

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

THE PEAK COUNTRY, 1520–1770

This book provides a new approach to the history of social conflict, popular politics and plebeian culture in the early modern period. Based upon a close study of the Peak Country of Derbyshire between *c.* 1520 and 1770, it has implications for understandings of class identity, popular culture, riot, custom and social relations.

A detailed reconstruction of economic and social change within the region is followed by an in-depth examination of the changing cultural meanings of custom, gender, locality, skill, literacy, orality and magic. The local history of social conflict sheds new light on the nature of political engagement and the origins of early capitalism. Important insights are provided into early modern social and gender identities, civil war allegiances, the appeal of radical ideas and the making of the English working class. Most of all, the book challenges the claim that early modern England was a hierarchical, ‘pre-class’ society.

ANDY WOOD is Lecturer in History, University of East Anglia

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History

Series editors

ANTHONY FLETCHER

Professor of History, University of Essex

JOHN GUY

Professor of Modern History, University of St Andrews

JOHN MORRILL

*Professor of British and Irish History, University of Cambridge,
and Vice Master of Selwyn College*

This is a series of monographs and studies covering many aspects of the history of the British Isles between the late fifteenth century and early eighteenth century. It includes the work of established scholars and pioneering work by a new generation of scholars. It includes both reviews and revisions of major topics and books which open up new historical terrain or which reveal startling new perspectives on familiar subjects. All the volumes set detailed research into broader perspectives and the books are intended for the use of students as well as of their teachers.

For a list of titles in the series, see end of book.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

The Peak Country, 1520–1770

ANDY WOOD



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521561143

© Andy Wood 1999

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999

This digitally printed version 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Wood, Andy.

The politics of social conflict: the Peak Country, 1520–1770 / Andy Wood.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in early modern British history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 56114 0 (hb)

1. Derbyshire (England) – Social conditions.

2. Social conflict – England – Derbyshire – History.

I. Title. II. Series.

HN398.D4W66 1999

306'.09425'1–dc21 98–48331 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-56114-3 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-03772-3 paperback

CONTENTS

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>List of tables</i>	x
<i>List of maps</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xvi
Introduction ‘Terms we did not understand’: landscape, place and perceptions	1
1 Social relations and popular culture in early modern England	10
Class and social history	10
Rethinking class in early modern England	18
Local cultures and popular cultures	26
 Part I The structures of inequality	
2 Economy and society in the Peak Country, c. 1520–1570	41
Technology and industry	41
Land, wealth and community	45
Landscape and population	53
3 Industrialization and social change, c. 1570–1660	57
Population change and technological innovation	57
Enclosure and common right	66
The mining industry and its workforce	72
4 The Peak Country as an industrial region, c. 1660–1770	89
The economics of regional identity	89
The priorities of capital	98
Poverty and labour	102

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contents

5 Social conflict and early capitalism	113
The Peak Country and the Industrial Revolution	113
Custom and economic change	116

Part II The conditions of community

6 'The memory of the people': custom, law and popular culture	127
Custom, law and popular culture in early modern England	127
'Time out of memorie of man': mining custom in the early sixteenth century	137
'A kind of levelling custom': the opponents of free mining	143
The uses of literacy: speech, writing and custom	150
7 The politics of custom	163
Law, order and the sense of the past	163
Gender, place and the construction of social identity	169
8 Community, identity and culture	179
Gender, work and identity	179
Community and local culture	188
The supernatural and the underworld	195

Part III The politics of social conflict

9 'Pyllage uppon the poore mynorz': sources of social conflict, 1500-1600	203
Late medieval quiescence	203
The 'troublesome people' of the Tudor High Peak	209
10 'All is hurly burly here': local histories of social conflict, 1600-1640	218
The confrontation over free mining in the Wapentake of Wirksworth	219
The politics of a parish and the King's Attorney-General	223
The 'illegal combinations' of the High Peak	231
Riot, litigation and free mining rights in the High Peak	238
11 The Peak in context: riot and popular politics in early Stuart England	249
Redefining popular politics	249

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770
Andy Wood
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

<i>Contents</i>	ix
Gender and the social basis of plebeian politics	254
Traditions of resistance	261
12 ‘Prerogative hath many proctors’: the English Revolution and the plebeian politics of the Peak, 1640–1660	267
War and allegiance	267
The Levellers, the miners and the eighth Earl of Rutland	277
The transformation and defeat of the miners’ political project	286
13 The experience of defeat? The defence of custom, 1660–1770	295
Changing interests, changing alliances	296
Resistance, protest and survival	303
14 The making of the English working class in the Derbyshire Peak Country	316
<i>Bibliography</i>	326
<i>Index</i>	346

FIGURES

3.1	Total baptisms per decade, four parishes, 1560–1769	<i>page</i> 60
3.2	Surplus/deficit of baptisms over burials, four parishes, 1560–1769	60
3.3	Price of lead ore per load, 1540–1770	75

TABLES

2.1	Comparison of the 1524–5 Lay Subsidy with lists of miners of the 1520s	<i>page</i> 47
2.2	Comparison of the 1543 Lay Subsidy with the 1541–2 list of miners	48
3.1	Occupational ascriptions in Youlgreave burial register, 1558–1604	61
3.2	Landholding on Cavendish estates, 1610–17	70
3.3	1653 production totals for five townships, expressed in loads and dishes	87
4.1	Seasonality of marriage in three parishes, 1560–1770 (%)	95
4.2	Occupations of grooms in three parishes, 1754–70	96
6.1	Number and gender of deponents to Consistory, Exchequer and Duchy of Lancaster courts, 1517–1754	132
6.2	Literacy of Peak Country deponents at the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1593–1638	154
6.3	Literacy in eight mining townships, 1641–2	154
6.4	Literacy in three mining parishes, 1754–70	156
8.1	Structure of 1,463 Peak mining households in 1641	180

MAPS

1	The topography of the Peak Country	<i>page</i> 29
2	The parishes of the Peak lead field	31
3	The administrative divisions of Derbyshire	32
4	The township boundaries of the Peak Country lead field	34
5	The manorial structure of the Peak lead field, <i>c.</i> 1640	35
6	The growth of the Peak lead field, <i>c.</i> 1540–1600	42
7	The population of the Peak Country in 1563: the distribution of acres per household	54
8	The population of the Peak Country in 1638: the distribution of acres per able-bodied man	64
9	The population of the Peak Country in 1664: the distribution of acres per household	65
10	Free mining as an employer: free miners as a percentage of the adult male population, 1641	78
11	Wage dependency and marginality: percentage of the mining workforce described as ‘cavers and hirelings’ in 1641	79
12	Industry and society: total percentage of the population dependent upon mining, 1638–1641	80
13	Topographies of poverty: percentage of households exempted from the Hearth Tax, 1664	91
14	The assertion and defence of custom: the extent of free mining rights, <i>c.</i> 1580–1762	208

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE

In the summer of 1988, I was present in Chesterfield, in the north-east of Derbyshire, to hear a speech given by the Member of Parliament for that town, Tony Benn. In that speech, Tony Benn referred to the presence of Levellers in Derbyshire. This intrigued me greatly. The Levellers were one of the most radical of the political movements of the late 1640s, and have been claimed by British socialists as their ideological ancestors. But historians of the Levellers have shown that the movement's base of civilian support was concentrated into the south-east of England, and into London in particular. What were Levellers doing in Derbyshire in the late 1640s?

At the time at which I first heard mention of the Levellers' connection with Derbyshire, I had it in mind to start a doctoral thesis on the organization of that movement outside London. I was, and remain, convinced that a closer understanding of grassroots Leveller politics and organization have important implications for the understanding of plebeian politics and culture in early modern England. My intention was to produce an argument about Leveller organization based upon a series of local case-studies. The Leveller presence in Derbyshire seemed as good a place to start as any, partly because it seemed so odd, and partly because of a long-standing personal affection for the Peak. In the autumn of 1989, I began my doctoral work. Checking the secondary literature on the Levellers, I found that the key source for their involvement in Derbyshire was a petition written in the name of the miners of that county, and published in September 1649 in the Levellers' newspaper *The Moderate*. Upon investigation, this petition raised more questions than it answered. It certainly demonstrated a degree of support for the Leveller movement amongst some of the miners of the Peak Country, in the north-west of Derbyshire. But for all that the petition was couched in the kind of language I had come to associate with the Leveller movement, it spoke to a local and peculiar politics of which I had no knowledge. It seemed that the miners were aggrieved by the denial of their customary rights, for which they blamed 'Great men' in general and the Earl of Rutland in particular. The denial of

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

Preface

those rights had prompted the miners to declare their support for the Levellers. Yet much remained unclear. What were these customary rights? What did the Earl of Rutland have to do with the matter? And what did this apparently trivial, local dispute have to do with the radical politics of the Leveller movement?

This book attempts to answer these questions, and a host of others besides. I cannot remember the point at which, as a post-graduate student, I stopped telling people that I was researching the Leveller movement, and started saying that I was writing about the Derbyshire Peak Country in the seventeenth century. In 1993, I eventually wrote a doctoral dissertation on that subject. In 1995, I started working on the subject again, this time for publication, and with a rather more ambitious chronology. Over a decade after I first heard Tony Benn refer to Levellers in Derbyshire, the book is finally finished. In the course of its production, I have incurred a great many debts. First of all, enormous thanks are due to the supervisor of my doctoral work, Keith Wrightson, from whose imagination, enthusiasm and critical support I have long benefited. John Morrill and Rab Houston were careful but sympathetic examiners of my PhD dissertation; in another context, this time in the company of Anthony Fletcher, John Morrill enabled the production of this book. At the University of York, Jim Sharpe and David Parrott's inspired teaching turned me into an early modernist. In my time at the Universities of York, Cambridge, East London, Liverpool, East Anglia, and at University College London and the Institute of Historical Research, I have incurred many other debts. The British Academy have been generous: they funded my doctoral work between 1989 and 1992, awarded me a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in 1995, and in 1997 even gave me a small grant to finish my work in Matlock. In 1992, the Institute of Historical Research awarded me a Scouloudi Research Fellowship, thereby keeping my head above water. I am grateful to John Arnold, Mick Brightman, Cathy Carmichael, Andy Davies, Michael Frearson, Dennis Glover, Paul Griffiths, Steve Hindle, Pat Hudson, Peter Martin, Simon Middleton, Kate Peters, Dave Rollison, Heather Shore, Tim Stretton, John Sutton, Eric Taplin and Garthine Walker for their ideas, criticisms and enthusiasms. Thanks to the staff of the repositories (listed in the Bibliography) where I consulted documents; but regrettably His Grace the Duke of Rutland refused access to his splendid holdings at Belvoir Castle. Pete Herdan and Ian Kirkpatrick have had to endure my conversation about the Peak Country for far too long. Deb Riozzie's friendship kept me going through my doctoral research, and much more. I reconceived and wrote this book between September 1995 and April 1998. I have shared those years with Lucy Simpson, and they have been the best of times.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03772-3 - The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520-1770

Andy Wood

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xv

The book is really about two things: it is about the history of working people, and it is about the Peak Country. I first learnt about both subjects from my parents, Jim and Joyce Wood, and I dedicate this book to them.

Andy Wood
Norwich

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AgHR</i>	<i>Agricultural History Review</i>
<i>APC</i>	<i>Acts of the Privy Council</i>
<i>BL</i>	British Library
<i>BPDMHS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society</i>
<i>CHT</i>	Chatsworth House
<i>CSPD</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic</i>
<i>DAJ</i>	<i>Derbyshire Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>DCL</i>	Derby Central Library
<i>DRO</i>	Derbyshire Record Office
<i>DRS</i>	Derbyshire Record Series
<i>EcHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>HLRO, MP</i>	House of Lords Record Office, Main Papers series
<i>JRL</i>	John Rylands Library
<i>LJRO</i>	Lichfield Joint Record Office
<i>LPL</i>	Lambeth Palace Library
<i>MCL</i>	Manchester Central Library
<i>NAO</i>	Nottinghamshire Archives Office
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>PRO</i>	Public Record Office
<i>SA</i>	Sheffield Archives
<i>TT</i>	Thomason Tracts
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History of Derbyshire</i>