ECO 301Y1

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

Topic No. 8 [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.


* 21. Christopher Clay, Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700,


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


g. Joan Broad, ‘Regional Perspectives and Variations in English Dairying, 1650 - 1850’, pp. 93-112.


57. Roger J. P. Kain, John Chapman and Richard Oliver, *The Enclosure Maps of*


C. 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.


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.)

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**Percentage of Lands Held by English Social Groupings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Grouping</th>
<th>In 1436</th>
<th>In 1690</th>
<th>1790</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: George Mingay, The Gentry (London, 1976), p. 59, Table 3.1 (figures adjusted, to add up to 100%).
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 different 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’?