

## Below stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and his household staff, c.1670–1710\*

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### Abstract

This article reconstructs the experience of domestic service among the menservants and maids employed in a late seventeenth-century gentry household, that of Sir Richard Newdigate, second baronet of Arbury Hall in the parish of Chilvers Coton, near Nuneaton, Warwickshire. By correlating the remarkable 1684 ‘census-type listing’ (by name, by age, by occupation, by relationship to household head) of the inhabitants of Chilvers Coton not only with the rentals generated as part of Newdigate’s ‘great survey’ of his manors in 1681–4, but also with the account books in which Newdigate recorded the tasks performed by, and the wages and rewards paid to, each servant throughout the period 1678–1710, it is possible to ascertain the size, structure and participation rate of the household staff; the range of jobs undertaken and the skills thought requisite to perform them; and the relationship between work, remuneration and other types of reward among the domestic labour force.

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In January 1694, Sir Richard Newdigate decided to dismiss one of his maids after almost twenty years’ service in his household at Arbury Hall in Chilvers Coton, near Nuneaton, Warwickshire. This was not by any means an unusual event, for Mall Porter’s departure was one of at least fifty occasions on which Newdigate sacked a member of his household staff between 1692 and 1706.<sup>1</sup> Close personal intervention in household affairs on this scale was in part a function of his boredom. Although he was a conforming Anglican, Newdigate’s whig allegiances (he was even suspected of tangential involvement in the 1683 Rye House Plot to assassinate Charles II) resulted not only in the briefest of parliamentary careers but also in very short-lived membership of the Warwickshire commission of the peace. Retiring prematurely to his Warwickshire estates, he was from 1681 until his death in 1710 almost continually resident at Arbury Hall, where the running of his household, his estate and his

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<sup>1</sup> All the calculations relating to the service of, salaries paid to and turnover among Arbury household staff in the period 1692–1706 are based on an analysis of the list of staff and salaries in Warwickshire County Record Office (hereafter W.C.R.O.), Newdigate Papers, CR136/V17, pp. 198, 230–1, 288, 302–3, 390, 404, 428, 440, 586, 608, 656–7, 670, 730, 742–3, 778–89, 794, 21–7 [reverse pagination]; V23, pp. 108, 198, 208, 298, 316, 408, 420, 490, 508.



Figure 1. Henry Bighton's 1708 drawing of Arbury Hall

coalmines were his principal preoccupations (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> In all these spheres of activity, Newdigate had a preference for micro-management which sat very uneasily with his irascible, volatile personality. He was, therefore, the worst type of control-freak: that is, one with time on his hands.

In 1675, Newdigate had put Mall Porter in charge of the Arbury wine cellar, almost certainly in the light of his mother's advice that it was probably 'better to let a woman keep the wine'; and of his wife's request that one of her own serving women keep the key to the cellar. At her dismissal some nineteen years later, Newdigate paid Porter the 16s which she was owed for four months' wages and added a gratuity of a further 20s. He apparently thought that even this meagre generosity was ill-deserved because she had been 'very careless'.<sup>3</sup> In at least one respect, however, Porter had served him extremely well. Newdigate had long been concerned about the spiralling costs of supplying his household with alcohol, but in December 1693 the residents of Arbury Hall were still consuming 'a hogshead and a half' (that is, almost eighty gallons, or 640

<sup>2</sup> For Newdigate, see E. Gooder, *The Squire of Arbury: Sir Richard Newdigate, Second Baronet (1644–1710) and his Family* (Coventry, 1990); V. M. Larminie, 'Newdigate, Sir Richard, second baronet (1644–1710)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47961>> [accessed 19 July 2010]; and S. Hindle, 'Sir Richard Newdigate and the "great survey" of Chilvers Coton: fiscal seigneurialism in late-17th-century Warwickshire', in *William Dugdale, Historian, 1605–86: his Life, his Writings and his County*, ed. C. Dyer and C. Richardson (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 164–86.

<sup>3</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 499 (21 Jan. 1694). For the advice of Lady Juliana and Lady Mary Newdigate, see W.C.R.O., CR136/B333 (16 March, undated, but before 1678); V84, p. 19 [reverse pagination] (7 March 1674). For Porter's service in the cellar, see W.C.R.O., CR136/A25, p. 102v (1675). Porter had in fact herself given Newdigate a quarter's notice of her intention to quit at Michaelmas 1693, though she subsequently received gratuities of 2s 6d on 24 Oct. and 1s on 28 Nov. for 'being diligent', and of 2s 6d on 4 Nov. for 'brewing good beer' (W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 199, 201; V90, p. 499).

pints) of small beer every week. Although he did not entirely trust Porter, Newdigate accepted the proverbial wisdom that he should ‘set a knave to catch a knave’ and accordingly instructed her to identify those ‘secret drinkers’ that ‘devour so vast a quantity of ale’. In a formulation that was entirely characteristic of his preference for what might be called ‘informal guarantees’, Newdigate intimated (though he would not promise) that Porter would be rewarded with 40s for ‘every full and clear discovery’ of tippling that she made. In due course, Porter reported evidence ‘with undeniable circumstances’ that William Etherington, Thomas Boidall and Robin Cholmley had been raiding the Arbury Hall cellar. Newdigate was, however, still reluctant to reward her, offering only 20s in the following February (1694) and a further 20s in February 1695, but making these sums conditional upon Porter’s promise that she would not ‘(as so many ill servants do) rail at the family after shee is gone away’. She apparently kept her part of the bargain and Newdigate at least partially kept his word (insofar as he had given it at all), paying her new husband 10s of the outstanding sum in October 1694.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Richard Newdigate’s dismissal of Mall Porter illustrates several characteristic features of master–servant relationships in a late seventeenth-century gentry household. Porter’s long and loyal service at Arbury Hall stands out in a working environment which was evidently characterized by very high staff turnover. Newdigate’s granting of supplementary gratuities and rewards indicates that, among the servants of the gentry in particular, the relationships between work, service and remuneration were discretionary rather than fixed. His recruitment of Porter to police the behaviour of her fellow servants illustrates the importance of networks of collusion and surveillance in managing a household of this size. In the background, moreover, lie the hazy figures of Newdigate’s mother and wife, both of whom seem to have exerted palpable (though indirect) influence on the deployment of household staff in the wine cellar and elsewhere. Above all, Newdigate’s concern to pay ‘hush money’ to Porter epitomizes the febrile nature of labour relations transacted within the confined space of a household where the boundaries between a gentleman’s domestic authority and his public reputation were fluid and contested.

But the Porter episode in particular and Newdigate’s experiences with his servants in general also speak to wider issues in the history of late seventeenth-century social and economic relations. As long ago as 1974, Edward Thompson famously described this period as one in which there was radical dissociation between ‘patrician society’ (the gentry riding to hounds, gathering on the sessions bench and participating in the London season) and ‘plebeian culture’ (the labouring poor working long and hard, eking out a living from tenuous and tenaciously defended common rights, and associating to grumble in marketplace and alehouse).<sup>5</sup> But emphasis on the interface between the patricians and the plebs within the gentry household itself is a valuable reminder that in what might be regarded as a ‘quasi-estate’ village like Chilvers Coton where the landlord was resident, there was never, and could not be, any such dissociation. Measured in terms of the turnover of his household staff alone, Sir Richard Newdigate had personal dealings with a significant proportion of the local population, many of whom were actually co-resident with him. The portico to the

<sup>4</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 499 (21 Jan. 1694). For the scale of alcohol consumption at Arbury, see Gooder, pp. 41–2.

<sup>5</sup> E. P. Thompson, ‘Patrician society, plebeian culture’, *Jour. Social Hist.*, vii (1974), 382–405. Cf. P. King, ‘Edward Thompson’s contribution to 18th-century studies: the patrician–plebeian model re-examined’, *Social Hist.*, xxi (1996), 215–28.

underexplored world of the gentry household is, therefore, an invaluable point of entry for the analysis of the ‘field-of-force’ of social relations in an environment where paternalism and deference were negotiated in conditions that were not merely face-to-face but personal and intimate.<sup>6</sup>

In turn, master-servant relations must be understood in the context of wider debates about the relationship between labour and leisure at a time of demographic stagnation and falling prices and rents. This was a period when labour was in relatively short supply, when it was believed that ‘the very fabric of society could be threatened, not just by rising wages and costs, but by a swelling independence among the working masses, which commonly manifested itself in a refusal to engage wholeheartedly in unremitting toil’.<sup>7</sup> As John Hatcher has shown, there was a growing consensus, emerging among the propertied elite in the century after 1650, about the ‘utility of poverty’. Employers, magistrates and political economists alike agreed that ‘the higher the wages labourers and artisans received, the less they worked, and that, while low wages bred industry and diligence, high wages bred laziness, disorderliness and debauchery’.<sup>8</sup> Newdigate’s strategies to incentivize work and reward loyalty among his servants might therefore be read as one manifestation of the attempt to impose labour discipline at a particularly troubling time in the history of relations between master and man.

The following discussion illustrates some of these themes through a detailed construction of the relationships between Newdigate and his household servants over the three decades he exercised authority at Arbury Hall. The first section briefly reconstructs the size, composition and cost of the Arbury household staff; the second discusses Newdigate’s strategies of remuneration and reward; and the third analyses the character of relations between master and servant on the basis of the sanctions and gratuities which characterized his attempts at labour discipline. Overall, it will be suggested that in its peculiar combination of charity and benevolence with ruthlessness and impatience, Newdigate’s interactions with his household servants represented in microcosm the problematic and often contested relations he enjoyed with wider constituencies: with the hard core of longwall miners who sank the shafts of his coalpits; with the sizeable estate workforce who tilled his fields and raked his hay; and with the much larger number of small tenants and cottiers to whom he rented strips, crofts and cottages.<sup>9</sup> Second, it will be argued that Newdigate’s strategies of household management both resonate with widespread contemporary concern about how plebeian labour could be disciplined and illustrate more progressive thinking about how work might be rewarded.

In 1684, the remarkable ‘census-type listing’ (by name, by age and by relationship to household head) of the inhabitants of the parish of Chilvers Coton drawn up by Sir Richard Newdigate’s court of survey identified no fewer than twenty-eight servants who were co-resident with the Newdigate family at Arbury Hall. Seventeen of them were male, ranging in age from the fourteen-year-old huntsman Edward White to the

<sup>6</sup> J. T. Cliffe, *The World of the Country House in 17th-Century England* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), pp. 97–107; N. Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry, 1480–1680* (New Haven, Conn., 1999).

<sup>7</sup> J. Hatcher, ‘Labour, leisure and economic thought before the 19th century’, *Past & Present*, clx (1998), 64–115, at p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Hatcher, p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> The social, economic and spatial aspects of these relationships are to be explored in my projected monograph *The Social Topography of a Rural Community*.

sixty-year-old shepherd William Clark, and including a land agent, two bailiffs, a husbandman, two gardeners, a postilion, a coachman, a wainman, a groom, a butler, a brewer and a cook. The remaining eleven were women, ranging in age from the nineteen-year-old lady's-maid Jane Sanders to the forty-year-old dairymaid Margaret Johnson, and including two maids specifically assigned duties to Sir Richard's wife and to his daughter, as well as other maidservants variously responsible for dairying, nursing and cooking.<sup>10</sup> The aggregate figure of twenty-eight was probably, in fact, the maximum size of the Newdigate household during the seventeenth century. In his uncle's time in 1621–2, for instance, there had been only about eighteen servants, thirteen of them men, including the agent and the kitchen boy, and five of them women, though the lesser numbers probably reflect the smaller size of the Newdigate family at that stage of John III's life-cycle.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Sir Richard's household itself shrank again after 1684 as his children were increasingly educated and provided for elsewhere, and especially after the death of his first wife Lady Mary in 1692.<sup>12</sup> Over the period 1692–1706, the number of household staff at Arbury averaged nineteen. Although this figure sits comfortably with the near-contemporary assessment that the large country household would typically include twenty servants, it is at the more frugal end of the spectrum of staff provision for those landholders whose estates were worth £3,000 a year and upwards, for Newdigate himself had a notional annual income of £5,137 in the sixteen-eighties.<sup>13</sup>

The cost of sustaining a household staff on this scale was substantial, even if it is calculated only in terms of basic wages. The average annual wage bill for the male servants throughout the sixteen-eighties was approximately £70, that for the females about £30. In basic wages alone, therefore, Newdigate was consistently spending about one-sixth of his rental income from the Arbury estate on his household servants (though of course this estimate takes no account of wages paid to the small army of craftsmen, day labourers and coalminers who worked around the estate, which would increase this proportion very considerably).<sup>14</sup> But as his chaotic and haphazard household accounts show, these nominal sums were usually inflated with supplementary rewards for good service. In the years 1681–5, fortunately, Newdigate kept his accounts in sufficiently good order to allow precise calculation of the value of these rewards. On average, the male staff could expect to have their basic wages supplemented by more than one-half (52.9 per cent), and the female staff by well over one-third (39.2 per cent). Overall, the wages and rewards of the female servants were far more consistent over time than those of the males, a characteristic which probably reflects the division of labour between Sir Richard and Lady Mary in supervising the male and female staff. Newdigate seems to have given his wife fixed annual sums to pay and reward her maids, while he personally retained discretionary control of the much larger sums from which he paid his male staff. His generosity, however, varied not only

<sup>10</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V12, p. 73. The names, ages and occupations of the servants are conveniently printed in Gooder, p. 37; and in N. W. Alcock, 'The hearth tax in Warwickshire', in *Houses and the Hearth Tax: the Later Stuart House and Society*, ed. P. S. Barnwell and M. Airs (York, 2006), pp. 106–21, at p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> V. M. Larminie, 'The lifestyle and attitudes of the 17th-century gentleman, with special reference to the Newdigates of Arbury Hall, Warwickshire' (unpublished University of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1980), pp. 101–2.

<sup>12</sup> Newdigate personally expressed confidence that his expenses would be lessened after his wife's death (W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 499).

<sup>13</sup> Giles Jacob, *The Country Gentleman's Vademecum* (1717), pp. 46–7; Cliffe, pp. 198–9.

<sup>14</sup> Newdigate's summary of his rental at Lady Day 1682 put his annual Arbury Hall income at £598 (W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 17 (20 May 1682)).

by gender but also from year to year. Those male staff fortunate enough to be on the payroll in 1681, for instance, received a bonus of over 120 per cent, while those employed in 1685 were given less than 15 per cent. At Lady Day 1689, he recorded that £40 10s was due in wages to male staff, and budgeted for £6 (another 14.8 per cent) to be given as rewards ‘to those that best deserve’.<sup>15</sup> By the time rewards are factored in, therefore, the proportion of the Arbury rental that was expended merely on paying the wages of (let alone feeding and clothing) the household staff in the early sixteen-eighties rises to almost 25 per cent. Maintaining the life-style and port of a gentleman was evidently a significant drain on Newdigate finances.

The elaborate system of bonuses was, however, only the most conspicuous element in Newdigate’s subtle and complex scheme of remuneration designed to reward loyal service among his staff. In a detailed series of memoranda probably drawn up in 1678 and entitled ‘a view of my intent to good servants’, Newdigate tabulated a scheme for incremental increases in the wages of his staff over time: the longer they served him, the more they would be paid, and these loyalty bonuses would be payable in addition to rewards for good service.<sup>16</sup> For each of fourteen particular staff positions within the household, ranging from his bailiff down to the humblest chambermaid, Newdigate painstakingly set down not only the basic annual wage and the discretionary annual bonus, but also loyalty increments payable year by year for the first seven years, the annuities payable after fourteen and twenty years’ service, and even the total expenditure he was likely to incur if the servant remained at Arbury throughout the whole two decades. Thus he calculated that while his bailiff might cost him as much as £161 for that whole period, his chambermaid’s wages and bonuses might be as little as £33. The price to be paid for such an apparently benevolent scheme was that the basic wages payable to staff were, if not exactly nominal, substantially less generous than those offered elsewhere. Indeed, they look relatively meagre in the context of the recently sketched ‘broad parameters’ of servants’ wages paid in the period 1660–1700. A gentleman’s cook, for instance, might earn anything up to £25 a year, but Newdigate was paying his only £6. He was even less generous to his coachman and his gardener, who at £2 and £3 per annum respectively earned less than the least well-paid equivalents elsewhere. The Arbury butler, however, did marginally better, earning £6 a year when his contemporaries were being paid up to £10.<sup>17</sup> Provided they were prepared to accept contracts at ‘small wages’, individual members of staff were nonetheless able to build up a ‘stock’, which would be used to finance gradual increments in the short and medium term and ultimately even stipendiary pensions when they ‘retired’ from Arbury Hall. Cumulatively these could be very generous: Newdigate’s valet could expect a life annuity of £30 if he remained at Arbury for twenty years, and even the nursemaids could retire on pensions of £10 per annum if they served that long. As will become clear, however, very few staff ever stayed the whole course.

In the short term, at least, Newdigate appears to have implemented the scheme rigidly, noting every Lady Day and Michaelmas during the early sixteen-eighties the gradual accumulation of stock which would finance loyalty bonuses and annuities. The fact that these levels never rose that high is, however, an indication of significant

<sup>15</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 546 (March 1689).

<sup>16</sup> W.C.R.O., CR 136/V84, pp. 21–7 [reverse pagination]: ‘A view of my intent to good servants’ (?c. 1678).

<sup>17</sup> Cliffe, p. 101.

staff turnover. The value of the stock for the men only exceeded £10 in the period between Michaelmas 1681 and Lady Day 1683 and had fallen to as little as £3 10s by Michaelmas 1685. The value of female stock was rather more consistent, fluctuating around £5 but also reaching its nadir (£2 15s) in the autumn of 1685. Newdigate was careful to note those rare cases where he had been prepared to pay his servants the going rate in the short term rather than lay aside money to reward their loyalty in the future. Sometimes he was clearly reluctant to count on future fidelity. Three successive gardeners, for example, came to work for him ‘for great wages’, and therefore had no stock. In other cases, he had probably been forced to pay the going rate and only subsequently persuaded the employee to conform to his usual policy. Sarah Searle, for instance, had been lady-in-waiting to Lady Newdigate since 1679 and only ‘came to small wages’ (and therefore to loyalty bonuses) in 1683. The case of William Clark, who had come to Arbury as shepherd in 1677, is indicative of some flexibility in this regard. Newdigate noted in 1684 that although he had taken in Clark ‘on charity, lame and able to do little’, he now considered him to have been ‘well recruited’ and thought that his loyal service should be rewarded with a stock from that point onwards.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he carefully monitored accumulating liabilities with respect to potential annuities. By 1681, he calculated that the eleven years’ service contributed by the nursemaid Mary Eburne notionally earned her a stock of almost £28. Just occasionally, indeed, servants really did reap the benefit of long service. His coachman Thomas Wright, for instance, received £2 14s in outstanding wages in 1693, but Newdigate added a further £9 ‘reward’ at his ‘going off’. When his butler George Nott left him after ten years’ service in 1693, Newdigate paid him the £4 he was owed for six months’ wages, but added a cash gift of £30. The wainman Edward Bryan had been earning £5 a year throughout the sixteen-eighties and nineties, but when he reached the age of fifty in 1697, Newdigate allowed him to ‘retire’ with an annual pension of £4 for life.<sup>19</sup> Both these arrangements conform exactly to the terms of the scheme Newdigate had projected in the late sixteen-seventies.

Annuities of this kind might create the means to support a comfortable standard of living. Probate material is, unfortunately, only extant for one individual who can be shown to have been a household servant at Arbury Hall in this period. When Robert Chandler died unmarried in 1725, he had risen through service to amass inventoried wealth of almost £120 (three-quarters of it in mortgages on a house and land). Although the exact capacity in which he had served the Newdigate family is unclear, the fact that he left riding apparel, including britches, boots, spurs and whip, to his brother and nephews suggests that he may have been a coachman or postilion. Chandler’s career is, therefore, powerful testimony to the significant opportunities for social mobility presented by service in a great house: that the son of a collier who in 1684 had rented from Newdigate a small tenement with a tiny garden in the Heath End – effectively the sink estate of the parish – could accumulate such material wealth suggests that the rewards of loyalty to the Newdigates could be very high.<sup>20</sup>

Whether or not the basic payments made to household servants were supplemented by regular rewards or loyalty bonuses, or even by life-time annuities, they were, of course, board wages, supplemented by accommodation, by food and in some cases by clothing. The Newdigate livery, probably renewed on an annual basis, seems to have

<sup>18</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, pp. 22, 24, 25 [reverse pagination].

<sup>19</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, pp. 499 (Lady Day 1693), 887 (Lady Day 1697).

<sup>20</sup> Lichfield Record Office (hereafter L.R.O.), B/C/11, inventory and will (22 Apr. 1725) of Robert Chandler; W.C.R.O., CR136/V12, p. 72.

been provided for two groups of servants, all of them male. The senior liverymen were those six men and boys who were most frequently in the squire's presence when he received visitors or travelled abroad and whose appearance and demeanour was intended to embody their master's prestige.<sup>21</sup> Thus Newdigate's coachman, postilion, groom, footman, footboy and butler each wore a suit, buckled shoes, a hat, gloves, a neckcloth and a handkerchief. The most visible (the coachman and postilion) probably wore frockcoats and wigs on duty too, although it is unclear whether their suits were adorned with the Newdigate crest or badge. Where livery was given, however, it might excuse a reduction in pay, as it did when William Etherington's wages were reduced from £4 to £2 15s on the occasion of his first receiving clothing in 1695. The junior liverymen were the very youngest servants whose clothing was given entirely in lieu of wages. There were usually only two or three youngsters in this category, and they were often husbandry boys wearing 'mild fustian' stockings, leather britches, boots, coats, aprons and hats.<sup>22</sup> Newdigate was, therefore, as determined as other country gentlemen to ensure that the dress of his household staff reflected well on him. It may be, too, that he intended to foster a corporate spirit among them. The testamentary gesture made by Robert Chandler in 1725 suggests that in some small measure he had succeeded, for Chandler's bequests included the gift of a pair of gloves to each of his fellow servants at Arbury Hall.<sup>23</sup> That said, Newdigate's reliance on a culture of surveillance and information among his staff sits uneasily alongside these ambitions. The meaning of livery to those who saw it or wore it is, therefore, ambiguous. From one perspective, the liverymen must have appeared to be the local labour aristocracy, to membership of which the parents of prospective servants might aspire in the belief that having a son or daughter employed in the big house might bolster their own positions as tenants of, or craftsmen and labourers working for, the Newdigates. Those who actually experienced service at Arbury Hall might, on the other hand, quickly come to a very different view.

The fundamental realities of service at Arbury Hall were those of time- and labour-discipline. In theory, there was no limit on the number of days or hours the household staff might be expected to work, and they were invariably subject to close supervision and surveillance both of work and of leisure. Whether or not the wages and associated conditions were comparable with those afforded by neighbouring gentlemen, the experience of service arguably depended not so much on the cash sums earned as on the character of the master, on the nature of his disciplinary regime (especially his attitude to leisure time) and on the quality of life in the household. Newdigate's demeanour, tolerance and language were, therefore, significant issues for staff morale, recruitment and retention. His promises of rewards for good service and loyalty notwithstanding, staff turnover within his household was extremely high. Between Lady Day 1692 and Lady Day 1706, the total number of servants who worked at Arbury Hall was 167, a figure equivalent to 21.4 per cent of the population of the parish in which it stood. Of these 167, however, only eight (4.7 per cent) served the Newdigates for longer than five years. Among this hard core of loyal employees there are some remarkable examples of longevity. The under-gardener Joseph Dagle and the butler George Nott worked for at least ten years for the family; the shepherd William Clark for at least eleven years; the wainman Edward ('Ned') Bryan for over thirteen years; and the nursemaid Mary Eburne for as many as twenty-six years. Genuine bonds

<sup>21</sup> R. C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2010), pp. 107–8.

<sup>22</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 391, 417, 422; V90, pp. 118–23, 166, 220, 711; V130, pp. 4, 6, 14, 81.

<sup>23</sup> L.R.O., will of Robert Chandler (1725).



of affection could develop between servant and master in these circumstances. When the butler George Nott became lame in 1689 after six years' service, Newdigate resolved to 'be charitable to him' and kept him on. Consideration of this kind might not only be remembered but also reciprocated.<sup>24</sup> Hence Robert Chandler's bequest in 1725 went beyond gloves for his fellow servants to include rings for each of six Newdigate children. Chandler's gestures also hark back to an older tradition in which servants might leave to their masters gifts in token of their respect and gratitude. In 1634, for example, the agent William Henshaw had bequeathed to various members of the Newdigate family rings engraved with the dedication 'in duty and service faithfull'; and in 1654 the bailiff Thomas Moreton had stipulated cash legacies with which his master, his mistress and their children could buy 'what they please to wear in remembrance of an old servant of and to the family of Arbury'.<sup>25</sup> The Newdigates themselves, moreover, were not beyond leaving gifts to their own servants. Thus William Henshaw had himself been left £40 in cash and a gelding by Lady Anne Newdigate in 1618; and even as late as 1686, Sir Richard Newdigate noted that he had paid six of his mother's servants not only the wages due to them at the time of her death but also the cash legacies that she had stipulated for them.<sup>26</sup> If affectionate attitudes like this had ever been typical, however, they were far from characteristic of day-to-day relations between Newdigate and his own servants at Arbury Hall during the sixteen-eighties and nineties. It is not coincidental that servants were conspicuous only by their absence in the provisions of Sir Richard's own will in 1710. On the contrary, the list of debts drawn up after his death suggests that Newdigate may have owed over £515 to employees on his Warwickshire estates.<sup>27</sup>

The day-to-day pattern of relations between master and servant at Arbury Hall is difficult to reconstruct. There is, however, fragmentary evidence in the pages of Newdigate's personal journal of his giving orders and dispensing payments to the household staff. In the late spring and early summer of 1680, for instance, Newdigate can be glimpsed 'giving money to the servants' at 8'o clock in the evening of 31 May; 'reckoning with and paying' the servants for expenses 'which they laid out at London or on the road' on the morning of 5 June; and giving cash gifts of £4 to the cook and £1 to the butler on 11 June. On Saturday 6 October 1682, he had tested the kitchen skills of a prospective cook by asking him to fry fish, and subsequently hired him, all before breakfast. None of this, apparently, was in the least unusual, for on 4 May 1682 he referred to his morning ritual of waking at six a.m., private prayer, breakfast and 'giving the usual orders'.<sup>28</sup> More generally, however, the surviving sources tend to emphasize only the crisis points in the history of labour relations, those moments when servants were recruited, rewarded, fined, threatened or dismissed. That said, the sheer number of those crisis points as recorded in the Arbury Hall household account books is instructive, for the impression they create is of a gentry household in

<sup>24</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 578 (Michaelmas 1689).

<sup>25</sup> L.R.O., will (3 Dec. 1634) of William Henshaw; The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Record Office, PROB 11/281, will of Thomas Moreton (1658). For Henshaw and Moreton, see V. M. Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: the 17th Century Newdigates of Arbury and their World* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 15–16, 32; and Larminie, 'Lifestyle and attitudes of the 17th-century gentleman', p. 108.

<sup>26</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 379 (Apr. 1686).

<sup>27</sup> W.C.R.O., C136/C1911 (2 Sept. 1708); C1978 (1710). Newdigate allegedly owed in excess of £56,000, of which £1,332 was due to 'workemen', £515 2s 2d worth of them in Arbury, Astley and Chilvers Coton.

<sup>28</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/B1305A, unfol., 1306A, unfol., 1306B, unfol.

perpetual motion – one might even say permanent revolution – with staff arriving and departing at a very significant rate.<sup>29</sup> Although the average tenure of a service contract at Arbury Hall in this period was just eighteen months, as many as 103 (60.2 per cent) of his employees did not serve even this long, sixty-three (26.8 per cent) of them lasting a mere six months. He seems to have had a particularly difficult time with cooks, who (unusually) were generally appointed and supervised by Newdigate himself rather than by Lady Mary in her capacity as mistress of the household. Four male cooks came and went in quick succession, for instance, in less than two years in the early sixteen-eighties.<sup>30</sup> Turnover of this kind was partly a function of the relationship between paying peanuts and recruiting monkeys, and it found expression in the voluminous evidence of Newdigate's personal frustration with his servants' disappointing capabilities, behaviour or attitude. Of the sixty-eight terminations of employment recorded between 1692 and 1706, Newdigate himself was responsible for fifty, giving a quarter's warning to thirty employees, and simply paying-off a further twenty on the spot. The chronology of dismissals also, however, implies that periodic waves of retrenchment may have been in play as Newdigate sank deeper and deeper into debt. At Lady Day 1687, for instance, he gave a quarter's warning to eight of his household servants, and at Lady Day 1699 to a further nine.<sup>31</sup> Of course, in financial terms, rapid turnover of employees might actually have suited Newdigate, for it prevented the accumulation of expensive annuities. But the social and emotional transaction costs of his willingness to let staff go were arguably even higher still.

The circumstances which might provoke dismissal were various. The cook Abraham Jackson was dismissed in 1683 for 'giving away meat to beggar women', though Newdigate's characterization of the offence as one of 'whoredom and theivery' suggests that what was at issue here was less the indiscriminate dispensation of hospitality than the sexual exploitation of those women who came to the kitchen door seeking charity.<sup>32</sup> More prosaically, the cook Edward Sadler and the coachman William Rutter were both turned off for drunkenness in 1688. Others seem to have been dismissed for simple incompetence. The lady's maid Ann Adams 'went away' in 1684 for being 'wanton and careless', having mislaid five pairs of sheets and pillow cases (losses for which Lady Mary made her pay). The female cook Frances Coles got the sack in 1700 after a disastrous meal in which she attempted to feed twenty-three people with 'only a loin of small mutton and two dishes of broath'. The wainman Abraham Hans lost his job in 1696 after returning home from market with empty wagons despite Newdigate having instructed him to purchase thirty-two strike of beans and provided him with eleven horses and two husbandry boys for the purpose.<sup>33</sup> By and large, however, the account books are littered with references to Newdigate giving a quarter's warning for unspecified reasons.<sup>34</sup> Some were apparently dismissed by

<sup>29</sup> Cf. N. Tadmor, 'The concept of the household-family in 18th-century England', *Past & Present*, cli (1996), 111–40, at p. 120–31, on the changing composition over time of the household of Thomas Turner of East Hoathly (Sussex) in the 1750s; and A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998), pp. 136–46, on the 'river' of female domestics flowing through Alkincoats near Colne (Lancashire) in the 1770s.

<sup>30</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, pp. 261 (29 Sept. 1681), 262 (6 Aug. 1682), 278 (Sept. 1683), 288 (Sept. 1683).

<sup>31</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 450 (Lady Day 1687); V17, p. 671 (Lady Day 1699).

<sup>32</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 288 (20 Sept. 1683). Cf. the near contemporary concerns of John Verney at Middle Claydon, cited in S. Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), p. 107.

<sup>33</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V130, p. 73 (16 Sept. 1688); V84, pp. 346 (31 March 1685), 433 (Jan. 1688); V17, pp. 405 (1696), 743 (9 Feb. 1700).

<sup>34</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 199 (Feb. 1694), 221 (July 1694), 441 (June 1697).

degrees. At Lady Mary's request, for instance, the under-dairymaid Lidia Beamish was first sent 'away into the garden' at Lady Day 1685 and then 'quite away' altogether the following Michaelmas.<sup>35</sup> Occasionally, Newdigate had neither the will nor the capacity to enforce his threat of dismissal. In July 1694, for example, he had responded to the notice of resignation given by his groom John Brabant by telling him that he could go in less than the three months usually required, and preferably within three weeks. Brabant was nonetheless still employed at Arbury over fifteen months later.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps Newdigate simply forgave him, as he did his clerk Alexander Hepburn in 1696. He had dismissed Hepburn for having been drunk at Grindon, 'but afterwards upon his and his wives earnest desire I abated him £2 a year wages & agreed to keep him'. Other compromises proved less satisfactory. In 1688 he had paid up Richard Tanner's wages and given him 10s 'to bear his charges up to London', but 'upon his penitence and submission' Newdigate kept him on. The following summer, however, Tanner was paid off on the grounds that he had only 'pretended' to have gardening skills.<sup>37</sup>

Servants themselves sometimes voluntarily terminated their contracts. Twelve at least bothered to give Newdigate notice of their intention to quit, but others simply absconded. Laurence Smith ran away to London in 1673 owing the Newdigates a debt of over £11, only to be apprehended and brought back to Arbury. The cook's maid Anne Jennings disappeared after only two weeks' service in the Arbury kitchen in October 1684, but Newdigate did not pursue her, apparently because 'she stole nothing' and had a reputation for being 'distracted'.<sup>38</sup> At least six of those recruited between 1692 and 1706 had, likewise, simply 'gone off'. These included the unnamed man from Stretton Audley (Oxfordshire) recruited as postilion in September 1693 who 'went away again within a month'; the 'good-for-nothing' maid Bryan Brewer who 'went away again', together with her idle, 'foolish' brother Thomas in October 1693; the coachman Anthony Middleton who simply disappeared in 1698; and the clerk George Masters who 'went away again' within days of his appointment in December 1699 after 'proving [himself] no scribe'.<sup>39</sup> Those who went absent without leave might, of course, have found better-remunerated positions elsewhere, but some of them probably found the style of household management at Arbury overbearing, perhaps even aggressive. In 1681, for example, Newdigate 'broke [Tom Cooper's] head', although he subsequently rewarded him with 2s 6d because he learnt his lesson and 'worked hard' thereafter. In 1688, he struck eighteen-year-old Ned White 'on a mistake', though again he made amends for his loss of temper by rewarding him with a gratuity of 1s.<sup>40</sup> Newdigate doubtless deployed the patriarch's prerogative of enforcing discipline through corporal punishment more frequently than he saw fit to record in his account books or diary, though more subtle sanctions were generally characteristic of the theatre of household management at Arbury.<sup>41</sup>

Like other late seventeenth-century gentlemen such as Sir Cecil Bisshopp, fourth baronet of Parham (Sussex), Newdigate adopted an elaborate system of forfeitures,

<sup>35</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 384 (18 Jan. 1685).

<sup>36</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, p. 221 (July 1694).

<sup>37</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, pp. 491 (Sept. 1688), 571 (Sept. 1689); V17, p. 303 (12 March 1695).

<sup>38</sup> Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p. 102; Gooder, p. 42; W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 344 (25 Oct. 1684).

<sup>39</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 199 (Sept.–Oct. 1693), 602 (Apr. 1698), 779 (Lady Day 1700).

<sup>40</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V130, p. 53 (30 May 1688).

<sup>41</sup> S. D. Amussen, "'Being stirred to much Unquietness": violence and domestic violence in early modern England', *Jour. Women's Hist.*, vi (1994), 70–89, at p. 72; S. D. Amussen, 'Punishment, discipline and power: the social meanings of violence in early modern England', *Jour. British Studies*, xxxiv (1995), 1–34, at p. 14; P. Horn, *Flunkies and Scullions: Life Below Stairs in Georgian England* (Stroud, 2004), pp. 22–3; Richardson, p. 195.

finances and penalties to set the parameters of acceptable performance among his household staff. Indeed, the Parham comparison may not be entirely coincidental, for in 1694 Bisshopp had become a relative of the Newdigates by marriage, his daughter Sarah having married Sir Richard's eldest son Richard. One might even imagine the two country squires passing the port in the parlour at Arbury Hall or Parham House and discussing the best means of securing diligence, obedience and deference among their household staff.<sup>42</sup> As might be expected, Newdigate was particularly severe when his servants lacked basic competence. In 1692, for instance, the groom Robin Sergeant was fined one shilling for failing to shoe one of Sir Richard's horses when he 'rode a hunting'; and the coachman Thomas Wright had his wages docked to the value of windows broken through his negligence. Newdigate's patience similarly evaporated in May 1697 when he fined the dairymaid Sarah Hazeldine one shilling for producing 'naughty butter and sour cream'. The wainman Robert Cholmley seems to have been a serial offender. In May 1696, he was in trouble for leaving a gate ajar at Griff Hill Farm. In 1697 alone he forfeited 12s: 5s on 18 May for causing three teams another day's work by bringing home plaster that should have been sent to Astley; a further 1s on 21 May for mistakenly sending a cart to Chilvers Coton; another 1s on 31 May for failing to appear promptly with a supply of marl; and finally 5s for neglecting his business (riding 'out to the alehouse', for all Newdigate knew) so that oats were not brought home until midday.<sup>43</sup> Another recidivist was the bailiff James Dowell who forfeited 20s in 1684 for 'inviting a boy to lie' overnight at Arbury 'who he did not know', against Newdigate's 'express order'; and was threatened with dismissal the following year for staying out for nine hours when he had been sent to the earl of Denbeigh's house at Monks Kirby only eight miles away.<sup>44</sup> These examples suggest that Newdigate's reluctance to allow his servants adequate free time was counter-productive, for they seem to have found ways to carve out unofficial leisure opportunities by dawdling on errands that had taken them out of the house.

But Newdigate was also concerned with his servants' morality, and seems to have been particularly vigilant, as his appointment of Mall Porter as an informer in the wine cellar suggests, with respect to their consumption of alcohol. At times, he must have feared that his staff were being borne down in a torrent of liquor. In 1684, his land agent Robert Johnson was fined 20s for being drunk at Coventry and his coachman Richard Drakeford forfeited a shilling for being at the alehouse until nine o'clock at night. In 1695, Newdigate similarly fined his wainman Ned Bryan 10s for 'tempting James Morris and old Richard Nash to the alehouse and making Nash drunk'. The cook William Wheeler forfeited 10s on Boxing Day 1696 for being 'dead drunk' and a further 5s in 1697 because he 'lay out drinking on Sunday night till 11 a clock'.<sup>45</sup> Newdigate also expected his servants to be God-fearing and fined them when they failed to attend church. When in April 1694 two maids preferred to attend Chilvers Coton church after Newdigate had ordered them to go to the service at Astley, Newdigate not only docked half-a-crown each from their wages, but handed these forfeitures over to Hester Cleaver, the one servant who had obeyed his instructions. In 1698, Mary Pickard similarly had her salary abated a shilling for her 'neglect of prayers'

<sup>42</sup> Cliffe, p. 98; Gooder, p. 105. For Sir Cecil Bisshopp and Parham, see J. Kirk, *Parham: an Elizabethan House and its Restoration* (Chichester, 2009), esp. pp. 75–6.

<sup>43</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 22 [reverse pagination] (Sept. 1692); V90, p. 1051 (7 May 1696); V17, pp. 148 (May 1692), 441 (26 May 1697), 587 (16 Sept. 1697).

<sup>44</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, pp. 302 (1684), 345 (31 March 1685).

<sup>45</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 302 (1684); V17, pp. 302–3 (21 Jan. 1695), 441 (Lady Day 1697).

at Arbury chapel. Even those who were merely late for divine service, like William Etherington on three consecutive Sundays in 1693, could expect to lose 6d a time for their tardiness.<sup>46</sup> In these respects, Newdigate was disciplining his servants in exactly the same way as a magistrate might exercise summary justice over labouring men and women brought before him for alehouse-haunting, idleness or insubordination. To this extent, he was running a one-man campaign for the reformation of manners within his own household.<sup>47</sup>

Wages were most often docked, however, for negligence, truculence and recalcitrance. Newdigate occasionally even agreed a scale of punishments for defaults by individual staff. In February 1696, he introduced a system of rewards and fines for the footboy Richard Suffolk, boosting his weekly salary to 18d so long as he kept each and every one of Newdigate's twenty-seven hounds out of the house, but stipulating a forfeiture of a penny every time a dog was found loose. The kitchen maid and under-dairymaid similarly had bonuses of 5s a piece for each taking care of a pregnant bitch, on condition that they would forfeit a farthing every time a pup was discovered about the household. Sure enough, penalties promptly followed. Within three days of the agreement, young Suffolk found himself 5d worse off as 'Comely' and two other hounds roamed through the house.<sup>48</sup> Other fines were less systematic, though no less swingeing for all that. The coachman Richard Drakeford forfeited 2s 6d in September 1683 for being 'cross and careless'; Tom Hayes lost a shilling the same month for his outright refusal to fetch a loaf of bread from the kitchen; Nan Turner and Grissell Armstrong were docked a shilling each in 1684 for being 'scolds'; Thomas Daniel was fined the very significant sum of 20s at Christmas 1693 for refusing to look after Newdigate's 'great grey mare'; Thomas Hankinson had 2s 'stopt out of his wages' in 1696 for refusing to carry lanterns back to a store-room; Abigail Bates and Mall Sparks forfeited 5s each in 1696 for 'bantering' with Newdigate about livestock; William Mumford lost 2s 6d in 1698 for 'refusing to fetch oats from Ballards Barn'; James Nooth's pay was abated 10s in 1698 for 'going out with a gun' when his master had appointed him business elsewhere; and Betty Goodale forfeited 5s that same year 'for laying out all night'.<sup>49</sup>

Even when he did not resort to financial sanctions, moreover, Newdigate was forever complaining about his servants' negligence. In March 1686, he noted incredulously that the recently arrived brewer and baker Thomas Thomson had actually 'set the house on fire'. He was appalled to discover in 1696 that his groom had cheated him of a shilling by falsely claiming to have shod one of his horses. The coachman Anthony Middleton apparently fell foul of his master four times between December 1696 and September 1697, three times for unauthorized absence from Arbury, the fourth for slothfulness when, Newdigate having ordered him to collect fallen timber,

<sup>46</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 221 (Apr. 1694), 656 (Lady Day 1698).

<sup>47</sup> For the practice and significance of summary justice, see R. Williams, 'Some aspects of summary justice in 18th-century rural Berkshire', *Archives*, xxvi (2001), 41–53; P. King, 'The summary courts and social relations in 18th-century England', *Past & Present*, clxxxiii (2004), 125–72; F. N. Dabhoiwala, 'Summary justice in early modern London', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, cxxi (2006), 796–822. For the reformation of manners, see M. Ingram, 'Reformation of manners in early modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 47–88.

<sup>48</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, pp. 717 (5 Feb. 1696), 776 (6–8 Feb. 1696).

<sup>49</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/A32, unfol. (24 Sept. 1683); V17, pp. 221 (28 Dec. 1693), 423 (16 June 1696), 602–3 (1, 28 Apr. 1698), 697 (Apr. 1698).

‘he did not stir out till near 11 o’clock’.<sup>50</sup> But it was his bailiffs who came in for most criticism. He complained that the faults of Thomas Mosley were ‘innumerable’, having let the hogs spoil winter corn rather than sending them to the stables in August 1697, and making such a mess of sowing that in the following September there were ‘all beans and no oats’ whereas sometimes there were ‘all oats and no beans’.<sup>51</sup> In August 1700, he vented his spleen against his land agents in scatter-shot fashion, berating their ‘intolerable remissness’ for having ‘paid off nothing’, noting with satisfaction that one of them had now left his service, and warning that two putatively ‘honest’ bailiffs who remained were nothing but ‘arrant knaves’.<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, however, Newdigate was perfectly prepared to use the carrot as well as the stick. Although he was never quite as generous as his scheme of intent of 1678 had suggested, he did dispense ‘bounty money’ when he felt his servants deserved it. Payments of between 1s 6d and 2s 6d for being ‘diligent’ or ‘careful’, or for performing well, were far from unusual. Five members of staff, for instance, received such recommendation and reward at Lady Day 1693.<sup>53</sup> The coachman Edward Weston similarly received 2s 6d in 1697 when Newdigate noted that ‘he drove me well’. Still more generous sums, like the 5s given to Nurse Eburne in September 1696 and to each of John Sutton, Robert Beighton and Robin Cholmley in August 1697, were not unknown.<sup>54</sup> In terms of the wages paid to individual servants, Newdigate’s bonuses might make a significant difference. By rewarding his daughter’s maid Betty Wilks with 2s 6d bounty money in 1696, he was boosting her annual wage by over 6 per cent. He was even more generous to long-serving dairymaid Margaret Johnson in October 1694, since her 5s bounty supplemented her wage by as much as 25 per cent, though he added suspiciously that she had previously made ‘a great deal of money out of fewer cows when there was a bigger family’ in residence at Arbury.<sup>55</sup> Newdigate could be equally benevolent when paying servants off too. As we have seen, the very generous severance terms stipulated by his 1678 scheme implied not only gratitude for services loyally rendered, but also a desire to see departed servants well provided—for as they set up their own households in marriage or ‘retirement’.<sup>56</sup> Nominal payments to short-term employees, by contrast, probably represented an understanding (not dissimilar to the modern confidentiality clause) that the staff would be discreet about what they had seen and heard around Arbury Hall. In the case of Mall Porter, with which this article began, this bargain was made explicit. In 1685, Newdigate similarly promised Tom Boly, ‘now turned off’, 10s every six months ‘if he behave himself elsewhere’ during the next two years.<sup>57</sup> In other cases, the fact that small gratuities were paid to those fired for incompetence or immorality might suggest a tacit understanding of discretion: why else would Edward Sadler and William Rutter be given sums of £2 and 10s respectively on their dismissal for drunkenness in January 1688? On one occasion, hush money was even paid in direct contravention of his wife’s wishes. When

<sup>50</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 385 (15 March 1686); V90, p. 776 (22–29 June 1696); V17, pp. 272 (Dec. 1693), 587 (1697), 602 (Lady Day 1698).

<sup>51</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, pp. 586–7.

<sup>52</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V17, p. 651 (Aug. 1700).

<sup>53</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 499 (March 1693).

<sup>54</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 1121 (3 March 1697); V17, pp. 201 (Oct. 1693), 209 (Dec. 1693); V90, p. 1049 (1696).

<sup>55</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V90, p. 1049 (1696); V17, p. 288 (Oct. 1694).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. D. R. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People: the Estate Steward and his World in Later Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 160.

<sup>57</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 383 (1685).

Sarah Griff left Arbury Hall in 1694 he not only paid up her wages, but gave her husband a cash sum which Lady Newdigate had ‘denied she should have’ and even added a further gratuity of almost 37s in silver which he bade her ‘keep herself’. This covert gesture implies that Newdigate may have had something of a weakness for his female servants, and might therefore represent another example of his desire to prevent rumour and scandal spreading through local society.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Newdigate was not by any means the only master in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England to worry about what servants might say about his household during, and especially after they had left, his service. Daniel Defoe famously complained in 1724 that the gentry were ‘at the mercy of their servants’ tongues’ and noted the ‘injur’d reputation’ of those masters and mistresses who had been the victims of gossip and scandal spread within and beyond the household.<sup>59</sup> Newdigate’s predicament was in this respect significantly worse than many of his contemporaries, not least because his sizeable staff was largely recruited from the villages that lay just beyond the park gates.

In 1684, when there were 780 inhabitants in Chilvers Coton, the twenty-eight servants who found employment within the household at Arbury Hall (to say nothing of those employed elsewhere on the estate and in his coalmines) amounted to almost 4 per cent of the total (and over 6 per cent of the adult) population of the parish. The provision of ‘hospitality’ on this scale obviously presented significant career opportunities for the inhabitants of the parish, and there is some evidence that the Newdigates had long had a preference for recruiting servants from among their tenants. Many of the surnames, including Beamish, Clark, Dagle, Drakeford, Johnson, Lines, Sergeant and White, of the servants employed at Arbury Hall in 1684 are very familiar from the seventeenth-century parish and estate records of Chilvers Coton. Only one member of the Arbury Hall staff that year can, however, definitely be shown to be related to a household listed elsewhere in the 1684 survey: ‘Robin’ Sergeant, the seventeen-year-old groom, was the son of a labourer who rented a house and tiny garden from Newdigate in the Heath End at an annual cost of 1s. Even so, such was the turnover of staff at Arbury that many younger residents of Chilvers Coton may have come to regard six or twelve months’ service with the Newdigates simply as a stage in the life-cycle to be undertaken at some point before they could get married. Once they left Arbury Hall, moreover, they often remained in Chilvers Coton. In 1687, for instance, the coachman Richard Drakeford married Jane Whestone of Long Itchington (another Newdigate estate), although Jane had herself been working as a chamber maid at Arbury Hall in 1684; and in 1691 Joseph Dagle the gardener married Mary Clark.<sup>60</sup> Both couples went on to baptize and raise children in Chilvers Coton, where their opinion of Sir Richard’s conduct and character might influence, for good or ill, the nature and quality of social relations between the landlord and his tenants, several of whom would also have done a stint in the big house, and an even more significant proportion (perhaps as many as a third at any one time) of whom would have worked for the Newdigates in some capacity at some point in their lives. It is nonetheless striking that the majority of those listed as Newdigate’s household servants in 1684 do not appear to have been baptized in Chilvers Coton. The recruitment and dismissal of staff at Arbury Hall was, therefore, a significant motor of population turnover in the parish as a whole. And either personally through his own vigilance or indirectly through the activities of his bailiffs, Newdigate exercised extraordinary

<sup>58</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 433 (Jan. 1688); V17, p. 213 (Feb. 1694).

<sup>59</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider’d* (1724), preface.

<sup>60</sup> W.C.R.O., DR62/1, unfol. (2 Feb. 1687, 3 May 1681).

authority over the inhabitants of Chilvers Coton in his capacity not only as master of the Arbury Hall household but as employer on the Arbury estate.

Newdigate did not, however, exercise authority unilaterally. The voice of Arbury is undoubtedly that of Sir Richard himself, but the accounts whisper with faint echoes of the gendered construction of household authority. On 10 November 1682, for instance, Newdigate noted that his wife had told him that when Sarah Searle had first come to Arbury as her lady-in-waiting in 1679, Lady Mary had agreed to give her £10 annual wages from the very outset. This was apparently the first that Newdigate had heard of this arrangement, and he accordingly had to stop the provision of Searle's stock which he had been making on the mistaken assumption that she was only being paid small wages. That such an arrangement can have existed for three years without the knowledge of the master of the house is an indication of Lady Mary's autonomy in contracting, rewarding and supervising her own staff.<sup>61</sup> Newdigate regularly handed over sums with which she was to pay and reward her own maids: in April 1688, for instance, he gave her over £16 for her servants' wages; and in 1687 almost £13 with which she could pay loyalty bonuses to two long-serving maids 'at going off'.<sup>62</sup> Newdigate seems not to have interfered with her direction or distribution of these sums. As the cases of Ann Adams (fined and dismissed for the loss of bed linen) and Lidia Beamish (first ostracized to gardening duties and then sacked altogether) suggest, moreover, some of Newdigate's sanctions against and dismissals of female staff in particular were self-consciously made at Lady Mary's request, perhaps even at her insistence. And it was, after all, Lady Newdigate, in conjunction with her mother-in-law, who had first argued in the mid sixteen-seventies that men were not to be trusted with the key to the Arbury wine cellar. Although it is clear that the 'servant problem' at Arbury Hall was endemic throughout the sixteen-eighties and nineties, it is probable that Newdigate's difficulties with his female staff in particular grew more intense after he was widowed. The fact that he does not seem to have delegated his eldest daughter Amphillis to manage the female staff in the ten-year interval between his first and second marriages suggests that he was oblivious to the stabilizing influence that Lady Mary had exercised within the household.

Whether servants departed from Arbury Hall contentedly with cash in hand, skulked away silently in the night or were dismissed with a stinging rebuke and a boxed ear, the extraordinary turnover of servants in Newdigate's household had very profound implications for social structure and social relations in the village of Chilvers Coton. After all, the departing servants were mixing with scores of Newdigate tenants who either had worked, or would at some point in their lives find themselves employed, either in the house or on the estate at Arbury. Word of his conduct as a master and employer was, therefore, fundamental to the social construction of Sir Richard Newdigate's authority, and especially to his most significant and fragile asset: his reputation as a gentleman.

How, then, might we characterize the relationship between Sir Richard Newdigate and the men and women who staffed his household; and what does that relationship tell us about the exercise of domestic authority by a late seventeenth-century master? To be sure, our understanding of the politics of the Arbury Hall household must take account of personal factors. Newdigate's mood was always volatile: he was often

<sup>61</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, p. 278 (10 Nov. 1682).

<sup>62</sup> W.C.R.O., CR136/V84, pp. 471 (1687), 494 (1688).



irascible, and his temper could be volcanic. Those household staff who most frequently came into personal contact with their master ran the risk of incurring his wrath for petty misdemeanours. In these respects, his was a disciplinary, perhaps even authoritarian, paternalism.<sup>63</sup> Even so, he doubtless regretted resorting to the sanctions of corporal punishment, and probably wished that he had not dismissed so many servants who quite frequently proved to be literally irreplaceable for any period longer than six months. Although he generally paid his staff only ‘small wages’, moreover, he offered attractive medium-term rewards, with the prospect of regular bounty money if they performed well.

There were equally, however, structural issues in play which complicated Newdigate’s exercise of authority at Arbury Hall. The sheer size of the household, compounded by the geographical origins of so many of those who wore his livery, meant that he had to be very careful about how his servants were treated both during and after their employment. Getting the best quality of service and labour out of the household staff workforce was also problematic. While Newdigate and his bailiffs might easily adopt piece-rates rather than daily wages to incentivize improved performance of the various agricultural tasks required of his labourers and craftsmen, he had no such room for manoeuvre with his household servants who were paid secure, if not generous, board wages.<sup>64</sup> He accordingly sought to incentivize effort by a system of rewards and loyalty bonuses, but as the significant number of serial offenders and the high turnover of staff suggests, he was not always successful in turning his servants into the model employees – industrious, sober, punctual, careful, deferential and above all discreet – that he hoped to recruit.

The complaint that he just could not get, and could not keep, the staff was therefore recurrent, but then it was (and, proverbially at least, remains) perennial.<sup>65</sup> Sir Richard Newdigate’s experience therefore seems to suggest a failure of management, and one all the more conspicuous precisely because gentlemen like him were, putatively at any rate, born to rule. Although it is not possible to reconstruct the servants’ perspective on labour relations through their words, their actions suggest that they were not in the least intimidated by his overbearing disciplinarian manner, and this in itself reveals a great deal about the balance of power between master and servant in the late seventeenth century. The fact that he sometimes gave notice to quit but then did not insist on dismissal is suggestive not only of his own short (but short-lived) temper but also of the more general pattern of master-servant relations. And the spatial dimension of the managerial failure is surely very significant: far from being distantly expressed in petitions of grievances and anonymous threatening letters, the menace of insubordination was shockingly close, even intimate. The ‘blur of indiscipline’ lay not so much beyond but actually within the park gates, and even (perhaps especially) within Arbury Hall itself.<sup>66</sup>

The employer-employee relationship at Arbury Hall was, accordingly, characterized by an attempt to impose labour-discipline, and even (given Newdigate’s obsession with punctuality) time-discipline *avant la lettre*, on a staff who were eminently capable of exploiting the privileges and perquisites of living in a house which was designed

<sup>63</sup> Cf. K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, Conn., 2000), p. 322.

<sup>64</sup> For the management of the estate work force at Arbury Hall, see S. Hindle, ‘Work, reward and labour discipline in late 17th-century England’ (unpublished paper).

<sup>65</sup> Richardson, pp. 175–93.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Thompson, p. 387.

as a theatre of gentlemanly authority. Both the problem of unruly labour and the development of managerial strategies to deal with it are conventionally thought to be distinctively associated with the industrial paternalism in the coalmines and factories of the early eighteenth century.<sup>67</sup> But Newdigate's experience suggests that the encouragement of work discipline through managerial incentives was required even in the late seventeenth-century gentry household, and it is probably not coincidental that Newdigate was familiar with the difficulties of controlling a recalcitrant workforce in his coalmines. At the same time, however, he was still rewarding his staff with a hybrid package of cash, bonuses and other perquisites rather than fixed wages. The late seventeenth century was arguably a period in which the nature of the relationship between labour and remuneration was being redefined, and perhaps in Newdigate's account books we catch a faint echo of that transition.<sup>68</sup> The facts, figures and projections of Sir Richard Newdigate's 'intent to good servants' might therefore represent the beginnings of a more explicit emphasis on the 'contractual' rather than on the strictly 'patriarchal' nature of the relationship between master and servant.

<sup>67</sup> J. Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750–1850* (1986), pp. 159, 161–2; D. Levine and K. Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham, 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 365–9.

<sup>68</sup> L. D. Schwarz, 'Custom, wages and workload in England during industrialization', *Past & Present*, cxcvii (2007), 143–75; A. Hann, 'Labour policy and rental policy on the Ditchley estate, 1700–50: parallel paths of transition', in *English Geographies, 1600–1950: Historical Essays on English Customs, Cultures and Communities in Honour of Jack Langton*, ed. E. Baigent and R. J. Mayhew (Oxford, 2009), pp. 71–86; Hindle, 'Work, reward and labour discipline'.