

The Copeman Family of Itteringham

For some time, while doing a full survey of the parish churchyard, we have been intrigued by the stained glass window and the gravestone in the aisle of Itteringham's St Mary's church both in memory of Robert Copeman who was buried in 1832. Who was this man with his now very worn and only partly legible stone; and why was he commemorated in such a prominent place – one of only two stones in the church aisle? Our curiosity was further fuelled by enquiries from Phil Bailey, one of his descendants living in Sydney, Australia who was so interested in his family history that it became the theme of a holiday in the UK during which he stayed at Itteringham Mill. He had researched the family and could tell the story of how Robert Copeman's daughter Pleasance Reid Copeman in October 1828 had married James Browne, Itteringham's tanner and tenant farmer living and working in Bintry Farm. Our friend was descended from James and Pleasance.

He also knew that Robert's son Frederick had become a miller, first at Itteringham Mill, then at Blickling Mill between at least 1845 and 1858, and then at the new steam mill at Dunkirk in Aylsham. From the 1841 census it was clear that the surviving Copeman family, headed by Frederick, then lived at what is now White House Farm in Itteringham and the 1839 tithe award showed Frederick, in addition to his milling interests, farming the neighbouring fields as a minor tenant of Lady Suffield (the Blickling estate) and a more substantial tenant of The Earl of Orford (Lord Walpole's Mannington and Wolterton estate). Phil had also discovered that Robert had married Blanche Lee Case of Great Fransham in 1792 (he knew plenty about her family too) and he knew the birth dates and places of most of their children in and near to Norwich. The Norwich Freemen list available at the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) showed that Robert had been a hatter and hosier.

But why did Robert end up in Itteringham; and more importantly where did he come from and what were his family origins? The Copeman family tree trail was cold before Robert and Blanche's wedding.

Our interest also lay in the coincidence of Robert Copeman of Itteringham and the more well known Robert Copeman of Aylsham - founder of Copeman Bank, lawyer and Clerk of the Peace for Norfolk - being contemporaries. They were definitely different people but were they related in some way?

And while we were at it, was our Robert (let us call them RC of Itteringham and RC of Aylsham for short) related to the Copemans of Norwich who, from origins in Hemsby and later as merchant grocers, became one of the founding families of what is now Archant Group and the Eastern Daily Press?

Both the Aylsham and Norwich Copemans have had very thorough family trees prepared (the one for the latter published in Norfolk Genealogy volume 13; the one for the Aylsham group written up by Nicholas Tyrell-Evans as 'The Copeman Family Tree 1538-1998' and focused on the descendants of Robert Copeman of Sparham 1711-1779 and privately available to members of the Copeman family). However, neither tree showed any Itteringham connection.

And finally we had come across a very small clutch of Copemans in Itteringham between the 1730s and the 1750s or so. There was no sign in the parish registers that they had stayed and survived as a family in Itteringham and certainly no evidence to connect them to our Robert. But could we show a link nonetheless?

So, with all the makings of a fine genealogical mystery, we could not resist doing further research. This article tells the story of what we found about the Copemans of Itteringham prior to the death of Robert in 1832. It is structured around three questions:

1. Who was our Robert, where was he from and was he any relation to the Copemans of Aylsham?
2. Was Robert a relation of Itteringham's eighteenth century Copemans?
3. Was Robert a relation of the Norwich/EDP Copemans and their predecessors in Hemsby Hall?

The main article covers the story of Robert of Itteringham and those related to him. For convenience this is in a downloadable pdf file. There is also a massive family tree with various notes embedded in it which is also in a separate file. This is written in Family Historian 3 – see their website for getting this excellent but inexpensive family tree software: www.family-historian.co.uk. It is a gedcom file and apparently should be readable by any software using this file format – for example it opens happily in Roots Magic and Brother's Keeper. This tree contains a lot more Copeman BDMs and will contents than are covered in the article, so it is well worth getting access to it and looking at the notes boxes as well as the tree itself. This includes an outline of our hypothesis for the mass of data on Foxley, Lyng and Bawdeswell (so much of the story rotates around Themelthorpe and surrounding villages) and even takes us to Great Yarmouth, Stalham, Knapton and Paston and beyond. In addition we have included as another downloadable item a picture file which shows everyone in the family tree – too large to show as a picture on the website itself.

There is also another shorter article focused on the evolution of the Copeman surname, which has further detail on both the name and our family. This also is on the website as a downloadable file.

The appendix to this main article lists some of the documents and family wills examined – the latter were particularly essential to our detective work given the very patchy survival of registers for the villages we are most interested in. Not that many wills have survived either for some parts of the Copeman clan.

The family tree that we have arrived at is a reasonable hypothesis - or simply a guess in some parts. However, all guesses are flagged and our rationale is explained for the assumptions made from the clues available. Precise dates mean entries in registers or Archdeacon's Transcripts and are thus generally baptisms and burials not births and deaths. Years without a precise date usually mean that this has come from a will; estimates are flagged as such. Copeman spellings have been standardised on the modern form and the many older variants ignored for the sake of simplicity in this article and attachments (but see the other article on the evolution of the surname). For what it is worth the whole tree manages to find a place for very many of the BDMs and will contents that we have found. This has increased our confidence in the tree, but we are only too happy to receive any corrections, new facts or better theories as to how it all fits together. Fortunately, most of our uncertainty lies in the side branches rather than in the main trunk of the tree going back in time from our Robert of Itteringham.

We hope that this article will be of interest to all those who want to know more about Itteringham's history; to those who are named Copeman or are related to the family; and to those who are simply interested in how widely a Norfolk family can spread from its origins in a single Norfolk village. Yes, we did find some interesting connections. Read on for the full story and please let us know of any new facts or ideas.

1. The Life of RC of Itteringham and his Antecedents

The clues to his origins start with the gravestone – see the Itteringham churchyard survey page. Though the stone is now badly worn, we are lucky that a nineteenth century

antiquarian's notes on Norfolk memorials survive in the Norfolk Record Office (NRO Rye MSS 52) and give us the original text of his stone in full.

In remembrance of
Robert Copeman
late of this parish
and during a long period
an earnest churchman
inhabitant of the City of Norwich he died
sincerely regretted by his
family and friends the
14th of March 1832 aged 77 years
Also of
Blanche Lee his wife
who died Jny the 14th 1840
aged 68 years

There is also a stained glass window on the north side of the church which includes the following text:

To the beloved memory of Robert Copeman who died March 14th 1832
aged 77 years and Blanche Lee his wife who died Jny 14th 1840 aged 68
years by their surviving daughters

Robert made a short will in September 1831 (NRO, NCC 1831 513 Cooke) which was proved in September 1832. He left all his estate, farming stock and effects to his wife Blanche Lee and his three sons Edward James, James Robert and Frederick. All four were made executors and were required to carry on the business of the farm to the benefit of his wife. Witnesses were his two servants Sarah Sparrow and Ann Barwick – good Itteringham names. From census entries and directories we know that Frederick continued to farm in Itteringham. We also know that in 1854 he agreed to lease 44 acres of Blickling Park – he remained committed to the area.

But this tells us little about the family and its origins. James Robert, we know from the Norwich Freeman list, was a lawyer and it seems quite possible that this was the James Robert Copeman attorney at law of the City of Worcester who died at the end of 1840 leaving in a terse will (The National Archive, Prerogative Court of Canterbury 1840 Prob11/1937) everything to his wife Sarah. Again no family clues. Although this will does not refer to any children, his brother's 1853 will says his brother James had children. So it is just possible that this Worcester Copeman is not our man. However, the two first names and occupation are quite compelling and he may not have felt the need to leave anything specifically to his children.

Edward James was a little more forthcoming in his 1853 will (TNA, PCC 1853 Prob11/2180) in which he made his wife Sophia (born Fisher) and his brothers in law James Brown (the final e comes and goes!) and Daniel Spurrell executors. He left lands to be sold in Thurgarton, where he was living as a gentleman, and in East Ruston. His house and lands in Itteringham he left to his brother Frederick. The painted window in his house and his shares in the Salisbury Gas Company were of importance to him but do not help us. But his bequests show us who were responsible for our Robert's 1832 gravestone and window:

- Edward's sister Ann Blanch Law, widow (she had married Joseph Alfred Law 5/10/1830 in Norwich St Gregory's)
- The children of his sister Pleasance Reid the wife of James Brown (they had married 9/10/1828 in Itteringham)
- His sisters Mary Copeman, Harriet Copeman and Jane Copeman

- The children of his deceased brother James

He asked to be buried near his first wife's grave in Roughton (burial there 3/4/1853, age 59). He had married Mary Joy there 21/8/1833. His first wife Mary left a will made in 1842 (NRO, NCC 1843 447 Miles) in which she left to her husband the £1,000 trust fund she had received in her marriage settlement. She referred to him as Edward James late of Coltishall merchant, but now of Thurgarton gentleman. The progress from trade to landed yeomanry and gentry is a feature of this family. And while he was living in Thurgarton his sister Sarah Frances married Daniel Spurrell Esquire of Bassingham Manor Thurgarton. We will see that nearly two centuries earlier there had been Copemans in Thurgarton, so a nice coincidence here.

So the structure of Robert and Blanche's family is becoming clear. Blanche Lee Case was born in August 1772 into a family with lands in Great Fransham and elsewhere in western Norfolk. Her parents were Edward and Ann Case. Her father had died at age 46 in 1781. It is possible that his widow and children may have then been looked after by either his uncle Edward or his wealthy uncle Philip. Edward's father was Thomas a tanner who left a will in 1755. Thomas's grandfather was an Edward Case a butcher in Necton who left a will in 1700.

So, Blanche Lee's family had their origins in butchery and tanning and she may well have met Robert through a family connection since his origins too are in the butchery business not far from Necton and Great Fransham. On the other hand it might be more romantic to imagine that she came to Norwich to buy a hat and met him that way!

She married our Robert in Great Fransham in 1792 when she was a single woman of Great Fransham and he was a single man of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich. They then proceeded to have a large family, with what seems to be quite a good survival rate through infancy, perhaps moving to an ever larger house as the family grew and his business flourished:

- Edward James baptised 2/6/1793 Norwich, St Simon & St Jude.
- Ann Blanch baptised 25/10/1795 Norwich, St Simon & St Jude.
- James Robert baptised 9/2/1797 Norwich, St Andrew (admitted freeman 1826 as an attorney at law and as son of Robert Copeman hatter).
- Robert William baptised 18/11/1798 (born 11/9) Norwich, St Michael at Plea (assume died young).
- Mary baptised 29/5/1801 Norwich, St Andrew.
- Pleasance baptised 5/1/1804 (born Dec '03) Norwich, St Andrew (Pleasance is an interesting name – there were people with that surname in Sprowston at this time. Was that the origin?).
- Harriet baptised 23/6/1805 (born 31/5) Norwich, St Andrew.
- Frederick born 20/2/1807 and privately baptised 15/3 Sprowston.
- Jane born 4/11/1808 and privately baptised 4/12 Sprowston.
- Catherine Case born 15/12/1811 and privately baptised 19/1/1812 Sprowston.
- Blanch Lee baptised 31/7/1814 Sprowston, when Robert is described as a farmer. (As an aside a William Copeman married Martha Withers in Sprowston in 1813. We do not know who he was and clearly more research on the set up in Sprowston is needed).
- Sarah Frances baptised 13/7/1817 Itteringham, by which time Robert is styled gent.
- Robert William baptised 15/8/1819 Itteringham and buried there 16/2/1842 age 21 having been a lodger at Itteringham Mill in 1841.

Our Robert was a hatter and hosier in Norwich, admitted to the freedom of the city 21/9/1784, not apprenticed (ie, he probably bought his way into the freedom, but would have had to be a capable hatter and hosier nonetheless). There are multiple references to his trade in the freemen records and in family wills. Assuming he was born in 1754-55 (age 77 in 1832) it seems that he might well have been apprenticed to this or a related weaving trade perhaps

from the typical age of 14 for 7 years. He would have had to learn the trade somehow, even if a formal apprenticeship was not the route to the privileges of the freedom of the city.

When he got married in 1792 he was of St Peter Mancroft and at 37 was much older than his young bride. But this reflects the times – someone in trade would usually marry in their late twenties or well into their thirties once they had completed their apprenticeship, developed their trade and had become able to support a family. We have found no evidence of an earlier marriage.

He may well have lived for some time in St Peter Mancroft – one of the major weaving and cloth trade centres in Norwich. In the 1750s there was a Copeman family living there and we assume that this may be more than coincidence. George and Anne Copeman had 5 children baptised there between 1748 and 1762 and may have been related to Robert's parents. That most of their children died very young at least shows that they might have had room for the young Robert at some time from about 1770. However, we have not yet been able to prove such a link, although there is a line of Georges identified in the tree in Foxley who just might be the source of this Norwich man, making him therefore a distant relative of our Robert.

Various Copemans feature in the city's apprentice and freemen records. In the 18C admissions include:

- John Copeman cordwainer 1755
- William Copeman glazier 1713
- Robert son of William 1746
- Joseph and William Copeman 1740 as worsted weavers

Interestingly there were also members of the Case family in the city mentioned in the freemen list. Although no link has yet been found, possibly these were relations of Blanche Lee – William Case tailor 1721, Thomas Case 1767 and William son of William Case tailor 1773.

But wherever we searched potentially relevant older parish registers in the city we found no evidence that our Robert came anciently from a city family. It began to look as though he was the younger son of a country family sent to the city to make good, if he could, via trade.

Indeed his shift to farming in Sprowston and his subsequent arrival in Itteringham as a tenant farmer made it seem quite likely his heart was in the countryside. To the end he seems to have remained a farmer. He appears as a tenant in a number of entries in the 1820s in the estate accounts for Wolterton/Mannington in the Walpole family papers held at Wolterton Hall.

At one point it seemed possible that Blanche Lee's brother Thomas Henry Case might hold the secret as to why Robert came to Itteringham. His family apparently had good connections to the Townshends and Walpoles and it is possible that through the latter he heard of a farm to let in Itteringham. On the other hand perhaps Robert Copeman heard of the farm to let from his Aylsham namesake? The Walpole/Orford estate accounts held at Wolterton Hall are incomplete and in particular have a gap from 1802 to 1816. But the Michaelmas 1816 accounts show Mr [Robert] Copeman paying £320 rent and the same again in the 1820 accounts. So we can be sure that Robert came to Itteringham after the birth of his daughter in Sprowston in 1814 and before the autumn of 1816. There were no Cases as tenants of Orford then or in the 1826 accounts and so we can be confident that Robert came to Itteringham well before the Cases.

Correspondence archived at Wolterton shows that in 1826 Robert Copeman had negotiated unsuccessfully with the owners of what is now Hill Farm on the Blickling side of Itteringham. At that time it had come into the ownership of a Miss Long of Dunston, whose father rejected the price Copeman offered. He also refused a direct offer from Orford and indeed failed to get his

target price at auction in 1826. Miss Long held the farm (with George Cook as tenant for 12 years from 1827) for a few years until it was sold to the Blickling estate in February 1832. No doubt Robert was disappointed at this deal in the month before he died.

In 1831 Robert Copeman paid £324 rent to Orford and Mr Case £181. This seems from a later comment in the same accounts to be James Case, who would be James Lee Case, Thomas's son. An undated document of about 1830 shows Robert renting 209 acres in Itteringham from the Orford estate and Thomas Case renting 203 acres in Itteringham. It seems that Thomas Case moved away in about 1830-31 and his son James Lee Case took over his lease fleetingly before concentrating on his main occupation as mill book keeper in Aylsham (where he was buried in 1898 age 89). White's Directory for 1845 shows Thomas Henry Case and William Case (another son or cousin/nephew?) as farmers not far away in Hevingham and at some point between 1854 and 1861 Thomas appealed against his poor rate charge in the petty sessions. Thomas Henry Case died in Hevingham in 1857 age 83. His family seems to have stayed there with his son also Thomas Henry being buried there in 1884 age 77. One of the Copeman women was also buried there and quite a number of Cases – see the tree for more details.

So Robert Copeman was in Itteringham well before the Cases, who may have arrived and taken over the Orford farm lease that had been held by John Jarvis and who died or moved away at some point in the 1820s. We cannot be sure where in Itteringham the Cases lived, but by a process of elimination it seems highly likely that it was in what is now known as the Old Rectory just to the north of the church. This had not always been the rectory and at this time our Rector's primary benefice was in London anyway. So this reasonable size house was almost certainly available to rent and might logically have gone with the second largest Orford farm in Itteringham. The land was probably largely in the area between the Barningham and Wolterton roads, but might also have included land on the Saxthorpe side of the parish.

In 1832 Robert's son Edward had taken over his lease and he was still farming in 1835 and 1836. At some point it seems that the Copeman's farm grew slightly to just over 230 acres – a respectable and typical larger tenancy on this estate, but not the largest. By 1840 the lease was held by Frederick who paid £325 for the land and £100 rent for Itteringham mill. The 1832 to 1840 accounts have no Cases renting Orford land in Itteringham or elsewhere.

Apart from the fleeting possibility of the Long estate there was no available land to buy freehold in Itteringham or its immediate surrounds (such was the grip of the Orford and Blickling estates) and in the 1839 tithe award Robert's son Frederick only owned a cottage and 1 rood of ground as opposed to the 200-plus acres he rented. Edward Copeman (Robert's son, Frederick's brother) also owned only a cottage in Itteringham in 1839. Both these cottages and their tiny gardens were on Itteringham Common where the Methodist chapel and adjoining cottages are now. They had been acquired from the Playford family in the 1830s; these were not long standing Copeman properties.

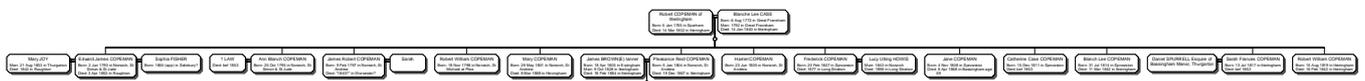
Given the original move out of the city to Sprowston, did Robert's family originally come from there perhaps? No, there are no register entries to support that idea. But occasional references may imply that Sprowston was the home village at the time for more than one Copeman family and possibly some of the Cases also. A Mary Case married Ezra Burrell there in 1817. However, we do not know where or whether she fits into our Case family.

In 1804 an Edward Copeman is admitted to the freedom of Norwich as a hatter and hosier, not apprenticed. By a process of elimination we are sure this was our Robert's brother. It may also mark the point at which Robert plans to move out of trade and into farming, bringing his brother in to run the Norwich business.

Edward Copeman made his will in 1820 (TNA, PCC 1823 Prob11/1666) and it was proved in February 1823, although he had died in Aylsham in 1820. He described himself as a gent of Aylsham (by now presumably retired) and made as executors his wife Anne, his brother Robert Copeman of Itteringham gent and Benjamin Reeve of Waynford(?) Suffolk gent. Perhaps she was a Reeve? Anne is looked after for life (£50 cash, £500 invested and use of the household stuff) with everything else going to Robert's children after Anne's death. The will also required messuages and lands in East Dereham and Scarning to be sold off. Anne died in Aylsham in 1834 without leaving a will as far as we can tell. Just to add to our confusion Edward's will was drawn up by Messrs Copeman and Parmeter of Aylsham and witnessed by two of their clerks and Robert Copeman of Aylsham himself. The Itteringham and Aylsham Roberts certainly knew each other, but were they related?

Where else to look for rural origins? The family tree of RC of Aylsham shows that line as coming from Sparham. It seemed worth looking there even though the tree did not show our Robert. Success! The Sparham register shows that a Robert Copeman was baptised there 5/1/1755 – spot on for our Robert's age at death.

So here is an extract from the full tree, particularly for those without access to it, showing Robert Copeman of Itteringham and his immediate family – click on it and blow up to read.

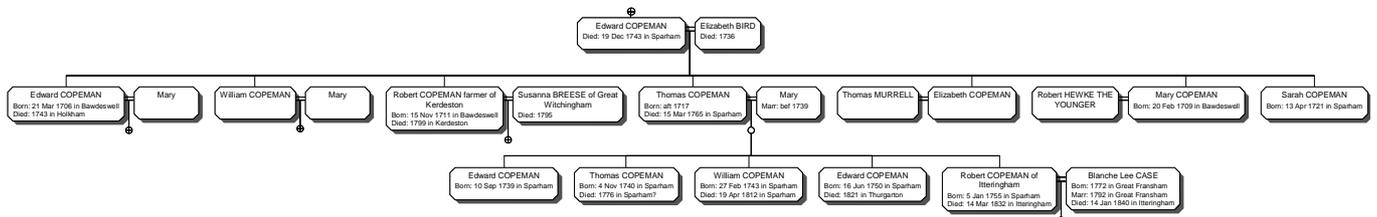


The Copemans of Sparham

It turns out that the two Roberts are close cousins. The family are not anciently from Sparham in fact, but let us start with Edward Copeman who was buried there 19/12/1743. He was pre-deceased by his wife Elizabeth, buried in Sparham 14/1/1737, and by whom he had the following children:

- Thomas – the father of Itteringham Robert
- Edward
- William
- Robert – the grandfather of Aylsham Robert
- Elizabeth
- Mary
- Sarah

Here is another extract from the detailed tree.



While we have not found every register entry for their baptisms, we are helped by the wills of Edward the father (NRO, ANW 1743 161/167); and of Elizabeth 'made with the consent of her husband' (NRO, ANW 1736 134/125); and of Edward senior's brother William who died in Norwich in 1720 but made his will in 1717 (NRO, ANW 1719-20 157). The family structure is clear.

Edward and Elizabeth's children

- Thomas, the youngest son but the most important to us, was born after 1717 and was buried in Sparham 15/3/1765 having died intestate. His wife Mary (the Aylsham Copeman tree says Mary Farrow married 23/9/1731, but we have not yet been able to verify where this happened and the 8 year gap before the first surviving child looks odd) gave birth in Sparham to five children. Mary was buried in Sparham 5/2/1783 as 'widow from Norwich', where presumably she had been living with one of her sons. We have no reason to believe that Thomas and Mary had other children than these, baptised in Sparham:
 - Edward baptised 10/9/1739 and we assume died young.
 - Thomas baptised 4/11/1740 and we assume is the Thomas Copeman buried there 11/11/1776. As yet we have found no evidence that he married or had children and we know no more about him. Did his father run the butchery business? Did son Thomas continue it after his death? At the moment we do not know, but that he seemed to stay in Sparham perhaps implies some connection to the original business.
 - William baptised 27/2/1743 (we have throughout translated January to March dates to the modern calendar) and almost certainly is the WC buried in Sparham 19/4/1812 age 70. Again we know nothing more about him, but if he stayed in Sparham perhaps he too was involved in the family butchery business.
 - Edward baptised Sparham 16/6/1750 and we assume is our Robert's brother referred to already who we think joined his hatting business and subsequently died in Aylsham in 1820.
 - **Robert** baptised 5/1/1755, buried 1832 Itteringham – our Robert.
- William, apparently Edward and Elizabeth's eldest son, was baptised in Bawdeswell 6/6/1703 and had sons Thomas and William alive in 1717. Beyond that we know nothing about him and the Tyrell-Evans Aylsham tree omits him altogether. As the eldest son he would have stood to inherit either the family butchery business or his father's lands or both. A William Copeman victualler died in Aylsham in 1787. Perhaps it was him since it is arguably a small step from butcher to victualler, although this would have made him quite an old man at death. So perhaps it was his son William, but the will does not give enough clues to make the link for sure. In any event he appears to have died without issue, leaving his Aylsham property to his wife Elizabeth.
- Edward was baptised by Edward and Elizabeth in Bawdeswell 21/3/1706. In the 1740/43 will he is cited as having 2 children. He died in Holkham leaving a will in 1743 (NRO, ANW 1743 51/59) which mentioned his brothers William, Robert and Thomas and his father Edward. His estate went to his two daughters Ann and Mary – the very decent sum of £400 each at 21 years old – and the residue to his wife Mary who was also the executrix. The will cites no occupation, so we assume no involvement in the Sparham butchery business.
- Robert was baptised 15/7/1711 in Bawdeswell and buried in 1779 in Kerdeston where he was a farmer (and no sign of being a butcher) and parent of a large brood of children many of whom ended up in Aylsham. He was the grandfather of **Robert of Aylsham**, the banker and contemporary of Robert of Itteringham and who died in 1846. We do not propose to go in to detail on the Copemans of Aylsham here, but a little more information is in the tree.
- Susanna baptised 14/2/1699 Bawdeswell, we assume she died young as she is not in any of the wills.
- Elizabeth baptised 9/2/1702 Bawdeswell, married Thomas Murrell a farmer of Twyford. Again it may not be just a coincidence that there are Murrells in St Peter Mancroft in Norwich at the time our Robert goes there.
- Mary baptised 20/2/1708 Bawdeswell, married Robert Hewke (the registers are consistently Hewke not Hawke) the younger a wheelwright of Hackford.
- Sarah, the youngest, baptised 13/4/1721 in Bawdeswell.

The parents' wills tell us more. Edward in 1735 was a butcher in Sparham and by 1743 he had progressed to yeoman status. Since butchery is a major feature of the Copeman clan it is

worth a short digression on what a butcher might have been in the 18C and 17C. He was probably a rather more substantial man than someone just running a single butcher's shop. We should have in our mind someone who may have had multiple outlets at various markets, who would probably have been involved in fattening animals perhaps on his own land (hence the shift to yeoman status) and who would have done the slaughtering work and would have dealt in skins and furs with the local tanners and others. All in all a butchery family could have been quite well off and likely to own and rent farm land. This was a trade of substance in a rural environment and very close to the land.

The Copeman family in the 17C and early 18C crop up as butchers in just about every village in and around Themelthorpe, which turns out to be the epicentre of the clan. The landscape all around here was heavily influenced by water meadows and pastures along the river Wensum and its many tributary streams and meadows, and by common grazing and heathland on the upper slopes of the gently rolling countryside. Faden's map of the late 18C still shows a heavy occurrence of commons and heath land in the area. In this environment focused on animal husbandry, the dominant butcher family would have had a very healthy business supplying meat and other produce well beyond the immediate locality.

Edward gave his son Thomas all his goods, cattle, stock and utensils of husbandry so that at the expiration of the lease of the farm he 'now lives in' they can be used to fund a number of legacies - £5 each to his own children and 10/- each to all his grandchildren to buy every one of them a lamb (farmer and butcher to the last!). He gave his interest in a house in nearby Lyng on Colehill Green, late George Bird's, to his son William. This is relevant as Edward's wife was Elizabeth Bird, and we assume George's daughter. Edward was also keen to look after his youngest daughter Sarah. She had the furniture in her own chamber, Edward's horse and saddle and a bullock in addition to her share of his money along with her siblings (but she got an extra £30 besides). She also had had a trunk and a chest of drawers in her mother's will.

It is clear that a significant family asset was another property in Lyng that appears in both Elizabeth's and Edward's wills. Taking the two sources together we can see that they owned an inn called The Sign of the Fox in Lyng, probably inherited from the Bird family (no Bird will yet found though to confirm this; nor any marriage in the Lyng register). In both wills it is in the occupation of Giles Davy – the Copemans were not publicans it seems. The proceeds from its sale after Edward's death were to go to all the children equally divided. Reference was also made to legacies in the will of Susanna the late wife of Bartholomew Rippingall gent of Bawdeswell.

Fortunately their wills survive. Susanna died in 1720 (NRO, ANW 1720 287) and Bartholomew in 1736 (NRO ANW 1736 12/14). When made in 1718 her will tells us that her husband was a grocer of Bawdeswell and by 1733 he described himself as a grocer and tallow chandler of the same village. Susanna referred back to a deed of 1695 by which for life she and her husband had the use of a messuage, garden and close in Lyng in the use of farmer Wade, which subsequently should pass to her niece Elizabeth Bird the wife of Edward Copeman of Bawdeswell, butcher. The reference to Elizabeth being then a spinster but to marry Edward shows that this deed (which does not seem to have survived) was effectively a marriage settlement for her. This would fit with the dates we have found of Elizabeth and Edward's childrens' baptisms. Elizabeth had in 1695 two unmarried sisters - Mary and Susan – and a sister Anne married to James Muddycliff. By an odd coincidence (!) there was a family with this rather distinctive name in Itteringham in the 1660s. Finally Bartholomew leaves the handsome sum of £30 to Edward Copeman the elder of Sparham, yeoman.

We believe Elizabeth's father was George Bird of Lyng who is thought by Norfolk Genealogy to be a son of the gentry family of Bird in Great Witchingham. The implication of all this is that

Elizabeth came from a family with modest property and farming land and an inn. Perhaps Edward supplied the meat to the inn, they met and the rest is history!

Edward's brother William's will (made in 1717 and proved in 1720) tells us a little more. A worsted weaver of Norwich and aged and infirm he died married but without issue. The reference to his agedness in the context of the times would normally be assumed to mean he was perhaps 60-70 years old when he made the will and would be relevant when we try to work out where and when he was born. He left money to his brother Edward and to his sisters Mary and Martha. Mary was married to John Low (just possibly Law) also a worsted weaver. Martha was then married to another worsted weaver Christopher Mason and her first husband had been a Mr Roddle by whom she had a son John. A range of other nieces and nephews and kin are mentioned, but none at this stage seem to help our story along. William seems to have lived in St Edmund's parish but also gave to the poor of St Giles, where he was buried 23/1/1720. His main beneficiary was his wife Susan (through £200 put out at interest for her for life), who was joint executor with his brother Edward and they shared any residue of the estate.

Interestingly, letters of administration for Anne Copeman of St Edmund's Norwich in 1682 add a little more on our family (NRO, ANW 1682 admon 161). Dying intestate her affairs were placed in the hands of her brother William Copeman of Norwich worsted weaver and her sister Martha Tyler wife of Thomas Tyler of Norwich worsted weaver (so she was married three times). The bond for proper execution of the administration was also sworn by William Copeman, butcher, of Bawdeswell. Anne may have been a contraction from the Susanna who we think died young, or there may have been another sibling whose baptism we have not found.

To lock all of this together we have found that William took on as an apprentice in Norwich 21/9/1677 Thomas Tiler worsted weaver. This would seem to be his sister's second husband to whom she was married by 1682, presumably having had an early and very short first marriage. In 1684 and 1689 William took on further apprentices. It is thought that William was born in about 1647 and this would fit with his taking on an apprentice at age about 30 and the 'aged' wording of his will. Blomefield tells us that he and Susan had grave stones in the nave of St Giles church in Norwich; but he did not record their content and unfortunately they have not survived the Victorian refurbishment of the church.

In any event this piece of the story shows our Copemans profoundly linked to Norwich and the weaving trade there, making it yet more likely that our Robert may have had kin in Norwich by the mid 18C. It also gives us the strongest evidence yet found that the father of Edward, William and the others was William Copeman of Bawdeswell. The relationship is not stated in the administration, but an affluent father standing guarantee would make sense while the siblings living on the spot sorted out Anne's affairs. It is almost impossible to fit Edward and William into the family tree unless they were sons of William of Bawdeswell. The only other possibility would be to link them to the rather shadowy Robert of Barton Bendish, but we have no evidence to support this. In the absence of any better fit we have concluded that they come from William of Bawdeswell.

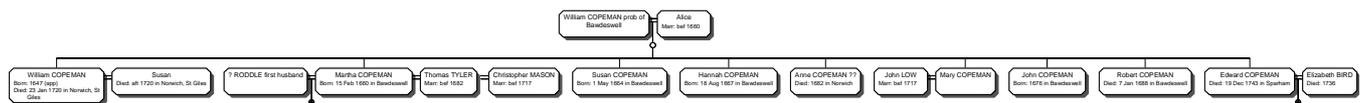
William Copeman of Bawdeswell

Pushing the history back earlier than Edward and Elizabeth is difficult and requires assumptions to be made. This is not a Sparham family through and through, going back into the 16C – the registers for Sparham show no very early evidence of Copemans there. In the detailed tree are the miscellany of baptisms, marriages and burials found that add to those cited above. The Bawdeswell link, already apparent in the baptisms of their first children, is more important. We believe that the William buried there 30/4/1694 and Mary wife of William buried there 30/12/1696 are probably Edward's father and possibly his mother or stepmother

(although she might have been a first wife of William the son). However, even this is an assumption since William the father did not leave a will.

Unfortunately we have not yet found, in the rather messy and gappy 17C Bawdeswell registers (or elsewhere), the baptisms of Edward or William. A William Copeman had three hearths in Bawdeswell in 1663-4, implying someone of greater standing than an agricultural labourer and consistent with a butcher. Through the sixties and seventies William and Alice baptised four children (Martha 1660, Susan 1664, Hannah 1667 and John 1676). Another 'son of William' was buried there - Robert in 1688 - presumably of the father rather than of the son? The long gap between Hannah and John could well have seen more baptisms either there or elsewhere and we assume that our Edward was born during this period, making him noticeably younger than his brother William.

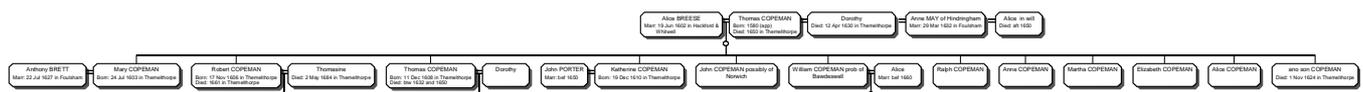
If William junior was 60-70 in 1717 this implies a birth in the 1640s. We have found no trace of this. The tree for the Aylsham line suggests this William was born in 1647, but does not give any source or place for this. We have only found a Godfrey son of a Thomas Copeman baptised in Bawdeswell that year; one of a clutch of children born to Thomas and Alice. And Godfrey died as a child not much later. There was also a William son of Thomas and Margaret baptised 19/8/1650 in Bawdeswell, but this does not readily fit the assumption either; and this is the single reference to a Thomas and Margaret here at this time and so is hard to interpret (see the tree for our Foxley linked assumption). On balance we favour the assumption that William was born about 1647, and hope to find out where.



A miscellany of other Bawdeswell entries take us back to the early 16C and beyond but do not give us any certainty about the William of Bawdeswell origins for our line of the clan. However the circumstantial evidence is strong and it is almost impossible to fit our Edward into any of the other lines of the family. So we assume that William of Bawdeswell the butcher was the father of our line and in turn we assume that he was one of the sons of Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe, butcher, who died in 1650 (a son William is in his will).

Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe died 1650

We have to make some assumptions here too since no Themelthorpe parish registers survive from before the rather late date of 1715, apart from a very few years of ATs. However, Thomas left a will (NRO, ANW 1650 300/323) and this, together with his father's 1616 will, gives us a clear idea of the structure of the Themelthorpe family. His immediate family again is not easy to work out since we appear to have found four wives for this man – see the tree for the detailed facts and assumptions that lead us to the four wives view.



First, what is the evidence that our William of Bawdeswell was the son of this Thomas? Unfortunately it is again circumstantial. Thomas, a butcher himself, had a son William to whom he left his two stalls in Hackford market place. The dates that we can assume for the birth of Thomas's children would work for William on the assumption that he was a younger son. There are few if any other options for who his son William was if not our William of Bawdeswell – for example there is no other matching William in the Hackford and Whitwell registers and no other William unaccounted for in other local parishes for which we have records. No other wills

that we have found mention a William around this time. However, a reasonable status butcher in the adjacent village to Thomas seems a very fair bet to be his son.

Thomas had other sons. Another younger son, Ralph, was given two stalls in Foulsham. The Foulsham registers show nothing on him and he may have lived elsewhere. We know nothing more about him. Another son John is simply mentioned in a list of children and we have not found out anything more about him.

Thomas also had had a son Thomas. Although there was no Thomas junior alive in 1650, there was mention of 'Alice the daughter of Thomas Copeman deceased'. A 1632 Foulsham register entry has Thomas the elder of Themelthorpe marrying. Given the year this must be Thomas d 1650. So in 1632 he had a son Thomas living. We cannot trace a death or will, but the 1637 admon for Thomas Copeman of Foxley seems likely to be this man. Administration of his affairs went to his wife Dorothy. His daughter Alice received a legacy in the 1650 will and no other details are given on this Thomas junior so we assume there were no more children.

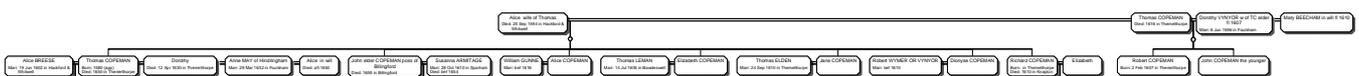
Thomas senior's eldest son Robert was the main inheritor in 1650, another name that recurs among the elder children of this line.

While Thomas senior's wife Alice was allowed to dwell in 'my parlour chamber and my parlour in the house where I now dwell for her life' and had the use of the best bed and bedstead, it is Robert who was executor and received the residue of the goods and all the houses and lands in Themelthorpe and elsewhere (except the stalls mentioned) after the legacies were paid. The provision for Alice is interesting as it supports the idea of a butcher with significant farming activities. She was to receive yearly for life a quarter of all his butter and cheese or whatever the profit on his dairy cows, a quarter part of all his corn now growing, all the corn presently in the chambers of his house, all the wood in his yard and on the common and all the fruit growing on two of his best trees in his orchard.

Thomas also had 5 or 6 daughters (the reference to Alice is in a summary list only and without a specific legacy might be a mistake by the drafter for Thomas's wife). Anne, Martha, Elizabeth and Alice (?) were unmarried in 1650; Mary was married to Anthony Brett (probably relevant later as we shall see when we get to the Stalham/Great Yarmouth section) and Katherine to John Porter.

Robert died in 1661 leaving a will in which his son Thomas inherited and who in turn died in 1727 leaving the inherited family lands in Themelthorpe, Foulsham and Reepham to his wife Mary. This last will referred to his kinsman Edward Copeman of Sparham, thus confirming that our line was closely connected to the Themelthorpe line. The main Themelthorpe line died out with Thomas in 1727; he and his only brother Richard of East Dereham having no children. See the family tree detail and will references for this lot, including their East Dereham offshoot.

Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe died 1616



Luckily Thomas's father's will survives to give us good information on the family another generation back (NRO, ANW 1616 will 58). Made in March 1610 he described himself as Thomas the elder of Themelthorpe, yeoman. Household goods (except his pewter which was to be shared out between his children) and £10 per annum for life were bequeathed to his wife Mary. It seems very probable that she was his third wife (just as he was definitely her second husband). A final clause in the will even effectively said that if she did not do as she should over the next year then she and her children shall not benefit from the will. Her children were

cited as Roger and John Beecham and Mary Ollett and were to receive £20 if she behaved herself.

It seems that all Thomas's own children were by one or other of his two previous wives. And the story is even more confusing – he referred in his will to two sons named John, one 'the elder' and one 'the younger' and they seem have been born to different mothers. While it was not unheard of to name sons by the same name it did not happen that often. Just as well as it makes interpreting wills very confusing!

John the elder was one of the executors, together with a Robert Eldinge and with Thomas Blofield gent as supervisor. The will cited a deed of 1st May (1608) which provided for Thomas's own use for life of certain specified fields (about 15 acres in all) in Themelthorpe which after his death were to go to his son Richard and wife Elizabeth who were the second party, with his son Thomas, John Leman and Richard Heyward gent as the third party (probably trustees and Leman or Heyward possibly father of Elizabeth). In return Richard was to pay legacies not exceeding £200 to his siblings. The will accordingly tells us that Thomas had sons Thomas, Richard, Johns the elder and younger and Robert. He had daughters Alice, Elizabeth, Jane and Dionyse. We know that Robert was born in 1607 to Dorothy, Thomas's second wife; and we assume that John the younger was born to her too. The other children seem to have been born to his first wife Alice – most of them already had several children by 1610.

Thomas received at least some 40 acres of specified lands in Themelthorpe, again being required to pay £200 to his siblings plus £10 a year for life to his step mother Mary. We know that this Thomas carried on in Themelthorpe as the butcher and farmer, with repeated mentions over the years in the court books. Although we have to be careful in interpreting register/court book entries since around the 1610 to 1615 period there were four Thomas Copemans alive in Themelthorpe and the repeated use of the name in most parts of the family means we have many BDMs that we simply cannot be sure to whom they relate. The tree is our best shot at it and explains assumptions in the notes.

Richard does not seem to stay in Themelthorpe (and we are sure he is the Richard who died in 1610 in Knapton), but his sons Thomas and William do have further entries in the court books and Thomas has some children in Themelthorpe. See the notes in the tree for more details. All in all it is clear that this family created the Knapton/Paston/Stalham and thus much of the Great Yarmouth cluster.

The two Johns may well explain the early sightings of John Copemans in Foxley, Bawdeswell and Hackford – see the tree for this.

The references to the daughters of Thomas of Themelthorpe d 1616 tell us little. Alice was married to a William Gunne, Elizabeth to Thomas Leman (a common name in the area and possibly related to the Leman in the deed cited in the will) and Dionyse to Robert Vynyor.

What of the previous generation? Thomas's will tells us that he had a brother Francis who had 'children' and a brother John who may or may not have had children but whose debt of £10 was written off as his bequest. Thomas also had a sister Thomasine married to John Tillney (with children) and Anne married to Christopher Some [or Soame?] again with children in 1610. No other relations were mentioned and unfortunately he does not name any of his nieces and nephews.

But we found another way of getting further back.

John Cockman died 1572

The Themelthorpe ATs for early in the 17C seem to use Copeman and Cokeman/Cockman almost interchangeably (see our separate article giving all the detail on this). This seemed very odd and made us wonder if, despite all the matching first names, they were in fact two different families. However, when we worked on the surviving Themelthorpe and Foulsham manorial court books it became clear that this was the same family and that the name was going through an extended transition from Cokeman or Cockman to Copeman. This was further reinforced by finding exactly the same transition in the Wood Dalling and Knapton court books of the same period. Entries using the two spellings interchangeably were found in both parishes.

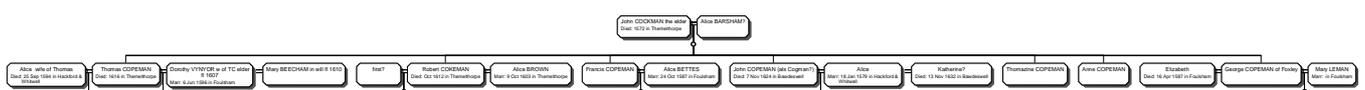
So we looked for Cokeman wills and had success.

John Cockman of Themelthorpe the elder, yeoman, made his will in February 1572 and it was proved the next month (NRO, ANW 1570-2 will 173). His eldest son appears to have been Thomas (our Thomas d 1616) who received lands in Themelthorpe and Kerdeston. Robert appears to have been the next in line from the amount of cash bequeathed. There were also three younger sons: John, Francis and George. He had two daughters: Thomasyne and Anne, both unmarried in 1572.

John's wife was Alice. From his reference to his 'brother William Barsham of Cardeston' she may well have been a Barsham. However, a brief look at Barsham wills has failed to shed any light on this (see the tree).

We also found the will of Robert Cokeman of Themelthorpe yeoman made and proved in October 1612 (NRO, ANW 1612 will 117/160). This was John's son and the brother of Thomas d 1616. Robert had three sons. Thomas the executor and eldest got lands in Themelthorpe, Foulsham and Kerdeston. Robert, probably the second son, got a stall in Foulsham market place. John got a small bequest. His daughters were married: Jane Gerrard and Kathryn Eglington. From this we deduce that all his children were by a first wife, rather than Alice named in the will. She was Alice Brown whom he married in 1603.

So we now have the earliest generation of the tree of which we can be certain:



Earlier Copemans

Before 1572 it is proving impossible to be certain about the family tree. The NRO has deed references for Themelthorpe land involving John Cokeman in 1548 and John Cokeman the elder in 1572. John Cokeman was one of the Themelthorpe senior men cited in the 1552 Survey of Church Goods. We think it quite likely that they are all referring to the same man.

Geoffrey Cokeman of adjacent Wood Dalling left a will in 1506. His wife was Alice. His eldest son was John and another son was Robert. One daughter was Margaret Bell, perhaps the wife of executor Richard Bell of Wood Dalling. The other daughter was named Annabel, with no hint as to whether she was married and so probably not. The property left is very modest and not consistent with a very close relationship to the John Cokeman active at the time. There is no mention of Geoffrey in the Wood Dalling court books around the turn of the century, which supports the hypothesis that he is a junior son and had little land to his name.

It is of course possible that our line could have come from Geoffrey, via perhaps two more generations in between. But more likely is that the line in Wood Dalling went straight through,

via another generation or two of Johns, to the John Copeman who left a will there in 1581. His wife was Elizabeth and his young children were Peter, William and Mary. The property left was again very little. This will again looks like that of a younger son or a minor line of the family. Although this John was a regular attender at the manorial court and his wife appeared and in due course so did Peter. But, this John was not closely related to John Cockman died 1572 – at best they might have come from a common grandfather. The Tyrell-Evans tree wrongly assumes that Thomas d 1616 came from the Peter in the 1581 will. Similarly there is no evidence to support that tree's date of 1530 for John and 1581 for Peter unless these are 'probably alive then' dates.

After this 1581 will we have no evidence to see Wood Dalling as important for the clan. Registers after 1653 show no BDMs for Copemans and the few ATs earlier add nothing. Peter appears briefly in the Wood Dalling court books in the early 1590s after his mother dies. There is a single Themelthorpe marriage of a Barnabeus Copeman to Anne Quashe 9/10/1603 which we cannot explain. Barnabeus also features briefly in the Wood Dalling court books around this time and is associated with a reference to nearby Thurning, where this line of the family may have moved to. Since the Thurning registers also do not survive this idea will be very hard to explore. There are no obvious deed references to Copemans in Wood Dalling after 1581 despite quite good document survival in this parish; and none for Thurning.

But Wood Dalling remains interesting for earlier years. Deeds survive in the NRO showing a Thomas Cokeman there in 1469 and 1475; and a John Cokeman there in 1494. Manorial records confirm a John Cokeman (or two?) was there from the 1480s well into the 16C. See our article on the name evolution for more detail. It is just possible that the family origins lay in Wood Dalling with our line moving to Themelthorpe by the mid 16C.

While they may have come originally from Wood Dalling, we can be sure that the Copemans were a long standing Themelthorpe and Foxley family, with Thomas and his brother(s) already established at the very respectable status of yeoman by 1610-16. From these origins we have focused on the line that leads through to Robert of Itteringham. But there are also a number of other lines that we have tried to write up in the tree. In the next two sections are some details of the more important parts of these side branches of the family.

The Knapton, Stalham and Great Yarmouth connection

Intriguingly there is a clear early connection to a cluster of Copemans in the Knapton, Paston, Stalham and Great Yarmouth area. Wills from 1647 and 1656 from Copemans hereabouts include references to their family owned lands in Themelthorpe, Reepham and Cawston. The Knapton and Themelthorpe court books confirm that Richard (son of Thomas d 1616) and his wife Elizabeth had sons Thomas and William and retained interests in Themelthorpe lands even when they had moved to the Knapton area. We assume, but have not yet been able to prove, that Elizabeth came from Knapton and inherited lands there. See our article on the evolution of the Copeman name for more details of the Knapton branch.

The story starts with Richard Copeman, originally of Themelthorpe, but who died in Knapton. He died intestate in 1610 and his administration survives (NRO ANF 1609-10 A78) with administration of his affairs granted to his wife Elizabeth. Unfortunately the parish registers for Knapton do not survive back this far, so yet again we are a bit limited for precise facts. But the court books filled in some details and helped us to find Elizabeth's will (she had re-married and died in 1623 as E Allen widow – NRO, NCC 1625 will 408 Belward).

Richard was the father of the William Copeman of Paston, yeoman, who died and left a will in 1647 (NRO ANF 1647 170). While then of Paston he asked to be buried in Knapton. The Paston registers survive but show no early Copeman entries, implying that their home had

been Knapton not Paston. He left £20 per annum for life to his wife Mary but died without issue and much of the will was focused on his elder brother Thomas and Thomas's children. Of them the second mentioned is also Thomas (shades of the Themelthorpe run of Thomas as eldest son). The only landed property mentioned was 'all my houses lands and tenements in Themelthorpe Reepham and Cawston which I purchased of my brother Thomas Copeman'. He gave these to Thomas's eldest son Richard (named as first son for his grandfather), whom he also made executor. The link to Themelthorpe is reinforced by a gift of £10 to Thomas Copeman of Reepham cum Hackford. No relationship is given, but the size of the legacy and the name/geographic links very strongly imply a close cousin and we think this Thomas was probably from one of the Johns in the 1616 will – see the tree.

William was quite a wealthy man. His will went on to give £500 to brother Thomas and £50 each to his nephews and nieces the sons and daughters of Thomas – Thomas, John, Ann Colman, Prudence, Mary, Frances, Sara and Elizabeth Fuller. He also gave £100 each to the four children of his wife Mary by her previous marriage – Bartram, Nathaniel, Blyth and Mary Blaxter (perhaps his wife was nee Bartram?). Minor cash bequests in both Thimblethorpe (Themelthorpe's old name) and Knapton and above average gifts to the poor of Knapton and Paston confirm the picture of a man of substance very well connected to our Themelthorpe family.

The Thomas of Hackford seems to us to be closely linked to the Bawdeswell and Themelthorpe family via the brother John cited in the 1616 will (see the tree for more). He was buried 29/10/1648 in Hackford and left a will (NRO ANW 1648 76/76). As by now you might expect, he was a butcher. He left to Dorothy his wife and after her death to his son Robert his house in which 'John Love now dwelleth which I late purchased of Thomas Tomson in Hackford'. Dorothy also got the bedstead in the parlour. Robert also was given his two stalls in Hackford market (probably different ones to the two left to William in the Thomas 1650 will, given the proximity of will dates and differently named recipients of stalls). The residue went to his son John who was made executor and may have been the elder son. Within this, John got 'all those houses I lately built on two small pieces of land, one of which I purchased of Robert Mously and the other of Thomas Tomson and is commonly called the folly' and 'my house or tenement which I late purchased of Christopher Parry, clarke'. This will again shows a man of substantial means and entrepreneurial behaviour – far more than just a butcher.

Back to William of Paston. His brother Thomas did not leave a surviving will, but Thomas's son Thomas did (NRO ANW 1668-9 101), made and proved in 1668. He was a pewterer of Great Yarmouth. The registers there show only a miscellany of 16C Copeman entries and no very early ones for the Copemans – again implying that they were from elsewhere not Great Yarmouth. His house 'where I now dwell in Great Yarmouth' was to be sold within three years together with his household stuff and shop wares and working tools and the proceeds were to go equally divided between his two sons James and Thomas when 21. His executors were to be his brothers in law Thomas Fryer and William Cash, with his cousin Thomas Ellis of Great Yarmouth, merchant, in reserve in case one of them died. His supervisors were to be his brother John and brother in law John Fuller. Among a variety of provisions the most interesting to us is that he gave to John his eldest son all his messuages lands and tenements in Themelthorpe Reepham and Cawston which were then in the use of Anthony Brett (remember that name from the marriage of one of the Themelthorpe girls?) by virtue of a lease in writing, 'which premises my brother Richard Copeman gave to me to hold for my son John when he is 21'. A later clause made clear that Richard had died before 1668.

That was in 1656 and he left a nuncupative or dictated will (TNA PCC Prob11/258) as Richard Copeman of Stalham, Esquire. He gave all his houses and lands in Stalham, Sutton, Hickling and Ingham to his wife Susan for life and then to his brother John Copeman. He gave all his Themelthorpe property to his brother Thomas as long as Thomas renounced all rights to his

Stalham and other lands. The will also added bequests to his sisters, which adds to the information on their married names (too complicated to add into this article/tree, but the family wills can be consulted if anyone needs the detail).

Brother John may also have been a wealthy man. He died in early 1677 as gent of the City of London (TNA PCC 1677 Prob11/353). The will adds yet more on his sisters and some details of his own two wives (see the tree for some of this). The main bequest was to his son John who got all his lands and houses 'in Paston and Bradfield, in Norfolk, now in the occupation of Edmund Allen and Robert Swann'.

We have not attempted to follow through this John junior as the link to our Themelthorpe family becomes tenuous with him (maybe we should in the context of our search for the origins of John Copeman of Itteringham – see later section for this and the Thurgarton cluster). But Thomas of Great Yarmouth's three sons can be tracked. Son Thomas appears to have died relatively young – he was not mentioned in his brother John's will in 1680 (NRO, ANW 1680 will 186). John died a single man and his major concern seemed to be to provide for the education and maintenance of his cousin Elizabeth the daughter of his uncle John of London. The money was to come from the rents from his houses and lands in Themelthorpe now in the occupation of John Brett. The will did not make clear what should happen to the property when Elizabeth reached 21 – no doubt his uncles as executors then faced a tricky family problem as to what to do, but it becomes clear that they passed the property on to brother James. Other details confirm more about John's aunts and their husbands. Small bequests went to the ministers at the congregational church – the first hint of nonconformity in this family and one not so far found elsewhere. The reason may be that uncle John's second wife was Sarah Bridges the daughter of the well known Yarmouth preacher. Another message, in Great Yarmouth, was to pass to his brother James.

James was a mariner of Great Yarmouth and died in 1696 having made a will in 1690 (NRO ANW 1696 321). He left all the property he had from his brother in Themelthorpe Reepham and Cawston to his wife Dinah. And she also had his message at the north end of Great Yarmouth and a half share in The George message (an inn?) assigned to him by his Aunt Fryer in 1689. If he should die without issue (we do not know if he did and have not looked at the registers of the late 17C) Dinah was to pay modest legacies to the children of Uncle John of London at Themelthorpe church porch.

We lose sight of their Themelthorpe property at this stage. But for much of the century the Knapton/Stalham/Great Yarmouth Copemans retained their links to Themelthorpe rather than simply selling off the land and houses.

Other Copemans around the Themelthorpe area

There are yet more Copemans to be explained and most of the facts we have found so far are in the detailed tree. Here is just a taster of the problems still to be solved fully and any work that others have done to add to this would be most interesting to see.

There was a cluster of Copemans in Foxley as shown by the mid-17C wills of John, worsted weaver, and Robert, yeoman, who we believe were brothers and sons of the Robert who died in 1612. The wills are our only major source since the registers have not survived. We are sure that in turn the family of Robert in Lyng also fits into the Foxley group – as a son of John, as an admon for him shows. All the ideas and the facts found so far are in the tree and the notes boxes for each individual.

In the subsidy list of 1663 and the hearth tax of 1663-4 there are references to a Robert Copeman of Barton Bendish. The hearth tax entry is partially obscured, but the first entry for

Barton Bendish is for a Mr Robert –opeman with 9 hearths. This implies a substantial manor house and some wealth. Unfortunately yet again the parish registers do not survive and we have not found a will for this Robert. Nonetheless our belief is that this is highly likely to be the eldest son of the Robert of Foxley. This is given credence by the fact that the Foxley subsidy list shows Robert Copeman of Barton having land and goods in Foxley. Also, as detailed in the tree, deeds relating to Thomas of Sharrington (a weaver who died in 1708) imply that Robert (a butcher) was his brother. We believe both were the sons of Robert of Foxley a yeoman butcher.

In Briston there was a cluster of Copemans in the late 17C and early 18C with Edward as the dominant name. Because we could not place our Edward with absolute certainty we wondered whether he came from the Briston group. Again no full registers survive here much before 1700 and so it is very hard to be sure who is related to whom. However it is hard to fit our Edward into such dates as we do have for the Briston family and there is no evidence that they were in the butchery business. From the hearth tax reference (Edward 3 hearths in 1663-4) they may have simply been farmers or in trade and we guess that they might come from Robert of Barton Bendish since there is no other incidence of the Edward name among our Themelthorpe area groups before the 1660s. The tree has what we have found to date.

Then there are the clusters in Billingford and Mattishall and East Dereham and elsewhere; again see the tree for what we have found and our guesses about relationships. All of these we think can fit in to the Themelthorpe clan without unreasonably big leaps, but our guesses may be wrong.

So although our sources are limited the wills have helped us to form a pretty good picture of the structure of the family. Although there are a few stray register entries that we have not explained our tree covers the majority of all will and register entries that we have found to date in all the parishes discussed. This in itself is circumstantial support for our assumptions.

2. Copemans in 18C Itteringham

So, on to our second question: can we establish any link between the Themelthorpe dynasty and the John Copeman in Itteringham in the 1730s and 1740s?

This is proving very difficult to fathom.

Earlier, in the mid seventeenth century we know that the Themelthorpe clan had a link to Itteringham/Mannington. The Themelthorpe court book in 1641 quotes a document in which Thomas Copeman butcher of Themelthorpe is appointed attorney to deal with a land matter for Charles Potts and his brother Francis and father Sir John Potts of Mannington. It shows that Thomas was a trusted man of substance and it gives a networking link to the Itteringham area.

Much later, we have repeated references to a John Copeman of Itteringham. He crops up as a minor rate payer in the poor law books that survive for Itteringham for the late 1730s and early 1740s (NRO). Various documents in the Walpole papers at Wolterton show that he was a tenant of the Mannington/Wolterton estate, farming a small holding of 30 acres or so and living in Itteringham. He was a 'poor tenant' and had his lease revoked for non-payment of rent in the mid-1740s, but he continues to crop up in the estate accounts for many more years, occasionally buying a horse from the estate and often providing carting or carrying services from Wolterton to Norwich and elsewhere.

The Wolterton papers also refer to him having a brother, probably living in Itteringham or nearby. The estate steward goes to see him, hoping he might have helped with John's rent

arrears. He did not. The estate accounts for the winter of 1741-42 show a huge number of local men employed at a shilling a day to dig the new stew ponds and plant trees in the new parkland around the house at Wolterton. William Copeman works almost every day of the winter at this task and we assume he must have been a sturdy young man and so probably John's brother. There is no further mention of him and no clue as to where he lived. The accounts also refer just once around this time to a George Copeman selling some oat seed to the estate. No details are given to locate him. We assume he may be another brother; but it is also possible that it was an error for George Copland one of the estate tenants. However the papers have not yet yielded any clue as to where any of these Copemans lived. Local registers for surrounding parishes have so far not come up with any answers either.

We also know that for many years in the mid-century a Mary Copeman was the housekeeper and cook at Wolterton Hall for Horatio Walpole. So far we have found no statement linking her to John or the others, but she could be wife or sister of any of them.

When going through the registers of St Peter Mancroft for our Robert's early years in Norwich we spotted a marriage entry: Mary Copeman single woman of Itteringham married Henry Worthy single man of Cley next the sea by licence on 21/1/1744. This implies a family in Itteringham and she may therefore be a daughter or sister of John, since he was definitely resident there that year.

We will write up more from the Wolterton archive on the Copemans in another article in due course in the context of our broader work on the history of Itteringham.

There are no Copeman wills of this era locally to help us and the Itteringham registers do not solve the problem of this Copeman cluster either. They just add to it, particularly since there is a ten year or so gap in the register around 1710-20 just when a cluster of Cobemans or Copemans were being born.

A John Cobeman (the 'b' is clear but it is likely to be an often found phonetic spelling of Copeman at a time when the Itteringham register was badly written and badly kept) was buried in Itteringham 20/6/1728 – possibly John's father or Stephen's teenage son, see below. After this date there are no Copeman or similar entries until our Robert's baptisms nearly 100 years later.

Before 1728 we have Itteringham register references to a Stephen Cobeman or Cobourn (both spellings are used). We have to be very wary of assuming that he is a Copeman, although we have spotted no evidence of Cobeman as a well used surname in north Norfolk. Cobourn of course is a bona fide name and so it may be that all of these entries are for an unrelated Cobourn family. But try saying each surname variant out loud with a heavy Norfolk accent and you will hear the problem! It is worth noting that we have found no Cobourn wills and no other evidence to suggest a family of that name locally.

The patchy ATs show that Stephen Cobemann married Anne Wilson in Itteringham 1st March 1714. This spelling inclines us towards Cobeman/Copeman rather than Cobourn as his original name. They had sons baptised as follows: John 18/4/1714, Samuel 24/9/1720 and James 25/8/1723. There was also an Elizabeth Cobeman baptised 23/6/1714, but as the daughter of Stephen and Margaret. We guess that Margaret is a mistake for Anne and that this may have been a late baptism, perhaps of a twin to John. There may well have been other baptisms in the 1720s when the register is incomplete.

Stephen Cobourn was buried in Itteringham 20/4/1727 and Ann Cobourn widow was buried there 5/12/1755, presumably his wife.

In the late 1680s and 1690s Itteringham had a Francis Cobeman (Cokeman or Cobourn also were used) having children baptised. The sequence starts with the baptism of Stephen 20/9/1689. Mary follows in 1692, Thomas in 1693, James in 1696, Samuel in 1697 and Hannah in 1699. The registers go to and fro between Margaret and Elizabeth as the wives. We think this is bad book keeping rather than two Francis Cobemans in Itteringham at the same time, but we cannot be sure. Before these late 17C events there are no references to any Copemans, Cobemans or Cobourns in the Itteringham registers.

Frankly we have no idea what to make of all this! They may not even be Copemans. If they are, it is not easy to fit them into the Themelthorpe clan tree; although there are various loose ends to branches of the Themelthorpe and Foxley groups from which they could come. There was also a Francis Cogman in Weston Longueville in the 1663-4 hearth tax, whom we are tempted to believe was a Copeman; and who, if so, could have produced the Itteringham Francis. We have to assume they came into the village from elsewhere. Our bet is that they were Copemans and probably offshoots of some kind from the Themelthorpe clan.

More work is needed in the surrounding parishes to see if we can spot anything that helps to tell us more. We have looked at Wolterton, Wickmere, Little Barningham, Erpingham, Calthorpe and Ingworth which yield only a very few further rather tantalising entries. Ann Copeman of Calthorpe married Joseph Smith of Ingworth in Erpingham on 1/2/1754. A John Copeman was buried in Erpingham 27/2/1773 and may of course be the Itteringham John. We need to do a more thorough search of the other parishes in which the Wolterton estate had lands – Saxthorpe, Oulton and Corpusty. Blickling and even Aylsham may also be worth a look.

We must also consider the possibility of a family line coming out of nearby Thurgarton. We know from the papers of Robert Doughty JP (NRS vol 54) that between 1663 and 1665 he had to deal repeatedly with one Thomas Copeman a labourer of Thurgarton. First with 'a general warrant for beating his wife extremely' (presumably modest beating would have been fine!!) and later for stealing timber from Mr Bell of Alby (or Alborough) and for stealing from Anne Pye spinster of Gresham her kettle and wooden dish. On the other hand, a month before the first warrant Messrs Underwood and Crow were had up for beating Thomas Copeman. But then they were estate bailiffs and we might guess that he was given a going over for poaching or theft from lands under their management in Gresham and Sustead.

Thomas was married to Elizabeth and from the parish register we know that they had a daughter Margaret baptised there 26/7/1663 and buried 13/6/1665; but there are no earlier Copeman entries right back to the start of the registers in 1538. So he was not originally from Thurgarton and he has that magic name Thomas, so maybe he was related to the Themelthorpe clan even though as a labourer he would only have been a younger son of a minor line.

Subsequently in Thurgarton we find the burial of Ann Copeman a single woman 2/7/1678 (perhaps a daughter?) and of Elizabeth Copeman widow 22/1/1712 (probably Thomas's wife). There are then no more Copeman register entries right through the 18C. There is however a surviving admon of 1699 (NRO NCC 1699 A17) for Mary Copeman of Thurgarton whose goods and debts are left to her husband Robert Copeman of Thurgarton labourer to sort out. Perhaps he was a son of Thomas. Did Thomas and Elizabeth or Robert and Mary have children that ended up in Itteringham?

Also it appears that there was a Francis Copeman rector of Gresham and Bassingham (the latter is a manor/village now effectively in Thurgarton) for 26 years until his death in 1758 age 64. His wife Susan died in 1768 age 74. Both were buried in Gresham. How might he fit in?

So we are left with the sneaking feeling that since so many of the north Norfolk Copemans can plausibly be connected back to the Themelthorpe/Foxley clan and since outliers seem to have no long history in the villages they are in by the early 18C that they just might all be related. But no proof; no story. Until we know more we have not included any of the Itteringham/Thurgarton data in the family tree. Further research required!

3. Connections to the Norwich/Hemsby/EDP Copemans

The conclusion is probably the same here too: more research needed. The Copemans who came from Themelthorpe to Knapton do not appear to be the source of the Hemsby line. But was there another link from Themelthorpe to the Hemsby line?

We know from the Norfolk Genealogy tree for the Copemans of Hemsby and then Norwich that the line starts with a Matthew Copen or Copeman alive in 1628 in South Walsham and having children then and over the next few years. This makes him the same generation as our Thomas and William, sons of Richard of Knapton. Matthew's children and grandchildren spread over Ranworth, Woodbastwick, Burlingham, Acle and Lingwood before the subsequent generation becomes established at Hemsby Hall. But the only two early wills (of 1687 and 1707) give us little clue to the family structure and are not apparently of particularly well off men.

These parishes are tantalisingly close to our Knapton/Paston/Stalham/Great Yarmouth cluster. Perhaps they were all related? Interestingly the surviving registers in this area and in the South Walsham area show no signs of any Copemans there earlier. Where did the Hemsby line come from? Were they locals or immigrants? If anyone feels like doing a search of all the remaining manorial documents in the area to find any Copeman references please let us know what you find! We are also interested in the hint that there were Copemans in Horstead around 1600. Were they connected?

Also it is clear that the Themelthorpe clan had various links into Norwich, particularly as we have noted into the weaving community – and they were also involved in that trade in various of the home villages. It would be a major undertaking to research all the 17C references to Copemans in Norwich and their descendants in the 18C, but there is a good chance of finding quite a degree of family connections to the Themelthorpe area. Whether any of these in turn were connected to the Hemsby/EDP line we just do not know ... for now!

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Family tree

See the tree written in Family Historian 3 (gedcom file) for a complete attempt at fitting all that we know together. There is plenty of detail in the notes boxes for many of the individuals as well as the more basic BDM detail. This file should open in most good family tree software – it certainly does in Roots Magic and Brother's Keeper.

See also the picture file of the whole tree, without the notes boxes, which should open readily in your standard picture viewer, but which is again too big a file to show directly on the website.

Name evolution

See our separate article on the Copeman name. This adds further detail to that in both this article and the family tree.

Appendix - documents looked at

This appendix is by no means a full description of all the material found but does list the all-important wills consulted. These are not absolutely complete references down to microfilm numbers but are sufficient to identify wills/admons online for the PCC or at the NRO for the Norfolk courts.

PCC wills available online or at the National Archives, Kew (note: at Kew and online they are indexed by the specific spelling in the will, so try Copman, Coapman, Coapeman, Coppman, etc, etc as well as Copeman). We have also searched, to no avail, for all variations of Cokeman and Cogman.

Richard Copeman of Stalham 1656 Prob11/ 258
Robert Copeman of Foxley 1657 Prob11/262
John Copeman of Billingford 1659 Prob11/289
John Copeman of City of London 1677 Prob11/353
Robert Copeman of Aylsham 1803 Prob11/1395
Peter Copeman of Aylsham 1815 Prob11/1570
Edward Copeman of Aylsham 1823 Prob11/1666
Edward Breese Copeman of Coltishall 1828 Prob11/1740
Philip Copeman of Norwich 1828 Prob11/1746
William Copeman of Norwich 1832 Prob11/1805
Robert Copeman of Aylsham 146 Prob11/2037
Edward James Copeman of Thurgarton 1853 Prob11/2180

Martha Hurrell of Aylsham 1839 Prob11/1915
Robert Parmeter of Aylsham 1793 Prob11/1227
Robert Parmeter of Marsham 1831 Prob11/1790

Subject to a further search we think we have found all the PCC wills for Copemans in Norfolk – of course some of the Copemans elsewhere around the country might be connected ... but don't let's go there! Please let us know if you find any that are definitely connected.

NCC wills and administrations (A) at NRO, where they are fully indexed and available on microfilm

Geoffrey Cokeman of Wood Dalling 1506/7

Anne Copeman of East Dereham 1646 A
Ditto, will
Edward Copeman of Little Melton 1841
Goerge Copeman of Wood Bastwick 1707
John Copeman of Mattishall 1727
Joseph Copeman of Holt 1753
Katherine Copeman of Aylsham 1832
Mary Copeman of Thurgarton 1699 A
Mary Copeman of Thurgarton 1843
Matthew Copeman of Great Witchingham 1804
Robert Copeman of Themelthorpe 1661
Robert Copeman of Briston 1709
Robert Copeman of Itteringham 1832
Roger Copeman of North Burlingham 1687
Samuel Copeman of Brinton 1739
Susanna Copeman of Norwich 1726
Susanna Copeman of St Giles Norwich 1834

Thomas Copeman of Briston 1712-13 A
William Copeman of Aylsham 1787
William Copeman of Wiggerhall 1845

Elizabeth Allen (previously Copeman) of Knapton 1625
John Bird of Great Witchingham 1660
Thomas Case of Fakenham 1799
Thomas Hurrell of Saxlingham 1793

There are a few more Copeman wills and admsons connected to the Hemsby, Horstead and Norwich line still to do, although we are not expecting any breakthroughs as they are mostly 18C.

ANF and ANW Archdeaconry courts' wills at NRO, where they are all fully indexed and available on microfilm

John Cockman of Themelthorpe 1572
Robert Cokeman of Themelthorpe 1612

Alice Copeman of Great Witchingham 1661 A
Anne Copeman of Great Witchingham 1661 A
Anne Copeman of Norwich 1682 A
Anne Copeman of East Dereham 1710
Cornelius Copeman of Norwich 1701
Edward Copeman of Sparham 1743
Edward Copeman of Holkham 1743
Edward Copeman of Aylsham 1821
Elizabeth of Lying 1662-3 A
Elizabeth Copeman of Sparham 1736
Frances Copeman of Aylsham 1837
James Copeman of Great Yarmouth 1696
John Copeman of Wood Dalling 1581
John Copeman of Bawdeswell 1625 A
John Copeman of Foxley 1663
John Copeman of Southwood 1672-3
John Copeman of Great Yarmouth 1680
John Copeman of Norwich 1809
John Breese Copeman of Hackford 1804
Joseph Copeman of Foxley 1729
Mary Copeman of Felmingham 1781
Mary Copeman of Hemsby 1780
Richard Copeman of Knapton 1609-10 A
Richard Copeman of Stalham 1656
Richard Copeman of East Dereham 1705
Richard Copeman of Foxley 1754
Robert Copeman of Lyng 1661 A
Robert Copeman of Horsford 1721
Robert Copeman of Kerdeston 1779
Susanna Copeman of Kerdeston 1795
Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe 1616
Thomas Copeman of Foxley 1637 A
Thomas Copeman of Hackford 1648
Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe 1650

Thomas Copeman of Southwood 1667
Thomas Copeman of Great Yarmouth 1668-9
Thomas Copeman of Mattishall 1671
Thomas Copeman of Norwich 1698
Thomas Copeman of Sharrington 1708
Thomas Copeman of Themelthorpe 1727
William Copeman of Paston 1647
William Copeman of Norwich 1719-20

William Barsham of Colkirk 1596/7
Matthew Breese of Great Witchingham 1800
Susanna Rippingall of Bawdeswell 1720
Bartholomew Rippingall of Bawdeswell 1736

Again, there are a few other wills and admons we have not examined but all seem marginal to our main interest.

Probate Inventories

We have not yet searched these and they may yield further snippets of information if any Copeman/Cokeman ones survive.

Other documents at the NRO

Court books for Themelthorpe, Foulsham, Wood Dalling and Knapton
Rentals for Foxley and elsewhere 1573
Paston rentals
Index cards for deeds surviving in various parishes – eg, the 15C references in Wood Dalling;
16C in Themelthorpe; 17C in Sharrington

Other family relations

Since we have so few surviving registers and thus proof of marriages it may well be worth in due course searching for wills of all the probable relations by marriage that come up in the 17C Copeman wills. This might add a little more to the story.

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