</sup> The significance of such staircases in seventeenth and early eighteenth-century houses seems to have been largely overlooked by Girouard, Bold and McKeon, even though many houses had one, and sometimes more than one; most, like Sudbury, also had separate, smaller backstairs, often with winders.<sup>96</sup> Secondary stairs were by no means as grand as principal or 'great' staircases, but they were certainly not intended only for servants. Sudbury's Middle Staircase is a perfect example.<sup>97</sup> Strategically positioned within the private half of the house, it climbed from the main ground floor to the attics, providing the house's major vertical artery, as well as an alternative route to the Turret.<sup>98</sup> Comprised of simple straight half-flights and half-landings, with good natural light

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<sup>93</sup> Cooper (1999), pp.219, 306.

<sup>94</sup> She found them popular at the end of the sixteenth century and still prevalent after 1660: Maguire (1989), pp.462, 469, 480.

<sup>95</sup> Gunther (1928), pp.124-25; Hill and Cornforth(1966), pp.31, 234.

<sup>96</sup> Eg – **Raynham Hall**, Norfolk, 1622–c.1632, built by Sir Roger Townshend: Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.57-60. **Horseheath**, Cambs, built 1663–65 for Lord Allington to Pratt's design; included carvings by Edward Pearce: Gunther (1928), pp.117-31, plan opposite p.118. **Eltham Lodge**, Kent, 1663–65, designed by Hugh May: Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.150-54; Maguire (1989), C3, p.47. **Highmeadow House**, Glos, completed by 1672: Nicholas Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume II, 1660–1830*, (Chichester, 1992), pp.161-63; plans in Colen Campbell, *Vitruvius Britannicus*, Vol.II, (1717), pls 39-40 and Vol.III, (1725), pl.62. **Longnor Hall**, Salop, c.1668–1690, begun by Sir Richard Corbet, completed by his son: Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.155-61; plan: Maguire (1989), C11, p.187-88. **Belton House**, Lincs (two secondary staircases, but no backstairs), 1684–88, designer possibly William Winde: Hill and Cornforth (1966), pp.193-202; Heal and Holmes (1994), p.303.

<sup>97</sup> Now called the Oak Staircase: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.12e, p.451; 17d, pp.588-89, **17.10–17.12**.

<sup>98</sup> Allowing for its narrower scale and the writhing of its handrail, the Turret staircase has the same profiling for its handrail and 'urn and twisted barley-sugar' balusters as the 'Middle Stairs': *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.551, 588.

from adjacent windows, its materials and detailing were (and remain) robust but of quality. Sufficiently generous (in width, rise and going) for all to have been able to use it comfortably, without losing dignity, its primary users would have been the family, and all but the most formal of guests. Servants could have used it too, depending upon their status, roles and tasks. It would have been by far the busiest staircase in the house. Existence of strategically positioned secondary staircases also meant that great staircases could have more elaborate and delicate balustrading (Sudbury being the perfect example), than would have been realistic if they were trodden many times a day and used by people carrying household items.

McKeon's 'dyadic separation between the public and the private' and 'between those labouring in the house and the family and guests who inhabit it', starts to look much less secure in the light of Sudbury's design.<sup>99</sup>

## 6. Conspicuous Consumption

To what extent was George Vernon a conspicuous consumer? Veblen associated the term with gentlemen of leisure.<sup>100</sup> In more recent writings such consumption has been linked to concepts of 'luxury', 'culture', 'emulation' and 'imitation', and considered the pre-cursor of the industrial revolution and associated with the expansion of capitalism.<sup>101</sup> Peck acknowledges building as the most prominent of all forms of

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<sup>99</sup> McKeon (2005), pp. xxi, 242.

<sup>100</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions*, (New York, 1899), ch.4.

<sup>101</sup> Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and John Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, (London, 1982); Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption – New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*, ii, (Bloomington, 1988) ch.5; Colin Campbell, 'Understanding traditional and modern patterns of consumption in eighteenth-century England: a character-action approach', in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, (London, 1993), pp.40-57. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds, *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object,*

conspicuous consumption, affording ‘the opportunity to project power, wealth, identity, and taste to neighbors, superiors, and subordinates’; furthermore, its impact could endure. She also acknowledges buildings to be a family’s greatest economic investment and cultural statement, a ‘less likely site of short-term changes in luxury consumption’.<sup>102</sup> All this certainly applies to Sudbury Hall. Without doubt George’s most conspicuous expenditure was the creation of his new mansion and its immediate surroundings, to an outlay of some £20,000.<sup>103</sup> It was unusually close to a public highway: even before it was externally complete, throughout the 1660s its construction site would have been of visibly impressive size. After it was being lived in (from the early 1680s), work continued to the end of the century on its gardens, including a formal area between Hall and main road. This was conspicuous consumption on a scale noteworthy for a gentleman of George’s comparatively modest status. Yet it is not certain who will have actually seen the sumptuous interiors, beyond members of the extended family and some Midlands gentry (sociability was not evidently George Vernon’s forte). But it is clear from his will and final directives, that he fully intended Sudbury Hall to make an impact into the future.<sup>104</sup>

Cooper gives several examples of houses of the first half of the seventeenth century about which contemporary comments indicate that ‘conspicuous consumption was one of the characteristics of architectural gentility’. He also looks closely at compact, rectangular Derbyshire gentry houses whose owners, or the next generation of them, would have been George Vernon’s peers; but Sudbury Hall is significantly larger and manifests no similarities – George seems to have been standing apart, striving for a

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*Text*, (London, 1995). Campbell warns that not all consumption is emulative; many items may be desired for their own sake, rather than for the prestige attached to them.

<sup>102</sup> Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendour: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, (Cambridge, 2005), p.188. Includes a rich account of building projects of English aristocracy in the first decades of the seventeenth century, but unfortunately it stops at 1660: *ibid*, ch.5.

<sup>103</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.20, pp.642-43.

different league.<sup>105</sup> Referring to the second half of the seventeenth century, and quoting some of Woolley's observations on seats of Derbyshire gentry (made in the first years of the eighteenth century), Hunneyball has concluded that people 'certainly had a good sense of the levels of display which they considered appropriate for a gentleman'.<sup>106</sup> Was George matching or exceeding their expectations? Woolley's interest was more in properties' landscape settings than in their architecture but, crediting George Vernon with its creation, he considered that his heir had 'a noble park and good house', and that Sudbury, 'for convenience of gardens, water, wood and site, as well as magnificence, is exceeded by few in the county'.<sup>107</sup>

Research has proposed a much wider relevance for conspicuous consumption, focusing mainly on ranges of working people of the 'middling sort'.<sup>108</sup> In much of the related writings, the emphasis is on the eighteenth century.<sup>109</sup> George Vernon seems to be on the edge of this historiographical frame. When geographic samples have been used, Derbyshire scarcely features.<sup>110</sup> Socially, George was below aristocratic echelons, but above the scope of the larger research projects covering the late seventeenth

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.690.

<sup>105</sup> Cooper (1999), pp.15-16.

<sup>106</sup> Hunneyball, (2004), p.24.

<sup>107</sup> Catherine Glover and Philip Riden, eds, *William Woolley's History of Derbyshire*, Derbyshire Record Society, Vol.VI, (1981, Wingerworth), pp.116-17. Written c.1715, but not previously published.

<sup>108</sup> Eg – Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760*, (London and New York, 1988); Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660–1730*, (London, 1989). Earle's sample includes rich merchants and landowners; if GV had owned a London house he would probably have been in the base from which the selection was drawn; the merchant brother-in-law of his third wife is named.

<sup>109</sup> Eg – Jenny Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, *Women and Material Culture 1660–1830*, (Basingstoke, 2007): despite title, nothing pre-1700; John Brewer and Susan Staves, *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, (London, 1995): focus is on land and concepts of property; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, 1689–1798*, the Ford Lectures, (Oxford, 1991): predominantly eighteenth century and later; likewise Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: British Women and Consumer Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540–1880*, (Oxford, 1984); Weatherill (1988); Wilson and Mackley (2000).

century.<sup>111</sup> Notwithstanding, aside from his overt architectural statement at Sudbury, in terms of his acquisitions and actions he appears aspiring and in the process became a conspicuous consumer.

From the juncture of his inheritance in 1659, George's lifestyle falls into two distinct parts. By far the larger was the time he spent over the ensuing forty-three years as a landed gentleman based at Sudbury, using most of his resources improving that estate and creating his grand new mansion. Until he became an MP in 1679 he only made occasional short visits to London; but in fourteen of the next twenty-two years, he was there for several weeks, sometimes months, at a time.<sup>112</sup> The capital thus became a much greater influence on his expenditure, a significant amount of it being conspicuous.

But even at home in his old Derbyshire manor house in the early 1660s George's choices were influenced by London's vogues: by 1662 he had a tailor there who supplied him with high quality, richly trimmed garments, advised on the latest fashions and handled some of his other London transactions.<sup>113</sup>

In writings on conspicuous consumption, the emphasis has tended to be on the types and quantities of items acquired. Very little is said about the extents of 'conspicuousness'. If merit was to be accrued through conspicuous consumption, then it will have required others than the acquirer to be aware of it. So the absence of commentary about Sudbury Hall by George's peers and contemporaries, beyond the briefest of references (Woolley, above), is hard to explain.

Circumstances changed when George went to London. Fisher highlights the point: 'an invariable characteristic of the gentleman come to town was his

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<sup>111</sup> Weatherill (1988); Earle (1989).

<sup>112</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.10d-e, 10g, 11h, chart p.414.

<sup>113</sup> Henry Nutting: *ibid*, ch.11d, pp.390-95.

ostentatious display'.<sup>114</sup> It would be unjust to brand George as ostentatious in this respect, but his spending was at times lavish and some purchases involved considerable sums.

By the early seventeenth century the London 'season' was clearly defined, with many landed gentry families routinely spending a part of every year there.<sup>115</sup> George's stays followed the pattern.<sup>116</sup> Occasionally he went on his own, but more often he was accompanied by members of his family and some servants. When late in life he re-entered Parliament, he rented a house in the newly developed area of St James's, Westminster, close to Piccadilly and fashionable St James's Park and Hyde Park.<sup>117</sup>

Extensive research on consumerism has been carried out using samples of probate inventories for both London and other selected areas of the country, from 1675 and well into the eighteenth century.<sup>118</sup> But lists and additions of goods found in such inventories present (literally) 'dead' information. They are of significant but limited value and can be misleading unless evidence from the type of accounting material such as is available for Sudbury is taken into consideration. For example, findings about utensils for hot drinks in Weatherill's inventory research (reflecting expanding enthusiasm for tea, coffee and chocolate), have led to the belief that they were not used in the West Midlands until the second decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>119</sup> But the

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<sup>114</sup> Frederick Jack Fisher, 'The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series, Vol.30, (1948), p.46.

<sup>115</sup> Eg, the Verneys of Claydon: Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660–1720*, (Oxford, 1999); Warren (2008), pp.162-70.

<sup>116</sup> From the autumn through Christmas and New Year to the spring, over by June: Fisher (1948), p.43.

<sup>117</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.10d, e, g, and Table 11h, p.414.

<sup>118</sup> Weatherill (1988); Earle (1989).

<sup>119</sup> Weatherill (1988), p.49; Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities, Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470–1750*, (London, 2002), p.298.

Sudbury steward bought coffee pots in the nearby Staffordshire market town of Uttoxeter in December 1688 and June 1689. George's family had chocolate in the first months of 1690, and in London in May 1701 he bought a chocolate mill and thirty-six pounds of sweetened chocolate to take back to Sudbury.<sup>120</sup>

A further limitation of inventories is that many households included not just the possessions of the deceased: those of other people living there also contributed to the establishment's assets. There are several Vernon examples. Within George Vernon's household, his wives, sons and daughters had their personal possessions – clothes, jewellery, books, sewing equipment and materials, musical instruments, even furniture – some purchased specifically for them, some received as gifts or bequests.<sup>121</sup>

Hori has contended that gentry account books 'offer neglected but invaluable material for the economic and social historian that deserves intensive exploitation'.<sup>122</sup> It is exactly these kinds of records of items purchased, payments made, and indications of creditors and debtors that have formed the largest element of my research. De Vries addresses concerns about consumer demand for goods, which he sees as a dynamic concept, relating to changing behaviour wherein individuals augment, replenish or reduce their goods.<sup>123</sup> Sudbury's archives illuminate his point.

An attribute of my case study is that it has drawn upon a rich mixture of primary sources: not only legal documents, personal correspondence and account books, but also bills from tradespeople and surviving objects and buildings. All help to give time-frames, animate contexts and add further dimensions, including indications of changes,

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<sup>120</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.11e, p.398.

<sup>121</sup> GV's parents initially lived with his grandfather at Haslington, hence the lists headed 'his' and 'ours' when the old man died: *ibid*, ch.2, p.38; his other grandparents shared the old Sudbury manor house with his great-grandmother: *ibid*, chs.1g, pp.25; 4c, pp.118-22; also ch.7b, pp.237, 243, 251-52.

<sup>122</sup> Motoko Hori, 'The Price and Quality of wine and Conspicuous Consumption in England, 1646–1759', *English Historical Review*, CXXIII (505), (2008), p.1459.

<sup>123</sup> Jan de Vries, 'Between purchasing power and the world of goods: understanding the household

not obtainable from the starkness of inventories: we learn when chests of drawers were acquired and sometimes where they came from; discover a garment's colours, the different fabrics and trimmings required for it, exactly how much they all cost and probably who made it. We know, for example, that George Vernon bought several coats in the early 1660s of differing weights and qualities, including the most heavily trimmed, fashionably long one when he was high sheriff of Derbyshire and was to receive the herald for the county's Visitation. Over the years he had different styles of wig, purchased new hats but also had an older one, a beaver, re-vamped.<sup>124</sup> The extensive ranges of choice and quality (of the kinds described by Thirsk) would have been influences.<sup>125</sup> George indulged his wives with gifts of expensive gowns, lace and fabrics; they could do him credit when appearing in society, albeit his associated expenditure was much in line with that of his peers. His only surviving son was extravagantly and modishly dressed even as a very small boy.<sup>126</sup> Some of his servants were liveried and had red waistcoats.<sup>127</sup> Whyman's view appears to confirm that all this amounted to conspicuous consumption:

City living also encouraged social display and material values. With increased availability of material goods, conspicuous consumption proved that one met certain standards.<sup>128</sup>

Moving to larger-scale, more long-term acquisitions, George began buying good quality furniture almost as soon as he arrived in the capital as an MP in 1679 and

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economy in early modern Europe', in Brewer and Porter (1993), Pt.II ch.5, p.103.

<sup>124</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.11d, pp.390-96.

<sup>125</sup> Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 1978), pp.106-9.

<sup>126</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.8c, pp.289-90.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p.397.

<sup>128</sup> Whyman (1999), p.93.

continued to do so during each of his London visits thereafter.<sup>129</sup> He bought expensive hangings, and more than once made purchases from ‘Mr Bealing’, probably the upholsterer Richard Bealing later named frequently in royal household accounts.<sup>130</sup>

George also went to many of the best London-based artists patronised by aristocrats and the crown.<sup>131</sup> This could have raised his profile and given opportunities for his commissions and acquisitions to be observed by people of much higher social standing than himself. He and members of his family sitting for their portraits in painters’ studios meant he could readily have been noted as a man of taste and prosperity. He also used well-known frame-makers.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, his visits to a remarkable number of the capital’s nurserymen in the 1670s and 1680s, and again around the turn of the century, could have been observed by other customers, many of whom were members of the nobility.<sup>133</sup>

After arriving at Sudbury, the majority of all these items would have been seen only by visitors going inside the Hall. The exceptions would have been all the flowers, shrubs and trees in its surrounding gardens, the lead garden sculptures bought from Anthony Verhuick, and Pearce’s freestanding monument to George’s first wife in Sudbury parish church – all of which had been transported from London.<sup>134</sup>

Another overt form of consumption was George’s expenditure on horses. Several were coach horses, but some cost considerably more and were probably for his own use when riding longer distances or performing his role in the militia. On one or two

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<sup>129</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.17e, 18a, 21a.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, chs.17e, p.591; 18a, p.608.

<sup>131</sup> Eg – carvers Edward Pearce and Grinling Gibbons; portrait painters John Michael Wright, John Riley, John Closterman, Sir Godfrey Kneller; landscape painters Hendrick Danckerts, John Griffier the elder and Johannes Vorsterman; vanitas pieces by Pieter van Roestraeten: *ibid*, pp.194-97, 221-22, 354-55, 389-90, 429-30, 547, 555-62, 583-86, 593-602, 687-88.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, ch.17g, pp.597-99.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, ch.19b-c, pp.621-30.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, ch.21d, pp.686-88; ch.6a, p.201.

occasions when young he rode in races. He kept hounds, and took some interest in hunting.<sup>135</sup> His acquisition of a Turkey horse in the mid-1680s, and then his sale of it for £86 to Lord Downes, would have been noteworthy.<sup>136</sup>

George Vernon, the landed Midlands squire, of respectable means but not exceptional status, and not known widely beyond the three shires where he held properties, must surely have raised his London profile by all his often overt consumption activities. At the same time he marked his presence significantly in Derbyshire by the scale and elaboration of his prominent new Hall at Sudbury. It may not have been in the league of the great high-standing examples owned by noblemen in the north Midlands, but it was much closer than most to a busy road, considerably larger and more imposing than the residences of many similar ranking families in the county, and crowned with a golden ball that would catch the sun and be identified from miles away.

## **7. Vernon marriage strategies**

Marriages provide one of the most consistently interesting, and in some respects unusual, facets of the lives of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire Vernons of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They form a particularly strong representation of acquisitive, strategic and socially aspiring alliances that can be added to the examples of other contemporary landed gentry families described, for example, by Finch, Clay, Slater, Stone, Larminie, Fletcher, Bonfield, Whyman, and Tinniswood.<sup>137</sup> Somewhat

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, ch.11f, pp,401-2.

<sup>136</sup> Bought from his wife's brother-in-law, Antony Balam, a Levant merchant, who does not appear to have been identified elsewhere as an early importer of horses from the Middle East: *ibid*, ch.6d, pp.226-27.

<sup>137</sup> Mary E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families, 1540–1640*, Northamptonshire Record Society, (Oxford, 1956); Christopher Clay, 'Marriage, Inheritance and the Rise of Large

curiously, examples of Derbyshire's seventeenth-century landed gentry families are absent from their work. The Vernon archives in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and Cheshire have never previously been explored for details about family life, marriages, property values and financial circumstances.

Habakkuk considered that 'marriage was the principal means by which landed families extended their estates'.<sup>138</sup> This was the case with the Vernons of Sudbury: ten out of eleven successive heirs between 1515 and 1805 married heiresses.<sup>139</sup> By the time of George Vernon's inheritance, substantial estates had been accumulated by his direct Vernon predecessors through three such marriages.<sup>140</sup> Early in 1660, both George and his younger brother married into families from other counties, with whom there had been no previous connections.<sup>141</sup> George's first wife, Margaret Onley, brought him a

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Estates in England, 1660–1815', *The Economic History Review*, NS Vol.21 No.3 (Dec 1968), pp.503-518; ditto, 'Property Settlements, Financial Provisions for the Family and the Sale of Land by the Greater Landowners 1660–1790', *Journal of British Studies*, XXI (1981), pp.18-38; Miriam Slater, 'The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past & Present*, No.72 (Aug 1976), pp.25-54; ditto, 'The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-Century England: A Rejoinder', *Past & Present*, No.85 (Nov 1979), pp.136-140; ditto, *Family Life in the Seventeenth-Century: The Verneys of Claydon House*, (London, 1984); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage, In England 1500–1800*, (London, 1997); Stone and Fawtier Stone (1984); Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions: Marriage in England 1660–1753*, (Oxford, 1992); Lloyd Bonfield, 'Marriage Settlements, 1660–1740: the Adoption of the Strict Settlement in Kent and Northamptonshire', in R.B. Outhwaite, ed, *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, (London, 1981); Vivienne Larminie, 'Marriage and the Family: the Example of the Seventeenth-Century Newdigates', *Midland History*, Vol.9, (1984), pp.1-22; ditto, 'Settlement and Sentiment: Inheritance and Personal Relationships among Two Midland Gentry Families in the Seventeenth Century', *Midland History*, Vol.12, (1987), pp.27-47; ditto, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World*, (Rochester NY, 1995); Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800*, (London, 1995); Susan E. Whyman (1999); Adrian Tinniswood, *The Verneys: A true story of love, war and madness in seventeenth-century England*, (London, 2007).

<sup>138</sup> John Habakkuk, 'The Rise and Fall of English Landed Families, 1660–1800', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, Vol.29 (1979), p.194.

<sup>139</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.1e, pp.18-20; 1g, p.24; 1i, p.35; 6a, pp.189-191; 8c, p.295; 8d, p.300; appendix B1, p.699; National Trust, *Sudbury Hall*, guide book (2005), pp.43-44 and inside back cover. The exception was John Vernon d.1600, m. Mary Vernon (née Littleton): *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.21-22.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, ch.1e, pp.18-19; 1i, p.35.

<sup>141</sup> GV m Margaret Onley, of Catesby, Northamptonshire, 1660: *ibid*, ch.6a, pp.189-97; Henrie Vernon m Mary Ladkin of Shawe, Staffordshire: *ibid*, chs.6a, pp.189-97.

substantial marriage portion.<sup>142</sup> The acquisitive trend prevailed in the next generation with the marriage of George's heir, through which the Vernons acquired the Venables' Cheshire estates.<sup>143</sup>

When it came to George's daughters, initially there were the predictable matches of the older three with sons of Derbyshire gentry.<sup>144</sup> But after his own third marriage in 1681 to the eldest daughter of London merchant Thomas Vernon (a distant kinsman) there was a shift to alliances with merchant families, echoing a trend established among landed families by the early seventeenth century.<sup>145</sup> Of George's younger girls, four wed established merchants.<sup>146</sup> Stone found that more than twenty per cent of daughters born in the last three decades of the seventeenth century to owners of medium to large country houses and who reached the age of fifty never married.<sup>147</sup> Vernons of that same period were thus unusually committed to achieving marriage for their daughters: of all George's eight to live to adulthood only one remained single.<sup>148</sup> In providing respectable portions for so many young women, the Vernons were also demonstrating their affluence.

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<sup>142</sup> £5,000, recently identified evidence [supersedes *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010) pp.191, 673]: DRO 410/M box 26.1567; GV's second wife, Dorothea Shirley, of Staunton Harold, Leicestershire, had a portion of c.£3,000; his third, Catherine Vernon, from London, £3,500: *ibid.*, ch.6c-d, pp.205-8, 215-16.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, ch.8c, pp.295, 298.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret (Peg) Vernon m Godfrey Meynell, Katherine (Kitty) m his younger brother, Richard, and Meriell (Melly) m James Boothby: *ibid.*, ch.7b, pp.236-37, 241-45.

<sup>145</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1967), pp.287-88.

<sup>146</sup> Mary (Molly) Vernon m Roger Drake, Henrietta Francia (Fanny) Vernon m Benjamin Poole, both 1693: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.7b, pp.257-59; Dorothea (Dolly) m George Vernon (her step-mother's younger brother), 1709: *ibid.*, ch.7c, pp.263-64; Matilda (Tilly) m Richard Lockwood, 1712: *ibid.*, ch.7d, pp.271-72.

<sup>147</sup> Stone (1977), pp.44, 47; Slater has demonstrated the disadvantages of spinsterhood: Slater (1984), pp.84-89. Froide shows how single women formed practical, supportive filial bonds, as several of GV's daughters did: Amy M. Froide, *Never Married, Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 2005), pp.52-61; *Vernon-Sudbury*, ch.7b, pp.242-60.

<sup>148</sup> Anna Catherina (Nanny) Vernon, 1682-1744, d aged 61 or 62: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.7d, pp.266-271, appendix B7, p.711. The case was similar, but to an even greater extent, with Sir Thomas Vernon's ten daughters; their marriages were used to forge aspirational and influential connections; only one never married, three married twice: *ibid.*, appendix B6, pp.706-9.

Alongside economic benefits (including retaining lands and dowries within the family), demonstrating their ancient lineage, maintaining the male line and perpetuating the Vernon name were constant priorities.<sup>149</sup> In the last particular, Vernon marriages stand apart from those of other landed gentry families. For some 110 years, spanning the whole of the seventeenth century, seven times, through five successive generations, they achieved unions with others who were already surnamed Vernon; in some instances the blood relationship was extremely remote.<sup>150</sup> Clearly their ancient patronym, with its connections back to eleventh-century Normandy, was highly prized and not willingly forfeited when daughters married. The diapered brickwork prominent on the two main façades of Sudbury Hall, while again copying Crewe, may have been another way of blazoning the fretwork device of the Vernon coat of arms.<sup>151</sup>

At a remarkably early date for the practice (1651/2) the Vernons adopted a form of strict settlement that included trustees ‘to preserve contingent remainders’. Habakkuk considered this device widely adopted by the later seventeenth century, but not until then.<sup>152</sup> Baker explains the technical advantages of creating such trusts,

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<sup>149</sup> Eg: *ibid*, ch.5g, pp.181-82; ch.6d, p.217; ch.10g, p.376. Eg, Dolly Vernon’s marriage with merchant George Vernon, avoided raising cash for her portion: *ibid*, ch.7c, p.263.

<sup>150</sup> All references from *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010) – Mary (née Littleton), widow of Walter Vernon of Houndhill, m 1598 his second cousin, John Vernon of Sudbury: ch.1c–e, pp.12-20; Mary and Walter’s eldest son, Edward, m 1605 John Vernon’s infant niece, his third cousin Margaret Vernon, thereby resolving the dispute over the Sudbury estate, and adding it to those of neighbouring Houndhill and of Hilton, Staffs (Margarett’s own direct inheritance from her father): ch.1f–h, pp.21-29. The marriage of Edward and Margarett’s eldest son to remote kinswoman, Meriell Vernon of Haslington, Cheshire, brought that Vernon estate under the same ownership: ch.1i; GV, m3 1681 CV, daughter of Sir Thomas Vernon: ch.5d, pp.218-19. GV’s second daughter (from his first marriage), Melly, after 13 years of widowhood, m distant kinsman, Dr Thomas Vernon: ch.7b, pp.243-44. Her younger half-sister Dolly m.1709 George third son of Sir Thomas Vernon (ie, her step-mother’s brother): ch.7c, p.263. Sir Thomas Vernon’s fifth son, Charles, m. Anna Catherina Vernon (grand-daughter of Sir George Vernon of Farnham, Surrey, older brother of Sir Thomas): appendices B5, p.705; B6, pp.706, 709. The Vernons’ high number of marriages with kinsfolk did not include any between first cousins until the eighteenth century, eg - GV’s son, Henry m2 1715, Matilda Wright, daughter of Henry’s maternal aunt Anne Wright (née Vernon): *ibid*, ch.8c, p.298, appendix B7, p.707; Anna Catherina Vernon, daughter of Henry Vernon, m 1748/9 Richard Lockwood, son of George Vernon’s daughter Matilda Lockwood: *ibid*, ch.8d, p.298; appendix B7, p.712.

<sup>151</sup> Illustrated *ibid*, **12.14** p.446, **12.17** p.450, **14.15** p.519, **15.12** p.524.

<sup>152</sup> H.J. Habakkuk, ‘Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Royal*

considering the practice to have been perfected between 1640 and 1700, thereafter remaining in use for three centuries.<sup>153</sup> Clay links it to the fact that estates assembled by marriage or inheritance under a strict settlement could not thereafter be broken up so easily.<sup>154</sup> The Vernon family used this strategy to their advantage, and continually thereafter, generation by generation. Their 1650s settlement provided for all Sir Edward and Lady Margaret Vernon's children, while also securing primogeniture and an exclusively male Vernon succession, anticipating the trend recognised by Thirsk.<sup>155</sup> The settlement prevented the estates being passed through a female line or being inherited by daughters.<sup>156</sup>

Given that the Vernons' 1650s strict settlement was such an early example, the question arises of how and by whom it was drawn up. Sir Edward Vernon's younger brother Walter was a barrister in the Inner Temple;<sup>157</sup> Sir Edward's eldest son also had chambers there.<sup>158</sup> The Vernons could have had ready access to the most current approaches to preparing family settlements. Bonfield draws attention to the early part played by Lord Chief Justice Coke (1552–1634) in determining the importance of

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*Historical Society*, 4th Series, Vol.32 (1950), pp. 17-18, 30. Bonfield likewise deems the introduction of such trustees to be the keystone of the strict settlement: Lloyd Bonfield, 'Marriage Settlements and the 'Rise of Great Estates': The Demographic Aspect', *The Economic History Review*, NS Vol.32 No.4 (Nov, 1989), pp.484. English and Saville provide useful explanations of the evolution and workings of strict settlements, succinctly summarising the progression, its significance and the debates around it: Barbara English and John Saville, *Strict Settlement A Guide for Historians*, (Hull, 1983), pp.11-52.

<sup>153</sup> J.H. Baker, *An Introduction to English Legal History, Fourth edition*, (London, 2002), pp.291-96.

<sup>154</sup> Clay (1968), p.504.

<sup>155</sup> Joan Thirsk, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century', *History*, Vol.LIV, (1969), p.366.

<sup>156</sup> Sir Edward and Lady Margaret's life interests were identified, annuities allocated to younger sons and unmarried daughters, with £600 portion for each of the youngest four (to be raised in successive years) and £200 more for one already married; residual legatees were the Vernons of Hodnet, Shropshire: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.2e, pp.62-65. Associated documents relate to numerous specifically identified parts of the Sudbury estate: references in footnotes, *ibid*, ch.2e.

<sup>157</sup> Walter Vernon is named in the succession; still alive Jan 1654/5, probably holding the tenancy of Mackley Hall, Sudbury, 1659; date of death not found: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.4b, p.111, 5b, pp. 146-47.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, ch.2b, pp.42-44.

vesting remainders in trustees.<sup>159</sup> It may be relevant that Coke's youngest son, Sir Edward Coke of Langford, Derbyshire, was formally named in the final High Court directives as a party in ensuring the implementation of Chancery Court orders regarding the Vernons' strict settlement.<sup>160</sup>

Paradoxically, George Vernon's actions close to the end of his life – willing all his property to be divided between two daughters from his third marriage, should his sole surviving son die without a male heir, thereby disinheriting his younger brother and his brother's four sons – flouted the conventions of ensuring retention of estates in a single male ownership and the continuing of entails in the Vernon name.<sup>161</sup> The contrast with all his predecessors' priorities and practices throughout the previous two centuries is striking. The resulting social reaction and condemnation clearly demonstrate the extent to which he failed to conform to the norms of his peers at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The perpetuation of the situation by his son less than two decades later provoked further criticism and challenges. In both cases, the actions of George and his heir were heavily influenced by pressures exerted by other members of the family who had acquired social and financial holds over them.<sup>162</sup> They provide unusual examples of an otherwise conventional landed family flagrantly acting outside established expectations when settling their succession and estates.

Slater considers that marriages arranged for financial advantages were the norm.<sup>163</sup> Mendelson challenges Slater's view, arguing for the influence also of

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<sup>159</sup> Lloyd Bonfield, *Marriage Settlements, 1601–1740, The Adoption of the Strict Settlement*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp.58-69, especially pp.59-60.

<sup>160</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.2e, pp.64-65. The majority of documents are in Derbyshire RO, duplicate copies for some in Staffordshire RO.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, ch.8e, pp.306-8.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, ch.8e, pp.308-11. Ironically, the protagonists were themselves Vernons, although in one case the kinship is too remote to be clarifiable.

<sup>163</sup> Slater (1976), pp.27-29.

romantic ideals.<sup>164</sup> There is much in Vernon examples to support Slater – they did not make economically disadvantageous marriages. However, there is evidence indicating that this was not always the sole factor; the bride’s suitability in other respects, such as social position, family connections, age and abilities, also came into play.<sup>165</sup> This would appear to be the case for the Vernons. Documents also indicate strength of affection between some couples at the time of their marriage.<sup>166</sup> And such bonds helped to ensure that at least one of the women of Sudbury played an important part in the Hall’s construction.

## 8. Gender, management and family dynamics

Much has been written about the extent to which men and women occupied distinct and increasingly separate roles within English households in the Early Modern period, and the ways in which marriages and expectations relating to them were changing.<sup>167</sup> It is generally presumed that women were in a subordinate role, but there are also debates about masculine identity and the exclusion of men from domesticity.<sup>168</sup> Flather sets out

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<sup>164</sup> Sara Heller Mendelson, ‘Debate: The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Past & Present*, No.85 (Nov 1979), pp.126-35.

<sup>165</sup> Cases where a male Vernon married a widow are rare; Colonel Edward Vernon is the exception: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.5f, pp.171-72.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, chs.6d, pp.218-19; 7b, pp.246-49, 272. Heal and Holmes argue that evidence is mainly about financial bargaining, with interest and emotion not quantifiable: Heal and Holmes, (1994), pp.62-64. Information about Vernon marriages includes correspondence augmenting formal documents, eg – *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.6c p.208; 6d, pp.216-17; 7b, pp.246-47, 271-72; 7d, p.269; 8c, pp.297-98. There is also detail relating to marriage celebrations: *ibid*, ch.7b, pp.236, 242, 245-46.

<sup>167</sup> Keeble and Shoemaker provide helpful outlines of the oscillating debates, identifying the key authors, from the time of Stone’s researches of the mid-1970s: N.H. Keeble, ed, *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman*, (London and New York, 1994), pp.115-118; Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650–1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?*, (London, 1998), pp.88-91; Stone (1977).

<sup>168</sup> Karen Harvey, ‘Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, *Gender & History*, Vol.21, No.3, (2009), pp.520-40; ditto, ‘The History of Masculinity, circa 1650–1800’, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol.44, No.2, (Apr 2005), pp.296-311; ditto, *The Little Republic, Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (London, 2012).

the issues stemming from the mounting body of writing that challenges many of the assumptions of the paradigm of separate spheres. She suggests, since most of the research, such as that by Vickery, addresses the eighteenth century, there is a need to extend study about gender roles back to the seventeenth century and my work supports this view.<sup>169</sup> Case studies of individual families, such as those drawn from the abundant archives of the Verneys of Claydon, Buckinghamshire, and Larminie and Hindle's work on the Newdigates of Arbury, Warwickshire, make it clear that scenarios varied enormously, with the relationship between a husband and wife hinging as much on the individuals' character, as on their circumstances and the arrangements through which the marriage came about.<sup>170</sup>

Wrightson has argued that evidence points to 'the private existence of a strong complementary and companionate ethos, side by side with and often overshadowing theoretical adherence to the doctrine of male authority and public female subordination.' His point is quoted and endorsed by Pollock and Larminie.<sup>171</sup> Although Wrightson is referring to 'the middling sort', his view chimes particularly strongly with George Vernon's relationships with two of his wives. Moreover, the considerable responsibilities undertaken by them were not private or 'behind the scenes': their

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<sup>169</sup> Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, (Woodbridge, 2007), pp.6-7; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, (New Haven and London, 1994), pp.9-11.

<sup>170</sup> Slater (1976), pp.25-54; ditto (1984); Whyman (1999); John Broad, *Transforming English Rural Society: The Verneys and the Claydons, 1600-1820*, (Cambridge, 2004); Tinniswood (2007); Larminie (1984), pp.1-22; ditto (1987), pp.27-47; ditto (1995); Steve Hindle, 'Below stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and his household staff, c.1670-1710', *Historical Research*, Vol.85 (227), (London, 2011), pp.71-88. The Newdigates provide close parallels with the Sudbury Vernons; seventeenth-century connections were remote; by the end of the eighteenth-century they were regular house guests at Sudbury for the Vernons' Christmas and New Year celebrations.

<sup>171</sup> Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680*, (London, 1982), p.92, quoted in Fletcher (1995), p.173; also in Larminie (1987), p.39; Linda Pollock, "'Teach her to live under obedience": the making of women in the upper ranks of early modern England', *Continuity and Change*, 4(2), (1989), p.232. It endorses Larminie's suggestion, in the light of her studies of the Newdigates, that Wrightson's deduction also applies to the gentry: Larminie, 'Marriage and the Family: The Example of the Seventeenth-century Newdigates', *Midlands History*, Vol.9 (1984), p.2.

competence would have been widely witnessed and their authority experienced by a large number of people with whom they had dealings across a broad social spectrum, from labourers to other landed gentry. It would also have been clear to all that George was affording his wife that responsibility, confident she could carry out a role which was often the same as one he undertook himself.

Marriage became a necessity for George Vernon when his father died. He had to clear or take on his father's debts of more than £5,000 if he was to retain his inheritance and not forfeit it to his brother. Much of Northamptonshire heiress Margaret Onley's comparatively large marriage portion (£5,000, equivalent to two-and-a-half years of George's annual income) appears to have gone in this way.<sup>172</sup> Given the level of responsibility that Margaret came to hold at Sudbury, it is easy to imagine her also being party to decisions relating to the building works taking place on her doorstep. She was there at the outset and could well have had views on the proposals.

It is not possible to give an account of the personal relationships between George and his wives comparable with those of the Verneys and Newdigates, or for example, described by Fletcher, Fraser, and Mendelson and Crawford.<sup>173</sup> There are no letters between them, other than the three from George's third wife written just before their marriage.<sup>174</sup> Nor alas are there any pre-nineteenth-century Vernon memoirs or diaries. However, extensive manuscript evidence of the way income and expenditure was managed at Sudbury sheds considerable light not only estate management and the new

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<sup>172</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.6a, pp.190-93, 20i, pp.673-74; but see also note 142, above.

<sup>173</sup> Fletcher (1995); Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Woman's lot in seventeenth-century England*, (London, 1984); Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*, (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>174</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.6d, pp.218-9. Given the number and diversity of letters carefully saved by George Vernon, his predecessors and his heirs over four centuries, it seems unlikely that, should letters have been written to him by a wife, they were all lost or destroyed. It seems more probable that he received little or no other such correspondence – understandable, given that as a couple they were rarely apart for periods of more than a few days.

Hall's construction, but also on the Vernons' lifestyle.<sup>175</sup> In particular, daybooks afford insights into how George's wives participated in the running of the Sudbury establishment. Vickery considers account books limited because they 'lack the emotional expansiveness of diaries and letters', but admits that they 'were as much an active representation of domestic business as they were a record of it'.<sup>176</sup> Sudbury's financial records (covering more than 250 years) include many that match Vickery's description of 'model' estate accounts.<sup>177</sup> The comparatively informal spontaneity of George's daybooks adds an immediacy not manifest in more meticulously presented, often 'copied up' volumes.

George's first marriage is the most interesting.<sup>178</sup> Sharp distinctions between the roles of mistress and master of the family do not appear to have applied in the running of the Sudbury household and estate while Margaret was alive. Indeed, surviving records reveal her increasing participation. George's Creditor-Debtor Book includes four years soon after his inheritance of pages that are like daybook entries, albeit he was then employing an experienced steward who handled substantial monies for him.<sup>179</sup> Margaret was only nineteen at the time of her marriage, but within a year she was dealing with some matters independently and every few months presenting her husband with her accounts.<sup>180</sup> She was also handing over money to a housekeeper. At this early

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<sup>175</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010); principally ch.20, but also numerous references to account book sources throughout chs.5–11.

<sup>176</sup> Amanda Vickery, 'His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past & Present Supplement 1*, (2006), pp.19-22.

<sup>177</sup> As *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), appendices A2, A3, A6, pp.694-97; those in DRO, Matlock cover nearly all years to 1884 in 162 volumes, most are formal and audited, some are clearly copied up from originals for audit purposes: DRO, 410/M, boxes 6-11.

<sup>178</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.6a, pp.189-202.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, appendix A1, pp.693-4. 1660–1663 inclusive: Cr-Dr Bk.trans pp.46, 48, 49, 54. Steward, Ben Edbury, was engaged Apr 1660, employed until the early 1670s: *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.20, p.642, note 2; given considerable responsibilities especially during 1664, GV's year of shrievalty, and during GV's first attempt at being elected to Parliament: *ibid*, chs 9c, 10b.

<sup>180</sup> Eg – 'laid out per her accompt of 14th May 63 £27-16-8 / [ditto] per her accomp. of 16 Sep: 63 £25-17-5' // 'To Ballance due to my wife £31-3-5 / more for a gowne I gave her yett charged in

period, George was generally paying the servants, but nonetheless there is an occasional payment to one of them by Margaret.<sup>181</sup> By the later 1660s she was herself entering payments she had made to building workmen, craftsmen and contractors in her husband's Creditor-Debtor Book.<sup>182</sup>

The extant daybooks, begun by Margaret in 1672, include a great many entries in her clear, firm, looping hand, continuing to three months before her death in August 1675.<sup>183</sup> They cover the widest possible range of household and estate items. There are no references to indicate she was maintaining any separate accounts by this period, although she may have been using her personal allowance for most of her own clothes and some items for the children. Analysis of the daybooks shows no differences between the kinds of entries Margaret wrote and those of her husband: she was just as likely to have dealt with the workers' weekly wages or recorded payments to other Derbyshire gentry for expensive horses.<sup>184</sup> Either of them might settle the bills of the nailer, mercer or butcher, or pay for food crops, fabrics, building materials, items from Burton market or carriers' charges. Indeed, Margaret made slightly *more* entries than

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Mr. Barkers bills £8-7-0' / Total due to my wife £39-10-5': Cr-Dr Bk.trans p.77. The counterpart to the page containing these entries: *ibid* p.79.

<sup>181</sup> Mainly outdoor ones – groom, coachman, gardener, gamekeeper, miller – together with his steward, a footman, butler and cook (at different times both male and female cooks were employed at Sudbury): *ibid* pp.189-190 (12 Apr 166 –13 Apr 1662), 197 (18 Jan 1659/60–20 March 1661). MV's payments: 6 Jan 1661/2, Cr-Dr Bk MS; trans.p.190; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.11d, pp.396-97.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, ch.6a, pp.197-8. To amplify – two to brickmaker Adam Browghton. Apr 1668: Cr-Dr Bk.trans p.102; several to glazier/plumber John Ball, Oct and Nov 1672, Nov–Dec 1673: *ibid* p.110; one to a tile-maker Jul 1671, another to stone carver William Wilson, Sep 1672: *ibid*, p.112; three to the woodsmen working in the coppice, Apr and May 1672: *ibid* p.117; to plasterer Samuell Mansfield, £5 Oct 1672, £4 29 Mar 1673, £4 8 Nov 1673, £4 19 Jan 1674/5: *ibid* p.118; £1 to builder Jonathan Massy Feb 1674/5: *ibid* p.126. The later payments also occur in the relevant daybooks, likewise entered in MV's hand.

<sup>183</sup> The opening pages in the two earliest surviving volumes of Sudbury daybooks were headed by MV 'Disbursements made for Mr Vernon of Sudbury beginning the 22th. April 1672' and 'The Receipts of Mr Vernon of Sudbury: Anno Dom: 1674' (starting 30 October), both her own and GV's entries appear on those same pages: Act Bks.2 and 3, *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), appendix A2, p.695. MV's last payment entry is dated 28 April 1675; she died 15 weeks later, bur Sudbury 15 Aug: *ibid*, Act.Bk.4, p.695; ch.6a, p.198.

<sup>184</sup> Acct Bks.2, 3 and 4: *ibid*, appendix A2, p.695. Example of MV's and GV's handwriting: *ibid*, ch.20a, **20.1**, p.645.

George. Furthermore, her participation was by no means confined to periods when he was away from home, as often put forward in other cases where women played a significant role in household and estate management. There were numerous days and weeks when they both made entries. The sense of an undelineated, integrated working partnership is very strong. Amy Louise Erikson has drawn attention to the scarcity of women's accounts in early modern England, and suggested that those that do exist deserve closer examination.<sup>185</sup> Margaret Vernon's contributions certainly validate this approach.

George's short second marriage was very different, manifesting none of the sense of shared responsibilities of his life with Margaret.<sup>186</sup> Dorothea Shirley appears to have lacked her level of practical education and competence. Her own rather awkwardly penned daybook entries are rarities; she never contributed to her husband's Creditor-Debtor Book. A sole daybook entry 'To my wife for the Use of the house £5-0s-0d' in October 1678 implies that Dorothea received housekeeping money. Whether this was on a regular basis is unclear – if it was, more such entries could have been expected.<sup>187</sup> When they were in lodgings in London it was always George who settled their landlady's weekly charges.<sup>188</sup>

A third marriage in April 1681, when George was forty-four and his bride eighteen, brought another capable young woman to Sudbury.<sup>189</sup> In the first year, Catherine Vernon made occasional entries in George's daybook, initially tentative, but later more confident. By September 1686 she was sufficiently informed and experienced

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<sup>185</sup> Amy Louise Erikson, 'Possession – and the other one-tenth of the law: assessing women's ownership and economic roles in early modern England', *Women's History Review*, 16:3, (2007), p.378.

<sup>186</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.6c, pp.205-15.

<sup>187</sup> £5, 24 Oct 1678: Acct Bk.4, *ibid*, appendix A2, p.695.

<sup>188</sup> Eg, *ibid*, ch.10c, pp.356-57.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, ch.6d, pp.215-30.

to be taking responsibility for recording in her own dedicated volume all the food crops produced on the land at Sudbury, or bought elsewhere, or taken from storage in the estate mills, barns and granaries, while also noting the many and diverse uses to which they were put. These records, more than 1,200 entries, maintained by Catherine for just over a year, were then checked by her husband, her page totals summarised by him.<sup>190</sup> This volume, a unique survivor in the Vernon archives, must surely have been one of other similar records kept by Catherine. But the book's most interesting page is a summary of the family's annual budget, demonstrating Catherine's sure grasp of their overall financial position in the later 1680s.<sup>191</sup>

In no way can it be said that the areas of responsibility and organisation undertaken by George Vernon, his first and third wives, or indeed his stewards, fell into gender-specific categories. Rather, there is the sense of individuals carrying out tasks according to ability and convenience, with roles shared and sometimes overlapping.

So, in the terms used by Harvey, was George Vernon a devout seventeenth-century patriarch or an example of anxious masculinity?<sup>192</sup> I believe he was both. Where religion was concerned, he was diligent: he spent money on improving the church, incorporated a small chapel in the Hall at a late stage in its building and routinely paid the Sudbury rector for saying prayers in his household. His

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<sup>190</sup> Corn wheat, blend corn and rye, oats, malt (for ale, beer, small beer, strong beer), beans, 'mill dust Meall and Greats'; oats dominated, a final total of 1,771 strikes. Purchases were mainly from Uttoxeter, presumably its market. The quantities of each crop remaining in stores and granaries were recorded, their diverse uses identified: beans and oats to sow and for poultry, pigs, geese, coach and hunting horses, and for GV himself, the keeper, coachman, cook and other household or estate employees, and 'strangers'; named individuals indicate visitors (predominantly relations), eg – Mrs Meynell of Bradley (GV's eldest daughter, Peg), Mrs Meynell (GV's widowed daughter Kitty), Mr Boothby (husband of GV's second daughter, Melly), Lady Anne and Sir Thomas Vernon, Mr Wright (brother-in-law), 'my brother', Cousin Brown, Doctors Morton and Floyd, Mr Graye (possibly MP Anchitel) and most notably the earl of Huntingdon: Acct Bk.9, *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), appendix A2, p.695.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, ch.20f, pp.665-66.

<sup>192</sup> Harvey (2005), pp.299-300; Fletcher (1995), pp.322-34.

responsibilities as head of an extended family were carried out conscientiously.<sup>193</sup> His parish and wider duties were undertaken seriously.<sup>194</sup> Unlike the ill-used household staff working at Arbury, Warwickshire for Sir Richard Newdigate (1644–1710), those employed at Sudbury were trusted, received regular salary payments, and were cared for when ill; several were retained for many years.<sup>195</sup> George was capable and authoritative when dealing with people he employed, especially in relation to all his building projects. But he could be competitive and argumentative with his social peers and was uncertain in relationships with those of higher standing, when he tended towards obsequiousness; at times he was awkwardly, even inappropriately, outspoken in a public arena.<sup>196</sup>

Pollock has observed: ‘In examining patriarchy in the home, historians have concentrated on the marital relationship, excluding other male-female diads such as brother and sister’. She calls for more attention to be given to ‘the interaction of the family as a system’ and concludes that: ‘Individuals moved between harmony and conflict. They formed, dissolved, and reconstituted alliances.’<sup>197</sup> My research supports her views. Further, I suggest that not only sibling, but also other important family relationships have been largely ignored. Five generations of Sudbury Vernons reveal many strong dyads within the family framework, with degrees of interaction and dependency varying and changing.

Moreover, significant relationships in the Vernon family were not necessarily between opposite genders. There are examples of uncles exerting authority over nephews; rivalries between brothers; tension between fathers and sons; sisters being

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<sup>193</sup> *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), ch.5, pp.143-63.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, ch.9, pp.312-34.

<sup>195</sup> Hindle (2011), pp.71-88; *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), pp.606, 666.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, chs.9 and 10.

<sup>197</sup> Linda A. Pollock, ‘Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England’,

companionable and supportive of one another; aunts generous to nieces and taking on responsibility for orphaned ones.<sup>198</sup> In George's own case, cousins and brothers-in-law featured in different ways, some far more positively than others.<sup>199</sup> Then there was the unusual dynamic with his third wife's father who was close to his own age but exerted financial controls that seriously increased through the last twenty years of George's life.<sup>200</sup> There were conflicts over money, property and political allegiances, but also positive associations through both obligations and social enjoyment. Just as Larminie has found with the Newdigate family, the Vernons' kinship network brought George considerable responsibilities as well as enhanced experiences and links with wider society.<sup>201</sup> I suggest that preoccupations with a nuclear family structure have eclipsed other strong relationships within seventeenth-century families, and that the Vernon example indicates that extended family and kinship networks were more complex and of greater consequence than is being acknowledged.

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*Journal of Family History*, 23:3 (1998), pp.3-4, 20.

<sup>198</sup> Eg – *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.2e, pp.60-64; 3f, pp. 95-98; 5a-c, pp.144-57; 5e, pp.161-63; 5g, pp.180-87; 7b, pp.235-60; 7d, pp.267-72, 8a-c, pp.276-93.

<sup>199</sup> Eg – *ibid*, chs.5d, pp.158-61; 6c, pp.208-14; 6d, pp.224-28.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, ch.6d, pp.215-21.

<sup>201</sup> Larminie (1995); *Vernon-Sudbury* (2010), chs.5 and 6.

## Conclusions

Research into the building of Sudbury Hall was prompted by the inadequacy of previous commentators' answers to the questions posed by its enigmatic qualities. However, it quickly moved into wider, more meaningful directions.

Exploring in depth the logistics of how Sudbury Hall was built involved assembling a great amount of detail about materials and the workforce, much of it without parallel for the immediate post-Restoration years. The complexity of the construction process was impressive. Confirmation that it was masterminded and closely directed over more than two decades by one man, George Vernon, only in his early twenties at its inception, drew the focus onto him. It was crucial to learn more about his life and circumstances.

This approach made it possible to see the Hall itself in a fresh light, date it properly, recognise the origins of many of its features and better understand aspects of its design. It has raised questions regarding other seventeenth-century houses, such as the strictures imposed by the adoption of symmetry, as against practical, functional design. For example, Sudbury Hall's plan, including a hierarchical complement of staircases, afforded subtle degrees of separation and facilitated great functional flexibility.

The previously little explored but extensive Vernon archives, and especially the substantial group of daybooks, yielded a wealth of information that also bears on several other fields.

In particular, they highlight developments in successful seventeenth-century marriage strategies, and upper gentry wives' responsibilities, which ranged more widely than generally presumed. The close working partnership apparent between

George Vernon and his first wife reveals her not as subordinate, but in a strongly interconnected role that extended beyond the bounds of domestic privacy. Other wide-ranging family relationships also emerge as important. George's spending activities represent considerable conspicuous consumption, not only in the form of his Sudbury mansion, but overtly during his extended sojourns in London, bracketing him with many higher up the social scale than himself.

Typical in many other respects of a landed Midlands gentleman, he appears exceptional because of his accomplishment manifest in Sudbury Hall. His ambition, matched by impressive competence, and almost obsessive tenacity, achieved a result that, from a twenty-first-century perspective, appears to have been unique. As the twelfth duke of Devonshire succinctly concluded, when standing for the first time in Sudbury's Long Gallery in September 2011, George Vernon 'was punching above his weight'.

Word count 10,378

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## **APPENDIX i. Published work**

*[Emboldened items submitted herewith]*

**Knott, Cherry Ann, *George Vernon 1636–1702, ‘Who built this House’ Sudbury Hall, Derbyshire, (Stroud, 2010)***

**Knott, Cherry Ann, ‘Sudbury Hall – Crewe Hall: A Close Connexion’, *Architectural History, Essays in Architectural History presented to John Newman, Vol.44, pp.322–31, (Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, Leeds, 2001)***

Beard, Geoffrey and Knott, Cherry Ann, ‘Edward Pearce’s work at Sudbury’, *Apollo, The National Trust Historic Houses and Collections*, (April 2000), pp.43-48.

**Knott, Cherry Ann, ‘Hilton Hall, Staffordshire’, *Tarmac Papers, Vol.II, pp.189-229, (Wolverhampton, 1998)***

Knott, Cherry Ann, *A History of Hilton Hall*, (Tarmac plc, Hilton, Staffordshire, 1989) privately printed, reprinted with additions (1991). Commissioned research.

**Knott, Cherry Ann, *Crafts in the 1990s, An independent socio-economic study of craftspeople in England, Scotland and Wales, full report, (Crafts Council, London, 1994). Commissioned research.***

Knott, Cherry Ann ‘*I Can’t Wait for Wednesday*’, *The Crafts in Adult Education*, report summary (Crafts Council, London, 1987); full report (1986). Commissioned survey.

*New Life for Historic Areas* (HMSO, London, 1973).

*New Life for Historic Buildings* (HMSO, London, 1971).

## **Appendix ii. Background**

<b>Postgraduate</b>	Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London Department of Sociology, University of Edinburgh
<b>Undergraduate</b>	Department of Architecture, University of Edinburgh Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London

### **Employment**

#### *Principal positions*

THE MUSEUM IN THE PARK, Stroud District Council  
**Displays and Research Co-ordinator** for new Heritage Lottery-funded museum.

INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION, University of London  
**Researcher**, Education and Technology Unit

THE NATIONAL TRUST (with Derbyshire County Council)  
**Property Manager/Curator**, Sudbury Hall and Museum of Childhood.

CRAFTS COUNCIL  
**Head of Regional Services, Head of Conservation.**

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
**Research Officer**, Conservation Areas Group, Urban Planning Directorate.

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL  
**Senior Planning Assistant**, Conservation Areas and Historic Buildings team.

#### *Other main contracts*

HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND, member of Committee for the South West (ongoing)

THE NATIONAL TRUST, EAST MIDLANDS REGION  
Research: architectural and landscape expenditure in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sudbury estate accounts; on-site investigations, analysis and production of report.

ARTS COUNCIL OF ENGLAND LOTTERY FUND  
Assessor; member of assessing team, Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

CRAFTS COUNCIL (with Arts Council Scotland and Welsh Arts Council)  
Project Director, Socio-economic Study of Craftspeople in England, Scotland and Wales.

CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION  
Director, Gulbenkian Craft Initiative: 'Furniture' and 'Vessels' programmes.

TARMAC PLC  
Research: the history of Hilton Hall, Staffordshire and the Vernons of Hilton

CRAFTS COUNCIL (with Welsh Arts Council)  
Survey Director, Craft Courses in Adult Education in England and Wales.

### **Appendix iii. Declaration**

I declare that the submitted material here, as a whole or in part, is not substantially the same as any that has been previously submitted or is currently being submitted, whether in a published or unpublished form, for a degree, diploma or similar qualification at any university or similar institution.

Cherry Ann Knott

Date