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THE ECONOMIC CAUSES OF THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

FREEDOM OF TRADE AND THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

George Yerby

ROUTLEDGE

The Economic Causes of the English Civil War

This is a coordinated presentation of the economic basis of revolutionary change in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, addressing a crucial but neglected phase of historical development. It traces a transformation in the agrarian economy and substantiates the decisive scale on which this took place, showing how the new forms of occupation and practice on the land related to seminal changes in the general dynamics of commercial activity. An integrated, self-regulating national market generated new imperatives, particularly a demand for a right of freedom of trade from arbitrary exactions and restraints. This took political force through the special status that rights of consent had acquired in England, based on the rise of sovereign representative law following the Break with Rome. These associations were reflected in a distinctive merchant-gentry alliance, seeking to establish freedom of trade and representative control of public finance, through parliament. This produced a persistent challenge to royal prerogatives such as impositions from 1610 onwards. Parliamentary provision, especially legislation, came to be seen as essential to good government. These ambitions led to the first revolutionary measures of the Long Parliament in early 1641, establishing automatic parliaments and the normative force of freedom of trade.

George Yerby took his degree at Birkbeck College, London University in 1986, and has since worked as an historical researcher. He specialises in the economic and political history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is the author of *People and Parliament: Representative Rights and the English Revolution*, published in 2008, and *The English Revolution and the Roots of Environmental Change*, published in 2016.

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In memory of my grandparents

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Abbreviations

Add. Ms.	Additional Manuscript, British Library
Agrarian History	*The Agrarian History of England and Wales 1500-1640* ed. J. Thirsk, (Cambridge 1967)
APC	*Acts of the Privy Council*
BL	British Library
CJ	*Commons Journal*
CSP	*Calendar of State Papers*
EETS	Early English Text Society
Gardiner	S. R. Gardiner, *History of England 1603-1642*, (London 1880s)
HA	Hertfordshire Archives
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
Hutchinson	Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson,* ed. J. Hutchinson, (London 1846)
LJ	Lords Journal
NA	Nottinghamshire Archives
Procs in Parl.	Proceedings in Parliament
DRO	Devon Record Office
SP	State Papers
TED	*Tudor Economic Documents*, ed. R. Tawney and E. Power
Discourse	*A Discourse of the Commonweal* (1549) ed. M. Dewar, (Virginia 1969)
TNA	The National Archives
TRHS	Transactions of the Royal Historical Society
VCH	Victoria County History
Woodhouse	A. S. P. Woodhouse ed. *Puritanism and Liberty*, (London 1938)

Introduction

Recovering the Economic Context of History

This volume attempts a broad, but coordinated view of the economic context of the English Civil War and Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. It seeks to substantiate the economic causes that were fundamental to the contest between king and parliament for command of the emergent English state. It affirms this perspective in the face of the uneven treatment that it has received from historians. Some have taken the force of economic factors as read, but presented it in a somewhat generalised form, which has enabled others, inherently unsympathetic to economic interpretations, to regard it as unproven, and set it aside. The answer offered here provides an inclusive and detailed picture of the seminal changes in the social, agricultural and commercial fields in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, identifying the new imperatives that came into being, and drawing out the specific connections between economic developments and the momentous political overturning of the 1640s.

Contemporary commentators writing before, or at the time of the Civil War were in no doubt that a great socio-economic transition had taken place in England. It was generally observed that there had been a transfer of property power from the king and the high nobility to "the people", or the middle ranks. This thesis was propounded most notably by James Harrington in the 1650s, but similarly held by all "the best thinkers among his predecessors and contemporaries"—including Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Bacon, James I, John Selden, Sir Henry Wotton, Sir Thomas Wislon, Spelman Bishop, Francis Quarles, Godfrey Goodman, Henry Parker, Henry Ireton, Gerrard Winstanley and Thomas Hobbes.[1] Many of them believed that the change in the balance of landowning and wealth created a platform for the parliamentary challenge to the crown. The best-known statement of this perception is in the writings of James Harrington. But we can find another, equally cogent, in the work of Lucy Hutchinson, who also noted a rise of "the people" at the expense of the old elite.

> When the nobility shrank into empty names the crown lost its supporters . . . when the full body of the people came rolling in upon it . . . the interest of the people, which had been many years growing,

> made an extraordinary progress in the reign of Henry VIII, who returning the vast revenues of the church into the body of the people, cast the balance clear on their side.[2]

This was consistent with her first-hand identification of the "middle sort" of yeomen and merchants as the distinctive and substantial core of parliamentarian support, when battle was joined. Of particular interest is her comment that this access of economic strength "left them now only to expect an opportunity to resume their power". She seems to have perceived that as a result of socio-economic change in favour of "the people" there had arisen a specific popular demand for some kind of political change.

Modern historical writing may be taken as beginning two hundred years after the Civil War, with the work of Thomas Macaulay. He inaugurated the "Whig" interpretation, which was the basis of the dominant academic tradition for another hundred years. The "Whigs" acknowledged the events of the Civil War period as revolutionary, but defined them almost exclusively in terms of constitutional disputes and developments. In essence they were describing the rise of parliament. Macaulay is not usually included in the ranks of the scholarly, but he offered some of the most incisive observations of the political aims of parliamentarians. "They were resolved to place the King in such a situation that he must . . . conduct his administration in conformity with the wishes of his parliament".[3] This was a precise description of the kind of power that parliament was seeking, but it was only half the story. Like most "Whig" historians, Macaulay seemed happy to suppose that the constitutional ambitions of parliament were held just for their own sake, or in the pursuit of a general notion of "liberty". This paid scant attention to the possibility that there may also have been other, more material motivations for enhancing the authority of parliament. It is interesting however that like most "Whig" historians, Macaulay does mention in passing some of the socio-economic factors that were seen as significant at the time. He notes, for instance, that, "The main strength of the opposition lay among the small freeholders in the country, and among the merchants and shopkeepers of the towns".[4]

The "Whig" thesis was sustained in Samuel Gardiner's magisterial study of the years between 1603 and the Civil War. Although it was written in the later nineteenth century, it remains the most balanced and comprehensive treatment of the political and constitutional history of the period. But it was compiled essentially from an exhaustive study of the State Papers, and for ten volumes there appears to be no significant awareness of the socio-economic context. It is of interest once again, however, that there is eventually a fleeting reference to the contrasting economic and geographical situations of the two sides. "England was divided by an undulating line, which left only the less wealthy and thickly

populated districts of the north and west to Charles". Gardiner noted that this gave parliament a substantial advantage in terms of the depth of financial resources.[5] The idea of an economic and geographical divide was to be revived some seventy years later by a committed social historian, who felt that it was a better guide to Civil War allegiances than just analysing political differences.[6] But to Gardiner it was a way of describing the Civil War rather than explaining it.

The Whig historian who attained the widest readership was George Trevelyan. He is an interesting case because he was a very acute observer of the social scene in itself. His general history of England under the Stuarts begins with an extended survey of social relations, but when he comes to define the central confrontation between king and parliament, it is treated as a separate, political and constitutional issue. Since, however, he was a social historian as well, he made more passing references to the significant, seminal socio-economic changes than did his Whig predecessors. He noted the disappearance of the open fields, and the associated rise of the yeoman farmer, which was one of the most crucial and distinctive developments of the period. He was aware that in other ways too English society was moving in a different direction from other European kingdoms. He observed the critical distinction that, unlike their later French counterparts, the English revolutionaries were not needy people, but "prosperous men". In the end, however, he thought that none of this should be regarded as causative. The contesting parties were "enamoured of liberty, or of loyalty, for their own sakes".[7]

The next generation of "Whig" historians were similarly focused on the constitutional perspective. The two most prominent figures continued to deal essentially with the rise of parliament, as it sought new areas of political initiative and independence. John Neale's in-depth study of the parliaments of Elizabeth I made him the most notable successor to Gardiner. And Wallace Notestein repeated the exercise in relation to the parliaments of James I. Yet, while still not advancing any idea of economic causation, they did not fail to note, in passing, some further aspects of significant change in the economic sphere. Neale recorded the appropriation of the borough seats in the House of Commons by gentleman landowners, an important development by which the socio-economic expansion of the gentry acquired a national-political focus.[8] Notestein, for his part, faithfully reflected the coordinated radical thrust of the free trade movement in the Commons in the first parliament of James I.[9] This was a particularly important contribution, since the demand for freedom of trade became a vital foundation of parliamentarian aims. Notestein did a great service in highlighting a crucial factor that has been generally ignored by historians of all persuasions in more recent times.

The Whig interpretation has often been criticised as the product of "hindsight" or "predetermination"—that is to say, reading history backwards. It must be said, however, that accusations of "hindsight" have

no actual verifiable force—they are allegations that can never be proved. There is no reason to suppose that it cannot be perfectly valid to see signs in the past of the way that history was to develop. In fact, as E. H. Carr pointed out, charges of "pre-conception" are really just devices by which unsympathetic historians seek to pre-exclude the evidence for radical change that they prefer not to recognise.[10] In fact, the Whigs were not preconceiving a process of constitutional development, they were reflecting and describing it. Macaulay was writing in the wake of the Great Reform Act of 1832, Gardiner in the light of two further extensions of the franchise in 1867 and 1884. The lifetimes of Neale and Notestein saw the struggle and success of women's suffrage. It is a simple and important truth that the history of the English polity since 1604 has been characterised by a process of constitutional change. The flaw in the Whig thesis was not pre-determination. The true limitation of Whig history was their assumption that constitutional development was undertaken just for its own sake, and that it owed nothing to the underlying socio-economic context of the place in which it occurred. They presented it as an abstract notion of national liberty, divorced from the real life of the community.

In the critical circumstances of the 1930s and 40s, constitutional process no longer seemed adequate to balance the affairs of the nation. The situation of the generality of people, in terms of what they required to survive, became a matter of greater political concern. The history of social relations acquired a new currency. Socially aware historians began to focus on the significance of the economic factors that had been identified by Civil War contemporaries, and sometimes noted in passing in the traditional Whig thesis. Richard Tawney led the way in elaborating the effects of economic change. He highlighted the plight of the peasant smallholders who, from the end of the fifteenth century, were increasingly losing their place on the commons and open fields in the face of market pressures, rising rents, and the enclosure or "engrossing" of holdings by larger commercial farms.[11] Less securely, Tawney went on to suggest a link between the work ethic of Reformed religion, and the emergence of a more capitalist economy.[12] But perhaps his most important thesis was "The Rise of the Gentry". In a variation on James Harrington's theme from three hundred years before, founding the Civil War on a transfer of economic strength to "the people", Tawney posited a redistribution of landed power from the higher nobility to the middle-ranking gentry, through a great increase in their numbers and their property holdings.[13] This, like most of Tawney's interpretations carried an essential truth, though it was not always to be measured precisely as he proposed.

Tawney's principal successor in publicising the case of economic history was the more explicitly socialist figure of Christopher Hill, who noted that the great changes in mid-seventeenth-century England fulfilled most of the conditions for the bourgeois stage of Marx's idea of a sequence of revolutions, beginning with the transition from a medieval to a capitalist

form of exchange and production. This was true enough, but once again, Hill did not really elaborate the precise form in which it was taking place. There was more clarity in his focus on another general observation of Civil War contemporaries—that the "middle sort" of people were at the heart of the parliamentary cause. He also gave centre stage to the geographical divide noted by Gardiner, outlining a Royalist north and west against a Parliamentarian south and east. Hill characterised the latter not just as richer, but economically "advanced". He was implying in effect that the force of commercialisation, by "the industrious sort of people" was the essential basis of parliamentary allegiance.[14] This may well have been the case, but again we were left without a definitive view of specific motivations, or a clear indication of how these economic developments were related to the political revolution at the centre of the state.

These omissions left the interpretations vulnerable to criticism, or to simply being set aside by historians who were inherently unsympathetic to the economic case. In the later twentieth century, notwithstanding the emerging environmental crisis that was demonstrating the contrary, there was a general tendency among historians to reject the significance of economic factors. There were various circumstances that encouraged, or enabled academics to turn a blind eye in that direction. Information technology was becoming the dominant force in society, and post-modern thought was propounding the conceit of the indeterminacy of language. Many philosophers and historians became trapped in the notion that linguistic form was a law unto itself, determined only by its own structures, incapable of being used with meaningful reference to independently definable realties beyond. Political events also implied a retreat from material certainties. The uprising in Paris in 1968, forceful as it was, appeared to be led by students and intellectuals with little connection to labour in any respect. At the same time the leading examples of materialist theory as a governing system were being discredited. The destruction of the Prague Spring exposed the Marxist inspired regimes of Eastern Europe as incorrigibly repressive and structurally unsustainable. All in all, even leftward-inclined figures like Michel Foucault concluded that it was no longer helpful to postulate a beneficial process of history from an economic base, and that the forces of domination were rather to be targeted as a "discourse-power" axis.[15]

Those of a rightward leaning seized on the failings of the Eastern European regimes as proof positive that Marxism was nothing more than a threat to liberty, in principle and in practice. They concluded that Marxist theory could now be discounted in every aspect. It should be recalled, however, that conservatives also had to deal with a real and flourishing manifestation of freedom that had arisen closer to home, especially in Britain and the United States. In the 1960s, Western society saw the emergence of a fully-fledged counter culture that denied the validity of power structures per se. This could be seen from certain angles as the

better side of Marxist theory, leaning towards direct democracy. It posed a fundamental challenge to the ruling system, and it had all the best tunes.

In reaction to these opportunities and challenges arose the New Right, or neo-liberalism, conceived to defend and reaffirm the hegemony of the capitalist system against all threats of subversion. In political terms, like it or not, this could at least be seen as a rational response. But in the field of history it was much less so. In fact, it led to some fundamental distortions of the historical discipline. In the 1970s there emerged a "revisionist" generation of historians, which can be seen as the academic wing of neo-lilberalism. Their contribution was to reject any concept that promoted or encouraged the idea of radical change. Fallacies arose when this present aim was superimposed upon the past. Interpretations of history that perceived a process of social, or constitutional, advance were henceforth to be disallowed in advance. The revisionists were rejecting Marxism as a theory, and were therefore driven to discount it in every aspect, irrespective of actual historical status. If Marx said that history was moving in a particular direction, then the revisionists must deny the very idea of consecutive change in history. If Marx said that economic factors were at the core of historical development, then the revisionists must dismiss any possibility of economic motivation.

They promoted an "empirical" methodology that could appear to justify their rejection of the idea of history as a process of development. They proposed instead an analysis of the past based on an account of isolated particulars, divorced in place and time.[16] They asserted that any perception of consecutive change was to be avoided, and that the past could and should be studied in dissected and dissociated form "in its own right".[17] This had the tactical advantage of sounding unexceptionable when stated glibly as a scientific axiom. But further consideration reveals it to be inapplicable to the discipline of history, and in fact a direct denial of the nature of chronological form. To assert a specific capacity to treat history empirically is a contradiction of our true relationship with the past. As a more authentic empirical theorist A. J. Ayer pointed out, to look at the past literally as it was "would require of the observer that he should occupy a position which ex hypothesi he does not".[18] Roland Barthes expressed the same thought in the abstract terms of post-modernism, and captured the character of historical pseudo-empiricism as a polemical device. It was, he said, "a sleight of hand, whereby something is aimed for outside the discourse, without it ever being possible to attain it outside the discourse".[19]

But to identify revisionist-empiricism as an illusion does not fully expose its negative effects. Far from looking at the past "as it was", it contradicts the nature of chronological form as continuous movement, and contrives to conceal the most powerful historical evidences. It depends on a variety of tactical sleights of hand. Since the revisionist preconception was of something that did *not* happen it was easier to present it as

not a preconception at all. And although it was impossible in actuality to see the past "in its own right", there was a means by which that impression could be created, by the simple expedient of refusing to recognise anything that seemed to prefigure the future. Revisionists could be heard to assert in tones of utter seriousness that to note any sign of forward development was to fail to see the past "as it was". This injunction had the effect of silencing the evidences that would reveal the strongest and most characteristic desires of the time—that is to say, the preferences and perceptions that were in the process of changing. We had been led into a kind of never-never land, where nothing ever changed. We were clinically divorced from the past, as if it had never existed.

It was the prospect of economic causation that provoked the most glaring and debilitating pattern of avoidance. The idea was dismissed by revisionism as a preconceived theory, "reducing" history to an economic explanation. This served to discount it in advance, and had the effect of concealing many of the most genuine and pertinent of historical evidences. This is graphically illustrated by some exchanges between two eminent historians, centring on David Underdown's study of Civil War allegiance in the near West Country.[20] Ironically, Underdown was unusual in the revisionist generation in that he could not ignore the logical probability that there was some kind of radical popular motivation behind the Civil War, but he shared the basic revisionist prejudice against economic causes. When challenged by the more thoroughgoing revisionist John Morrill to demonstrate the reality of popular sentiment, Underdown sought to find it in the notion of religio-cultural independence. There was an important truth in the idea of a motivating spirit of independent-mindedness, but Underdown had not presented it in the most relevant or cogent form. Morrill was in any case unconvinced, but his response was surprising. Focusing simply on rebutting Underdown's theory of popular culture, and no doubt assuming that in a revisionist world economic factors could not possibly be regarded as significant, he said that the only thing shown by Underdown's evidence was a general link between parliamentarian support and the commercial and manufacturing centres. Underdown expressed surprise that Morrill had even mentioned that correlation, and replied that he could not acknowledge it himself, because it would have been economically reductionist to do so.[21] The two professors had tripped up over their own prejudices, and tumbled together into the vale of self-contradiction. The only thing demonstrated was that the revisionist determination to ignore the force of economic motivation and causative development resulted in the specific concealment of the most crucial and conspicuous kinds of evidence.

Meanwhile, back in the real history of the seventeenth century, and not far away from Underdown's West Country, John Corbet was observing the issue at first hand, as chaplain to the parliamentary garrison in another thriving commercial and manufacturing centre—the market

town of Gloucester. Corbet made a balanced and precise assessment of the character of the personnel who formed the backbone of the parliamentarian movement, and identified their principles and beliefs. He noted that the cause depended principally on "a generation of men truly laborious, jealous of their properties, whose principal aim is liberty and plenty".[22]

The capacity of a generation of revisionist historians to discount such statements, and to indulge in the deliberate avoidance of economic causation, is one of the most distorting and debilitating academic tendencies of our time. It is graphically demonstrated once again in a recent publication misleadingly described as a *Handbook of the English Revolution*.[23] The general thrust of the contributions is in fact to deny the idea of a developing revolution, largely by concealing the distinctively English character of the English Civil War. This agenda produces the bizarre situation where the editors begin by disowning the title of their book. Michael Braddick calls it "problematic". Peter Lake prefers to talk of "the events formerly known as the English revolution".[24] They would rather have called it "The War(s) of the Three Kingdoms", but as Braddick admits, this concept has little currency outside academia. Perhaps the commissioning publisher perceived that such a title was simply not intelligible, either in itself or as a reflection of the revolutionary nature of the event. All possibility of coherence vanishes into the unbridgeable gap between singular and plural. It demonstrates again the lengths to which revisionist historians are prepared to go in order to avoid the force of economic causes, for it is much easier to set aside the seminal socio-economic changes that were noted by contemporary commentators, and were distinctive to the English kingdom, if you transpose the Civil War into an imaginary and amorphous "British" dimension.

"The War(s) of the Three Kingdoms" is an artificial construct, exaggerating the significance of the part played by Scotland and Ireland in a Civil War that was essentially English in character. The supposed "British" dimension seems to consist of seeking out any reference to Scottish and Irish contributions, however incidental or contingent they may be, and gathering them together as if this automatically converts them into one and the same occurrence.[25] The interpretation presents nothing in the way of reasoned association or logical sequence of a sort that might indicate a common movement among the peoples of the three lands. It is difficult to imagine indeed what form such a development could take. Ireland was not in any case an English kingdom. It was a land of many Irish sub-kings, and only partly colonised by the Anglo-Normans. The lack of any pretence of a unitary structure meant that Ireland could not possibly have played a direct part in the English Civil War. We shall see ahead that the part played by the Scottish Covenanters was also indirect. They were involved only briefly, until they found that their essentially religious agenda was in fact foreign to the aims of the English Parliamentarians.

Further resisting a more substantial explanation for the English Civil War, leading contributors to the *Handbook* seek to avoid the whole category of causes. Peter Lake sets the tone for the denial of historical cause with an article on "Post-Reformation Politics, or On Not Looking for the Long-Term Causes of the English Civil War". Lake attempts to address some of the great seminal changes in the century before the Civil War, while precluding the possibility that these things might have contributed to the causes of the struggle itself. He has taken on a difficult task, since the English Reformation was a change so dramatic, so undeniably long-term, so distinctively laicised and English in character that it is difficult to believe that it did not have some effect on the political balance. So lest his readers may stumble into that logical assumption, he begins by issuing an injunction that the developments that he records are not to be taken as causes of the Civil War, though they might have influenced the form of it once it had occurred. He then makes a careful selection of "influences" that relate to the fringes rather than the substance of affairs, and are least likely to be regarded as causative. He deals with the peripheral and superficial, like variations in the platitudes of church supremacy, and the flurries of invective that arose at the religious extremes between the Puritan and Catholic camps, which he describes as the political discourse of the period. He treats the Reformation as a struggle for control between crown and Papacy. He ignores the truly distinctive features of the English Reformation, like the great reversal of socio-economic potential that was completed by the laicisation of the church lands, which contemporaries like James Harrington and Lucy Hutchinson regarded as the platform for the challenge to the crown. He takes no account of the unique concept of sovereign representative law that emerged from the destruction of the independent jurisdiction of the church, giving parliament a defining share in legislative sovereignty, which established the radical proposition that the crown could not exercise such sovereign powers by its own authority, and provided a model upon which other prerogatives of the crown could and would be challenged, as was done quite specifically in the dispute over impositions. Nor does Lake perceive that statute law had thereby acquired a unique nationally binding force that gave it broad public appeal and made it the basis of an alternative concept of good government. And he does not recognise that the Reformation did much to create a set of national priorities, and a view of foreign policy definable without reference to the interests of the crown—a perspective that the House of Commons pursued independently in the 1620s, by refusing to pay for anything else. All these matters were aspects of what I have called the growing tension between the governmental claims of "patent" or "parliament", and this was the real political discourse in the early seventeenth century.

After a long journey in which he manages to overlook these major issues, Lake arrives at an extraordinary passage that attempts to make

the concept of cause actually disappear. He notes that there was a heightening of tensions in establishment circles and in the exchanges of invective between the "Puritan" and "Catholic" sides in the late 1620s, then goes on: "But, of course, since the civil war did not start in the 1620s, we are still not talking about the causes of said civil war".[26] He seems to be saying that the Civil War could not have been caused until it had actually started. He is supposing in effect that the Civil War was caused by itself, and that the guns were set firing by spontaneous combustion. A further chapter in the present volume will describe a parliamentarian zone in the English Civil War. The people of the area joined forces to sustain an independent military position in the face of Royalist opposition in the county, over the course of several years. They established a series of garrisons across the region by a considerable communal effort of organisation and supply. They expended substantial amounts of money and resources, losing many men, and setting up nursing centres for the wounded, year after year, "in the public service". It does scant justice to the obvious commitment and sacrifice of these people to suggest that the deep conflict in England was the result of a series of accidental confusions and incidental contingencies in surface relations with the other lands in the British Isles. English parliamentarians were fighting for practices and principles relating to the most vital conditions of their lives.

Perhaps we can regard Lake's attempt to eradicate the idea of cause as a deliberate exaggeration to further distance himself from the notion of the long-term. For if we admit to any kind of consecutive cause, it must necessarily open up the possibility of the long term, since there can be no fixed cutoff point before which one historical circumstance becomes incapable of causing another. We can offer an example of a specific causal link between the late 1620s and the early 1640s, which carries the implication of preceding causes. It is clear that the decision of Charles I to rule without parliament during the 1630s was a direct cause of the initiative taken as a priority by the Long Parliament to ensure that such an "intermission" of parliaments could never happen again. The connection is manifest, and it points us further back in time, for the determination to ensure regular assemblies arose not simply because absence had made the heart grow fonder. The public demand for more parliaments and more parliamentary influence, not less, was being expressed explicitly in the Commons by 1628. And the pressure of these parliamentary ambitions goes far to explain why Charles decided to rule without them in the 1630s. So we are drawn yet further back. Why was it that people had come to feel that parliament should be given a greater degree of input in governmental affairs? Clearly there must have been good reasons, and so we are driven ever further back.

Chronological form works in a continuum. In an age that seems oddly content to do without a concept of consecutive relationship, where can we look for a guiding precept that recognises the real nature of history as

movement through time? Perhaps it might appear inadvertently. Jacques Derrida may seem an unlikely ally in the quest. He is usually seen as the high priest of the autonomy of language—the author of the most quoted axiom that there is no determinable truth existing beyond the text. More specifically, he devised the concept of "the trace", to convey the idea that no stable, settled point of meaning or "self-presence" can ever be established, because everything always contains the trace of "the other". He went part of the way with structuralism in as far as it reflected the "abandonment of all reference to a centre, to a subject, to an origin". Derrida became concerned, however, by the danger that the autonomous structure might itself be taken for a centred point of knowledge. It was therefore useful for him to extend the concept of the trace into the historical field, so that he could disallow the existence of independent structures, like Foucault's supposition of historical periods defined within the limits of their own discourse. No, said Derrida, no historical era can ever be simply of itself, it must always contain the trace if what precedes and follows.[27] The idea of "the trace", taken out of the realm of linguistic theory and applied to the reality of historical time, gives us an appropriate definition or necessary pattern of historical development. And in the parliamentary demand for more constant and more influential assembly there is the trace of the reasons for which this was desired.

What represents at once the great omission, and yet the underlying aim of the so-called *Handbook of the English Revolution*, is the absence of any treatment of the seminal socio-economic transitions in England that contemporaries regarded as the platform for the challenge to royal authority. The determination of the *Handbook* to avoid the idea of long-term explanations is further pursued by a willingness to present a truncated view of the past where events have consequences, but no causes. John Miller's article is titled, "The Long-term Consequences of the English Revolution: Social and Economic Development", as if the revolution itself was not a consequence of anything. He begins, "The impact of the revolution on England's economic and social development was considerable".[28] Possibly so, but it was little in comparison to the great socio-economic transition that occurred in the century before the Civil War, and was seen by contemporaries as a crucial contributory cause. Miller makes cursory reference to the fact that "many historians have tried to explain the origins of the Revolution in terms of social and economic change", but he mentions these attempts only to dismiss them as unsuccessful. He provides a brief survey of the hackneyed list of hostile comments on the work of R. H. Tawney and Christopher Hill, and thinks that the matter can be left there. In truth, although there have been many partial criticisms of the economic interpretations, none has seriously challenged the essential force of the developments that they identified. For the studies of Tawney and Hill were not just theories, they reflected the considered observations and opinions of the best-informed

commentators at the time of the Civil War itself. Miller also chooses to ignore the fact that there has been a great deal of modern research and writing that reinforces the contemporary testimony.[29] He then seeks insurance for his evasive view by supposing that in any case, the new emphasis on "embracing the three kingdoms" means that explanations in purely English terms are no longer sufficient.[30] To the present author this rather confirms that the "British" dimension was conceived specifically as a means of diverting attention from the reality of the powerful, long-term socio-economic causes which were distinctive to the English kingdom.

So to recover the economic context of the English Civil War and Revolution is also to recover the most powerful testimonies of the time. What kind of public demand did Lucy Hutchinson perceive that led her to feel that following their "extraordinary progress" in socio-economic terms, the people were left "only to expect an opportunity to resume their power"?[31] And what exactly did James Harrington mean when he said that the economic rise of the people and the weakening of the force of the nobility undermined the position of the crown, to the effect that "the dissolution of this government caused the war, not the war the dissolution of this government"?[32]

Notes

1. C. Hill, "James Harrington and the People", in *Puritanism and Revolution,* (London 1968), pp. 291–3
2. L. Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, ed. J. Hutchinson, (London 1846), p. 75
3. T. B. Macaulay, *The History of England,* (first published 1848), Everyman edition, (London 1906), vol. I, p. 71
4. Ibid, p. 85
5. S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War,* (London 1893), I, pp. 34, 308
6. C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution,* (London 1961), p. 121
7. G. M. Trevelyan, *England Under the Stuarts,* (London 1904), pp. 30–1, 162
8. J. E. Neale, *The Elizabethan House of Commons,* (London 1949), p. 140
9. W. Notestein, *The House of Commons 1604–1610,* (New Haven 1971), p. 106
10. E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (London 1961), pp. 96–8
11. R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century,* (London 1912)
12. R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism,* (London 1926)
13. R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry 1558–1640", *Economic History Review 11* (1941), pp. 1–38
14. Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, pp. 121–5; *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England,* (London 1964), pp. 124–33
15. M. Poster, *Foucault, Marxism and History,* (London 1994)
16. Early exercises in the revisionist/empiricist tendency were G. R. Elton, "A High Road to Civil War?" in *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*, ed. C. H. Carter, (London 1966); C. Russell, "Parliamentary History in Perspective 1604–1629", *History 61*, pp. 1–27
17. G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History,* (London 1969), pp. 84–6

18. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, (Harmondsworth 1971), pp. 25, 135
19. R. Barthes, "The Discourse of History", in *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, ed. D. Attridge, (London 1987), p. 3
20. D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion,* (Oxford 1985)
21. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, p. vii; J. Morrill, "The Ecology of Allegiance", and Underdown's rejoinder: JBS 26, pp. 451–73
22. J. Corbet, "A True and Impartial Account of the Military Government of the City of Gloucester", in *Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts,* ed. W. Scott, (London 1809), V, pp. 303–7
23. *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution,* (Oxford 2016)
24. Ibid, pp. 4, 21
25. This critique of the "British" dimension is extended in the chapters ahead as appropriate, and will be brought together in a forthcoming article
26. Ibid, p. 34
27. J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, (London 1979), p. 286; M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. Sheridan-Smith, (London 2002), pp. 5–9, 146; J. Derrida, *Positions*, ed. A. Bass, (Chicago 1981), pp. 57–8
28. *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, p. 501
29. For instance: J. Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism,* (Oxford 2000); R. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman,* (Oxford 1992); J. P. Somerville, *Politics and Ideology in England 1603–1640,* (London 1986); G. Yerby, *The English Revolution and the Roots of Environmental Change,* (Abingdon 2016)
30. *The Oxford Handbook of the English Revolution*, p. 502
31. Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, p. 75
32. J. Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, ed. H. Morley, (London 1887), p. 60

1 The Basis of Change

The Early Breach of the Manorial Stasis in England; the Coming of the Commercial Yeoman Farmer; and the Increase of Opportunity—"The Exceeding Lucre They See Grow"[1]

Lucy Hutchinson noted that the interest of the people "had been many years growing". James Harrington pinpointed some of the reasons behind this development. He cited three statutes from the reign of Henry VII whereby the prospects of the middling sort had been improved. The best known was the Statute of Retainers, which was the first significant step in the extended campaign of the Tudor monarchs to reduce the independent regional power of the great magnates, and it did indeed result in the devolution of local authority towards the middle ranks of society. The Statute of Alienations tended in the same direction, loosening the exclusive grip of the landlords by providing a freedom to sell or entail land. But perhaps most interesting is Harrington's view of the Statute of Population. Tudor governments are usually thought to have failed in their regular attempts to resist the enclosure of the common lands, and the depopulation that it was believed to cause. But Harrington perceived that the provisions of this and other statutes for protecting the integrity of smallholdings with over 20 acres, tended to promote the survival, and often the extension of the larger copyhold farms. In some cases at least it helped the dweller to avoid the status of a mere cottager and become "a man of some substance that might keep hinds [or wage labourers] and servants". In effect, this encouraged the creation of commercial units. It placed "a great part of the lands to the hold or possession of the yeomanry or middle people, who living not in a servile or indigent fashion were much unlinked from dependence on their lords".[2] Tudor laws and courts may not have done much to stop the erosion of rights on the common lands, but they did assist some of the more substantial copyholders to transcend it.

Perhaps the single most important platform of change, however, was the development recorded in another early seventeenth-century text—the history of the Berkeley family compiled by their steward John Smyth. He described and explained the widespread alienation of manorial lands to tenants, which became a distinctive feature of the English scene in the early fifteenth century. The collapse of the population level in the fourteenth century had led to a decline in the demand for tenant land,

an acute shortage of labour, and a fall in the market price for arable produce. The first response of landlords was to exploit their customary rights over tenants more rigorously, because the relative value of the dues and services that they owed was now higher.[3] But the accumulated resentment at this oppressive stance was a significant cause of the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, which in turn produced a change of policy. In effect, landlords sought a more secure way of maintaining their income. John Smyth recalled that it was "much occasioned by the insurrection of Wat Tyler, and generally by all the commons in the land" that the family began to lease out their estate. "Then instead of manuring the demesnes with his own servants . . . this lord began to . . . tack in other men's cattle onto his pasture . . . and to sell his meadow grounds . . . let out by the year still more and more . . . sometimes at racked improved rents".[4] It became general in fifteenth century England for lords to sell, or lease out their demesne lands. This broke the link of obligation and restraint between the manor and the village that had maintained an essential stasis in medieval society. The working character of both the lord's estate and the tenant's land was radically altered. Their relationship came to be determined by commercial rather than feudal considerations. The farmer depended on the market rather than the manor. The land was necessarily leased out at market value, that is to say the level at which it would be profitable to the farmer. Since it had been the lord's land it had no dues or services upon it, and it tended to be physically of a more coherent shape than could readily be made of the scattered strips in the open fields. In essence, this created a new class of independent, commercialising farmers, which played a crucial part in putting English history on a markedly different course from that of other neighbouring kingdoms. An important aspect of the change was that to some extent the form of tenure ceased to matter—the decisive factor was simply whether a farmer could acquire the use of enough workable land to make a substantial profit in the market. A good example was the background of the mid-sixteenth-century churchman Hugh Latimer. He described his father as "a yeoman, and held no land of his own . . . tilled as much as kept half a dozen men. He had a walk for a hundred sheep".[5]

Smyth's commentary also puts the Peasants' Revolt in a new perspective. It has sometimes been regarded as inconsequential because the uprising was suppressed, and the promised commutation of dues and services was subsequently forgotten. But it seems that in fact there were indirect, long-term consequences that could scarcely have been more significant. Although the revolt failed, the scale and force of it, in an unusually compact kingdom, was a severe shock to the political establishment. At both manorial and central government level there was a transition towards a more circumspect approach to labour relations. The ill-judged initiative of the poll tax was not repeated. There was no further attempt to load the burden of taxation onto the shoulders of the general body

of husbandmen smallholders. The English peasantry thereby escaped the fate that was overtaking their continental counterparts. The policy being pursued by other European monarchs at the time was to establish a standing army to support a system of collecting tax arbitrarily from the poorer classes, while the nobility was left largely exempt. The classic example of this kind of development was France.[6] In England, by contrast, the principal general tax, the parliamentary subsidy, fell mainly on the landowning class that could afford to pay it. This had several crucial effects. It allowed the commoners and smallholders a special and beneficial degree of freedom from fiscal burdens. It has been calculated that in some places in England in the sixteenth century, only one person in every twelve was paying tax of any kind. Equally important, this "progressive" distribution of financial obligation gave the English gentry a powerful vested interest in sustaining and extending both the practice and the principle of a right to consent to the provisions of public finance. In this way too, England was embarked on a distinctive course, and most of the classes in English society were acquiring a stake in a specific kind of economic liberty.

A recent study of landholding patterns in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Norfolk has confirmed the consequences of the changing balance in creating a new class of independent, commercialising village farmers.

> The significance of the period between 1440 and 1580 . . . lies in the freedom, prosperity and . . . the lack of landlordly interference experienced by the rural population, and in the fact that an economy generated by small landholders unburdened with heavy exactions by state or landlord could promote the development of capitalism.[7]

Since the alienation of manorial land took place in a nationwide perspective, the net effect on the country's economic performance was considerable. Robert Allen has found that it was the emergence and success of a distinctive class of yeoman farmers that laid the basis for the doubling of crop yields that was the measurable product of the agricultural revolution that took place in early modern England.[8]

The Growth of Opportunity and Profit in an Integrated Economy: How the Rise of the Cloth Trade Encouraged Sheep Farming and Made "Notable Rich Men by the Doing Thereof in Brief Time"

The spread of farms of sufficient size and compactness to be put on a commercial basis was the main vehicle of agricultural advance. But the vital accompaniment of this transition, and in a sense the pre-condition, was a raised level of market opportunity, which enabled the yeoman farmers to make full use of their position and their freedom. In fact, it

is possible to pinpoint the character of the development that constituted the principal incentive and provided the initial substance for what Lucy Hutchinson called the "extraordinary progress" of the people. There was a qualitative change in the nature and scale of economic activity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

In general terms this took the form of an extension of regional trading links, transcending the localised limits of medieval markets. In the words of Jan de Vries, the crucial change involved "a specialisation pattern when the English and the Dutch in particular began to trade bulk products over longer distances".[9] In England the leading example of regional specialisation and exchange came with the emergence of the cloth trade in the later decades of the fifteenth century. This was the kingdom's first manufactured export, and its rise was dramatic. By 1513 the Venetian Ambassador could hail English kerseys as "one of the most important foundations of trade in the world".[10] The cloth trade maintained a period of strong expansion through to the middle of the sixteenth century, and it brought a new dimension to the economy as a whole. The manufacturing and agricultural sectors now developed in mutual reinforcement on a national basis. There was a very substantial extension of sheep farming, which had all the more effect because it was taken up by the tenants as well as by the landlords. As Brailsford said, the new leaseholders who were farming the old demesne lands "were often graziers, who possessed some capital, and belonged to the new age of commercial agriculture".[11] They were indeed men like Hugh Latimer's yeoman father, who "held no land of his own" yet "had a walk for a hundred sheep".[12]

Contemporaries were very aware of the exceptional profits that were to be made from sheep farming. This may have provided the impetus for agricultural "improvement" in more ways than one. For instance, it probably lay behind the emergence of agricultural literature, focusing on the means by which the advantages could be maximised. It was at the height of the expansion of the cloth trade that Fitzherbert produced his pioneering books of husbandry and surveying. His farming advice was very comprehensive—he believed that it was essential to combine arable and pasture. But he recognised that sheep were "the most profitable cattle a man can have", and concentrated on how to improve the methods of sheep rearing. One definite recommendation was to provide them with enclosed pastures.

The first systematic analysis of the economy in general, *A Discourse of the Commonweal*, published in 1549, also regarded it as axiomatic that sheep farming offered an exceptional means of high profit. Men were attracted to it because of "the exceeding lucre that they see grow". It was, moreover, quite special in this regard. "They see that there is more advantage in grazing and breeding than in husbandry by a great deal . . . what should better encourage them thereto than to see them that do it become notable rich men by doing thereof in brief time?"[13] In fact, the *Discourse*

understood the new power of the profit motive, and was the first text to recommended that the way forward was to channel and accommodate it. Sheep farming had all the attributes for maximising profit margins. It was lightly taxed, and unlike the corn trade, it was not subject to export restraints when prices reached a certain level. It was associated with an area of rising production—a steadily growing cloth market that created manufacturing capacity as it went along. Grazing was in general a less precarious exercise than arable husbandry, and it required only a minimum of labour, at a time when labour costs were still relatively high. The *Discourse* summed up these comprehensive advantages with the thought that the products of grazing involved "small charge and small labour" and had "free vent to be sold both on this side and beyond the sea at the highest penny".[14] The benefits of these freedoms were found to be so clear that they should be extended to other fields. So the way to "cherish" the production of corn was not to artificially control or protect the market, but to give it the same freedoms, or "allurements and rewards" that were enjoyed by the pastoral farmers. To "make the profit of the plough to be as good rate for rate as the profit of the grazier".[15]

The Great Tudor Inflation: The Beneficial Balance of the General Increase in Opportunity, Population and Prices; and the Basis of Agricultural Improvement

Arable farming was in fact to become a very profitable exercise in its own right in the course of the sixteenth century, but not through the lifting of restrictions as the *Discourse* had proposed. It was not until the early seventeenth century that central authorities began to consider lifting the age-old price controls and export restraints on the corn trade. Nevertheless, farming of all kinds entered into a generally flourishing state in the sixteenth century, mainly because, in contrast to the long periods of stability that preceded and followed it, the period between 1520 and 1640 witnessed a strong and sustained rise in the levels of population and prices. So the century and a quarter before the Civil War, sometimes called the long sixteenth century, was distinguished by a continuous inflationary trend of a kind that had not been seen since the thirteenth century, and would not be seen again until the eighteenth century. This created a steady and dependable seller's market, offering substantial profits to those with enough land to generate a regular surplus. In fact, in the agricultural world, the capacity for high profits had a fairly clear definition in terms of the amount of land required. It seems that there was a threshold of 60 to 70 acres, above which a farmer could produce a regular surplus for market, which enabled him to profit even in years of poor harvests. These conditions had a downside for the smallholder with less than 40 acres and no significant surplus, because in a bad year he would have to buy in dear, and might be in danger of losing his holding.

But this again served the interests of his more substantial neighbours who were ready to expand further.

Our knowledge of the trend in population levels rests on the work of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population, and their exhaustive "aggregative analysis" of the vital events—marriages, births and burials—of the 404 best-kept parish registers.[16] It can now be stated with confidence that the population of England and Wales roughly doubled between the 1520s and the 1640s. Over the same period there was an equally distinctive long-term rise in prices. Phelips, Brown and Hopkins compiled an index of price movements between 1264 and 1954 and concluded that, "the most marked feature . . . is the extent and persistence of the Tudor inflation".[17] And agricultural prices rose fastest of all.

The steadily rising level of population is usually, and no doubt rightly, taken as the platform or at least the necessary condition of the continuing rise in prices. As contemporaries noted, the fact that the high price of food could be met without an interruption to the upward trend in population seemed to indicate that there was plenty of money around. To identify one of the reasons, we can turn to the interesting question of what produced the increase in population. In terms of simple mortality rates it is clear that the sixteenth century offered a favourable contrast with what had gone before. In the preceding centuries Europe had been ravaged by the bubonic plague, and it was not until the turn of the sixteenth century that the incidence of the epidemic declined. The earlier centuries had also suffered to a greater extent from the recurrence of bad weather and poor harvests. To add to the problems, fifteenth-century England had experienced an unusually high level of internecine warfare, which was, in general terms, ended by the arrival of the Tudors. Thus by the early 1580s, Richard Hakluyt could observe that, "through our long peace and seldom sickness . . . we are grown more populous than ever before".[18] More recent calculations confirm the good fortune of Elizabethan England in this respect. By the general standards of early modern Europe, life expectancy in England was "exceptionally high between 1566 and 1621". And in the best years, between 1566 and 1586 "mortality was lower than it was again to be until after 1815".[19]

But the rise of population in the sixteenth century was not simply the result of a falling death rate. It is generally agreed that it was more the result of rising fertility, and most crucially a consequence of the fact that the balance of the interaction between mortality rates and fertility rates was changing. In the preceding two centuries, lower mortality rates would have been met and cancelled out by a corresponding *fall* in fertility, because at a time of finite resources and inelastic economies, the longer survival of one generation would mean less scope for the next, who might therefore delay marrying and having children. What appears to have been different in the sixteenth century, and what at least technically generated the rise in population, was the fact that lower mortality

was not cancelled out by a fall in fertility, but was on the contrary, reinforced by rising or sustained fertility. It seems that in the sixteenth century there was a distinctive tendency towards younger marriages, and thus towards having children earlier and in greater numbers. The result was a steady rise in population.

This was the mechanism through which change occurred. But behind it, if less easy to demonstrate, were the economic factors that encouraged earlier marriage. There was an increasing number and range of opportunities emerging in sixteenth-century England. The younger generation did not necessarily have to delay setting up a household until the traditional source of income from an inherited smallholding became available to them. It is not difficult to identify the additional possibilities that were coming on stream. Agricultural activity was becoming more commercialised, intensive and diverse, and often in association with this there were arising new opportunities in crafts, manufactures and trade. In other words, the distinctive feature of the sixteenth century economy was the creation or discovery of extra capacities and a greater range of employments.

Much hinged on the arrival and expansion of the cloth trade, which brought with it a new dimension of manufacturing activity. The effect was reinforced by the fact that the cloth-making industry operated through the domestic system of production, whereby cloth merchants put out work to individual households in the villages, where employment could be most usefully provided. Joan Thirsk was among the first to draw attention to the phenomenon of rural industry, and the growth of semi-farming, semi-industrial communities supplying national and international markets with textiles".[20] A common feature was that rural industries arose in areas with abundant supplies of labour but limited agricultural potential, and was often a by-employment for labourers or smallholders who were glad to supplement the income that they made from the land.

H. Medick outlined the basis of the connection between extra opportunities and a rise in fertility. In a peasant household without additional potential in the market, the time of marriage of the succeeding generation was delayed until the parent died or gave up the farm. So the mean age at first marriage remained high and fertility was low. But the introduction of cottage industry created more scope, and freed the younger generation to consider early marriage. Medick's suggestion finds detailed confirmation in studies quantifying the demographic implications of rural industry. Particularly striking was David Levine's work on a pair of Leicestershire villages. In Shepshod the smallholders seized the opportunity of taking in framework knitting for London merchants. This generated a sharp drop in the mean age of first marriage, and a corresponding rise in the fertility rate. In nearby Bottesford, by contrast, there were no opportunities beyond the agricultural, and in consequence there was a rise in age at first

marriage, which produced a decline in the level of population.[21] Thus, as L. A. Clarkson has said, from the sixteenth century onwards, "it seems clear that general economic expansion—including the development of rural industry—was accompanied by some slight fall in the age at first marriage, and by an increase in fertility".[22]

In this way, a steadily rising population level was economically sustained throughout the years between the 1520s and the 1640s. The 1550s saw the only five-year interval when this population rise was briefly halted by widespread famine conditions. This indicates that the period was in general one of significant advance in the kingdom's capacity to sustain the physical wellbeing of its people. That this could be achieved while agricultural prices and profits were at a continuing high was a doubly seminal change. Increasing levels of food production were the necessary basis. The remarkable statistic of a pre-industrial peak in life expectancy in the 1580s seems to underline the efficiency of the agrarian economy, in particular in the late Tudor period. If this has not received due recognition in recent historiography it is in part because of the tendency among modern historians to try to tone down the traditional lustre of Elizabeth's reign. It may also be because Eric Kerridge originally seemed to overstate the case by talking of an "agricultural revolution" between 1550 and 1650. Historians of the more recent generation tend to avoid the idea of revolution unless it is absolutely explicit, and they have been more inclined to give the name to the period after 1650, when the adoption of new crops and methods began to be systematically recorded. But it is misleading to restrict our judgements to the most obvious sources, when other general evidence may actually be more instructive. The distortion is persistent. Mark Overton, for instance, makes little of the real achievement of Elizabethan agriculture in his overall assessment, even though his statistics seem to show that there was indeed a strong upward trend in agricultural productivity between 1550 and 1650, after which it tailed away again. And most strikingly, the years from 1590 to 1630 saw a sharper rise in wheat yields than in any period until the 1830s.[23] Similarly, it is hard to see why Robert Allen puts so much stress on the seventeenth century, when his figures indicate that two-thirds of the overall improvement in corn yields occurred between 1550 and 1650.[24] These findings underline the very notable levels of life expectancy achieved in mid-Elizabethan England.

So we need to assert the distinctive significance of the period up to 1650 in agrarian and demographic advance. And in truth the agricultural achievement is not hard to explain. The expansion of pasture in the sixteenth century was so general that it is too easy to overlook. From the late fifteenth century on, there was a vast increase in sheep farming to supply the cloth trade, the kingdom's first manufactured export. It was often associated with enclosure, and the closer management of the flock, which was known to improve output. It is thought that when land

was enclosed for agriculture its annual value increased by 31%, and that the value of land enclosed for pasture exceeded that of land enclosed for arable by 27%.[25] It should not be forgotten that the rise in sheep farming constituted in itself a very important field of agricultural improvement, both in respect of method and productivity.

It also provided a good basis for advance in other areas of farming. Even if there was a decline in the extent of land used for arable, this could induce other arable farmers to raise their game in order to meet the new market opportunity. And in some important ways the extension of pasture gave them the means to do it. The great expansion in the numbers of sheep produced a general rise in stock density, which was a good indicator of improvement. The availability of more animals, and more manure, corrected the shortage of dung that had been a major problem in medieval times. This allowed an extension of the arable and generated higher yields. It became axiomatic among the agriculturalists that farmers should be combining pasture and arable. "And not the one without the other" said Fitzherbert firmly.[26] He understood how the increase in stock density and the provision of enclosed fields could be used to return advantage to the arable, and raise the value of the land by half as much again—"by reason of the composting and dunging of the cattle that shall go and lie upon it both day and night".[27] The beneficial effect of sheep dung on arable fields is so marked that it is still employed by farmers today as the best way of maintaining fertility. This took force in the sixteenth century. It did not need a specific invention or discovery, but just the realisation that the vast increase in the numbers of sheep on the land made it possible to improve the productivity of the arable.

In effect the rise of pastoral farming led to a pattern of diversity and interaction, which created a more efficient balance, and enhanced the agricultural product overall. The process of conversion and enclosure did much to inaugurate the concept of improvement, as well as the idea of manipulating the land for profit. Since grain prices were rising faster than wool prices for most of the second half of the century, there was a tendency to capitalise by reconverting land to tillage. The advantages in terms of yield were substantial. The ploughing in of pasture was an effective way of creating nitrogenous fertilizer, the shortage of which had been the main limiting factor in medieval agriculture. So by various means the increase in pasture could actually work to improve arable output.

The gain could be sustained by a pattern of farming that regularly combined pasture and arable. This was what Eric Kerridge referred to as convertible husbandry and took as one of the pillars of what he perceived as the late sixteenth century agricultural revolution. If, as seems to be the case, this practice began in the sixteenth century, it was no doubt because of the marked increase in the numbers of stock available at that time. Critics have noted that it was only recorded in a formal sense in parts of the Midlands. But even if this was a true reflection of its incidence

this would not necessarily limit the general effect. The late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw the emergence of a new economic dynamic—a pattern of regional marketing, whereby a particular region would specialise in a favoured product in order to engage in a long-distance trade with other regions. The resulting benefits have been estimated at much the same level as those of enclosure. That is to say, the process of specialisation and exchange in specific crops or commodities would increase interregional productivity by half as much again. In this way, the restriction of an agricultural improvement to selected regions could work to the general advantage.

But there is, in any case, no justification for assuming that convertible husbandry was not generalised because it was only mentioned explicitly in certain areas. The whole context of the agrarian economy led farmers towards the practice at some level. The greater availability of stock put mixed farming at a premium. Convertible husbandry was taking place piecemeal, at most times and in most places, during the period. In Sussex in the early seventeenth century, Sir Thomas Pelham was looking to "maximise his returns" by denshiring and ploughing in areas of grass, which would in itself serve to add nitrogenous nutrients to the ground.[28] The widespread conversion to pasture in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had engendered a pattern of diversity, flexibility and interaction, which meant that at any stage the land could be used in a way that maximised the productivity and the profit that was to be achieved.

Diversification thus offered various means by which the fertility of arable land could be increased. But there was another particularly important kind of fertiliser that has not been given full recognition, even by Kerridge, perhaps because it was less structural in form. This was the more targeted and widespread use of lime. It might not seem a sufficiently substantial change in method to be at the heart of a revolution, but that was probably its power. The vital effect of lime was to reduce the acidity of the soil, and free the nitrogenous nutrients to be taken up. This again addressed the shortage of nitrogen food that was the main technical handicap of medieval farming. Tudor farmers may not have understood the scientific links, but with the intensified search for improvements in the sixteenth century, the practical benefits and value of liming became clear. Fitzherbert believed that the essential ingredients for improving the arable were dung and lime. In Dorset, the process of enclosure "was accompanied by other improvements in land use. Lime was liberally used as a fertilizer".[29] The same was true in Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. In Devon and Cornwall too, the provision of enclosure was followed by the wider use of lime and other fertilisers.[30] The liming of acid soils in Devon appears to have begun in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. The change in Cornwall was especially striking, because by the end of Elizabeth's reign, a region that had once struggled to produce

enough corn to feed itself was now in a position to export the commodity. Liming was also used to great effect by "good husbands" in Wales.[31] On the other side of the island, in Sussex, when Sir Thomas Pelham "strove to maximise his returns" by ploughing in areas of grass: "Lime was spread at the same time".[32] Liming must thus be regarded as a genuine and highly significant innovation of the age. In fact it was recognised as such by contemporaries, and was the factor most often mentioned in explaining the rise in yields. In 1616 it was noted that "the husbandry of liming the ground for corn was first practiced within the memory" of living generations.[33] In 1578 the general effect was summarised thus: "in later years since the knowledge and use of liming was found there groweth more plenty of corn".[34] In the 1630s Gabriel Plattes gave it full credit: "He that found a way of fertilising land with lime (though by accident) did a more charitable deed . . . than if he had built all the capital hospitals in England". [35]

The benefits were such that farmers were prepared to put a great deal of effort and money into producing the lime. In 1618 John Norden noted that:

> In Shropshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, and now lately in some parts of Sussex, the industrious people are at a more extraordinary charge and toil. For the poor husbandmen and farmers do buy, dig and fetch the limestone, two, three, four miles off, and in their fields build limekilns, burn it and cast it on their fields, to their great advantage.[36]

This captures the real basis of change. There was a new economic balance, of expanding opportunities, generating an unprecedented and sustained rise in population and prices, which encouraged even the "poor husbandmen" to invest in improvements, in the expectation of substantial profits. For the middling yeoman farmer it was a golden age. Those with something in excess of 70 acres could do well enough to transform their status, and swell the ranks of the gentry, joining them in the broadening processes of national administration and law making. It was also a context that engendered a desire for maximum economic freedom, which was eventually asserted in association with political aims.

Notes

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2 Dynamics of Change

The New Shape of Interregional Trading; the Mutual Benefits of Specialisation and Exchange; and the Growth of a National Land-market

The growth of opportunities was general and structured. The scope and character of trade underwent a qualitative transformation from the late fifteenth century. The period is rightly famous as the age of discovery, when the European kingdoms extended their imperial and trading power across the oceans. But it is crucial to understand that the broadening of horizons was local as well as global. The new way of business consisted essentially in the development of regional specialisation and exchange. This created a dynamic for integration within the English kingdom, as well as an enhanced profile for exports overseas. The spread of broad, commercialised marketing came to overlay the more circumscribed context of medieval times, which had been characterised by a multitude of undifferentiated local markets, each providing the same basic range of products for a relatively small area. The new extended market system would also come to be associated with another kind of departure from traditional economic assumptions. With the growing potential of trade, there arose a demand that merchants should be allowed on principle to operate free of impositions and restrictions.

The expansion of the scope of trade can be measured on the ground in terms of the number and range of markets. Mark Overton notes the "density" of markets at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when they were still at their greatest in number and most limited in reach. He estimates that most medieval markets served an area of about ten miles radius, with little traded outside.[1] W. G. Hoskins was even less generous, suggesting that "in general people found all their earthly needs met within an area of three or four miles at most, within sight of their own church spires".[2] Though perhaps over-restrictive, this captures the essential character of the medieval economy.

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was an important change, of which Alan Everitt produced a structured analysis. He established that "economic concentration is one of the salient themes of inland trade during this period". Everywhere, agricultural traffic was being drawn away from the smaller markets and focused on larger

provincial centres like Maidstone, Canterbury, Reading, Newcastle and King's Lynn. These expanded markets became the points of distribution for regional specialisations. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, "most towns still served a purely local area, and specialised in no particular commodity". But during the course of the century, "a broad pattern of specialisation becomes clear". By this time about half of the eight hundred market towns in England were specialising in the marketing of some particular product. The trend to specialisation "was clearly marked by the fourth quarter of the sixteenth century, and some of its principal features were already emerging by the 1530s".[3]

This constituted a seminal transition in the dimensions of trade and marketing, as each town and region began to concentrate on the more intensive exploitation of the most favoured products and resources of its area, to serve markets and regions further afield than before. Certain regional marketing characteristics became apparent. The markets of the Eastern counties specialised mainly in corn. In the Midlands the predominant speciality was livestock. The West Country offered another variation, specialising in wool, yarn and cloth. Northern counties showed the highest proportion of concentrated marketing, because two specialisations were on offer—livestock and cloth. London was a transcendent commercial centre, boasting a wide range of manufactures, and a uniquely broad base of consumption, while maintaining a particular importance as the dominant outlet for the nation's principal export of cloth. It drew the threads of regional specialities together into a national and international market system.

Market forces became at once more distant, but more focused and coordinated. Commercially minded farmers were thoroughly conversant with the strengths of each regional market, knowing what high-quality goods it offered, and when they were at their best.[4] Buyers and sellers travelled long distances to avail themselves of the benefits of regional exchange. The wool market at Doncaster was one of the largest in the kingdom and attracted buyers from more than half a dozen counties, and from towns fifty miles away. By Elizabeth's reign, the markets for textiles and livestock served a radius that was generally over twenty miles and not infrequently more than forty. People travelled as far as seventy miles to the great sheep marts of the Midlands and the North. Rotherham market brought sellers from Ellerburn in the Vale of Pickering, seventy miles away, and the sheep fair at Worcester drew sellers from equally distant Camarthenshire.[5] One particular example illustrates the new scope of marketing, and the essential impetus behind it. A Westmoreland packhorse man carried cloths from Kendal to Southampton every year from 1492 to 1546.[6] This coincided with the period of maximum expansion of the cloth trade. The regular trip to market, covering almost the entire length of the kingdom, encapsulates how the land was being turned into

a commercial unit, and shows again how the assurance of good profits was intensifying economic activity.

One of the ways in which regional specialisation served to increase the range and the benefits of commerce was by enabling each area to concentrate on the production of those commodities to which it was especially well suited, but might not previously have been free to exploit effectively. This would raise productivity almost by definition, and Mark Overton managed to put a figure on the level of absolute advantage gained when two regions began to focus on maximising their production of the crops or items for which they naturally enjoyed the highest yields. The result was a further increase in overall output of more than half across the two regions.[7] This was much the same, we note, as contemporary estimates of the benefit achieved by enclosure. The coordinated market brought a sustained growth of opportunity.

The previous chapter touched on the diversification and extended productivity generated by the leading example of regional specialisation and exchange—the combined growth of sheep farming and cloth manufacture. Since the making of cloth was carried out largely as a cottage industry in the countryside, it could tap underused resources of labour and environment, and bring valuable by-employment to areas that were not best suited to productive farming. This, for instance, was the basis on which the people of the West Riding of Yorkshire were able to alleviate the disadvantages of poor soils and an over-wet climate, and develop a strong economic identity by the rapid expansion of cloth production. In the area around Halifax, which was "planted in the great wastes and moors where the fertility of the ground is not apt to bring forth any corn or good grass" it was said that the people "altogether do live by cloth making".[8] A further consequence of the new focus was that the manufacturers began to source their wool not as traditionally from the most local market, but from more distant, specialist suppliers. In fact, the people of the West Riding flourished sufficiently by the making of cloth to enable them to import all their other basic needs from the appropriate specialising regions elsewhere: their corn from Lincolnshire, their cheese from Cheshire and Warwickshire, and their black cattle from Lancashire.[9]

An interesting example of a regional speciality is the iron industry in the Sussex Weald. Iron was the largest metal industry, and it was sited mainly in the Weald. The area was not best suited to arable farming, but it was well equipped for harnessing waterpower, and it boasted a plentiful supply of wood for charcoal. The new technology of the blast furnace reached the Weald from France at the end of the fifteenth century. It was a true industrial advance, which increased productivity fivefold. The number of furnaces and the level of output rose rapidly during the course of the sixteenth century. By the 1570s there were at least sixty-seven blast furnaces in operation, and fifty-two of them were in the Weald. It was the

principal source of many of the necessities of the Elizabethan consumer society, from ploughshares, to fire-backs, to cannon and shot. It was a good example of how the restriction of an activity to one region did not limit but actually encouraged the overall expansion of the economy.

The mining industry was an obvious candidate for intensified production in regions less well suited to arable farming. Lead mining was another field that saw a dramatic increase in output during the sixteenth century. It rose from 625 tons in 1500, to 3,300 tons in 1580, to 12,400 tons by 1600.[10] It became a specialised product, for instance, in some of the less agriculturally favoured areas of Derbyshire. The extended market in coal was also an important element in the development of interregional trade. The southwest corner of Nottinghamshire provides a good example of how this kind of activity could convert a local economy from subsistence to export mode. The area was not blessed with rich agricultural land, but it did possess a resource of convenient coal reserves, and during the sixteenth century it began to exploit them on a substantial basis. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, coal production in the hinterland of Nottingham had reached a level at which the local authorities were happy that they could rely on coal exports to solve any shortage of basic foodstuffs, by means of an annual exchange with Lincolnshire for the grain in which that county was able to specialise.[11]

J. E. Nef estimated that coal output increased fourteenfold between 1550 and 1680, as the most significant factor in the first "industrial revolution". The prime region of coal production, the northeast, generated a flourishing export trade through Newcastle. Much of this was shipped down the coast to the ports of East Anglia, which sent in return their own specialised commodity of grain. The bourgeoning market of London was another major customer. It is also notable that by the second half of the sixteenth century there was a substantial export trade in coal to France, usually in return for salt. By 1640, on the basis of this multi-dimensional trade, England was producing three times as much coal as the rest of Europe put together.[12] Coal from Newcastle was even finding its way to the more distant reaches of the Mediterranean. English ships were returning to those waters on the basis of a much broader, yet more connected pattern of trade than had obtained in medieval times.

So the development of regional specialisation and exchange had a crucial international context. In medieval times, long distance trade was mainly in luxuries, and it was very one-dimensional, as well described by R. H. Tawney: "With the Mediterranean as its immemorial pivot, expansion had hardly begun. Tapping the wealth of the East by way of the Levant, it resembled, in the rigidity of the limits placed on its commercial strategy, a giant fed through the chink of a wall".[13] In the sixteenth century these limits were transcended by a flexible, expanding European-wide trading network. Jan De Vries concluded that, "medieval commerce did little to alter local self-sufficiency because it remained dominated by

long-distance luxury trade". The critical change occurred with the "specialisation pattern", through which the Dutch and the English in particular began to trade basic commodities between regional markets.[14] The cloth trade was England's main contribution, and a national speciality. In 1513 it was hailed as "one of the most important foundations of trade in the world". Fernand Braudel saw the development of the textile trade as the clearest indicator of the emergence of a capitalist marketing context, displaying "division of labour, rationalisation and specialisation . . . there grew up a textile industry on capitalist lines and connected to distant markets, which was of decisive importance".[15] In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was becoming a trading nation in a more definitive and coordinated sense than had previously been the case.

The development of internal and interregional exchange in England was encouraged by the fact that inland trade proceeded in a context of exceptional freedom, when compared to other European kingdoms. Unusually, England boasted no large urban centres except London, the uniqueness of which as a coordinating market tended to encourage rather than restrict economic integration. Nor were there any semi-independent provinces. As a result, in contrast to France and Germany, there were few internal tolls or customs barriers between regions in England.

> Internal trade went largely untaxed in the period 1500–1700 . . . one of the principal strengths of the network of internal trading . . . was the relative lightness of passage tolls, pontages and other duties on domestic trade which created in much of Western Europe a fairly rigid series of customs unions.[16]

Even the tolls that had once existed in English town markets had largely fallen into disuse by the sixteenth century. An increasing amount of business was in any case being done outside the confines of the towns, often at inns. These trends towards private marketing "seem to have developed very substantially in this period, as functions of the spread of the major interregional trades in agricultural commodities".[17]

The Development of a National Land-Market

As land became more valuable, and more readily exploitable for profit, so the demand for it increased, and it came to be bought and sold more often and more widely. By the second half of the sixteenth century there had arisen a national land-market of a recognisably modern type. In medieval times land was held under a different set of assumptions, and its transfer was less normative. The shape of landholding and occupation may be characterised as open, dispersed and limited in nature. The lines of possession and division were not as definite as the absolute property rights of today. Land was granted for use rather than sold. All land was

held of the king on certain obligations. The bounds of the kingdom were also relatively open. There were no fixed state borders. It has been rightly said that the term "the medieval state" is a misnomer. The king's claims could extend into other realms, but were also subject to challenge within his immediate territory. The absence of discrete state boundaries was manifest in the position of the universal church, which was a body with independent political status, whose vast properties stretched out across the whole of Christendom. Local lords held their lands of the king, and let them on to their tenants, with a variety of tenures, obligations and services due. An equally important constraint was that property was not supposed to be used for the maximisation of individual profit, but in line with the common good, as God intended, for ultimately it was held as a trust from him.

The lands of the lord, and the disposition of the manors, both within and without, also tended to be dispersed in form. And the common lands worked by the tenants and villagers were the ultimate expression of fragmentation and dispersal. The smallholding of each village farmer would be composed of a large number of small strips, scattered across the open fields, and in the words of one contemporary "interlaced" with those of neighbours, with no formal barriers between them. It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that surveyors began to seek ways of rendering the entirety of each smallholder's strips in one collected entry, so that for the first time it became possible to know "the parcels of land that belong to every messuage".[18] In the medieval context there had apparently been no perceived need or inclination to record a discrete individual holding in any respect. This was a society that did not treat land as an itemised commodity. The "lands" or strips were dispersed yet fixed, and it was sufficient that each farmer or household knew which were theirs to work. The essential stability of the scene is well captured by Peter Bigmore, in his description of medieval Bedfordshire. "Through the medieval period the size of the holdings, and their scattered disposition among the open fields remained remarkably static". But in the first half of the sixteenth century "there is abundant evidence that piecemeal enclosure was occurring in the open fields".[19]

A great change was in train, whereby land ceased to be the fixed foundation of regulated livelihoods, and became a commercial item. J. D. Mackie's summary of this process bears referring to at length. New concepts were arising in respect of the meaning and use of land. "No longer was it regarded solely as the stable basis of an ordered society; it was becoming a commodity to be exchanged and used for gain". Land had changed hands often enough in the middle ages, but this did not as a rule affect the economy of an estate, "or the lives of an agricultural community. Quite different was the effect of this new traffic in land. A landmarket was coming into being, and people who made purchases . . . did so in the belief that the transaction would be profitable to themselves".