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‘Intelligible to the mind and pleasing to the eye’: Mapping out kinship in British family directories (1660-1830)

Stéphane Jettot

Sorbonne University, France

Abstract

The *Peerages* and *Baronetages* were successful commercial directories sold by some prominent London booksellers since the beginning of the 18th century. They provided an account of most titled families (peers as well as baronets). As serial publications, they were intended for a larger public in need of identification tools in a context of expanding urban sociability and of major recomposition within the elites. In these pocket books, there were no longer the elaborate tree diagrams which had ornamented most of the visitation books of the College of Arms and which still could be found among ancient family papers. Such a disowning was required for technical, commercial and also ideological reasons. Publishers’ selling point was to provide an up-to-date account of the ‘modern’ families which could be better achieved through alphabetical listings, biographical discourses or tabular charts. However, this formal reconfiguration also led to many criticisms. These family directories were accused of compromising the dignity of titled families. The idea of a lost Golden Age when ancient lineages were exhibited on stone, wooden panels or vellum, regained some attraction among social commentators. After 1760, with the renewal of radicalism and the age of revolutions, tree thinking came to be rehabilitated but also reinvented to better defend and naturalise social hierarchies. In this context, trees were increasingly used as powerful national emblem and less as dynastic emblem. The changing fortune of family trees in the 18th cent British prints enable us to reflect on the ideological aspects of the visualisation of kinship.

Keywords

commercialisation, diagram of kinship, directories, family tree, honour and aristocracy

Corresponding author:

Stéphane Jettot, Sorbonne University, History Department, 5 rue Victor Cousin, Paris 75005, France.

Email: stephane.jettot@sorbonne-universite.fr

Introduction

In a preface to their *Annual peerage of the British Empire* (1827), the Innes sisters claimed to have found the best nomenclature to express family relatedness in what they called the ‘higher class’. Discarding ascending family trees, they chose instead the configuration provided by the ‘Almanac de Gotha’, namely an alphabetical listing of names. The titled holder, his wife, children and his parents figured in prominent position and were followed by his sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts.



ANSON, ENGLISH VISCOUNT.

ANSON.

2d V. Anson, and B. of Soberton, 1806.

THOMAS-WILLIAM, b. 20 Oct. 1795, suc. 31 July 1818, m.
11 Feb. 1819,
Louisa-Catherine, youngest dau. of Nathaniel Phillips,
Esq., dec., b. 1802.

ISSUE :

- 1 Hon. Louisa, b. 6 Dec. 1819.
- 2 Hon. Anne-F....., b. March 1823.
- 3*Hon. Thomas-George, b. 8 Aug. 1825.
- 4 Hon. Miss....., b. 26 Dec. 1827.

VSS.-DOW. MOTHER.

Anne-Margaret, 2nd dau. of Thomas-William Coke, Esq.,
M.P., [by Jane, sister of James, 1st Ld. Sherborne,]
b. 23 Jan. 1779, Wid. of
THOMAS, 1st V., b. 14 Feb. 1767, m. 15 Sept. 1794, † 31
July 1818.

BROTHERS and SISTERS.

- 1 Hon. Anne-Margaret, b. 3 Oct. 1796, Coss. of Roseberry.
- 2 Hon. Lt.-Col. George, Aid-de-Camp to the Commander
of the Forces, b. 13 Oct. 1797.
- 3 Hon. Charles-Littleton, b. 28 Jan. 1799, † 23 Sept. 1812.
- 4 Hon. Capt. William, R.N., b. 26 Feb. 1801.
- 5 Georgiana, b. and † 6 June 1802.
- 6 Hon. Henry, b. 15 May 1804, † 1827.
- 7 Edward, b. 21 June 1805, † an infant.
- 8 Hon. Georgiana, b. 3 Jan. 1807, † 10 Feb. 1821.
- 9 } A Son, still-born 20 Aug. 1808.
- 10 } Twins, { Hon. Edward-Harcourt, b. 20 Aug. 1808, †
26 June 1817.
- 11 Hon. Frances-Elizabeth, b. 9 Jan. 1810.
- 12 Hon. Frederica-Sophia, b. 24 Aug. 1814.
- 13 Hon. Elizabeth-Jane, b. 26 Feb. 1816.

UNCLES and AUNTS.

Issue of
George Adams, Esq., b. 1731, assumed the name of
ANSON.

Figure 1: Anson’s family¹

Their editorial strategy was guided by a sense of practicality and accessibility: lists of names in pocket guides were cheaper to print and was much in line with the many professional directories produced at that time (for a list of London and provincial directories, see Norton, 1950). Moreover, the Innes sisters were also eager to meet the expectations of a ‘kinship-hot society’, in which the knowledge of horizontal ties among close families surpassed the need to celebrate remote ancestors.² Ascending pedigrees were of little use for tightly-knit British elites. Furthermore, the publishers may have been influenced by the forthcoming Reform Bill, which was intended to open parliamentary franchise to industrialists, merchants, military and colonial administrators. As this article will show,

Innes's directories were aimed at vindicating the rise of an aristocratic class against the levelling criticisms from radical reformers by providing the picture of an open elite. For such a task, annual guides of family names constituted an appropriate device to represent a collective identity in the making. Other successful directories, such as Debrett's and Burke's, provided more detailed accounts of ancestors but similarly did away with trees.

It is worth bearing in mind, as the other articles in this special issue have shown that 'cognitive metaphors do not work in a void; they interact with empirical evidence, with social and biographical circumstances, with all kinds of aims and constraints aesthetic, moral and political' (Ginzburg, 2004: 537). The example of the *Annual Peerage* illustrates the importance of a close contextualisation of concepts and diagrams of kinship. In this article, I would like to argue that kinship diagrams displayed an underlying tension between the need to expand ancestors' origins further into in history and the need to promote a horizontal perspective in order to include as many kin and alliances as possible. To further advance this line of enquiry, I have studied the formal disposition and graphic editing of family directories as they developed during the long British 18th-century.

We will consider three phases during which the disappearance or rather the reconfiguration of family trees can be mapped out. In the first part of 18th century, to merge noble values with those of the commercial classes, trees were evicted from most pocket or octavo family directories. The politically sensitive Hanoverian succession also contributed to the decline of dynastic culture. In a second part, it will be argued that the Seven Years War and the accession of George III to the throne in 1760 coincided with several attempts to 'reenchant' genealogical metaphors. Several courtiers commissioned various projects aimed at rehabilitating both the official heralds of arms and the mystic potential of family trees. These attempts were at first met with ridicule although as the fears generated by the American and the French Revolution grew in intensity, they became more successful. However, as the third part of this article will show, the consequences of those revolutionary wars, notably the considerable surge of new titles, compromised the chances of this revival. The decline of a loyalist culture after 1810 meant that arboreal imagery could no longer effectively account for a booming social elite in Britain as well as in its Empire. However, the tree-diagram was reconfigured by loyalists for new uses, becoming a powerful British patriotic emblem.

British succession crises and the difficult survival of family trees (1689-1750)

The commercialisation of genealogical guides in Britain was a slow and protracted process. After a modest introduction in the early-modern book market, it gained pace in the first decades of the 18th century. Initially, it coincided with the 'pedigree craze' observed by several historians during the Elizabethan period and corresponded to a considerable increase in the size of landed classes (Plumb, 1969; Klapisch Zuber, 2003). At first, family directories were overshadowed by an exuberant production of painted pedigrees by both local artisans in the counties and heralds of the College of Arms. In theory, the latter had a monopoly over the certification of arms and pedigrees, which they carried out during their visitations (Cust, 2017; Ramsay, 2014; Wagner, 1972). In practice, the landed gentry gave hefty sums to any skilled craftsman able to design ornamented trees with foliage, fruits, animals.³ Trees were not only painted as they were placed in carvings and mouldings in domestic interiors and funerary monuments and thus could be touched as well as seen.

No further visitations of the heralds were commissioned after the accession of William III. However, this did not mean that genealogical practices were on the wane.

Instead they took different forms and contents. After 1689, to fill this unexpected institutional void, various London booksellers began to publish series of directories, which were instrumental in identifying the growing number of landed families moving around the country and in the colonies. Their pocket format was similar to the many calendars, almanacs and gazettes with which the public was already familiar. Their selling point was to provide an up-to-date account of the titled families which could be better achieved through alphabetical listings, short biographies or tabular charts than they could be by tree diagrams. They were composed by journalists and hack-writers who provided a restricted and practical view of the ascent and descent of titled individuals. Tree diagrams were replaced by charts and columns of births, deaths and marriages, which were cheap to produce and could be easily annually updated. Indexes were devised to provide a bird's eye view of all the peerage, thus allowing a rapid skimming of the genealogical notices. Such a trend has been well charted by Volker Bauer in his studies of German Court directories (Bauer, 2016). After 1700, he identified a significant shift from the *Special Genealogien*, dealing with the territorial ruling houses, to the spread of *Staatskalenders*, which provided an annual list of office holders. Ancient lineages were no longer the prime focus of attention in these directories: officers and administrators were of greater significance, since the birth of a more bureaucratic state required a functional and meritocratic elite. Similarly, in Britain, the growth of a powerful fiscal state required a more functional guide to the principal family dynasties in Court and in Parliament.

Hence, tree-shaped diagrams disappeared from these directories with some key exceptions – the royal trees - displayed in the several editions following the Hanoverian Succession. In 1709, for example, Arthur Collins's first edition of the *Peerage* in 1709 included a rough engraving depicting a dynastic tree from James Ist to George of Hanover. Collins's diagram may have alluded to the considerable research carried out by Leibniz on Hanoverian rights to the British throne, which had far-reaching implications 'regarding history, imperial law and interest-driven politics' (Beiderbeck, 2018: 678). On a more discreet note, Francis Nichols in his *Rudiments of Honour* (1720) displayed a sketchy shrub in his frontispiece, which carried royal and noble crowns from top to bottom.



Figure 2: Francis Nichols, *Rudiments of Honour or the second part of the British Compendium*, 1720.

In their diagrams, both Collins and Nichols avoided tackling the thorny issue of the Jacobite claim to the throne, in contrast to the *Genealogical Tables* (1732), published by James Anderson, a Church of Scotland minister.⁴ Anderson dedicated his work to the Prince of Wales, Frederick Lewis, heir to the British throne and from whom ‘we owe our deliverance from all we dreaded and the enjoyment of all we wish under the just and benign Government of your Royal father and grandfather’.⁵ Anderson explained that his method was mostly inspired from the stemmata produced by Johann Hübner and Jacob Wilhelm Imhoff: ‘perhaps the most important authority on international genealogy in Germany’ (Friedrich, 2019: 69). Although in the preface, he defended himself from giving ‘offence to any Nation, or Family, to any Party or Person’, his tables were financed by a subscription of Whig MPs and Peers (Speck, 1982: 58). Anderson intended to connect the Hanoverians to the most powerful European dynasties and to insert them in a universal history dating back to the Patriarchs. Anderson was driven by a partisan agenda and decided to draw a pedigree of all the ‘royal progeny of King James’, including ‘the Roman Catholicks cut off by Act of Parliament’.⁶ And in another table related to James II, he he went so far as to add three stars above the name of his heir, which ‘are the mark of a new family, or that the person under is not of blood with the family of the table’.⁷ The example provided by Anderson demonstrated that pedigree-making was not solely confined to High Church Tories. However, in the context of the Hanoverian succession, most mainstream politicians, whether they were Whig or Tory, avoided taking side in a highly contentious and still unpredictable issue. It was not until the failure of the last Jacobite invasion in 1745 that the succession was definitely settled.

Finally, along with practical or political rationales, the decline of tree diagrams could also be explained by a larger public debate on values and manners in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The promotion of a ‘polite culture’ aimed at reconciling both commercial and landed interests did not follow party lines: ‘politeness was not an exclusive

whig concept; Tories were using it for their own ideological ends already in the 1690s' (Peltonen, 2005: 394). Both parties embraced the need to reform noble values. Criticisms of vanity, lies and corruption were commonplace in many discourses. As they could be easily caricatured and diverted from their initial aim, tree-diagrams could be used as a didactic and striking device to denounce aristocratic biases. While the making of genealogies was not condemned as such, trees were mobilised by social commentators to point out various flaws in characters. Joseph Addison or William Hogarth, two influent middle-sort satirists used them to better display several objectionable aspects of the ruling elite.⁸ In the widely-read *Spectator*, Addison let the reader imagine what the family tree of an 'impudent Libertine' in London would look like if his own illegitimate issues were represented: in his words a 'more flourishing Tree never came out of the Herald's Office.'⁹ The hieratic family tree of 'young Patriachs' disguised their forest of adulteries and illegitimate sons and daughters. Along with hiding patriarchal sexual appetites, pedigrees were linked to the sin of pride. They encouraged the title holder to believe that he came from a continuous line of worthy ancestors dating back to the most remote times.

Finally, the irrelevance of dynastic tree was further confirmed from another point of view. Sir William Blackstone in his *Commentaries* had stressed the fundamental weakness of pedigrees in legal proceedings. He stated that most documents from the College of Arms were not relevant in inheritance cases, notably in the Court of Chancery.¹⁰ As they were based on the declaration of the head of the household, they excluded all younger sons and daughters along with their spouses and own children. In *An Essay on Collateral Consanguinity*, Blackstone reconfigured the ancient family tree in order to insert the counting of degrees of connection which were better suited to legal enquiries (see Martinez, 2014: 50-2). Using roman numerals to express the degrees of relationship, along with squares and circles, he intended to provide an accessible and accurate rendition of family relatedness. He clearly placed the early modern pedigree and its narrow lineage configuration in opposition to his printed table of descent which were better suited to legal matters. However, in the second part of the 18th century, tree diagrams also began to be rehabilitated for genealogical purposes. Several factors, both political and commercial, accounted for this.

Social unrest, royal prerogative and the rehabilitation of dynastic trees (1750-1793)

First, it should be noted that their disappearance from most family directories during the first Hanoverian reigns had not been left unnoticed and had led to many criticisms from disgruntled customers on whose financial and archival contributions to the directories compliers relied. While most used to send a written account, a significant number continued to insist on dispatching their own sketch of their pedigrees or even an old parchment depicting their descent. There were several reasons for such obduracy.

First, drawing a tree was in itself 'a crucially important and creative act of *inventio* well before it became an act of representing information' (Friedrich, 2019: 74). One should not discard the pleasure with which customers had in drawing their own tree. Second, some correspondents insisted on the didactic utility of trees. Hence, in 1741, Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell alluded to the tedious lists of names, adding that 'ye lineal descent in ye margin in form of a pedigree (...) would take little room and would make the whole article more intelligible'.¹¹ A tree printed on the margins of the text would provide a summary of its meaning and could be easily updated, he suggested, while a directory without pedigrees would confuse the readers. Furthermore, the value of tree diagrams was enhanced by the fact that they had been previously authenticated. Some customers reminded the publishers that

their trees had been certified by various institutions (College of Arms, Court of Chancery) and so had a higher value than any other piece of evidence. In a letter to the publisher Thomas Wotton, Sir Henry Nelthorpe desired to have his sketch pedigree printed as the later was ‘taken from a decretal order of the Court of Chancery’.¹²

More fundamentally, whether old or new, many of the social elites still succumbed to the powerful attraction of tree-imagery. Analogies between sap and blood, contrasts between the erectile shape of trees and the amorphous female soil were part of a resilient patriarchal imaginary and some families deeply resented the publisher's conversion of their family treasure into a casual list of names. A Yorkshire gentleman, Sir Roger Beckwith complained to Wotton about the surge of pocket directories, which were accused of compromising the dignity of the most ancient families.¹³ As part of this reaction, the idea of a lost Golden Age when ancient lineages were exhibited on stone, wooden panels or vellum, regained some attraction. The strong attachment to family trees may have been mocked by the *Spectator* but many families still hung on to them as a precious relic. New directories were suspected of reducing the prestige of their ancestry, by mixing old and new families. Many customers were unsatisfied with this trend and wished for more respectable and sumptuous directories. All the more so that many 18th-century county histories were still enriched by hundreds of pedigrees. Ralph Thoresby in his *Ducatus Leodiensis* (1715) inserted all the family trees of gentry and the nobles living in and around Leeds. One reader wrote to Thoresby to thank him for having consented to publish his pedigree, which will ‘consecrate my name to eternity’.¹⁴

These aspirations could be best explained by taking the wider political context into account. Several historians, notably John Brewer, pointed out the destabilizing effects caused by decline of the whig oligarchy, the growth of radical ideas and the accession of George III in 1760, all of which led to an ‘ideological volte-face’ (Brewer, 1986: 53). During their exile from power, many Tory grandees had stressed the need to re-establish an ‘organic polity whose parts, operating independently within their assigned sphere, fitted together harmoniously’ (Bailyn, 1967: 36). Two consecutive global confrontations against the French (the War of Austrian Succession, the Seven Years War) had led to new political coalitions, a massive tax increase and much social unrest. Radical reformers such as John Wilkes complained about the oligarchic nature of parliamentary institutions and the endemic corruption of their members (Lords, Members of Parliament). Convergence between the commercial and the landed ethos, which has been remarkable during the reign of the first Hanoverians, was now put into question by the growing discrepancy between the crucial importance of trade to sustain the British Empire and the underrepresentation of merchants in Parliament.¹⁵ Brewer has convincingly demonstrated that popular radicalism and political uncertainty led to a surge of caricatures and engravings, mostly bought by aristocratic and genteel consumers. Cartoonists’ responses to elite social anxiety were mostly to ridicule plebeian politics by caricaturing noisy and rude crowds (Brewer, 1986: 17). Some publishers of genealogical guides also found that they they needed to respond to this dramatic turn of events.

It was hardly a coincidence that the new king’s arrival on the throne was accompanied by a whole series of monumental *Peerages*, which were financed by public subscriptions and aimed at reinforcing public loyalism. In 1762, William Guthrie published his *Complete history of English Peerage* (£2 16sh), followed by the herald Joseph Edmondson and his magnificent *Baronagium Genealogicum: Or the Pedigrees of the English Peers (...)* including as Well Collateral as Lineal Descents (London, 1764). Under the patronage of powerful courtiers, such as Lord Bute, both celebrated the restoration of the royal prerogative and the Church of England. Bute as well as George III desired to foster a new form of patriotism, which would be more inclusive and less partisan. Unlike the first Hanoverians, George III wanted to revive a dynastic culture, seeing himself as a ‘Patriot King’ astride the

summit of the natural chain of being. For each family, whether Whig or Tory, Edmondson published a highly detailed pedigree along with a coloured coat of arms.

His directory included English as well as Scottish pedigrees, placing Lord Bute on equal footing with the most ancient English families. The luxurious nature of the compilations was in itself a political statement. Unlike James Anderson who had recognised his debt to major German genealogists such as Imhoff and Hübner, Edmondson's table was much more parochial in scope. Celebrating the memory of the herald William Segar, he ignored the prominent works of two historians from Göttingen, Johann Christoph Gatterer and August Ludwig Schlözer (on their dominating influence in the field of genealogy and history, see Bauer, 1997: 62-70). His aim was not to be innovative but rather to contribute to the rehabilitation of the College of Arms. Far from being a marginal detail, the promotion of tree diagrams after 1750 actually fits into a larger political reform aimed at reinforcing both social hierarchies and the royal prerogative.

The publication of Guthrie's and Edmondson's *Peerage* was met with mixed responses. Guthrie and Edmondson's publications provoked much criticism and the arboreal metaphor was used to fulfil a more subversive agenda. In the engraving *The Scotch Paradise*, a royal oak tree was turned by the royal favourites into a tree of corruption which John Bull was trying to put down.



Figure 3: Edward Sumpter, *Scotch Paradise a View of the Bute full Garden of Eden borough* (1763).

John Brewer argues that Bute was no match for the well-organised political publishers in London: ‘few opportunities were missed by these increasingly effective propagandists to aim a passing blow at the favourite’ (Brewer, 1973: 18). In 1785, another courtier was mocked in a similar manner. James Ridgeway published the burlesque pedigree of John Rolle, M.P. for Devon, ridiculed as a knight from the Norman invasion with a ducal coronet.



Figure 4: Avito frondet honore, 1785.¹⁶

John Rolle's tree was used as a frontispiece to a satirical comment on an epic poem: *Criticisms on the Rolliad*, published in the *Morning Herald* and directed against Rolle and his patron, Pitt the Younger. *The Rolliad* referred to a speech made by John Rolle in Parliament during which he alluded to his so-called ancestor the Duke Rollo, first ruler of Normandy. The parody relied on the contrast between the alleged glorious ancestors at the bottom and John Rolle's family members in the higher branches: Walter Roll, a 'very tall man', and Jeremiah, a 'very fat man' and his mother Dorothy, whose main deed was to have died of dysentery. The question remains whether Rolle's tree was used to demonstrate the decline of a prestigious Norman family or to expose the dubious rationale of dynastic trees in general. The latter hypothesis seems more likely since there is no effort to depict, as Hogarth did, the print as an ancient artifact. Rolle's tree stood alone, separated from any former tradition and thus demonstrated the futility of trying to connect one's family back to an ancient and irretrievable past.

As with many other genealogical devices (coats of arms, mottos, epic tales), family trees could be easily subverted to serve a subversive and demeaning purpose. However, if it was first met with much sarcasm by the radicals and the parliamentary opposition, the heraldic policy led by the king and his ministers had long lasting consequences in the following decades.

Loyalist trees: From an aristocratic statement to a British emblem (1793-1830)

Along with ruthless legal repression directed at the British Jacobins, the post 1792 government commissioned many artefacts (such as songs, portraits or cards) intended to support the loyalist cause (Mori, 2003). In addition, George III and Pitt the Younger considerably increased the number of titles in order to reward hundreds of families engaged in the war effort. Within this broader context, lineage culture was also being redefined in response to events in France. The new republic chose to honour its worthy citizens by publishing their names and biographies in lists akin to the London publishers' directories.¹⁷ In response, and in support of the monarchy, most publishers of family directories condemned the egalitarian excesses across the channel, and turned to the production of expensive folios adorned with dynastic trees. However, despite a supportive environment, it will be demonstrated these attempts were not commercially successful. A more conclusive impact of the loyalist culture after the American War of Independence and the French Revolution was to reconfigure the association between tree-diagrams and ancestry. From representing family dynasty, trees gradually became emblems of British identity.

In 1795, several Lords commissioned *The Genealogical Tables of the Sovereigns of the World* published by the Reverend William Betham. A volume in folio, his compilations represented the pedigrees of all known royal families, beginning with the 'Antediluvian Patriarchs', the British Royal Races and the European nobility. Dedicated to the King, the volume was aimed at celebrating dynastic principles from the Biblical time to the French Revolution. Betham then proceeded to produce the first directory of Baronets that was adorned with extensive 'genealogical tables'. Unlike Guthrie's edition in 1763, Betham included many newly-created titles. He argued that the 262 families of new Baronets deserved to be fully celebrated by recognition in a prestigious publication in five volumes, in quarto. He saw his tables as a way to improve their prestige and to place them on equal footing with more ancient families. While the French republic was waging war on aristocracy, Britain was able to reconcile inherited honour with individual merit. In his directory, principles of continuity and growth were closely knitted together. Moreover, as his compilation was published after the Irish Act of Union, Betham hoped to reflect the unification of a British landed elite. The latter was turned into a powerful interest which survived Pitt's death, thus changing the 'status structure' of Britain (Cannadine, 1994: 23-6).

However, the rehabilitation of family pedigree was not easily done and ultimately was a failure. Betham was confronted by the difficulty of representing an heterogenous social group of old baronets and new comers, including many of Scottish and Irish descent. These families had different expectations as to their sense of relatedness, some willing to chart their lineage as far back in time as possible while other insisted on horizontally displaying their collateral branches. Despite having the same title, these families claimed a different relationship to the past and to ancestry. The use of tree diagrams as a unifying project in support of the loyalist cause conflicted with the increased heterogeneity of the landed elite.

Moreover, unlike the London journalists and hack-writers who composed most of the family directories, Betham was a clergyman based in Suffolk. An outsider in the publishing world, he failed to attract many customers. Unlike narratives or lists of names, pedigrees exposed in a more striking manner his inability to gather sufficient data on recent families. While he could rely on the many previous guides dedicated to the landed gentry, he struggled to obtain any precise data on the recent urban elites in Britain. Some respondents only indicated their male lineage at the expense of the alliances.

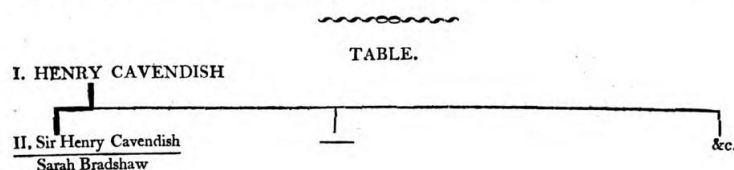


Figure 5: Sir Henry Cavendish.¹⁸

The first and second baronet Cavendish belonged to a prominent family in Derbyshire. The second baronet sat in both the Irish and the British House of Commons and his wife Sarah was promoted to the Peerage of Ireland (Baroness of Waterpark). Betham could not have ignored the considerable status of this Anglo-Irish family but he completely failed to gather enough information about them. For example, he could not name all four children of the second baronet, and listed them simply as: 'Henry', ' _ ', 'Hon. J.', 'Hon. Miss'.

It seems that there was little appetite in the public for these genealogical tables and Betham failed to provide a harmonious and consistent portrait of the British elite. One respondent advised him to print first a draft version of the tables which he would be able to distribute among his 'friends' for corrections.¹⁹ Despite this assistance, Betham's tables were incomplete and faulty. This major obstacle, along with the high selling price (four guineas for a 'common paper' £4.4sh) of his *Baronetage*, accounted for the commercial failure of his project. He was forced to sell his copyright to William Millar, a London bookseller who launched in 1804 a pocket edition devoid of any chart. John Stockdale, a London publisher of family directories also refused to publish any pedigree as 'it is the amount of places and not persons that is wanted' by the public.²⁰ Stockdale saw that the main purpose of his guides was to link the names of the social elites with their address in towns and countries. It was not only family trees which became irrelevant, but also the appeal of luxury family directories.

After 1810, the trend was decidedly in favour of pocket directories which did away with trees. Prestigious families were 'pigeon-holed' into similar categories, thus being deprived of any singularity. In the introduction, we have seen that the *Annual peerage of the British Empire* (1827) by the Innes sisters was guided by similar principles. Trees were losing their relevance as a structuring device for the British elite, while achieving ever greater success in their application to natural sciences and biology. In terms of wider political usage, trees - like other natural elements in the British landscape - were used as national metaphors. Alongside rivers, seas and mountains, as well as dynastic symbols such as mansions, paintings and parks, trees were becoming part of a national heritage. Reflecting on this phenomenon, Linda Colley argued it was part and parcel of a distinctive British identity: 'Only in Great Britain did it prove possible to float the idea that aristocratic property was in some magical and strictly intangible way the people's property also' (Colley, 1992: 177).

Particularly important here was the 'royal oak'. Since the Civil War of the 1640s, this tree had either been linked to the Stuart dynasty directly, or broadly speaking was taken to symbolise the constitution based upon the Crown, the Church and the law.²¹ In the 18th-century, it was often associated with the Tories and later gained a more inclusive meaning during the revolutionary wars. To counter the American or the French liberty trees, the royal oak in the loyalist culture came to become closely associated with Britannia. In 1793, Isaac Cruikshank opposed in his caricature *French Happiness. English Misery*, starving Frenchmen next a tiny sprout named 'Tree of liberty' to plump English feasting under a tree loaded with fruits (Brewer, 1986: 256). It was also used during the Napoleon Wars as an emblem of the British identity: the strong British oak contrasted with the dynastic 'pippin trees' shrubs of 'little Corsican Gardiner'.



Figure 6: James Gillray, *New Dynasty - or- The Little Corsican Gardiner Planting a Royal-Pippin-Tree* (1807).

Napoleon was shown trying to plant an old-fashioned aristocratic tree with several medallions. The roots were tied in a bag with the inscription ‘William the Norman Robber’ and the branches carried the name of various English traitors: ‘Robert Hungerford, beheaded. 1406’ or ‘Countess of Salisbury’ decapitated in 1541 for her involvement in the catholic plot. In contrast the ‘royal oak’ was no longer linked to a dynasty. It bears instead British and constitutional emblems: monarchy, protestant faith, ‘integrity of the Lord’, ‘independence of the Commons’ and ‘liberty of the press’. Unlike the shallow-rooted Corsican pippin-trees planted on foreign soil, the royal oak had become a national sanctuary. It was in vain that the usual enemies of the State, such as Catholics, or unpatriotic Whigs, were trying to cut it down. After Waterloo, in 1815, Napoleon’s pedigree was no longer compared to a tree but to a bunch of violets growing on dungs and mushrooms, evanescent and soon to be erased from history.²²

The demise of aristocratic pedigree still generated hostile comments, but these were marginal. Sir Egerton Brydges, a publisher of voluminous *Peerages* denounced the commercial success of these plain pocket directories. In his autobiography, he claimed to descend from the Norman barons and compared his family to a ‘naked trunk’, a relic of a former chivalric age:

We have stood with difficulty the waves and weathers of time, and have many a hard battle to fight. We have been stripped of our foliage, and our arms mutilated and laid bare: the naked trunk only remains – hoary, knotted, and barkless; shaking to the blast, and its roots uncovered; often exposed to the blows of the axe, which has hitherto rebounded from it.²³

The passage is indicative of a nostalgic impulse for a dying emblem. This was a lonely voice from a rather discredited author who refused to accept the profound reconfiguration of social elites in the post-revolutionary period.

Conclusion

A long 18th century constitutes a relevant time frame to account for the transition between an early modern period, which was defined by an exuberant material and visual culture around pedigrees and a Victorian era, in which the use of family trees became marginalised. While they still adorned many county histories and antiquarian periodicals, they had disappeared from the most successful family directories. It would be tempting to assume that the commercialisation of genealogical knowledge led logically to the disappearance of tree-diagrams. However, a close study of these guides reveals a different picture. In mid-eighteenth-century Britain, the celebration of patriotic ideals was combined with a renewed dynastic culture, which did not only apply to the landed elite but to a larger body politics. In the context of the Revolutionary and the Napoleonic wars, trees not only came to represent the endangered lineages of titles families but also a British entity. This shift clearly demonstrated that politics and state-building play a role in the public modelling of kinship (Erdmute *et al.*, 2021).

By the same token, objects generated by the commercialisation of genealogical practices open up encouraging prospects. Renewed attention has been given to various object such as bibles, directories or portraits which have been explored in several collective volumes (Eickmeyer, Friedrich, and Bauer, 2019; Jettot and Lezowski, 2016). Most London publishers did away with ancient and patriarchal pedigrees, providing instead the latest data on a restricted family relatedness which better suited to customers' expectations. However, the need for practical directories for mundane and practical reason conflated with the desire to see one's name in luxury and appealing compilations. Pedigrees were still as visually appealing and imbue with social exclusiveness. In Modern Britain, the figure of the toppled tree in aristocratic estates kept its evocative strength. Sebald in the *Rings of Saturn* alluded to his visit to Ditchingham Hall, in Suffolk and his witnessing of the final destruction of its trees through drought and storm (1998: 206):

I still remember that I did not believe my eyes when I looked out again and saw that where the currents of air had shortly beforehand been pouring through the back mass of trees, there was no just the paleness of empty horizon. It seemed as if someone had pulled a curtain to one side to reveal a formless scene that bordered upon the underworld.

Unlike Brydges, Sebald did not grieve the end of the aristocratic tree. Even set in an exclusive estate, his toppled trees had lost a great part of their dynastic significance to attain a more universal feeling of loss and homelessness.²⁴

Notes

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1. (Innes, 1827: 34). On the commodification of ancestry in general, see my forthcoming book by Oxford University Press.
2. For the 19th century, David Warren Sabeau and Simon Teuscher pointed out the importance of ‘horizontalization of relationships, fostered by new emphases on cousinship, repeated marriages within well-integrated kindreds, and a new valence given to in-law relationship’ (Sabeau and Teuscher, 2013: 6). On the notion of ‘kinship-hot society’, see Mathieu, Sabeau, and Teuscher (2007: 3).
3. See the roll for the Heveningham family in 1509, College of Arms, MS 13/7 or the two-metres high tree ornamented by Isaac Oliver, Sackville Pedigree, London, Victorian and Albert Museum, MSL.41-1981; A painted and decorated family tree pedigree for the marriage of Lady Magdalen Egerton (d. 1664), The Huntington Library, HM 68179.
4. (Anderson, 1732).
5. Ibid., dedication.
6. *Royal Genealogies*, Table DXV, p. 770.
7. Ibid., Table DVI, p. 761.
8. The connexion between family and biblical tree has been noticed by many historians, whether in a positive (Tree of Jesse) or in a negative sense (Tree of knowledge) (Bouquet, 1996: 48-51).
9. *The Spectator*, October 1, 1711, n°203.
10. ‘The failure of inquisition *post mortem*, by the abolition of military tenures, combined with the negligence of the heralds in omitting their usual progresses, has rendered the proof of a modern descent, for the recovery of an estate or succession to a title of honour, more difficult than that of an ancient’ (Blackstone, 1775, Vol. 3: 106).
11. Sir Mark Pleydell to Wotton, 26 March 1742, British Library, Add. Ms 24121, f. 172.
12. Sir Henry Nelthorpe to Thomas Wotton, 1741, British Library, Add. Ms 24121, f. 124.
13. Sir Roger Beckwith to Thomas Wotton, 18 July 1725, British Library, Add. Ms 24120, f. 46.
14. ‘My own pedigree (since you are pleased to honour me so far as to consecrate my name to eternity, by inserting it among your rare collections) shall be communicated to you by the first convenient opportunity.’ Robert Molesworth to Thoresby, 1705 (Thoresby, 1832, Vol. 1: 445).
15. Linda Colley referred to the ‘dissatisfaction with the moral formal institutions of the state, to a growing belief that they were too hidebound and too exclusive to carry out all the changes that traders wanted’ (Colley, 1992: 100).
16. Avito frondet honore, 'Publish'd for J. Ridgway N° 196 Piccadilly 1785, BM: J.2.40.
17. On the definition of honour and citizenship during the French Revolution (Chappey, 2013).
18. (Betham, 1803, Vol. 3: 257).

19. 'Some of my Northern Friends, to whom I shall give the loose copies you are to pull off for me, may know, from their own families, of marriages of some of the men mentioned in the table', Sir Robert Heron to Betham, July 1803, BL, Add. 21033, f. 38- 39.
20. John Stockdale to Noble, July 1799, Oxford, Bod. Lib., Misc. D. 156/2, f. 275.
21. See 'The Royall Oake of Brittain', in *Anarchia Anglicana*, printed by Clement Walker in 1649, London, British Library, E.1052.
22. George Cruikshank, 'The Peddgree of Corporal Violet', June 1815. Bodleian Library.
23. *Autobiography, Times, Opinions, and Contemporaries of Sir Egerton Brydges, Bart. K.T. (Per legem terrae) Baron Chandos of Sudeley* (London, 1831), vol. 2, 183.
24. On Sebald's arboreal imagery, see Bianca Theissen (2006).

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Author biography

Stéphane Jettot is Assistant Professor at Sorbonne University. He has explored the relation between genealogies and collective memories, in notably *The Genealogical Enterprise: Social Practices and Collective Imagination in Europe (15th-20th Century)*, edited with Marie Lezowski (2016) and a forthcoming monograph entitled: *The Milk of Human Kindness. Family Directories and the Commodification of the Aristocratic Past in Britain (1700-1832)* (2023).

