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The Tie that Binds: Peasant Marriages and Families in Late Medieval England On the last day of May 1319, Henry Kroyl senior attended his manorial court at Brigstock, Northamptonshire, and transferred a semi-virgate of land to his son Henry Kroyl junior and his son's intended wife, Agnes, the daughter of Robert Penifader. At the same session, the younger Kroyl endowed his bride with a small house, an adjoining yard, and six rods of land. Because the marriage that lay behind these transactions united the children of two prominent villagers, the Brigstock records contain nearly 2,000 references to the activities of Kroyl junior, Agnes Penifader, and the members of their immediate families. By using these legal proceedings to reconstruct the social spheres of the Kroyls and Penifaders, this article examines how this marital union changed the social networks of the principals, their parents, and their siblings.¹

Medieval marriage was both a private matter and a public institution. Although it technically required only the couple's consent, it usually involved the assistance of parents, the participation of neighbors, and the approval of administrators. Marriage disintegrated old families by removing members to create a new family, but it also forged human links that could strengthen social

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1 The 549 Brigstock court records from 1287 to 1348 are deposited with the Montagu Collection at the Northamptonshire Record Office in boxes X364A (files 1 through 24), X364B (files 25 through 38), and X365 (files 39 through 54), and in the Public Record Office, SC-2, 194/65 (courts for 1298-1299). References to the Montagu materials are hereafter cited by NRO, file number, and court date (day/month/year). The marriage settlement is found in NRO, file 31: 31/5/1319. Space does not permit full citations of all Brigstock records or full descriptions of all aspects of the Kroyl and Penifader networks. Specific information is available from the author upon request.

ties with blood relations. As a result, the social extent and social limitations of this pivotal institution highlight the boundaries and content of kinship ties in late medieval England.²

Our ability to uncover these kinship limitations and possibilities, however, has been inhibited not only by the difficulties of using legal records for social analyses, but also by our methodological approaches to the extant data. The aggregative techniques employed in recent studies of medieval rural life have been extraordinarily useful in recreating rural social structures, but they have usually obscured the familial elements that underpinned those institutions. This historical perspective can be reversed by analyzing the recorded interactions of a selected group of people whose families have been reconstituted with unusual completeness. Such a narrow focus provides an ideal setting for network analysis. This system of charting and analyzing individual contacts must necessarily be applied only to small groups because personal networks can quickly grow to unwieldy proportions. Thus, in focusing on the small set of interrelated households that constituted the Kroyls and Penifaders of early fourteenth-century Brigstock, we can use network analysis to assess the importance of specific kin relationships in the medieval English countryside.³

In everyday speech, the term “network” is used loosely to describe the bonds that link an individual to others, but the an-

2 For discussions of medieval marriage in both theory and practice, see Richard H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (London, 1974); Bennett, “Gender, Family and Community: A Comparative Study of the English Peasantry, 1287–1349,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (Univ. of Toronto, 1981), 83–142, 363–372.

3 Court rolls provide extensive details on the daily lives of medieval villagers, but they rarely include complete demographic or familial information. The most recent published studies are Zvi Razi, *Life, Marriage, and Death in a Medieval Parish* (London, 1980); Edward Britton, *The Community of the Vill* (Toronto, 1977). Most anthropological studies of social networks have focused on very small groups. See Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends* (Oxford, 1974), 97–146; Bruce Kapferer, “Norms and the Manipulation of Relationships in a Work Context,” in J. Clyde Mitchell (ed.), *Social Networks in Urban Situations* (London, 1969), 181–244. Two recent applications of network theory by English historians have, nevertheless, dealt with large numbers of individual networks. In one case, the authors reported impressive details about kin linkages, but revealed little about the social quality and meaning of these connections. See Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (New York, 1979), 73–109. In the other case, the analysis combined all kin into one category and obscured possible variations between contacts with different types of relatives. See Richard M. Smith, “Kin and Neighbors in a Thirteenth-Century Suffolk Community,” *Journal of Family History*, IV (1979), 219–256.

thropological use of social networks is much more precise and analytical. Evolving in response to the inadequate coverage of informal social activities found in most structural-functionalist studies, network analysis examines how connections between individuals both reflect and affect behavior. Although there is no formal theory of social networks, network analysis has, in the last few decades, produced an elaborate set of analytical techniques and devices. The basic methodology is simple and straightforward; the researcher charts and analyzes the contacts that an individual develops with members of his or her community. The application of network analysis, however, is becoming increasingly sophisticated; the qualitative content and directional flow of contacts must be considered, as well as the extent of independent interactions between two members of a third person's network. Network analysis provides a series of complex quantitative and qualitative measurements that allow researchers to assess the importance of informal social dynamics within a given social environment.⁴

In the past two decades, imaginative approaches to the data found in English village court rolls have sharply revised our understanding of rural society and economy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The Brigstock court was fairly typical. It met regularly every three weeks and considered a broad sweep of matters relevant to village life; inheritances, assaults, trespasses, property disputes, personal arguments, petty thefts, and land transfers were but a few of the items that normally fell under its jurisdiction. These records primarily supply data on nonconflictive social interactions and relations, as most contacts in village courts involved cooperation and exchange, rather than the interpersonal disputes that we customarily associate with legal transactions.⁵ Like all historical records, court rolls cannot reflect the complete social worlds of their constituents, but the breadth and depth of items brought before village courts made them a clearing house for most community activities. Village courts are a window, albeit circumscribed and cracked, through which historians

4 Succinct descriptions of network analysis can be found in Mitchell, "Social Networks," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, III (1974), 279-299; James A. Barnes, *Social Networks* (Reading, Mass., 1972).

5 For example, Kroyl junior's post-marital network included only 24 conflicts in 322 total contacts.

can observe the actions and dramas of rural life in medieval England.⁶

The jurisdiction of Brigstock manor extended beyond the main village to include part of Stanion, an adjacent daughter settlement located two and a half miles to the northwest. The lives of the residents of these two villages were inextricably intertwined. The main Kroyl holdings lay in Brigstock, but Kroyl junior's particular interests focused on Stanion. Similarly, the activities of the Penifaders spanned both villages, although their main holdings rested in Stanion. Sharing common origins, common legal jurisdictions, and common ecclesiastical institutions, the inhabitants of Brigstock and Stanion constantly exchanged both personnel and property. The clerk of Brigstock manor usually treated the two villages as one community. Because these villages lay in the heart of Rockingham Forest, the manor was held by the crown as part of the ancient demesne and was surrounded by royal preserves. Its economy mingled agriculture and animal husbandry with extensive exploitation of the adjacent parks and woodlands. During the six decades prior to the arrival of the mid-fourteenth-century plague in the area, somewhere between 300 and 500 adult males resided in the Brigstock-Stanion community. Both economic and demographic prospects were faltering, if not declining. As in most rural villages at this time, social life was dominated by a core group of long-resident male villagers who enjoyed both economic privilege (in holding semi-virgates) and political power (by controlling village offices).⁷

6 The major work that began the historical reevaluation of court rolls is still the best introduction to these sources. See J. Ambrose Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility: Studies in the Social History of the Mediaeval English Village* (Toronto, 1964). Other recent studies include *idem*, *Warboys: Two Hundred Years in the Life of an English Mediaeval Village* (Toronto, 1974); Edwin Brezette DeWindt, *Land and People in Holywell-cum-Needingworth* (Toronto, 1972).

Smith's extensive work with village courts led him to concur with the conclusion that court rolls faithfully reflect social relationships. See his "Kin and Neighbors," 222–223. Obviously, historians, unlike anthropologists, cannot interview their subjects to inquire into the full social importance of various relationships. But, as Alan Macfarlane has argued, the abundant and accurate information contained in historical records about social relationships requires the development of historical methods for network analysis. See his "History, Anthropology and the study of Communities," *Social History*, V (1977), 638–639.

7 Bennett, "Gender," 43–82. Although it is tempting to speculate that Kroyl junior's marriage to Agnes was calculated to smooth his entry into Stanion life, no evidence

The fathers of Agnes Penifader and Kroyl junior both belonged to this elite. Robert Penifader was a substantial landholder in Stanion who served in several community offices. He and Alice, his wife, produced eight known children (three sons and five daughters). The careers of all three sons can be traced in the Brigstock records. The life histories of two daughters who only sporadically appeared in the courts cannot be fully reconstructed. Of the three other daughters, Cecilia never married, Cristina married an outsider and emigrated (although she subsequently made land-related appearances in the Brigstock court), and Agnes married Kroyl junior just one year after her father's death. Her husband's father, like her own, held substantial lands and offices in the community, but his main holdings were located in Brigstock rather than in Stanion. Together with his wife, Agnes, Kroyl senior had four sons and no known daughters. William Kroyl ceased to appear in the courts in the early 1320s, but the records show that his three brothers pursued important careers in the community through the 1340s.⁸

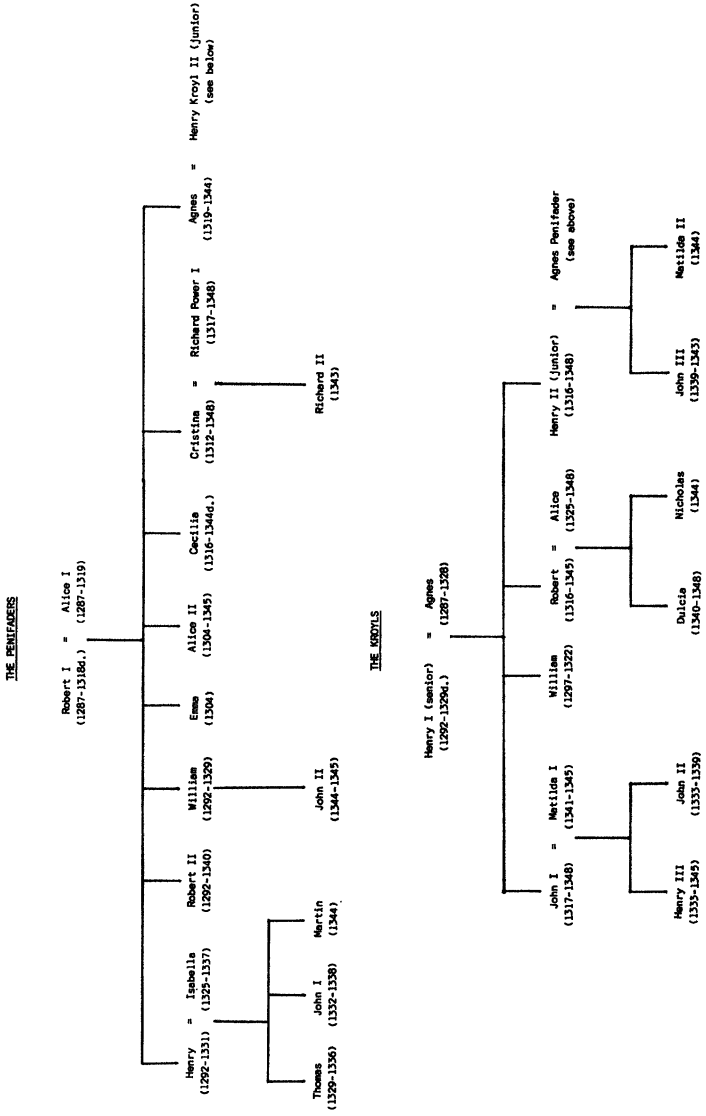
Fig. 1 sets forth the reconstructed genealogies of the Kroyls and Penifaders. The thirty-one people shown made 1,965 appearances in the extant records of the Brigstock courts between 1287 and 1348. Personal networks have been constructed for each individual by listing the persons with whom the subject interacted and by counting the number of exchanges. The content of these transactions has been divided into six qualitative categories that collectively encompass all possible transactions. These categories are based upon whether the network subject interacted with another person by (1) receiving assistance, (2) giving assistance, (3) acting jointly, (4) receiving land, (5) giving land, or (6) engaging in a dispute.⁹

supports this hypothesis. As a general rule, interpersonal relationships totally ignored the physical boundary between Stanion and Brigstock. Geographical proximity was found to be an irrelevant factor in explaining patterns of interaction between the Penifaders and Kroyls.

8 The lost histories of Emma and Alice Penifader probably reflect untraced marriages rather than early death or emigration. Because women usually dropped their natal surnames upon marriage, they cannot be traced if their marriage records are lost. As a result, the potential social importance of the affine connections created by such marriages also cannot be examined.

9 Giving and receiving assistance usually took the form of personal pledging (guaranteeing the court-incurred obligations of another) or *essoining* (excusing those absent from court). Joint activity includes all instances in which two persons acted together; two men

Fig. 1 The Penifader and Kroyl Genealogies^a



^a All of the relationships shown in this chart were explicitly stated in court entries. Dates shown indicate period covered by court appearances (not life span). Birth order is unknown. The known deaths are indicated by a terminal "d."

These personal networks have been constructed completely from court entries and therefore reflect only those exchanges that prompted legal attention. By the nature of the craft, medieval historians must rely upon archival evidence and can neither observe their subjects nor inquire into the importance of certain relationships or contacts. Within the boundaries of this limitation, the records of medieval village courts are particularly fine guides to the social worlds of their constituents. The courts met frequently and regularly, almost everyone attended their sessions, and the items considered ranged over a broad field of social, economic, and political matters. Every social interaction did not merit a court notation, but influential social ties undoubtedly found their diluted reflection in the court records; when a man needed a personal pledge to back up a legal obligation, he turned not to a stranger, but to a friend. The daily associations of these people in the homes, fields, and lanes of their villages cannot be retrieved, but the transactions that they recorded in their triweekly community court are fair indicators of their most important social relationships.

Prior to the marriage of 1319, the social worlds of the Kroyls and Penifaders were discrete. Despite their mutual prominence in community life and their large personal networks, Robert Penifader and Kroyl senior never interacted with each other in court before the marriage of their children. Nor did the members of the second generation of each family associate before the marriage. After the summer of 1319, however, this situation changed dramatically, but these changes varied according to both family position and gender.¹⁰

who together pledged for a third man were counted as acting jointly. Land transactions include both leases and outright transfers. The dispute category includes all controversies that arose between villagers—slanders, attacks, trespasses, unpaid debts, and thefts. Debt agreements rarely appear in the Brigstock courts and do not merit a separate category. The one debt contract recorded (when John Hirdman loaned Kroyl junior and his wife 10 shillings in 1339) was counted in the “assistance received” column. Court citations have not been automatically translated into interactions. A dispute that lasted for several months and generated numerous court entries has been counted as a single interaction regardless of the actual number of citations. Because personal pledges, however, could and did change over time, each pledging relationship has been registered as a new interaction even if it involved the same people and problem.

10 Robert Penifader’s network included 97 people with whom he had 211 contacts. Although he died one year before the marriage of his daughter Agnes, his three decades

Kroyl junior's social world was radically altered by his marriage. His limited premarital social contacts were strongly centered on his father, but, after marriage, contacts with his father sharply declined as his network grew to include a much more diverse collection of cognate, affine, and nonfamilial associations. His premarital network included thirty interactions with twenty people, and he interacted more than once with only three individuals—his father (nine contacts) and two persons to whom he was not related (two contacts each). His only multiplex relationship (involving more than one type of contact) was with his father, and this paternal influence was reinforced by the overlap of personnel in the networks of father and son. Clearly, the younger Kroyl's early years in the Brigstock community were supervised and shaped by his father's assistance and influence.¹¹

of activity included only one contact with a Kroyl. In 1292, he was pledged by a Matthew Kroyl, whose relationship to the Kroyls here considered is unknown (NRO, file 3: 10/7/1292). Whatever Matthew's tie to the other Kroyls might have been, this single contact is insignificant in view of the size of Robert Penifader's social network. Kroyl senior's network included 182 contacts with 103 people. He lived for a decade after the marriage of his son to Agnes, but he never interacted with the Penifaders (aside from his participation in the marriage settlement and in Agnes' endowment).

Just a few months prior to the marriage agreement, Kroyl junior pledged for Alice Penifader (who would become his mother-in-law) and for Richard Power (the husband of his future wife's sister). NRO, file 31: 4/1/1319. Occurring in such close proximity to the marriage, these interactions were probably prompted by the knowledge of a future relationship. The decision of Kroyl junior and Agnes to wed necessarily required some social interaction between them or their families. But, because the court records reveal only minimal premarital exchanges between these families, we can assume that the social dynamics that preceded the marriage were neither frequent nor intense.

11 The term "cognate family" includes all members of a subject's natal family (parents and siblings) as well as all members of a subject's personal marital family (spouse and children). In addition, descendants (grandchildren, nieces, etc.) and ascendants (grandparents, uncles, etc.) of these families are included. The complementary term "affine family" designates all persons to whom the subject was indirectly related through marriage (wife's brother, sister's husband, etc.). Contacts denoted "nonrelative" or "nonfamilial" are persons with whom the subject possessed no known family ties. In actual fact, however, such individuals are only presumed to be nonrelatives because of the very real possibility that ties existed which remain untraced (especially through incompletely reported marriages).

Kroyl junior's relationship with his father was multiplex because he received assistance from his father 8 times and gave assistance once. Multiplex relationships are generally more stable and more important than single-stranded connections because the variety of associations fosters stronger bonds. A multiplex relationship should not be confused with a multiple relationship (in which more than 1 contact of the same type occurred between 2 people). See Boissevain, *Friends*, 28–32; Kapferer, "Norms," 226–227.

This paternal influence sharply declined after Kroyl junior's marriage. Father and son interacted only twice in the decade after the wedding from 1319 to 1329, during which time both men were alive and active in the village. This abrupt shift was not prompted by Kroyl senior's retirement; while he remained economically and politically active, his married son proceeded to construct an exclusive set of social relationships. Nevertheless, Kroyl junior's contacts with his cognate kin continued to provide his most important and enduring associations. After his marriage, he replaced his father's influence with a reliance upon his brother John, who quickly became the single most important person in his rapidly expanding network. Although Kroyl junior did not incorporate all of the members of his cognate family into his post-marital network, his recorded associations with cognates were more frequent, more multiplex, and more reciprocal than were his traced contacts with either affines or nonrelatives (Tables 1 and 2). Mutual assistance and cooperation characterized Kroyl junior's interactions with his immediate family.¹²

Kroyl junior's marriage, then, altered specific cognate relationships without weakening the general preeminence of cognate kin in his social life. At the same time, his new Penifader relatives were starting to play more significant roles in his community life. He associated with all of his wife's siblings who were traceable during his married period (a breadth of association which was not matched by his contacts with his own siblings). Although the extent of this association with affines contrasted sharply with the minimal contact he had developed with them before he was married, no particularly strong individual relationships emerged (Tables 1 and 2). The average number of contacts traced between Kroyl junior and each affine (3.0) exceeded the average for nonrelatives (1.8), but the incidence of multiplexity was very low, and the qualitative content of these transactions was heavily lop-

12 Kroyl junior's relationship with his brother John (involving 17 multiplex contacts) was followed at a far distance by his relationships with 2 nonrelatives—with each of these he had 10 multiplex contacts. He never had contact in the village courts with his brothers William (whose network consisted of 9 contacts with 9 people) or Robert (whose network comprised 48 contacts with 30 people). Because William ceased to appear in the court records after 1322, his lack of interaction with Kroyl junior must not be overemphasized. Robert, however, appeared in the courts for nearly 3 decades.

Table 1 Quantitative Breakdown of Kroyl Junior's Post-Marital Network

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF PERSONS	NUMBER OF CONTACTS	NUMBER OF MULTIPLEX RELATIONSHIPS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF CONTACTS PER PERSON	PERCENT OF TOTAL PERSONS		PERCENT OF TOTAL CONTACTS		PERCENT OF MULTIPLEX RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN CATEGORY
					NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	
Cognates	5	33	3	6.6	3	10	3	10	60
Affines	9	27	1	3.0	6	8.5	6	8.5	11
Nonrelatives	142	262	17	1.8	91	81.5	91	81.5	12
Total	156	322	21	2.0	100	100	100	100	13.5

Table 2 Qualitative Breakdown of Kroyl Junior's Post-Marital Network

TYPE OF INTERACTION	COGNATES		AFFINES		NONRELATIVES		TOTAL	
	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
Assistance received	6	18	0	0	18	7	24	7.5
Assistance given	11	34	26	96	199	76	236	73.0
Joint action	10	30	1	4	15	6	26	8.0
Land received	2	6	0	0	4	1	6	2.0
Land given	3	9	0	0	3	1	6	2.0
Dispute	1	3	0	0	23	9	24	7.5
Total	33	100	27	100	262	100	322	100.0

sided (with most contacts involving Kroyl junior giving assistance to his wife's kin).¹³

This pattern of preminent cognate relationships supplemented by less intense affine contacts and by a variety of contacts with nonrelatives is confirmed by tracing the overlap between persons active in both Kroyl junior's network and in the networks of other males in his generation to whom he was related. His total post-marital network of 156 persons can be narrowed to the fifty-five people in his effective network (composed of nonrelatives with whom he had more than one traced contact). These fifty-five persons can, in turn, be compared to the contacts established by his brothers and his wife's brothers. The indices derived from this comparison confirm the patterns observed in the analyses of Kroyl junior's direct contacts. The most significant overlap was between Kroyl junior and his brother John (thirteen mutual associates). The absence of direct interaction between Kroyl junior and his two other brothers Robert and William was reinforced by the independence of their personal networks (William shared no contacts with Kroyl junior; Robert shared only two). Kroyl junior's lukewarm relationships with his wife's brothers were reflected in the moderate number of associates he held in common with these men (eight with William Penifader, nine with Henry, and seven with Robert II).¹⁴

13 Kroyl junior associated with all of the members of his wife's natal family except Emma Penifader and Alice Penifader II, who cannot be fully traced in the court records.

14 Network density measures the degree to which the members of a subject's network independently contacted one another. See Boissevain, *Friends*, 37-40; Barnes, "Networks and Political Process," in Mitchell, *Social Networks*, 61-64. A full measure of density in a personal network is a lengthy process, requiring examination of the separate networks of all persons in the primary subject's network. The approach used here is a shortened technique for analyzing the intersection of the networks of related persons.

Arnold L. Epstein first proposed dividing networks into different sectors based upon intensity of interaction in "The Network and Urban Social Organization," in Mitchell, *Social Networks*, 110-111. Boissevain refined this notion by defining 6 zones based upon subjective evaluations. See his *Friends*, 46-48. Because such subjective information is unavailable to historians, the prudent course is to divide personal networks into 2 sectors based upon frequency of contact with the subject. All persons who had more than 1 contact with the network subject have been placed in the network's "effective zone." The "extended zone" includes all persons who had only a single contact with the subject. Because effective zones are used in this study to estimate the important social associations that the network subject shared with his or her kin, persons related to the subject have been excluded from the effective network.

For Kroyl junior, then, marriage was accompanied by a dramatic rearrangement of his social contacts. He replaced his father's former dominance with an intense and mutually advantageous association with his brother. Although his cognate relatives continued to play the most important roles in his social life, his horizons expanded to include not only moderately frequent associations with his wife's siblings, but also a vast array of contacts with other, nonrelated individuals within the community. The changes experienced by his wife were equally momentous, but qualitatively different. When Agnes, the daughter of Robert Penifader, became Agnes, the wife of Kroyl junior, she took on a new set of personal allegiances and dependencies that essentially excluded her natal kin, precipitating a totally new familial orientation, rather than merely a rearrangement of various natal ties.

The realignment that marriage prompted in the social lives of women is clearly demonstrated in the contrast between the personal networks of Agnes Penifader-Kroyl and her unmarried sister Cecilia. Appearing in the court records not often, but with roughly equal frequency, these two sisters developed typically female court networks, with transactions heavily characterized by the receipt of assistance from male kin. Agnes' very small personal network (thirty-one contacts with eleven people) included no members of her natal family and focused strongly on her husband. She had multiple contacts with only three people—her husband, his brother John, and his close associate, William Werketon. Cecilia, in contrast, boasted a much larger personal network (forty-five contacts with twenty-two people) that was heavily based on natal relationships. She interacted in the courts with her father and with all three brothers, and also had numerous contacts with her sister's husband (Kroyl junior) and brother-in-law (John Kroyl). Moreover, her social world overlapped completely with those of her male kin; every nonrelative in her effective network had independent multiple contacts with at least one of her male relatives. In short, the social experiences of these two sisters differed greatly. Cecilia, who remained single, never altered her primary orientation toward her family of origin, but Agnes ignored that same family of origin and focused exclusively on the Kroyl family into which she had married.¹⁵

15 Hyphenated surnames for married women (combining both natal and marital surnames) are used in this article to underline the dual familial ties of these women. This

Because manorial courts were predominantly male forums, tracing the activities of females through their records is especially precarious and tentative. Lacking basic legal and political rights, women doubtless developed alternative modes of social interaction and exchange. As a result, court records—which provide only diluted reports of male social activities—are even less reliable indicators of female social horizons. Agnes Penifader-Kroyl almost certainly did not completely forsake her natal family after her marriage, but presumably maintained untraceable contacts with her mother, her sisters, and her brothers. Her husband's expanding interactions with her siblings reflects a continuing, if indirect, exchange between Agnes and her family of origin. Nevertheless, it is significant that her court network—the record of her public alliances and dependencies—never included members of her original family. Regardless of the ways in which her social horizons might have developed in spheres unknown to historians, her public name, status, and allegiances shifted irrevocably upon marriage to her husband's family.¹⁶

The different experiences of Kroyl junior and Agnes underline how gender affected the social options and responses created by marriage. The importance of their union, however, extended beyond those immediate rearrangements to influence the lives of their siblings. The wedding did not create a tight alliance between the various branches of the Kroyls and Penifaders, but it did clearly offer a possibility for increased interaction. Some siblings expanded their social contacts to take advantage of this new connection, but others totally ignored the opportunities created by the marriage. A variety of diverse factors, including personal idiosyncrasies, gender, and social position underlay these different responses.

Since Kroyl junior had no traceable contacts with his brothers

usage is ahistorical; married women usually (although not invariably) were identified by their husband's surnames. Agnes Penifader-Kroyl appeared in court on 29 occasions, and Cecilia Penifader appeared 30 times. When women acted in court, their legal disabilities prompted heavy reliance upon males (usually in the form of pledging) which they could not reciprocate because female guarantors were legally unacceptable. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that most women turned to male relatives for such unreciprocated aid.

16 Analyses of the experiences of peasant women in medieval England are still in the preliminary stages. See Rodney H. Hilton, "Women in the Village," in *idem* (ed.), *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 95–110; Britton, *Community*, 16–37, 52–56; Bennett, "Gender."

William and Robert, it is not surprising that his marriage prompted no changes in their social interactions. These two brothers built social worlds that excluded not only their brother, but also his wife's relatives. In contrast, John Kroyl, whose constant interchange with Kroyl junior provided the steady foundation of each man's social activities, did develop relationships with his brother's Penifader relatives, but the extent of such contact was minimal (four exchanges with two Penifaders). Although this slight interaction between John and the Penifaders represented a change from the complete lack of contact that characterized the period before the union, John's social horizons were only marginally expanded by his brother's marriage.

In contrast, the Penifader siblings were much more profoundly influenced by their sister's marriage. All of Agnes' siblings (as well as all of their known spouses) developed contacts with her husband. In most cases, Kroyl junior became a vitally important person in the networks of these Penifaders. He was by far the most influential person in Cecilia's network, developing nine contacts with her and interacting independently with every person in her effective network. When Cristina Penifader-Power and her husband, Richard Power, occasionally returned to Brigstock to pursue various land claims, they were similarly more likely to rely upon Kroyl junior than upon any of Cristina's brothers. The three Penifader brothers also developed important relationships with their sister's husband. Although their contacts with Kroyl junior were usually less frequent and less balanced in content than their exchanges with cognates, they did interact with him on a significant number of occasions. Kroyl junior also boasted both more associates and more effective associates (with whom he had multiple contacts) in the effective networks of each of his brothers-in-law than they did with each other.¹⁷

17 To a certain extent, the strong intersection between Kroyl junior's social contacts and those developed by his brothers-in-law might be explained by his far-reaching influence in the community. Because he interacted with such a large number of people, he had greater opportunities for accumulating personal associations that might be held in common with each of the Penifader brothers. Nevertheless, the overlap of networks cannot be dismissed as a statistical artifact. John Kroyl, despite a breadth of contacts that rivaled those of his brother (300 contacts with 116 people), boasted almost no common contacts with the effective networks of the Penifader brothers. He had 1 associate in common with Robert Penifader II's effective network, 2 with William Penifader's, and 1 with Henry Penifader's effective network.

The overall contrast between John Kroyl's minimal response to the broadened kin network created by his brother's marriage and the fundamental changes that the marriage precipitated for the Penifaders is best explained by their differing social and familial options. John, like his brother Kroyl junior, was an extremely active member of their community. Both men possessed substantial lands, served frequently in local office, and developed exceedingly large personal networks. For both brothers, cognate family contacts were more frequent and more balanced than were other social relationships, but these familial interactions comprised only a small proportion of their total social worlds (10 percent of all contacts for each brother). The careers of the three Penifader brothers were much more modest and displayed considerably less economic, political, and social power. Faced with a narrower set of social options, the Penifaders were far more likely than the Kroyl brothers to rely upon their cognate kin for mutual aid and assistance (26 to 31 percent of all contacts were with cognates). Those Penifaders whose social options were most restricted—Cecilia (by virtue of her gender) and Cristina, along with her husband (by virtue of their residence elsewhere)—were most likely to fall back upon familial connections. The marriage had more impact upon the lives of the Penifaders because they were already predisposed (due to their moderate social position) to focus upon familial ties in their social relationships.¹⁸

¹⁸ Henry Penifader's network included only 69 contacts with 44 people. William Penifader accumulated 118 contacts with 42 people, and Robert Penifader II's personal network included 64 contacts with 36 people. Because the networks of the Penifader brothers were considerably smaller than those developed by John Kroyl and Kroyl junior, the proportional influence of family connections was correspondingly greater for the Penifaders. See Boissevain, *Friends*, 35–37. The higher ratios of cognate contacts for the Penifader brothers were not, however, simply functions of their smaller social worlds. Although the personal networks of both Kroyl brothers excluded active members of their cognate family, the networks of the Penifader brothers included nearly all contemporaneous cognate kin. Because Cecilia Penifader and the Penifader-Powers frequently interacted with noncognate relatives, estimates of cognate contacts (ranging from 20% to 59%) are insufficient to demonstrate their family focus. A better measure calculates the proportion of all familial contacts in their social interactions. This ratio ranges from 47 to 62% (comparable figures for the Penifader brothers range from 30 to 39% and for the Kroyl brothers from 11 to 19%). These observations of the family focus of the Penifaders complement Smith's finding that persons of moderate social standing in Redgrave and Rickingham focused particularly strongly upon relatives in their social dealings. Although Smith also found that marginal villagers were less family focused, his data on this point do not necessarily

However, the preeminent social position and political sway of Kroyl junior did not usually succeed in supplanting the primary cognate focus of the Penifader's familial orientation. The three Penifader brothers interacted with Kroyl junior because they were accustomed to using family members in social affairs, but they did not interact with him more frequently than they did with each other. The only exceptions to the primacy of cognate contacts were Cecilia and the Penifader-Powers, who suffered such severe social liabilities that they did turn to this influential brother-in-law for assistance more frequently than they resorted to their male siblings.

The social importance of Kroyl junior and Agnes' marriage stopped with their own generation; neither parents nor offspring were particularly affected by the union. A series of disputes over the inheritance of Cecilia Penifader's properties in 1344 indicates that the next generation of Kroyls and Penifaders (first cousins) certainly recognized their kinship ties, but clear evidence of any social importance in these ties is lacking. Because the disposition of the unmarried Cecilia's lands necessarily involved collateral lines, the convergence of cousins around this issue is unsurprising. Aside from the mixture of cooperation and conflict found in these entries in 1344, no other interactions between these cousins were recorded before the surviving series of court records ended in 1348.¹⁹

Even more intriguing than the marriage's minimal impact on the subsequent generation was its unimportance in the lives of the principals' parents. The widow of Robert Penifader (who had died a year before the wedding) was the sole parent in either family whose social connections expanded in response to the union. On three occasions in 1319 she turned to Kroyl junior for assistance in meeting her legal obligations. Since she ceased to appear in the courts after this year, subsequent contacts between her and the Kroyls cannot be traced. Her reliance upon Kroyl junior probably sprang from the same impulses that prompted

cast doubt upon the existence of strong family orientations for Cecilia Penifader, Cristina Penifader-Power, and Richard Power, as most of Smith's marginal villagers were resident males. See Smith, "Kin and Neighbors."

¹⁹ NRO, file 51: 21/5/1344, 11/6/1344. When the court series ended in 1348, none of these cousins had begun to take very active roles in community life and most had developed only very small personal networks.

her daughters Cecilia and Cristina to turn to this new in-law; as reflected in her small, family-focused network (sixteen contacts with eleven people), Alice Penifader's status in the community was marginal. Still, the marriage did not expand Alice's horizons beyond increased contacts with her daughter's new husband; she did not develop social relationships with either her son-in-law's parents or with his siblings. The other set of parents was completely unaffected by their son's marriage; neither Kroyl senior nor his wife ever developed traceable contacts with the Penifaders.²⁰

When Kroyl junior and Agnes exchanged marriage vows in the summer of 1319, the importance of their union redounded strongly on themselves, but only minimally on their families of origin. Their marriage was a binding tie within narrow limits. Its impact was felt most keenly at the center, by the principals, and then expanded out in waves that created options, not requirements. These possibilities moved horizontally and extended neither up nor down generationally. Actual responses were always strongly oriented toward the marital couple, and most social linkages moved to that center, not beyond or through it. This marriage joined together two individuals, not their families. It created a conjugal family, not a family alliance.

The image of marriage that emerges from these analyses is strongly individualistic. The lives of Kroyl junior and Agnes were profoundly affected by their marriage, but its impact upon their siblings, their parents, and their descendants was fairly insubstantial. It would be unreasonable, in view of this evidence, to think that the Kroyl and Penifader parents manipulated or coerced their children into this marriage. Neither the parents nor their other children benefited enough to merit excessive familial interference in the decision. Kroyl junior and Agnes almost certainly did not marry without recourse to familial advice and support, but such familial input probably did not overshadow the essentially personal nature of their undertaking. More than likely, the actions that culminated in this marriage conformed to ecclesiastical prescriptions; the primary decisions and commitments rested upon

20 Alice Penifader's network included 16 contacts with 11 people; 56% of her interactions were with persons to whom she was related.

the principals, supported secondarily by their families and their community.

The family structure that most dominated the social lives of the Kroyls and Penifaders was the small, nuclear group. For men, the most important familial ties were to their parents and siblings (family of origin) and to their wives and children (marital family). Familial relationships that extended beyond these limits were clearly less important. For women, the family images are less clear. On the one hand, Agnes Penifader-Kroyl's experiences suggest that a woman's family identification could shift abruptly upon marriage from the family of origin to the marital family. On the other hand, the evidence indicates that Alice Penifader and her daughters Cecilia and Cristina looked beyond the normal confines of nuclear relationships to seek closer ties with more distant kin. These two divergent patterns are not mutually exclusive. Women protected within a dependent role in a nuclear family could focus very narrowly upon that family. But women who had lost the protection brought by a secure position in a male-headed household might have had to compensate for their social marginality by exploiting all available family ties. Hence, the family orientation of women was usually more intense than that of men and, depending upon the circumstances, was either more narrow or more expansive.

As suggested by the different experiences of the Penifader women, the existence of options was a fundamental feature of family life. Not only gender, but also social position, familial circumstances, and personal idiosyncrasies determined whether any family relationship would acquire social meaning. Because our records present only a filtered version of community life, it would be foolish to maintain that Kroyl junior never spoke with his brother Robert or that John Kroyl never dealt at all with Henry Penifader. But such social interactions must have been only minimally important, as they were never reflected in the dozens of exchanges recorded in the courts for each man. The diluted evidence of the community court indicates that kin relationships created social options that could be utilized or ignored at will. In almost all cases, kinship ties were used for cooperation and assistance. With only a few exceptions, recorded conflict either among the Kroyls, among the Penifaders, or between the two family groups was extremely rare. Familial relationships, when translated

into social exchanges, were remarkably harmonious and cooperative.²¹

For the Kroyls and Penifaders, then, the family was flexible, small, and ego-focused. It was not, by any measure, insignificant, but instead provided the primary foundation for social intercourse. Because these people were members of the upper levels of a heterogeneous rural population, they are not necessarily or strictly representative of the medieval peasantry. The overall features of their family experiences might well be broadly applicable, but such generalizations must await verification in further analyses of other rural dwellers whose social, economic, or regional backgrounds differ from the Penifaders and the Kroyls. Such studies can best be accomplished not by aggregate analyses, but by close examination of reconstructed microcosms. Unless carefully and selectively applied, aggregation simply complicates the problem of inadequate genealogical reporting characteristic of all court rolls.

A few decades ago, historians were pleasantly surprised to realize that we could recreate collective aspects of preindustrial rural life. We must now move beyond that preliminary realization to acknowledge both the feasibility and the efficacy of studying the familial and social experiences of individual peasants. We shall never, in the absence of letters, diaries, and other intimate personal records, know how medieval peasants felt about their families, but we can at least reconstruct how, within certain social contexts, they acted toward their kin.

21 The only direct controversy (aside from the dispute of 1344 over Cecilia Penifader's properties) was a protracted argument in 1332 between Kroyl junior and his brother John. Details were not specified and no recorded reconciliation survives.