THE RIVALS:
LANDED AND OTHER GENTLEMEN

By Penelope J. Corfield

This essay was published in
N.B. Harte and R. Quinault (eds), ***Land and Society in Britain, 1700-1914*** (Manchester, 1996), pp. 1-33.
The first version, given as a lecture to the Conference for F.M. L. (Michael) Thompson,
began with a tribute to him as benign Head of History (1968-77)
at London University's Bedford College (as it then was)
and as the admirable 'first gentleman' of London University's Institute of Historical Research (1977-90).

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?[1]

Although a choice between Adam and Eve for gentlemanly qualities might appear straightforward, the answer to this ancient riddle has proved historically far from simple. Much social heartache and printer's ink has been expended over the problem of social definition. Who indeed was the gentleman? The question was asked by many in anxious personal enquiry; and by others with an undertow of sardonic protest. If all men were created equals, how did one get status and another not? In particular, how did one become something as desirable and as nebulous as a gentleman and another face rejection as not 'quite quite'?

Such was the lure of this unofficial title - in English social mythology trailing connotations of stalwart landownership - that history was retrospectively amended to bring some illustrious but unlikely candidates into the ambit of gentility. Was Noah a gentleman? Yes, said the anonymous *Boke of St. Albans* (1486).[2] Was Christ the carpenter a gentleman? Emphatically so, wrote Sir John Ferne in *The Blazon of Gentrie* (1586): 'Christ was a Gentleman, as to his flesh, by the part of his mother; ... and might if he had esteemed ... the vain glory of this world ... have borne coat-armour'.[3] What about the apostles? Again Ferne was not in doubt. 'The Apostles also ... were Gentlemen of blood', although he admitted that they had gone down in the world as far as outward occupation was concerned. The gentility of Christ was often attested. But the attribution was not usually dependent upon ancient lineage. For example, Thomas Dekker based the claim upon moral worth rather than armorial bearings. His reference to Christ in 1604 was much repeated: 'The best of men/ That ere wore earth about him, was a sufferer,/ A soft, meeke, patient, humble, tranquill spirit,/ The first true Gentleman that ever breath'd'.[4] These diverse attributions between them indicate the rival strands of external status and personal merit within the concept of gentility.

Social revaluation was certainly contagious. Was Shakespeare a gentleman? His career as an actor and playwright might give cause for doubt, although he did in fact purchase a grant of arms in 1599.[5] But, with time, he had achieved not only theatrical immortality but also personal beatification. The anonymous *Laughing Philosopher* explained in 1777 that a gentleman was made by nature. Title, rank, birth, dress, education, manners, and even foreign travel could not in themselves work the trick. Hence 'Kings are often not Gentlemen', he warned, 'while Peasants are so'.[6] He then supplied some famous examples. Henry VIII, although a King, was not a gentleman, on the evidence of his behaviour with his wives. Yet the 'divine' William Shakespeare, son of a Stratford butcher-cum-dealer, was one, and not because of his armorial grant. Similarly, the duplicitous Charles I did not qualify for the title, while the matchless John Milton - son of a London scrivener - did. This made good reading for literary

men from modest commercial backgrounds, but it indicated scope for a wider confusion, when landed status and blue blood were still eagerly admired by many, including not a few pedigreed landowners themselves.

'What a Gentleman is, 'tis hard with us to define', as lawyer John Selden observed.[7] Daniel Defoe assented that the problem was sufficiently complex that it might 'serve in the schools for a good Thesis and long learned Dissertations may be made upon it'.[8] This essay does not attempt so much. Instead, it analyses the rival interpretations of gentility; and identifies the 'social flotation' of the concept, as it moved away from a strict definition by external status towards a more personalised qualification. The argument does not deny the high standing of the landowner with a distinguished lineage and an independent 'stake in the country'. But it shows that there was more than one source of elite status in English society between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Hence it is wrong to assume that all 'gentlemen' came from landed stock and owned a landed estate. That was the myth but not the actuality.

From its earliest usage in English, the term 'gentle' carried both social and moral connotations, as did 'noble'. It was always a complimentary term. A man described as 'gentil' in Chaucer's time was gentle by 'birth or character', additionally glossed as 'noble', 'excellent', 'worthy', 'well-bred', 'charming', 'mild' or 'tender'.[9] The combination of qualities reflected a chivalric ideal, whereby men of high rank justified their elevation by their gracious and courteous bearing. They were not expected to be proud, haughty, rude, or aggressive, but modest, magnanimous, well-mannered, and valorous.[10] In theory at least, social and personal qualities were dovetailed, as in Chaucer's 'verray parfit gentil knyght'.[11] This ideal was not cold-bloodedly planned to deflect the potential envy and wrath of the excluded plebeians. Yet the gentle code could be invoked to that effect. John Ball's critique of terrestrial inequality, as a contravention of the primitive equality of Eden, could be theoretically disarmed by appealing to a match between social and personal worth. A 'moralised' hierarchy was easier to defend than a crudely and overtly exploitative one.[12] 'Gentilesse' brought with it obligations as well as status,

very much as did *'noblesse oblige'*.

Nonetheless, the most common early use of 'gentleman' and of its collective noun the 'gentry' was simply in reference to high-ranking individuals. The linked terms seem to have come into use fairly rapidly in the fifteenth century to describe men of some distinction, often entitled to bear a coat of arms, whether with or - significantly - without the formal title of nobility.[13] There was, however, no strict legal definition of a 'gentleman', either then or later. As land was the chief source of status and power, the term certainly referred to many freehold landowners.[14] At the upper end of the scale, the gentry included the younger branches of the nobility, who by English social convention were not themselves designated as noble. Meanwhile, at the lower end of the scale, the status of the lesser gentlemen tailed away into the ranks of the substantial freeholders or yeomanry. But even the minor gentry - historians sometimes term them mere 'parish gentry' - were powerful figures within their own localities.

By the sixteenth century, a rich if imprecise social terminology was well-established. Beneath the monarchy, a numerically-restricted peerage of dukes, earls, marquesses, and lords held the highest rank. They were often termed 'gentlemen' by courtesy but they were also noble, the 'nobilitas maior'. The rest of the population constituted the 'Commons' of England, but among their capacious numbers there were many further distinctions of status. They were led by the 'gentry', who included hereditary baronets (a new title created in 1611), knights, esquires, and plain gentlemen. Although if elected to Parliament such men sat in the House of Commons, they were frequently differentiated from the ordinary 'commonalty'.[15] Indeed, some social commentators referred to them as the 'nobilitas minor', although they did not have noble ranking. This term was still to be found in the eighteenth century. It became, however, increasingly archaic.[16] The status of a 'gentleman' did not need the prop of noble claims. His social lustre embraced the titled aristocracy. Thus, as Chamberlayne noted, 'All Noblemen are Gentlemen, though all Gentlemen are not Noblemen'.[17]

Through these qualifications, there were two overlapping sorts of social division. One

was the legal distinction between the very few who were titled nobility and the very many who were commoners. The other was a social distinction that was less well defined but in practice even more important. It differentiated between the elite few (some with titles, some without) who were accepted as the 'gentry' or the 'quality' and the non-elite many, known as the 'common people' or the 'masses' (but not - alas for verbal symmetry - as the 'quantity').

But who constituted this eminent, if non-noble, gentleman, with his family of 'gentlefolks' and his even more grandly-titled consort or 'lady?'[18] Definitional difficulties blurred the picture from the start. A 'gentleman' in chivalric theory was intended to be a man not only of status and independent wealth, but also of sterling personal qualities in intellect, manners, and morals. Landed property was held to be the best guarantee of that. It produced men 'whose lands are answerable to their virtues, and whose rents can maintaine the greatnesse of their mind', as Deloney explained optimistically in 1597.[19] There were, however, many problems in practice. There were men of landed estates who lacked ancient lineage; there were men of wealth who lacked either estates and/or lineage; and there were men of personal distinction who lacked all the trappings of land, ancestry, and affluence. As a result, there were many diverse claimants to the right to be styled 'Master' or 'Mr.' The title was used contentiously: as when one Hugh Venables of London was indicted before the law courts in 1430 as a gentleman alias 'common cutpurse'.[20] And with irony: in the eighteenth century, the fair-spoken and well-mounted highwaymen were known as 'gentlemen of the road'.[21]

Throughout the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the term gained both in popularity and in elasticity. Not only did non-landowners buy into land and acquire the dignity that way;[22] but many non-landowners who did not buy into land were also accorded the status. As a result, there was an undoubted 'rise of the gentleman' in English history, as the title was increasingly coveted, increasingly emphasised, and increasingly used. Only very gradually, by the nineteenth century, did the insistent pressures of its social success begin to dilute its appeal.

Established families were frequently resistant to newcomers claiming the status. Sticklers for punctilio therefore maintained that the only true gentlemen were landowners with family pedigrees ('good blood') and armorial bearings that had been accepted by the heralds of the College of Arms[23] or, in the event of dispute, had been upheld before the controversial Court of Chivalry.[24] This view was repeated over the centuries with great earnestness: most recently in 1900.[25] Yet it was both disputed and circumvented. Eager aspirants were not afraid to gild their own family trees. Hence, although in Tudor and Stuart times the College of Arms toured the counties to adjudicate heraldic claims and to 'disgrade' impostors, there were subtle and not-so-subtle pressures upon them to give recognition to plausible newcomers. These visitations were relatively infrequent - every 20 or 25 years - and imperfectly administered, which allowed ample leeway for social invention.[26] Moreover, both institutions were drastically cut down to size at the end of the seventeenth century. After 1689, the English monarchs ceased to issue writs for the visitations and the social inquisition at once halted, although the College of Arms still survived - indeed survives - as the heraldic registry.[27] Meanwhile, the last years of the civil-law Court of Chivalry were very chequered. It ceased to meet in 1640, with the ending of prerogative monarchy; was ruled illegal by the Grand Remonstrance in 1641; was briefly delegated to a Commission in 1646; was revived in full by James II in 1687 but lapsed again in 1708. Then, despite a last flurry of business in the early 1730s, it simply ceased to meet after March 1737.[28]

More crucially, others simply disagreed that pedigrees and traditional armorial bearings were the sole prerequisites for gentility. Plenty of gentlemen were accepted by the world without these accoutrements. Instead, the potential breadth of the concept had rapidly made gentlemen in England 'good cheape'. That came from a famous interpretation, first penned by William Harrison in 1577 but best-known in its revised form by Sir Thomas Smith in 1583:

> *For whosoever studieth the lawes of the realme, who studieth in the universities, who professeth the liberall sciences, and to be shorte, can live idly and without manuall labour, and will beare the port, charge and countenaunce of a gentleman, he shall be called master, for that is the title which men give to esquires and other gentlemen, and shall be taken for a gentleman.*[29]

As that made clear, the criteria included the acquisition of certain specialist skills plus the absence of heavy, grinding, sapping, manual labour. It did not preclude all work, for a gentleman might well undertake certain tasks - activity in local government, for example, or the supervision of financial matters - but he was not condemned to incessant physical toil. He had to have sufficient income and sufficient leisure to be able to 'live idly' and to cultivate the social graces. But, other than that, the ideal was not determined by the size of a man's landed estates or by the blueness of his blood. It was a question of public reputation. The boundaries between esquires and gentlemen were often blurred - the esquires ranking above gentlemen as sons of knightly families or as Justices of the Peace - but all had achieved social esteem. For those who had won such recognition, the Heralds would then, if requested, supply a coat of arms 'for money', as Smith noted. But that was an optional consequence and not a necessary cause of gentle status.

Flexibility was thus enshrined within England's honour system. Formal titles - from peerages through to the relatively humbler knighthoods - were allocated by royal prerogative, exercised directly by the monarch or occasionally delegated to a military commander in the field. That allowed some regulation of supply. The early Stuarts were unusual in their prodigality in selling titles, but subsequent monarchs and their advisers were thereafter careful not to devalue the honour by an excess of grants. Only a minority of the gentry were hereditary baronets, or knights of the shire, just as only a minority of all large landowners were peers of the realm.[30] However, these formalities were offset by the latitude of the unofficial title of 'gentleman', which blurred any sharp distinctions between nobles and non-nobles.[31] Nor was that honour under royal control. The monarch could create knights and baronets but could not

regulate the wider accolade. As a result, royal policy was perforce non-interventionist. The dictum was often quoted that 'a king may make a nobleman, but he cannot make a gentleman'.[32] Moreover, there was no sign that the crown objected to this *de facto* limitation. And, in practical terms, successive governments had no need to repine, as the gentry in England - however defined - were not exempt from taxation.[33]

Among non-landowners who claimed gentle status, fifteenth-century office-holders under the crown were the first to gain success.[34] Within the next hundred years, it had become accepted, even by the traditionalist Sir John Ferne, that the informal title was also allowable to the senior professions, all University graduates, practitioners of the liberal (but not the mechanic) sciences, leading municipal office-holders for the duration of the Mayoralty, and England's army commanders,[35] although the rank-and-file soldiery, who did the brutal work of bloodshed, were excluded. The concept kept an aura of knightly chivalry and valour; but it had clearly lost any exclusive association with military prowess. Instead, the criteria were civilian and humanist. And, while 'idleness' was desirable, in the sense of not having to struggle daily for a living, it was not construed as mere frivolity. Thus a gentleman was defined by having the required bearing ('port'', responsibility ('charge'),[36] and personal demeanour ('countenaunce') for the role.

Merchants and dealers posed the greatest difficulty under these criteria. Sir John Ferne, for example, was certain that following the 'mechanicall sciences' as a tradesman or craftsman was a serious barrier to gentility, although it might be waived for an exceptional individual.[37] Much Tudor and Stuart literature endorsed that view,[38] although there was a brief literary flirtation in the 1590s with shoemaking as the 'gentle craft'.[39] Few real-life social pioneers were as bold as Sir Baptist Hicks, a London mercer and silk merchant, whose decision to keep his shop open even after he had been knighted in 1604 scandalised conservative opinion.[40] A snobbish prejudice against trade long continued. For example, when the gawky social-climber Mr. Dubster in Burney's *Camilla* (1796) was challenged as to how he had become a gentleman,

he replied that it was by 'leaving off business'.[41] That was written during the heightened tensions of the 1790s, but it neatly encapsulated the anti-trade ethos - an attitude that still persists in some circles today.

Even the purists, however, conceded some points. A merchant was redeemed by holding a honorific civic office, at least while in post. But advocates of gentlemanly commerce went further. They pointed out that wholesale trade did not involve brutish or dirty physical labour. And they disputed that indentured apprenticeship entailed a personal bondage that forever marked a man as 'ungentle'. It was obviously a matter of concern, especially to the great London dealers and financiers whose wealth and commercial importance entitled them to claim status. The question was canvassed in a tract of 1629, entitled *The Cities' Advocate in this Case or Question of Honor and Armes: Whether Apprenticeship extinguisheth Gentry?*[42] It concluded very confidently that it did not. An amplified text was reprinted in 1674,[43] suggesting both that the message was still disputed and that its conclusion was still welcome to a City readership. In practice, however, the matter was gradually being decided in favour of commerce. Some of the evidence comes from cases that were disputed, such as those of the clothier, the linen draper, the soap-boiler, and the goldsmith, whose claims were argued before the Court of Chivalry in the early seventeenth century.[44] But the system of surveillance was far too haphazard to prevent others from slipping through the net.

Practice, in other words, was pragmatic, even if theory was slower to catch up with the trend. No doubt the non-landed gentlemen long remained in a minority. Yet they were there from the start.[45] *De facto* the English gentleman was always a latitudinarian. Historians have too often ignored - or mentioned only to dismiss - his bourgeois component. But the 1,172 'gentlemen' of London, who were presented to the heralds in 1633-35, were not primarily landowners, even if some may have owned land. Indeed, the recorded occupations for 845 of them consisted of 696 merchants, 67 lawyers, 35 courtiers, 29 medical men, 14 City officials, and 4 churchmen.[46] Furthermore, those were minimum figures, since an unknown number

refused to respond to the heraldic summons at all. It was enough to provoke Robert Burton to dry satire in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), averring that: 'Cookery is become an art, a noble science; Cooks are Gentlemen'.[47]

- II -

Thereafter, both theory and practice complicated matters yet further. The continuing debates in the later seventeenth and eighteenth century showed that the 'social flotation' of the concept was in full spate. Attempts that were made in 1661-4 and again in 1678 to legislate for a compulsory state registration of all coat armour and gentle pedigrees were unsuccessful,[48] and matters were thereafter left to the unofficial social negotiation between claimants and conservatives. In vain, did the Court of Chivalry (before its demise in 1737) strive to restrict new armorial bearings and to prevent painters from depicting them on carriages.[49] The College of Arms after 1689 made no campaign for the revival of the heraldic tours and confined itself to devising, registering, and adjudicating heraldic insignia. Little wonder that spasmodic attempts in the seventeenth century to revive the ancient sumptuary laws (repealed in 1604) in order to specify appropriate garb for the different ranks of society did not gain Parliamentary support; and that the Game Laws, which from 1670 to 1831 regulated hunting in the English countryside, prudently did not mention the rights of 'gentlemen' - confining hunting permits to the sons and heirs of esquires and above, to freeholders worth £100 per annum, and to major leaseholders.[50]

Two distinct developments continued to broaden the definition of a 'gentleman'. The first of these was the continuing pressure from successful merchants and businessmen to assert their gentility and to join the 'quality'. There was a continuing torrent of writings, attempting to systematise the unsystematic. John Brydall, for example, argued in 1676 that there were four sources of gentility: birth; office; creation; and reputation[51] - the last of those leaving plenty of latitude. Significantly, he did not mention owning land as a qualification in itself. But the classification remained imprecise. The Tory traditionalist Edward Chamberlayne noted mournfully in his annual handbook, *Angliae Notitia* (1669), that the younger sons of the gentry

went not only into the professions, court, and army 'but of late too many of them to Shop-keeping'.[52] However, even he accepted that a non-apprenticed gentleman did not lose rank by engaging in foreign trade; and in the twentieth edition (1702) the publication added, on the authority of the seventeenth-century herald Guillim, that nobles and gentlemen were not degraded by apprenticeship.[53]

Furthermore, in the rival Whig account of *The State of England* (1691), Guy Miège stated baldly that the term stretched upwards to include the nobility and downwards to 'any one that, without a Coat of Arms, has either a liberal, or genteel Education, that looks Gentleman-like (whether he be so, or not) and has wherewithall to live freely and handsomely'. The virtues no longer included 'idleness'. Instead, Miège praised the beneficent effects of commerce as a means to wealth and status, adding: 'The truth is, Gentility with competent Means is an excellent Compound; but without it, 'tis but a wretched Condition, as the world goes now'. It was thus better to be an honest, substantial tradesman than a poor gentleman by birth, 'in this Age especially, where Poverty is ... grown so contemptible'.[54]

The flexibility of usage was noticeable enough to impress a Swiss visitor in 1719. He claimed with fine hyperbole: 'This State of Things has given place to the Abuse of every Man's calling himself Gentleman in England'.[55] That was not literally true but there were very many aspirants for the accolade, especially since formal titles were handed out only sparingly. As the ranks of 'the quality' were insidiously broadened, so new sub-classifications were introduced, although these were not used systematically. By the later seventeenth century, people referred not only to the 'landed gentry' or the 'country gentry' but also to the 'city gentry' and 'town gentry'.[56] That indicated a response to the diversity within the concept, even if the divisions were not at all clearly demarcated. To assist the process of identification, a modern historian has also suggested that the urban variety be termed the 'pseudo-gentry'.[57] However, that seems unfairly to imply that the town gentry were fraudulent or pretentious or both; and the suggestion has not generally found favour.

No one social group in eighteenth-century England achieved a monopoly of the unofficial title. Clearly, however, the new power of the 'monied interest' was disturbing to the peace of mind of the landed traditionalists. Evidence of that occurred in 1710, when a Tory-dominated Parliament passed the Property Qualifications Act for England and Wales (but not Scotland), which remained on the statute book until 1838. This restrictive legislation decreed that an income of at least £600 p.a. from land was the prerequisite to stand as MP for a county seat, and at least £300 p.a. for a borough seat. Exception was made only for the oldest sons of peers and the sons of men qualified to be MPs for shires.[58] The Act did not risk a general definition of social worth; nor did it insist upon any form of commoner's title (knight or baronet); but it sought to create a landowning monopoly of Parliamentary power. In practice, however, its impact was limited, partly because 'monied' men set up inventive schemes to gain bogus qualifications[59] and partly because the division between trade and agriculture was not a rigid one. Hence a modern analysis of the 'Honourable Gentlemen' elected as MPs between 1734 and 1832 finds that those with commercial and professional interests amounted to just over half the total (2555 MPs out of 5034 studied, or 50.75 per cent) but also points out that many of these commercial MPs were simultaneously landowners.[60]

Participation in parliamentary politics was thus not confined exclusively to men in possession of high birth or rolling acres of freehold land. Blackstone, for example, referred loosely to 'our gentlemen of independent estate and fortune', stressing the importance of independence rather than any particular sort of fortune.[61] As England in the eighteenth century was regularly acknowledged as a 'trading nation',[62] successful commercial and professional men found their way into the elite if they were able to demonstrate sufficient affluence and live in a suitable style.

Gentlemanly status was a matter not for law, but for social negotiation. There was nothing to prevent ambitious individuals from claiming the role. It did, however, demand a sufficiently confident display to gain public acceptance. That helps to explain the success of the

many ‘courtesy’ manuals, which offered to teach the requisite manners and polish.[63] Certainly, the style demanded some attention. A gentleman had to know how to carry his sword, if not how to fight with it, and how to spend his money, if not how to earn it. Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) explained her matrimonial ambitions in the following terms:

> *I was not averse to a Tradesman, but then I would have a Tradesman forsooth, that was something of a Gentleman too; that when my Husband had a mind to carry me to the Court, or to the Play, he might become a Sword, and look as like a Gentleman, as another Man; and not be one that had the mark of his Apron strings on his Coat, or the mark of his Hat upon his Perriwig.*[64]

This stress on outward appearances produced a very competitive and fashion-conscious society. It also left ample scope for deception, as Moll Flanders found to her cost. She married her ‘amphibious Creature, this Land-water-thing call’d, a Gentleman Tradesman’, only to be left deeply in debt, discovering that he was ‘a Tradesman that was Rake, Gentleman, Shop keeper, and Beggar all together’.

Real-life examples of ‘town gentry’ did not, however, always end badly. On the contrary, the title of gentleman was often the outward badge of success in a professional or commercial career, particularly but not solely upon retirement from active business. In Norwich, for example, there were 22 practising attorneys who voted in the 1734 election, all defining themselves not as lawyers but as ‘Gentlemen’. Moreover, it was not a matter of exceptional comment, by the eighteenth century, to find bankers, dealers, and other more modest tradesmen also styling themselves as ‘Mr’ or, more powerfully, as ‘Gent.’ or ‘Esquire’.[65] For example, there were individual vintners, brewers, tanners, theatre-managers, and dancing-masters who used the title. Indeed, a survey of 16 British commercial town directories in the 1770s and 1780s[66] has found at least 1,375 townsmen who were then styled as gentlemen or esquires, of whom 601 (43.7%) were listed without an accompanying occupation (although they may nonetheless have had one) while another 774 (56.3%) did record one: of those, 582 were in the professions, 180 in commerce or banking, 7 in manufacturing, plus 5 others. And these figures

were far from comprehensive, since the Directories did not set out to provide the total coverage later demanded of the censuses.

Men who prospered even in unglamorous trades were able to redefine themselves as they rose in the world. One Samuel Collins of Tothill Fields voted in the 1784 Westminster election, stating his occupation as a 'rubbish carter'. Someone of the same name and address voted in 1788 and 1796, identifying himself as a 'scavenger'. Finally, Samuel Collins 'gentleman', also of Tothill Fields, went to the polls in 1802.[67] If all these records relate to the same individual, they suggest a process of upward social mobility over a period of 18 years; if to father and son, they suggest inter-generational change; and if to more than one person from more than one family, they at least suggest a measure of residential propinquity between gentlemen and rubbish-carters. Furthermore, in addition to many urban tradesmen, army officers and senior professional men were allowed the status without controversy, even by the traditionalist heraldic office.[68] Thus, for example, the attorneys routinely and non-controversially named their new association, founded in c.1739, as the 'Society of Gentlemen Practisers in the Courts of Law and Equity'.[69]

Between them, these people not only formed the leadership of the growing towns of eighteenth-century England but they also intermingled with the landed gentry of the countryside.[70] There were continuing tensions and snobberies between the rival sources of power and prestige, and much anguish - expressed both privately by individuals and publicly by social commentators - as successive generations faced the competing clashes of old and new claims to status. Traditionalist laments also confirmed the very processes of change that they deplored so strongly. For example, in 1756 John Brown, a literary vicar, poet and playwright, wrote vehemently to express his fear that England's social leadership had been overcome by a 'vain, luxurious, and selfish EFFEMINACY'. He agreed that there had been a welcome reduction in aristocratic coarseness, but called also for a full return to ancient chivalry and feudal loyalty.[71] Diatribes such as this were frequent, and as often contradicted by rival experts. That

indicates in itself that there was no simple fusion of ‘interests’ to lay the disputes finally to rest. Yet, just as significantly, it also suggests that the social order was continuously experienced as under stress and adaptation, for without that there would be no cause for debate.

This relative social flexibility can be variously interpreted. It can be argued that England’s elastic honours system seduced the commercial world into coveting the style and status of a traditional rural hierarchy. A modern and far-from-conventional Earl has recorded his belief that ‘the concept of the gentleman was invented by the aristocrats to keep the middle classes in order’.[72] There are, furthermore, some apparent grounds for supporting this spritely dictum by Bertrand Russell. The imaginative hold that the chivalric ideal and the lure of decorative ‘idleness’ exercised over England's socially-ambitious bourgeoisie discouraged a direct onslaught upon the concept of honours and titles. It may also have promoted an undue reverence for gentlemanly ‘breeding’ rather than for ability, have diluted the social glory of the commercial and industrial interests, and inculcated a distain for mere money-grubbing. Thus capitalism (itself a concept in need of precise definition) found itself in England adopting an amateurish and unbusinesslike ethos - to its own ultimate detriment, in the opinion of a number of historians.[73]

Yet the developing ethos of the gentleman was by no means a simple seduction of non-landed society by the landed interest. It should be viewed instead as a successful business and professional intrusion into the informal honours system, whereby landowners were deprived of a monopoly, and recognition was accorded to wealth and commercial success as well as to birth and land.

- III -

That was enhanced by the second distinctive development within the concept of the ‘gentleman’, which occurred as a number of writers promoted the case for a personal gentility that had little or nothing to do with outward circumstances - and everything to do with individual morality and merit. The claim had been made long before 1700, but thereafter was

given new emphasis. There was not anything as organised as a formal campaign, and meritorious individuals did not all adopt the title of gentleman. But the growing corpus of writing upon moral gentility generated a literary and cultural pressure that made itself felt gradually and often insidiously within the general climate of opinion.

So was launched 'nature's gentleman'. Such arguments drew strength from the old requirement for the 'parfit gentil knyght' to have a fine mind as well as a fine family: the combination of the two made the 'only perfect Gentrie', as Ferne had agreed.[74] By these means, the liberal intelligentsia were able to cut the titled aristocracy and landowning society down to size. It was better 'to boast of Virtue than Birth', wrote a 'Person of Quality' in 1672, perhaps not quite heeding his own lesson.[75] Richard Steele in the *Tatler* in 1710 was one of the first to publicise the case unequivocally. He argued that a courtier, a tradesman, a scholar, all had equal claims to be a gentleman: 'The Appellation of Gentleman is never to be affixed to a Man's Circumstances, but to his Behaviour in them'.[76] He later satirised the idleness of landowners and praised the achievements of commerce. But external role was not the ultimate test: genuine qualities came naturally from within. 'There is an innate virtuous spirit of manners about a real Gentleman, which no education can give', the *Laughing Philosopher* agreed in 1777.[77] A journalist in the *World* (1755) joined the attack upon excessive pride in rank and family: later generations would find it odd, he predicted correctly, that the English population was held to be divided into people of 'birth' and those of 'no birth', implying that there were two sorts of people 'some BORN, but the much greater number UNBORN'.[78]

Steele had also chastised in 1713 those empty-headed noblemen who thought of nothing but 'Rank and Precedency' and who sneered at the '*new* Man' of lowlier birth. He accepted that illustrious families had just claims to social respect; but argued that it was illogical for them to condemn successful newcomers, as they had the very talents and drive that characterised the founding father of the high-born family, 'upon whose Reputation they value themselves'.[79] The meritocratic case was also put into verse. John Gay in 1738 quizzed the idle gentleman as a

fluttering fly, who did no public service but fed on delicacies produced by others.[80] And in 1733/4, Alexander Pope produced some ringing couplets:

> *Worth makes the man, and want of it, the fellow;*
> *The rest is all but leather or prunella.*
> ...
> *What can ennoble sots, or slaves, or cowards?*
> *Alas! not all the blood of all the HOWARDS.*[81]

Eloquence from literary men such as these did not, of course, overthrow traditional reverence for rank and birth. There were plenty of people who agreed with Edmund Burke's sonorous pronouncement that 'We fear God; we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility'.[82] But such attitudes were not universal. For example, in 1735 one 'Crito', a Lincoln's Inn lawyer, acknowledged the deplorable tendency of some men in the middling ranks of society to look up to their social 'superiors'. However, he riposted that 'Personal Merit is the only true Nobility, and the Lord who inherits the Dignities without the Virtues of his Ancestors, is but a despicable Creature'.[83] Similarly, an anonymous poem to a young nobleman in 1736 repeated that greatness did not lie in externals: 'Who rise to Glory, must by Virtue rise,/ 'Tis in the Mind all genuine Greatness lies'.[84] Such writings put a cumulative pressure upon the titled aristocracy to justify their pre-eminence by an ethos of service - a case that gained emphasis in the course of the century.[85]

'Nature's gentleman' was thus a meritocrat - but in the name of character and morals rather than intelligence or business skills. Education came to be stressed more strongly as the debates progressed;[86] but schooling was expected to build upon innate qualities of virtue. At the same time, 'nature's gentleman' was not a social leveller. He did not attack titles and honours. But he did expect men of high birth to behave with a restrained dignity and to treat other 'gentlemen', of whatever origin, as their equals. Addison and Steele, the promoters of an urbane

and moderate Whiggery, who were themselves sons of professional men, argued thus in their journalistic campaigns devised to tame aristocratic pride, rowdiness, and debauchery. The rake was to be urbanised and civilised. High spirits and fine dress were acceptable but only when accompanied by refinement in mind, manners, and morals. Steele provided the classic pen-portrait in 1713:[87]

> *When I consider the Frame of Mind peculiar to a Gentleman, I suppose it graced with all the Dignity and Elevation of Spirit that Human Nature is capable of: To this I would have joined a clear Understanding, a Reason free from Prejudice, a steady Judgment, and an extensive Knowledge. When I think of the Heart of a Gentleman, I imagine it firm and intrepid, void of all inordinate Passions, and full of Tenderness, Compassion and Benevolence. When I view the Fine Gentleman with regard to his Manners, methinks I see him modest without Bashfulness, frank and affable without Impertinence, obliging and complaisant without Servility, cheerful and in good Humour without Noise.*

Perhaps redundantly, he added that 'these amiable Qualities are not easily obtained'.

There was in this teaching both a strongly Aristotelian emphasis upon moderation and a religious undertone, with a quasi-Puritan contempt for mere outward show and a stress upon individual morality. But the message was a secular as well as religious one. Samuel Richardson, who came from a nonconformist background, provided a noted literary exemplar in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753/4). This novelistic paragon was intended to outshine Lovelace, the dashing but debauched nobleman who had proved too attractive as the anti-hero in *Clarissa* (1748). Admittedly, Richardson allowed Grandison a knighthood and a country estate; but Grandison's merit as a forbearing Christian gentleman was contrasted favourably with the dissolute and thoughtless behaviour of his noble rivals. Variations on this teaching long remained popular with English novelists.[88] It allowed for undue aristocratic pride to be satirised, even while 'gentle' values were inculcated. 'Norman' names constituted a literary indicator of false and empty grandeur. Thus Trollope in the mid-nineteenth century savaged the de Courcys,[89] just as Jane Austen had earlier satirised Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whose proud nephew Fitzwilliam

Darcy memorably found that his first proposal to Elizabeth Bennett, socially his inferior, was rejected as deficient in 'gentleman-like manner'.[90]

Part of the campaign to 'moralise' and civilise the social hierarchy included opposition to aristocratic duelling. Honour entailed not swagger and fighting but courtesy and dignity. Again, that was a subject on which Sir Charles Grandison held strongly anti-militaristic views. A readiness to avenge imagined slights with bloodshed was far too impetuous and lawless to suit either Aristotelian moderation or Christian meekness. Many writers and preachers joined the attack on duelling. Sheridan (1775) satirised male braggadocio amusingly, when his country bumpkin squire, Bob Acres, found his courage 'oozing out as it were' at the moment of crisis.[91] Of course, literary and clerical campaigning did not immediately transform the behaviour of the young bloods, but it put pro-duellists on the defensive. Hence the custom became gradually outlawed in fact as well as in law.[92]

One sign of that was the decline of sword-wearing, except on ceremonial occasions. The right to bear arms was a legacy of the military role of the medieval knights. Hence, in the early eighteenth century, wearing a sword was still the mark of a gentleman. But, once military necessity had well and truly waned, fashions were gradually adapted. By the 1780s the sword was fast disappearing from daily wear.[93] Richard 'Beau' Nash, the arbiter of manners in early eighteenth-century Bath, had been one of the first to discourage the awkward appendage. A century later, George 'Beau' Brummell, the next undisputed master of gentlemanly elegance, ventured outdoors with nothing more lethal than a cane or brown silk umbrella. Men of fashion followed this lead, taking their style not from princes but from the 'Beaux', both of whom were (from an aristocratic point of view) utter parvenus.[94]

All this indicates that the code of the 'gentleman' was not a straightforward celebration of either 'good blood', landownership, idleness, or militarism. It was an urbane and cultivated ideal, that was becoming detached from any very precise social position. As a result, it could be invoked to satirise defaulters from all rungs of the hierarchy. Hence, while some mocked

parvenu tradesmen, others mocked the boorish minor squires, who had status in their own locality but lacked city style and polish. William Pitt the Younger allegedly complained at the ignorance and obstinacy of the country gentlemen backbenchers, even while eulogising them in Parliament when he wanted to tax them.[95]

Fielding had already provided the literary prototype of the backwoodsman in Squire Western (1749). Sheridan's Bob Acres of Clod Hall (1775) was another. And George Colman provided a third in Sir Harry Beagle (1761), teased for his inelegant conversational cry of 'Yoicks' and for his habit of evaluating the human physique in terms more suitable for horseflesh.[96] These were the men devoted to 'hunting, shooting and fishing', who were satirised as lacking both brains and conversation. A writer in 1809, who believed that 'Education ... makes us Gentleman', lamented: 'How many of the Nobility are far from being truly Gentlemen in every respect'.[97] And in similar vein, a satirical poem of 1818 argued that landowners should talk of more elevated topics than turnips and manure, more intellectual matters than stables and food. Otherwise - shades of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* - they merely competed with their own menials:

> *Is this a time for senators to vie*
> *With those who clean a horse, or make a pie?*[98]

Meanwhile, the idealised concept was used not only to train the great but also to assimilate the social climber. The old debates about trade and gentility were no longer so heated, since many merchants had assumed the title *de facto*. The Stock Exchange's famous motto 'my word is my bond' was a direct parallel with the gentlemanly code of honour. Snobbish jibes against tradesmen (rather than against the nation's commerce) still continued; but others rejected the prejudice. For example, the *Spectator* depicted in 1711 the sagacious merchant Sir Andrew Freeport to contrast with the old-fashioned backwoods squire Sir Roger de Coverley.[99] Daniel Defoe also strongly promoted the commercial interest. He noted (1727) that many landed families were founded upon trade. Thus 'to say a Gentleman-tradesman is not so much

nonsense, as some people would persuade us to reckon it'.[100] George Lillo - a jeweller turned dramatist - promptly had a great popular success with his play *George Barnwell* (1731), which featured a handsome young apprentice merchant. This gave a sympathetic rendering of commercial life and was apparently well liked in the City, even though Barnwell himself was led into crime and came to a sad end.[101]

Collectively, these writers argued against an undue reverence for ancient family. They did not advocate a cult of discovering plebeian or mercantile ancestors; but they helped to assuage the sensitivities of those who had them anyway. Edward Gibbon thus did 'not blush to descend' from a trading branch of the Kentish Gibbons, explaining that 'Our most respectable families have not disdained the counting-house, or even the shop'.[102] However, newcomers were expected to adopt the gentlemanly style. Gawky ex-shopkeepers, like Fanny Burney's Mr. Dubster (1796) were satirised, to encourage them to acquire social polish;[103] and the ultra-rich India `nabobs' and overseas merchants were satirised, to tone down their vulgar display of wealth. The selfish creed that 'Gold is God' did not accord with 'pure Morals and true Virtue', as a satire of the nabobs declared in 1773.[104] Indeed, friction over the claims of 'new money' tended to heighten over time, because society's power structures were under continuing pressure to accommodate new business and industrial fortunes. There was a further poetic protest in 1818:

> *All praise to Commerce and the swelling sail*
> *Yet may its influence too much prevail*.[105]

Amongst such complexities, the gentlemanly ideal was pushed and pulled in rival directions between the overlapping claims of land, wealth, and virtue.

For those who wished to honour personal merit, it became a testing social art to distinguish the man of honour from the fop or hypocrite. It was not enough to rely solely upon family background, although adventurers who could not name their parentage were at a disadvantage. The art instead required a careful process of discrimination and assessment. But,

as it was impossible to give each newcomer a thorough moral audit, the world often fell back upon externals, this time in the form of dress and, above all, manners. An urbane courtesy to all, without servility or fussy ceremoniousness, was the desideratum. Chesterfield's controversial *Letters ... to his Son*, which were published in 1774,[106] endeavoured to teach the gentlemanly style - with the famous if unheeded advice 'often be seen to smile, but never heard to laugh'. But his calculative good breeding risked degenerating into mere hypocrisy. There was continuing concern that externals might prove deceptive. Women were allegedly the most prone to be misled, but all were vulnerable to clever impostors. As a character in Shillito's drama about *The Man of Enterprise* (1789) commented: 'The world is grown to such a pass, that it requires some judgement to distinguish real gentility from the herd of its servile imitators'.[107]

Familiarity began to dilute respect in practice, even while the ideal remained undimmed. A letter in the *Connoisseur* (1755) joked about the multitude of self-styled gentry: all the 'women' had become 'ladies', and 'Every priggish fellow, who can clap a queue to his peruke and hang a sword awkwardly dangling by his side, thence assumes the importance as well as the name of a Gentleman'. Citizens, actors, and authors used the title, the writer continued; and no doubt a search through garrets and cellars would find many more.[108] The *Laughing Philosopher* (1777) was similarly worried that society's heroes might prove fops or frauds: 'It is Virtue joined to the most refined Manners which constitutes the Gentleman. The young Men of this Age entirely mistake the character: they emptily think, that it consists in flutter, dress, and grimace, or riding a horse full gallop through the streets to pay morning visits. ... [But] It is Honour, godlike Honour, that stamps alone the heavenly character'.[109] Encouraged by such arguments, the young Vicesimus Knox in 1778/9 ventured the radical thought that: 'There is many a nobleman, according to the genuine idea of nobility, at the loom, at the plough, and in the shop'.[110]

Rival concepts of gentility carry with them major analytical implications for interpreting the economic history, the language, and the culture of the gentleman. In the first place, the definitional complexities make it difficult to classify and to count the gentry - as it was for contemporaries. It is certainly very misleading for historians to assume that everyone styled as a 'gentleman' was *ipso facto* a landowner. That takes as an axiom what was really a matter for debate. Hence historians who classify all 'gentlemen' as 'landowners' merely build a systematic bias into their analysis, falsely inflating the category of 'landowners' by inserting many professional and commercial 'gentlemen' into their ranks. Such results give but a spurious confirmation to the mythology that England's ruling elite was always an agrarian one.

Equally, historians of urban society who doubt the *bona fides* of townsmen using the label of gentleman compound the same error. The term was used very freely by successful urban businessmen, office-holders and professionals, as well as by rentiers, living off private incomes without occupation. 'The word gentleman re-echoes from one end of the kingdom to the other', declared in 1824 an anguished traditionalist - the self-styled 'Chevalier' Lawrence - arguing that the armorial gentry should resume the name of nobility and stand on equal terms with their continental peers.[111] That might have helped historians but English practice had long decreed otherwise.

It follows that estimates of 'gentry' numbers need to specify the definition employed. For example, in c.1500 there were perhaps 500 knights, 800 esquires, and 5,000 other gentlemen entitled to bear arms, making a 'lesser nobility' of 6,300 heads of household; but these were minimum figures as they excluded the non-armorial gentry.[112] Between 1500 and 1688, both the numbers and the percentage of England's cultivated land owned by the 'middle and lesser gentry' rose significantly from about 25% (1436) to 45-50% (1688) - a huge shift achieved at the long-term expense, not of the great magnates, but of the crown and church.[113] This data obviously referred to landownership; with non-landed assets, the position was yet stronger.

Gregory King's computations of English society in 1688 provided further estimates, valued for their scope rather than for their absolute accuracy. His best-known estimate gave 800 baronets, 600 knights, 3,000 esquires, and 12,000 gentlemen, totalling 16,400 'gentry' heads of household. But he was thinking essentially of landowners, for in this version of his calculations he listed merchants, professions, and office-holders under other headings.[114] Thus King's estimates were very cautious, in contrast to the many inflated figures in circulation. A debate in Parliament illustrated that. When discussing taxation in 1692, Paul Foley, a Herefordshire Whig, spoke of some 100,000 gentlemen, while Edward Seymour, a West Country Tory, doubled the figure to 200,000.[115] Both spoke vaguely and no doubt hyperbolically - Seymour certainly so. But a wider definition and less caution would certainly surpass King's total. Indeed, a modern historian notes that there were in 1702 'roughly' 32,000 county Commissioners for the Land Tax, few of whom were not gentleman.[116]

Precise figures were never sought, still less obtained, by eighteenth-century governments. Contemporaries took the absence of official control or intervention as a matter of course. Only one man conducted heraldic visitations to check upon gentry coats of arms in the eighteenth century; and he turned out to be an impostor who was fined, pilloried and imprisoned in 1727 for levying money under false pretences.[117] Even without official records, however, some long-term trends are apparent. Thus it is known that, as a result of continuing restraint in granting knighthoods, the eighteenth-century gentry comprised more than ever a non-titled group of esquires and gentlemen commoners, as the number of knights and baronets did not keep pace with population growth but actually fell from 1,150 in 1700 to 859 in 1800.[118] This trend put 'gentility' still further beyond the control of kings and governments. Meanwhile, the eighteenth-century complaints about the extension of the unofficial title manifestly implied that the number of gentlemen of all sorts grew considerably; and that the non-landowners increased as a proportion among them.

In aggregate, it is therefore reasonable to conclude that the incomes of all those with

plausible claims to gentility were becoming increasingly diversified and flexible to include non-agrarian as well as agrarian resources. The turnover of personnel was no doubt greatest among those with speculative businesses, but it was also found among landed families.[119] After 1690, the percentage of England's cultivated acreage owned by the 'gentry' grew slightly from a high figure of 45-50% to c. 55% of the total in 1873.[120] That has been taken to imply a conservative case for a protracted social continuity between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet the information by definition relates only to one form of property, and to one sort of gentleman. It also says nothing about the scale of turnover, as families moved into and out of landownership. Hence the appearance of landed continuity concealed a wider diversification.

Another speculative set of social estimates, by Patrick Colquhoun in 1814, confirmed the complexities.[121] He found that Great Britain and Ireland together had 46,861 household heads who were baronets, knights, country gentlemen, and 'others having large incomes'. These ranked below the titled aristocracy as a 'second class' (out of seven). It was a group substantially based upon land, but also including the wealthiest commoners. Next came a further 12,200 household heads, comprising senior state officials, leading clergymen, eminent lawyers and physicians, substantial merchants and manufacturers, and bankers of the first order. They formed the 'third class'. Both groups were likely to have been styled 'gentlemen', making a total of 59,061,[122] of whom 12,200 (20.66%) were not designated as landowners or as very rich. These were also no more than minimum estimates, because a sizeable but unknown number of the large 'fourth class' - comprising middling professionals, merchants, manufacturers, and men on moderate incomes - also claimed the coveted status. That suggests that by 1814 there were well over 60,000 'gentlemen' and that at very least 20% of these were not primarily landowners. In practice moreover, in a larger total, the non-landed urban percentage must have been much higher than that. Nineteenth-century directories indeed listed numerous town residents explicitly under the collective name of 'gentry'. And those urban residents were certainly not landowners, since many of them were additionally recorded under

the ‘trades and professions’.[123]

If these socio-economic boundaries lacked precision - and Colquhoun did not suggest that his seven-class model was used by his contemporaries - the language of social description equally lacked clarity.[124] The rival definitions of ‘gentility’ contributed to the ambiguities. That raises a second set of implications for historians. The differing interpretations show that there is not an invariate one-to-one correlation between key words and the social structures to which they allude: some concepts are at once powerful but imprecise in usage. There are many examples of such malleability in the language of social description. Thus the ‘gentleman’ was, like the Church of England, latitudinarian in practice, even if numerous exasperated devotees wished otherwise. That does not make the concept of ‘gentility’ any less ‘real’ or less culturally important. Indeed, it was the social flexibility of usage around a constant moral ideal that launched the gentleman on his long career. But this complexity highlights the need for historians to interpret past linguistic evidence with care. In these matters, a learned quotation of one contemporary dictum does not suffice to delineate a social structure - and still less does it suffice to prove or disprove a social trend.

Indeed, the ‘English gentleman’ was already by the eighteenth century almost too popular. He figured in plays, poems, novels, magazines: the successful monthly periodical was entitled the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1731-1907). There were tracts by him[125] and about his interests, from accountancy to bawdy-ballads.[126] The breadth of the term was notable: in eighteenth-century legal testimony, it was not unusual for witnesses to refer to a man who ‘looked like a gentleman’ or ‘behaved like a gentleman’, without imputing any very great social elevation to him.[127] Yet the high-ranking Prince Regent, Beau Brummell’s ‘fat friend’, was lauded not as the supreme aristocrat but as the ‘first gentleman of Europe’.

Moreover, in the nineteenth century, a ‘gentleman’ was the legal designation for a person living off private income without an occupation. At the same time, courtiers were ‘gentlemen-in-waiting’; Members of Parliament were ‘Honourable Gentlemen’; jurors were

'gentlemen of the jury'; soldiers were 'gentlemen in red'; highwaymen were 'gentlemen of the road'; pirates were 'gentlemen of fortune'; doubly genteel valets were 'gentlemen's gentlemen' (1725); commercial salesmen were 'gentlemen travellers' (1822); and the Devil himself had long been the 'old gentleman' or 'the gentleman in black'. After all that, it seems otiose to record that a stranger could also be referred to as 'a fine gentleman'. It was 'a term of complaisance', which could be used ironically. Dr. Johnson included that in 1755 as one of the five central meanings of the word.[128] A less magisterial dictionary (1721) had already expressed its alarm at the number of upstart 'gentlemen', warning sternly that 'you cannot make a silken Purse out of a Sow's Ear'.[129]

Ultimately, the vocabulary itself began to diversify under the strain of multiple meanings. Originally, the 'gentry' was the collective noun for many 'gentlemen'. But the two terms began insensibly to diverge. By the later eighteenth century, the predominant emphasis within the term 'gentry' was shifting up the social scale, although it was still used in the Victorian era to refer colloquially to any group of men.[130] One famous tome helped to consolidate the high status of the collective noun. That was the regular publication from 1846 onwards of Burke's *Dictionary of the Landed Gentry*,[131] which singled out the landowning variety and strengthened the mental associations between 'gentry' and landownership. But the meaning of 'genteel' travelled in the other direction. Initially, it was a laudatory term, as the adjectival reference for good gentlemanly behaviour. By the early nineteenth century, however, it was increasingly used to sneer at people of modest social origins, who were trying too hard to ape good manners in order not to be 'common'.[132] Their anxious parade of status was held to lack the inner ease and outward *savoir faire* of true gentility.

'Gentleman', meanwhile, did not follow either of these routes to specialisation. Instead, the concept became extended, retaining its respectability but shedding coherence and prestige as it did so.[133] Tennyson in 1850 thought the 'grand old name of gentleman' was by then 'defamed' and 'soiled'.[134] Later, when 657 prostitutes in 1890 reported that they had been first

seduced by a 'gentleman', they meant clerks, commercial travellers, shop assistants, and men dressed more smartly than ordinary workmen.[135] The diffusion of the term was thus a linguistic index to wider social changes. That was what de Tocqueville (himself a nobleman spouse of an English middle-class wife) meant when he wrote in 1856: 'Its history is the history of democracy itself'.[136] Indeed, modern societies retain a diluted but universal version of the gentlemanly address. All men, irrespective of rank, are now styled 'Mr', may be written to as 'Esq.', and colloquially hailed as 'Squire'. As a result, Mervyn Bunter's comment in 1937 that 'Gentleman ... is what I should designate as an elastic term' was by then a masterly understatement.[137]

Thirdly and finally, these rival conceptions have significance for debates about gentlemanly culture. Too often it is assumed that the 'gentleman' stood proxy for the values of a traditionalist aristocracy. He is taken to be the heir to feudal values, landed, glorying in his estates, contemptuous of business routines, proud of his hereditary rights, hostile to wealth creation, uninterested in city life, and devoted to ornamental idleness and sports.[138] Indeed, the challenge cricket matches between 11 amateur 'Gentlemen' and 11 paid 'Players' - played intermittently between 1806 and 1829 and then regularly until 1962 - are often taken to symbolise an endemic anti-commercialism among England's elite.[139] No doubt, some landowners had all those characteristics, and a greater number had some of them. However, recent research has emphasised aristocratic enterprise rather than torpor;[140] and it is far from proven that such a 'package' of views typified a majority of landowners, let alone of England's multifarious gentlemen. Certainly, these individuals did not halt the long centuries of economic and imperial expansion before 1914.

Instead, the definition of gentility remained disputed.[141] There were shifts in emphasis, from the fourteenth-century knight of chivalry to the eighteenth-century man of manners to the Victorian product of a good public school. Yet such latitudinarianism served not to embalm a caste but to blur divisions among England's elite - divisions that might otherwise have been

more rigid: between titled and untitled society; between business and land; between professionals and non-professionals; between town and country; and between the upper class and bourgeoisie. It signified not stasis but flexibility. For example, one tract in 1720 addressed itself to 'Gentlemen of All Ranks and Orders'. Yet Beckford in 1761 named the country gentlemen as part of the 'Middling People of England',[142] while the Burkes in 1846 saw the landed gentry as the lower tier of the aristocracy.[143] All these variants indicated the opacity of class definitions, which continues to puzzle historians.[144] While formal titles were highly restricted, informal honours were unregulated. That was especially characteristic of the Anglo-American tradition where the diversities of custom and practice rather than the formalities of legal privilege held sway.[145] Other nations had their own complexities; but visitors to England remarked upon the hybrid English gentlemen.[146]

Viewed from outside, the ideal had limitations. It came to be depicted as lacksadaisical, snobbish, effete. Its ethos was not necessarily anti-wealth or anti-work (other than hard physical labour) but it could be so represented, as it sought to civilise rather than to celebrate production. Ultimately, in a mass society, the gentleman could not stretch to accommodate all citizens. The ideal was partly appropriated by other 'interests', such as the professions,[147] partly ignored. Yet it was rarely attacked directly. Denunciations of inherited titles or wealth did not obliterate the merits of personal honour. Even Laski's sharp modern polemic on *The Danger of Being a Gentleman* (1939) ended with nostalgic regrets for a code of probity and service.[148]

Who was then the gentleman? In practise, he was eclectic. His numbers were legion, although not infinite. In principle, his word was his bond; while, culturally, he strove to blend and civilise the rival claims of the landowner, the businessman, the courtier, the man of letters, the army officer, the respectable leaders of the 'middling' citizenry, even the Prince Regent, and the secular saint.

ENDNOTES

[1] From John Ball's radical sermon (1381), itself an adaptation of an old religious ballad: R. Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (New York, 1973), pp. 211-12, 222; and J.E. Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making: Studies in the History of English Courtesy Literature ... from 1531-1774* (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 7, 303-4.

[2] W. Blades (ed.), *The Boke of St. Albans by Dame Juliana Berners* (facsimile edn, 1881), *sub* 'How gentlemen shall be known from churls'. In this version, gentlemen were descended from Noah's son Japheth and 'churls' from Japheth's brother Ham, whose son Canaan was cursed by Noah to be a 'servant of servants': *Holy Bible*, Genesis, X: 25. An alternative made Abel the first gentleman, Cain the first churl.

[3] J. Ferne, *The Blazon of Gentrie* (1586), pp. 97-8. Ferne, knighted in 1604, was a small landowner, common lawyer, and minor office-holder under the crown. His study became a standard authority: L.C. Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 87, n. 28.

[4] T. Dekker, *The Honest Whore, Pt. 1* (1604), p. 78.

[5] Shakespeare's father had applied in 1596 for a grant of arms but did not pursue the claim, whereas in 1599 Shakespeare himself did so successfully, his arms being subsequently displayed on his tomb at Stratford: see *ODNB*.

[6] Anon., *The Laughing Philosopher*, also cited as *Momus: Or, the Laughing Philosopher* (Dublin, 1777), pp. 80-1.

[7] J. Selden, *Table Talk* (1659), p. 21.

[8] D. Defoe, *The Compleat English Gentleman*, ed. K.D.Bülbring (1890), p. 12.

[9] F.N. Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1957), p. 953.

[10] See R. Kelso, *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (Urbana, Ill., 1929), esp. pp. 70-110.

[11] G. Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales, Prologue*, l.72, in Robinson (ed.), *Works of Chaucer*, p. 18.

[12] See C. Wright Mills, *Elites and Society* (1966), pp. 7-23, 145-8; G.L. Field and J. Higley, *Elitism* (1980), pp. 18-47, 117-30.

[13] See variously G.R. Sitwell, 'The English Gentleman', *The Ancestor*, I (1902), pp. 58-88; N.E. Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 6-29, esp. 26-9; and D.A.L. Morgan, 'The Individual Style of the English Gentleman', in M. Jones (ed.), *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (Gloucester, 1986), esp. pp. 16-19. For gentry wealth *vis à vis* the fifteenth-century baronage, see also S. Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: The Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1-3.

[14] It has been estimated that a gentleman in 1640 might have an average annual income of under £100, whereas a baronet had £1,000 - £1,500. By 1815, the respective figures were £600 and £4,000, w.ith many regional variations: G.E. Mingay, *The Gentry: The Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (1976), pp. 11-13.

[15] D.M. Palliser, *The Age of Elizabeth: England under the Later Tudors, 1547-1603* (1983), pp. 68-71. For an excellent discussion of evolving concepts, see K. Wrightson, 'Estates, Degrees, and Sorts: Changing Perceptions of Society in Tudor and Stuart England', in P.J. Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 30-52, incl. pp. 37-40, for the complexity of the 'gentleman'.

[16] For a determined reference to the major and minor nobility, see e.g. J. Brydall, *Ius Imaginis apud Anglos: The*

Law of England relating to the Nobility and Gentry (1675), p. 38. By the nineteenth century, the resurrection of the 'minor nobility' was a nostalgic campaign of a few traditionalists [see fn.111 below].

[17] J. Chamberlayne (ed.), *Angliae Notitia: Or the Present State of England* (21st edn, 1704), Pt. 3, p. 298.

[18] A 'lady' originally partnered a 'lord' but by the 1600s the term was also adopted, in lieu of the cumbersome 'gentlewoman', for the partner of the 'gentleman'. The *OED* (*sub:* lady, 4) notes that 'lady' retains a residual social superiority over the gentleman, adding 'Hence, and not directly as the result of the sentiment of gallantry, the customary order of words in "Ladies and Gentlemen".'

[19] T. Deloney, *The Gentle Craft*, Pt. 1 (1597; in 1637 edn.), p. 44 [pagination added].

[20] R.L. Storey, 'Gentlemen-Bureaucrats', in C.H. Clough (ed.), *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Later Medieval England* (Liverpool, 1982), p. 95.

[21] An alternative was 'gentlemen of the shade', quoting from Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1*, Act 1, scene 2.

[22] Historians have yet to devise a satisfactory way of measuring the scale and pattern of movement into and out of landed society. In 1941, R.H. Tawney proposed the counting of manors to gauge the respective land-holdings of the peerage and landed gentry: R.H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry, 1540-1640', *Economic History Review*, 11 (1941), pp. 1-38. But the manor as a unit of accountancy was successfully disparaged by J.P. Cooper, 'The Counting of Manors', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 8 (1956), pp. 377-89; repr. in idem, *Land, Men and Beliefs*, ed. G.E. Aylmer and J.S. Morrill (1983), pp. 17-42; and J.H. Hexter, 'Storm over the Gentry', in idem, *Reappraisals in History* (1961), pp. 124-9. For the extent of social fluidity, see also L. Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700', *Past and Present*, 33 (1966), pp. 18-19. It must not be assumed, however, that success was measured only by land-holding; nor that the social movement was only from town into countryside.

[23] The College was empowered to accept persons ('not vile born') owning at least £10 a year in land or £300 in moveable goods - both relatively low totals by the standards of seventeenth-century landowning wealth [see fn. 14 above]. Between 1560-1640, the College granted the right to bear arms to nearly 4,000 applicants (including William Shakespeare): see Mingay, *The Gentry*, p. 5; and L. Stone, 'The Inflation of Honours, 1558-1641', *Past and Present*, 14 (1958), p. 47.

[24] See G.D. Squibb, *The High Court of Chivalry: A Study of the Civil Law in England* (Oxford, 1959); idem, *The Law of Arms in England* (Wilts., 1953), pp. 1-14; and P.H. Hardacre, 'The Earl Marshal, the Heralds, and the House of Commons, 1604-41', *International Review of Social History*, 2 (1957), pp. 106-25. Interestingly, parliamentary opposition to the Court of Chivlary in 1640 was led by the young Edward Hyde, later leader of a moderate royalism: E. Hyde, *The Life of Edward Earl of Clarendon, Written by Himself* (Oxford, 1857 edn.), Vol. 1, pp. 67-8 See G.D. Squibb, *The High Court of Chivalry: A Study of the Civil Law in England* (Oxford, 1959); idem, *The Law of Arms in England* (Wilts., 1953), pp. 1-14; and P.H. Hardacre, 'The Earl Marshal, the Heralds, and the House of Commons, 1604-41', *International Review of Social History*, 2 (1957), pp. 106-25.

[25] See 'X' [A.C. Fox-Davies], *The Right to Bear Arms* (1900), and overview in Sitwell, 'English Gentleman', pp. 77-88.

[26] For a fascinating account of one of the last heraldic tours, in which the young Gregory King studied heraldry and social investigation, see P. Styles, 'The Heralds' Visitation of Warwickshire, 1682-3', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 71 (1953), pp. 96-134.

[27] M. Noble, *A History of the College of Arms, and the Lives of All the Kings, Heralds, and Pursuivants from the Reign of Richard III ... until the Present Time* (1804), pp. 315-16.

[28] Squibb, *High Court of Chivalry*, pp. 68-72, 86-9, 92-3, 105, 117. Since the Court was dormant not abolished, it was (briefly) revived in May 1954 to adjudicate between Manchester Corporation and the Manchester Palace of

Varieties Ltd: ibid., pp. 123-7.

[29] T. Smith, *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), ed. M. Dewar (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 71-2. For the complicated authorship, see M. Dewar, 'A Question of Plagiarism: The "Harrison Chapters" in Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum*', *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979), pp. 921-9.

[30] Mingay, *The Gentry*, pp. 17, 53. The Tudors were sparing with titles, and Elizabeth I was annoyed when the Earl of Essex knighted 81 men in Ireland in 1599. James I was more prodigal, creating the new hereditary title of baronet in 1611; but the later Stuarts returned to the policy of circumspection: ibid., pp. 4-5; Stone, 'Inflation of Honours', pp. 49, 50-1, 52-4, 59-62.

[31] As critics often note, historians find it difficult to write about the aristocracy and the gentry without substantial overlap - because the cadet branches of titled families were, under English law, gentle and not noble - and because titled noblemen were also courtesy 'gentlemen'. See Mingay, *The Gentry*, pp. 1-17; J.V. Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England, 1660-1914* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 16-42; and D. Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 8-15.

[32] Often attributed to James I, the saying became a commonplace. Thus Edmund Burke reported it with the introduction 'Somebody has said ... ': R.B. McDowell (ed.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, Vol. 8: Sept. 1794 - April 1796* (Cambridge and Chicago, 1969), p. 130: Burke to William Smith, 29 January 1795. John Selden's version of this was: 'The King cannot make a Gentleman of Blood ... nor God Almighty, but he can make a Gentleman by Creation': Selden, *Table Talk*, p. 21.

[33] That was pointed out by Smith, *De Republica*, p. 72.

[34] Storey, 'Gentlemen-Bureaucrats', pp. 90-7.

[35] Ferne, *Blazon of Gentrie*, pp. 33-60, 72-3.

[36] *OED* defines a common meaning of 'charge' (no. 12) as task, duty, responsibility, trust, which is probably the sense intended here. But possibly it invokes a rarer usage of 'charge' (no. 6), meaning a heraldic device upon an escutcheon; but the context suggests a reference to duty rather than to heraldry.

[37] Ferne, *Blazon of Gentrie*, pp. 68-9.

[38] See variously Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox*, pp. 83-7; Kelso, *Doctrine of the English Gentleman*, pp. 60-7; J.P. Cooper, 'Ideas of Gentility in Early Modern-England', in idem, *Land, Men and Beliefs*, pp. 46-77; and L. Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge, 1995).

[39] Stevenson, *Praise and Paradox*, pp. 183-5, 202-4, 209, 211: citing popular works by Rowley, Dekker, and Deloney. However, the cult quickly ran thin, being parodied e.g. by Beaumont and Fletcher's play, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1611): ibid., pp. 209-10.

[40] *ODNB*, *sub:* Hicks, Baptist (1551-1629), later 1st Viscount Campden and ancestor of the Earls of Gainsborough. His promotion owed much to the eminence of his brother, Sir Michael Hicks, chief secretary to Lord Burghley.

[41] F. Burney, *Camilla: Or, a Picture of Youth* (1796), ed. E.A. and L.D. Bloom (Oxford, 1983), p. 431.

[42] [E. Bolton], *The Cities Advocate, in this Case or Question of Honor and Armes: Whether Apprenticeship Extinguisheth Gentry? Containing a Clear Refutation of the Pernicious Common Errour affirming it, swallowed by Erasmus of Rotterdam, Sir Thomas Smith in his Common-Weale, Sir John Ferne in his Blazon, Ralph Broke, York Herald, and Others* (1629), pp. 13-14.

[43] Re-entitled [E. Bolton], *The Cities Great Concern* (1674).

[44] Squibb, *High Court of Chivalry*, pp. 176-7.

[45] This crucial point is also stressed by Morgan, 'Individual Style of the English Gentleman', pp. 21-6. With reference to Tudor and Stuart England, there is scope for fresh research to discover who actually styled themselves 'gentlemen' - without assuming that all who did so were automatically landowners. Studies have tended hitherto to focus upon rural society, but there are some references to expansion in the numbers of 'urban gentry'. For changes in south Wales, contrast: H. Lloyd, *The Gentry of South-West Wales, 1540-1640* (Cardiff, 1968), pp. 15-21, 205-12; and P. Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 20-42.

[46] J.H. Grant, 'The Gentry of London in the Reign of Charles I', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 8 (1962), pp. 197-202: returns for City of London and adjacent parishes. Of these 1,172 gentlemen, 309 were sons of Londoners, 863 sons of non-Londoners; and of that latter group, 785 (91%) were sons of country gentlemen: ibid., p. 199.

[47] 'Democritus Junior' [R. Burton], *The Anatomie of Melancholy* (1621; Oxford, 1652), Pt. 1, sect. 2, memb. 2, subsect. 2.

[48] Styles, 'Heralds' Visitation of Warwickshire', p. 117.

[49] Squibb, *High Court of Chivalry*, pp. 92-3.

[50] See N.B. Harte, 'State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England', in D.C. Coleman and A.H. John (eds.), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England* (1976), pp. 148-51; and P.B. Munsche, *Gentlemen and Poachers: The English Game Laws, 1671-1831* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 12-13.

[51] Brydall, *Ius Imaginis*, pp. 57-8. For other Restoration surveys, see e.g. R. Allestree, *The Gentleman's Calling* (1660); E. Waterhouse, *The Gentleman's Monitor: Or, a Sober Inspection into the ... Rise and Decay of Families* (1665); and Anon. [W.R. Ramesey], *The Gentleman's Companion: Or, a Character of True Nobility and Gentility ... by a Person of Quality* (1672).

[52] E. Chamberlayne (ed.), *Angliae Notitia: Or, the Present State of England* (1669; in 5th edn., 1671), Pt. 1, pp. 311, 313.

[53] Ibid. (20th edn., 1702), p. 301: the assertion was then repeated annually. In 1704, Chamberlayne's son, John, inherited and from 1708 published the guide as *Magnae Britanniae Notitia: Or, the Present State of Great-Britain* (1708-55).

[54] G. Miège, *The New State of England* (1691), Pt. 2, pp. 226, 230.

[55] M. Misson, *Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England*, transl. J. Ozell (1719), p. 200.

[56] 'Country' and 'landed gentleman' were so termed from at least 1647: see *OED*, *sub* 'landed'. For 'city gentry' and 'country gentry', see Waterhouse, *Gentleman's Monitor*, p. 71; and G. Jacob, *The Country Gentleman's Vade Mecum* (1717).

[57] A. Everitt, 'Social Mobility in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 33 (1966), p. 70.

[58] See *Statutes at Large*, 9 Anne cap. 5 (1710/11). Legislation along these lines was first mooted in 1696 but was several times defeated in the Lords: see E. and A.G. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons: Parliamentary Representation before 1832* (Cambridge, 1903), Vol. I, pp. 166-70.

[59] For fictitious qualifications available to men of wealth both before and after an amending Act of 1760, see ibid., Vol. I, pp. 170-8. Very few candidates were excluded under this legislation, which was replaced by a general property qualification in 1838

[60] G.P. Judd, *Members of Parliament, 1734-1832* (New Haven, 1955; repr. 1974), pp. 54-73.

[61] W. Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford, 1765-9), Vol. 1, p. 7: the independent gentlemen for him were 'the most useful as well as considerable body of men in the nation'.

[62] 'Trade/commerce' was gradually enlarged into 'trading/commercial empire'. See e.g. Miège, *New State of England*, Pt. 2, p. 229, for England as 'one of the most trading Countries in Europe' (1691); R.W. Chapman (ed.), *Boswell: Life of Johnson* (Oxford, 1976), p. 347, for Boswell on 'this great commercial country' (1765); and J. Hanway, *The Defects of Police the Cause of Immorality* (1775), p. 247, for the 'British commercial empire'.

[63] See Mason, *Gentlefolk in the Making*; G.C. Brauer, *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England, 1660-1775* (New York, 1959); and, from a large contemporary literature, two popular exemplars: J. Gailhard, *The Compleat Gentleman: Or, Directions for the Education of Youth* (1678); and W. Darrell, *A Gentleman Instructed in the Conduct of a Virtuous and Happy Life* (1704).

[64] D. Defoe, *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722), ed. D. Blewett (1989), p. 104.

[65] In eighteenth-century records - such as poll books, directories, legal transcripts and parish registers - a suffix or prefix to the personal name was taken to indicate some degree of social status in contrast to the masses, who were still termed only by first name and surname. For the Norwich attorneys, see P.J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain, 1700-1850* (1995), p. 80.

[66] Directories Database: for further information, contact the author.

[67] Westminster Historical Database, 1784-1820: for further information, see C. Harvey, E.M. Green and P.J. Corfield, *The Westminster Historical Database: Voters, Social Structure and Electoral Behaviour, with CD-ROM* (Bristol, 1998). I am grateful to Edmund Green for access to the Westminster Database and for drawing the voting saga of Samuel Collins to my attention.

[68] For heraldic acceptance of the gentility of the professions and of other learned men, including poets and historiographers, see R. Holme, *The Academy of Armory* (Chester, 1688), Bk. 3, p. 67.

[69] R. Robson, *The Attorney in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 20.

[70] Again, there is scope for much more work on the relationship between urban and landed society in eighteenth-century England, particularly from the urban end, which has been relatively under-researched. But see R.G. Wilson, *Gentlemen Merchants: The Merchant Community in Leeds, 1700-1830* (Manchester, 1971); N. Rogers, 'Money, Land and Lineage: The Big Bourgeoisie of Hanoverian London', *Social History*, 4 (1979), pp. 437-54; debate between D.T. Andrew and N. Rogers, *Social History*, 6 (1981), pp. 359-69; and H. Horvitz, '"The Mess of the Middle Class" Revisited: The Case of the "Big Bourgeoisie" of Augustan London', *Continuity and Change*, 2 (1987), pp. 263-96.

[71] J. Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757 edn.), pp. 44-5, 67. This work ran to many editions and prompted heated debate. See also M. Akenside's 'Ode XI: To the Country Gentlemen of England' (1758) in idem, *The Poems of Mark Akenside, MD* (1772), p. 326: commencing 'Whither is Europe's ancient spirit fled?'

[72] Bertrand Russell (1971) as quoted by W.L. Arnstein, 'The Survival of the Victorian Aristocracy', in F.C. Jaher (ed.), *The Rich, the Well-Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History* (Urbana, Illinois, 1973), p. 236.

[73] This argument has been applied to modern England, as in M.J. Wiener's much-disputed *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge, 1981) and evoked, in a somewhat different guise, by P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism:*

Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914 (Cambridge, 1993), esp. pp. 22-37; and idem, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-90* (Cambridge, 1993). For an overview, see also M.J. Daunton, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Industry, 1820-1914', *Past and Present*, 122 (1989), pp. 119-58.

[74] Ferne, *Blazon of Gentrie*, p. 23.

[75] [Ramesey], *Gentleman's Companion*, p. 4. This work also pioneered a call for women's equal rights to education: ibid., pp. 9-13.

[76] R. Steele in 'I. Bickerstaff' (ed.), *Tatler*, 207, 5 August 1710. For Sealand's speech praising merchants as an honourable and useful 'Species of Gentry', see also R. Steele, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in S.S. Kenny (ed.), *The Plays of Richard Steele* (Oxford, 1971), p. 359.

[77] Anon., *Laughing Philosopher*, p. 79.

[78] 'Adam Fitz-Adam' in the *World*, no. 114, 6 March 1755.

[79] R. Steele in the *Guardian*, no. 137, 18 August 1713.

[80] J. Gay, 'Fable VIII: The Man, the Cat, the Dog, and the Fly' (1738), in V.A. Dearing (ed.), *John Gay: Poetry and Prose* (Oxford, 1974), Vol. 2, pp. 409-10: finally, the man swats the fly as a 'spunger on the public'.

[81] A. Pope, *Essay on Man* (1733/4), Epistle IV, II, lines 203-4, 215-16, in J. Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope* (1975 edn.), p. 542. A reference to this quotation is found in A. Trollope's *Doctor Thorne* (1858; in Oxford, 1980 edn.), p. 395.

[82] E. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. C.C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth, 1979 edn.), p. 182.

[83] 'Crito' of Lincoln's Inn, in H. Stonecastle (ed.), *The Universal Spectator: Or, Weekly Journal* (1735-6), 4 Jan. 1735; an abbreviated version was promptly reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 5 (Jan. 1735), p. 9.

[84] Anon., *An Epistle to a Young Nobleman from his Praeceptor* (1736), p. 4.

[85] For vivid documentation of this argument, see P. Langford, *Public Life and Propertied Englishmen, 1689-1796* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 510-81, esp. pp. 569-81. Langford shows that a sober 'new-model' aristocracy of service was cultivated by the later eighteenth century, but understates the extent of the earlier campaigns from the efforts of Addison and Steele onwards. See e.g. G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992), pp. 37-104.

[86] The stress upon learning, including a classical education from a 'good' school, was notable by the later nineteenth century; but the importance of schooling was argued earlier. See e.g. a children's tract by J. Carey, *Learning Better than House and Land, as Exemplified in the History of Harry Johnson and Dick Hobson* (1808; 1813): Harry Johnson, a landowner's son, refused to study and after many vicissitudes became a barber in the United States ('What a fall for poor Harry': p. 125). Dick, the son of a cow-herd on the Johnson estate, was an apt scholar and eventually became a rich merchant and U.S. Congressman. Dick was then shaved by Harry but did not recognise him in his poverty. The moral was clear (p. 140): 'Whene'er a dislike to your learning you harbour,/ Remember the fate of the gentleman barber'.

[87] Richard Steele in the *Guardian*, no. 34, 20 April 1713.

[88] See variously H.J. Shroff, *The Eighteenth-Century Novel: The Idea of the Gentleman* (New Delhi, 1978); M. Shinagel, *Daniel Defoe and Middle-Class Gentility* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); R. Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (1981); S. Letwin, The Gentleman in Trollope: Individuality and Moral Conduct (1982), esp. pp. 3-21; and N. McKendrick, '"Gentlemen and Players" Revisited: The Gentlemanly Ideal,

the Business Ideal and the Professional Ideal in English Literary Culture', in N. McKendrick and B. Outhwaite (eds.), *Business Life and Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1986), esp. pp. 98-118.

[89] Earl De Courcy and his family were pilloried e.g. in A. Trollope, *Doctor Thorne* (1858) and *The Small House at Allington* (1864).

[90] J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice: A Novel* (1813), Vol. 2, p. 132.

[91] R.B. Sheridan, *The Rivals* (1775), ed. E. Duthie (1979), p. 112.

[92] For the fluctuating decline in duelling, see V.G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 185-222; and F. Billacois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France,* ed. T. Selous (New Haven, Conn., 1990). For gentry opinion turning against duelling in later eighteenth-century Wales, see also Jenkins, *Making of a Ruling Class*, pp. 212-13.

[93] A. Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (1979), pp. 55, 58, 88; C.W. and P. Cunnington, *Handbook of English Costume in the Eighteenth Century* (1957), pp. 100-102, 263.

[94] Nash was the son of a minor Welsh gentleman, who was a partner in a Swansea glass-manufactory: see *DNB, sub* 'Nash'. Brummell was the son of a middle-ranking civil servant and protegé of Lord North, although Brummell implied that he had come from 'nowhere': W. Jesse, *The Life of George Brummell, Esq., Commonly Called Beau Brummell* (1844), Vol. 1, pp. 17-30. For Brummell's umbrella, see ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 80-1.

[95] Anecdote from one Colonel Dillon, as reported in ibid., Vol. 1, p. 73.

[96] See H. Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling* (1749); Sheridan, *The Rivals*; and G. Colman, *The Jealous Wife* (1761) in E.R. Wood (ed.), *Plays by David Garrick and George Colman the Elder* (Cambridge, 1982), e.g. pp. 65-9.

[97] S. Pegge, *Anonymiana: Or, Ten Centuries of Observations on Various Authors and Subjects* (1809), p. 446.

[98] Anon., *The Gentleman: A Satire* (1818), p. 5. The comparison with cooks was made earlier in S. Jenyns' satire of *The Modern Fine Gentleman* (1746), p. 3: where this hero was quizzed as 'Half Atheist, Papist, Gamester, Bubble, Rook,/ Half Fiddler, Coachman, Dancer, Groom, and Cook'.

[99] *Spectator*, no. 2, 2 March 1710/11.

[100] D. Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters* (1726/7), Vol. 1, pp. 368-87, esp. p. 380. He also quoted approvingly a quip, attributed to Charles II, 'That the Tradesmen were the only Gentry in England': ibid., Vol. 1, p. 369. In his final years, Defoe also worked on *The Compleat English Gentleman*, published posthumously in 1890 [see fn. 8 above] but he did not manage to reconcile happily the two sections on the 'Gentleman BORN' and the 'Gentleman BRED'.

[101] G. Lillo, *The London Merchant: Or, the History of George Barnwell* (1731); this ran into many editions and was also translated into French (1751), German (1772) and Dutch (1775). For its reception in London, see also *DNB, sub* Lillo.

[102] J.B. Bury (ed.), *Autobiography of Edward Gibbon: As Originally Edited by Lord Sheffield* (Oxford, 1959 reprint), p. 6.

[103] Mr. Dubster is first depicted at an Assembly, standing awkwardly 'with the air of a poker': Burney, *Camilla*, p. 69.

[104] Anon., *The Nabob: Or, Asiatic Plunderers - A Satyrical Poem* (1773), p. 41. But a rival poem defended the East India nabobs from accusations of corruption: see Anon., *The Saddle put on the Right Horse: Or, An Enquiry into the Reason why Certain Persons have been Denominated Nabobs - with an Arrangement of those Gentlemen into their Proper Classes of Real, Spurious,*

Reputed, or Mushroom Nabobs (1783).

[105] Anon., *The Gentleman*, p. 15. For the growing intensity of attacks upon businessmen in the later eighteenth century, see J. McVeagh, *Tradefull Merchants: The Portrayal of the Capitalist in Literature* (1981), pp. 83-100; and J.R. Raven, 'English Popular Literature and the Image of Business, 1760-90' (unpub. University of Cambridge PhD, 1985).

[106] P.D. Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield, *Letters ... to his Son* (Dublin, 1774), Vol. 1, p. 268 and passim. This work was much reprinted and satirised, e.g. in the amusing Anon., *Chesterfield Travestie: Or, School for Modern Manners* (1808).

[107] C. Shillito, *The Man of Enterprise: A Farce* (Colchester, 1789), p.11. This was not a new complaint: e.g. it was Steele's fear that women were led astray by dress and imposing manners that led to his depiction of the 'Fine Gentleman' in 1713 [see n. 87 above]; and the theme recurs in plays and novels of the era.

[108] Letter from 'unknown correspondent' to the *Connoisseur: by Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-general* (1755), Vol. 1, pp. 419-20.

[109] Anon., *Laughing Philosopher*, pp. 81-2.

[110] V. Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary* (1778-9), Vol. 2, p. 231.

[111] Sir James Lawrence, *On the Nobility of the British Gentry: Or the Political Ranks and Dignities of the British Empire Compared with those on the Continent* (1824), pp. 45, 50. Lawrence, who claimed to be a Knight of Malta, styled himself 'Chevalier' on the continent, where he travelled frequently, but the warrant for both that and his knighthood seems uncertain: see *ODNB*. Fittingly enough, he provides the only example so far found of a historic user of the term 'pseudo-gentleman': ibid., p. 24.

[112] Mingay, *The Gentry*, p. 4.

[113] For tabulation, see C. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England, 1500-1700 - Vol. 1: People, Land andTowns* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 143; and discussion pp. 157-64.

[114] See G. Holmes, 'Gregory King and the Social Structure of Pre-Industrial England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5 ser., 27 (1977), pp. 66-7. For King's notebook variations, with estimates ranging from 12-20,000 gentlemen, see J.P. Cooper, 'Social Distribution of Land and Men', in idem, *Land, Men and Beliefs*, pp. 38-9. Here King may well have been experimenting with differing permutations of social categories.

[115] H. Horwitz (ed.), *The Parliamentary Diary of Narcissus Luttrell, 1691-3* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 144, 160.

[116] Holmes, 'Gregory King', p. 57.

[117] He was Robert Harman, an Irish dancing-master, who had 'visited' Suffolk and 14 other counties: *London Journal*, 22 April 1727.

[118] Tabulated in J. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 32 - but these figures exclude baronetcies that were held by titled noblemen, as they were classified with the peerage: p. 33, n. 101.

[119] J.V. Beckett, 'The Pattern of Landownership in England and Wales, 1660-1880', *Economic History Review*, 2 ser., 37 (1984), pp. 13-14. For a critique of recent studies that have played down movement into landed society, see D. and E. Spring, 'Social Mobility and the English Landed Elite', *Canadian Journal of History*, 21 (1986), pp. 333-51. In addition, mobility from the land has been little studied; but see J. Thirsk, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century', *History*, 54 (1969), pp. 358-77.

[120] The landed gentry's share rose from an estimated 45-50% in 1690 to 50% in 1690 (England and Wales) and to c.55% in 1873 (England only): tabulated in Beckett, 'Pattern of

Landownership', p. 5. Pioneering estimates were presented by F.M.L. Thompson, 'The Social Distribution of Land and Property in England since the Sixteenth Century', *Economic History Review*, 2 ser., 19 (1966), pp. 505-17; and augmented by Cooper, 'Social Distribution of Land and Men', in idem, *Land, Men and Beliefs*, pp. 17-42. Reviewing subsequent research, Beckett concludes that, while all figures are subject to a margin of error, the overall picture has stood the test of time well. That meant that between 1690 and 1873, the great landowners and the landed gentry made territorial gains collectively at the expense of the small owners: Beckett, 'Landownership', p. 5.

[121] P. Colquhoun, *A Treatise of the Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire in Every Quarter of the World* (1814), pp. 106-7.

[122] Classes 2 and 3 together constituted under 2% of Colquhoun's total of 3,501,781 adult male householders in Great Britain and Ireland: see ibid.

[123] E.g. in Preston, three members of the Horrocks manufacturing dynasty were listed as 'gent.' or 'Esq.', while their cotton-spinning business was simultaneously entered under 'tradesmen': Mannex and Co., *History, Topography and Directory of ... Preston* (Beverley, 1851), pp. 64, 81. Or, in Maidstone, the Scudamore brothers were listed twice, both as 'gentry' and as 'attorneys': J. Phippen (ed.), *New and Enlarged Directory for Maidstone ...* (Maidstone, 1850), pp. 38, 40. I am grateful to David Reader for reference to this source.

[124] See P.J. Corfield, 'Class by Name and Number in Eighteenth-Century Britain' and G. Crossick, 'From Gentlemen to the Residuum: Languages of Social Description in Victorian Britain', in Corfield (ed.), *Language, History and Class*, pp. 101-30, 150-78.

[125] Including Anon., *The Historian's Vade Mecum: ... by a Gentleman of the Inner Temple* (1741). In total, the anonymous gentleman's output greatly outnumbered works by rivals such as 'A Nobleman', 'A Cit' or 'Citizen', 'A Plebeian', or even 'A Lady', although she considerably increased her literary tally in the nineteenth century.

[126] Writings about the gentleman included numerous guides to rank and precedence, with minute details about fine gradations of status: see e.g. Anon., *Of the Several Degrees of Gentry and their Precedency* (1719). Other works were variegated, including R. North, *The Gentleman's Accomptant* (1714); [T. Richards], *The Gentleman's Auditor* (1707); W. Bradford et al, *The Gentleman and Traders Guide* (Nottingham, c.1770); Anon., *Gentleman Angler* (1726); [A.S., Gent.], *The Gentleman's Complete Jockey* (1697); Anon., *The Gentleman Farrier* (1732); R. North, *The Gentleman Farmer* (1726); [J.H.], *The Compleat Gentleman Soldier* (1702); Anon., *The Gentleman and Lady's Key to Polite Literature* (1761?); E. Synge, *A Gentleman's Religion* (1693); and Anon., *The Gentleman's Bottle-Companion: A Collection of Eighteenth-century Bawdy Ballads* (1768; repr. Edinburgh, 1979). The genre was most popular in the later seventeenth/early eighteenth centuries but continued well into the nineteenth: e.g. Anon., *The Gentleman's Art of Dressing with Economy* (1876).

[127] E.g. one Thomas Bew, described as 'very much of a gentleman' and 'always behaved like a gentleman', was the keeper of 'a tavern, like all other taverns, where a man might have a woman when he had an occasion': *Proceedings on the King's Commissions of the Peace ... in the Old-Bailey* (1753), no. 4, pp. 131-2: 2-7 May 1753. I am grateful to Tony Henderson for this reference.

[128] S. Johnson (ed.), *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), Vol. 1, *sub* 'Gentleman'. The other four meanings were (1) a man of birth, though not noble; (2) a man raised above the vulgar by character or post; (3) the servant that waits about the person of the man of rank; and (4) a term used of any man, however high (i.e. including kings and noblemen).

[129] N. Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721; and many later edns.), *sub* 'Gentleman'.

[130] See *OED* sub 'gentry 3'.
[131] J. and J.B. Burke (eds.), *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland* (1846-9), 3 Vols. By then, the cumbersome title of the first Burke survey had been discarded: compare J. Burke (ed.), *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland, Enjoying Territorial Possessions or High Official Rank but Uninvested with Heritable Honours* (1833-8), 4 Vols, listing 1,146 families (many with cadet and collateral branches).
[132] See *OED sub* 'genteel' for the overlap between the older commendatory meaning and the new sarcastic usage. The compound 'shabby-genteel', however, retained the older sense of the term.
[133] K.B. Phillipps, *Language and Class in Victorian England* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 5-14; also Crossick, 'From Gentlemen to the Residuum', pp. 163-5.
[134] A. Tennyson, 'In Memoriam, A.H.H. – CXI' (1850), in C. Ricks (ed.), *The Poems of Tennyson* (1969), p. 964.
[135] G.P. Merrick, *Work among the Fallen: As Seen in the Prison Cell* (1890), p. 40: but the upper classes were distinguished as 'real gentlemen'.
[136] A. de Tocqueville, *L'ancien régime et la révolution* (Paris, 1856), in Eng. transl. by S. Gilbert (New York, 1955), p. 83.
[137] D.L. Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937), p. 307.
[138] See the pen-portrait given in Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*, p. 24, which in turn quotes from J. Powis, *Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 87-9.
[139] By 1900, the Players had won 69 games, the Gentlemen 53 (with 24 draws and 1 tie), the predominance of the Players being dented only when W.G. Grace joined the Gentlemen: scores recorded in F.S. Ashley-Cooper, *Gentlemen v. Players* (1900). For the analogy applied to modern Britain's industrial culture, see D.C. Coleman, 'Gentlemen and Players', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 26 (1973), pp. 92-116; and refs. in fn. 73 above. Further evidence is needed, however, to prove whether and, if so, when the gentlemanly code inhibited enterprise and among which social groups; especially as Coleman notes that gentlemanly financiers, for example, were often very successful: ibid., pp. 110-11. Meanwhile, W. Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875-1914* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 17, 183-203, notes the extent of commercialism in sport, often disguised by 'shamateurism'.
[140] Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, pp. 126-47; Beckett, *Aristocracy in England*, pp. 133-321. Cain and Hopkins agree that the aristocracy combined commercialism with traditionalism; but they saw that formidable mix as essentially safeguarding rather than as adapting the landed elite of rentiers: Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*, pp. 23-4.
[141] The nineteenth-century discussions by (*inter alia*) Trollope, Ruskin, Craik, Gaskell, Arnold, Cardinal Newman, Smiles, Thackeray, and the 'silver fork' novelists are much better known than those of the previous century, but both debates covered remarkably similar ground: see M.W. Rosa, *The Silver Fork School: Novels of Fashion preceding Vanity Fair* (New York, 1936); M. Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981); and P. Mason, *The English Gentleman: The Rise and Fall of an Ideal* (New York, 1982), pp. 106-87.
[142] See variously Anon., *Most Honourable, Learned and Worthy Gentlemen, of All Ranks and Orders* (?1720) - a semi-ironic address in praise of sloth; plus BL Add. Mss. 38,334, Liverpool Papers Vol. CXLIV, f. 29 r and v: transcript of William Beckford's speech in Parliament (November 1761), disparaging both the aristocracy and the mob ('the scum and the dregs') but

lauding the 'Middling People of England - the Manufacturer, the Yeoman, the Merchant, the Country Gentleman, they who bear all the heat of the day and who pay all Taxes to supply all the Expenses of Court and Government'.

[143] J. and J.B. Burke (eds.), *Landed Gentry*, preface (unpaginated).

[144] Thus the 'gentry' may be viewed as the middle class in relation to an upper class of great landowners or as an upper class in relation to a middle class of businessmen. Whether classes in England were defined by levels of wealth or by sources of income remains debated; and ambiguities in the status of landed and other 'gentleman' add to the problems. One much-quoted study by W. Rubinstein, 'The Victorian Middle Classes: Wealth, Occupation and Geography', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. 30 (1977), pp. 602-23, displays such respect for upper-class landed purity that it classifies even millionaire plutocrats, merchants, bankers, etc., as middle class.

[145] In republican America, without formal titles, the gentleman was a cultural ideal rather than a separate status: E.H. Cady, *The Gentleman in America: A Literary Study in American Culture* (Syracuse, 1949), esp. pp. 24-7. Thus by the early nineteenth century the social graces had spread well beyond the elite: see R.L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York, 1992), pp. xvii-xviii, 404-5, and passim.

[146] The English gentleman was not, for example, a direct counterpart of the French 'gentilhomme', as the latter was by no means so pervasive either as an ideal or as an actual title. For foreign visitors' comments on the originality of the English gentleman, see e.g. de Tocqueville [fn. 135 above] or T. Fontane, *Ein Sommer in London* (Dessau, 1854), p. 264: 'Du brauchst kein Gentleman zu sein, du musst nur die Mittel haben, als solcher zu erscheinen und du bist es'. [You need not be a gentleman, you must only have the means to appear one, and you are one.]

[147] McKendrick, ' Gentleman and Players" Revisited', pp. 119-36.

[148] See H. Laski, 'The Danger of Being a Gentleman: Reflections on the Ruling Class in England', in idem, *The Danger of Being a Gentleman and Other Essays* (1939), pp. 13-31.