

Chair: John Broad

7.21 Henry French:

Landlords, tenants and paupers? Rural society and the 'tripartite model' in eighteenth-century England: a case study

Keith Wrightson and David Levine's study of the Essex village of Terling ended, chronologically, in the late seventeenth century. At this point, they argued, the community of Terling had crossed a threshold of development, in social, economic and cultural terms. Population growth and capitalist agricultural consolidation had divided the village permanently between the ruling elite of prosperous farmers, a collection of less successful husbandmen and craftsmen, and a third group of permanently impoverished wage labourers. The latter were increasingly dependent on the Elizabethan Poor Law, but in consequence also subject to unflinching scrutiny by the ratepayers. Wrightson and Levine argued that this economic and social change produced a deep cultural fissure, which was further deepened by the advent of 'Puritan' religious ideals in the 1620s.

However, this was not the end of the story for the village of Terling. Although it had now entered the era of agrarian capitalism and social alienation, it was subject to further, and perhaps even more dramatic, developments during the eighteenth century. By 1800, Terling had become an 'estate village', dominated by the Strutts of Terling Place, and their tenant-farmers. By the same date, it had also become a very tightly administered parish, with voluminous Poor Law records, a parish workhouse, and a closely observed, and permanent, group of 'paupers'. These patterns were mirrored across the country in the eighteenth century, as the independent 'yeomen' farmers who had benefited from the long Elizabethan and Jacobean price inflation were bought out by large landowners, and as the institutions of the Poor Law became ever more intrusive and elaborate. However, although these trends have featured, in passing, in a number of local studies, there are few sustained analyses of their effects in a particular location, of the kind that Wrightson and Levine applied to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This paper attempts such an analysis by examining the effects of two important strands in the village's eighteenth-century history, using estate and parish records for the period 1740 to 1801. The first of these is the settlement's transition to an estate village, cemented finally by the Strutt family's purchases in 1760. In particular, the paper will focus the effects on the village elite of becoming tenant-farmers subject to a resident landlord, *both* as these were expressed through their tenurial relations and in their continuing administration of the village. Secondly, the paper will focus on this detailed poor law administration and regulation, which culminated in a detailed census of pauper households in 1801, itemizing household structure, age, and health. It will trace the expansion in provision, the increase in costs and the rise in complaints about the need to control the 'idle and profligate poor'. This analysis will assess the significance of these developments in the light of the interpretation provided in *Poverty and Piety in an English Village*. It will investigate how far they merely reflect the culmination of existing trends towards capitalist development, economic differentiation and social alienation, and how far these trends should still be viewed in the context of a small-scale, face-to-face society in which personal connections ran alongside profound social differences and distances. Consideration of these issues will also enable the economic and social experiences of Terling to be set in the context of lowland England more generally in the eighteenth century.

Henry French is Professor of Social History at University of Exeter. His research has focused on the definition and social identity of the 'middle sort' within rural society in the seventeenth century. He has published articles on this

subject in a number of journals, and completed a monograph published by Oxford University Press in July 2007. Having worked on two research projects with Prof. Richard Hoyle at the University of Central Lancashire between 1994 and 1999, he is also co-author of two articles on land ownership and the decline of the small farmer in early modern England. He and Prof. Hoyle published a monograph study with Manchester University Press of land ownership in the Essex village of Earls Colne in March 2007, entitled *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750*. He has also researched the fate of the urban common lands in England, in two articles published in the *Agricultural History Review*.

7.22 Briony McDonagh – Elite women and the agricultural landscape, 1700-1830

The paper investigates the role played by elite women in managing large agricultural estates in the long eighteenth century. Female landowners controlled significant amounts of property in early modern England, yet their contribution to the agricultural changes which transformed the landscape between 1700 and 1830 has been almost entirely overlooked. Drawing on detailed archival research in the Midlands, the paper investigates female landowners' role in managing and improving their estates. Despite the difficulties in accessing women's 'hidden histories', the evidence presented here demonstrates that propertied women – particularly widows – were actively involved in estate management, enclosure, landscaping and agricultural improvement.

The paper also discusses comparative material from other English regions where contrasting soils and land use histories produced distinct landscapes and economies in which female landowners potentially played very different roles. In doing so, the paper explores important questions about propertied women's position in Georgian society, as well as contributing to wider cultural debates about women's place in the environmental, social and economic history of Britain.

Briony McDonagh is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Nottingham where she is currently working on a project entitled 'Elite women and the agricultural landscape, 1700–1830'. She was previously a Research Fellow on the AHRC-sponsored 'Landscape and Enclosure' project at the Universities of Sussex and Hertfordshire, where she also lectured in landscape and early modern history. She has recently published papers in *Rural History* and the *Agricultural History Review*, as well as in M. Gardiner and S. Rippon (eds), *Medieval landscapes in Britain: landscape history after Hoskins* (Windgather Press, 2007).

7.23 John Broad and Richard Hoyle – Who owned England at the end of the eighteenth century? The possibilities of the land tax

The Land Tax was collected in England between 1692 and the 1950s, and so one might expect it to offer the historian many possibilities for tracing the ownership of land. But because it was a quota tax where each administrative unit owed a set sum year on year, central government paid little attention to it, and such records as once existed were mostly made – and held – locally and are substantially lost. Where they do survive from the eighteenth century, they are frequently difficult to analyse in any meaningful sense. The exception is that between 1780 and 1832, there was a requirement to deposit annual returns with the county authorities as a check on the entitlement to exercise the franchise. A great deal of work has been based on these records in attempts to see changes in landholding in a dynamic fashion. Little of the results have been deemed to be entirely satisfactory. One problem is that the Land Tax was a tax on property and not simply land. The surviving returns give the name of the owner, the occupier and the sum taxed: it is therefore hard to move from this single figure to an acreage.

This paper offers a new approach to the Land Tax, utilising papers in the National Archives which have not been drawn on to any great extent. In 1798 the government decided to offer tax payers the opportunity to 'redeem' the Land Tax, that is, to pay a capital sum to be free of the tax in the future. Large numbers did so, and this created the redemption archive that we utilise. This consists of three series in the National Archives, chiefly the master set of the land tax returns for 1798 (IR

23), which is keyed to the redemption certificates (IR 24). The latter often offer a description of the land whose tax was being redeemed, and often an acreage.

The disadvantage with this method is that landowners were not compelled to redeem their tax. The advantage is that because landowners tended to redeem all their landholdings in a single tax district on a single certificate, it is possible to see the extent of their landholding over a wide area and draw horizontal connections.

On this occasion the possibilities that this record linkage offers will be demonstrated using the examples of Earls Colne in north Essex, and Oakley and other parishes in north Buckinghamshire. We will show that data from 1798 does allow us the possibility of seeing landholding at the end of the eighteenth century in a new light and ultimately of making large calculations about the composition of the landowning class.

John Broad retired last year from London Metropolitan University, and is now Visiting Academic at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, and Chair of the Executive Committee of the British Agricultural History Society. His publications include *Transforming English rural society. The Verneys and the Claydons, 1600-1820* (2004) and he is the editor of *A Common Agricultural Heritage: Revising French and British Rural Divergence* (AgHR Supplement Series 5, 2009). His current research interests are in rural housing, social structure, and landholding.

Richard Hoyle is Professor of Rural History at the University of Reading, and editor of *Agricultural History Review*. His books include (with Henry French) *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750* (2007).