Costume, vol. 48, no. 1, 2014

Death and Memory: Clothing Bequests in English Wills 1650–1830

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Specific clothing bequests form a distinct and often intimate feature in a range of English wills during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Carefully and symbolically allocated to new owners, garments were thus imbued with commemoration as well as financial worth. This paper suggests that gender differentials in this practice have been exaggerated as individual men could be as committed to the process as their female counterparts. Crucially, men and women without children or partners were most disposed to draw up detailed wills reallocating a range of possessions, especially clothing. In this creation of stewardship for chosen garments, individual personality and familial situation were more decisive than any general social or economic considerations.

KEYWORDS: *will, bequest, consumption, mourning, gift, commemoration, memory*

INTRODUCTION: INDIVIDUAL CLOTHING BEQUESTS

CONSUMER CHOICE IN BRITAIN proliferated during the long eighteenth century, not least in the availability of fabrics, accessories and ready-made clothing.[1] Whilst improvements in production, marketing, retailing and distribution increased the variety of material goods for sale, mean income-levels grew across society. In spite of a range of new consumer durables, clothing and textiles were still regularly chosen as chief amongst the items bequeathed in wills, and thereby transferred to new owners.[2] Bequests of clothes in wills were a long-established avenue for reallocating garments, individual and in bulk, forming an indirect supply to the flourishing second-hand clothing market.[3] This paper investigates the micro context rather than the macro, focusing on specific clothing bequests, not whole wardrobes. In the light of existing research on testamentary bequests, it looks to provide further evidence for the popularity of these symbolic clothing bequests across the social strata and by both genders. By the use of selected examples, it identifies those individuals predisposed to write detailed wills, whether through social standing and/or personal choice and situation. It concurs with those cultural historians, most notably Maxine Berg and Amy Froide, who see a significant difference between specific 'symbolic' bequests of garments and those general economic or 'monetary' bequests of an unspecified selection of 'wearing apparel'.[4]

In the context of a will, any bequest is a form of 'gift', and symbolic 'gifting' has been a prominent feature in cultures at least as far back as classical Roman society. Primitive societies, too, were imbued with such customs, and these 'archaic' societies formed the basis of Marcel Mauss's seminal work *Essai sur le don*, published in

© The Costume Society 2014 DOI: 10.1179/0590887613Z.00000000037

France in 1925. Social loyalties, Mauss explained, were cemented by the use of a variety of debt obligations, including symbolic gifting: 'exchanges and contracts take place in the form of presents; in theory these are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily'.[5] In essence, therefore, the giving of a gift is not simply a generous gesture, but part of the interwoven mesh of social interaction. Mauss concluded that the gift was equally crucial in the early twentieth century:

> A considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with the same atmosphere of the gift, where obligation and liberty intermingle. Things still have sentimental as well as venal value [. . .][6]

More recently, Avner Offer has extended Mauss's research on gifts, notably in his paper, *Between the Gift and the Market* in 1997.[7] He identifies a 'widespread reluctance to use money as a gift'. Indeed, a gift is 'enhanced if given voluntarily: a temporary loan, expert opinion, a cooked meal, used clothing [. . .] a gift is personalized [. . .] it provides evidence of an effort to gratify a particular individual'.[8] Thus the act of bestowing a gift, or bequeathing one, is intended to manifest affection or esteem, or to acknowledge obligation and commitment. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the regular selection and presenting of gifts provided part of the grist of everyday social interaction in a deeply symbolic, often emotional, manner. Margot Finn has defined these relationships as follows:

> The regular exchange of neighbourly and familial gifts further undercuts the primacy of contractual and monetary transactions, perpetuating older norms of reciprocity that generated social (as well as economic) forms of capital. Gift-giving was, if not ubiquitous, widely pervasive in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century economy, where it worked at once to mark social distinctions and to maintain social solidarity.[9]

The process of specific clothing bequests fits neatly into this context of social 'gift-giving'. Clothes were ubiquitous in the household, essential personal possessions, representing financial outlay and individual choice. Garments clearly projected messages to the rest of society, indicating a person's position within the community hierarchy, and providing 'visible markers of social status and gender'.[10] This paper will suggest that clothing's visual symbolism frequently carried with it an emotional resonance, able to perpetuate a particular connection between testator and beneficiary from beyond the grave. The intimacy of bequeathing a garment was an acknowledgement of a highly personal relationship, reflecting the style, age, taste, character and even the scent of the deceased. Instructions left in wills reflect the belief that stipulated bequests would represent special gifts, denoting more than mere financial worth and important in emotional rather than economic terms. As Maxine Berg has argued, clothes selected for particular and specific mention in a will have thus been 'endowed with some emotional, familial or material value'.[11] They have also become 'infused with significance beyond their material existence or monetary value, consolidating their status as memory objects'.[12]

As garments age with their wearers, so they become 'material companions through life's journey [able] to accumulate meaning and value by sheer dint of their constancy in a life'.[13] Specific bequests served as an emotional, post-mortem 'souvenir' of the benefactor, and as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has argued they were 'intended to serve as a reminder of an ephemeral experience or absent person, rooted in the history of a life [. . .] valued more for what they signify, for the large biographical whole of which they are a part, than in themselves'.[14] It will be shown here that the language of some wills suggests that testators were reallocating personal possessions when facing their own impending deaths.[15] The planning of clothing bequests in wills formed a pre-funeral ritual, just as the wearing of mourning dress, and the gifting of gloves or rings to mourners were part of the actual funeral. Such bequests were intended to endure beyond the grave as 'potent reminders of the deceased'.[16]

A. L. Erickson has concluded that there were about two million English wills made between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries, of which between 20% and 27% comprised women's wills.[17] Wills have long been recognized as the prime legal means to reallocate clothing for re-wearing, whether individually or en masse.[18] Statistics, however, are not in abundance. Maxine Berg's work on eighteenth-century metalworkers' wills provides one of the few large-scale surveys measuring the prevalence of these clothing bequests. From a sample of 422 men's wills and 126 women's in Birmingham, dating from 1700 to 1800, she finds that 15.6% of men and nearly 27% of women left bequests of their clothing. In Sheffield for a larger sample of 725 wills, 7.2% of men and 25.6% of women made clothing bequests.[19] Tessa Heyworth's examination of 66 Rainow wills, also dating from 1700 to 1800, found that 11 (16.7%) left clothing or wearing apparel bequests.[20] Nesta Evans' research on 55 earlier East Anglian widows' wills dating between 1550 and 1640 found that 26 (47%) left clothing bequests.[21]

Here, as an additional statistic, a selection of 142 published wills from three small Cheshire towns dating from 1651 to 1760 has been studied. The frequency of clothing bequests matches those in Tessa Heyworth's Rainow wills in the eighteenth century. For 114 wills from Ashton and Sale, 15 (13%) have such bequests, 8% of the men's wills and 20% of the women's; whilst a further 7 testators left money for memorial rings or gloves. For 28 wills from Bowden, 5 (18%) contain clothing bequests, 17% of men's wills and 25% of women's.[22]

A will was frequently drawn up when the testator/testatrix felt conscious of his/her mortality, as with an onset of sickness or old age. A gap of up to two years seems to have been usual between the drafting of a will and the 'reading' after death, as with some of the women's wills selected for this paper: Marie Holbrooke of Manchester, 24 months; Elizabeth Radcliffe of Manchester, 23 months; Anne Lancashire of Manchester, 23 months; Ellen Buxton of Manchester, 21 months; Mary Cotton of Middlewich, 9 months. The time between the writing and the reading of 47 of the 80 wills from Rainow in Cheshire analysed by Tessa Heyworth could be assessed. Over half (27 or 57%) had written their wills less than a year before their decease.[23] The clothes bequeathed therefore would still be recent enough to be in fashion and still desirable gifts, quite suitable for re-wearing.

WOMEN'S CLOTHING BEQUESTS

In law, a woman could only make a will if unmarried or widowed, as she could not disperse property independently of her husband. Adrian Green has argued that the unmarried or widowed status of these will-making women, the *femmes soles*, placed them in 'a small subset of society, the *women without men* who so often fell through the net of official documentation'.[24] However, Peter Laslett's sample of 100 rural and urban communities throughout England in the early modern period reveals that single women comprised over 30% of adult women, and widows another 15%.[25] This evidence is corroborated by A. L. Erickson's large scale analysis of 11,835 wills from Lancashire and Cheshire in four 20-year periods from 1660 to 1740 which reveals that between 20% and 27% were made by women, with the higher percentages in the earlier period.[26] The vast majority of these women, over 80%, were widows and the rest were spinsters. Erickson also draws attention to the propensity for women to select clothing as appropriate material for bequests: 'Women more often bequeathed clothing than men, and less often land'.[27]

Independence for educated or wealthier single or widowed women was often an attractive proposition, as has been highlighted by Olwen Hufton.[28] Single women could retain and bequeath property and material goods, and they were disposed to include precise legacies, carefully ordered in the manner of a household inventory and graded into different categories. They were also clothes-orientated, as John Styles summarizes: 'Women were especially likely to use their wills to make gifts of specific, cherished items of clothing as tokens of affection'.[29]

As an example from 1662, the widow, Marie Holbrooke, left a will particularly precise in its instructions for the future of her clothing. She intermingled items of dress with other valued possessions such as silver, pewter, jewellery, books and items of furniture, and each object is allocated a selected new owner:

> I give to my daughter in law Marie Holbrooke a black scarfe with a lace upon, and a pair of gloves with blue ribbon upon. To my son Richard Holbrooke £100 and also 3 rings and 8 pieces of gold [. . .] and all my brass and pewter and the boiler in the said kitchen, and all my silver plate except my gilt silver salt [. . .] also, I give the said Richard my best looking glass, and the best wrought cap that was his father's, and that stuff which I bought to have been a gown for myself [. . .] To my grandchild Marie Poole my gilded salt before mentioned and £6. 13s. 4d [. . .] To my neighbour Misteris Minshall a pair of gloves that were given me at the marriage of my daughter Mary Poole, and my new purse of Paris work [. . .] To Elinor the wife of John Madoke one pair of gloves which my daughter Marie Poole shall think fittest for her, and 20s.To my daughter Mary Poole my silk gown. To my sister Elizabeth Ashton my stuff gown.[30]

The will of Marie Holbrook illustrates complex strands of sentimental 'gifting' as she was a wealthy widow with costly material possessions. Clothing forms part and parcel of the goods as a whole, as important as silver and furniture, and chosen as *memento mori*, as for her son, Richard, who gets both the finest of his late father's embroidered caps (which has obviously been carefully preserved by his mother), and woollen fabric that his mother had bought to make herself a dress and which she now hopes her son will use. A suit or coat made from fabric selected by his deceased mother, and indeed intended for her own use, would form an intimate garment for Richard. Marie leaves her silk dress to her daughter, Mary, and her stuff dress to her sister, Elizabeth, before turning to selected friends and neighbours, such as Mistress Minshall, who is left a pair of gloves which Marie herself had received at her daughter's marriage, or Elinor Madoke who is given a pair of gloves, which are to be selected after Marie's death by her daughter Mary.

The past history or provenance of many of these selected garments imbues them with representational significance. As Maxine Berg has concluded: 'women's clothing [. . .] was densely described and left to favoured friends and relations. These were valuable goods, but the bequests were deeply personal, and closely tied to a passing on of something of the identity of the testatrix to those closest to her'.[31] Such wills exemplify an intended process of commemoration through the deeply personal act of wearing a garment; it is intended that beneficiaries should be drawn into a designated procedure to abide by 'post-mortem' instructions.

Careful future planning is echoed in Anne Lancashire's will of 1691 which left a compendious list of legacies, replete with detailed descriptions of many of her gowns and accessories. A widow in Manchester, Anne had five daughters, all with bequests minutely described to aid identification. She chose dresses (gowns or mantuas) as her chief bequests, and Anne Buck's research on Bedfordshire wills from the early seventeenth century concludes that gowns were 'clearly the most important garment' owned and bequeathed by women.[32] They were selected as the premier candidates for these token symbolic bequests (Figure 1).

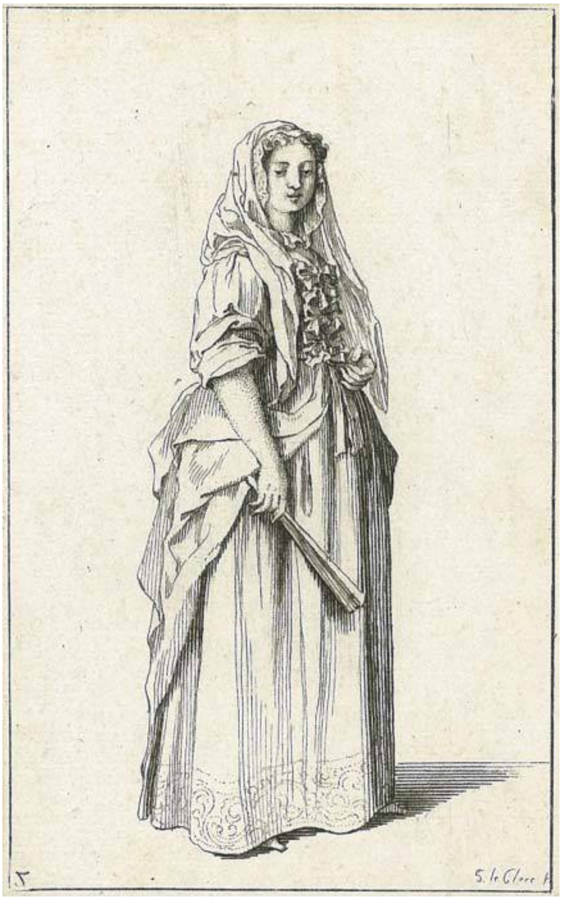


FIGURE 1. Sebastien Leclerc (1637–1714), lady in a mantua, *c.* 1690. Print on paper
Manchester City Galleries, 1966.700.5

Anne Lancashire allocates to her daughter, Elizabeth, ‘my cloth mantua and lute string petticoat, my scarlet petticoat and my bengal dust gown and my new night rail’, to Mary ‘my crepe gown, my black tabby petticoat, my under serge petticoat, my new lace cornet or pinner and two new lace forehead cloths, my laced tippet and the black fringe she gave me’, to Jane ‘my crepe mantua and petticoat, my tabby stays, my new cloth shoes, my stuff mourning gown, and three flaxen shifts’, to Anna ‘my new white sarsnet hood and two new large cambric handkerchiefs’, and to Katherine ‘my best silk mourning gown, my best farrinden petticoat with the fringe about, my coloured tabby petticoat with the silver and gold lace about, my white Barmillion petticoat, my best Alamode hood, and the thin hood she gave me’. Apart from her daughters, she leaves a goddaughter, Anne Drinkwater, ‘my old silk night gown and sarcenet petticoat’, and her daughter-in-law, Mary, ‘five yards and a half of flowered silk that she gave me’. In her bequests to her daughters Mary and Katherine, Anne Lancashire is careful to leave gifts back to their original donors: three items are annotated ‘she gave me’ and then bequeathed back to the presenter.[33] The history of any item should be respected in its selected future.

MEN’S CLOTHING BEQUESTS

When men left mention of individual clothes in their wills, they often did so in a somewhat different language from their female counterparts. Many male testators provide rather less detailed descriptions than their female counterparts, as when the Stockport chapman, Humphrey Ridgway, wrote his will in 1669:

> I do give and bequeath unto the said Henry Collier my said sonne in law twelve pounds in money, my Best Suite of Apparell, my Best Coate, my Best Hatt and my Blacke Suite of Apparell. I do give and bequeath unto William Whittacker my brother in law, my gray Breeches. I do give and bequeath unto William Fogge, my Worst suite of Apparell.[34]

Similarly, Richard Wright, a Stockport joiner, after £5 bequests to his two sons and two daughters, stipulated the future of his clothing also in 1669:

> I give and bequeath unto my sonn, Oswell Wright, my best Hatt, and best Band, and 1 paire of [. . .] Stockings. I give and bequeath unto my wyfe my Cloake. I give and bequeath unto my son John Wright all the Rest and Residue of my Wearing Apparell and Clothes.[35]

Neither of these Stockport men stipulates any type of fabric, and only one colour is mentioned. Within a largely masculine context, they allocate their clothes to suitable recipients: close relatives get the newest and ‘best’ items; older clothing goes to acquaintances lower down the social scale; and appropriately ‘unisex’ garments such as loose cloaks can be left to beneficiaries of the opposite sex when appropriate. Some wealthier male testators, such as Sheffield cutlers, also left rather general bequests. John Smith left a male friend his ‘best suit of cloaths’, whilst another cutler, John Vaughan, left a friend his best coat, waistcoat and doeskin breeches.[36]

But other men felt the need to leave more careful instructions. John Candler, a ‘stuff maker’ in Selby, left his ‘camblet coate and black waistcoat’ to his father-in-law, Joseph Arnold, and his ‘ryding coat’ to his brother-in-law, Joseph Morley, in 1703.[37] Or Henry Waller who left his uncle his ‘old gray coate’, and his friend

William Armstrong his 'best broadcloth suite' and 'best gray coate and hat', and another friend Thomas Wand 'all the remainder' of his 'woollen cloaths' in 1681.[38] In 1657, Nicholas Poole, a Selby tanner, left his 'ould Father' his 'second cloake which I now weare, and one shirt, one cappe, one black hatt, one pair of stockinges' and his 'beste shooes'.[39] This comprises a full outfit, even the cloak which the testator is wearing as the will is being drafted (Figure 2).

Certainly, clothes were re-worn after death, at least within the family. Richard Latham, the smallholding farmer from Scarisbrick in Lancashire, whose family accounts survive from 1724 to 1767, could rarely afford new clothing. After his son Dicy's death aged only twenty in 1748, Richard was able to expand his frugal wardrobe by wearing many of his late son's clothes, including two new coats and three pairs of breeches.[40] Detailed male bequests continue to the middle of the eighteenth century: in 1757 Hugh Holt of Bowden, a victualler, left Sarah Johnson a spinster his 'late wife's Black Silk Gown and Petticoat', and Samuel Renshaw, a yeoman, his own 'Brown Coat with Black Buttons and Button Holes' and his 'Black Allopeen Wastcoat with glass Buttons'.[41] These are clearly identified garments, and the widower has also preserved some of his late wife's clothes.

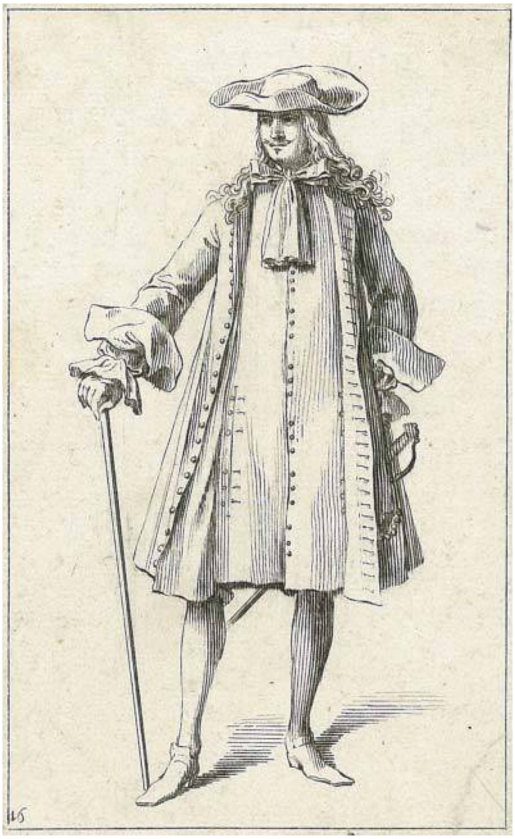


FIGURE 2. Sebastien Leclerc (1637–1714), gentleman in a long coat and waistcoat, *c.* 1690. Print on paper
Manchester City Galleries, 1966.700.13

These men are participating in what Margot Finn has called ‘a constant exchange of gifts’, as part of male consumption of consumer goods.[42] By examining four examples of detailed diaries, Finn is able to conclude that men, like women, had ‘investment in gifting activity’. Clothing as much as any ‘masculine possession’ was used as a gift or as a bequest and was also as much a preoccupation of the male mind as of the female.

THE BEQUESTS OF THOSE WITHOUT CHILDREN OR PARTNERS

If there is less of a gender distinction in clothing bequests than has been assumed, living as an unattached, single individual in society does seem to have focused the mind on post-mortem arrangements. Single women and single men, widows and widowers without surviving children often left particularly detailed bequests, including clothing.[43] Such individuals were frequently the head of their own household, involved in financial and domestic management, at whatever social level. Men were usually in charge of their household, but Richard Wall’s work on the towns of Lichfield and Stoke-on-Trent between 1695 and 1701 shows that between 72% and 79% of widows were also independent heads of their own households.[44] Single unmarried women were far less likely to maintain an independent establishment, although a small proportion of up to 6% did so, often well-off or business women and in urban locations.[45]

Amy Froide, amongst others, has identified the propensity for single women to write wills that included bequests of individual clothes to female relatives or to female friends. In her words, ‘single women’s social relationships were also significantly female-centred, according to their wills. The majority of legacies bequeathed by never-married women [. . .] went to other women’.[46] A. L. Erickson concurs, seeing ‘women’s wider recognition of kin, and [. . .] their preference for female legatees’.[47] When female siblings were remembered, the unmarried ones with greater financial need received larger legacies. Wealthy or ‘middling’ women were able to make special charitable bequests for poor widows, suggesting an awareness of women’s economic and legal vulnerability.[48] Spinsters and widows chose to bequeath to their whole social circle of family and friends in the place of family, drawing attention to wider female kinship networks.[49] There is a special intimacy in the language in some women’s wills, demonstrating a communality of female interests. Elizabeth Armitt’s 1794 will is particularly poignant, as the young woman writes an instruction to her mother: ‘my mother shall have any part of my clothes that she thinks proper and the remainder shall be divided between my sisters’.[50]

Women or men with surviving children usually left possessions including their clothing to their offspring, but the childless were free to leave more varied legacies. Alice Armetriding of Euxton in Lancashire was typical in 1730 in selecting from her whole wardrobe to identify her most important relatives and friends:

> I give to my sister Ann my gray crape gown and petty coat, black callamanca petty coat and Handkerchief, My Lute String Hud, black silk apron, my Indie silk crisp gown, my best stays [. . .] Petty coat and two Dimitty under petty coats and all my household linnen. Also I give to My Cousin Elizabeth Armetriding [. . .] My dimitty gown and petty coat, and my white Quilted Coat, My best laced head cloathes, two handkerchiefs, My Ruffles and white

> Lute String apron, and my best Fan, and a Holland Shift [. . .] Item I give to Mrs Ann Low, My little panier Linnen petty coat, My muslin apron, My double cambrick handkerchief and best long mobs and two cotton check aprons. Item I give to my Aunt Armetriding My fine plain head cloathes and Ruffles. Item I give to Hannah Green My Callamanca gown and my prined linnen gown, My brown stuff gown and yellow Quilted coat and old stays.[51]

As Alice works her way through her wardrobe, she also runs through her female family, friends and dependants, bequest by bequest. Each item has been chosen with a female beneficiary in mind, drawing attention to the important relationships in Alice's life. As Froide concludes, the single woman's will 'can be read as an autobiographical text that explains how she wanted to present her life (at the moment of her death), how she hoped to display her relationships, and how she wished to perpetuate her memory'.[52]

A compulsion to allocate and list a vast selection of garments pervades some childless women's wills. In 1721, the childless widow, Mary Cotton, of Middlewich wrote a will allocating over fifty possessions, of which over thirty relate to clothes or textiles.[53] She left these to ten non-familial beneficiaries, primarily her friend, Mary Goodnich, and her two daughters. This desire by female testators to list every item in their treasured wardrobes echoes through to the early nineteenth century. After examining a selection of 254 men's and women's wills from the towns of Glasgow and Edinburgh dating from 1822 to 1824, Ann McCrum concludes that a 'distinguishing feature between men's and women's wills was the fact that in general women's, and particularly childless women's dispositions and settlements were more detailed. Some appear to have envisaged every possession and given small things to a huge number of individuals'.[54] This 'post-mortem transfer of property' provided 'an opportunity for repayment of past kindnesses and care' giving 'the delegator a chance to express affection in a material way'.[55]

The wills left by childless women examined here support this view. Bewilderingly complicated lists of bequests can be left, seemingly involving every item in a wardrobe but each reallocated after thought and planning. Ellen Buxton, a childless widow from Manchester, left a will in 1692 with over 60 individual clothing bequests to 17 beneficiaries, mostly family members. She is precise in her descriptions: 'my black mantue, my petticoat with the silver fringes on it [. . .] my spotted gown lined with black [. . .] my black birdeye hood, my loope lace tippet'.[56] The attached inventory valued her apparel at a sizeable £15. Like other testators, she prefixes garments with 'best' and 'new': 'my best stays, my best satin petticoat [. . .] my best mask, my best black apron [. . .] my new cercinett [sarsenet]'. This is usually where there are obviously a number of similar items, such as stays and aprons. Interestingly, she is also able to leave garments to male relatives, as she selects some of her valuable lace and muslin to be remade into cravats. Thus to her brother Buxton and her brother-in-law Benjamin Warbutton she leaves each 'one half of my Flanders lace cornet for a Cravatt'. To John and Thomas Warbutton she leaves one breadth of her 'florished muslin for Cravatts'. Here, Ellen makes explicit her desire for some of her clothing to be re-worn after her death.

Widowed and childless men were also most likely to leave details of bequests, often within a male-centred world. The 1669 will of William Ashton, a childless widower of Penketh in Lancashire, contains five clear clothing bequests to his brothers and nephews, four of them receiving clearly described hats:

> I give and bequeath to my Brother Thomas Ashton, a black demicaster Hatt and 10s in silver to buy him a ring [. . .] to my nephew John Ashton, my shoulder belt with a Blacke Fringe, my Sword, my Blacke shagged Hatt and 10s [. . .] to my Brother Andrew Ashton, my Blacke furred Capp and 40s [. . .] to my Brother Andrew's son, John Ashton, my Gray Hatt and 40s [. . .] to my Brother Sander's son, Peter, my Buff Doublet and 40s.[57]

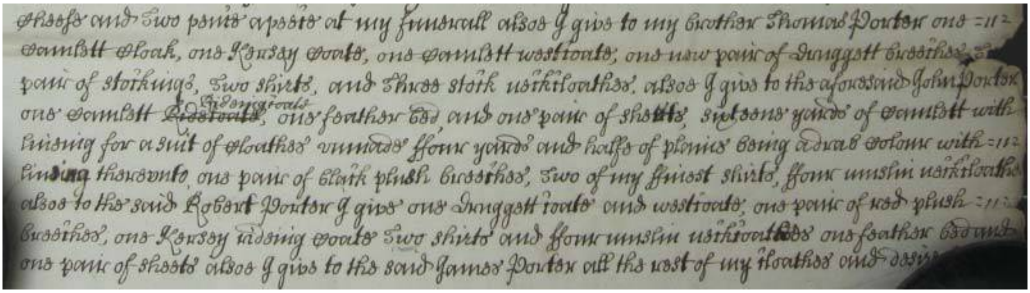
Each recipient in this will is left one or two chosen items of clothing which are specifically connected to the ritual of commemoration as seen in the amounts of cash to buy mourning rings. Hats would be very easily re-worn by the beneficiaries.

Maxine Berg's conclusion that 'few men appear to have attached personal identity to their clothing significant enough for them to make individual bequests of items of apparel' therefore requires closer analysis.[58] In fact, William Ashton was not unusual in his careful disposition of four favourite hats, his sword and his buff doublet to his five nearest male relations. William Porter, a wealthy childless chapman from Rainow near Macclesfield, wrote a will in 1719 making clear mention of over twenty garments. He left his brother, Thomas, 'one Camlett Cloak, one Kersey Coat, one Camlett waistcoat, one new pair of Druggett breeches, one pair of stockings, two shirts and three stock neckclothes'. His nephew John got 'one Camlett Riding Coat, sixteen yards of Camlett with lining for a suit of clothes, unmade, four yards and half of plaine being a drab colour with lining thereto, one pair of black plush breeches, two of my finest shirts, and four muslin neckclothes'. Two other nephews received equally precise bequests (Figure 3).[59]

The single and childless man or woman was often obliged to leave more imaginative and specific provisions in his/her will if they sought any form of commemoration. They had no partner or offspring with whom to discuss arrangements or who could be relied upon to convey oral instructions. In drafting detailed wills, they looked to construct networks to distribute gifts which would engender a sense of gratitude amongst friends and the wider family, nurturing feelings of remembrance.

THE GRADING OF CLOTHING BEQUESTS

The wills quoted so far have provided a number of examples of the grading of clothing into 'old' and 'new', 'coarse' and 'fine', 'best' and 'workday' or 'best' and 'common'. Not surprisingly, 'best' items, newest or most valuable, were most



Cheese and two pence apeece at my funerall also I give to my brother Thomas Porter one =
Camlett Cloak, one Kersey Coate, one Camlett westcoate; one new pair of Druggett breeches =
pair of stockings, two shirts, and three stock neckcloathes. also I give to the aforesaid John Porter
one Camlett ~~Westcoate~~ Ridingcoate, one feather bed, and one pair of sheets, sixteen yards of Camlett with
lining for a suit of cloathes unmade ffour yards and halfe of plaine being a drab colour with =
lining thereunto, one pair of black plush breeches, two of my finest shirts, ffour muslin neckcloathes
also to the said Robert Porter I give one Druggett coate and westcoate; one pair of red plush =
breeches, one Kersey riding coate two shirts and ffour muslin neckcloathes one feather bed and
one pair of sheets also I give to the said James Porter all the rest of my cloathes and desi

FIGURE 3. Detail of the will of William Porter of Rainow, 1719

Courtesy of Dr Tessa Heyworth
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likely to be chosen for a bequest, and usually to the nearest relations. Jane Siddall, a Stockport widow, left wearing apparel valued at only £1 4*s.* 0*d.* in 1667, but in her will was careful to allocate her 'best red petticoat and broadcloth waistcoat' to her sister, Alice Bostock, with 20*s.*[60] Similarly, in 1664, another Stockport widow, Anne Dickenson, left her daughter, Margaret Parker, her 'best gowne and best petticoat', and her daughter-in-law amongst other items her 'Ridinge Sute that is of cloth and with lace uppon it' and her 'best cloth gowne'.[61] Margaret clearly has a best gown (silk) and a best cloth gown (wool).

This form of language recurs in probate documents, and it was also used in domestic and personal housekeeping.[62] In wills, such distinctions separated garments for their selected post-mortem existence, ordering them qualitatively according to the testator's wishes. This made explicit in Catherine Hesketh's will from 1763:

> I give to my sister Margaret Greenhalgh of Standish the sum of twenty pounds and all my common wearing aparel, that is to say the coarser sort of aparel both linnen and woollen. And all the better sort of my apparel, both linnen, woollen and silk together with all my goods and Household stuff and Furniture, I hereby order to be sold and the money I bequeath as follows.[63]

Catherine then stipulated cash bequests totalling fifteen guineas, which obviously approximates to the amount that she thinks will be raised. She was unusual in leaving so close a member of the family as a sister what she prefixes second-rate or 'coarse' clothing, but she was still anxious not to simply to sell all her clothes. In a further example, Anne Robinson, a Stockport widow, divided her linen into 'workeday' and 'best' in 1662:

> I doe give and bequeath unto Frances Boardman, widdow, my daughter, five shillings, a piece of silver, my best kertle and wastcoate and the halfe of my wearing linens except the workeday linens. I doe give and bequeath to my daughter Sara Beaver, another five shillings, a piece of silver, my best gowne and the other halfe of my wearing linens except workeday linens. I doe give and bequeath to my servant Dorothy Knott all my workeday apparell, linen and woollen, and ten shillings in silver.[64]

The servant was obviously much favoured by her mistress, receiving equivalent money to the daughters, but she is allocated 'workeday' garments, appropriately practical clothes that would be suited to her place in society. Widow Robinson's 'best' garments and linen are reserved for her own kin, as it was inappropriate that a servant should be dressed as fashionably as her mistress.

Such language of qualitative graduation, recognizing the authority of a social hierarchy, continued in the bequeathing of garments into the nineteenth century. John Rushton, an unmarried butcher from Rainow in Cheshire, selected traditional language to enumerate his bequests in his will dated 1829, stipulating a division of his wardrobe into 'inferior' and 'better':

> I give and bequeath all my inferior wearing apparel to my oldest serving men living with me at my death, and all my better cloathes I direct my executors to take care of and deliver to my brother David's children at such time as they may think proper and necessary.[65]

CONCLUSION

Post-mortem gifting of clothing featured in a variety of wills from the whole period from 1650 to 1830, and when stipulated individually this reflected the personal and emotional significance of such intimate possessions. In a world where death was common and dreaded, and illness often a constant companion, preparations could be both comforting and talismanic. Personal gifts were apportioned for remembrance — 'for my sake' — and garments could perpetuate identity more effectively than other material goods. Bequests were also appropriate social gifts. When Mary Cotton of Middlewich bequeathed thirty specific clothing items to friends, and when Ellen Buxton of Manchester left sixty such bequests, they had invested considerable time in devising schedules and plans. It would have been simpler to accept that their whole wardrobes would be sold en masse and the moneys distributed than it was to select beneficiaries and gifts carefully. Both these 'plans' concur with Amanda Vickery's view of a distinctly feminine construct for the domestic 'world of goods'. As she concludes: 'Women's records consistently reveal a more self-conscious, emotional investment in household goods, apparel and personal effects', and 'most women had only movable goods to bestow'.[66]

But, as we have seen, men too chose to leave specific clothing bequests to their male friends and relatives, particularly when childless. It is likely that individual personality and a search for commemoration were as much a part of the dynamo driving this process as any specific gender behaviour. Perhaps, indeed, Amanda Vickery identifies the essence of this precise process when describing the thoughts of an ageing Elizabeth Shackleton as she approached death: 'Growing frail, she contemplated the durability of the material in contrast to the transience of flesh, hoping her heirlooms would guarantee remembrance'.[67]

Economically, of course, like other material goods, clothing became relatively less valuable and significant over the period considered. In the seventeenth century, for 'middling' testators, parcels of land or houses or small businesses could be left to one or more sons, whilst this inheritance could be balanced for other beneficiaries, perhaps daughters, by possessions like furniture, valuables and even garments. In the eighteenth century, new cheaper and more easily manufactured goods meant that the value of most possessions declined, both financially and emotionally, precluding such a balancing act, and prompting fewer testators to include specific mention of such items in their wills.[68]

Although the process of clothing bequests became uncommon, it continued to the end of the eighteenth century, particularly in the wills of single women. As late as 1789, Ann Ibbotson, a widow from Sheffield, left a particular friend a black crape gown, a red flannel petticoat and a callimanco quilt; Maxine Berg includes seven individual examples of specific clothing bequests in her article with a date range from 1770 to 1800.[69] But, by the early nineteenth century, the drafting of many legal documents allowed for less idiosyncrasy, resulting in set wording and standardized types of bequest in most typical wills. Although a small minority of testators chose to continue the earlier tradition of remembrance bequests, garments were usually either allocated outside the will or left as general 'wearing apparel'. Clothing still projected the potent, poignant and personal messages that it had always had, but these were increasingly conveyed outside the context and construct of the will.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Negley Harte, Professor Margot Finn, Professor Penelope Corfield and Professor Beverly Lemire who all made very helpful suggestions during the preparation of my thesis, which underpins the research for this paper. I am also grateful to Dr Tessa Heyworth for generously sharing her research with me and for providing the image of William Porter's will.

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