

The petitions submitted by war widows during the Civil Wars and Interregnum

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Motivation: During the Civil Wars and Interregnum war widows submitted petitions in order to achieve financial subsistence for themselves and their families.



Anon., *The Resolution of the women of London to the Parliament* ([London], 1642), frontispiece.

If their husband had fought and died for Parliament then a Parliamentarian war widow could petition their local Quarter Sessions for a pension alongside maimed soldiers. However, if their husband had fought for the King that was impossible until after the Restoration. Moreover, many widows whose husbands owned land saw their and their children's inheritance confiscated by Parliament as a result of their husband's choices. These Royalist war widows petitioned Parliament's central Sequestration and Compounding committees to have those lands restored to them.

Language: When war widows constructed their petitions many of them drew upon the biblical framework of the poor widow who was deserving of charity.



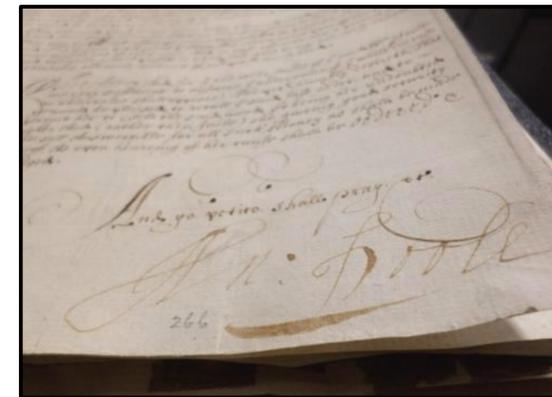
William Warren, *Strange, true and lamentable newes from Exceter* (London, 1643), frontispiece.

For example: 'Yee shall not afflict any widow, or fatherlesse child' (Exodus, 22: 22-23).

War widows also invoked the financial loss that they had suffered, as well as the suffering of their children, in order to request that their case be heard favourably.

Additionally, widows drew upon the actions of their husbands in order to persuade the hearer of the petition to look kindly upon them. If their husbands had fought for Parliament many widows used language of faithful and true service when they requested pensions.

Process: These petitions were not written by the widows themselves, although occasionally they signed them.

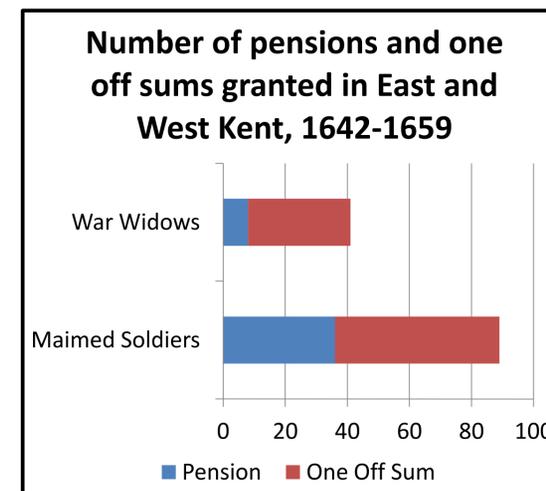


Petition of Anne Presse, 10 March 1646, The National Archives, SP 23/177, p. 405.

When men petitioned in similar processes, they rarely wrote theirs either. Instead, these documents represent a collaborative process between the petitioner, scribe and possibly a lawyer who gave advice.

In most cases, a petitioner had to accompany her petition to court in order to present her case orally. For those Royalist widows who needed to present their case in Westminster, these could mean travelling a considerable distance.

Outcomes: It is almost impossible to make a direct link between the type of language that a widow used and the outcome of her petition.



Kent History and Library Centre, Quarter Sessions Order Books (Q/SO/E1, W1) and Sessions Rolls (Q/SB/1-7).

Many Parliamentarian war widows who petitioned for a pension in Kent were ultimately granted a pension or one of sum (see Graph). Almost all of the Royalist war widows who petitioned to have their sequestration removed were granted it (see H. Worthen, 'Supplicants and guardians: The petitions of royalist widows during the Civil Wars and Interregnum, 1642–1660', *Women's History Review*, vol. 26, issue 4 (2017), pp. 528-540).

Some widows were unsuccessful, but it is rarely clear as to why.