The Past and Present Society

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND*

IT IS A TRUISM THAT THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1560 AND 1700 WAS a time of social transformation in England, and it is generally agreed that it was also a time of more rapid change than the following or preceding periods. The nature and tempo of social mobility, however, varied immensely between different districts, classes, and types of community. There was great diversity in the pace of change between (and indeed within) such counties as Suffolk, Kent, Northamptonshire, and Leicestershire, though all of them were within the "lowland zone". There was obviously great diversity in the pattern of mobility between county, village, and town society; and also between peers, gentry, clergy, peasantry, tradesmen, and labourers. In endeavouring to outline the pattern of mobility in a few of these different classes and types of community, it is primarily this diversity that I wish to emphasize. Until many more local studies are written, generalization is inevitably tentative where society was still so highly localized.

Throughout this period the basic unit of society was of course the village, and the mainstay of many villages was the rural labourer. Though forming at least one quarter or one third of the population, farmworkers have rarely received much attention from historians.[1] When mentioned at all they have often been envisaged as sunk in uniform poverty and misery. Though the reason for this neglect — the paucity of source material — is not far to seek, this prevailing impression is misleading. Poverty was obviously widespread, but in

* This is a revised version of my paper to the 1965 Past and Present Annual Conference on "Social Mobility".

[1] The following paragraphs are based on my study of "Farm Labourers, 1500-1640", in the forthcoming Agrarian History of England, vol. iv, ed. Joan Thirsk. The principal sources used include manorial surveys, farming account books, probate inventories, Exchequer Special Commissions and Depositions, cases in the Courts of Chancery and Requests, and scattered references in State Papers Domestic and by contemporaries such as Harrison, Norden, and Carew. For a general account of labourers, see G. E. Fussell, The English Rural Labourer (London, 1949); but much of Mr. Fussell's evidence relates to yeomen and husbandmen, not farmworkers. For Devon see W. G. Hoskins and H. P. R. Finberg, Devonshire Studies (London, 1952), "The Farm-Labourer through four Centuries". Cf. also D. C. Coleman, "Labour in the English Economy of the Seventeenth Century", Econ. Hist. Rev., 2nd ser., viii (1955-6). Labourers' numbers varied much from region to region. They were usually fewest in moorland areas, highest in arable. The general figure rose from 25-33% in Henry VIII's reign to 47% by the end of the seventeenth century.

fact the labouring population was far from being economically homogeneous. Between 1540 and 1640 it was undergoing a twofold social transformation within its own ranks of great importance to the countryside as a whole. Basically this change was due to the rapid growth of population, the continuous decline in real wages, and the progress of commercial farming, requiring an ever-growing army of wage-labourers. In part it was an economic phenomenon. In the sixteenth century large numbers of farm-labourers were still primarily peasants, supplementing the produce of their smallholdings with seasonal or occasional wagework. With the increasing pressure on land, however, a rapidly expanding labour force came into being. A small minority of farmworkers was still possessed of relatively extensive holdings or common-rights and was able to profit by the new commercial openings of the age, working their way up, in a generation or two, into the yeomanry. The middle and lower ranks of cottagers, however, were losing their modest property-rights and sinking to the level of a landless proletariat.

This change in the labouring community was accompanied by a growing distinction between working communities in forest and in "fielden" areas of the countryside. In the ancient, nucleated villages characteristic of the latter areas, forms of society were often deeply rooted, social classes were relatively stable and diversified, and the labourer's outlook imbued with the prevalent preconceptions of church and manor-house. Here, the farmworking family more often remained rooted in the same district from one generation to the next, sometimes working on the same farm and passing on the same customary skills to children and grandchildren. Few labourers in these areas were well-off, even by labouring standards; their holdings were small and common rights often negligible; but manorial charity was more accessible and the very poor and destitute were usually less numerous than elsewhere.

In the scattered hamlets characteristic of so many forest districts, by contrast, the labouring population sometimes changed dramatically between 1540 and 1640. The manor-house was often remote and the population largely composed of a single social class — that of the rural cottager. This cottage population sometimes inhabited small, entirely new settlements, founded by squatters who had either been evicted by enclosure or were unable to find work or living-room in their native villages. Quite certainly the Tudor and early Stuart period witnessed a large movement of surplus labourers away from fielden villages to forest settlements in many parts of England: in Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire, and Kent, for example. Perhaps more frequently, however, these woodland

settlements consisted, on the one hand, of a small core of indigenous peasants with sizeable holdings and a high standard of living, a sort of labouring aristocracy; and, on the other hand, of an ever-expanding number of very poor squatters and wanderers, virtually landless, often lately evicted from elsewhere, "given to little or no kind of labour, . . . dwelling far from any church or chapel, and . . . as ignorant of God or of any civil course of life as the very savages amongst the infidels . . .".[2] It was from this latter group, in consequence of their semi-vagrant origins, that the growing army of seasonal workers was largely recruited, called into being by the needs of commercial farming. As a rule such workers were either more willing than labourers in fielden villages, or more frequently compelled by necessity, to leave their homes and migrate at peak seasons in search of employment elsewhere. At harvest time they found work on arable farms, and were lodged in barns and outhouses where rough beds were temporarily erected for them. In the slack seasons many of them turned to by-employments such as spinning, knitting stockings, lace-making, and various woodcrafts to eke out their modest subsistence.[3] In a few favoured areas, such as parts of Hertfordshire, they were able to make a substantial living by these diverse means, and occasionally left personal property worth £30 or £40 at their death.

With infinite local variations in detail, the Tudor period thus witnessed a marked drift in the labouring population from the field and plain areas to unenclosed woodland, heaths, and corners of wasteland. It saw the gradual rise of the better-off alongside the impoverishment of the great majority of cottagers. It also saw the emergence of a radical distinction between the relatively static labouring population of the plains and the newer and more mobile communities on heaths and in forests. In short, the Tudor labouring population was neither economically nor geographically immobile. Within its ranks there was a distinct social hierarchy, stretching from the inexperienced youth or odd-job man up to the highly-regarded shepherd with his own small sheep-flock, or the shrewd smallholder.[4]

[2] *Harrison's Description of England in Shakspere's Youth*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Part iii (New Shakspere Soc., 6th ser., viii, 1881), p. 180.

[3] For a study of such industries see Joan Thirsk, "Industries in the Country-side", in *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England in Honour of R. H. Tawney*, ed. F. J. Fisher (London, 1961).

[4] Shepherds were able to build up a flock of their own — sometimes of a hundred or more sheep — because their perquisites included the right to a few lambs each year from their master's flock, to be run on his own pastures. It is interesting that in speaking of nineteenth-century shepherds, W. H. Hudson remarked that "the caste feeling is always less strong in the hill shepherd than in other men who are on the land . . .": *A Shepherd's Life* (Everyman edn., London, 1949), p. 37.

This sense of hierarchy was important in shaping the modest ambitions of the settled farmworker. Only a few labourers endeavoured to venture beyond it into the perilous seas of the agricultural market, and of those who did do so a number ended up in the Courts of Chancery or Requests; but for a small minority it was still possible to climb a degree or two in the social scale.

If the basis of rural society was the village community, the apex was the county community, and the county gentry formed its chief element. In some respects the England of 1640 can be likened to a union of partially independent shire-states, each with its own distinct ethos and loyalty. Of course by no means all were equally distinct, nor were all changing equally quickly. Both in the broad structure of landed society and in the relative antiquity of the body of local gentry as a whole, a number of striking differences come to light between various shires.[5] In Suffolk the pattern of gentle society was relatively clear-cut. Some counties were dominated by a single titled magnate; but in Suffolk no noble family or group of peers exercised indisputable supremacy. There were in fact very

[5] In addition to the sources referred to in the following paragraphs, valuable studies of county and local society in this period include: J. T. Cliffe, "The Yorkshire Gentry on the Eve of the Civil War" (London Ph.D. thesis, 1960), summarized in *Bull. Inst. Hist. Research*, xxxiv (London, 1961); T. G. Barnes, *Somerset, 1625-1640: a County's Government during the "Personal Rule"* (London, 1961); A. H. Smith, "The Elizabethan Gentry of Norfolk" (London Ph.D. thesis, 1959); *V.C.H., Wiltshire*, vol. v (London, 1957), "Parliamentary History, 1529-1688", by S. T. Bindoff, especially pp. 122 ff.; Hoskins and Finberg, *op. cit.*, "The Estates of the Caroline Gentry"; Alan Simpson, *The Wealth of the Gentry, 1540-1660: East Anglian Studies* (Cambridge, 1961); Mary E. Finch, *The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families, 1540-1640* (Northants. Rec. Soc., xix, Oxford, 1956); A. H. Dodd, *Studies in Stuart Wales* (Cardiff, 1952), pp. 2, 14, 179-81, and *passim;* D. H. Pennington and I. A. Roots, eds., *The Committee at Stafford, 1643-1645* (Staffs. Hist. Collections, 4th ser., i, Manchester, 1957), Introduction. For the aristocracy as a whole see Helen Miller, "The Early Tudor Peerage, 1485-1547", *Bull. Inst. Hist. Research*, xxiv (1951); Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965). For the yeomanry, see Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeomen under Elizabeth and the early Stuarts* (New Haven, 1942). For the place of office in influencing social mobility see G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants* (London, 1961), pp. 267-82, 322-36, 445. Regarding the effect of the Dissolution on landed society, see A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London, 1964), pp. 150-66. For the controversy over the "Rise of the Gentry", see the bibliographical note in J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (London, 1961), pp. 149-52, and W. A. Aiken and B. D. Henning, eds., *Conflict in Stuart England: Essays in honour of Wallace Notestein* (London, 1960), p. 37. I. A. Roots in his review article "Gentlemen and others", *History*, xlvii (1962), gives some further references; see also Perez Zagorin, "The Social Interpretation of the English Revolution", *Jl. of Econ. Hist.*, xix (1959); and *American Hist. Rev.*, lxii (1956-57), pp. 751-2, for a summary of discussion on the subject at a meeting of the American Historical Association.

few peers in the county, and none of great importance.   The 700 or
so families who, by Charles I's reign, composed the body of Suffolk
gentry — the vast majority of them of merely "parochial" status —
were headed by thirty or so major "county" gentry, most of whom
were knights or baronets.   Amongst these thirty, the Barnardistons
of Kedington clearly stood out as county leaders, partly from their
territorial influence, but quite as much from their personal repute as
solid puritans.   Although there was a core of very ancient families in
the county, however, of whom the Barnardistons were one, Suffolk
was pre-eminently a county of relative newcomers.   Of the ninety-
nine ruling parliamentarian families in the Civil War, only twenty-five
were genuinely indigenous, and probably at least forty had settled in
the local countryside since 1603, either as complete outsiders or in
some cases as heirs of Ipswich merchants.   Ipswich, by far the
largest town and port, had played a prominent part in the rapidly
increasing wealth of the county and its gentry.   In such ports
wealth was always made more quickly and usually on a larger scale
than in inland towns like Leicester and Northampton, though not
always on so solid a basis.   Many of the greater Suffolk gentry also
maintained trading links with London, though this rarely seems to
have deflected their outlook from a predominant interest in the
county.   All five brothers of Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston were
merchants, three in London and two overseas, and the family lost
none of its local influence through these mercantile connexions.
Other families owed much of their wealth, and sometimes their
origin, to the county's very extensive export trade in agricultural
products, especially cheese.   Essentially, Suffolk was a county of
many middling gentry, with a few really wealthy families but no
court-magnates.   Mobility and stability were in unusual harmony
and balance. [6]

   In Kent the position was very different.   By 1640 there were at
least as many landed families in the county as in Suffolk, but the
gentry were more closely interrelated, and the structure of society
was more clan-like.   In part this local peculiarity was due to the
peninsular position of the county, so that frequent intermarriage
between neighbouring families was virtually inevitable, since only
very occasionally did most of them ever venture beyond the county
boundary.   It was also due to the fact that large numbers of Kentish
gentry stemmed from quite a small number of family-stocks.
Directly or indirectly, the custom of gavelkind tenure had led to the

   [6] Alan Everitt, *Suffolk and the Great Rebellion, 1640-1660* (Suffolk Records
Society, iii [Ipswich, 1960]), pp. 16-21, 27-8, 33-4, 36.

frequent practice of setting up younger sons of the family with a small estate of their own. As a consequence, by 1640, families like the Boyses had no fewer than ten separately-established branches in the county; the Finches had nine branches, and dozens of other families had six, five, or four. Such proliferation also existed elsewhere, but I have not myself found it to anything like the same degree in other counties, and it led to the saying, "in Kent they are all first cousins".[7] In Northamptonshire, by contrast, out of 184 families in 1619, only eight consisted of three branches and only two of more than three; by 1681 even these small numbers had fallen to no more than two families with three branches, and one with five.[8]

Equally striking was the fact that so many of these Kentish families, outside the immediate metropolitan area, were of local origin. Lambarde's well-known remark that "the gentlemen be not here (throughout) of so ancient stocks as elsewhere" is strictly applicable only to his own region round London, where in any case few influential families, apart from the Walsinghams of Chislehurst, were seated.[9] The great majority of the gentry lived either on the Chartlands between the Downs and the Weald, or in the populous and fertile area of East Kent. In the immediate vicinity of the metropolis only one-third of the gentry were indigenous to the county and nearly half had settled there since 1603. By contrast, in Holmesdale, twenty to thirty miles out of London, the proportion of native families rose to 50 per cent, and only one fifth of the gentry were newcomers since Queen Elizabeth's reign. In East Kent, between forty-five and seventy-five miles from London, 85 per cent of the gentry were indigenous and only 3 per cent had arrived since 1603; whilst in the High Weald around Goudhurst and Benenden virtually all came of native stock. Several of the newcomers in the latter regions, moreover, had not purchased their estates themselves, but

[7] Alan Everitt, "The Community of Kent in 1640", *The Genealogists' Magazine*, xiv (1963), pp. 240-8. Cf. P. G. Selby, *The Faversham Farmers' Club and its Members* (Faversham, 1927), for a description of the inbred and clannish farming community of the area in the nineteenth century. See also *Letters of Jane Austen*, ed. Lord Brabourne (London, 1884), i, p. 20, where the editor describes the nexus of relationships marking the novelist's Kentish family background.

[8] The figures for Northants. are based principally on *The Visitations of Northamptonshire made in 1564 and 1618-19 . . .* , ed. W. C. Metcalfe (Harleian Soc., 1887); *The Visitation of the County of Northamptonshire in the Year 1681*, ed. H. I. Longden (Harleian Soc., lxxxvii, 1935); G.E.C., *Complete Baronetage* and *Complete Peerage;* Oswald Barron, *Northamptonshire Families, V.C.H., Northants.* (London, 1906); John Bridges, *The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire*, ed. Peter Whalley (Oxford, 1791); Finch, *op. cit.*

[9] William Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (Chatham, 1826 edn.), p. 6.

had obtained them by inheritance, their father having wedded a local heiress.   Of the older Kentish families, the great majority had been reckoned armigerous by Henry VII's reign.   A substantial proportion had emerged as small local freeholders in the high Middle Ages, often, like the Honywoods and Twysdens, taking their name from their native property.   The end of the fifteenth century usually marked the conclusion of a long period of slow consolidation in their fortunes and the commencement of a more rapid rise.   But very rapid expansion was rare: families who played for high political or financial stakes like the Fanes and Vanes — both from the same Wealden stock, one legitimate, the other illegitimate — were exceptional.   Much more usual was the painstaking and often fluctuating increase, during a century and a half, of families like the Boyses, Derings, Honywoods, Oxindens, and others.   This fact was certainly significant in influencing the county's political alignment in 1642-1660.   The great majority of the gentry were too deeply embedded in their land and too closely interrelated to relish either social change or political interference.   The county was too large to be governed by any single magnate, and most of the gentry formed a solid phalanx of opposition, increasingly difficult to control, under the leadership of twenty or thirty major, and mostly indigenous, families.[10]

Equally remarkable was the continued ability of these native Kentish families to survive the financial rigours of the Great Rebellion.   Out of 179 leading Kentish families, at least three-quarters, broadly speaking, retained their ancestral estates and position in the country beyond 1700.   The percentage that definitely failed to survive was probably little larger than the proportion that died out in the half-century before 1640, despite the sequestrations, compositions, and high taxation of the Civil War.   But of the newer families who had arrived since 1603, only 29 per cent retained their position in Kent until 1688, whereas no fewer than 87 per cent of the indigenous families survived at least until Queen Anne's reign.   Amongst the complex causes contributing to the survival of the latter, the mere fact of immobility and inbreeding was prominent; but also, it is clear, some of them paid more careful attention to their estates than spendthrifts like the Braemeses and Thornhills.   Their rise had been slower, but it was more solidly based than that of the newer families.[11]

[10] Everitt, "The Community of Kent in 1640", *loc. cit.*
[11] This paragraph is based on the concluding chapter of my book, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester, 1966).

Quite different, again, was the situation in Northamptonshire. "Everywhere adorned with noblemen'[s] and gentlemen's houses" was Camden's comment on the county.[12] But despite the common reputation of the county of squires and spires, Camden's remark would not have been applicable before the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The thirteenth century, to which so many families in Kent and the West Country could trace their modest beginnings, seems to have left relatively little trace in seventeenth-century Northamptonshire. During the Tudor and early Stuart period, in fact, the county underwent a dramatic social transformation. Out of a total of 335 gentry in the mid-seventeenth century, the origins of some 274 are traceable with fair certainty. Of these, only 27 per cent were genuinely indigenous to Northamptonshire; 40 per cent had settled in the county in the Tudor period, and 33 per cent since 1603. Of the indigenous families the bulk were apparently not accounted armigerous until well into the sixteenth century; and of the Tudor families most had not settled in Northamptonshire until Queen Elizabeth's reign. The remaining sixty-one families also require a comment. None of them in the seventeenth century could trace their genealogy back for more than two or three generations, at least not to the satisfaction of the Heralds. Yet in some cases, and probably many, they had originated in the county, whilst others had come from only just across the border in Buckinghamshire or Bedfordshire. Most of them must have stemmed from local yeoman stock, or in a few instances from lawyers or tradesmen of Northampton. All had struggled up into the ranks of the gentry by the reign of James I or Charles I. In other words the vast bulk of the gentry of Stuart Northamptonshire, probably at least three-quarters, were of very recent origin: only the slenderest thread of blue blood flowed through county society from its medieval sources.[13] In part this relative modernity may have been due to the changes wrought in the county by the enclosure movement. This cannot be the sole reason, however, since in the neighbouring open-field county of Leicestershire the social metamorphosis was less pronounced.[14] Probably also important was the fact that half the county had formerly been royal forest; for many of the estates and mansions for which the shire

[12] William Camden, *Britannia*, ed. Edmund Gibson, vol. i (London, 1753), col. 511.

[13] For sources see note 8 above.

[14] There were many new minor families in Leicestershire, but scarcely any newcomers of comparable importance to the group of Elizabethan and Stuart gentry who dominated Northants. Its society was still virtually controlled by the two feudal families of Hastings and Grey, and split by their notorious rivalry.

became famous — Rockingham, Kirby, Boughton, Milton, Deene, and Apethorpe, for example — were situated in or near these old forest areas, though not all were of recent origin.

It is sometimes supposed that this degree of social transformation was typical of Elizabethan England generally; but this is an over-simplification.   It was not true of Kent, except, as one would expect, in the narrow fringe of country skirting London.   It does not seem to have been characteristic of Devon.[15]   It was evidently less true of Leicestershire than of Northamptonshire.   Even in Suffolk the metamorphosis of society was less marked than in Northamptonshire, and a more powerful group of native families survived to stabilize the rapidly changing community.   It is clear, however, that where new families were predominant, as in these last two counties, many of the gentry displayed marked affinities with puritanism and decisively supported Parliament during the Civil War.   There was no simple equation between politics and social stability.   The more deeply-rooted gentry did not necessarily support the king outright.   But many of them advocated moderate courses, and hence became increasingly alienated from the parliamentarian régime.[16]

During the later seventeenth century, Northamptonshire under-went a further phase in its development.   This time, however, the trend was in the opposite direction.   As Professor Habakkuk and more recently Mr. Mingay and Professor Stone have shown, the economic developments of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries favoured the larger landowners and witnessed an increas-ingly rigid stratification of landed society.[17]   Some of the symptoms

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[15] Hoskins and Finberg, op. cit., "Three Studies in Family History", "Some old Devon Bartons", and "The Estates of the Caroline Gentry".

[16] Cf. my Suffolk and the Great Rebellion, p. 21.   In The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, I have worked out this theme in more detail.   The complex of local factors influencing political allegiance, however, must not be oversimplified.   Dr. T. G. Barnes has stated that in Somerset there was no apparent connexion between the newer families and political allegiance: Jl. of Econ. Hist., xxii (1962), p. 102.   Other influences were no doubt at work.

[17] H. J. Habakkuk, "English Landownership, 1680-1740", Econ. Hist. Rev., 2nd ser., i (1940), pp. 2-17 (based principally on estates in Northants. and Beds.); "Marriage Settlements in the Eighteenth Century", Trans. Royal Hist. Soc., 4th ser., xxxii (1950), pp. 15-30; G. E. Mingay, English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1963), pp. 15, 26-7, 39, 47, and chapters iii and iv; Lawrence Stone, op. cit., passim.   One suspects, however, that some of the major Northants. estates were unusually large even before the Civil War.   This would be difficult to prove conclusively, but it was already more a county of architectural palaces than Suffolk, Leicestershire, or Kent.   There was little in any of these counties to compare with the enormous, and entirely modern, piles of Burghley, Kirby, or Holdenby.   Nearly all the great mansions of Kent — Knole and Penshurst, for example — were essentially medieval, and the characteristic ones were much smaller than in Northants. generally.

of these changes have already become apparent in speaking of Kent. Others, such as the decline of many of the minor gentry, were also evident elsewhere, for example in Devonshire.[18] Perhaps in few areas, however, were these new tendencies more pronounced, in contrast with the rapid changes of the preceding century, than in Northamptonshire. It was in this period, rather than the early seventeenth century, that the county became dominated by its famous caucus of titled magnates. There had been important peers in the county before 1640, such as the Earl of Northampton; but it was the squirearchy, not the nobility, who determined Northampton- shire politics during the Civil War. Within a couple of generations, however, the flowing lava of local society had solidified. The county of rapid change became increasingly the county of rigid caste, until, at the turn of the last century, Oswald Barron, in his superb volume of Northamptonshire pedigrees, produced unanswerable reasons for recognizing the existence of only nineteen families in the whole shire! "Those who find themselves within our gates," he blandly observed, "may rest assured that there at least neither wealth nor title can gain admission for those without".[19] What, then, had happened to the rest of the 335 Stuart families of the county ? What was the occasion of this new development, and what determined its course ?

Some of the principal factors in the change were analysed, more than twenty years ago, by Professor Habakkuk. It is not necessary to repeat what is already familiar, but one or two points may be added.[20] There can be little doubt that one of the reasons for the metamorphosis was the impassioned reaction of the gentry against the lawlessness let loose by the Civil War. The fabric of society had so nearly perished that it seemed imperative, from the peasantry's viewpoint as well as their own, to reassert the authority of local government. Warfare was at least as disastrous for the peasant as for the peer, especially in a county so unhappily caught between the incessant fire of both king and parliament. During the Civil War,

[18] This was Sabine Baring-Gould's view in writing of Devonshire gentry in Old Country Life (London, 1890).

[19] Barron, op. cit., pp. xvi-xix.

[20] Habakkuk, "English Landownership", loc. cit.; cf. A. H. Johnson, The Disappearance of the Small Landowner (Oxford, 1909), passim. This and the following paragraphs are based principally on the Northampton Borough records (Guildhall, Northampton), the records of the Committee for Compound- ing and Committee for Advance of Money in the Public Record Office, Calendars of State Papers Domestic, contemporary tracts and newspapers in the British Museum and Northampton Borough Library, and information regarding local families mentioned in note 8 above.

most of the leading gentry had either left the county for Oxford or taken refuge in the parliamentarian stronghold of Northampton itself, the most powerful garrison in the south Midlands. Governed by the County Committee, the whole wartime population of the town — tradesmen, troops, and country gentlemen — had rapidly become pervaded by an overwhelming sense of grim and efficient puritan authoritarianism, increasing with the rising tide of ruin all around. In this respect the temper of Northampton differed markedly from that of its nominally parliamentarian, but far more hesitant, neighbour, Leicester.[21] After the Civil War, when the gentry once more dispersed to their homes, their determination to reassert control was redoubled. The confusion consequent upon warfare was heightened by the lawlessness endemic in a forest region, where many peasant settlements were relatively isolated and free from manorial restraint, and where newcomers and alien magnates were by no means always welcome.

Other factors were also at work. By 1700 the roots of most of the Northamptonshire gentry had become more localized, and the longer they remained settled in one place the more frequently they inter-married, and the more intense became their sense of mutual cohesion. Along with this sense of cohesion and with the growing determination to establish their authority, the influx of new blood into the gentle classes from the local yeomanry was no longer welcomed: by Queen Anne's reign the supply had virtually dried up. The sense of caste itself had been strengthened, moreover, during the Civil War. With the gathering of armies in Oxford and other garrisons, the gentry were torn from their local roots and closely jostled by men of all ranks and classes. The older gentry were driven to bolster their position by rigid class-assertion, and the younger Cavaliers by a senseless personal arrogance which often made them intensely unpopular when they returned to their native shires.[22]

With the closure of the means of entry into it from below, the

[21] For Leicester, some important Civil War tracts are reprinted in John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, iii (2), (London, 1804), App. iv.

[22] This was manifestly so in Kent in 1648: cf. my *Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion*, chapters vi and vii. For Oxford there is much material in contemporary tracts and memoirs; see also F. J. Varley, *The Siege of Oxford* (London, 1932) and Supplement. There are relevant chapters in Sir J. A. R. Marriott, *Oxford: its place in National History* (Oxford, 1933); Ruth Fasnacht, *A History of the City of Oxford* (Oxford, 1954); and much useful material in, for example, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood*, vol. i, 1632-63, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford Hist. Soc., xix, 1891); G. D. Boyle, *Characters and Episodes of the Great Rebellion selected from the Autobiography of Edward, Earl of Clarendon* (Oxford, 1889); *Memoirs of Lady Fanshawe* (London, 1905).

Northamptonshire squirearchy gradually became a more or less closed community, at least in comparison with its state a century earlier. The closure of the ranks, however, by no means precluded mobility within the ranks: it quickened it. The consequences of heavy taxation, which, as Professor Habakkuk and others have shown, hit the minor gentry particularly hard, were carried a stage further by natural causes. As some of the small gentry died out in the male line, their heiresses, through whom in the past local lawyers and yeomen had risen to gentility, sometimes married small neighbouring gentry whose estates, when united with their own, now raised them to the level of squires. When the families of knights and squires themselves died out, *their* daughters carried the family patrimony to fellow-knights, who thereupon sometimes became baronets. The supply of land and the influence that went with it thus tended to be confined to an ever-narrowing circle of local proprietors.[23]

With the universality of primogeniture, moreover, there was henceforth little likelihood that the younger sons of the gentry would set up new and independent establishments in the county. Locally, there were neither mines to exploit nor industries to invest in. Much of the county was either insufficiently fertile or too far from seaports to enable a young man to found an estate by means of the intensive farming practised by minor families in Suffolk and Kent.[24] By 1700, apart from a few minor gentry or ex-army officers who had

[23] This phenomenon is more easily traced in some counties than in Northants. — for example in the growth of the Oxinden estates in East Kent in the eighteenth century, recorded in E. Hasted, *History of Kent*, 2nd edn. (Canterbury, 1797-1801), vii-x, *passim*. A useful account of its political consequences in Northants. is given in E. G. Forrester, *Northamptonshire County Elections and Electioneering, 1695-1832* (London, 1941), pp. 5-11, and *passim*. The social and economic consequences also profoundly affected Northampton town, gradually increasing the hold of the greater gentry over its development. The rebuilding of the town after its destruction by fire in 1675 was controlled by the county magnates. Of the annual income of the Northampton Infirmary, founded in 1744, 75% was contributed by the country gentry, 13% by the townsmen; five leading peers subscribed more than the whole town. — "A list of the Annual Subscribers to the County Hospital of Northampton", 1744, British Museum pressmark T. 1034/19.

[24] In Kent, too, however, the late seventeenth century brought a change in this respect. The heir of Nicholas Toke of Godinton, instead of farming much of his lands himself, like his predecessor, let out "all the ou⸱lying farms and lands, and only paid directly his gardener and the workers on the Godinton land": E. C. Lodge, ed., *The Account Book of a Kentish Estate, 1616-1704*, British Academy Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales, vi (London, 1927), p. xxxix. Nicholas Toke had employed his own nephews and cousins from other branches of the family, alongside labourers from the village, no doubt so that they might learn something of farming and estate management for the benefit of their property when it fell due to them.

settled in Northampton town, no doubt provided with a small annuity or family allowance, most younger sons seem to have either entered the church or gone into trade in London.[25] Of the Knightleys of Fawsley, two were London drapers, two Hamburg merchants, one was a city merchant and another a tobacconist at Temple Bar. The same pattern obtained amongst the late Stuart kinsmen of the Norwiches, Pickerings, Randolphs, Thorntons, Thursbys, Scattergoods, Palmers, Parkes, and other major or middling Northamptonshire gentry. For the most part their younger sons became merchants, goldsmiths, grocers, stationers, chandlers, ironmongers, or gunsmiths; whilst their numerous daughters more frequently married London merchants than local Northamptonshire gentry.

If both the labouring community and the county community were undergoing a social transformation in the seventeenth century, so too was the community of the town. Here it is possible to mention no more than one or two of the many factors making for social mobility in English towns. As a rule, they were centres of exchange rather than manufacture, markets rather than industrial communities. As a consequence, they became the focus of the revolution in agricultural marketing which occurred between 1540 and 1640. Fundamentally this revolution was brought about by the general expansion in population, the growth of regional specialization in agriculture, and the increasing dependence of rural and urban communities, particularly London, on food supplies and raw materials brought to them from a distance.[26] The traditional "open market" of the local town ultimately proved incapable of meeting the expanding demand. The great bulk of the new trade took place outside the official "open market", in the warehouses, and above all in the inns, of provincial towns. To meet it, a whole new class of wayfaring traders came into being, from local badgers and cattle drovers to wealthy horsedealers and barley factors, who sometimes travelled over a dozen different counties, and indeed from Scotland in the

[25] As one might expect, the custom of entering the church is more marked in late than in early Stuart Northants.; in Kent it was an older tradition, partly due to the many families connected with the local cathedral clergy of Canterbury and Rochester. The tendency to enter London trade seems to be more striking in Northants. than in Kent, but this may be partly because the Heralds were more thorough in recording the fact in their visitations of Northants.

[26] For a study of urban wealth and mobility in the early Tudor period see W. G. Hoskins, "English Provincial Towns in the Early Sixteenth Century", *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., vi (1956), pp. 1-19. For the growth of London, see N. G. Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London, 1935); Valerie Pearl, *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford, 1961), chapter i.

north to London and Bristol in the south.[27]   Of course this develop-
ment was not an entirely novel phenomenon.   Itinerant wool-
merchants were a common feature of the countryside long before
Queen Elizabeth's reign.   But there can be no question that this
society of wayfaring traders expanded immensely in the later sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries.   The enormous growth in the number
and size of commercial inns in towns like Northampton — sometimes
a five or sixfold increase within two or three generations — is one of
many proofs of it.   Meeting one another in the same towns, even in
the same inns, year after year, these factors and "commercial
travellers" gradually became an increasingly differentiated and self-
concious community.   They began as amateurs, and ended up as
professionals.   And it was principally as a consequence of their
activity that by 1640 a select number of English towns, such as
Derby, Shrewsbury, Northampton, and Salisbury, became either
general emporia for a wide stretch of countryside, or inland
entrepôts noted for marketing some particular commodity.   Don-
caster, for instance, had emerged as the chief wool market of the
north-east, buyers and sellers coming from all over Yorkshire,
Lincolnshire, County Durham, and the north Midlands.   Northamp-
ton, by Defoe's time, had become "the centre of all the horse-
markets and horse-fairs in England . . .".   Peers and gentry, as well
as farmers, coachmen, and waggoners, travelled from north and
south, east and west, to attend Northampton's great horse-fairs.[28]
     The Stuart inn was in many ways very unlike its modern counter-
part, which is rather the descendant of the humble tavern or alehouse.
Besides being primarily a hotel, sometimes with thirty or forty
rooms, it supplied the place of a warehouse, bank, exchange, auction-
room, scrivener's office, and coach and waggon park.   By the turn

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[27] For the expansion of the agricultural market and the increase in middle-
men's activities, see R. B. Westerfield, *Middlemen in English Business* (New
Haven, 1915); F. J. Fisher, "The Development of the London Food Market,
1540-1640", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, v (1934-35); N. S. B. Gras, *The Evolution of the
English Corn Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915); P. V. McGrath, "The Market-
ing of Food, Fodder, and Livestock in the London Area in the Seventeenth
Century . . ." (London M.A. thesis, 1948); N. J. Williams, "The Maritime
Trade of East Anglian Ports, 1550-1590" (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1952).   For
the development of the "private market" and of marketing generally see my
chapter on "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce, 1500-1640", in the
forthcoming *Agrarian History of England*, iv, ed. Joan Thirsk.
     [28] For Doncaster, see Public Record Office, E. 134. 17 Car. I. M. 8 and E. 134.
18 Car. I. E. 9; for Northampton, Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through England and
Wales* (Everyman edn., London, 1959), ii, pp. 86-7.   There is much information
in Defoe regarding marketing development.   See also *Tradesmen in Early-
Stuart Wiltshire*, ed. N. J. Williams (Wilts. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc., Records
Branch, xv, 1960), pp. xi-xv.

of the seventeenth century it was also sometimes a posting-house, a centre for local lectures and exhibitions, and an information bureau of the commercial and social facilities of the area.   The larger inns in places like Salisbury and Northampton could sometimes accommodate seventy or eighty travellers, and equally large numbers of horses. Gradually, stage by stage, they developed a distinct and well-defined hierarchy amongst themselves.   In Northampton, there were three inns at the top of the scale, of which the George was the chief.   The landlords of these inns had usually graduated from the smaller Northampton establishments, originating as innkeepers in the lesser market towns of the county, or in places on the main roads converging upon the town from London, Leicester, Cambridge, Oxford, Coventry, and the north and west.   When one of these landlords died, someone else moved up in the scale to take his place, and a general post ensued in half the inns of the town.   As a rule, the wealthier innkeepers in Northampton became local mayors and aldermen; their daughters sometimes married local clergy; their sons occasionally became lawyers, and their grandsons moved up into the ranks of that rapidly expanding class of leisured inhabitants of the town (of very mixed origin) which can best be described as the "pseudo-gentry".[29]   If the society of Northampton is any guide, this English innkeeping population, with its bevies of servants and grooms, together with the travelling merchants dependent upon it, was one of the most mobile elements in the community.   The general increase of travelling amongst the upper classes, especially after the Restoration, also contributed much to its rapid development.[30]   We should not exaggerate its numbers, but in an important inland town, such as Northampton then was, it became the predominant economic element in the urban community.[31]

The mention of what I have ventured to call the "pseudo-gentry"

[29] Ibid.; Northampton Borough records (Guildhall, Northampton), Assembly Books, Chamberlains' Accounts; advertisements in The Northampton Mercury, 1720 sqq.; Northamptonshire Record Office (Delapré Abbey, Northampton), Northampton Archdeaconry Probate Records, Inventories and Wills relating to Northampton innkeepers, 1660 sqq.

[30] For the increase in travel cf. W. G. Hoskins, Provincial England: Essays in Social and Economic History (London, 1963), chap. xi, "The Rediscovery of England"; E. A. L. Moir, The Discovery of Britain: the English Tourists, 1540-1840 (London, 1964).   Defoe, op. cit., Thomas Baskerville (Hist. MSS. Commission Reports, Portland, ii [London, 1893], pp. 263-314), Celia Fiennes (The Journeys of Celia Fiennes, ed. Christopher Morris [London, 1947]), and many others bear witness to this development.

[31] Between 1660 and 1750, the proportion of urban wealth in Northampton in the hands of innkeepers, as recorded in probate inventories, was 19%.   This of course omits the wealth of townsmen who were too impoverished to leave inventories.

raises the last point I wish to note. The fact that this elusive group is equally difficult to trace and to define is an indication both of its amorphous character, and of its importance in the ladder of social ambition. Who were these people, and where did they come from ? By the term "pseudo-gentry" I refer to that class of leisured and predominantly urban families who, by their manner of life, were commonly regarded as gentry, though they were not supported by a landed estate. In most areas they began to emerge into prominence in the later seventeenth century, though their origins often go back to an earlier period. Usually they lived in the larger or county towns, or in one of the rising Restoration spas; but one of their chief characteristics was their lack of any deep local roots. They migrated easily from London to towns like Northampton, and from Northampton to Bath or Tunbridge Wells. Some of them were younger sons of the country gentry; some were themselves impoverished gentry; some were clergy, or sons or daughters of clerics; some had served as officers in the army; some had married merchants' heiresses, with modest fortunes in the South Sea Company; some were the heirs of local lawyers, scriveners, or doctors; and some were the grandsons of those wealthy factors, maltsters, moneylenders, and innkeepers who, in the seventeenth century, became so numerous in inland entrepôts like Northampton. Naturally, they were not everywhere equally numerous. They were noticeably more prominent in Northampton than in its sister-borough of Leicester: partly because Northampton was then cleaner and better-built; partly because many of the county gentry possessed town-houses there; partly because it was a more important coaching centre, readily accessible to London, Bath, Oxford, and Cambridge; and chiefly, perhaps, because it had already become a centre of those many sophisticated trades, pursuits, and amusements which came into existence to meet their own taste and that of the country gentry. It was partly their demand that transformed many of the trades in Northampton at this time, and produced a whole crop of local goldsmiths, silversmiths, engravers, woodcarvers, sculptors, heraldic painters, and other refined craftsmen.[32]

[32] For these remarks on Northampton trade I have relied principally on an analysis of the freemen's lists in the Northampton Assembly Books (Guildhall, Northampton); wills and inventories of Northampton people (Northants. Record Office, Delapré Abbey, Northampton); tradesmen's advertisements in *The Northampton Mercury* (1720 *sqq.*). For Leicester, see *V.C.H., Leicestershire*, iv (London, 1958), "The City of Leicester: Social and Economic History", by E. W. J. Kerridge. The rapid spread and success of provincial newspapers after 1700 and the growth of clubs — the word in this sense is of seventeenth-century origin — were two of the many important consequences of the rise of the pseudo-gentry: both were developments working against the localism of the older country gentry.

By 1700 these pseudo-gentry formed one of the few remaining social links, outside London, between tradesmen and professional people on the one hand and gentry on the other. Far away in the background of their lives there was often an echo of genuine gentility: some country squire, perhaps, who was their uncle or cousin, some knight or baronet whose niece they had married. One gets the impression, however, that their ambiguous position led them to harden their own attitude to inferiors. For them, with their relatively weak local links, in many cases, it was easier to maintain rigid distinctions of caste than for jumped-up squires in a countryside where people remembered a man's lowly origins. In fact, the increasing ease of travel after the Restoration was one of the principal factors in the emergence of this new urban class.

At all levels, and in each different type of community, the seventeenth century was obviously a time of transformation. But the degree and the pace of social change should not be exaggerated. When all is said, it was not so rapid or so complete as the comparable landed revolution in some of the Scottish border counties in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In Kirkcudbrightshire, for example, virtually none of the Victorian and Edwardian landed estates of the county are traceable as distinct entities before 1750 or 1800. Most of the properties around the new market-town of Castle Douglas, such as the Glenlair estate of the Clerk-Maxwells, were recent agglomerations of farms or smallholdings, with no historical unity. Most of the new lairds' homes were entirely rebuilt, occasionally, as at Glenlair, with a Georgian farmhouse as its nucleus, and a Stuart name for its title. These changes in the Galloway countryside often took place within the space of a single generation.[33] In England, by contrast, the metamorphosis of society under the Tudors and Stuarts was usually spread over two or three generations, and frequently longer. If equally striking in its ultimate consequences, it was on the whole less rapid in its progress. The dramatic effects of the enclosure movement, the rise in prices, the

[33] This account of Kirkcudbrightshire is based on P. H. M'Kerlie, *History of the Lands and their Owners in Galloway* (Edinburgh, 1870-79), v; *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, iv (1845); W. A. Stark, "The Vale of Urr", *The Gallovidian*, viii (1906); C. H. Dick, *Highways and Byways in Galloway and Carrick* (London, 1916); and a study of some of the families of the area in detail, in particular the Clerk-Maxwells. Much of the area was in the fifteenth century in the hands of the Glendonwyns, and a small part was still in a Miss Glendonwyn's hands in 1845. But this great family's inheritance was breaking up and fissiparating from the sixteenth century onwards, until the new gentry-owners reclaimed it, in many small estates, from the late eighteenth century onwards.

dissolution of the monasteries, the progress of commercial farming, the expansion of London, the development of transport, the increase of population, and the catastrophe of the Civil War must not blind us to the forces of continuity and conservatism.   Even in a county like Northamptonshire many ancient ways and local prejudices survived alongside the transformation of the community.

University of Leicester   *Alan Everitt*

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

and

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The ANNUAL CONFERENCE of the *Past and Present Society* will be held on Thursday 7 July 1966 in Birkbeck College, London.   The subject will be POPULAR RELIGION. There will be two sessions: the first (10-30 a.m. to 12-30 p.m.) will be on the later medieval and early modern periods; the second (2-15 p.m. to 4-15 p.m.) on the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries.   For further details see the leaflet in this issue, or write for a copy to The Editor, *Past and Present*, Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

The ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the *Past and Present Society* will be held at 12-30 p.m. on Thursday 7 July 1966 in Birkbeck College, London, at the conclusion of the morning session of the Annual Conference.