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Introduction

A. J. FLETCHER and J. STEVENSON

(i) A POLARISED SOCIETY?

It has become a commonplace to refer to early modern English society as imbued with rank, hierarchy and degree. But this commonplace is an indispensable starting-point. We cannot usefully consider the means of order and the sources of disorder until we have established the context of men's personal, social, economic and cultural relationships in this period. So the first section of this introduction is concerned with social structure. Tudor and Stuart society was highly stratified. Our problem, as Keith Wrightson has pointed out, is how to bring together contemporary perceptions of its nature and the view of social developments which is emerging from the thinking of early modern historians over the last few years.¹ The criteria of social rank included birth, wealth, occupation and the life style that accompanied their gradations. Historians do not agree, any more than did contemporary commentators, on the precise weight to be given to these various criteria.²

In Elizabeth's reign William Harrison distinguished four 'degrees of people': gentlemen, the citizens and burgesses of the cities, yeomen in the countryside and finally those who had 'neither voice nor authority in the commonwealth but are to be ruled and not to rule other'. About 1600 Sir Thomas Wilson listed nobles, gentry, citizens, yeomen, artisans and rural labourers as the main social categories, taking care to make distinctions within the gentry between titled and professional men. Gregory King in 1695 followed Wilson in his insistence on the importance of distinguishing levels of gentility but, moving down the social scale, used a ladder of occupations rather than status terminology to characterise the

¹ Wrightson, pp. 17–38.

² A. Sharpe, 'Edward Waterhouse's View of Social Change in Seventeenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, LXII (1974), 27–46.

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mass of the people. The most striking feature of this society, recognised by these writers and others, was social inequality.³ There was a broad consensus among contemporaries about the pattern of inequality, though there was room for emphasis on different criteria of status. When Oliver Cromwell told parliament in 1654 that the distinctions between a nobleman, a gentleman and a yeoman were 'a good interest and a great one' he was expounding an assumption so fundamental that in more settled times there was no need for it to be said.⁴

What gave abiding strength to these perceptions of the social order was that they were based upon an old cosmology in which the concepts of a 'Great Chain of Being' and of a 'body politic' held sway. While these concepts prevailed, an ideal of harmony, of society as a living organism in which each man and woman had an allotted role, underpinned the complex reality of a system of hierarchical relationships. These relationships were mediated by the vertical ties of patronage and clientage and softened by additional horizontal ties of kin and neighbourhood. The nobility's exercise of 'good lordship' was still evident in the dealings with their tenants of some great families, like the Percies and the Stanleys, between 1500 and 1640, while it may have been declining in others. This was one expression of the traditional view of order.⁵ The ceremonial which still punctuated the lives of citizens in the larger towns in the early sixteenth century was another. Examining the Corpus Christi celebrations in towns like Coventry, York, Wakefield and Chester, Mervyn James has argued that 'the concept of body provided urban societies with a mythology and ritual in terms of which the opposites of social wholeness and social differentiation could be both affirmed and also brought into a creative tension one with the other.'⁶ Charles Phythian-Adams has shown in detail what civic ceremonial, and particularly the hierarchical ordering of communal processions, meant in the life of Coventry's citizens at the end of the middle ages. The town's 'history was expressed in myth; the ideal of its contemporary structure in ritual . . . both were mediums of celebration . . . both were lived rather than studied or articulated analytically'. Myth and ritual, taken together, 'served to identify and explain what made Coventry different from anywhere else'.⁷ The traditional concept of order was suited to a localised

³ D. Cressy, 'Describing the Social Order of Elizabethan and Stuart England', *Literature and History*, III (1976), 29–44.

⁴ T. Carlyle, *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (1871), vol. III, p. 21.

⁵ M.E. James, 'The Concept of Order and the Northern Rising', *Past and Present*, LX (1973), 49–83; B. Coward, 'A "Crisis of the Aristocracy" in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries? The Case of the Stanleys, Earls of Derby, 1504–1642', *Northern History*, xvii (1982), 72–3.

⁶ M.E. James, 'Ritual, Drama and Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past and Present*, xcvi (1983), 4.

⁷ C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the Citizen: the Communal Year at Coventry 1450–1550', in P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500–1700* (London, Routledge, 1972), pp. 57–85; C. Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City* (CUP, 1979), pp. 112, 130, 170; see also D.M. Palliser, 'Civic Mentality and the Environment in Tudor York', *Northern History*, xviii (1982), 79–85.

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society in which hierarchy, together with obligation to those below and deference to those above, made sense of people's lives.

This mental world did not suddenly collapse at some point during the period between 1500 and 1800 but, in face of changes in thinking about man, God, science and the natural environment, it was slowly being dissolved.⁸ Furthermore the forces of social change interacted in such a way as to produce two crucial developments. Local communities were penetrated ever more deeply by a process of administrative and cultural integration which brought into them national standards and fashions. At the same time a polarisation was occurring that detached the gentry and some of the middling ranks from labourers and the poor, finally leaving the traditional culture, a culture imbued with symbolism, magic and superstition, high and dry.⁹ Peter Burke has shown that this polarisation was a European phenomenon, which led eventually in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the self-conscious rediscovery of popular culture by intellectuals as part of a 'movement of cultural primitivism in which the ancient, the distant and the popular were all equated'.¹⁰ By the end of our period a chasm had opened between the mentality of the gentry and the people that was not apparent at its beginning. Yet, stated thus, this crucial development in English society is almost certainly made to appear too simple. There were many in the middling ranks who belonged neither wholly to the patrician culture nor wholly to the plebeian one.¹¹ Their attitudes, customs and life style cry out for an investigation that is not imprisoned by a view of society which supposes a rigid dichotomy between classes. In any case our understanding of many aspects of English culture in the early modern period is still at a very primitive stage.

John Morrill and John Walter in their essay in this volume draw attention to 'a developing conflict between the beneficiaries and victims of economic change'. Margaret Spufford comments on the fate of smaller farmers in the open arable areas during the disastrous decade of the 1590s.¹² Prosperity came to those with surplus produce that they could sell and the improvement in the facilities for inland and coastal trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought into being a much more sophisticated system of marketing.¹³ Local studies have shown how at the same time, in certain areas like districts of Cambridgeshire, Essex and Oxfordshire at least, the growth of a rural proletariat was proceeding

⁸ For these changes see Thomas pp. 641–68; P.M. Harman, *The Scientific Revolution* (London, Methuen, 1983); M. Hunter, *Science and Society in Restoration England* (CUP, 1981); K.V. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* (London, Allen Lane, 1983).

⁹ Wrightson, pp. 13–14, 222–8.

¹⁰ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, Temple Smith, 1978), pp. 3–10.

¹¹ E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, VII (1974), 382–405.

¹² Below, pp. 48, 152.

¹³ J.A. Chartres, *Internal Trade in England 1500–1700* (London, Macmillan, 1977).

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swiftly.¹⁴ Thus there was a gradual pushing apart of the social groups described by commentators like Harrison and King. A critical aspect of this process was the alliance between the gentry and groups among the middling ranks, an alliance eased, as John Morrill and John Walter put it, 'by an identity of economic interests in service of the market'. The old pattern of hierarchy and local loyalties was at the same time complicated by new forms of association, based for instance on religious affiliation and the particularism of certain groups of workers. E.P. Thompson has argued that the riots or strikes of eighteenth-century workers and the behaviour of London's labouring poor at the gallows tree were 'fleeting expressions of solidarities' foreshadowing a class society.¹⁵ This may be so, but a class society had not in our period yet arrived.

The nobility and gentry's assimilation of a national culture which distinguished them, and those of the middling ranks who aped their ways, from the mass of the people was a slow process that took many decades to complete. In some respects it had begun before the civil war; yet in many other respects the process was still at its height in the mid-eighteenth century. We can start with people's homes. Between the accession of Elizabeth and the civil war, the gentry's reception of classical principles of architecture was piecemeal and often muted. Many did rebuild in a new style, adopting a symmetry in their designs that showed the impact of the Renaissance.¹⁶ But it was only after the Restoration that the vernacular tradition and timber framing went decisively out of fashion. This was when stone and brick came into their own, not just for the mansions of the wealthiest men but for unpretentious manor houses and town houses as well. A home in the classical style had become a prerequisite of social respectability.¹⁷

London's dominance of English cultural and social standards, secure at the beginning of our period, was even more deeply rooted by its end. The metropolis increasingly set the tone of the gentry's life; it became the criterion by which all other environments were judged. The residences of local gentry and of professional men, together with the allurements of the shops that lined the main streets, brought the fashions of the capital to provincial cities. The Glamorgan-shire gentry, for example, began to make regular visits to Bath and Bristol from the 1660s, buying among other commodities tea, spices, sugar, fine linens, tobacco and books. Nor was it only the gentry who benefited. By the early

¹⁴ Spufford, pp. 46–167; Wrightson and Levine, pp. 19–42, 175; J. Walter, 'A Rising of the People? The Oxfordshire Rising and the Crisis of the 1590s', *Past and Present*, cvii (1985).

¹⁵ *Journal of Social History*, vii (1974), 399. P. Linebaugh, 'The Tyburn Riot against the Surgeons' in Hay, Linebaugh, Thompson, pp. 65–117; E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History*, iii (1978), 157.

¹⁶ e.g. A.J. Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War* (London, Longman, 1975), pp. 27–8.

¹⁷ A. Clifton-Taylor, *Six English Towns* (London, BBC, 1978); C.W. Chalklin, *The Provincial Towns of Georgian England* (London, Edward Arnold, 1974); N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England* series (London, Penguin).

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eighteenth century the more substantial Glamorganshire farmers and tradesmen were adorning their homes with silver as well as pewter, and with clocks, maps and prints, items which had previously only been accessible to the very rich.¹⁸ All over England by then, tea, coffee and chocolate were the drinks which denoted respectability. The consumer society was on the way.¹⁹

A whole range of artistic and intellectual interests also marked off the gentry of Georgian England from the people.²⁰ The period from 1720 to 1760, for instance, was one of the most distinguished in English sculpture, a time when artists of the quality of Michael Rysbrack and Louis Francois Roubiliac worked on busts and monuments for noble and gentry patrons.²¹ There is no more forceful way of appreciating the gulf that separated the patrician and plebeian cultures than to visit one of those parish churches, such as St Martin's at Stamford, where a huge marble tomb proclaiming the confident superiority of a great aristocrat dominates an aisle or chancel. The fifth earl of Exeter died in France in 1700 having already ordered the tomb now at Stamford from Pierre Monnot in Rome.²²

Towns became centres for leisure activities, where the gentry congregated for assemblies, balls and visiting the theatre. The town, Peter Borsay has argued, played 'a crucial role in servicing the increasing demand for status'.²³ The musical life of many towns was burgeoning: the Three Choirs Festival was founded in 1715 in connection with Worcester, Gloucester and Hereford and the Holywell Music Room at Oxford, built in the 1740s, was the first building constructed for the sole purpose of musical performances in the country.²⁴ This was the age of the development of the provincial press, of the multiplication of spa towns, of the discovery of landscape, of circulating libraries, of county antiquarianism, of ballooning and pleasure gardens. Many gentry became obsessed with the breeding of livestock and preoccupied with foxhunting and horse racing. The animals with which they were most closely involved – horses

¹⁸ P. Jenkins, *The Making of a Ruling Class* (CUP, 1983), pp. 239–55.

¹⁹ See the essays by N. McKendrick in N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialisation of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, Hutchinson, 1982).

²⁰ J.H. Plumb, 'The Commercialisation of Leisure', in McKendrick, Brewer, Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, pp. 265–85; G.A. Cranfield, *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper* (OUP, 1960).

²¹ M. Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530–1830* (London, Penguin, 1964), pp. 67–131.

²² N. Pevsner and J. Harris, *Lincolnshire* (London, Penguin, 1964), p. 661.

²³ P. Borsay, 'The English Urban Renaissance: the Development of Provincial Urban Culture c.1680–c.1760', *Social History*, 11 (1977), 581–98; P. Borsay, 'Culture, Status and the English Urban Landscape', *History*, LXVII (1983), 1–12. See also P. Clark (ed.), *Country Towns in Pre-Industrial England* (Leicester University Press, 1981), pp. 21–4, 176–84, 198–243.

²⁴ A. Everitt, 'Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England', *TRHS*, xxix (1979), 96–7; J. Sherwood and N. Pevsner, *Oxfordshire* (London, Penguin, 1974), p. 217.

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and greyhounds for example – became privileged species worthy of an honour and praise which was denied the rest of the brute creation. ‘Dogs differed in status’, Keith Thomas has noted, ‘because their owners did.’²⁵ What was common to this whole pattern of activities was a new confidence in man’s mastery of the natural environment, a confidence which made possible the public pursuit of happiness. From the last quarter of the seventeenth century, J.H. Plumb argued, ‘the pursuit of happiness was entangled in social emulation: it therefore became competitive . . . happiness became less private, less a state of the soul, a personal relationship with God than something visible to one’s neighbours’.²⁶

Popular culture, by contrast, was rooted in a view of life as hazardous and uncertain. The poorest sections of the population did not plan their careers or their marriages or their financial affairs or their purchases of land and stock or their holidays. E.P. Thompson has emphasised the plebeian lack of a ‘predictive notation of time’: ‘hence experience or opportunity is grabbed as occasion arises, with little thought of the consequences, just as the crowd imposes its power in moments of insurgent direct action, knowing that its moment of triumph will last only a week or a day’.²⁷ This is not to say that the popular mentality of our period was fatalistic. It can be described in terms of the people’s consolations, their defences against the tribulations of the world, their escapisms. But such an account misses the assertiveness and the toughness, the strength of belief in luck and fortune, with which many faced the world. Popular culture was certainly permeated by symbolism: in the wife sale, in the characteristic forms of economic or religious riot and protest, in the rites of passage, in the village routines of rough music and the cucking stool.²⁸ But such rituals were not simply defensive mechanisms clung to by those who lacked a purchase on influence and authority in the state. They were more purposeful than that and more constructive.

There is an unresolved debate about how far popular culture in our period possessed its own coherence. Before it can be resolved it seems likely that historians will have to come to terms with the recent thinking of social anthropologists and philosophers about meaning and rationality. Those anthropologists who worked in the older functionalist tradition put emphasis on the underlying psychological reasons for popular beliefs and practices rather than on any intrinsic sense they may have had. Keith Thomas’s seminal *Religion and the*

²⁵ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 100–9.

²⁶ J.H. Plumb, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New Haven, Yale Centre for British Art, 1977), p. 3; see also J.H. Plumb, *The Commercialisation of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England* (University of Reading, 1973).

²⁷ *Social History*, III (1978), 157–8.

²⁸ For wife sales see S.P. Menefee, *Wives for Sale* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981); for rough music and cucking stools see below pp. 123–36.

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Decline of Magic, published in 1971, was written, as he himself has confessed, within that tradition. It was of course at the same time informed by the wide-ranging analysis of the substratum of convictions about occult influences and sympathies, the animate universe and the symbolism of particular rituals which Thomas's reading had brought to light. His conceptual approach was challenged in 1975 by Hildred Geertz who was unconvinced by his definition of magic in pragmatic terms. She also questioned his sharp distinction between religion, which offered 'a guiding principle, relevant to every aspect of life' and magic, which he alleged was no more than 'a collection of miscellaneous recipes'. The plausibility of popular beliefs and rituals, Geertz argued, 'derives from the fact that a particular notion is set within a general pattern of cultural concepts, a conventional cognitive map in terms of which thinking and willing, being anxious and wishing, are carried out'. British historians, she suggested, should work towards 'a highly specific picture which sets off the early English popular image of reality from those of other societies and other times'.²⁹

A not entirely dissimilar line of criticism was employed by E.P. Thompson in an earlier review article of *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. His research on eighteenth-century popular culture led him to conclude that 'one appears to confront a system of beliefs with its own coherence even if this is most clearly seen in relation to particular occupational groups'. E.P. Thompson called for social historians to study both dialect and old Welsh and Gaelic, repositories of 'forgotten modes of thought and habits of work'. He directed attention to poetic and symbolic meanings and to the value of literary sources, painting Thomas Hardy's Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as the epitome of a man steeped in plebeian culture for whom magic was at the centre of all life's fortunes and accidents.³⁰

These pleas for conceptual rethinking and a sustained examination of early modern popular culture on a broad front have not yet produced extensive published results. Indeed the paucity of the British output is the more remarkable when a comparison is made with the same field in France. Stuart Clark has assessed the conceptual problems raised by recent work in the French field. His conclusions can be fruitfully applied to English studies as well. Sweeping aside the whole functional tradition, he argues that the historian's initial step should be 'the acceptance of primitive "magical" and "religious" beliefs as enunciated, a literalism which recognises that the associated practices could have genuinely instrumental ends and that their rationale was a coherent system of ideas which

²⁹ H. Geertz and K.V. Thomas, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VIII (1975), 71–109.

³⁰ E.P. Thompson, 'Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context', *Midland History*, I (1972), 46–55.

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explained the world and its workings'. But this literalism by itself, he argues, is not enough: 'if experience (material and psychological, as well as mental) is already a world of meanings, the need to explain how the latter emerge from the former disappears and is replaced by a semantic account of how practices, emotions and beliefs go together'. Literalism should be blended with 'some form of relativist account' of the rationality of the popular culture of particular societies. Historians, in this view, must escape the shackles of the old anthropology with its attendant dangers of impoverishing plebeian belief and practice by the implication that it is not reputable. They need to start their investigations with the assumption, as a simple matter of 'conceptual propriety', that the people of our period lived in a mental world that mostly made perfectly good sense to them and engaged in rituals which were seen neither as necessarily ineffective nor as merely the fragmentary cultural debris of earlier ways of thinking.³¹ There is then much to be done before any kind of definitive account of early modern popular culture can be expected.

In the English village there was probably no appreciable decline of magic before 1800. Numerous folklore studies testify to the survival of magic in the Victorian countryside. James Obelkevich has found a flourishing belief in witchcraft in the South Lindsey district of Lincolnshire during the mid-nineteenth century. He documents the work of wise men who were 'public figures known over wide areas'.³² Charles Phythian-Adams has portrayed the characteristic activities of the cunning men who plied their trade all over Victorian England.³³ Such work provides overwhelming arguments for continuity with Keith Thomas's world of seventeenth-century magic. There is also some specific evidence of lynching for witchcraft, magical healing and divination during the eighteenth century, a time when magic was no longer respectable yet the folklorists had not begun to conduct their field studies.³⁴

Popular culture throughout our period remained imbued with the sense of the power of the supernatural. Keith Thomas's argument that by 1700 it is possible to draw a distinction between religion and magic is persuasive with regard to the gentry elite but not with regard to the people at large.³⁵ Victorian south Lincolnshire, explored by Obelkevich, provides us with an insight into an older mental world. Villagers, he writes, inhabited 'a pluralistic, polymorphous universe in which power was fluidly distributed among a multitude of beings'.

³¹ S. Clark, 'French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture', *Past and Present*, c (1983), 62–99.

³² J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825–1875* (OUP, 1976), pp. 283–91.

³³ C. Phythian-Adams, 'Rural Culture' in G.E. Mingay (ed.), *The Victorian Countryside* (London, Routledge, 1981) vol. II, pp. 616–25.

³⁴ R.W. Malcolmsen, *Life and Labour in England 1700–1780* (London, Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 87–91; Thomas, particularly p. 582. ³⁵ Thomas, p. 640.

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The rural populace took from the church and its rituals what they wanted. The place of Christianity as such in their lives was only tenuous, but their reinterpretations of the church's holidays, its rites and the role of its clergy boosted the forms and structure of popular culture. Thus, while the sacramental power of the clergy failed to engage the people's imagination, ministers, churches and churchyards provided 'a vague reservoir of spiritual potency . . . which could be tapped and directed to non-Christian ends'.³⁶

The evidence of the chapbooks, those small penny pamphlets sold by pedlars which fed the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century appetite for cheap literature, tells us something more about popular piety. Margaret Spufford has found that the small godly books were largely calls to repentance which deliberately evoked fear. Death was usually portrayed as 'a figure who was very well-known by and very close to' the reader.³⁷ Deborah Valenze has emphasised how closely eighteenth-century chapbooks were tailored to their market. Prophecies, Day of Judgement books and reports of trances were all commercially successful. Chapbook catechisms discarded the usual approach to religious education and all lessons on obedience in favour of 'a veritable dictionary of prophetic symbols and stories'. Religion emerges from this popular literature shorn of theological subtlety, at its simplest and most facile. There was clearly no market among those who patronised the roving pedlars for serious doctrine. Yet the fusion of the sacred and secular worlds, so apparent in other aspects of popular culture, is again striking: despite the corrective efforts of protestant divines and the diffusion of scientific knowledge, Valenze concludes, the 'commoner's world revolved within a universe of magic'.³⁸

Plebeian identity was rooted in the sense of belonging to a local environment. John Clare's account of his feelings on leaving his village to seek work is the classic evocation of this: 'I started for Wisbech with a timid sort of pleasure and when I got to Glinton turnpike I turned back to look on the old church as if I was going into another country . . . I could not fancy England much larger than the part I knew.'³⁹ Local dialects were pronounced. There was only limited standardisation of vocabulary, diction or grammar. Districts had their own special kinds of drink and food and their own festivities and customs. Yet, despite this variety and heterogeneity, there were characteristic features of popular culture which were common to all regions: the relaxation from work through

³⁶ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 259–312.

³⁷ M. Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories* (London, Methuen, 1981), pp. 194–213. See also G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society: from Caxton to Northcliffe* (London, Longman, 1978); V. Neuberger, *Popular Education in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, Woburn Press, 1971).

³⁸ D.M. Valenze, 'Prophecy and Popular Literature in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, xxix (1978), 75–92.

³⁹ Cited in Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England*, pp. 93–4.

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parish feasts, country fairs and popular sports; the socialisation and leisure activities associated with the alehouse; the fiction distributed by the pedlars; music which was so integral to a culture that remained fundamentally oral. R. W. Malcolmson has examined the huge range of sports and pastimes which fulfilled the deep human desire for fun, distraction and laughter.⁴⁰ Peter Clark and Keith Wrightson have investigated the central place of the alehouse in the village society of pre-industrial England.⁴¹ Margaret Spufford has surveyed the art of courtship books, the slapstick and dunghill humour of the small merry books, the historical and chivalric novels. This was an essentially escapist literature, opening a world of imagination and fantasy to the unlettered reader which was always available from the chapman's bag at prices up to sixpence.⁴² Music, the most accessible, public and democratic of the arts, lifted men's spirits at work and play. It has left little trace in the records, more in literature, such as John Clare's writings and Thomas Hardy's novels. The simple instruments of the poor – flageolets, tabors and pipes – are well recorded in medieval gargoyles and misericords. There must have been plenty of them in the Stuart and Hanoverian countryside, for this was the great age of dancing at weddings and festivals led by the village fiddler, of town waits and itinerant street musicians. Moreover, the eighteenth century saw the spread of church choirs and bellringing societies.⁴³

We can detect then a whole series of developing polarities – of speech, dress, manners, living conditions, leisure pursuits and literary interests. What needs much closer investigation is the process by which this polarisation came into being. Essentially this was a process of withdrawal by the gentry and middling groups from a common heritage of assumptions about social integration. It did not occur in a uniform or even manner but seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records are littered with the evidence of its inexorability and dynamism.

The gentry's withdrawal from armed political demonstrations in alliance with the people had occurred by 1600. In Lincolnshire in 1536 the gentry grasped control of an outburst of discontent at the enforcement of the Henrician Reformation, mobilising their own wapentakes and preparing a set of articles to be sent to the Council in London.⁴⁴ 'It seems likely', C.S.L. Davies argues in his analysis of the Pilgrimage of Grace in this volume, 'that many gentlemen and priests were happy to allow themselves to be sworn.' Again, in 1549, in 1554 and in 1569, to a remarkable extent, the normal assumptions of society were carried

⁴⁰ R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society* (CUP, 1973).

⁴¹ P. Clark, *The English Alehouse* (London, Longman, 1983); K. Wrightson, 'Alehouses, Order and Reformation in Rural England 1590–1660' in E. and S. Yeo, *Popular Culture and Class Conflict* (Hassocks, Harvester Press, 1981), pp. 1–27.

⁴² Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, chapters vii, ix.

⁴³ Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England*, pp. 99–101.

⁴⁴ A. J. Fletcher, *Tudor Rebellions* (London, Longman, 1983), pp. 17–19.