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Prodigal Years? Negotiating Luxury and Fashioning Identity in a Seventeenth-century Account Book

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ABSTRACT Focusing on the account book of the MP and antiquary Sir Edward Dering (1598–1644), which covers the decade of his life in which he came of age, was knighted, and embarked on an ambitious political and courtly career, this article argues that his account book was a space in which Dering recorded momentous life events and mediated upon his purchases. Dering reveled in his attire, spending a great deal of money on it, as well as taking the time to record each element of its construction and decorative design in minute detail. Purchasing luxury goods – particularly clothing – was an important way for an ambitious politician to express his social, emotional and political links to

patrons, and to show his suitability for promotion. While he begins the account book in 1619 by chastising himself for spending too much in a “prodigal year,” by the end of the account book in 1628, Dering seems content to buy expensive goods, including a costly linen damask tablecloth depicting the story of the prodigal son. This article traces Dering’s acquisition of luxury goods at home in Kent, in London and overseas, and places him in relation to contemporary discourses of luxury and prodigality. It argues that Dering’s consumption of luxury goods was part of a wider project of self-definition, which included having his portrait painted, and even forging his family history

KEYWORDS: luxury, prodigality, clothing, shopping, London, accountancy, heraldry, forgery, consumerism, consumption

1619 was momentous for Sir Edward Dering (1598–1644).¹ It was the year that he turned 21, received a substantial inheritance of land and money from his grandfather, and married his first wife, Elizabeth (Davie, 1987, p. 129). It was also the first year he began actively listing his purchases in an account book. He dated his book as beginning “half a year before I was first married” and his list of expenses begins in some style: “Price of knighthoode Jan 22 160 [pounds]” (Dering 1619, p. 4r).² Perhaps he wished to mark such momentous events – his rise up the social scale and his preparation for marriage – by taking on the responsibility of accountancy. But his aim was immediately marred by failure; Dering announced the first three months as “my desperate quarter”; and when he tallied up the whole year’s expenses, “beinge ye yeare wherein I was married which sett me in debt 110li,” he deemed it “My prodigall year” (3r, 4r). At some later point, he changed his mind about this assessment, crossing out these three words in black ink strokes (Figure 1).

Over the course of a nearly a decade, until 1628, Dering recorded other momentous and costly purchases in his account book, alongside many more mundane and humble expenses, tallying up his outgoings down to the last penny spent on pins, tar, and repairs to household items. We can trace Dering’s acquisition of luxury goods as he traveled from his home in Kent to surrounding towns, the city of London, and even overseas to France and Ireland. We can also witness how he negotiated his purchases as he recorded them. The space of the account book enabled Dering to meditate on his expenditure, to luxuriate in his newly acquired goods, and to assess and value what he had bought. Dering’s consumption of luxury goods was part of a wider project of self-definition. This article will explore how one aspiring politician and member of the gentry painstakingly used such goods to further his political and social ties and to construct an identity. What once seemed like “prodigall” and excessive spending to Dering could, as his black scribbles through the words “My prodigall year” suggest, be justified as necessary expenditure for a gentleman of his stature.

~~My Prodigal Year~~ L 68 00

The last quarter anno 1618, and
first of anno 1619.

1618. Last quarter
from my master's day, unto
our Lady's day.

Price of bought goods Jan. 22	160 00 00
Expenses for	43 00 00
Colonization, gratuities	2 18 00
For materials and dyett at London, Pluckley, Wares, Newmarket, Canterbury, Dordrecht, and marriage, for my self and wife and for 5 p more by 3 years of 13 years	06 19 09
A huge house on St. Francis Beaumont in Shilburne St. Feb. 15	01 12 00
Dyett and lodgings at my wife's The Dordrecht	03 11 00
A table for my day	00 15 00
Otherwise spent on my day	01 14 00
Brown away, all Boughton and all expenses	01 05 00
200 and a half of blacke wrought velvet at 24s	
200 to make a full table	08 14 00
200 of blacke furs, full x 1/2 at 30s	
200 to line the table	15 15 00
3 3/4 quarters of blacke furs, full, all 18 x 20 to make a full	07 14 00
Elk at 1/2 of coloured furs, to line the table	00 15 00
2 dozen and 10 of interlaced furs line at 20s per dozen	02 26 08
200 of blacke furs, full	02 06 04
Sum of this full 58-3-2	
Althoing from table	
Expenses at all of time from this year	02 48 08
Other expenses of most necessary nature	06 00 00
	14 00 08 01
Sum of this quarter	283 00 02 01

Figure 1

Edward Dering, "A Booke of Expences from Ye Yeare 1619 (being Halfe a Year before I Was First Married); unto Ye Yeare -, " (1619–1628), Kent History and Library Centre, U350/E4, 4r. Image reproduced courtesy of Kent History and Library Centre.

Note: at the very top of the page, the three words "My Prodigal Year" which have been crossed out.

Accounting – for life events and emotions

Edward Dering, of Surrenden Dering in Pluckley, Kent, was the eldest son of Sir Anthony Dering and his second wife Frances. Born in the Tower of London, Dering had been educated at Westminster School and attended Magdalene College, Cambridge from January

1615 to September 1617. He was admitted to the Middle Temple in October 1617 and was knighted at Newmarket by James I in January 1619. While his early education followed the appropriate trajectory for the eldest son of a gentleman, his subsequent career has been described as “eccentric” (Salt 2004). Throughout the 1620s, Dering pursued court connections, and his links to the Duke of Buckingham enabled him to gain positions as an MP for Hythe and Kent and as a gentleman-extraordinary of the Privy Chamber. On 1 February 1627, Charles I made him a baronet. In addition to being a justice of the peace, Dering obtained the lieutenancy of Dover Castle in Kent, but by the 1630s, his interests in a court career seem to have faded. His son – also named Edward (1625–84) – reported that Dering had “wholly addicted himself” to the study of Divinity and his later years were dogged by religious and political controversy (Copy of a letter from the Privy Coucil, endorsed by Edward Dering in 1658, KHLIC, U1107/Z3 as cited in Salt 2004). Dering was elected to the Long Parliament, but disagreed vehemently when the House of Commons passed the Grand Remonstrance in November 1641, which listed grievances against Charles I’s rule and demanded drastic reform of church and state. In 1642, Dering published his *Collection of Speeches* attacking the Grand Remonstrance, which were considered so scandalous that in February of that year they were publicly burnt by the hangman while his printer was made to stand in the pillory (Cressy 2006, p. 308). Dering was promptly expelled from Parliament. In print he was fiercely critical of certain Church of England divines whom he deemed indistinguishable from papists, and his religious beliefs seem to have led him to support the Royalists during the Civil War. Dering infamously defected from Royalism in early 1644, and died on 22 June 1644, apparently from a brain tumour. His estate was sequestered, so his last months were reportedly endured in extreme poverty. His inconsistency in religious and political matters have marred Dering’s memory; Lord Clarendon called him “a man of levity and vanity, easily flattered by being commended” (Collins 1741, p. 17). But Dering’s account book, which covers his early career, as he attempted to increase and strengthen his court connections, challenges this assessment.

Dering kept his decade of accounts in one tall and thin vellum-bound book. It is written entirely in his own hand, which is a mix of secretary and italic forms. In it, Dering mentions other accounting books, for example in 1619 when he notes the “purchase of 3 bookes for expences, whereof this is one” for 7s. 6d.; the others no longer survive, though we have other records in his hand including parliamentary writing, antiquarian notes, and correspondence (6v).³ Each of these textual forms was intended for a different purpose, and as such one man may have many different voices. This account book seems to be a fair copy – that is to say, Dering probably took notes in another of his three books, or on single leaves of paper, and then copied them neatly into this one, considering it his final and

definitive set of accounts. In it, he noted the date, the item or service purchased, and in carefully ruled columns the cost in pounds, shillings and pence (see Figure 1).

While the book was primarily kept to fulfil a purpose – as a record of expenditure – it is filled with biographical detail. Family events were often marked with purchases of gifts or payments that express key moments in the Dering family's lifecycle. The birth of Sir Edward's son Anthony is anticipated months in advance of his name being mentioned, as when Dering paid 18s. 8d. for "4 yds of holmes fustian at 16d ye yd. to line ye Curtaines of my wives childbed" on 29 January 1620 (Dering 1619, p. 12r). Anthony's development through childhood can be mapped through purchases – first of a festive yellow coat and petticoat on 7 March 1620, followed by playthings such as "Babeyes" (dolls) on 27 October 1622, "Bables" (toys) in May 1623 and a fiddle in February 1625 (13r, 27v, 30v, 55r). On 10 March 1626, Dering paid 18s. to "ye taylour for all worke about a Cloake and suit for Anthony" (69r). Although this purchase is not recorded with any ceremony, it probably marks six-year old Anthony's breeching. In early modern Europe, boys spent their infancy in petticoats and were first dressed in breeches between the ages of five and eight (Vincent 2013, p. 169). As Heide Wunder has shown, men often remembered this as a significant moment in their youth, both as a coming of age and also the beginning of their masculine identity (Wunder 2002, pp. 25–6). Anthony's breeching coincided with the start of payments for schooling (including at the prestigious Charterhouse, then located in Smithfield, London), for two grammars and a copy of *Aesop's Fables* "in English" (61r, 68v, 72v). The minutiae of childhood developments, so rarely recorded in early modern manuscripts, come to life through these payments.

Alongside these records of birth and childhood, Dering recorded the premature death of his first wife Elizabeth in June 1622 through his payments to hire a hearse cloth, to the sexton "for tollinge ye bell and digginge ye grave," and for a coffin and embalming (24r). Dering took particular care to note the purpose of one payment of seven shillings to Thomas Robins: "for lending of blacke Cotton to hange escocheons on viz to hang all ye Church except ye greate Chancell, 3 times Downe ye body. And my fathers hall" (24r). Given that the account book was a personal record, kept by Dering to track his outgoing expenses, such a long description of the positioning of the cloth in the Church was not strictly necessary. Whether he wanted to remember the decorations himself, or to record the splendor of the occasion he provided for his wife for posterity, this detail suggests that at times Dering used his account book for more than just simple accountancy.

Dering also recorded his purchase of "a black cloake for my selfe" which he bought for a costly £4 11s. 10d⁴. As Dering clearly associated the day of his wife's funeral with his new mourning cloak he listed it as a purchase on that day, but it would have been commissioned in advance – as a tailored item it would have taken him some

days to source material and have it made up into a garment. Sometimes Dering specified that the date of an entry was not the date on which an item had been purchased, for example on 28 November 1623 he noted down the 3s. 4d. cost for “supper yesternight and dinner too day” (34r). As Craig Muldrew has outlined, this was an era in which many consumers relied heavily on credit, paying for goods days, months or even years after they had been commissioned and received (Muldrew 1998). In January 1624, Dering settled his debt of a hefty £7 7s. to the tailor “Master Draper” for a black satin suit and “for making up a mourning Cloake unto itt, for Sir John Tufton’s funerall circiter Aprill 21” (42v). Clearly Dering was creditworthy enough to pay his tailor nine months after the receipt of his mourning suit, but his note of the date of his friend’s funeral also suggests that the account book could also act as a site of memorialization.

While we can mine the book for biographical detail, we can also find moments like Elizabeth’s funeral at which Dering breaks with accounting convention and provides further comment, or extraneous asides, to discover what literary scholar Adam Smyth has described as “interpretative” or “autobiographical” writing within the account book (Smyth 2010, p. 104).⁵ Smyth was not the first to recognize the self-narrative nature of Dering’s account book. The eighteenth-century scholarly-vicar Lambert Larking (1797–1868), who had been given access to the “Surrenden Dering Manuscripts” by Sir Edward Dering 8th Baronet (1807–96), described it as a store of “real character ... an impartial autobiography” (Larking 1849, p. 130). Dering’s careful description of his wife’s funeral hints at his pain and sadness at her death. His accounts also contain moments of affection for his growing child, whom he often called “little Anthony” or “my little boy” (30v, 41v).

Accounting for clothes

Most scholars of Dering have focused on his impressive library which included two volumes of Shakespeare’s plays (he is the first recorded purchaser of the First Folio) and the dramatic works of Ben Jonson (Krivatsky and Yeandle, 1992; Lennam 1965; Smith 2016). His account book records that between 1619 and 1624 Dering made twenty-eight payments to see plays and bought over 225 playbooks. Nonetheless, frustratingly he did not note the title of the plays he was seeing or the theatres he was frequenting, and he often just listed books by their quantity such as “3 books” or “16 playbooks” (34r, 38v). In his records he paid far more attention to – and was clearly delighted by – the details of his attire, the vast majority of which was acquired, made up and maintained in London. He meticulously described each element of fabric, cutting, shapings, stiffenings, color and accessory. Take, for example, this entry for an olive and gold buttoned and striped suit that Dering paid for in March 1623:

4 yds half qrter of oliue Coloured broade Cloath att 17s per yd to make one suite and Cloake	03 08 00
4 yds of Deuonshire bayes to lyne my Cloake att 3s 4d per yd	00 13 04
5 dozen of Chaine gold lace for suite and Cloake weighin 7 ounces qrter' att 5s 8d per ounce	02 01 00
2 dozen of haire coloured and gold pointes to this suite att 14s per dozen	01 08 00
Canuas and stiffening	00 02 06
An ell qrter' of taffaty to line doublett	00 16 04
two yds half qrter' of satten to edge this suite and Cloake att 13s 4d	01 08 00
3 ounces of stitching and sowing silke	00 06 00
An ell and half of holland to ye hose	00 04 00
Pocketts	00 01 08
Galloune to bind ye doublett and hose	00 01 00
hookes to ye suite	00 00 02
Drawing ye peeces of ye Cloake	00 01 08
Stiffing to ye Cape	00 00 04
ffor making this suite and Cloake edged and bottoned doune ye armes, and backe, and with stripes before on the hose	01 00 00
9 dozen of oliue colour and gold baskett buttons att 14d per dozen	00 10 06
15 dozen of larger buttons of ye same making att 18d per dozen	01 02 06
1 dozen of greate buttons for ye Cloake	00 10 00
A loope button with a gold head for ye Cloake	00 02 00

To the left of this list, he placed a wide open bracket and noted “Summ of this suite 13-17-0” (36v). Dering’s precision in writing down each element of the suit – from the cheap stiffening (possibly card or animal hair, to give structure around areas such as the shoulders, back and stomach) to the woven buttons – might reflect the manner in which he was compiling his accounts. If, while at his desk, Dering had the bill from his tailor in one hand and his pen in the other, it is possible that he copied the itemized list of costs directly into the account book. However, such precision and description of color (olive, “haire coloured,” gold) was unnecessary. Why note down, or copy out from a bill, that the suit and cloak were “edged and bottoned doune ye armes, and backe, and with stripes before on the hose,” if not just to revel in the exuberant details of this new outfit?

On the very next page, Dering recorded the charges for another suit, costing slightly less at £11 16s. 4d., with a note that this cost was “beside ye outside of my doublet which was Cloth of gold given me by my mother ... ye breeches were uncut velvet” (37r). Until the repeal of sumptuary legislation in 1604, wearing a doublet made of cloth of gold was a privilege reserved only for members of the royal family, earls, viscounts and barons.⁶ That Dering could not help but include a complete description of his new outfit, even though he had not paid for the cloth of gold, suggests that he wanted to record it in its splendid entirety. This ensemble must have been spectacularly fine; at a candlelit dinner or evening event, light would have played over the textured surfaces of the cloth of gold doublet (which was made of real beaten gold wrapped around threads of silk) and lush uncut velvet hose. These entries, and many others for apparel, suggest that Dering enjoyed taking time over his appearance, and that the careful accounting for clothes was a moment in which he could recall the thoughtful consideration, “making,” styling and luxurious materials invested into each item in his wardrobe.

Dering’s account book, then, confirms Ulinka Rublack’s claims that early modern individuals had constant involvement with the making and maintenance of their clothing. Historians have recently started looking at materiality as evidence of skill, knowledge, and what Rublack terms “craft spectatorship” – that is, proof that people were used to looking at goods and valued their decorative elements (Rublack 2013, p. 62). A deep investment of time and knowledge was required of those who made and commissioned clothing and other material goods. Across the early modern world, “[a]lmost all members of society engaged in transforming matter in some way – whether through daily labour, their interests, or quotidian practices,” Rublack explains, “through everyday customer choice: fabrics and threads were chosen; designs were discussed with tailors, seamstresses and embroiderers; materials ranging from fabrics to metals were customized” (Rublack 2013, pp. 45–6). Clothing was not insignificant frippery, as we have seen with Dering, it cost the wearer significant time and expense as the result of a complex process of verbal, visual, and skill-based exchanges between sellers, makers, and consumers. It was crucial for the wearer to assert their status and access through wearing sumptuous and fashionable clothing, and they were willing to invest the time and money necessary to do so.

Dering’s descriptive precision enables us to reconstruct a wardrobe at least as rich as his celebrated library. It incorporated the finest textiles – from “taffaty” and “french silk” (4r), to “spanish cloath” (5v), plush, “satten,” “Philipp and cheiney” (a worsted), fine “holland” linen (27r), “mockado” (36v) and “white Florence satten” (42r). He owned stockings in a variety of hues from “willow colour” (5r), “pearle,” “sky Colour” (68r) and “yellow” (69r). He had a “peache coloured and green” scarf (5r), a “scarlett” doublet (5v), a “blew silke wast Coate” (41v), “ashcolour” (5v) and “olive coloured kentish broadcloth” suits

(4v) and “orange Colour silke pointes” with which to tie his doublet to his hose (30v). He bought feathers dyed yellow, black and red, which he might have used to decorate one of his many beaver hats (9v, 58v). Dering accessorized with a “cuttworke falling band and cuffes” (6r), ruffs decorated with “bone lace” (36r), a “silver girdle and hangers,” “white spanish leather shoes” (31v), and an “earinge with Rubyes” (6r). While many of Dering’s clothing items were costly, a new style or alteration could be relatively inexpensive. In January 1626, he bought “2 pendent pearles Counterfeited” for 5s. and in May paid 10s. “for dying a flame Colour gowne into black” (58r, 67v). For thirteen shillings, he had his “greate ridinge Coate” altered “into a small” (14v). Dering usually commissioned a matching suit of clothing (doublet, hose, cloak, and points to attach the doublet to the hose), but he could have mixed elements of his suits to create new ensembles, and altered his look with a new hatband, different ruff, pair of colored stockings, gloves or a jeweled and feathered accessory.

A large team of skilled craftspeople made his extensive wardrobe possible. In his account book he named eleven tailors and paid numerous unnamed ones (some of whom he refers to as “my taylour” and others who made or repaired clothing for his wife, household staff, and children), as well as making many payments to his shoemaker “Arrowes,” mercers, starchers and a laundress. Dering also took care of his bodily appearance through visits to the barber and to other unnamed professionals who charged him 2s. for “cuttinge ye Cornes on my feete” (8v). On one occasion, Dering paid Arrowes the shoemaker six pence to cut his corns, suggesting that professionals might take care of both clothing and body (11r).

Spaces of luxury

Dering traveled often, going to court and to the homes of friends and patrons for business and pleasure. While he bought many household goods and services from his local village of Pluckley and the nearby town of Ashford, including wooden bowls, pairs of stockings, meat, and butter, his luxury purchases were mostly sourced from further afield. On a trip to Calais and Gravelines in August 1620, he bought two bracelets and some thread as well as souvenirs of cheese and wine (9v). In Ireland, while visiting with his cousin in 1621 he bought two books and two handkerchiefs (16v). During a two-month summer tour of Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire in 1624 his purchases included a sea-green satin doublet and matching velvet cloak, green and gold chain, laces and buttons, six books, two shirts, a scabbard, sixteen pairs of gloves, a set of knots and a chain of ribbon as a gift for his sister Margaret. He also bought a new hatband and a map of England (38r–39r).

But it was in London where Dering really went on spending sprees. His account book records him dining with friends, attending

the theatre, going to the barber, visiting the tombs at Westminster Abbey and – above all – buying things. As Linda Levy Peck and others have noted, an array of new shops appeared in early seventeenth-century London, which enabled Londoners and visitors to the capital to shop for fine, often imported, luxury goods and services (Peck 2005). New spaces, such as Thomas Gresham's Royal Exchange (opened officially by Queen Elizabeth in 1570) and the New Exchange (1609) situated in the aristocratic West End, made shopping a sociable leisure activity (Walsh 2003). Customers could stroll under grand covered walkways between shops that were open until late (the Royal Exchange closed at 6 p.m., while the New Exchange was open from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. in summer, and between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. in winter). The Royal and New Exchanges were both filled with shops (120 and one hundred, respectively) which sold newly fashionable blue and white porcelain imported from China alongside the finest textiles, looking glasses and Italian perfumes. The only extant inventory from the Royal Exchange – from a haberdashery rented by Thomas Deane – was made half a century before Dering's London excursions (Staniland 1997). However, if the list of silk threads, ribbons, clothes fastenings, decorative handkerchiefs that remained in the shop's stock at Deane's death in January 1572 is at all representative of the goods available in subsequent decades, it seems that fine clothing and accessories were popular sellers. With his taste for fine clothing and accessories, Dering would have been Deane's ideal customer.

While Dering did not specify where he shopped in London, it is tempting to suggest that the "crimson satten petticoate embroidered with gold and silver, out of the exchange," which he bought at the eye-watering price of £24, was from either the Royal or the New Exchange (92r). Like many of his peers, Dering was also happy to acquire second-hand goods.⁷ In December 1624, he spent over £8 on six turkey-work stools and a carpet "at the second hand" (66v). He would also have been a regular at St Paul's Churchyard, the heart of the book trade.

Even though we do not know precisely where he shopped in London, we do know what kinds of luxuries Dering bought. Although London was filling up with imported goods, aside from fine textiles, he shows a surprising lack of interest in foreign luxuries – the most exotic items listed in his account book being beaver hats from North America (5r, 6r, 13r, 27v, 34r, 41r, 55r, 68v, 92v), Venetian glasses (53r, 67r), Spanish shoes and a Spanish ruff for his wife (5r, 6r, 13r, 15v, 27v, 29r, 31v, 37v, 67v), a black French "quoife" (coif) (67v), and gold Paris buttons (41v). He did, however, spend 6d. to see "the elephant" – presumably the one gifted to King James I in July 1623 by the King of Spain (Egerton 1962, pp. 411–12). He also made three purchases of tobacco (6v, 35v, 36r).

London's attractions proved so strong that between 1596 and 1640, seventeen royal proclamations were issued to force the gentry

out of the capital and back to their country residences and responsibilities (Heal 1988, pp. 211–12). James I even wrote a poem in 1622 blaming clothes shopping as the cause for a London-obsessed gentry who “dreame on nought but vizitts maskes and toyes/And thinke the cuntrey contributes no joys.” James’s poem pointed the finger at gentry wives, who were said to be so keen to “be kept in fashion fine and gaye” that they “Care not what fines there honest husbands pay” (James I, as cited in Heal 1988, p. 214). Dering’s account book suggests otherwise. In fact, Dering records the purchase of five masks for his second wife Anne between 1625 and 1626, indicating that he indulged her passion for London fashions, while shopping for his own wardrobe.

Accounting for marriage

Dering’s marriage to Anne Ashburnham (1604/5 – 28) his second wife, seems to have driven some of his most extravagant spending in London. This event – a clever match for an aspiring politician, given the Ashburnham family’s links to the Duke of Buckingham – was hosted in Whitehall at the latter’s lodgings on New Year’s Day (Lefevre and Thrush 2010). Dering relied on Buckingham, James I’s “favourite,” for social and political advancement, and his account book maps his attempts to curry favor – he visited the Duke regularly, gifted him two mastiffs in June 1625, and clearly dressed to impress at his own wedding (52r).⁸ Dering arrived in London on 25 October 1624, and spent two months there preparing for the event. Again, Dering had the corns on his feet cut, visited the barber and the laundress, and bought himself a looking glass, four tortoise shell combs, another beaver hat, a hat band, a lace ruff and cuffs, a pair of buck leather gloves fringed with silver, a pair of “etwizes” (tweezers), and some curling irons (40v, 41r). Perhaps Dering was anticipating wedded bliss when he noted a two pence purchase of lipsalve (40v). He also had to spend two shillings to pay for the soft wax needed to seal two bonds for “when I borrowed mony,” which he presumably needed to fund his enormous outgoings (41r). Three days before his wedding he paid £1 14s. for “my wedding ring.” In the days after it, Dering lavished gifts on Anne (to whom he proudly referred as “my wife”) including a comb, 12 pairs of gloves, a fan, and, most spectacularly of all, seven diamonds which were added to “some of my old ones, at 15s a peece, for setting of them into the forme of a heart which I gave unto my mistress” (41v, 42r). As Hannah Greig has convincingly shown, gifting and resetting diamonds was a common elite practice (particularly at marriages) in eighteenth century London, with gift-giving often taking place in public spaces (Greig 2013, pp. 32–62). The metropolitan elite, Greig suggests, created a “shared identity forged through material goods” aside from the marketplace (Greig 2013, p. 46). Much of what Greig describes holds true for Dering and his milieu in the mid-seventeenth century, as diamonds,



Figure 2

Doublet and Breeches, c.1630–1640, unknown maker, England, made of stamped satin, lined with linen and buckram, trimmed with braid and silk ribbon, Victoria and Albert Museum, 348&A-1905. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

held in esteem above all other objects, circulated between families and favorites. Each borrowed or gifted jewel was expected to communicate the social status and connections of both the receiver and the giver. Dering's account book does not make clear whether he gave the diamond heart to his wife in private or in front of guests

**Figure 3**

Detail of the stamped or 'printed' satin in Figure 2 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

during wedding celebrations, but perhaps Dering hoped, through his combination of his "old" diamonds with some new purchases, to demonstrate his ability to take part in elite gift exchanges in front of Buckingham and his circle. The shape of the heart would have read as symbolising love for his new wife, but the diamonds themselves probably held an even greater symbolism.

Dering's wedding wardrobe was clearly intended to convey his emotional and social connections. He bought an elaborate white satin doublet which he had "printed," a technique whereby decorative shapes were punched into the surface of the fabric to decorate it in regular textured patterns (Figures 2 and 3). He paid £4 9s. 3d. for gold parchment galloon (a narrow braid) with which to trim his white doublet and his scarlet hose, and dozens of gold buttons for his suit (41v). Dering's lists paint a vivid picture of two stunningly luxurious suits – one white, gold and scarlet, the other silver, black and scarlet. Dering seemed resigned to the expense of all this: "so the silkman had of me toward these two suites of Cloathes 26-19-3" (42r). Perhaps this is because some of his costs were unavoidable. Dering needed to buy points to attach his doublet to his hose – he bought twenty-six in scarlet and gold at £1 14s 8d for his "second

suite" (42r) (For an example of decorative points, see the bows at the waist of the suit in Figure 2). But he also had to buy points as wedding favors for his guests to take away. As Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths have noted, there is a surprising lack of scholarship on gentry weddings.⁹ Dering's wedding resembles their account of Nicholas LeStrange's nuptials in September 1630, including his purchases of traditional wedding gifts for guests (Whittle and Griffiths 2012, pp. 168–9). Dering bought five dozen scarlet and silver "for my wedding points" at a cost of four pounds, and four dozen more for three pounds "all given away" (42r). In addition to those he had purchased specifically to give away, the guests must have asked for (or grabbed) his wedding accessories from his body, for Dering also had to spend £6 10s on a "per of black and silver garters of ye very best knotts, 2 yds of riband, and 2 dozen of pointes all alike, for my selfe after my wedding garters and points were gone" (42r). LeStrange spent similar sums to Dering on gloves and rings for his wedding guests – £19 9s – and £2 for garters for the two bridesmaids (Whittle and Griffiths 2012, p. 169). Dering also bought garters in "pinke Colour and sillver" which he noted were "of ye very best" for Lady Mary Villiers (the Duke of Buckingham's daughter) and Lady Elizabeth Feilding (Buckingham's niece) (42r). Dering calculated that all of "this ware besides others gloves and girdles and hangers &c, comes to 29-15-0 whereof," he noted, £21 4s. was "given away" (42r). Through these purchases and gifts, Dering demonstrated his style, taste, attention to detail and social and emotional connections in the presence of influential society.

Accounting – for events and necessities

Dering totted up his expenditure at regular intervals. At the bottom of each page of his account book he recorded the total and at the end of each half year and full year he worked out the amount he had spent in these periods. He also occasionally calculated the sum cost of certain events, such as a journey (he noted that his trip to parliament in Oxford between July 29 and August 15 had cost £8 17s. 6d.) (52r). He also tallied up the total amount spent on each of his suits of clothing and for the sum cost of his trips to London, which suggests that he regarded both sorts of expenditure as discrete events in themselves. In these tallies we can see Dering attempting to scale down and justify his costs, for example over the course of his wedding he notes, "Layd out in all this time of my being at London 258-3-0 wherein note 1-18s-0 lost att cards and 13-14s paid Master Draper, not sett downe within this compasse" Dering concludes, "So the true expence of this time hath been 242-11-0" (42v).

While he excused himself for losing money at cards, noting it as an expense that should not really count to his overall tally, Dering seems to grumble when he pays for his wife's gambling losses or when debts are collected. His tone is self-defensive when, pressed

to pay £1 7s. he writes, “paid for Tith due whilst I lived in Aldergate streete, never demanded before” (79v). That Dering recorded money lent to others as an expense says something of their propensity to pay – in July 1621, he parted with £1 2s. and recorded it as “Lent unto my Lady Alice Barrey.” Later, with darker ink and smaller letters, he added four damning words: “I may say given” (16v). As we have seen, Dering was content to pay for expensive goods when he thought that they were worth their price, but his account book also records his frustration at undue expense: “paid ye dyer for that that was not unto me worth 10s” £1 4s 6d. (66r).

Dering often referred to costs, such as money spent on his first wife’s wardrobe upon marriage, as “necessity” and he glossed over certain expenditures with this term: “expences whereof most were very necessary” (4r, 93r).¹⁰ Shortly after his second marriage in 1625, he even attempted to divide “household” expenditure from “foreign” costs, seemingly to separate the money spent on his daily needs in Kent from the larger sums spent while traveling to London and elsewhere. This experiment was abandoned without comment after a year, presumably because he felt the distinction unhelpful.

This experiment can be related to Dering’s larger interest in redefining his place in society after his second marriage. In March 1625, Dering paid the painter George Cottington for portraits of his first wife Elizabeth, himself, his new wife Anne, and his brother Henry. He also noted that his father had paid for pictures of his son Anthony and his grandfather (57r). Mapping the generations and marital connections of the Dering family, these portraits are now lost – most likely in the fire that laid ruin to Surrenden Dering in 1952 – although they are recorded in black and white photographs taken by the National Portrait Gallery in the early twentieth century (Tittler 2009). They show a dashing young man and his family, elegantly dressed in fashionable clothes, proudly depicted next to their arms.¹¹

Heraldry

Few people were more concerned with heraldry than Sir Edward Dering. His account book is full of costs associated with this obsession. In addition to having his arms prominently depicted at the top left of his portrait, he bought dozens of books on the history of heraldry, paid to borrow medieval charters, and bought quires of the best “Italian royall paper” on which to copy down pedigrees (69r). Dering paid for his and Anne’s arms to be engraved into eight pieces of the silver plate “given us att marriage” (41v) and he acquired yellow, blue and russet silk thread, possibly to embroider his arms onto the second-hand turkey-work stools and carpet (66v). He also paid for his arms to be cut into a brass, “for to presse my armes on my bookes” (37r). In 1627, through Buckingham, he was able to obtain a warrant to consult state archives without paying fees, which he later described as “my key to unlock the shrines of antiquity” (Der-

ing 1631, p. 64). After gaining the lieutenancy of Dover Castle in 1629 he discovered Anglo-Saxon charters and a copy of the Magna Carta, and in 1638 he even founded a fellowship for the study of heraldry called “Antiquitas Redivivia” (Wright 1950).

While Dering’s family had a respectable gentry background dating to the early fifteenth century, such roots were clearly not deep enough. Lawrence Stone has described “the frenzied status-seeking and ancestor-worship of the age,” and it is difficult to see this as an exaggeration with reference to Dering (Stone 1965, p. 712). Dering wrote that he was keen to record his family’s history for his posterity, hoping it make his descendants “active-minded in virtue ... and quicken them in thoughts of worth” (Dering 1631, p. 61). Through an inventive blend of scholarship and wishful thinking, he managed to claim descent from a ninth-century Saxon named Diering and took it upon himself to reinsert this lost – or rather con-fected – history back into the rolls. In the family chapel at Pluckley Church, Dering commissioned craftsmen to alter memorial brasses by including his doctored saltire and adding horses as footrests to provide precedent for the crest that he concocted (D’Elboux 1947). Such amendments might explain two payments made in 1627 to “master Marshall ye tombe cutter” – firstly for of 10s. “for worke for me” and then £2 “for tombe worke in brasse” (81r, 84r). Later, he added the initials “J.D.” to the first of these two payments, which might refer to the tomb of John Dering – though the name John was common in the family and so may relate to brasses of Dering’s ancestors who died in 1425, 1517, or 1550. His alterations were not confined to his family chapel. He is now believed to have doctored at least 11 rolls and forged three seals (Harris 2016, p. 98). While Lieutenant of Dover Castle, he scratched out the arms and name of Nicholas de Criol in c.1270 roll, crudely changing “nic” into to “Ric” for Richard, and keeping the “ri” of Criol for “Dering.” (Figure 4) The roll, currently the oldest English one in existence, is held at the British Library; it is now known as the “Dering Roll.”

Dering’s attempts to fake his family lineage suggest that he was seeking, through manuscripts and monuments, to justify his knight-hood and later baronetcy with evidence of family pedigree. After all, his family had shot up the social spectrum from esquire to baronet in just three generations. A notebook, in which Dering drafted a family history, suggests that he was deeply disturbed by his failure to uncover real evidence for ancient precedent in archives and collections. For, he asked, “What is history but the pedegree of the world? And what history but insisteth upon the descent and succession of the emenent persons therein mentioned?” (Dering 1631, p. 92). His obsessive pursuit of a deep ancestry might be explained by his claim that, “In all ages and nations, and through all religions there hath beene a constant practice to distinguish between man and man by a different valewation made arising from some observable worth or want discerned betwixt them whereby the able and worthy

**Figure 4**

Detail of the Dering Roll, c.1270–1280, parchment, The British Library, Add Roll 77720. © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD, ADD. ROLL 77720, F1.

Note how the writing above the shield on the far left has been altered from “Nic de Criol” to “Ric. Fiz Dering”. Dering was able to change the “N” into an “R” and retained the “ri” of “Criol” when he replaced it with the word “Dering”.

have alway[s] beene raised in estimation (as itt were) severed from ye ignoble and unworthy” (Dering 1631, p. 92). In short, Dering was driven not only to write a family history, but to create a fictional past in material, as well as textual, form.

A Prodigal Purchase?

But for all of his lavish and ambitious self-fashioning, Dering was clearly anxious, when he dismissed 1619 as his “prodigal year,” about excessive expenditure on unnecessary luxuries (4r). How, then, to interpret his purchases of costly clothing, portraits, fine furnishings and embossed arms?

The term “prodigal” was used in positive and negative senses in the seventeenth century – it had long been used to describe a person who was extravagantly spendthrift, but from the end of the sixteenth century it started to be connected with ideas of generosity (OED, 2007). To a gentleman-scholar like Dering, the term would have immediately called to mind the parable of the prodigal son from the book of Luke 15:11–32 in the King James Bible. This tells of the fall of a young man who spends his father’s inheritance on the good life, and ends up a penniless swineherd, envious of the food he feeds to the pigs. The prodigal son sees the error of his ways, repents, and asks his father for forgiveness, and his father welcomes him home. Intended to demonstrate God’s mercy and the importance of love and forgiveness, the story had many echoes in the popular culture of early modern England and was used and adapted by Renaissance dramatists as a shorthand for youth and folly. As Paul Bailey has noted, unlike the medieval plays which were often

set in the countryside, the Renaissance prodigal son was associated with the city of London, which probably played well to audiences of young single men living in a metropolis full of apprentices, trainee lawyers, merchants and maidservants. Although we do not know which plays Dering saw and read while in London, the extensive use of the motif of the prodigal son in Renaissance drama – including plays by Thomas Dekker, John Fletcher, Thomas Heywood, Ben Jonson, Phillip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, and John Webster – suggests that he would have been familiar with the scene on the London stage (Bailey 1983, p. 39, pp. 42–3). Cheaply printed broadside ballads with titles like *The Prodigal Son Converted* (1640–74[?]) and *The Extravagant Youth, / OR, / An Emblem of Prodigality* (1671–1702[?]) also played with the trope of the prodigal son, at once casting him as a humorous loveable rogue and presenting men tempted by fine silks and feathered hats with a cautionary tale.

Concepts of prodigality were intimately connected to the contemporary view of luxury goods. Dering did not use the term “luxury” in his account book. But his repeated use of the term “necessity” and his occasional need to justify expenses implies he considered some of his purchases luxuries. As Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeill explain, “Luxury is contingent: it depends on what a society assumes to be ‘beyond’ the expected” (McNeil and Riello 2016, p. 4). This was not to say that Dering, or his contemporaries, regarded his luxuries as prodigiously wasteful or excessive. The economic historian Jan de Vries has argued that a growing market of affordable but desirable goods (such as imitation porcelains, shoe buckles, coffee, tobacco), coupled with the decline and repeal of sumptuary laws that had restricted the non-elite from purchasing and wearing of fine fabrics and noble colours, contributed to a redefinition of the concept of luxury in the early modern period. He contrasts the “old” luxury of European courts with a “new luxury” of sociability and fashionability, driven by urban consumers (Vries 2008, see also Berg, 2005).

Early modern economists also debated luxury, and considered both the merits and problems of prodigality. Those who advocated trickle-down economic spending, like Henry Peacham, argued that high expenditure could benefit the realm: “the prodigall man is more beneficial to, and deserveth better of his countrey then the covetous miser, every trade and vocation fareth the better for him, as the Tailor, Haberdasher, Vintner, Shoemakers, Sempsters, Hostlers, and the like” (Peacham 1641, p. 3). Peacham’s claims foreshadowed a now-famous argument, made in the *Fable of the Bees* (1714) by the Dutch philosopher Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), that the consumption of luxury goods stimulated the economy and increased prosperity. In turn, eighteenth-century thinkers David Hume and Adam Smith both took on Mandeville’s claims and helped to establish luxury as a positive force in early modern Britain. But Dering’s anxieties were shared by many of his contemporaries, as they struggled to decide whether their expenditure was appropriate in both social and

moral terms, and whether their belongings accurately represented and communicated their emotional, social and moral values.

Rather poetically, as Dering's account book nears its end almost a decade after the 21-year-old chastised himself for having a "Desperate quarter" in a "prodigall year," one of the last listed purchases is 6 yards of fine damask "of the history of the prodigall Child ... to make a tablecloth" (75v). At 10s. per yard, Dering paid £3 for this material on July 20, 1627, which would soon decorate his home with its tale of youthful excess and generous forgiveness. A fine damask tablecloth depicting the prodigal son story survives in the collections of the Rijksmuseum (Figure 5). Woven into its surface are images of the son receiving his inheritance while flaunting a feathered cap,

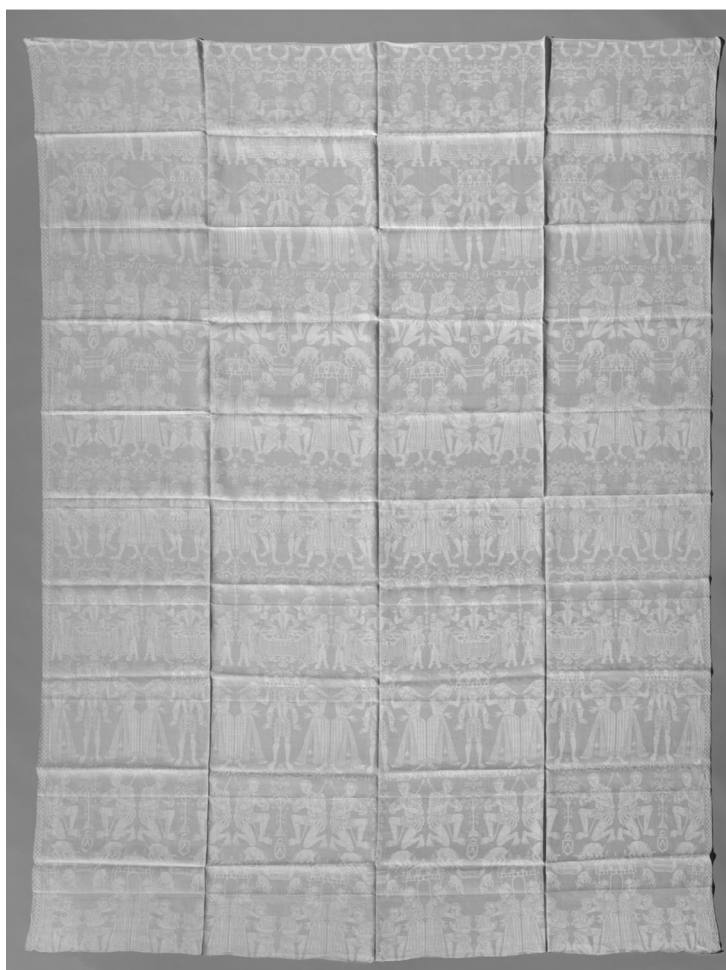


Figure 5

Tablecloth depicting the story of the Prodigal Son, unknown maker, c.1550–1610, linen, 280 cm × 212 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam BK-1973-159.

feasting with women, kneeling amongst the pigs, and finally begging his father for forgiveness. While the tablecloth's story concludes with an exhortation not to be prodigal in expenditure, its depiction of a scene of feasting includes a fine tablecloth, which drapes over the knees of the prodigal son and the ladies with whom he dines. It is an ambiguous object, on the one hand moral and didactic, designed to protect and ennoble the home, and on the other, woven with fine and expensive threads, it associates itself with excessive spending and feasting.

When Dering purchased this fine damask tablecloth to decorate his home in a manner befitting his status and reflecting his morals, he turned prodigal expense and luxury into a necessity. Perhaps this was when he flipped the pages of his account book back to the beginning and scratched out the words "my prodigall yeare" with firm black strokes.

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Notes

1. As was customary, Dering used the Julian calendar, which took the first quarter of the year as beginning on 25 March ('Lady Day'), the second quarter on 24 June (Midsummer's Day), the third quarter on 29 September (Michaelmas) and the fourth on 1

- January (New Year's Day). I have kept the dates consistent with Dering's usage in his account book.
2. All further references to the account book are to this manuscript, and will be included parenthetically in the text with folio number.
 3. For this article, in addition to Dering's account book, I consulted Folger Z.e.27 (c.1635 history of the Dering family from the Norman Conquest); Folger V.b.296 (Diverse Remembrances of the Dering Family), Folger V.b.297 (Catalogue of Dering books), Folger V.b.307 (c.1631 Notes for a history of the Dering family), Kent History and Library Centre U350 F16 (Genealogical notes), U350 F17/5 (Notes for a monumental window and epitaph for Sir Edw. Dering by himself) and miscellaneous letters, U350/C2. Other records – from Dering's library classification scheme and memoranda book to correspondence, antiquarian and historical transcripts, letter books relating to Cinque Ports business, and his notes as chairman of the Long Parliament subcommittee on ministers' grievances – are held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, the Society for Antiquaries, London and the Kent History and Library Centre, Maidstone. For a list, see S.P. Salt, 'Dering, Sir Edward, first baronet (1598–1644)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7531> and Smyth, *Autobiography in Early Modern England*, p.94.
 4. Adam Smyth's recent chapter "Money, accounting, and life writing, 1600–1700" examines Dering's account of Elizabeth's funeral in depth, and elegantly explores the implications of financially valuing a funeral. As Smyth's chapter was published after I had written this article, I was unable to integrate his work into the body of my piece, although I wholeheartedly agree with his claim that we should read financial accounts "with a sense of genre" to discover "more than ... facts" and that Dering's account book "suggests the importance of objects in the production of his written selfhood (Smyth 2016, 97).
 5. Adam Smyth beautifully argues that Dering's account book, and other seventeenth-century financial accounts can be read as autobiographical texts, Smyth 2010, pp. 57–122.
 6. This had been encoded in the 1533 "Act for Reformation of Excess in Apparel" and was repeatedly restated in proclamations throughout the Elizabethan period. For more on sumptuary legislation in the Elizabethan period, and its repeal, see (Baldwin 1923; Harte 1976; Hooper 1915; Pitman forthcoming 2017; Vincent, 2003, pp. 117–52).
 7. See, for example, Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 69–71.
 8. As Ian MacInnes has shown, English mastiffs were highly regarded by Europeans, and were cultivated by the aristocracy who regarded the dog's courage, strength, and humoural

properties as similar to the ideal masculine Englishman. Mastiffs were used in bear baiting, and were evidently highly prized as gifts amongst the elite – the East India Company gave one to the Mogul besieging Ormuz in 1615. For more, see Ian MacInnes (2003) “Mastiffs and spaniels: Gender and nation in the English dog”, *Textual Practice*, 17:1, pp. 21–40.

9. Like Whittle and Griffiths, I refer to the scholarship of David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1992) and J.R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to Present* (Oxford, 1985).
10. However, Dering’s discursive calculations at the back of his account book suggest he felt that Anne’s father, Sir Nicholas Tufton, had not provided Elizabeth with an appropriate wardrobe. An exploration of this is beyond the scope of this article, but will be explored in my forthcoming PhD thesis, *The Making of Clothing and the Making of London, 1560–1660*, University of Cambridge forthcoming, 2017.
11. Sadly, without the original paintings, it is difficult to tell what colors and textiles are depicted, and so we cannot confidently match the depictions to clothing mentioned in the account book. Dering is clearly wearing large hose, striped with decorative braiding, and his flat fronted doublet is decorated by a row of decorative points tied into bows. Delicate lace adorns the edge of his ruff and cuffs, and over his right arm is slung a large dark heavy cloak. He rests his left hand on a sword handle. Anthony is depicted in a doublet and petticoat, as the portrait was made before his breeching. Anne wears a beautifully decorated textile in her skirt and stomacher – perhaps it is a silk damask or embroidered with flower sprigs. Elizabeth, with her hand resting on a skull to show that she is deceased, wears a dark embroidered overgown, with large cuffs and a delicate ruff. To see the portraits of Anne, Anthony, Edward, and Elizabeth, and for more on this commission and the artist, please refer to Robert Tittler, “George Cottington and the Dering Family Portraits of 1626,” *The Burlington Magazine* 151 (2009): 208–211.

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