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978-0-521-27768-6 - Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700: People,
land and Towns

C. G. A. Clay

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AND SOCIAL CHANGE:
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People, land and towns

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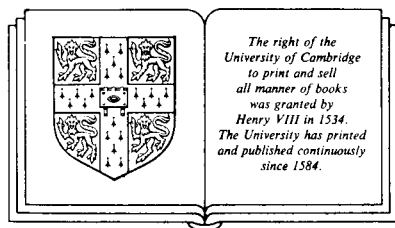
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ECONOMIC EXPANSION AND SOCIAL CHANGE: ENGLAND 1500–1700

Volume I
People, land and towns

C.G.A. CLAY

Reader in Economic History, University of Bristol



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PREFACE

More than a quarter of a century ago Professor F.J. Fisher, in a most memorable phrase, referred to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the 'dark ages' of English economic history. Since he wrote an entire generation of research has thrown a flood of light onto many matters that were then almost entirely obscure. New methodologies have been developed, new sources of evidence exploited, and the frontiers of historical understanding rolled back uncovering in the process a wide range of developments whose existence was entirely unsuspected in 1956. Some old controversies may have been laid to rest, but new ones aplenty have sprung to life, and both student and teacher are now faced with an awe inspiring mass of literature to master if they are to come properly to grips with the subject. There are several short introductory books available which give an excellent overview of the economic and social history of the period, and a number of useful pamphlets by acknowledged authorities devoted to particular aspects of it. However, there has not hitherto been one which provided a substantial amount of information about all major aspects, set firmly in an interpretative context. What follows is an attempt to fill that gap.

The work is explicitly designed as a text-book. This does not mean that only those studying for examinations will find it interesting, but that its purpose is to provide a synthesis of present understanding, organized in such a way that the reader may easily locate the discussion of any particular matter in which he is interested. It is not concerned to advance a particular thesis or interpretation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a whole. Rather it examines the principal subject areas into which the economic and social history of the period has been conventionally divided, considers the main issues which their study has thrown up, relates them to one another either by discussion in the text or by cross-reference, and attempts to reconcile the conflicting view points of historians rather than to take sides between them. And as in another economic history text-book, albeit one devoted to a later century, 'isms'

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have been eschewed as far as possible. So have the dreadful jargon derived from sociology and the chilling abstractions of economic theory, both of which have begun to disfigure some historical writing. Phrases like 'probated decedents' and 'negative externalities' may have their uses in other disciplines, but the Muse of History should speak with a voice that all may understand.

The period has been treated thematically rather than chronologically in order to stress its underlying unity, although in certain chapters where this procedure was likely to cause confusion some chronological subdivisions have been introduced. Despite its length the book cannot pretend to be a complete treatment of *all* aspects of the economy and society. There is something, but not a great deal, about transport and the conduct of internal trade. There are no chapters devoted specifically to living standards or economic fluctuations, although a good deal is written about both in various contexts; nor are the economic and social origins of the Civil War separately discussed, although at various points its consequences are duely emphasized. But had I covered absolutely everything the book would have extended into three volumes rather than two, and it seemed worth treating the most important subject areas fully even at the expense of omitting others.

In many ways this book may be compared to a voyage undertaken by one of the Elizabethan privateers chronicled by K.R. Andrews, not because I have loosed off salvoes of shots at every historian whose works I have encountered, but because I have ruthlessly plundered them for facts and ideas. This is inevitable in a work of synthesis, and I hope none of the numerous scholars involved will find their views misrepresented or reproduced unacknowledged, though over the years of reading I have inevitably absorbed ideas of whose origin I am no longer aware. As far as possible I have indicated by means of the bibliographical references inserted into the text the sources upon which I have drawn, although some passages, such as the first two sections of Chapter 3, will be found to have few of these because the argument draws so widely that it would have been impracticable to cite all the works that might have been cited, and invidious or misleading to mention only a few. The references are, however, intended to fulfil a dual function for they are also a guide to further reading on each aspect of the subject matter, and some items are therefore also included for their general relevance to the argument in question.

A considerable number of people have assisted me in one way or another during the preparation of the book. My wife has given much needed encouragement and listened with patience to my frequent lamentations at ever having got involved in doing it. William Ashworth,

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Joan Thirsk and Bob Malcolmson read certain chapters in draft, while Joe Bettey, Bernard Alford, John Moore, Patrick McGrath, John Guy, Bob Machin, Mike Costen, John Holman and Raine Morgan helped by discussion and correspondence to clear areas of doubt, provided bibliographical references and furnished missing pieces of factual information. Errors of fact and judgement no doubt remain, but they are the fewer for their efforts. I would also like to thank Anne Griffiths and Rosemary Graham who between them typed the whole of the very lengthy manuscript at least once, some parts twice, and a few obstinate passages several times.

Finally I am grateful to Patricia Williams, formerly of the Cambridge University Press, for commissioning this book in the first place, and to her and to Stephen Barr for the patience displayed as its completion date was postponed again and again, and its predicted length grew greater and greater.

Bristol, April 1983.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ag.H.R.</i>	<i>Agricultural History Review</i>
<i>A.H.</i>	<i>Agricultural History</i>
<i>A.H.E.W.</i>	<i>Agrarian History of England and Wales</i> (8 vols. Cambridge, 1967, continuing)
<i>B.H.R.</i>	<i>Business History Review</i>
<i>B.I.H.R.</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
Carus-Wilson	<i>Essays in Economic History</i> , ed. E.M. Carus-Wilson (3 vols., London, 1954, 1962)
<i>C.E.H.E.</i>	<i>Cambridge Economic History of Europe</i> (6 vols., Cambridge, 1942–77)
<i>E.H.R.</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>Ec.H.R.</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>H.L.Q.</i>	<i>Huntingdon Library Quarterly</i>
<i>J.B.S.</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>J.E.Ec.H.</i>	<i>Journal of European Economic History</i>
<i>J.E.H.</i>	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
<i>J.I.H.</i>	<i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i>
Minchinton	<i>Essays in Agrarian History</i> , ed. W.E. Minchinton (2 vols., Newton Abbot, 1968) vol. I
<i>N.H.</i>	<i>Northern History</i>
N.S.	New Series
<i>P. & P.</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
<i>R.E.H.</i>	<i>Research in Economic History</i>
R.O.	Record Office
Ser.	Series
<i>T.E.D.</i>	<i>Tudor Economic Documents</i> , ed. R.H. Tawney and E. Power (3 vols. London, 1924 and later impressions)
<i>T.R.H.S.</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>U.B.H.J.</i>	<i>University of Birmingham Historical Journal</i>
<i>V.C.H.</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>