

Cambridge University Press

052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630

Christopher W. Marsh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

This book is an intensive exploration of the hidden and mysterious world of the 'Family of Love' in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The Familists, devoted followers of a Messianic Dutch mystic named 'H.N.', were passionately denounced by many literate contemporaries, and an association with extremism, subversion and hypocrisy has endured.

The author tracks the English Familists into their houses, fields and places of work. The imaginative and highly detailed methodology makes possible an especially fruitful interaction with the past, and ensures that no single social context dominates the emerging picture. For instance, although the full extent of Familism at the court of Elizabeth I is revealed for the first time, the members there are discussed side by side with their 'loving friends' in the fields and fens of eastern England.

This study is, however, most significant for what it reveals about the nature of wider society. The processes by which the Family of Love came to be represented to posterity are examined carefully and placed alongside less accessible evidence. This approach brings into play a compelling and hitherto unsuspected dialogue between the forces of hostility and the lesser-known forces of tolerance: one surprising conclusion is that most English men and women seem to have possessed an impressive capacity to tolerate known 'heretics' in their midst.

Cambridge University Press

052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630

Christopher W. Marsh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History

THE FAMILY OF LOVE IN ENGLISH SOCIETY,
1550–1630

Cambridge University Press
052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630
Christopher W. Marsh
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History

Series editors

ANTHONY FLETCHER
Professor of Modern History, University of Durham

JOHN GUY
Professor of Modern History, University of St Andrews

and JOHN MORRILL
Reader in Early Modern History, University of Cambridge, and Fellow and Tutor of Selwyn College

This is a series of monographs and studies covering many aspects of the history of the British Isles between the late fifteenth century and the early eighteenth century. It includes the work of established scholars and pioneering work by a new generation of scholars. It includes both reviews and revisions of major topics and books which open up new historical terrain or which reveal startling new perspectives on familiar subjects. All the volumes set detailed research into our broader perspectives and the books are intended for the use of students as well as of their teachers.

For a list of titles in the series, see end of book.

Cambridge University Press

052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630

Christopher W. Marsh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE FAMILY OF
LOVE IN
ENGLISH SOCIETY,
1550–1630

CHRISTOPHER W. MARSH

Lecturer in Modern History, The Queen's University of Belfast



Cambridge University Press
 052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630
 Christopher W. Marsh
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521441285

© Cambridge University Press 1994

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1994
 This digitally printed first paperback version 2005

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Marsh, Christopher W.
 The Family of Love in English society, 1550-1630/Christopher W. Marsh.
 p. cm. (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History)
 Based on the author's thesis (Ph.D.) –
 Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 44128 5

1. England – Social life and customs – 16th century. 2. England – Social life and customs – 17th century. 3. Familists – England – History – 16th century. 4. Familists – England – History – 17th century. 5. England – Church history – 16th century. 6. England – Church history – 17th century. I. Title.

DA320.M3 1993

289.9-dc20 92-37006 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-44128-5 hardback
 ISBN-10 0-521-44128-5 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02000-8 paperback
 ISBN-10 0-521-02000-X paperback

Cambridge University Press

052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630

Christopher W. Marsh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Keith and Judith
And for Katie

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> xii
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xvii
1 Introduction	1
Hostility and historiography	2
Problems of access	6
A microscopic method	10
Emerging themes	14
2 Familist belief: the quest for perfection	17
The voice of H.N.	18
Precedents and influences	28
Voices raised in hostility	33
Extracted 'confessions'	34
Voices raised in self-defence	39
Wills	43
Knowing them by their fruits	48
3 Seedbeds and first shoots (1550–1565)	52
Marian protestants	54
Conservatives	64
Anabaptist 'sectaries'	66
Enthusiastic conformists	68
A background in astrology	70
Mysticism: a common thread?	74
4 Development and consolidation (1565–1579)	77
Books and ballads	79

Cambridge University Press

052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630

Christopher W. Marsh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Contents

Internal organisation	85
‘Parlour meetings’ and Familist sociability	89
Behaviour before ‘the world’	93
‘Progress’	100
5 Crisis (1576–1582)	103
Chronicle: the Familist crisis	103
<i>Animus</i>	110
The need for a scapegoat	113
Courtiers	116
Country people	122
The puritan crisis	124
John Knewstub <i>versus</i> Robert Seale	127
Outcomes	136
6 Resolution: the pursuit of internal cohesion (1582–1603)	140
The wills of Creake and Raven (part I)	143
Familist households	145
Economic networks and material prosperity	150
Mutual support	157
The lie of the land	161
Friends in high places: the courtier Familists	162
Office-holding in the country	170
7 Resolution: the pursuit of external integration (1582–1603)	174
The wills of Creake and Raven (part II)	175
Faith and social relations	176
Outward charity and social responsibility	182
Religious tolerance in country and court	187
The Familist paradox	196
8 Crisis renewed (1603–1610)	198
<i>Basilikon Doron</i> (James VI)	200
<i>A supplication of the Family of Love</i> (Robert Seale?)	201
<i>The Family of Love</i> (Thomas Middleton)	205
Ely repercussions: William Safford’s books	213
Balsham repercussions: the burial of Thomas Lawrence	218
Resolution	231
9 After the first generation (1610–1700)	235
10 Conclusion	249
The house that Robert Dorrington built	260

Cambridge University Press
052102000X - The Family of Love in English Society, 1550-1630
Christopher W. Marsh
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

<i>Contents</i>	xi
<i>Appendix: the membership of the Family of Love</i>	265
<i>Bibliography</i>	288
<i>Index</i>	299

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

1 'Woolstreet Way' (photograph by Jonathan Marsh)	<i>page</i> 62
2 Familist schoolroom (woodcut from H.N., <i>Exhortatio I</i> ; reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)	86
3 An Elizabethan Yeoman of the Guard	121
4 Funeral procession of Elizabeth I (add. MS 35324, fol 38v; by permission of the British Library)	199
5 Medieval gravestones in Balsham churchyard (photograph by Jonathan Marsh)	222
6 The brick-lined grave of Thomas Lawrence? (photograph by Jonathan Marsh)	226
7 Church bell at Balsham	233
8 The two hearts of the Family of Love (reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library)	254
9 H.N.'s <i>Benedicite</i> (Bodleian Library, Oxford)	257
10 The manor house at Stow Longa (reproduced by permission of the General Editor of <i>VCH Hunts.</i>)	261

FIGURE

Marriages within the Family of Love	149
-------------------------------------	-----

MAPS

1 Cambridgeshire and surrounding counties	50
2 'Woolstreet Way'	61
3 The royal progress, 1578	101
4 Elizabethan and Jacobean waterways in the Isle of Ely	216

TABLES

1 Offices held by members of the Family of Love in the diocese of Ely, 1560–1615	<i>page</i> 171
2 Bequests to the poor in Familist wills	184

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Members of the Family of Love in early modern England were, and are, extremely difficult to track. I have pursued them across widely variant historical terrain, and have stopped at numerous points to ask directions from others. Without their assistance, I would doubtless have spent a higher proportion of my time stumbling along false trails.

I would therefore like to thank the following for their suggestions, encouragement and enthusiasm: Ian Archer, Mike Braddick, Eric Carlson, John Craig, Eamon Duffy, Amy Ericson, Malcolm Gaskill, Paul Griffiths, Elisabeth Leedham-Green, Joseph Martin, Charlotte Merton, Rachel Neaman, Derek Plumb, Bill Sherman, Peter and Francis Spufford, Bill Stevenson, Matthew Story, Motoyasu Takahashi, Amanda Vickery, Tessa Watt, John Watts, Helen Weinstein and Keith Wrightson.

Encouragement to turn a thesis into a book came from my examiners, Patrick Collinson and David Hey, and from the editors of this series, Anthony Fletcher, John Guy and John Morrill. Their comments have been extremely helpful. Linda Randall of Cambridge University Press also deserves thanks for the patient and efficient manner in which she has dealt with numerous inconsistencies of presentation.

The staff of numerous libraries and record offices have also provided invaluable assistance. My principal hunting grounds have been the Cambridge University Library, the county record offices of Cambridgeshire, Devon, Essex, Hampshire, Huntingdonshire and Essex, the Public Record Office, the British Library and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to Godfrey Waller, superintendent of the Manuscripts Room in the Cambridge University Library.

I have, at various times, been thankful for the technical expertise and advice of John Atiyah, Rosemary Rodd, Pieter Goedkoop Senior and Pieter Goedkoop Junior. I am also grateful to the two Jonathans, Marsh and Kelly, for their assistance in the preparation of photographs and maps.

The British Academy financed the major part of my research, while Corpus Christi College and Churchill College, Cambridge, successively

have provided me with ideal environments in which to carry it out. The book took its final shape during my first year at The Queen's University of Belfast, and I wish to thank my friends and colleagues there for their sympathy and support.

Towards the end of the research period, I stopped writing for a few weeks and began to dig, hoping to unravel an extraordinary episode surrounding the burial of Thomas Lawrence, a Cambridgeshire Familist, in 1609. I would like to thank all those who assisted me, particularly the Revd William Girard, Julian Litten, Edward Martin, Janet Miller, Warwick Rodwell, William and Joanna Sanders, Josh Schwieso, Robert Taylor and Ken Wildsmith. I hope the efforts of the 'gravestone gang' did not disturb the bones of Goodman Lawrence unduly.

I also wish to acknowledge the role – indirect but crucial – of my family and close friends, who know instinctively when to ask me about my work and when to throw me a frisbee. I am more than grateful for the support of my parents, Keith and Judith, my brothers, Simon and Jonathan, my sister, Lucy, and my friends, Eric Reid, Jonathan Kelly, Andrew Jotischky, Caroline Hull and Rachel Marsh. I would also like to thank the entire Goedkoop family.

My wife, Katie, has been my closest companion during the five years of work drawn together in this book. I cannot adequately express my appreciation of her love, tolerance and generosity throughout that period.

Without the encouragement and guidance of Margaret Spufford, my PhD supervisor, I would never have thought of becoming an historian. Her enthusiasm has never wavered, and her friendship has ranged over many more matters than are articulated in the pages below. I will always be grateful.

ABBREVIATIONS

APC	<i>Acts of the Privy Council</i> , ed. J.R. Dasent, vols. I–XXXII (London, 1890–1907)
CRO	Cambridgeshire Record Office
CSP <i>Dom.</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers. Domestic</i>
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EDR	Ely Diocesan Records
Ely CC	Ely Consistory Court Will Register
G and C	Gonville and Caius College Library
GLRO	Greater London Record Office
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
PRO	Public Record Office
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>