

SOME INFLUENCES ON THE YOUNG ISAAC NEWTON

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THE appointment of a wife as sole executrix of her husband's will seems to have been usual in Berkshire in the 17th century even when there were sons. If the same was true in Lincolnshire then no special significance follows from Newton's grandfather, James Ayscough, having acted in this way in 1652 with respect to Margery, his widow-to-be (Baird (1987), see page 172).*

The probate records at Reading, which were proved in the Archdeaconry Court of Berkshire, disclose that of the 200 wills made by men during this century, who had a wife still living, 161 made their wife sole executrix. The remaining 39 named various members of the family such as mothers, daughters, kinsmen, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well as sons. Nearly all these men left children, many of whom had grown-up sons and daughters of their own.

When a man made a verbal (nuncupative) will the court seems always to have made any surviving widow his executrix. In cases of intestacy any surviving widow was named as the administrator on the court bond, and only if the widow were deceased did the court call upon a son. Seventeenth-century widows apparently had greater legal standing than is often supposed.

* K. A. Baird, 'Some influences upon the young Isaac Newton', *Notes Rec. R. Soc. Lond.* **41** (1987), 169-179.