



CHICAGO JOURNALS

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North American
Conference on
British Studies

The County Community in Stuart Historiography

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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Spring, 1980), pp. 54-73

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) on behalf of [The North American Conference on British Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175493>

Accessed: 08/12/2012 12:11

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The County Community in Stuart Historiography

CLIVE HOLMES

The 1635 ship money writ elicited a "common feeling of dissatisfaction" throughout England. It was the general belief that the tax contravened "fundamental law," and that in its imposition Charles "had deliberately treated the nation as a stranger to his counsels, and that if his claim to levy money by his own authority were once admitted, the door would be open to other demands of which it was impossible to foresee the limits." Contrast this account by S.R. Gardiner with a more recent analysis of the response to ship money provided by J.S. Morrill, a scholar who has acknowledged a substantial intellectual debt to Alan Everitt, the progenitor and leading exponent of the concept of the "county community" in seventeenth-century England. "The King's right to levy the rate was rarely questioned in the provinces. Ship money was hated for its costliness and its disruptive effects on the social and political calm of the communities . . . Above all," the levy was detested because "it exemplified the government's insensitivity toward localist sentiment and belief."¹

In these divergent accounts, a fundamental difference emerges between the traditional school of English historians and the county community school of local historians. For Gardiner, seventeenth-century Englishmen were fully aware of and vitally concerned about the actions of their national rulers, actions they evaluated against the touchstone of constitutional principle. Everitt and Morrill insist, by contrast, that even the gentry were "surprisingly ill informed" about "wider political issues"; they were "simply not concerned with affairs of state." Rather, their political horizons were circumscribed by the boundaries of their shires—their "county commonwealths," their "countries." In an England that can be described as "a union of partially independent county-states," localism flourished, and local concerns took precedence over national issues.²

This paper was originally presented at the Middle Atlantic regional meeting of the Conference on British Studies in November 1977. I am grateful to David Underdown, the commentator, and to J.H. Hexter, Derek Hirst, Linda Levy Peck, and Lawrence Stone for their criticisms.

¹ S.R. Gardiner, *History of England 1603-1642* (London, 1884), vol. 8, p. 85; J.S. Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces* (London, 1976), pp. 24-29.

² The quotations are taken from Morrill, *Revolt*, p. 22; Alan Everitt, *The Local Community and the Great Rebellion* (London, 1969), p. 8; Everitt, *Change in the Provinces* (Leicester, 1969), pp. 47, 48. In fairness, it should be remarked that both Everitt and Morrill disclaim any intention of arguing that "provincialism excluded concern for general . . . political or constitutional issues" (Morrill's phrase). Yet

Many of the suggestions advanced by Everitt and his colleagues present valid challenges to Gardiner's account of the political milieu, with its predominant emphasis upon central institutions. We may agree that provincial life exhibited considerable diversity and that the county was the focus of a degree of emotional attachment. It is equally clear that the political and administrative framework of seventeenth-century England allowed local agents to delay the execution of, and even to pervert or neglect, the injunctions of Westminster. It can be argued, however, that the further stage of analysis developed by Everitt, stressing the preeminence of local allegiance and the gentry's ignorance of and lack of concern for national issues, goes beyond the evidence, and that this undue emphasis upon the localism of the county community has occasioned other misunderstandings of Stuart politics and society. It has resulted in a neglect of popular attitudes and aspirations; in a failure to recognize ideological divisions, as against superficial rivalries for local status and prestige among the county gentry; in the establishment of a crude and unsympathetic account of the national government as a monolithic "other" informed by no understanding of the constraints under which that government developed and administered its policies.

The argument for the existence of an introverted, isolationist local unit rests, in part, upon analysis of certain incidents in the period. Yet more fundamental than this element of *conjuncture* is the analysis of the *structure* of provincial society. The insularity of the county community is ostensibly demonstrated by investigations both of the social and cultural milieu in which the gentry moved, and of their role in the burgeoning agencies of local government, the development of which recognized, interacted with, and enhanced the pattern of social relationships. It is this structural argument of the county community school that is questioned in this essay. The argument is sustained by an overemphasis on those elements that appear to suggest local autonomy and by a neglect of evidence to the contrary.

Provincial Society

Everitt investigates the social and cultural experience of the county gentry in terms of a few crucial variables: the patterns of gentry marriage, particularly the extent of intracounty alliances; the relative antiquity of the gentry within the shire; the sources of their wealth; the ties of friendship and hospitality among them. He argues that the insularity of the county community of Kent stemmed from the local gentry's roots in their native soil (both in terms of their involvement in agricultural production and the antiquity of their families' settlement upon their estates), and from the web of cousinage, spun by endogamy, that conjoined them.³

Everitt believes that localism "was normally . . . more powerful" than any national consciousness, while in his narrative, Morrill consistently downgrades national concerns (Everitt, *Local Community*, p. 5; Morrill, *Revolt*, p. 14).

³ This account is distilled from Everitt's *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester, 1966).

With respect to antiquity of settlement, it is not the case that it necessarily bred an introverted conservatism. The medieval pedigrees of the Essex Barringtons and the Suffolk Barnardistons were impeccable, yet both families were deeply involved, through the Providence Island company and the New England venture of Winthrop and his associates, in the international schemes of the godly brotherhood. Conversely, Sir David Foulis, proposing opposition to the 1632 knighthood composition, rhapsodized the traditional concern of "true Yorkshiremen . . . for their rights and liberties": Sir David was one of the hungry Scots who had crossed the border with King James and had built up his Yorkshire estates on the profits of court office.⁴

Not only is the supposed correlation between ancient lineage and the strength of localist sentiment unproven, but Everitt, arguing from his paradigm example of Kent, is too ready to suppose that antiquity of gentry settlement was the national norm. Lawrence Stone's comment, "The gentry of Kent are the only stable landed community we know of," may have to be expanded to include Cheshire and Lancashire, yet it is clear that Kent is far from typical.⁵ The social profiles of many counties, some, like Dorset and Lincolnshire, remote from London, appear closer to those of Northamptonshire and Suffolk, where Everitt has himself suggested that the recent settlement of the gentry, and their business and marital ties beyond the county boundary, would make for a less introverted political culture.⁶

We should also reconsider the statistical analysis of marriage alliances that Everitt provides. More than two-thirds of the eight hundred-odd Kentish gentlemen in 1640 "married among their neighbours." Yet of this group only a few participated actively in the shire as a social or political unit. The bulk of them were lesser gentry, whose "sphere was the parish rather than the county," as Everitt writes. They were rooted on their tiny estates; they married in their immediate neighborhoods: these facts would support, not a sense of county community identity, but a more limited local affiliation. It is the experience of the major gentry families, the governors of the shire, that is more relevant to the county community hypothesis. Here we are still confronted with diversity—just under 60 percent of the

⁴ See Clive Holmes, *The Eastern Association in the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 28-29; J.T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry* (London, 1969), pp. 300-01.

⁵ Lawrence Stone, "English Land Sales, 1540-1640: a reply to Mr. Russell" in *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, vol. 25 (1972), p. 121 note 6, and the sources cited there. For Cheshire, see J.S. Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660: County Government and Society during the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 2-4; for Lancashire, B.G. Blackwood, "The Cavalier and Roundhead Gentry of Lancashire" in *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, vol. 77 (1967), p. 83; for Dorset, J.P. Ferris, "The Gentry of Dorset on the Eve of the Civil War" in *Genealogists' Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1965), pp. 104-08. In Lincolnshire I find that only 17 percent of the gentry could claim pre-Tudor lineage.

⁶ Everitt, *Local Community*, pp. 21-22; Everitt, *Suffolk and the Great Rebellion* (Ipswich, 1960), pp. 17-22.

leading Kentish and Lancashire families married within their county as against 30 percent in Essex and Hertfordshire—but, in general, the proportions reveal social relations that are not so absolutely county centered.⁷

But what is the social consequence of the fact of the preponderance of intracounty marriage? That any significance can be attributed to the flat percentages of endogamy, or to the daisy chains of kinship beloved by prosopographers, turns ultimately upon demonstrating that family relationships involved real social interaction. In this respect the study of Sussex by Anthony Fletcher represents a major improvement over the works of those scholars who, from bare statistics, leaped to conclusions concerning the introversion of county society.⁸ From a study of the names of those invited to dinners, hunting parties, and important rites of passage; of the recipients of gifts and legacies; of those nominated as the overseers and executors of wills, Fletcher concludes that “the tight circle of intimate friendship . . . ran within the wider circles of blood.” His meticulous study of the patterns of friendship centering upon Sir Thomas Pelham of Halland is exemplary: yet, typically, while Fletcher stresses the importance of Pelham’s alliances for “the dynamics of county affairs,” connections that “encouraged the introversion and strengthened the cohesiveness of the gentry community,” he does not give equal attention to the social or political significance of the knight’s extracounty relationships. In the 1620s Pelham “regularly” visited relatives in Hertfordshire and Cheshire; he also traveled to Brocklesby in northern Lincolnshire, where a cadet branch of the Sussex Pelhams had settled and made good. A junior member of that family, Henry, who shuttled between his London practice and Lincolnshire, was Sir Thomas’ legal advisor.⁹ With the Lincolnshire Pelhams, there is the opportunity to study the social characteristics of another exogamous marriage. The lawyer Henry’s elder brother, Sir William, married a daughter of Lord Conway. It is not remarkable to find Sir William Pelham engaging in a friendly correspondence with his father-in-law, the secretary of state: such court ties had obvious utility if one sought, as did Sir William, to secure the punishment of a particularly scandalous local cleric or to avoid the shrievalty.¹⁰ More surprising are the close ties that developed, as a function of the Conway match, between the Lincolnshire family and the Herefordshire Harleys—for Lady Pelham and Lady Brilliana Harley were sisters. Social visits and a regular correspondence were maintained. Edward Harley, an undergraduate at Oxford, was enjoined by his mother to watch over his freshman Pelham cousin: “be . . . kinde to him.” The ties survived the death of Lady Pelham, and

⁷ For Kent, see Everitt, *Community of Kent*, pp. 42-43, 328; for Lancashire, B.G. Blackwood, “The Marriages of the Lancashire Gentry on the Eve of the Civil War” in *Genealogists’ Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 7 (1970), pp. 321-28; for Essex and Hertfordshire, Holmes, *Association*, pp. 13, 229.

⁸ Anthony Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex 1600-1660* (London, 1975), pp. 44-53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁰ Public Record Office, State Papers (hereafter SP), 14/162/58; 16/514/29.

were more than purely social. Lady Brilliana recommended a favored godly minister upon learning of the availability of a Lincolnshire living in Pelham's gift, and maintained a constant, and ultimately critical, concern for Sir William's political affiliations.¹¹

The intellectual and political awareness of the major gentry was frequently enhanced by kinship ties with families from other counties. Two other elements in their social experience, which are neglected or dismissed by Everitt and his disciples, also broadened their horizons: their education and their contacts with London.

The former, gentry educational patterns, at least admits of some statistical analysis. J.H. Gleason has demonstrated that in 1562 two-thirds of the "working group" of justices of the peace in his six sample counties had never been enrolled in a university or one of the Inns of Court; by 1636, while the number of justices of the peace in those counties had virtually doubled, only 16 percent lacked a formal education. The statistics are not at issue; their significance is another matter. Gleason writes of the changing educational pattern as constituting a major "cultural revolution"; W.K. Jordan believed that educational endowments were "a most important solvent of the parochialism which marked the English society at the outside of our long period."¹² Yet for Everitt the gentry's "brief years" of formal education were "an interlude, principally designed to fit them out for their functions in their own county"; while Morrill insists that we must not "over-emphasise the educational sophistication of the country gentlemen," and that their training produced merely "a veneer of polite learning." Victor Morgan has argued that the ties formed by Cambridge colleges to certain regions, through closed fellowships and endowments, nourished local particularism. For him, the attempt to link the influx of the gentry into institutions of higher learning with the rise of a national political consciousness and culture is nothing but "a Whiggish conception stalking in modish statistical garb."¹³

Yet this bizarre specter is not easily laid. Morgan's arguments entail a conflation of the experience of the undergraduate scions of the gentry with that of the impoverished postulants for the ministry who were dependent on the beneficence of the college; and upon overemphasizing both the universality of the local ties of the colleges and the role of the latter as the preeminent focus of university life. In his membership, for purposes of philosophical discussion and biblical exegesis, of "an honest club of scholars, of his own, and other colleges," Thomas Wadsworth was maintaining

¹¹ T.T. Lewis (ed.), *The Letters of Lady Brilliana Harley* (London, 1854), pp. 9, 27, 30, 32, 59, 68, 81, 107, 130, 161.

¹² J.H. Gleason, *The Justices of the Peace in England 1558-1640* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 83-95; W.K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England, 1480-1660* (London, 1959), p. 361.

¹³ Everitt, *Local Community*, p. 6; Morrill, *Revolt*, pp. 23-24; Victor Morgan, "Cambridge University and 'the Country', 1560-1640" in Lawrence Stone (ed.), *The University and Society* (Princeton, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 183-245; quotation from p. 185.

a tradition that extended back to Bilney's White Horse group.¹⁴ Questionable for Cambridge, Morgan's formulation cannot be transposed to the seventeenth-century Inns of Court. While each inn had some "regional bias," that affiliation was so broad that it can hardly be viewed as reinforcing local particularism: like Shallow's drinking companions, the Lincoln's Inn students who were bound in a "chain of amity" with Thomas Egerton were from widely dispersed areas. Nor was the inn the sole locus of its members' social contacts: the proximity of city opportunities and temptations guaranteed that. When William Welby of Gedney, a student at Grey's Inn, determined to undertake an action guaranteeing immortal fame (in fact, an assault on a Lambeth house of ill repute), none of his fellow roisterers was from either his home county or his inn.¹⁵

The institutions of higher learning performed a "melting pot" function, not only by expanding the potential range of social contacts of their alumni, but by broadening their intellectual horizons. The new educational system produced gentlemen-scholars, who, while their field of action may have been their locality, could articulate their local experience and concerns, organize and explain them, and generalize from them within the framework of a common intellectual system. Sir Thomas Aston wrote his *Remonstrance against Presbytery* in response to the activities of the Puritan enragers in Cheshire after 1640, which, he feared, would lead to the collapse of public order and the subversion of social hierarchy in the county. Yet his arguments are buttressed by citations from the classics, the Fathers, eminent continental divines, popish casuists, the protagonists in the late sixteenth-century debate on ecclesiastical government, and a slew of legal authorities from Bracton through Coke.¹⁶ Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* or Spelman's *History of Sacrilege* can be analyzed in similar terms: intellectual edifices stemming from the problems faced by, respectively, a Kentish J.P. and a Norfolk landowner. We should note that these gentlemen-scholars, whatever their local affiliations, formed a national intellectual coterie.¹⁷ But a more important point in general social terms is that they anticipated that their arguments would be comprehended and appreciated by their fellow magistrates and landowners, who shared their training, if not their scholarly devotion. Reginald Scot's erudition was formidable (the book is prefaced by a table of the twenty-three English and 214 continental authorities employed in the work), while, as he wrote, the "groundwork of

¹⁴ H.C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 45-46, 269-71.

¹⁵ W.R. Prest, *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts* (Totowa, 1972), pp. 32-40; for Egerton, see L.A. Knafla, *Law and Politics in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 48-49; for Welby, W.P. Baildon (ed.), *Les Reportes del Cases in Camera Stellata 1593-1609* (London, 1894), p. 315.

¹⁶ Thomas Aston, *A Remonstrance against Presbytery* (London, 1641), passim; for the local background to this work, see Morrill, *Cheshire*, pp. 45-53.

¹⁷ D.C. Douglas, *English Scholars 1660-1730* (London, 1951), pp. 30-37, analyzes the fruitful scholarly interaction of Spelman (Norfolk), Dugdale (Warwickshire), and Dodsworth (Yorkshire).

my booke is laid" in "divinitie and philosophie"; yet he believed that his gentry reader would be "very sufficiently informed" in those subjects. Sir Thomas Barrington's purchases for his library suggest that his Cambridge and Grey's Inn education was far more than a "veneer."¹⁸ A common educational pattern produced a common language of intellectual discourse, and, thus, a common gentry culture.

Discussions of the influence of London upon the experience of the gentry lack even a common ground in statistics. Hence debate has consisted of vigorous exchanges of counter-examples: Fuller "could call London 'the inn-general of the gentry . . . of this nation'"—yet Clarendon's mother "spent the whole of her life in the county of Wiltshire." The available evidence, including that of the expansion of appropriate housing facilities within London, suggests the increased resort of country gentry to the city, though it does not enable us to determine how general the practice had become.¹⁹ Everitt has argued both that a journey to London was still exceptional for the gentry, and that the majority of those gentlemen who did visit the capital did so in circumstances—the pursuit of "some wearisome lawsuit"—hardly likely to endear the place to them. Yet even infrequent visits on legal business had the effect of broadening social contacts and horizons. The tangled legal affairs of his family brought the Norfolk magistrate, Thomas Knyvett, to London almost annually in the 1620s and 1630s. In his letters to his wife, he expressed sentiments of disgust with this "ungodly town" and his desire to be home "in thy armes," sentiments very similar to those of Henry Oxinden of which Everitt makes much.²⁰ Yet the London experience was important to Knyvett's perceptions and social contacts. He attended the court, and retailed its gossip to his wife; he sent back fabrics and other items of "conspicuous consumption" and comments upon, and patterns for, the latest fashions. During his stays in London, remote kinship ties were transmuted into meaningful friendships: Knyvett boarded with "my cousin Elsing" (the grandson of Knyvett's great-uncle's wife by her first marriage) and dined frequently with John Hampden's mother, an equally distant relative. The contacts of these well-placed kinsmen were actively employed when, in 1643-45, Knyvett stood in danger of sequestration for his role in the abortive Lowestoft rising; later, in perhaps more typical circumstances, Henry Elsyng and Lady Hampden sought to assist Knyvett when he was contem-

¹⁸ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Totowa, 1973), p. xvi; Mary E. Bohannon, "A London Bookseller's Bill, 1635-1639" in *The Library*, 4th series, vol. 18 (1937-38), pp. 417-46.

¹⁹ Quotations are from Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1964), p. 388 and Everitt, *Local Community*, p. 6; Stone (*ibid.*, pp. 385-98) provides a general review of the evidence for the attraction of London. In *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution* (London, 1977), pp. 209, 447, Peter Clark argues that the Kentish gentry had closer ties with London than Everitt supposes; for the Yorkshire gentry, see Cliffe, *Yorkshire Gentry*, pp. 21-23.

²⁰ Everitt, *Community of Kent*, p. 44.

plating remarriage. A "wearisome lawsuit" had certainly expanded Knyvett's social circle beyond the boundaries of Norfolk.²¹

A variant aspect of the influence of a "wearisome lawsuit" in broadening political horizons emerges in the correspondence of Lord Montagu. In the winter of 1626-27 Montagu was involved in a number of suits, and received regular reports on their convoluted progress from two of his estate agents and his solicitor in the City; but they also detailed the progress of the forced loan in London and the home counties; the king's anger at the judges' refusal to subscribe; the triumphant popular reception accorded those Londoners who resisted the demand "so stoutly." Stone has emphasized the degree to which "public confidence in government" was diminished by the lurid gossip of the court purveyed by professional newsletter writers in London. But this luxury product was less important in heightening the political awareness of the gentry than was the correspondence of city lawyers, ministers, and merchants, retailing information to their country clients and cousins. The quantity and the quality of news available in the localities is apparent in the diary of the Suffolk clergyman, John Rous. Rous seldom traveled far from his home at Brandon; he certainly did not move in the circles of the county elite; yet, by collecting ballads, reading *corantos* and royal proclamations, and, chiefly, by conversing with his fellow clerics and the minor gentry of the locality, some of whom were in regular correspondence with London, he kept well abreast of national affairs and constitutional arguments.²²

Elements in the social milieu in which major gentry families participated necessarily entailed their involvement in relationships and attitudes that were not enclosed by their county boundaries. Exogamous marriage, participation in a common educational system, and intercourse with London ensured that their horizons were not narrowly local. A similar conclusion follows from a study of the second element in their experience that Everitt isolates as a foundation of the county community; the gentry's involvement in local government in a period marked by "the growth of county administration, the development of county institutions."²³

Local Government

While ever more gentlemen were enrolled in the commission of the peace and were responsible for the execution of an ever expanding series of enactments, it is a broad leap from these facts to the argument of a growth of *county* institutions. Gatherings of the full body of the county magistracy for collective action were comparatively infrequent. A magistrate's administrative and police activities focused upon the area in the immediate

²¹ B. Scofield (ed.), *The Knyvett Letters, 1620-1644* (Norwich, 1949), *passim*.

²² H.M.C. *Buccleuch*, vol. 3, pp. 307-14; Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (London, 1972), p. 91; M.A.E. Green (ed.), *The Diary of John Rous* (London, 1856), *passim*.

²³ Everitt, *Local Community*, p.6.

vicinity of his estate and upon the monthly "petty sessions" formalized by the Book of Orders. Quarter-sessions was seldom a county event—certainly not "a kind of local parliament."²⁴ Even in Essex, a county where the judicial system was centralized, on average only 25 percent of the working group of J.P.s attended each Chelmsford quarter-sessions. A similar proportion attended in Somerset, a fifth in Cheshire; but in both these counties each of the four quarter-sessions was held in a different town, and many of the J.P.s would only attend the session held nearest their homes. Decentralization went further, and the concept of a "local parliament" appears to be even less applicable in those shires where each of the four courts were held in separate towns for distinct divisions of the county; in Sussex, by the 1630s, the benches of the eastern and western parts of the county were effectively quite separate, lacking any "regular opportunity to discuss and argue out administrative and political problems"; a similar situation appertained in Lincolnshire, which by the 1660s, was fragmented into eight divisions, each with its distinct series of quarter-sessions served by a discrete group of J.P.s.²⁵ So the bulk of the gentry's administrative experience was forged in units smaller than the county, and it could be argued that these smaller divisions became the cynosures of their loyalties. J.P.s frequently challenged their colleagues on the county bench over demands, chiefly the apportionment of taxation, that were thought to be inequitable or otherwise contrary to the interests of their immediate locality. And they might even refer to the latter as their "country"—that term Everitt considered quasi-sacramental. In 1638 Sir Edward Hussey was praised by a fellow J.P. for his concern for "the good of . . . the country"; but "the country" in this case was Kesteven, unfairly rated by a Holland sheriff.²⁶

This essay is not trying to insert yet more "closed corporate communities"—the community of the division, perhaps, of the lathe, of the wapentake—into a landscape already cluttered with such entities. Yet it needs to be emphasized that the bulk of the gentry's administrative activities were undertaken in these limited areas, not the county.

There were gatherings attended by the magistracy of an entire county, but these were Janus-faced. At the assizes, at general meetings for the execution of special royal commissions, and at county elections—at each the county elite was reminded of its involvement in a national polity.

In Lincolnshire or Sussex, where a fully decentralized system of magistracy had developed, the county's administrative unity was regularly asserted only at the Lent and summer assizes; in a shire like Essex, too, the

²⁴ Stone, *Causes*, p. 95.

²⁵ For Essex, see Joel Samaha, *Law and Order in Historical Perspective* (New York, 1974), pp. 81-83 and App. IV; for Somerset, T.G. Barnes, *Somerset 1625-1640* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 68-70; for Cheshire, Morrill, *Cheshire*, pp. 9, 16; for Sussex, Fletcher, *County Community*, pp. 134-36, 243.

²⁶ SP 16/380/60. For similar local divisions within a county, see Clark, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 256-57, 311 (the paradigm county, Kent) and G.F.C. Foster, "The North Riding Justices and their Sessions, 1603-1625" in *Northern History*, vol. 10 (1975), pp. 110-11, 115, 118.

politico-administrative existence of the county community received a fuller expression by virtue of the higher attendance of the gentry elite at the assizes. The latter was an important social occasion, and general attendance ensured that matters of common concern to the local gentry, such as candidacies for a forthcoming election, would be discussed. Moreover, in the 1620s, in some counties, the magistrates sought to realize Bacon's ideal, that the assizes should be a place where "the distastes and griefs of the people" could be represented to the government, by developing formal mechanisms, either petitions from the bench or grand jury presentments, to bring grievances to the judges' attention. Thus the assizes provided the fullest expression of the corporate existence of the county community and a forum where its collective sense could be articulated. It is in these respects that Everitt argues that the assizes "resemble a kind of informal county 'parliament'."²⁷

The assizes *were* an important county gathering, but they also emphasized the local magistracy's responsibility to, and dependence upon, a centralized system of government and law. Some of the aura of royal majesty inhered in the assize judges, and was symbolically represented by the ceremonial panoply of their visitations upon which they insisted so pertinaciously—hence the lordly refusal of the judges at Gloucester assizes to accept the ministrations of ecclesiastics of lower rank than the prebendaries of the cathedral. The local J.P.s acknowledged the superior prestige and authority of the assize judges, not only in such little incidents as the fine of one hundred pounds, which the Worcestershire bench levied on a parish after Sir Robert Hyde had complained of the disgusting state of their highway upon which his lordship was obliged to travel, but, more significantly, in their readiness to enlist the judges to back them in the day-to-day business of local government. So, as T.G. Barnes has shown, administrative orders, which would have had equal legal validity had they been made at quarter-sessions, were issued under the aegis of the judges of assize in the belief that "the judge's position was such that his order would be more decisive, more quickly obeyed, less readily contemned."²⁸

The judges' prestige was a function, in part, of their reputation as legal luminaries; in part, of their intimate contacts with the executive. In both respects they played a significant role in articulating the local magistracy into a national system of government.

As "oracles of the law," the judges' expertise provided valued assistance and instruction to the J.P.s. Abstruse technicalities beyond the capacities

²⁷ Everitt, *Kent*, p. 95 note 2. For Bacon's comment, see J.S. Cockburn, *A History of the English Assizes, 1558-1714* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 173; for examples of such presentments, see Derek Hirst, "Court, Country and Politics before 1629" in Kevin Sharpe (ed.), *Faction and Parliament* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 134-35.

²⁸ T.G. Barnes (ed.), *Somerset Assize Orders, 1629-1640* (Frome, 1959), p. xxix. For the Gloucestershire and Worcestershire examples, see W.B. Willcox, *Gloucestershire: A study in local government 1590-1640* (London, 1940), p. 43; R.D. Hunt (ed.), "Henry Townshend's 'Notes of the Office of a Justice of the Peace' 1661-63" in *Worcestershire Historical Miscellany*, no. II (Leeds, 1967), p. 109.

of the local bench—the exact definition of burglary, the distinction between treasonable and seditious words, the correct form of an indictment, whether a man who married the grandmother of a child maintained by the parish was to be “accounted as a Grandfather within the statute”—were resolved by the judges in their decisions in specific cases, or in answer to a question propounded formally by the county magistrates or informally by an individual J.P., perhaps over dinner in relation to a set of hypothetical facts. If a case or inquiry raised legal issues of any magnitude, the judges could debate it with their colleagues at Westminster and then issue a general ruling that would be promulgated at the assizes: so the 1624 licensing regulations or the 1633 “Resolutions of the Judges of Assize” concerning the Poor Law. This continuing legal education of the J.P.s might involve some harsh lessons; verbal castigation and heavy fines were visited upon those who failed to observe proper legal forms and procedures.²⁹

The system, whereby the local magistrates were controlled and informed by professional jurists, did ensure, to quote Barnes again “that the expanse of the common law... would remain common.” It is worth insisting upon this. The institutional arrangements of local administration varied from shire to shire; the “conventions and customs to meet local needs,” which Morrill emphasizes, might develop with respect to matters where the relevant legislation gave the J.P.s discretionary powers. But in fundamentals, the English county communities were governed by a common law.³⁰

The other element in the status and respect accorded to the judges by the local gentry was a function of their role as spokesmen for the government. They were the overseers of the various royal programs for the more efficient execution of criminal justice and of administrative law. In their formal charges at the commencement of the assizes they apprised the local gentry of the current law enforcement, administrative, religious, and political priorities of the crown. And in the 1630s, they also preached the constitutional theory designed to legitimize those priorities. In 1635, the judges of assize were instructed “to let the people know... with what Alacrity and Cheerfulness they... are bound in duty to contribute” to ship money, and in 1637, to promulgate the extra-judicial opinion upholding the king’s right to demand the levy. The judgment in *Hampden’s* case received similar official publicity: Finch, having treated his audiences at the assizes to a paraphrase of his high-flying exchequer chamber opinion, then “inveighed against and threatened all such as refused to pay.” Political propaganda could inform not only the judges’ charges, but their case decisions. At Gloucester assizes in 1636, it emerged that Richard Legge,

²⁹ For these examples, see Hunt (ed.), “Townshend’s Notes,” pp. 83, 85, 86–87, 88, 90, 93, 94, 95, 109, 117; *The English Reports* (Edinburgh, 1907), vol. 80 (2 Bulstrode), 345, 348–49, 349–50, 351–52, 355–56; vol. 123 (Hutton), 99.

³⁰ Barnes (ed.), *Somerset Assize Orders*, p. xxvii; Morrill, *Revolt*, p. 22. See also Cockburn, *English Assizes*, pp. 168–72.

suings a bailiff for an assault stemming from the latter's taking a distress for ship money, had originally refused to pay "because it was not granted by Parliament." Baron Davenport directed the jury to find against the plaintiff, and informed Legge, "in great passion," that "the King was not to call a Parliament to give him satisfaction."³¹

The response to this official propaganda was not always the loyal acquiescence intended by the government. The effect of the extra-judicial opinion that Charles solicited in February 1637 was undercut by the proliferation of rumors that some judges had only signed under considerable pressure. In 1638, Croke's powerful dissent in Hampden's case seems to have been more effective in mobilizing opinion than the majority decision; it was widely circulated, and invoked by the recalcitrant in Cheshire, Somerset, Nottingham, and Yorkshire. Indeed, judicial pronouncements could be counterproductive: Baron Weston's charge at Maidstone assizes gave focus to Sir Roger Twysden's previously inchoate doubts as to the legality of the writ.³²

These facts do not square easily with Morrill's assertions, cited at the beginning of this paper, that ship money was not resented for any generally perceived lack of "constitutional propriety," but because the government's cavalier disregard for the customary arrangements governing tax assessments categorically demonstrated its "insensitivity to localist sentiment."³³ The dissonance between the facts and Morrill's assertions points to a second major flaw in the county community interpretation of early Stuart history. Concentrating its attentions exclusively upon the locality, the county community school provides inadequate accounts of the ideals and performance of the central government.³⁴ So, in his account of the history of the ship money levy, Morrill fails to recognize that a decisive element in the situation was the government's ability to police and to silence overt opposition.

Morrill insists that issues of constitutional principle did not lie behind the battery of complaints against ship money on "administrative grounds": the latter were not "a cover for deeper political designs." Yet the local rating disputes were invariably generated by men closely associated

³¹ John Rushworth, *Historical Collections* (London, 1680), vol. 2, pp. 294-98, 352-56; vol. 3, pp. 985-89; William Oldys and Thomas Park (eds.), *The Harleian Miscellany* (London, 1810), vol. 5, p. 568; *Articles of Accusation exhibited by the Commons . . . against Sir John Bramston* (1641), pp. 32-33.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; Barnes, *Somerset*, p. 228 note 48; Elaine Marcotte, "Shrieval administration of ship money in Cheshire, 1637" in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 58 (1975-76), p. 159; *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series* (hereafter CSPD), 1637-38, p. 443; Cliffe, *Yorkshire Gentry*, p. 309; F.W. Jessup, *Sir Roger Twysden, 1597-1672* (London, 1965), pp. 37-38.

³³ Morrill, *Revolt*, pp. 24-29. Robert Ashton, *The English Civil War: Conservatism and Revolution 1603-1649* (London, 1978), pp. 63-66, also emphasizes the localist aspect of the opposition to ship money.

³⁴ See Derek Hirst's recent articles, "The Privy Council and Problems of Enforcement in the 1620s in *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 18 (1978), pp. 46-48; and "Court, Country and Politics" in Sharpe (ed.), *Faction*, pp. 105-37.

with groups that had opposed the various royal fiscal expedients of the 1620s on grounds of constitutional principle. In Somerset, Sir Robert Phelips and Sir Henry Berkeley, who had excoriated the dangerous precedent of the 1627 ship money demand, led the attack upon the 1635 assessment of the county. In Lincolnshire in 1635, a number of men refused to pay their rates, claiming shrieval corruption and peculation; the list was headed by the loan refusers, Sir John Wray and the Earl of Lincoln. Wray and another loan refuser, Sir Anthony Irby, men noted for "their backwardness and crossness to . . . Royall prerogative, treading a parliament way," were then in the forefront of the local investigation of the sheriff's manifold abuses.³⁵ Covert opposition, disingenuous sniping about the equity of the rates, was a preferred tactic. Why? Because the crown would crush overt opposition, and men did not court martyrdom.

In 1636, the Earl of Warwick led resistance to the levy in Essex. Pressing the king to summon parliament, he told Charles to his face that the Essex men would not tolerate such "notable prejudices as ship money," or surrender "the liberties of the realm." The king was unmoved: deposition from office was threatened against recalcitrant magistrates; sixty refusers were arraigned in the exchequer; *quo warranto* proceedings were begun to test Warwick's right to appoint the hundred bailiffs who had refused to aid the sheriff. Under pressure, Warwick retreated. In 1637, he was still the spokesman for the county's opposition—but he now attributed Essex's backwardness to the inequities of the sheriff's rate. So too, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, who had expressed (in the secure privacy of his journal) the opinion that ship money "was absolutely against law, and an utter oppression of the subject's liberty," later, as sheriff, replied to government demands for expedition, not with high-sounding principles, but with evasive excuses about the poverty of Suffolk and administrative problems.³⁶

Opposition could come into the open in 1639-40 when the council, overwhelmed with the manifold problems of the Bishops' Wars, lacked the leisure to supervise the system adequately. Its threats, very real to Warwick and his Essex cohorts in 1636, lacked bite and were neglected both by local officers, also weighed down with the additional burdens of war, and by taxpayers. Awareness of the situation at the center is fundamental to an understanding of the development of local reactions.

A similar criticism, of a lack of concern for the changing priorities of the government, can be leveled at Fletcher when, contrasting the dismal returns upon the earlier royal fiscal expedients with the success of the forced loan in Sussex, he attributes the latter to the government's agreement that the shire might employ the bulk of the money to defray its vast

³⁵ Barnes, *Somerset*, pp. 216-17; SP 16/315/121; 331/26; 336/78.

³⁶ V.A. Rowe, "Robert, Second Earl of Warwick, and the Payment of Ship Money in Essex" in *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 3rd series, vol. 1, part 2 (1962), pp. 160-63; J.O. Halliwell (ed.), *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes* (London, 1845), vol. 2, pp. 129-36.

outlay for billeting.³⁷ Yet in other counties, which lacked such powerful local stimuli to generosity, the high returns upon the loan were as marked and as unprecedented. The general success enjoyed by the loan was because it was *forced*, because the government dedicated itself (a dedication that, the Venetian ambassador complained, paralyzed all other business) to crushing opposition.³⁸ The employment of the subsidy book for assessment, the skillfully designed machinery of intimidation embodied in the secret instructions, the perambulating privy councilors, the fate of the recalcitrant, all demonstrate the government's determination. It is impossible to explain either the productivity of the forced loan or the collapse of the ship money collection in 1639-40 in terms of purely local considerations; in both cases the pressure that the central government was prepared, or was able, to exert is a critical determinant.

Discussion of the forced loan introduces the second category of general gatherings of the county magistracy. The meetings to execute special royal commissions, particularly those designed to extract extra-parliamentary revenues, were also amphibious, both county and national in their orientation. And at these, as at the assizes, "wider political issues," national concerns, were raised.

The attempts in 1614 and 1622 to raise benevolences had been (typically) lethargically administered by James's government, while the rhetoric of the request was low key—an emphasis on the dangerous international situation, plus a slap at parliament for its irresponsible failure to supply the king's wants adequately. In consequence, in most counties, the J.P.s instructed to organize the collection procrastinated or entered pleas of poverty before finally forwarding a derisory sum to the treasury. But some county elites responded not only with tight fists but with principled constitutional objections; typical was Devon's 1614 "scruple" that "exceeding prejudice . . . may come to posterity by such a president."³⁹ Charles's initial demand in 1626 was far more aggressively phrased. The J.P.s were to summon the populace, dilate upon the international crisis, remind their audience of parliament's intention (foiled by "the disordered passions of some members") to grant four subsidies and three fifteenths, and solicit the money as a gift: the king concluded that his benign request was a signal favor since "noe ordinary Rules can prescribe law to necessitie;" the "very subsistence of the whole" was at stake "and might justly warrant us, if out of our royal prerogative and power we should take any waie more extraordinary or lesse indifferent."⁴⁰

Only in three counties did the ominous, scarcely-veiled threats of the royal missive result in even a sum equivalent to a single subsidy being

³⁷ Fletcher, *County Community*, pp. 195-96, 212.

³⁸ Hirst, "Privy Council," pp. 52-53

³⁹ *Acts of the Privy Council* (hereafter APC), 1613-14, pp. 491-93, 557-58, 628-31, 649-50, 655-56; APC 1621-23, pp. 176-78; James Spedding (ed.), *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London, 1869), vol. 5, pp. 81-83, 132-34; CSPD 1621-23, p. 393.

⁴⁰ SP 16/31/30, 31.

contributed. The J.P.s of twelve counties sent answers couched in virtually the same form and phraseology as that of Hertfordshire, the first to reply:

They are most willinge to contribute for the defence of the Kingdome and for the supply of his Majesty's wants . . . in a Parlemen-tary manner even beyond their habilities

—But they would not fork out money *this way*.⁴¹

Rebuffed, Charles withdrew the request for a gift, but within a month had devised a scheme for the loan of a sum equivalent to five subsidies from the subsidy-men. Again the constitutional issue was presented starkly to the local gentry who, as before, were ordered to organize the collection: "necessity (which makes laws to itself) puts him upon this course," the king asserted; he was "enforced by necessity . . . to which noe ordinary rules of law can be prescribed."⁴²

"Necessity . . . to which noe ordinary rules of law can be prescribed:" the county elites witnessed the consequences of the king's constitutional doctrine at first hand in their localities. Privy councillors attended the initial county meetings and were swift to demonstrate "that his Majesty wanteth no good meanes to chastise . . . refractorie humors." Local magistrates who refused to assist in the collection or pay the sums demanded were summoned before the Privy Council, harangued, and, if they remained obdurate, imprisoned. Lesser men "who will not serve him with their purses . . . must serve . . . with their persons, and be enrolled among those forces wherewith he purposeth to assist the King of Denmarke, or otherwise must looke to have soldiours lodged upon them."⁴³

It did not require the tract *To all true-hearted Englishmen*, which was dispersed at some of the county meetings,⁴⁴ to educate the gentry on the "wider political issues" of the forced loan; royal pronouncements and royal actions were very sufficient. In 1626-27 county-wide assemblies of the local magistracy were confronted starkly with major issues of constitutional principle. We cannot suppose that the development of "county institutions" produced only closed political horizons and an introverted, self-centered localism.

Consideration of the fiscal expedients attempted by James and his son raises another questionable characteristic of the county community school: a refusal to recognize the possibility of ideological division within the shires. The latter are suffused in a roseate aura of mutual love, charity, and unity. So Everitt compares the Kentish gentry to an extended family, its internal peace unruffled save by superficial squabbles over local prece-

⁴¹ SP 16/33/8; CSPD 1625-26, pp. 397, 398, 399, 404, 406, 407, 410, 413, 419, 424, 425, 428, 435.

⁴² SP 16/25/75, *Instructions which his Majesty's commissioners for the loan of the money . . . are exactly and effectually to observe and follow* (London, 1626), passim.

⁴³ APC 1627, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁴ SP 16/54/82; Thomas Birch (ed.), *The Court and Times of Charles I* (London, 1848), p. 202.

dence until, from 1642, Sir Anthony Weldon and his clique of power-hungry and unprincipled outsiders shattered the idyll.⁴⁵ Yet many county elites were bitterly divided in their response to the forced loan as they were to be again by distraint of knighthood and ship money. Some gentlemen preferred prison to payment. Some, such as Sir Robert Phelips, avoided contamination by a well-timed visit to London. Others conformed to the extent of subscription and initial participation in the collection process, but once government supervision relaxed, as the council became enmeshed in the logistical problems of the Rhe expedition, deliberately avoided further involvement. In Holland, the entire responsibility for raising the loan devolved upon two commissioners, who sardonically noted that the "others, purchase, have justifiable excuse."⁴⁶ Yet certain men accepted the royal claims embodied in the forced loan instructions, or in the justification offered for the 1627 ship money—"the defence of a Kingdom . . . are not tyed to ordinarie and continued presidents." In Lincolnshire, Lord Castleton, active in the execution of the forced loan and then of the knighthood composition, wrote that "we must obey necessity." Sir Edward Rodney and the Somerset D.L.s acted in response to "inevitable necessity" and "because we heard of the King's absolute power at Westminster."⁴⁷

In parliament in 1628 Phelips, reflecting on the work of the deputy lieutenants in billeting, raising coat and conduct money, and enforcing the loan, denounced the "decemvirate in every county." The suggestion that every shire contained a clique absolutely committed to the court and to its novel constitutional doctrine is clearly an exaggeration. The extraordinarily complex patterns of affiliation and response to central demands in Yorkshire, as a function of the feud between Saville and Wentworth, each with his "bande of reytters" among the gentry, and Phelips' own fluctuating allegiances, are warning enough that personal ambition for court preferment or local precedence could deflect and diffuse issues of principle.⁴⁸ Yet in many counties the court-country dichotomy is more analytically useful than a romantic evocation of an organic gentry community—in Northamptonshire, in Lincolnshire, in Cornwall, where a group of gentlemen not only worked actively to forward the forced loan, but agreed to oppose Sir John Eliot's candidacy for the 1628 shire election "lest his majesty suspect our fidelity."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Everitt, *Kent*, pp. 52-53, 117-18.

⁴⁶ SP 16/71/50. Ashton (*English Civil War*, p. 47) has also emphasized that "the Commission of the Peace was by no means monolithic in its attitude to royal centralising processes."

⁴⁷ SP 16/60/31; Robert C. Johnson, Mary Frear Keeler, Maija Jansson Cole, William B. Bidwell (eds.), *Commons Debates, 1628* (New Haven, 1977), vol. 2, p. 254.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 69; J.P. Cooper (ed.), *Wentworth Papers 1597-1628* (London, 1973) pp. 5, 314; Cliffe, *Yorkshire Gentry*, pp. 282-306; Barnes, *Somerset*, pp. 281-98; Ashton, *English Civil War*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Johnson et al. (eds.), *Commons Debates, 1628*, vol. 2, p. 33. See also Harold Hulme, *The Life of Sir John Eliot* (London, 1957), pp. 173-81.

The county election is the third ambivalent institution in which the entire county elite was involved, which affirmed its corporate identity, and yet necessarily reminded the gentry of their participation in a national polity.

James frequently addressed the Commons as though members were errand-boys for their particular constituencies. M.P.s, especially during debates on taxation, voiced a similar self-image in their concern for the "blame" ("fury" even) that their impoverished constituents would visit upon them if subsidies were voted without redress of grievances.⁵⁰ Yet other concepts of parliament's function and powers jostled and interacted with the belief that it was "an aggregation of local informers . . . [and] . . . a group of messengers."⁵¹ Parliament was "the great watch of the Kingdom," the "Counsell of the land;" M.P.s were "publique [men] vested for the commonwealth's service." In March 1628 Eliot classified the various capacities in which an M.P. might function:

I speak . . . not for myself, that's too narrow . . . It is not for the country for which I serve. It is not for us all and the country which we represent, but for the ancient glory of the ancient laws of England.⁵²

The Commons frequently acted, in accordance with Eliot's ranking, as though their responsibilities extended beyond their own bailiwicks. In 1628, the House, "tender of the liberty of the subject," was not deterred from censuring a Lincolnshire deputy lieutenant by the speeches in his favor by the knights of the shire.⁵³

M.P.s might think in terms of their overriding duty to the nation, but what of those who elected them? The practice whereby the county court, at the conclusion of the election, presented a formal statement of local grievances to the knights of the shire to be forwarded to Westminster, might suggest, as do grand jury presentments at assizes, a conception of the county community as an independent political entity with its own peculiar concerns. Yet, as Hirst has shown, such petitions might deal directly with

⁵⁰ See Derek Hirst, *The Representative of the People?* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 166-77. The debates on March 19-20, 1624 concerning the subsidy provide the fullest example of this habit of thought (Houghton Library, Harvard, English Ms 980, pp. 123-39, 143-49: I am extremely grateful to the Yale Center for Parliamentary History for allowing me to use their transcripts of the manuscript diaries for the parliaments of 1624 and 1626).

⁵¹ E.R. Foster, "The Procedure of the House of Commons against Patents and Monopolies, 1621-1624" in W.A. Aiken and B.D. Henning (eds.), *Conflict in Stuart England* (New York, 1960), pp. 59-85, especially pp. 61-62.

⁵² Wallace Notestein, Frances Helen Relf, and Hartley Simpson (eds.), *Commons Debates, 1621* (New Haven, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 353-54; vol. 3, p. 30; Cambridge University Library, Ms Dd 12 22 f. 17v; Johnson et al. (eds.), *Commons Debates, 1628*, vol. 2, p. 57.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 355, 356, 359, 360.

national issues, not merely their local repercussions. Similarly, in their speeches, M.P.s attributed national interests, some fairly sophisticated, to their constituents—an active concern for the privileges of parliament, for example. This was more than a rhetorical convention: Wentworth's local speech in justification of the 1621 subsidy dwells more upon parliament's concern for "the happiness of the whole Kingdome," and M.P.s "duties towards our greatt mother, the commonwealthe" than upon any specific benefits that had accrued to Yorkshire.⁵⁴

The growing reluctance of the counties to elect "courtiers" is a relevant consideration here. Wentworth's argument in 1621 that immediate local interests, "the Causes of our Countye," might be advanced most effectively by a representative with access to, or enjoying the favor of, the executive, was duplicated in 1626 by John Winthrop and in 1628 by the Cornish deputy lieutenants. Yet, as the Suffolk gentry responded to Winthrop, while the privy councillor, Sir Robert Naunton, was "abell to doe us good," his connections with the court disqualified him:

He was tyed in so partickiuler an obligation to his majesty as if ther was occasion to speke for the Cuntry he wold be silent, and in Generall they wolde give no voise to anye cortier espetially at this time of all others.⁵⁵

With the alienation of the "political nation" from the Stuart court, concern for the representation in parliament of the interests of the country/county shaded into one for those of the country/commonwealth. Early in 1641, a member of the Norfolk elite wrote to the knight of that shire:

it gives no smale content unto us in the Countrye to be assured of such constant Patriots as yourselfe, that will persevere faythfully in the defense of Church and Commonwealth.⁵⁶

This emphasis upon representation by "Patriots" dedicated to "Church and Commonwealth" ensured that the county court was more than a political expression of a self-centered county community.

An examination of the attitudes of the electorate suggests another doubtful element in Everitt's analysis of seventeenth-century politics. He adheres to a patriarchal, organic model of social organization that is misleadingly elitist. Everitt's account of the March 1640 Kentish election rivals Sir Lewis Namier in its insistence upon the politics of deference:

⁵⁴ See Hirst, *Representative*, pp. 164-66, 175; (Sir Edward Nicholas), *Proceedings and Debates in the House of Commons in 1620* (Oxford, 1766), pp. 296, 343, 352; Cooper (ed.), *Wentworth Papers*, pp. 152-57.

⁵⁵ G.W. Robinson (ed.), *The Winthrop Papers*, vol. 1 (Boston, 1929), pp. 324-26. See also Hirst, *Representative*, pp. 143, 175.

⁵⁶ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms 66 f. 65.

First the Knight . . . who set out to rule the county secured the support of the countryside around his own manor house. Then his kinsmen among the greater gentry obtained the allegiance of their own labourers, tenants and neighbours. Finally each major family secured the adherence of those groups of minor gentry whose social influence depended on their place in these galaxies of greater gentry. In this way the whole community of the county gradually gathered into a series of rival family connection.

Everitt describes the organization of the March 1642 Kentish petition and the 1648 revolt in similar terms.⁵⁷ This conception of a society conjoined in organic hierarchy may explain the ambiguous use of the term county community that pervades Everitt's writings. The structural analysis designed to explain the social basis of the community is concerned exclusively with the local gentry: it is argued that their marriage alliances, their administrative experience, were rooted in the county and explain their devotion to its interests. Yet the expression county community is employed as a synonym for the entire population of the shire. This is legitimate, however, if we can assume that the significant attitudes, ideals, and concerns of the inhabitants of Kent are essentially identical with those of the gentry elite.

But we cannot make that assumption. A number of studies have shown that, while the organization of gentry alliances and the dragooning of tenants played a major part in electoral strategies in Kent in the 1620s and again in 1640, there was an independent electorate to be wooed, an electorate vitally concerned with the candidates' religious zeal and their political affiliations. The role of the independent freeholders was even greater in other shires in 1640; in Gloucestershire only slick shrieval legerdemain prevented the voters, encouraged by a "pack of either deprived, silenced or puritanically affected" ministers, from upsetting the cosy arrangements of the local worthies.⁵⁸

Unless the existence of groups of peasants and craftsmen who were perfectly capable of forming political opinions, and of expressing them forcibly in action, independent of the gentry, is recognized, events during the early stages of the Civil War in many areas—Somerset, the West Riding—are inexplicable.⁵⁹ Nor can it be argued that such popular intervention was purely a consequence of the unprecedented conditions of 1642-43. Derek Hirst had demonstrated the existence of an electorate that was far from passive and deferential in a number of county contests in the

⁵⁷ Everitt, *Kent*, p. 83; see also pp. 48, 70, 98, 240-59.

⁵⁸ J.H. Plumb, "The growth of the electorate in England from 1600 to 1715" in *Past and Present*, no. 45 (1969), pp. 105-06; Clark, *Provincial Society*, pp. 385-86; J.K. Gruenfelder, "The elections to the Short Parliament, 1640" in R.H. Reinmuth (ed.), *Early Stuart Studies* (Minneapolis, 1970), pp. 209-10, 223-24.

⁵⁹ David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), pp. 38-41; Brian Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution* (London, 1976), pp. 210-15.

1620s;⁶⁰ and, in the pattern of opposition to royal fiscal demands in that and the following decade, the independent concerns of elements of the populace also emerges. Of course, opposition per se is no indicator of independence: the consistent hostility that the inhabitants of Hatfield Broadoak offered to Charles' fiscal project was certainly not unrelated to the machinations of their Barrington landlords. Yet we cannot invariably invoke seigneurial influence. The clothing towns of the Stour valley, backward in the forced loan, backward in the collection of ship money, refusing to erect altars or follow Laudian ritual, lacked a resident gentry.⁶¹ So, too, did the fens of South Holland. Yet of the seventy-two men who absolutely refused to pay the forced loan in Lincolnshire, more than two-thirds came from Holland, and in the summer of 1627 the collectors of that division faced a barrage of excuses—pleading poverty or inequitable assessment—to a far greater extent than their counterparts in Lindsey or Kesteven were subjected. Popular opposition to ship money in 1635 was concentrated in this region, and in the next year the local officers were refusing to aid the sheriff, one saying that “he had rather answer afore the Lords of the Counsell then distreine his neighbors.”⁶² A model of a “one-class society,” to which the county community school leans, cannot explain the behavior of the fenmen during the personal rule, of the Gloucestershire freeholders in 1640, of the men of the West Riding upon the outbreak of war.

The central concern in this paper has been to challenge the analysis of the social structure of the county and of the institutions of local government within it made by the county community school. The social experience of the gentry, particularly their formal education and their involvement with the national capital, London, ensured that their horizons were not narrowly local. In their participation in local administration, the gentry were continuously reminded that England was a centralized polity, governed by a common law, and they were frequently obliged to confront major constitutional issues directly. Other aspects of the work of Everitt and his colleagues have also been questioned: the insufficient attention to the quality of the central government's intervention; the romantic image of communal corporatism; the failure to recognize the political aspirations and concerns of classes other than the gentry. Seventeenth-century England was more than “a union of partially independent county-states.” Many of its inhabitants, particularly the gentry, were well informed and deeply concerned about national religious and constitutional issues. They participated in a national political culture.

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⁶⁰ Hirst, *Representative*, pp. 144–47; see also the analysis of the 1620s elections in Kent by K.B. Sommers in her unpublished Yale University doctoral dissertation, “Court, Country and Parliament: Electoral Influence in Five English Counties, 1586–1640” (1978), pp. 239–47.

⁶¹ SP 16/350/54.

⁶² SP 16/56/39; 58/110; 73/45; 78/8; 357/96 VIII; CSPD 1637, p. 104.