ECO 301Y1

The Economic History of Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 1250 - 1750

Topic No. 9 [17]:  The ‘Rise of the Gentry’ Debate:


Within each section, all readings are listed in the chronological order of original publication (when that can be ascertained), except for some collections of essays.

A. PRIMARY READINGS: on the Tawney-Stone-Trevor Roper Debate


(a) Part I: Excerpts of articles, essays etc. by Engels, Tawney, Trevor-Roper, Hexter, Zagorin, Hill, and Stone himself.

(b) Part II: Selected documents on Tudor-Stuart England relevant to the debate.


B. Other Studies on the Structure of Landholding and Related Topics in Tudor-Stuart England: up to the Restoration (1485 - 1660)


   *On this topic see: Edward Waterhouse, *The Gentlemen's Monitor: Or a Sober Inspection into the Virtues, Vices, and Ordinary Means of the Rise and Decay of Men and Families* (1665).*


no. 146 (February 1995), pp. 174-87.


C. The Enclosure Movement and Agrarian Change in England:


   Documents, with commentary and analysis, of royal commissions investigating enclosures in this period (reign of Henry VIII).


   This is the classic study on the problem of enclosures, combining traditional trade models (now in disfavour) with his own thesis on ‘emergent agrarian capitalism.’ Read at least Stone's introduction, Tawney's own introduction in Part I, chapter 1; and Part II, chapter 1; and Part III, chapter 2 (General Conclusions).


No. 4 (1953).


(e) Peter Bowden, ‘Agricultural Prices, Farm Profits, and Rents’, (chapter 9), pp. 593-695.


Partly relevant for the period under discussion, in that he shows that the later 17th and early 18th centuries was the era marking the greatest diminution in the holdings of the small farmer.


A trenchant rebuttal of Tawney (1912). By no means easy reading, with its emphasis on legal questions. But read at least pp. 17-31, 94-136.


An important article. He places the beginnings and major phase of Enclosures, i.e. of the Tudor era, well before any demographic upswing; and explicitly or sometimes more implicitly attributes enclosure to the
economic consequences of the late-medieval demographic decline and stagnation.


*Note:* Their attack on the older, traditional views linking enclosures with the cloth export trade is seriously undermined by two critical faults: (1) an unrepresentative series of wool prices (from the bishopric of Durham, quite unrelated to the areas enclosed, which were chiefly in the Midlands); and (2) by a faulty econometric model.


27. Donald N. McCloskey, ‘The Economics of Enclosure: A Market Analysis’, and also his ‘The Persistence of English Common Fields’, in W.N. Parker and E.L. Jones, ed., *European Peasants and Their Markets: Essays in Agrarian Economic History* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 123-60 and 92-120, respectively. This chiefly pertains to the later enclosures, of the 18th century, but the analysis is important for this period as well.


Unfortunately, this book, written by a geographer, is less useful to the historian than it would appear, since it treats various aspects of common field systems, enclosures, and land use by various regions of England over the entire four century period, chapter by chapter.

33. J. P. Cooper, ‘In Search of Agrarian Capitalism’, Past and Present, No. 80 (August 1978), 20-65. One of many attacks on Brenner’s article (see the preceding).


The latest and most provocative thesis on English enclosures, contending that the major period of English enclosures was not the 16th or the 18th centuries, but the in between period of the 17th century. Note, however, that the first half of the 17th century (or up to the 1640s) encompasses the latter part of the ‘traditional’ Tudor-Stuart era of enclosures; but the later 17th and early 18th centuries have also traditionally been viewed as an ‘in between’ period of few enclosures. Wordie would agree that there was some diminution in the rate of enclosures ca. 1700-1740s.

37. John Chapman, ‘The Chronology of English Enclosure’ and,

J.R. Wordie, ‘The Chronology of English Enclosures: A Reply’, both in:


* 59. Gregory Clark, ‘Land Rental Values and the Agrarian Economy: England and


D. The Gentry and the Aristocracy in England, 1660-1760


3. H. J. Habakkuk, ‘The Long Term Rate of Interest and the Price of Land in the Seventeenth Century’, Economic History Review, 2nd ser. 5 (1952), 26-


8. Charles Wilson, England's Apprenticeship, 1603-1763 (1965), Part II (1660-1700), chapter 7; Part II (1700-63), chapter 11, 16.


42. David R. Green and Alastair Owens, eds., *Family Welfare: Gender, Property, and*


SOCIAL RANK AND STATUS IN TUDOR-STUART ENGLAND

PEERAGE

Greater Nobility: Lords, Ladies

Who Sit in the HOUSE OF LORDS

1. Duke, Archbishop
2. Marquess, Marquise
3. Earl
4. Viscount
5. Baron, Bishop

LESSER NOBILITY: Gentleman

Who May be elected to the HOUSE OF COMMONS

6. Baronet (from 1611 only) (Sir)
7. Knight (Sir)
8. Esquire (Mr.)
9. Gentleman (Mr.)

Percentage of Lands Held by English Social Groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1436</th>
<th>1690</th>
<th>1790</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church and Crown</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peerage (Aristocracy)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentry</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeomen Freeholders</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
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Sources:


QUESTIONS

1. Who were the English ‘gentry’? In what senses are they a unique social class or social grouping in Europe: in particular, a non-noble ‘lesser nobility’? In what respects do they resemble the French seigneurs; in what critical respects do they differ? How are they related to, and how do they differ from, the English aristocracy? In what House of Parliament do the representatives of the English gentry sit?


2. Review and discuss the Tawney-Trevor Roper debate. Were the English gentry of Tudor-Stuart England ‘rising’ or ‘falling’? Are Tawney and Trevor-Roper speaking in fact about the same groups of gentry, in the same areas of England, and in the same time periods? Can their views be at least partially reconciled? How do Stone's and Hexter's views (and those of Zagorin, Hill, etc.) fit into this debate: and with what success?

3. What relationship is there between Trevor-Roper's views in this debate about the English gentry and his thesis about the ‘General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century”? See his article, with that title, in Trevor Aston, ed., Crisis in Europe, 1560-1660: Essays from Past and Present, pp. 59-96.

4. In more general terms, what relevance does the debate about the gentry have with the following?:
   (a) The Price Revolution of the Sixteenth Century.
   (b) The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century.
   (c) The Tudor-Stuart Enclosure Movement.
   (d) The ‘Rise of Capitalism’.

5. In particular, what was the economic significance (if any) of the English gentry for the economic development of Tudor-Stuart England? How do they compare with other English social classes/groupings (aristocracy, yeomanry, merchants, & other bourgeoisie, etc.) in: (a) enclosure of land for arable and/or pasture; (b) investments in rural and/or urban industries and trades. Did the gentry have ‘a social predisposition to invest productively’--or a more marked predisposition to do so than the aristocracy?

6. What changes occurred in England landholding between 1500 and 1700 in terms of the following: aristocracy, the Church, the Crown, the gentry, the ‘yeomanry’ (and other peasant freeholders), the ‘bourgeoisie’ (merchants, lawyers, etc.)?

7. Did the English titled, landed aristocracy make a ‘comeback’ in the later 17th and 18th centuries (1660-1740)? Read Habbakuk, in particular, on this question: Part C, no. 1, et seq. In what respects was the post- Restoration aristocracy a difference social class from that of the pre-Civil War era? How many of Tawney's ‘gentry’ had, by or after 1660, been elevated to the peerage? How does Habbakuk's thesis relate to the Tawney-Trevor Roper debate (and to the views of Lawrence Stone). And to the ‘17th-Century Crisis’?