

S T E V E H I N D L E

THE SOCIAL TOPOGRAPHY OF A RURAL COMMUNITY

Scenes of
Labouring Life
in Seventeenth
Century England



OXFORD

The Social Topography of a Rural Community

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*Scenes of Labouring Life in Seventeenth
Century England*

STEVE HINDLE

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For Tom, Joe, & Livvy

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Acknowledgements

I first encountered Chilvers Coton in conversation with my friend Tom Arkell, whose expertise in the analysis of the hearth tax is justly celebrated. In the summer of 2000, he and I were discussing the relationship between hearth tax returns and parish accounts when he mentioned his long-standing interest (in turn stimulated by the late Eileen Gooder, author of *Squire of Arbury*) in the 1684 ‘census type-listing’ of the inhabitants of the parish. Tom subsequently shared with me his and Eileen’s preliminary (type-written!) transcripts of some of the survey and probate material and of the parish registers. Some four years later, as my second monograph was nearing completion, Tom took my breath away by explaining that he had no appetite for developing the project himself and urged me to take it on. Since I had long been looking for an archive on which I might base what I then thought of as a ‘community study’, these conversations were serendipitous to say the least. I should, however, have been careful what I wished for, because the deeper I dug into the archival seam, the more challenging the enterprise became. The reserves of material proved to be vaster than I could ever have imagined and required a range of different extractive techniques: like the Griff colliers, I had to become adept at longwall as well as pillar-and-stall mining. I suspect that Tom knew that (if it were done properly) it would take many years to bring this project to fruition, and I am sure that his estimate of the likely completion date grew even more pessimistic when I abandoned Warwickshire for southern California in 2011. I am sorrier than I can say that he did not live to see the book go to press. Although I regret that I did not get the chance to walk the streets of Coton Town with him one last time, I hear Tom’s thoughtful whisper in my ear (‘the jurors, Steve, the jurors!’) as I type this tribute to his patience, generosity, and wisdom.

A very large number of individuals have contributed to this project in myriad ways. Pride of place is justly reserved for Dr Heather Falvey, who was appointed as the post-doctoral researcher on a British Academy grant in 2008–9, during the course of which she patiently transcribed and cleverly tabulated the probate material for the parish and conducted characteristically exhaustive searches in the National Archives for litigation involving the protagonists of the chapters. Ever since then, she has been generous in transcribing a vast array of other manuscripts, including the intractable account books of the Griff coalmine, and has enthusiastically and assiduously collected other material on request. She has painstakingly read and constructively critiqued every single word of this and of previous drafts of the book. My debt to her is only slightly less palpable than those of Andrew Hardy’s creditors. The combination of Heather’s archival expertise

with Mathew Enger's extraordinary accomplishments in cartography, graphic design, and GIS ensured that the spatial aspect of the project could be developed convincingly. Matthew worked with Thomas Hewitt's 1684 survey map and cross-referenced it with the jurors' census to create a digital reconstruction of Coton Town. That Matthew was able to extend that geo-spatial analysis across those southern and western parts of the parish that were *not* covered by Hewitt's map is both a marvel to me and a tribute to him. It also explains why the maps featured in Chapters 10–15 are digital reconstructions, rather than reproduced details from Hewitt's original manuscript map. Without the efforts of Heather and Matthew, *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* would have been a far inferior book.

The staffs of the National Archives, the Northamptonshire Archives, the Staffordshire Record office, the much-missed Lichfield Joint Record Office, and the Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service have been unfailingly efficient, courteous, and patient. Without the help and advice of archivists and other colleagues in the Warwickshire County Record Office who steward the Newdigate papers so sensitively, *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* would not exist at all. I am deeply grateful to Professor Jane Whittle for sharing with me the database of the inventory sample for the counties of Cornwall and Kent that underpinned the analysis of material culture in Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean, and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750* (London, 2004), which is cited in the notes as 'Overton-Whittle database'.

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happy to acknowledge the very large number of howlers from which these generous readers and critics have saved me. More heroic still have been the efforts of two close friends, John Demos and John Walter, each of whom honoured their promise to read the full draft: the former encouraged me to keep my nerve about passages of informed speculation and the latter helped me work out at a crucial, late stage WTF it was that I had actually written. I am also deeply grateful to the two anonymous readers for Oxford University Press whose constructive criticisms substantially improved the book and helped me think afresh about some fundamental conceptual issues.

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Material that appears here in Chapters 2, 4, 8, and 12 has previously been published in four separate essays: ‘Sir Richard Newdigate and the “Great Survey” of Chilvers Coton: Fiscal Seigneurialism in Late-Seventeenth-Century Warwickshire’, in *William Dugdale, Historian, 1605–1686: His Life, His Writings and His County*, eds. Christopher Dyer and Catherine Richardson (Woodbridge, 2009), 164–86; ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend John Perkins: Scenes of Clerical Life in Late Seventeenth Century England’, in *Faith, Place and People in Early Modern England: Essays in Honor of Margaret Spufford*, eds. Trevor Dean, Glyn Parry, and Edward Vallance (Woodbridge, 2018), 70–94; ‘Work, Reward and Labour Discipline in Late Seventeenth-Century England’, in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, eds. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter (Woodbridge, 2012), 255–80; and ‘Below Stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and His Household Staff, c.1670–1710’, *Historical Research*, 85 (2012), 71–88. I am grateful to Dr Michael Middeke of Boydell and Brewer and to the editor of the journal *Historical Research* for permission to republish that material here.

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A Note on the Maps

Thomas Hewitt's survey map of Chilvers Coton (WCRO CR136/M14), completed in July 1684, does not cover the entire parish: it is available online here: <www.oup.co.uk/companion/Hindle-Social_Topography>, map i.1. The map is restricted to the north-eastern part of the settlement, focusing on Coton Town and the surrounding common-field system, but extending from Cuttle Mill in the east to the furthest extremity of the Heath End in the west, and from Wash Lane in the north to Griff Hollows at the southern boundary of Windmill Field. The map is very badly faded in certain parts: the representation of the holdings in the Heath End is just about legible, but that of the properties in Wash Lane is not. It is for this reason that only the maps presented in chapters 3–9 are details from Hewitt's manuscript masterpiece. The maps used in the remaining chapters (10–15), which deal with the residents of Wash Lane, Griff, the Arbury Demesne, and The Woodland are all details from a digital map drawn with expertise and flair by Matthew Enger, who used a combination of resources, including Hewitt's very rough draft maps of the Arbury Demesne; narrative accounts of the layout of roads, tracks, and pathways in the jurors' survey; nineteenth-century ordinance survey maps; and modern aerial photographs (including those on Google Earth) to plausibly identify the precise location of the farms and cottages on the northern and southern perimeters, and of the western half, of the parish. Supported by sophisticated use of geo-spatial referencing through ARC-GIS, Matthew was able to reconstruct the social topography of the entire parish (and not merely of Coton Town) in ways that I would never have thought possible. Although we lack Thomas Hewitt's thumbnail sketches of the vernacular architecture of the buildings in Griff and The Woodland, we nonetheless have an accurate representation of the geographical and occupational distribution of all 176 householders of the parish as they were recorded by the jurors in December 1684. The 'Master Map' is available here: <www.oup.co.uk/companion/Hindle-Social_Topography>, map.i.2. Matthew and I hope that you will enjoy zooming in and out.

List of Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
CC	Chilvers Coton [in the footnotes only]
EBBA	English Broadside Ballad Archive [https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu]
ERA	East Riding Archives, Beverley
Gooder	Eileen Gooder, <i>The Squire of Arbury: Sir Richard Newdigate, Second Baronet (1644–1710) and his Family</i> (Coventry, 1990)
HL	Huntington Library, San Marino CA
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
HS	Household Size
HTA	Hearth Tax Assessment
NA	Northamptonshire Archives, Northampton
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
SBTRO	Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office, Stratford-upon-Avon
SRO	Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford
TIV	total inventory value
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
VCH	<i>The Victoria History of the County of Warwick</i> , eds. W. Page et al. (8 vols, London, 1904–69)
WAAS	Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service, Worcester
WCR	<i>Warwick County Records</i> , eds. S. C. Ratcliff, H. c. Johnson, and N. J. Williams (9 vols, Warwick, 1935–64)
WCR HTR	<i>Warwick County Records: Hearth Tax Returns, Volume I, Hemlingford Hundred: Tamworth and Atherstone Divisions</i> , ed. Margaret Walker (Warwick, 1957)
WCRO	Warwick County Record Office, Warwick
WHTR	<i>Warwickshire Hearth Tax Returns: Michaelmas 1670 with Coventry Lady Day 1666</i> , ed. Tom Arkell with Nat Alcock (Dugdale Society, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2010)

But I meet with very few that take notice of the common people; how they live, what their general employment is, and what the particular employment of them is in the several counties respectively, and yet I found this an enquiry very full of useful observations, and attended with innumerable incidents, which gave light into things of the greatest moment, as well in history as antiquity; and which seem'd to add a part in the knowledge of the country, which a traveller cou'd not be without.

To come to the point, 'tis necessary to observe to you, as the ground-work of my whole design, that the common people of this country have suffer'd a kind of general revolution, or change in their disposition, temper and manners, within a certain term of years, (*which I shall mark out to you in its place also*), I say they have suffer'd a general change, such as I believe no nation has undergone but themselves; I wish I cou'd say it was a change for the better; but be that as it will, I shall endeavour to give you an impartial account of it as it is.

It is in the next place needful to observe to you, that I took this journey at the unhappy time when this change, or revolution in the manners and temper of the common people was in the height of its operation, namely, in the years 1684 to 1688; for I was near four year before I finish'd my travels.

I that was then a stranger to the people, tho' not altogether to the place, was not fully acquainted with their just character in times past; but my companion, upon whose judgement I very much depended, and who being an observing as well as an antient man, had been conversant among them for threescore years before, supply'd me in that part, in a manner, which no books or maps cou'd do, for this part is, as I have said, scarce meddl'd with in history.

Daniel Defoe, *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd* (1724), in *Religious and Didactic Writings of Daniel Defoe, Volume 6* (ed. J. A. Downie, London, 2007), 68–9.

A flat ugly district this; depressing enough to look at, even on the brightest days. The roads are black with coal-dust, the brick houses dingy with smoke; and at that time—the time of handloom weavers—every other cottage had a loom at its window, where you might see a pale, sickly-looking man or woman pressing a narrow

chest against a board, and doing a sort of treadmill work with legs and arms. A troublesome district for a clergyman; at least to one who . . . understood the 'cure of souls' in something more than an official sense; for over and above the rustic stupidity furnished by the farm labourers, the miners brought obstreperous animalism, and the weavers an acrid Radicalism and Dissent.

George Eliot, 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverent Amos Barton [1857]',
in *The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot: Scenes of Clerical Life* (ed. Thomas A. Noble, Oxford, 1985), 23–4.

INTRODUCTION

A Time in Place, a Place in Time

The historical study of the early modern rural community enjoyed its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, but its influence in the field of English social and economic history still resonates.¹ Reaching its high-water mark in 1979 with the publication of *Poverty and Piety in an English Village*, Keith Wrightson and David Levine's analysis of Terling (Essex), this stream of scholarship converged with work being undertaken in the context of New England (by John Demos and others) and of Germany (by David Sabean).² The Terling study became particularly influential because Wrightson built its findings into his masterful creative synthesis of the 'new social history' of early modern England, *English Society, 1580–1680*, published in 1982.³ While there was a great deal of scepticism (shared, of course, by Wrightson himself) that the county of Essex, still less the village of Terling, could be taken for all England, many of the themes that are now regarded as standard in the historiography of the period—economic differentiation, social polarization, stratified cultural diffusion, the incorporation of the local community into the developing nation state—were initially conceptualized and verified in the context

¹ M. K. Ashby, *The Changing English Village: A History of Bledington, Gloucestershire, in its Setting 1066–1914* (Kineton, 1974); David G. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle Under the Tudors and Stuarts* (Leicester, 1974); Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974); Cicely Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition: Kibworth Harcourt, 1280–1700* (Cambridge, 1983); Nicholas Cooper, *Aynho: A Northamptonshire Village* (Banbury, 1984); Gwyneth Nair, *Highley: The Development of a Community, 1550–1880* (Oxford, 1988); David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham 1560–1765* (Oxford, 1989); J. V. Beckett, *A History of Laxton: England's Last Open-Field Village* (Oxford, 1989); Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500–1620* (Cambridge, 1991). For a significant precursor, see W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (London, 1957).

² Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (New York, 1979). Cf. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970); and e.g. Stephen Innes, *Labour in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton, 1983); David Warren Sabean, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984); David Warren Sabean, *Property, Production, and Family, 1700–1870* (Cambridge, 1990); David Warren Sabean, *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge, 1998).

³ Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (London, 1982). For the context, see Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter, 'The Making and Remaking of Early Modern English Social History', in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, eds. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard, and John Walter (Woodbridge, 2012), 19–27.

of this one East Anglian village whose population never reached more than 600 in the seventeenth century.⁴

By the time that the Terling study was reprinted with a new postscript in 1995, the historiographical moment had passed, and fewer ‘community studies’ have been attempted since.⁵ This outcome is to some extent paradoxical, not least because the availability of ever-more sophisticated databases makes the method of nominal record-linkage that is crucial to that kind of project rather easier now than in the days of slips of paper and of punch cards. Alan Macfarlane’s never-completed study of Earls Colne (Essex) has become a salutary warning: floating in cyberspace as a database of vast proportions yet remarkable discoverability, the source material for this one village was so extensive that the challenge of writing it up was beyond a historian of even Macfarlane’s skill and imagination.⁶ A not-dissimilar fate befell Hassell Smith’s attempt to reconstruct Stiffkey (Norfolk), which resulted only in two influential articles rather than the projected monograph.⁷ The politics of academic research performance management which has blighted the humanities in British universities over the last two decades has also contributed to the decline of the ‘community study’: the time and effort required to collate data for projects of this kind is so prodigious as to be incompatible with the demands of the Research Excellence Framework. It is not coincidental that *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* enjoyed the luxury of prolonged maturation in a Californian humanities institute well beyond the reach of ‘Research England’.

The dormant tradition of the community study is reanimated here for both conceptual and empirical reasons, which converge in the reconstruction of a particular settlement at a specific moment in its historical development. For the last thirty years, humanities disciplines from literary studies to the history of science have taken the significance of space, place, and mapping ever more

⁴ For conceptualization and verification as processes central to the credibility of the social history project, see Keith Wrightson, ‘Household and Kinship’, *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 151–8; Keith Wrightson, ‘The Family in Early Modern England: Continuity and Change’, in *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson*, eds. Stephen Taylor, Richard Connors, and Clyve Jones (Woodbridge, 1998), 12–15.

⁵ Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (2nd edn, Oxford, 1995). For later experiments, see Pamela Sharpe, *Population and Society in an East Devon Parish: Reproducing Colyton, 1540–1840* (Exeter, 2002); Henry French and Richard Hoyle, *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550–1750* (Manchester, 2007); Dolly MacKinnon, *Earls Colne’s Early Modern Landscapes* (Aldershot, 2014).

⁶ Alan Macfarlane, ‘Plan of a Possible Book on Earls Colne (c.1980)’: <<http://www.alanmacfarlane.com/TEXTS/BOOK.pdf/>>. For the database itself, see: <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/earls_colne/contents.htm>.

⁷ A. Hassell Smith, ‘Labourers in Late Sixteenth-Century England: A Case Study from North Norfolk [Part I]’, *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 11–52; A. Hassell Smith, ‘Labourers in Late Sixteenth-Century England: A Case Study from North Norfolk [Part II]’, *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), 367–94.

seriously.⁸ Like many of the methodological innovations that have transformed the historical discipline since it was first professionalized in the mid-nineteenth century, the ‘spatial’ turn has been far more frequently theorized than taken. Historians interested in spatiality have been significantly influenced by the philosopher Henri Lefebvre’s notion that space is socially produced and by his identification of its three mutually constitutive forms: *spatial practice* (through which constructed spaces are segregated but linked through human movement); *representations of space* (which conceive and represent those spaces in order to shape how they are inhabited and used); and *representational space* (space as lived and experienced through a set of symbolic associations).⁹ Developed in the work of the post-modern geographer Edward Soja, these ideas have coalesced in the recognition that spatiality is simultaneously both ‘a social product (or outcome) and a shaping force (or medium) in social life’.¹⁰ That said, there is little consensus about how the social production of space or, come to that, the spatial production of sociality, might be historically reconstructed.¹¹

The approach taken here is influenced by the spatial turn in its emphasis on the endowment of specific spaces with ‘a sense of place’ as they were inhabited and experienced; and on the flow of people, goods, and information through space.¹² It is, however, conceived less as a contribution to ‘spatial history’ than to the history of specific sites in which processes of labour, leisure, and sociability were transacted. To that extent, it is fundamentally concerned with the landscape and with the built environment and how those spaces were animated by social actors whose behaviour was profoundly influenced by these contexts, and who, in turn, transformed them. Both the broader landscape (the village upon which the study focuses) and the particular sites within it (farmhouses and hovels, furlongs and meadows, claypits and coal-shafts) are, moreover, micro-economic in scale. This

⁸ The literature is vast, but two useful introductions to the implications of the spatial turn for the practice of history are Charles W. J. Withers, ‘Place and the “Spatial Turn” in Geography and in History’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1 (2009), 637–58; and Mike Crang, ‘Spaces in Theory, Spaces in History and Spatial Historiographies’, in *Political Space in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Beat Kumin (Farnham, 2009), 249–66.

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Chicago, 1991), 37–41. For a ferocious critique, see Tim Unwin, ‘A Waste of Space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 25 (2000), 11–29.

¹⁰ Edward W. Soja, *Post-modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989), 7.

¹¹ For suggestive attempts in the context of early modern England (though one theoretically influenced less by Lefebvre and Soja than by Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Doreen Massey), see Amanda J. Flather, ‘Space, Place and Gender: The Sexual and Spatial Division of Labour in the Early Modern Household’, *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 344–60 and Amanda Flather, ‘Women, Work and Land: The Spatial Dynamics of Gender Relations in Early Modern England, 1550–1750’, in *Women and the Land, 1500–1900*, eds. Amanda L. Capern, Briony McDonagh, and Jennifer Aston (Woodbridge 2019), 29–50.

¹² Steve Hindle, ‘A Sense of Place? Becoming and Belonging in the Rural Parish, 1550–1650’, in *Communities in Early Modern England*, eds. Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington (Manchester, 2000), 96–114.

choice is informed both by the anthropological recognition that the local is where the action is and by the conviction that the historical reconstruction of specific communities is not a matter of *studying villages*, but of *studying in villages*. The primary conceptual assumption of the project is that 'big' historical processes are best analysed, just as they were most usually experienced, in relatively small places.¹³ It is not, however, conceived as a 'community study' on the Macfarlane model but rather as 'societal history' in the terms articulated by Charles Phythian-Adams: that society can only *be* where people (regularly interacting according to a broadly shared habitual code) actually *are*, inhabiting social structures embedded in a circumscribed landscape; that where people dwell in spatial terms must be regarded as significant as their matrix in the abstract, vertical, value-scale of wealth and status according to which economic historians usually measure inequality; and that it is only in these localized contexts that social history might reincorporate the women and children who invariably compose two-thirds of its subjects.¹⁴

These conceptual ambitions can be realized only because of the availability of a particular archive. *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* reconstructs the pattern of social, economic, and spatial relations in an exceptionally well-documented late seventeenth-century English parish: Chilvers Coton in north-eastern Warwickshire (Map 1.1). Lying in the distinctive *pays* of the Arden, and punctuated by the Warwickshire coal seam, Chilvers Coton was an environment in which mixed farming and industrial activity had long thrived, but like many midland settlements it retained a common field system which survived until parliamentary enclosure in the 1760s. Lying a mile south of the burgeoning market town of Nuneaton, seven miles north of the stagnating industrial city of Coventry, and abutting to the south the much larger and desperately poor coalmining community known as 'black' Bedworth, Chilvers Coton spread itself across just over 4,000 acres (Map 1.2). Like many Arden landscapes, it was topographically diverse, a differentiation expressed in the distinctive residential patterns and tenurial structures of three separate settlements. Coton Town (later known as Coton High Town) in the north-east of the parish was a populous, nucleated, village lying at the heart of almost 600 acres of open fields. It contained the parish church of All Saints and the only watermill in the community and was home to many of the local craftsmen (metalworkers and masons, shoemakers and tanners, carpenters and blacksmiths) and, at its western extremity in the Heath

¹³ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 22. Cf. Andy Wood, 'Afterword: Small Places, Big Questions: Reintegrating Social and Economic History, c.1350–1750', in *Custom and Commercialization in English Rural Society: Revisiting Tawney and Postan*, eds. J. P. Bowen and A. T. Brown (Hertford, 2017), 252.

¹⁴ Charles Phythian-Adams, 'Introduction: An Agenda for English Local History', in *Societies, Cultures and Kinship: Cultural Provinces and English Local History*, ed. Charles Phythian-Adams (Leicester, 1993), 5.



Map 1.1 The location of Chilvers Coton in north-east Warwickshire

End, to most of its landless labourers and colliers. A significant proportion of its hundred-or-so householders were either owner-occupiers or sub-tenants of small freehold estates. The much smaller hamlet of Griff, straggling towards the parish boundary with Bedworth, lay a mile to the south. Long enclosed and long a site of industrial activity because of its proximate coal mines and quarries, Griff had one very substantial freehold estate, but most of its score of tenants either leased their farms or held their small tenements at will from their landlords the Newdigates or the Coventrys. Much the most extensive (but highly dispersed) settlement in Chilvers Coton was the wood-pasture zone known as The Woodland lying to the west and extending through Nuthurst Heath abutting the parishes of Arley and Astley. Dominated by the manor house of Arbury Hall but containing several small hamlets and two dozen isolated farms, The Woodland was home to thirty-odd labourers, husbandmen, and yeomen who leased their farms from the Newdigates and to a small number of craftsmen who provided services in the Hall and its park and gardens. In 1684, Chilvers Coton had no village shop, let alone a market, though by the 1690s Sir Richard Newdigate had developed unsuccessful ambitions to create one.¹⁵ The one licensed alehouse in the parish accordingly enjoyed an enhanced role in the circulation of raw materials, the buying and selling of produce, and the extension of credit. The marketplace in Nuneaton, which lay immediately adjacent to the parish boundary, nevertheless

¹⁵ WCRO CR136/V183, p. 148 (2 Jan. 1696): 'establish a market in Chilvers Coton if it may be'.



Map 1.2 Henry Beighton's printed map of Warwickshire, 1730 (detail)

attracted substantial numbers of the wives and servants of Chilvers Coton residents as they made their weekly purchases of provisions every Saturday.

Containing approximately 800 souls at the end of the seventeenth century, Chilvers Coton was relatively populous. At almost forty households per acre, its population density was not quite comparable with that of the proximate market centre of Nuneaton (over 60) while at the same time being dwarfed by that of the adjacent mining settlement of Bedworth (almost 140). Its topographical differentiation led to a remarkable degree of economic specialization. The open field agriculture more typical of the wolds persisted despite the rapid development of dairy farming, coalmining, metalworking, and textile manufacture. The result was a highly stratified social structure in which wealth, largely a function of access to land, was very unevenly distributed. While the tenants of the ten largest holdings farmed 995 acres (almost a quarter of the parish) between them, and the eighteen middling farms extended across another 725 acres, as many as 89 (50.1 per cent) of the householders had no access to land at all. Although the situation was not as polarized, perhaps even desperate, as in neighbouring Bedworth where in 1670 almost four-in-every-five households were exempt from paying the hearth tax, the fact that almost one-half of Chilvers Coton tenants were not regarded as liable suggests that the pyramid of the social and hierarchy was very broadly based.¹⁶

The growth of specialized economic activities in Chilvers Coton nonetheless had profound implications for the integration of the people of the parish into wider social and cultural networks. Lying at the north-eastern edge of the 'cultural province' associated with the drainage-basin of the Severn and the Avon, this part of Warwickshire had (despite the lack of an insuperable topographical barrier) long been a frontier zone, its border with south-western Leicestershire representing a 'cultural edge' which inhibited intermarriage and migration (Map 1.3).¹⁷ Chilvers Coton was one of a number of rural settlements adjacent to Watling Street, which ultimately became not only the jurisdictional boundary between counties and dioceses, but also an economic borderland between the furthest outposts of Coventry silk ribbon-weaving and the extremity of the hosiery industry based on Hinckley and Leicester, and perhaps even a liminal space across which local dialects did not translate.¹⁸ During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, the economy of Chilvers Coton was reshaped in ways that profoundly changed its relationship with neighbouring settlements. On the one hand, the growth of dairying and of coalmining reoriented the local

¹⁶ *WHTR*, 55–60 (table 9). The precise exemption rates for Bedworth and Chilvers Coton are 79 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. For Bedworth, see A. L. Beier, 'Poverty and Progress in Early Modern England', in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, eds. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim (Cambridge, 1989), 226, 236, 239.

¹⁷ Phythian-Adams, 'Introduction: An Agenda for English Local History', 16.

¹⁸ Charles Phythian-Adams, *Rethinking English Local History* (University of Leicester Department of English Local History Occasional Papers 4th ser., 1, 1987), 37–42. Cf. Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 68.



Map 1.3 The border of north-western Warwickshire and south-eastern Leicestershire, from Michael Drayton, *PolyOlbion* (1612)

economy northwards and eastwards as markets were sought for cheese and butter along the Soar and the Trent and colliery labour was recruited from the pit villages of Leicestershire and Shropshire. On the other, the development of ribbon-weaving drew the parish ever more tightly into the orbit of the Coventry undertakers and, in turn, of their metropolitan silk-masters. Fixed *in place* as an Arden settlement, Chilvers Coton nonetheless oscillated *in space* as it was incorporated into wider markets for goods and labour, eventually becoming a suburb of the Victorian railway town of Nuneaton, a satellite of the post-industrial city of Coventry and, ultimately, a demoralized and abandoned mining community in the dormant West Midlands coalfield.¹⁹

Chilvers Coton has since the late sixteenth century been the seat of the Newdigate family who, as lords of Arbury Hall and latterly earls of Daventry, have exercised very considerable influence over the local economy.²⁰ By the early 1680s, 2,418 (almost 60 per cent) of the 4,056 acres in the parish were owned by the Newdigates. The second baronet, Sir Richard Newdigate (1644–1710), was by 1680 a political outcast, having been dismissed from positions not only at court (the privy chamber) but also in his adopted county (the Warwickshire commission of the peace). Temperamentally, Newdigate was the worst kind of control-freak: that is to say, one with time on his hands. Obsessive to the point of compulsion, and extraordinarily reluctant to delegate authority to stewards or bailiffs, he threw himself into the micro-management of his Warwickshire patrimony.²¹ His entrepreneurial ambitions ultimately crystallized in a five-volume survey of his estate, at the heart of which lies a remarkable ‘census type-listing’ (compiled in 1684) of the 780 inhabitants of Chilvers Coton, recording in each case their names, ages, and occupations, together with their relationship to the head of the household in which they lived.²²

This census is, however, only one jewel in the crown of an archive which also contains a manorial survey of all the landholdings including a detailed (though

¹⁹ Cf., on the scale of the county, Phythian-Adams’s discussion of how Leicestershire ‘moved’ in space (from representing ‘the south of the North’ to a new status as ‘the north of the South’) as its economy and political geography was gradually reorientated from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards. Charles Phythian-Adams, ‘Local History and National History: The Quest for the Peoples of England’, *Rural History*, 2 (1991), 17–20.

²⁰ Vivienne Larmine, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The 17th-Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World* (Woodbridge, 1995).

²¹ Eileen Gooder, *Squire of Arbury: Sir Richard Newdigate, Second Baronet and His Family, 1644–1710* (Coventry, 1990); Vivienne Larmine, ‘Newdigate, Sir Richard, second baronet (1644–1710)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47961>>, accessed 1 May 2022; and Steve Hindle, ‘Sir Richard Newdigate and the “Great Survey” of Chilvers Coton: Fiscal Seigneurialism in Late-Seventeenth-Century Warwickshire’, in *William Dugdale, Historian, 1605–86: His Life, His Writings and His County*, eds. Christopher Dyer and Catherine Richardson (Woodbridge, 2009), 164–86.

²² The Newdigate archive is located at the Warwickshire County Record Office, gathered principally in WCRO CR136, but also scattered across other deposits including CR764.

only partial) estate map; and a plan of who occupied each seat in the parish church. Numerous other sources are also extant: the wages books for the Arbury agricultural estate and the adjacent coalmines; the rentals and household account books of the lord of the manor together with excerpts from his private journal; and a vast collection of deeds which record thousands of property transactions stretching back some 600 years. *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* is rooted in the analysis of these materials, but supplements the Newdigate archive with spatially sensitive nominal record-linkage based on some 159 wills and 170 probate inventories relating to inhabitants of the parish and on dozens of others from neighbouring settlements; on the parish registers of baptisms, burials, and weddings; on the disbursements of the overseers of the poor; on extensive witness testimony given during the course of litigation in Chancery, Exchequer, and other jurisdictions; on the finest series of county hearth tax returns and quarter sessions order books in the country; and on a significant array of miscellaneous documents. If, as Wrightson has so candidly admitted, the Terling study was a case of ‘making bricks without straw’, Chilvers Coton can be reconstructed from plentiful archival supplies not only of straw, but of sand, clay, lime, iron oxide, and magnesia, fired together in the kiln of vastly enhanced computing power. To be sure, the compound is not quite perfectly calibrated: the survival of parish registers only from 1654 militates against a full-scale family reconstitution and it is frustrating that the accounts of the parish officers are fragmentary before the late 1680s.²³ That said, the Chilvers Coton archive—and especially the remarkable coincidence of the occupational census type-listing with its contemporaneous survey map—facilitates the fulfilment of the historiographical fantasy of reconstructing the spatiality of social relations in an English village.

More remarkably still, the seventeenth-century parish of Chilvers Coton enjoyed a nineteenth-century literary afterlife. George Eliot wrote in 1876 that ‘a human life . . . should be well rooted in some spot of native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours [that] men go forth to, [and] for the sounds and accents that haunt it’.²⁴ For Eliot, that ‘native land’ was the Warwickshire countryside, with which she fell so deeply in love that her novels (all of them written long after she had left home) deploy an archive of visual and aural references specific to the precise ‘spot’ of the landscape in which she had been born. Her father, Robert Evans, was land agent to Francis Parker Newdigate, and his youngest daughter Mary Ann was born at South Farm on the Arbury estate in 1819, four months before the family moved to the much more

²³ Personal communication (the reference is to Exodus 5: 6–19). For a more formal assessment of the limitations of the archive on which the Terling study was based, see Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, x.

²⁴ George Eliot, *The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot: Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley (Oxford, 1984), 18.

substantial 280-acre farm at Griff Hill.²⁵ In later life, Mary Ann became George Eliot and her first published work *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) begins with a short story set in the early 1830s recounting ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, the vicar of the parish of ‘Shepperton’, a very thinly fictionalized Chilvers Coton.²⁶

Eliot’s references in ‘Amos Barton’ to vividly remembered features of the landscape and the built environment of the parish are to some extent elegiac, but they are so precise that they cumulatively laid the foundations of a new kind of realism in fiction. Her description of the paupers being preached at in the Shepperton workhouse has become justly famous (and is quoted *in extenso* in Ch. 15 below), but so too ought to be her characterizations of those who sat so self-consciously in the pews of the parish church (alluded to here in Ch. 4) and of those who skulked subversively in the corners of the village alehouse (an image which resonates with the themes of Ch. 6). But she was no less interested in the ‘dirty backyards, measly pork, and dirty linen of the poorer households’ or in the ‘temples of cleanliness’ where butter was churned in the farms of the middling sort. All of Chilvers Coton life is here: the well-paid colliers ‘doing nothing but swilling ale and smoking’, the farmwives fretting over mouldy dairy produce ‘because their husbands had counted on the cheese money to make the rent’, the expressions of neighbourly sympathy (‘the kind pressure of the hand, the cordial looks’) prompted by bereavement.²⁷ Images of Chilvers Coton also persisted in her later fiction, especially in *Felix Holt the Radical*, which begins with the view from the windows of a stagecoach thundering along the turnpikes of the midlands, ‘looking down on a village dingy with coaldust, noisy with [the] shaking of looms’ and ‘skirting a parish all of fields, high hedges and deep rutted lanes . . . in a rural region [where] the neighbourhood of the town was only felt in the advantages of a near market for corn, cheese, and hay’.²⁸ Her novels are replete with images that conveyed her sense of place in a community where she had seen labourers dancing, drinking, making love, milking, and shearing; and in which the pale faces and twisted bodies of the ribbon-weavers contrasted vividly with the ruddy complexions and rotund bellies of the yeomen farmers. It is for all these reasons that one of the epigraphs of this book is taken from *Scenes of Clerical Life*, that its subtitle performs homage to Eliot’s literary genius, that the idioms of her

²⁵ Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (New York, 1999), 10, 12; Kathleen McCormack, *George Eliot’s English Travels: Composite Characters and Coded Communications* (London, 2005), 18–26; Caroline Dakers, ‘Land Agents: Fact and Fiction in the Long Nineteenth Century’, in *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future*, eds. Carol Beardmore, Steven King, and Geoff Monks (Cambridge, 2016), 77–84; David Paterson, *Fair Seed-Time: Robert Evans, Francis Newdigate and the Making of George Eliot* (London, 2019).

²⁶ George Eliot, ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, in *The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot: Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford, 1985), 7–72.

²⁷ Eliot, ‘Sad Fortunes’, 8, 11, 14, 24, 25–8, 68, 70.

²⁸ George Eliot, *The Clarendon Edition of the Novels of George Eliot: Felix Holt, the Radical*, ed. Fred C. Thomson (Oxford, 1980), 8.

fictional realism recur throughout its chapters, and that its conclusion echoes her sympathy for the poetry and pathos lying in the experience of otherwise unremarkable people.

The matrix of source material for seventeenth-century Chilvers Coton is exceptionally rich for one particular point in time, the early 1680s when Sir Richard Newdigate's jurors administered the survey of his manors. The 'chronology' of this study is, however, even more specific than that, for the census of the inhabitants can be dated precisely to the first week of December 1684. The project is accordingly designed to capture social and economic relations 'in motion' at one particular instant in one circumscribed space.²⁹ It is accordingly a study both of *a time in place* and of *a place in time*. The closing decades of the seventeenth century, and the 1680s in particular, constitute a particularly significant period in the social and economic history of England.³⁰ Recent work on urbanization has suggested that this was the first period in English history in which more of the population lived in towns of over 2,000 inhabitants rather than in the countryside.³¹ Students of occupational structure have demonstrated that this was also the point at which employment opportunities in the industrial and service sectors first exceeded the availability of work in agriculture.³² More generally, it was also the first time for almost 200 years that population growth was stagnant, that labour was in short supply, that wages were rising, and that rents were falling.³³ The period also witnessed the 'industrious revolution' and the

²⁹ Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, eds. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox, and Steve Hindle (London and New York, 1996), 12.

³⁰ For the broader context of 'living with the market' in the century after 1660, Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, 2000), 273–330.

³¹ E. A. Wrigley, 'Urban Growth and Agricultural Change; England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period', reprinted in E. A. Wrigley, *People, Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford, 1987), 157–93; Alan Dyer, 'Small Market Towns, 1540–1700', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume II: 1540–1840*, ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge, 2000), 425–50.

³² These findings are derived from the working papers associated with the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure project on 'The Occupational Structure of Britain, c.1379–1911'. See especially Sebastian Keibek, 'Using Probate Data to Determine Male Occupational Structures' (Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History, no. 26, March 2017); Keibek, 'Allocating Labourers to Occupational (Sub-) Sectors Using Regression Techniques' (Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History, no. 26, March 2017); and Leigh Shaw-Taylor, Keith Sudgen, and Xuesheng You, 'A Preliminary Estimate of the Female Occupational Structure of England and Wales, 1700–1911' (Cambridge Working Papers in Economic and Social History, no. 33, November 2019); Sebastian Keibek, 'Why was Britain the First Industrial Economy? An Exploration Starting from the Country's Comparative Modernity c.1700' (Unpublished Paper, 2018).

³³ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), 210; Peter J. Bowden, 'Agricultural Prices, Wages, Farm Profits and Rents', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume V: 1640–1750, II, Agrarian Change*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, 1985), 77–8; D. R. Hainsworth, *Stewards, Lords and People: The Estate Steward and His World in Later Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1992), 54–5. For specific case studies, see Margaret Gay Davies, 'Country Gentry and Falling Rents in the 1660s and 1670s', *Midland History*, 4 (1977), 86–96; James M. Rosenheim, *The Townshends of Raynham: Nobility in Transition in Restoration and Early Hanoverian England* (Middletown, Conn., 1989), 77–9; John Broad, *Transforming Rural Society: The Verneys and the Claydons, 1600–1820* (Cambridge, 2004), 141, 142, 146.

burgeoning consumer culture which not only incentivized it but which, in turn, it accelerated.³⁴ The first shoots of the English enlightenment were also emerging, Newtonian ideas efflorescing both in the learned metropolitan circles associated with the Royal Society and in the projects of engineers and the experiments of natural philosophers working in the provinces.³⁵ By mapping these macro-economic transformations in the context of one specific place, the project is designed to reconstruct the lived experience of social and economic change. More than that, it argues that the life-chances of the generation who were born in the 1640s and 1650s and lived into the 1710s and 1720s were, in Chilvers Coton as elsewhere, particularly distinctive. Their lives spanned a period of population depletion sufficiently serious to disrupt the coherence of pre-existing patterns of social and economic relations and to encourage the generation of new societal solutions with such novel spatial emphases that even survivors from the old pattern were tempted to relocate and innovate.³⁶ The project captures the inhabitants of Chilvers Coton as they responded to, and in turn initiated, changes in social and economic activity, making their own history on their own terms.

The local archives also capture Chilvers Coton at a particular point of inflection in its own specific trajectory of historical development: the moment when the 'great survey' of its three manors was undertaken; when its coalmines were reopened after lying dormant for almost thirty years; when the ribbon-weaving industry that subsequently came to dominate local employment opportunities was being introduced; when there were significant construction projects at Arbury Hall, especially the building and wainscoting of a substantial stable block; when parts of the Arbury demesne were imparked; when leasehold tenancy was systematically extended across the Arbury estate; when the small freeholds which had been purchased by copyholders over a century previously were being aggressively reabsorbed into the Newdigate patrimony; when (in tentative anticipation of the parliamentary enclosure of the open fields which was not to take place for another eighty years) the common waste was first hedged and ditched; and when cattle-rearing and dairying, especially the churning of butter and the maturing of cheese, were coming to dominate the regional agricultural economy.

All these themes are captured in the thirteen substantive chapters that follow, but they are introduced through a narrative strategy which focuses on the

³⁴ Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behaviour and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2008); Craig Muldrew, *Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness: Work and Material Culture in Agrarian England, 1550–1780* (Cambridge, 2011). The literature on consumption is vast, but see in particular Lorna Wetherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture, 1660–1760* (London, 1988); Mark Overton, Jane Whittle, Darron Dean, and Andrew Hann, *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750* (London, 2004); Anthony Buxton, *Domestic Culture in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2015); Joanne Sear and Ken Sneath, *The Origins of the Consumer Revolution in England: From Brass Pots to Clocks* (London, 2020).

³⁵ Larry Stewart, *The Rise of Public Science: Rhetoric, Technology, and Natural Philosophy in Newtonian Britain, 1660–1750* (Cambridge, 1992).

³⁶ Phythian-Adams, 'Introduction: An Agenda for English Local History', 7.

contributions and experiences of particular households in the parish, each of them located on a specific site in the landscape and the built environment. Rather than devote a specific chapter to the communal regulation of agriculture, for example, the stinting of the common fields and the enclosure of the common waste are analysed in the course of two separate chapters which discuss two individuals for whom these developments had momentous consequences: the miller who rented a yardland-and-a-quarter (Ch. 3) and the husbandman who leased the new allotment (Ch. 14). Similarly, rather than focusing an entire chapter on the institutionalization of the poor law, discussions of the distribution of parish relief are introduced in the course of biographies of the miller who, as one of the parish officers, left the earliest extant list of pension payments (Ch. 3); and of the carpenter whose widow was made to wear the parish badge and whose daughter was incarcerated in the workhouse some five and twenty-five years respectively after he had himself served as overseer of the poor (Ch. 15). This approach permits a more holistic perspective on the life-experiences of the inhabitants than would be offered by artificially compartmentalized thematic discussions of ‘common right’ or ‘welfare dependency’. These examples could be multiplied: the ownership of livestock by mapping the client-base of the blacksmith who ringed his neighbours’ pigs and shod their horses (Ch. 7); the prosecution and punishment of moral offences discussed as a backdrop to a notorious sex scandal (Ch. 11); the nature and significance of local networks of credit and debt analysed in the context of a discussion of the inventory of the most substantial local creditor (Ch. 13); the spread of commercial tenures through an analysis of the farming practice of the husbandman who was subject to the most restrictive lease (Ch. 14). The focus is therefore on specific individual experiences mediated through particular spaces rather than on aggregated social and economic trends abstracted from time and place.

That place was, moreover, emphatically not self-contained, still less isolated.³⁷ Throughout these chapters it will be apparent that Chilvers Coton was increasingly well integrated into markets for raw materials (grain, silk, iron, coal, milk) and for produce (bread, ribbon, nails, coke, cheese) that were not just local and regional, but national and international. When John Knight wove textiles in his Bridge Street workshop (Ch. 5), his loom was part of a commodity chain which brought Turkish silk yarn from Aleppo via London and exported finished ‘Coventry-blue’ ribbon to the New World. Made from iron imported from Sweden, the nails hammered at Christopher Smith’s forge (Ch. 9) bolstered pit-props in the mines of the black country and secured the hulls of naval vessels

³⁷ Richard M. Smith, ‘“Modernization” and the Corporate Medieval Village Community in England: Some Sceptical Reflections’, in *Explorations in Historical Geography*, eds. A. H. R. Baker and Derek Gregory (Cambridge, 1984), 140–79; and the essays collected in Christopher Dyer (ed.), *The Self-contained Village? The Social History of Rural Communities, 1250–1900* (Hatfield, 2006).

protecting British trading interests across the world. The Coal Measures of Griff were mined not only by William Nock (Ch. 10), but by hundreds of colliers recruited from Shropshire, and it burned in the grates of the better sort of the burgeoning towns of Coventry, Leicester, and Lutterworth. The cheeses produced by Ann Hardy in her dairy on the Arbury Demesne (Ch. 13) were too small to justify transportation to distant markets, but those matured by Mary King at Temple House (Ch. 14) were large enough to find their way along the Trent to be sold in Gainsborough and Hull, or perhaps even in London. In one way or another, all the households in Chilvers Coton were enmeshed in wider networks of production, consumption, and exchange, and the micro-historical reconstruction of their activities offers an invaluable perspective on the penetration of the local by the global.³⁸ Nor was this integration into broader structures simply economic, it was also political and jurisdictional, Chilvers Coton being incorporated into a nascent welfare system where the discretionary authority of parish officers was subject to review in the Westminster courts; and into a judicial hierarchy where Warwickshire magistrates exercising summary powers were held accountable not only by the judges of the midland circuit but also by the privy council and the secretary of state.³⁹

Each of the thirteen substantive chapters accordingly takes one of the 176 households as emblematic of the wider pattern of social, economic, and spatial relations within and beyond the parish, and moves between and through them following the itinerary of the members of the manorial court of survey ('the jurors') who in December 1684 collected information about the names, ages, and professions of each of the householders and the ages and kin and non-kin relationships of those who were co-resident with them. The choice of the household discussed in each chapter was dictated partly by the desire to reflect the occupational structure of the community. All the sectors of the local economy are represented: farmers (chs. 3, 11, 13, and 14); craftsmen (Chs. 7, 13, and 15); industrial workers (Chs. 5, 9, and 10); an agricultural labourer (Ch. 8); and the domestic servants at Arbury Hall (Ch. 12). Other households were selected because of their innate interest, thrown into still greater relief because they have gone largely unexplored in the historiography: there are very few existing studies of millers and milling (Ch. 3), for instance, or of silk weavers and ribbon

³⁸ Cf. Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', *California Italian Studies*, 2 (2011), 1–24; and the essays collected in John-Paul Ghobrial (ed.), *Global History and Microhistory, Past and Present*, Supplement 14, Oxford, 2019).

³⁹ Cf. Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550–1640* (London and New York, 2000); Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, c.1550–1750* (Oxford, 2000), 431–2; cf. Chs. 3, 9, and 14 below. For a settlement case involving Chilvers Coton that became enshrined in eighteenth-century case-law, see James Burrow, *A Series of the Decisions of the Court of King's Bench upon Settlement-Cases* (London, 1768), 766–70 (no. 239 Rex vs. Inhabitants of Weddington, 1744).

manufacture (Ch. 5); and the opportunity to reconstruct the life-ways of an agricultural labourer (Ch. 8), a nail-smith (Ch. 9), and a coalminer (Ch. 10) seemed too important to miss. Specific households were chosen because the availability of relevant supplementary documentation—a particularly revealing will (Chs. 5, 6, and 13), for example; or detailed probate material (Chs. 4, 11, 13, and 15); or a body of legal testimony (Chs. 10, 11, and 15)—permits the skeleton of demographic evidence to be fleshed out with lived experience. It also seemed appropriate to emphasize the significance of specific sites in the built environment, especially the mill (Ch. 3), the vicarage and the parish church (Ch. 4), the alehouse (Ch. 6), the forge (Ch. 7), the colliery (Ch. 10), the gentry seat (Ch. 12), the ancient manor house where local courts convened (Ch. 14), and the parish workhouse (Ch. 15). These were the most obvious spaces for focused interaction in the parish and their importance for the quotidian constitution of social relations cannot be underestimated. Of the thirteen households on which the substantive chapters focus, eight lay in Coton Town, one in Griff, and four in The Woodland, a selection which broadly reflects the spatial distribution of the households and the residents. While the 127 households in Coton Town represented 72.2 per cent of the occupied housing stock and contained 64.7 per cent of the population, the twenty households in Griff and twenty-nine in The Woodland contained 13.5 per cent and 21.8 per cent of the population respectively (though the latter proportion is distorted by the large number of residents at Arbury Hall, which itself accounted for almost 5 per cent of the inhabitants of the parish).

Eleven of the chapters have a titular focus on men, and in each case analyse the working opportunities through which the male household head attempted to make a living and provide for his family.⁴⁰ A twelfth chapter (Ch. 6) focuses on a woman, the only one of the twenty-six female heads of household who was not merely generically described as a widow but also specifically given an occupational identity, in Frances Rason's case that of victualler. The 'household head' approach is not, however, as 'patriarchal' as it might at first seem. To be sure, the census listed the name, age, and occupation of the household-head *first* in every case, and these householders were overwhelmingly, though not exclusively, adult males. Whether or not they succeeded in doing so, husbands and fathers were *expected* to generate significant income with which rent could be paid and bellies filled. However complex the actual sexual division of labour and the pattern of by-employment within any particular household, the designated occupational status of its head almost certainly determined how it was seen by its neighbours. That said, each chapter amplifies and elaborates the significance of women's work to the survival of the household irrespective of the nominal occupation of the putative male 'breadwinner'.

⁴⁰ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), 186–92.

There was, inevitably, an uneasy fit between a census structured by male occupations and the much more complex reality of household strategies of production and reproduction, and where the documentation permits, the chapters reconstruct the crucial economic contributions and cultural experiences of the wives and daughters of the male householders. There are accordingly discussions of the elderly Mary Knight labouring at her wheel and loom in the workshop of her Bridge Street cottage (Ch. 5); of the young widow Lettice Brown picking up the fragments of the blacksmith's business on Windmill Field Lane after her late husband's sudden death (Ch. 7); of Alice Checkly raking hay in the Arbury meadows with dozens of other women and girls (Ch. 8); of Mistress Ann Beighton in conversation with her neighbours in Griff impugning her rival's sexual propriety (Ch. 11); of mother-of-seven Ann Hardy maturing cheese and churning butter in her dairy on the Arbury Demesne (Ch. 13); and of widow Elizabeth Nash navigating the church courts at Lichfield as she administered the probate of her late husband's Woodland estate (Ch. 15). But even where such evidence does not survive, it must not be assumed that men were the 'real' workers while women were confined to a supporting role of relentless domestic drudgery. Many early modern households employed servants precisely *because* the housewife's economic role was too important to be taken up with childcare and charring. Aside from those cases where records survive of particular people being paid to perform specific tasks, evidence of who actually did what within such households is extremely rare. In some households there was simply far too much work for one man to undertake alone, a practical problem which invites speculation about how the sexual division of labour was managed in practice. Wives must have played a significant economic role in all of the households discussed here, but Elizabeth Clay (Ch. 3), Lettice Brown (Ch. 7), Ann Hardy (Ch. 13), and Mary King (Ch. 14) in particular were almost certainly running their family farms while their husbands pursued their specialist occupations as miller, blacksmith, stonemason, and horse-dealer respectively.⁴¹ All this is to say nothing of women's commercial agency in buying, selling, and provisioning, most

⁴¹ Amy Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London, 1993), 193–5; Nicola Verdon, '“... Subjects Deserving of the Highest Praise”: Farmers' Wives and the Farm Economy in England, c.1700–1850', *Agricultural History Review*, 51 (2003), 23–39; Jane Whittle, 'Housewives and Servants in Rural England, 1440–1650: Evidence of Women's Work from Probate Documents', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 15 (2005), 51–74; Jane Whittle, 'The House as a Place of Work in Early Modern Rural England', *Home Cultures*, 8 (2011), 133–50; Jane Whittle, 'Enterprising Widows and Active Wives: Women's Unpaid Work in the Household Economy of Early Modern England', *The History of The Family*, 19 (2014), 283–300; Jane Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to “Domestic Work”: Women, Work and the Pre-industrial Economy', *Past and Present*, 243 (2019), 35–70; Jane Whittle and Mark Hailwood, 'The Gender Division of Labour in Early Modern England', *Economic History Review*, 73 (2020), 3–32. For more spatially sensitive analysis, see Flather, 'Space, Place and Gender'; Flather, 'Women, Work and Land'; and Charmian Mansell, 'Beyond the Home: Space and Agency in the Experiences of Female Service in Early Modern England', *Gender and History*, 33 (2021), 24–49.

obviously in their weekly trips to the Nuneaton market, but also in their seasonal visit to the fairs at Atherstone and Hinckley.⁴²

However well or poorly documented these economic contributions are, women's work was almost invariably supplemented by the ubiquitous and relentless pressures of childbearing and mothering. The widow and eleven of the wives of the protagonists of the chapters shared the common experience of motherhood. In 1684, they were on average aged 39, had been married since their mid-twenties, and would go on to bear their husbands five children. They had given birth for the first time at around the age of 26 and would bear their last child after a decade-long reproductive career at the age of 36. For at least seven of them (Mary Knight, Francis Rason, Lettice Brown, Ann and Alice Checkly, Ann Hardy, and Elizabeth Nash) motherhood brought joy and tragedy in equal measure, for these women lost one or more children either in infancy or adulthood.⁴³ Lettice Brown and Elizabeth Nash suffered particularly badly: Brown buried three children in the 1660s and 1670s and Nash two infants in the late 1680s and early 1690s, in both cases before they had themselves reached the age of 25. Ann Hardy lost only one child, but two of her surviving children suffered extremely poor health and required intensive care. Although four of the thirteen women (Elizabeth Perkins, Ann Checkly, Lady Mary Newdigate, and Ann Hardy) would predecease their husbands, the other nine either had been or would become widowed, typically in their mid-fifties. At least two were appointed as executor (and another as administrator) of their late husband's estate before going on to die between three and four years later without having remarried. For some of these women (especially Alice Smith and Elizabeth Nock, the wives of a nail-smith and collier respectively) the documentary record is so slight that it is impossible to discuss their life-experience in any detail, though 75-year-old Smith can be fleetingly glimpsed organizing her late husband's funeral in August 1696.⁴⁴ Archival silence should not, however, be taken to imply that their contribution to the well-being of their husbands, children, and neighbours was any less significant than those whose economic activities, material culture, or social experiences were, however serendipitously, inscribed in a wages book, a probate inventory, or a church court deposition.

Each of the thirteen chapters begins with the moment of 'collision' when the jurors knocked at the door to gather demographic and occupational information about the household as it was constituted in early December 1684. The census compiled by the jurors functions much like a photograph, vividly capturing the residents in motion but artificially fixing them at a specific moment in time. Each

⁴² David Pennington, *Going to Market: Women, Trade and Social Relations in Early Modern English Towns, c.1550–1650* (Farnham, 2015). For the influence of improved transport infrastructure on the rising fortunes of the market towns north of Coventry in the late seventeenth century, see Alan Dyer, 'Warwickshire Towns Under the Tudors and Stuarts', *Warwickshire History*, 3 (1976–77), 123–8.

⁴³ Chs. 6, 7, 12, and 14 below. ⁴⁴ Ch. 9 below.

chapter accordingly takes seriously the historical obligation to reanimate the protagonists by tracing their prior experiences and outlining their subsequent fate, by pulling them into and drawing them out from the frozen frame. The longitudinal studies of these households offered here are in part biographical, structured by narratives of birth, marriage, parenthood, bereavement, and death. They are also, however, significantly influenced by the recent rethinking of the historical relationship between ‘the household’ and ‘the family’, especially the insight that the structure of early modern households was particularly fluid not merely because of ‘natural’ demographic turnover created by fertility and mortality, but also because of the incessant flow of ‘fictive’ kin (servants, apprentices, and other boarders) through domestic space.⁴⁵ Of the thirteen specific households considered here, ten had at least one resident in December 1684 who was not related by blood or marriage to the household head, and in several of these cases the number of fictive kin rose and fell according to the demand for supplementary labour, the availability of houseroom, and the obligations of charity. The disabled pauper Anne Derby, who was temporarily resident with the King family at Temple House in the mid-1690s, is only the most well-documented example of demographic turnover among this transient constituency of adolescents and others for whom the formation and maintenance of their own ‘household-family’ was either temporarily or permanently impossible.⁴⁶

The biography of each of these households is also, however, *spatial* and *material*. The chapters pay particular attention to the location of a specific household in the landscape and to its relationship with its neighbours and to significant sites of authority, labour, leisure, and sociability. To this extent, the approach imitates archaeological attempts to reconstruct ‘taskscape’, the natural and built environments in which work was performed and the processes of social and economic life carried forward.⁴⁷ That said, although the archaeological evidence for Chilvers Coton is in some respects quite strong, the built environment of

⁴⁵ Naomi Tadmor, ‘The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 151 (1996), 111–40; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001), 18–43.

⁴⁶ Cf. Ch. 14 below.

⁴⁷ Tim Ingold, ‘The Temporality of the Landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25 (1993), 152–74. For the influence of the concept in archaeological research, see Ulla Rajala and Philip Mills, eds., *Forms of Dwelling: 20 Years of Taskscape in Archaeology* (Oxford, 2017). Historians have gradually begun to take notice, apparently without realizing that Ingold was vigorously dismissive of the historical method. Cf. Katrina Navickas, ‘Luddism, Incendiarism and the Defence of Rural “Task-Scape” in 1812’, *Northern History*, 48 (2011), 72; Simon Sandall, ‘Industry and Community in the Forest of Dean, c.1550–1832’, *Family and Community History*, 16 (2013), 95; Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People: Custom and Popular Senses of the Past in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2013), 84, 150, 198, 234, 235, 267; Antony Buxton, *Domestic Culture in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 2015), 39; Carl J. Griffin and Iain Robertson, ‘Moral Ecologies: Conservation in Conflict in Rural England’, *History Workshop Journal*, 82 (2016), 31–2; Carl J. Griffin and Briony McDonagh, ‘Remembering Protest’, and Nicola Whyte, ‘Remembering Mousehold Heath’, both in *Remembering Protest in Britain since 1500*, eds. Carl J. Griffin and Briony McDonagh (London and New York, 2018), 12–14, 36, 39, 42.

the most densely settled eastern part of the parish in particular was radically transformed by the ambitions of the Victorian railway engineers, of the *Luftwaffe*, and of the Thatcher government at war with the National Union of Mineworkers in the 1980s: there are no extant seventeenth-century buildings in Coton Town or Griff.⁴⁸ The taskscapes of this particular parish are most plausibly reconstructed not through archaeological fieldwork or the study of vernacular architecture but through analysis of the rich documentary record of the material culture in which it developed and which it gradually reshaped. Particular attention is paid in each case to the functioning of the household economy and the sustenance of livelihoods in particular spatial contexts of labour and domesticity. The approach focuses relentlessly on the materiality of work, an analysis made possible by a significant body of probate material: of the 176 household heads listed in the census, 26 (almost 15 per cent) subsequently left an inventory that can be correlated with the particular building in which a householder lived. Nine of these examples figure prominently in the following chapters, and in three of them (Chs. 4, 6, and 7) the survival at generational intervals of multiple inventories facilitates the analysis of material culture as it developed over time in one particular space. These inventories are situated in a broader sample of probate material from the village, which includes 170 inventories in total, 98 of them dating from the period 1660–1720. In every case, particular care has been taken to analyse inventories in comparative context rather than as absolute measures of total wealth, especially by layering them with other documentary evidence that discloses the material circumstances of the testator. Probate material may have its limitations, and perhaps even its fictions, but its potential, when cross-referenced with the other sources available to the student of the local community, is self-evident.⁴⁹

The chapters therefore offer spatial and material biographies of thirteen householders and their families. They are, in essence, a sequence of ‘biographies of the overlooked’, cumulatively representing a prosopography of the marginalized and ignored. ‘Overlooked’ is intended here in two senses. First, these individuals and

⁴⁸ Philip Mayes and Keith Scott, *Pottery Kilns at Chilvers Coton* (Society for Medieval Archaeology, Monograph Series 10, 1984); Daniel Eddisford, Melissa Melikian, and Martin D. Wilson, ‘The Medieval Manor of Chilverscoton: Excavations at Bermuda Park, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, 1970–2004’, *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, 114 (2010), 81–109; Martin D. Wilson, ‘Medieval Pottery Production at Chilvers Coton, Warwickshire: Re-examination of the Archaeological Evidence and the Historic Landscape Context’, *Medieval Ceramics: The Journal of the Medieval Pottery Research Group*, (2015), 61–79.

⁴⁹ The essential starting points are Margaret Spufford, ‘The Limitations of the Probate Inventory’, in *English Rural Society, 1500–1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, eds. John Chartres and David Hey (Cambridge, 1990), 139–74; and Lena C. Orlin, ‘Fictions of the Early Modern English Probate Inventory’, in *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Henry S. Turner (London, 2002), 51–83. For an elegant summary of the critical literature on probate inventories, see Jason Scott Warren, *Shakespeare’s First Reader: The Paper Trails of Richard Stonley* (Philadelphia, 2020), 74–114.

millions like them have been overlooked by being *historiographically neglected*, usually on the assumptions that their lives are too poorly documented to be worth sustained analysis or (still worse) that their life-experience lacked either meaning to them or significance to the historian. Mercifully, the Thompsonian project of ‘history from below’, and the ‘new social history’ which it inspired, has exposed these prejudices for what they are, though in most cases those rescued from the ‘enormous condescension of posterity’ have been either collectivities or individual ‘deviants’ whose failure to conform to social norms was inscribed in an archive of repression.⁵⁰ With one exception, none of the individuals whose life-stories are reconstructed here could plausibly be described as a malefactor, and part of the appeal of the project is that whether inflected with success or misfortune, joy or sorrow, aspiration or regret, their lives were essentially unremarkable.⁵¹ Their histories have been so long suppressed that they are now entitled to the dignity of recognition.

The protagonists of the chapters are also overlooked in the sense of having been *subject to surveillance*. Their lives can be reconstructed precisely because their basic demographic and economic parameters (age, gender, and occupation) were inscribed in a census. That census, like all censuses, was a significant bureaucratic achievement, but the experience of *being counted* was doubtless unsettling for those whose names were taken, not least because such lists were more usually compiled to satisfy governmental ambitions of coercion, control, or extraction.⁵² The interactive recording of demographic and occupational information begs significant questions about the social, cultural, and economic relations between those who gathered it and those whose data was captured by it. In this respect, an understanding of the identities and character of the jurors (offered here in Ch. 2) is critical.⁵³ The census, and the manorial survey of which it was part, was their work and it permits a view of the parish through their eyes. While the process of

⁵⁰ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1966), 12. The achievements of the new social history in the context of early modern England are captured in Hindle, Shepard, and Walter, ‘The Making and Remaking of Early Modern English Social History’; and in the essays in Keith Wrightson, ed., *A Social History of England, 1500–1750* (Cambridge, 2017). For work on collective identities, see Levine and Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society*; David Hey, *The Fiery Blades of Hallamshire: Sheffield and its Neighbourhood, 1660–1740* (Leicester, 1991); J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700–1820* (Cambridge, 1993); Andy Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520–1770* (Cambridge, 1999); and Malcolm Chase, *Early Trade Unionism: Fraternity, Skill and the Politics of Labour* (Aldershot, 2000); and for early historiographical examples of individual transgressors see, e.g., Malcolm Gaskill, ‘Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England: The Case of Margaret Moore’, in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, eds. Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (London, 1994), 125–45; Steve Hindle, ‘The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England’, *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), 391–419.

⁵¹ The exception is the unfaithful husband Henry Beighton III: see Ch. 11 below.

⁵² Paul Griffiths, ‘Local Arithmetic: Information Cultures in Early Modern England’, in *Remaking English Society*, eds. Hindle, Shepard, and Walter, 113–34; Griffiths, ‘Surveying the People’, in *Social History*, ed. Wrightson, 39–59.

⁵³ See Ch. 2 below.

information gathering was initiated by the lord of the manor who evidently had his own opinions and prejudices about the inhabitants and the landscape in which they lived, he did not personally collect the evidence. The project therefore intentionally analyses Chilvers Coton not *from above* (vertically, from the perspective of the landlord), but *from within* (laterally, from the viewpoint of the jurors). In this respect, as in many others, it takes its cue from Edward Thompson's insight that 'the life of a parish might equally well revolve around the weekly market, the summer and winter festivals and fairs, and the annual village feast' than about the occasions of the gentry household and that 'the gossip of poaching, theft, sexual scandal and the behaviour of the overseers of the poor might occupy people's minds rather more than the remote comings and goings up at the park'.⁵⁴ The chapters accordingly follow the jurors' itinerary as they walked westward from the watermill at Cuttle Place in Coton Town (Ch. 3), concluding only when they reached the carpenter's 'middling' farmhouse in The Woodland north-west of Arbury Hall (Ch. 15).

This is, in sum, an innovative project made possible by a unique archive. It is the first book-length study of any of the two dozen communities for which an occupational census-type listing survives, and Chilvers Coton is the one example of a village with a census that can be correlated with a contemporary estate map.⁵⁵ Its novelty lies in the combination of social and economic with spatial analysis and in the potential to map the protagonists of each chapter as they participated in processes of labour and leisure. The archival material is so plentiful as to be almost overwhelming in its density and complexity. Its analysis presents methodological challenges which might more accurately be characterized as 'anxieties' experienced by the historian trying to do justice not merely to such rich evidence but also to those historical actors who generated it and whose lived experience it captures.

The first anxiety is what might be described as the 'no-comparator problem': no other early modern English village (arguably not even the celebrated case of Earls Colne) is so richly documented. How, then, might comparisons be made with other settlements? To be sure, specific aspects of the history of Chilvers Coton might be compared with those of other parishes for which appropriate archival material survives. Whickham (County Durham) is one obvious example, through which the fully documented growth of the coal industry throws the experience of boom-and-bust in the Griff colliery into greater relief. Similarly, the survival of estate accounts at Stiffkey (Norfolk) offers an opportunity to benchmark the size and composition of the agricultural workforce at Arbury. Examples of this kind could be multiplied: the church seating arrangement at Myddle (Shropshire), the

⁵⁴ Edward Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), 22.

⁵⁵ Jeremy Gibson and Mervyn Medlycott, *Local Census Listings, 1522-1930: Holdings in the British Isles* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1992).

regulation of communal agriculture at Laxton (Nottinghamshire), the operation of the land market at Earl's Colne (Essex), the management of the Verney estates at Claydon (Buckinghamshire), and the badging of the poor at Terling (Essex) are all invaluable points of reference.⁵⁶ But the larger question remains: how typical or representative is this place at this time? The assumption underpinning the project is that Chilvers Coton is exceptional only to the extent that it is extraordinarily well documented, that its unique archive can be interpreted to disclose social, economic, and spatial relations which (however invisible they are in the documentary record elsewhere) were elaborated in various patterns across hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of other villages. If the social differentiation and cultural polarization which occurred in Terling was 'but "one model, one variant" of the outcome of larger social processes refracted into the distinctive arena of a particular local society', then the occupational structure and associated material culture which evolved in the north-east Warwickshire landscape was not wholly unique but one membrane of a larger map in which Chilvers Coton was, in economic and demographic terms, central.⁵⁷ The parish has for more than four centuries never been more than twenty miles from the 'weighted mean center' of the English national population, the notional geographical point that would minimize the total distance walked by every person in the country if all of them were to assemble at a single place.⁵⁸ Chilvers Coton lay right at the heart of 'deep England', and perhaps even (given its coalmining heritage) of deepest, darkest England. To rehearse a beloved micro-historical idiom, *The Social Topography of a Rural Community* is, in both of the senses implied by Eduardo Grendi, an 'exceptional norm': it is rooted in documentation that is only apparently exceptional; and it adopts micro-historical method to create a new—richer and better articulated—paradigm of macro-economic change.⁵⁹ Chilvers Coton is, in sum, *England anywhere*—one place in particular, but everywhere at once.

The second challenge is presented by what might be identified as the 'limitations of the microscope'. The research strategy of the project is granular, teasing out social relationships at the micro-spatial level and subjecting extremely small objects of enquiry to very large magnification. The approach therefore has

⁵⁶ Levine and Wrightson, *Making of an Industrial Society*; Hassell Smith, 'Labourers in Late Sixteenth-Century England [Parts I and II]'; Hey, *An English Rural Community*; Beckett, *History of Laxton*; French and Hoyle, *Character of English Rural Society*; Broad, *Transforming Rural Society*; Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*.

⁵⁷ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety* (2nd edn.), 218.

⁵⁸ E. A. Wrigley, 'Rickman Revisited: The Population Growth Rates of English Counties in the Early Modern Period', *Economic History Review*, 62 (2009), 731–3 (esp. figure 2).

⁵⁹ Grendi's formulation, first published in Italian in 1977, is cited and discussed in Edward Muir, 'Introduction: Observing Trifles' and Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historiographic Marketplace', both in *Microhistory and the Lost People of Europe*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore, 1991), xiv, 7–8. Cf. Edoardo Grendi, 'Microanalisi e la Storia Sociale', *Quaderni Storici*, 35 (1977), 512. For 'deep England', see Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare* (London, 2009), 35.