POSTSCRIPT

**Small places, big questions:
reintegrating social and economic history, c. 1350-1750**

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'Big History' and local history
I want in this postscript to do more than to suggest some possible areas of future work. The fields I address not only require closer empirical investigation but also possess potential for the closer integration of late medieval and early modern economic and social history. In particular, following one of the organizing concepts behind this volume, I am interested in themes that move across the boundary between economic and social history – fields that were once united, but in recent years have drifted apart. In some cases, joined-up, integrated thinking about otherwise separated sub-fields might produce some important insights. In others, I have suggested possible areas for further empirical enquiry, especially where there are implications for how we think about social power, the social order and productive relations.

I also engage with a recent polemical work that has attracted a lot of attention amongst professional historians. This shortish and constantly provocative work – more of an argumentative essay than a cool and detached survey – represents an attack on what is termed the 'Short Past' in favour of some version of 'Big History'.[1] It is a book that is worth reading, as much for its irritations as its inspirations. In suggesting areas where a closer integration between the economic and the social might be productive, I celebrate the diversity of approaches and subject matter in much recent work. The point at which something becomes a 'definitive' subject is the point at which a field of enquiry dies; we need to be reminded that there is always more to do, and different ways in which to do history.

In contrast to this diversity, and to the emphasis upon the small-scale and the levl of lived experience, 'Big History' celebrates the macro-scale of world history; in particular the authors of The History Manifesto have been sharply critical of micro-history. The virtue of the kind of micro-historical approach that has been adopted by many social historians of the period – a micro-history that owes as much to W.G. Hoskins as it does to Carlo Ginzburg – is precisely its attention to the local worlds within which most medieval and early modern people lived their lives.[2] Diversity in historical methodology, subject area, conceptual

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[1] J. Guldi and D. Armitage, The history manifesto (Cambridge, 2014), http://historymanifesto.cambridge.org. Accessed 15 July 2015.
[2] C. Ginzburg, The cheese and the worms: the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller (1976; Eng. Trans., Baltimore, 1980) is a defining text in Italian micro-history; in its own very English way, W.G. Hoskins, The Midland peasant: the economic and social history of a Leicestershire village (London, 1957) was equally revolutionary. The best known example of the Annales School's approach to the field is E. Le

approach and empirical material has here been the key to historical creativity. The Big History approach currently advocated might well illuminate the growing dominance of a capitalist world order, but it does so by crushing small places and subaltern people under its grinding wheels.

Taking the lead from social anthropology, then, the field of community and regional studies has often helped to answer big questions through the study of small places. So, too, have examinations of individual lives and particular moments.[3] So, more micro-histories of individual episodes that seem to reveal a larger world – what Victor Turner has called 'social drama' - should always be welcome.[4] Robert Darnton's work has been very influential; future digs within the legal records, estate papers, diaries, correspondence and so on are likely to produce fresh archival finds in which moments of contestation, embarrassment, anger, inversion (and so on) reveal something of wider social structures, sensibilities and understandings.[5] Future work in this field is unpredictable – it depends sometimes on chance finds in the archives, or in finding lateral connections that are in many ways intuitive and depend upon serendipity. It entails a kind of archival archaeology, the sifting of the fine grain of manuscripts in search of stories, people or events who don't quite <u>fit</u> with the dominant order. This failure to fit is both reflective of forms of dissidence – or just a stolid refusal to budge – but also, by turning the material on its head – of dominant norms.

In contrast to Big History, the protean instability that is embedded within micro-history is difficult to capture in, for example, applications to research councils for project funding, with their demands for clarity, rigour, stated methodology, likely published outputs, and so on. But it is in studies of particular moments, or other small communities, that we often find larger worlds revealed to us. We should press on: not only does micro-history reveal more of the past to us, but its anarchic unpredictability represents the reverse of the joyless priorities of our governing institutions and their research managers.[6]

Roy Ladurie, <u>Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village, 1294-1324</u> (1975; Eng. Trans. London, 1978).

[3] Keith Wrightson's recent book, <u>Ralph Tailor's summer: a scrivener, his city and the plague</u> (New Haven: Conn., 2013) represents a model in micro-historical investigation and is especially important for its self-reflective discussion of historical methodology and the approach to the archive.

[4] For social drama, see V. Turner, <u>Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society</u> (Ithaca, NY, 1974), 37-42; V. Turner, <u>The anthropology of performance</u> (New York, 1987), 34-5; V. Turner, <u>From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play</u> (New York, 1982), 70-2. For one historian's use of the concept, see D. Rollison, <u>The local origins of modern society: Gloucestershire, 1500-1800</u> (London, 1992), 136-48. Turner's influence is also to be in an earlier piece by the same author: D. Rollison, 'Property, ideology and popular culture in Gloucestershire village, 1660-1740', <u>Past and Present</u>, 93 (1981), 70-97.

[5] R. Darnton, <u>The great cat massacre and other episodes in French cultural history</u> (New York, 1984). See also his discussion of the relationship between cultural history and anthropology in R. Darnton, <u>The kiss of Lamourette: reflections in cultural history</u> (New York, 1990).

[6] These comments grow out, at least in part, from the current crisis unfolding in Europe, in which neo-liberalism is facing new and unpredictable challenges. Given that a neo-liberal managerial model now predominates within university governance within the United Kingdom, historians may well find themselves living in interesting times. I am partially informed in these comments by Andy Merrified's strange and wild book, <u>Magical Marxism: subversive politics and the imagination</u> (London, 2011).

As the anthropologists remind us, the local is often the best place to be. This is true for late medieval and early modern social and economic historians in two ways. Firstly, the local focus allows us to approach something close to a 'total' history – or at least, an <u>integrated</u> history - encompassing demographics, landholding, household structure, wealth distribution, gender relations, resistance, literacy, local culture, litigation, belief, authority, social change, landlordship, tenure, custom, governance, ecology, landscape, and so on. Secondly, perhaps more importantly, local histories have done more than present focussed case-studies of wider phenomena. Rather, the last two generations of local studies have pointed up the <u>diversity</u> of regional and local cultures, social structures, and ways of thinking and working. The local, then, is not just a methodological focus: it is also a fluid, shifting historical entity in its own right, and as such is as worthy of study as royal courts or grand diplomacy.

<u>Periodization and the excluded</u>
This postscript is especially focussed upon themes and questions that transcend the late medieval/early modern divide. It is worth noting that what is often called early modern English social history it is very often the social history only of the period 1560-1640. This is not just about record survival; in fact, there are very good records for the 1500-1560 period. The point is that this chronological focus allows social historians to avoid the contentious areas of the Reformation and the English Revolution. The focus on this eighty-year period also allows for synchronic, relatively static analysis of themes such as popular culture, gender, age, class and so on.[7] Equally, much of the social and economic history of the late medieval period tails off around 1450. The result is that there are two significant chunks of the historical past where there is a substantial lack of a developed social history: c.1450-1560 and 1640-1750. Notably, the economic history of the 1660-1750 period is better served than that of the 1640s and 1650s (the English Revolution awaits its social historian) and for the 1450-1560 period.[8] The political, religious and cultural history of later Stuart and early Georgian England has received a lot of attention: interest has blossomed in confessional and party

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[7] For an example of synchronic work that lacks a sense of change over time, see A. Wood, 'Poore men woll speke one daye': plebeian languages of deference and defiance in England, c.1520-1640', in T. Harris (ed.), <u>The politics of the excluded in early modern England</u> (Basingstoke, 2001), 67-98.

[8] Of course, there is some excellent work going on regarding the economic history of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, most notably that by Jane Whittle. See especially her monograph <u>The development of agrarian capitalism: land and labour in Norfolk, 1440-1580</u> (Oxford, 2000). Yet the social history of that period remains much more patchily covered. This is perhaps especially true of the two generations before the Reformation. The book-length treatments of the following communities and regions commence somewhere in the period 1520-1560: Terling [Essex]; Wickham [Co. Durham]; Highley [Shropshire]; the Peak Country [Derbyshire]; Myddle [Shropshire]; Chippenham [Cambridgeshire]; Hallamshire [Yorkshire]; Colyton [Devon]; the Forest of Arden [Warwickshire]; Earls Colne [Essex]. Given the significance of local-community studies in early modern social history, this is especially problematic. For an exception, see Marjorie McKintosh's duel-monograph study of Havering (Essex): M.K. McIntosh, <u>A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620</u> (Cambridge, 1991); M.K. McIntosh, <u>Autonomy and community: the royal manor of Havering, 1200-1500</u> (Cambridge, 1986). For a local community study (this time of a small town) that covers the <u>longue</u> durée necessary to capture, for example, the profound consequences of the Reformation, see D. Rollison, <u>Commune, country and commonwealth: the people of Cirencester, 1117-1643</u> (Woodbridge, 2011).

identities, print culture, the public sphere and gender relations. This has underwritten a fertile interaction between cultural and political history. The main contribution of economic historians to this period has been in the study of consumption; social historians have primarily concentrated on the urban middling sort. In particular, research on patterns of consumption amongst middling people has eclipsed the relations of production and exploitation that produced the food and goods on which that consumption relied.[9] The consequence of this over-concentration on the polite world of the urban middling sort is a history of Augustan England that is too often blind to social structure, to inequalities of wealth and power, and to the lives of ordinary people in rural communities.[10] There is a profound erasure occurring here, in which historians of bourgeois politeness and middling sort public spheres are active agents. Research on the rural proletariat, and of poor commoners, in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England is badly needed.

Resistance and social relations

One area where there is a need more micro-studies is that of resistance. It would be marvellous to know more about village conflicts in the period between the Wars of the Roses and the Reformation: this remains a largely empty area. Meanwhile, the parameters of social conflicts within English villages in the 1560-1640 period have been sketched out.[11] A triangular disposition of lords, established tenants and the migrant or settled poor produced some surprising alliances, for example where lords established mining operations in regions like Lancashire, Yorkshire and the North-East and hired poor migrants to work in those mines as wage-labourers.[12] Attacks by tenants upon these newly settled poor folk therefore disguised a lord/tenant conflict. Similarly, for all that tenants

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[9] For further development of this point, see Adrian Green's review of A. Vickery, Behind closed doors: at home in Georgian England, in English Historical Review, 127, 526 (2012), 734-6.

[10] An exception to this is Steve Hindle's current project, reconstructing the social and economic history of the Warwickshire village of Chilvers Coton: see S. Hindle, 'Work, reward and labour discipline in late seventeenth-century England', in S. Hindle, A. Shepard and J. Walter (eds), Remaking English society: social relations and social change in early modern England (Woodbridge, 2013), 255-80. An example of the kind of work that could be done is P. King, 'Social inequality, identity and the labouring poor in eighteenth-century England', in H. French and J. Barry (eds), Identity and agency in England, 1500-1800 (Basingstoke, 2004), 60-86. For 1660-1750, the middling sort of rural England has received greater attention than have those below them in the village pecking order. See for instance H. French, The middle sort of people in provincial England, 1600-1750 (Oxford, 2007); P. King, 'Edward Thompson's contribution to eighteenth century studies: the patrician-plebeian model re-examined', Social History, 21, 2 (1996); for a case-study, see S. Pearson, 'Threshing out the common in community: The Great Tey Riot of 1727', Rural History, 9, 1 (1998), 43-56. There is little work on popular protest in the period 1660-1740. Work on rural protest after 1740 has primarily been concerned with food rioting.

[11] For a very stimulating materialist overview, see S. Hipkin, 'Property, economic interest and the configuration of rural conflict in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England', Socialist History, 23 (2003), 67-88. For local studies of these tangled conflicts, see S. Hindle, 'Persuasion and protest in the Caddington common enclosure dispute, 1635-1639', Past and Present, 158 (1998), 37-78; M. Clark, 'The gentry, the commons and the politics of common right in Enfield, c.1558-c.1603', Historical Journal, 54, 3 (2011), 609-29; H. Falvey, 'Crown policy and local economic context in the Berkhemsted Common enclosure dispute', Rural History, 12, 2 (2001), 123-58; S. Hipkin, 'Sitting on his penny rent: conflict and right of common in Faversham Blean, 1596-1610', Rural History 11, 1 (2000), 1-35.

[12] For now, the best discussion remains J.U. Nef, The rise of the coal industry, 2 vols (London, 1932), I, 305-319.

presented themselves as the 'poor men', oppressed by 'rich men' and 'gentlemen', this linguistic formulation was often overridden by their economic interests in preventing pauper settlement: men and women who one moment might be describing a bi-polar social conflict between the gentry and the commons might, the next, be driving poor folk off common land, restricting pauper settlement, and whipping their poorer neighbours for stealing firewood from enclosing hedges. Language did not constitute class in this period, any more than it did in the nineteenth-century. But that does not mean that languages of social classification and social conflict do not matter; more research needs to be done into the ways in which material interest and the linguistics of class interfaced and conflicted, and how this changed over time.

Similar studies are required for the late medieval period. There are some excellent studies of lord/tenant conflict. But it would be good to know more internal social conflicts and patterns of social polarization within villages before 1550.[13] Study of this area in towns and cities is currently being undertaken by Christian Liddy, who has stressed the importance of a vernacular, customary sense of citizenship as a legitimating force in urban popular politics.[14] A lot is now known about customary law in the 1500-1750 period. But how did ideas about custom emerge in rural England in what was often the critical period of their genesis, between the years period 1350-1500? Work has been done on legal and administrative aspects of late medieval manorial custom, but in contrast to the literature on the early modern period, the cultural and political dimensions of both manorial and parochial custom in the late medieval period remain an undiscovered country.[15]

The area where further work is really needed across the late medieval and early modern periods is that of the broader field of resistance. Social relations were not only dictated by open conflict. Social tensions could be muffled under a blanket of outward deference. Plebeian anger might take the form of threatening letters, animal-maiming or attacks on the landscaped environment of the gentry.[16] The rick-burning campaign in the Captain Swing era had its roots in much earlier forms of resistance: it would be good to know more about these kinds of long-term continuities. Similarly, I am doubtful that the Luddite movement in the Midlands and the North sprang fully-formed from the Industrial Revolution. There may well be something particular about the local cultures within which movements such as Luddism emerged; this requires long-term, finely graded local analysis. Social historians long ago moved away from

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[13] For valuable studies, see C. Dyer, 'The English medieval village community and its decline', Journal of British Studies, 33, 4 (1994), 407-29; M. Muller, 'A divided class? Peasants and peasant communities in later medieval England', Past and Present, supplement 2 (2007), 115-131; L.R. Poos, A rural society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350-1525 (Cambridge, 1991).
[14] C. Liddy, 'Urban enclosure riots: risings of the commons in English Towns, 1480–1525', Past and Present, 226, 1 (2015), 41-77.
[15] I tried to trace some of these issues in A. Wood, The memory of the people: custom and popular senses of the past in early modern England (Cambridge, 2013), ch.1. But this was really a stab in the darkness and much more remains to be said.
[16] For a very perceptive essay on attacks on elite landscapes and enclosures, see C.J. Griffin, '"Cut down by some cowardly miscreants": plant maiming, or the malicious cutting of flora, as an act of protest in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural England', Rural History, 19, 1 (2008), 29-54.

the idea that popular politics was merely reactive and spasmodic, to emphasize instead its active engagement with the world about it.[17] But long-term continuity in popular political language, culture, organization and mentality remains to be studied.

One such field concerns the relationship between coercion, consent and social cohesion within the village community. The social and cultural meanings of work could be one important subject, so far neglected in the historiography. The exhausting experience of agricultural labour may have been enough to secure the quiescence of early modern labouring people for much of the time.[18] Yet the authority of lords and wealthier villagers depended upon much more than the grinding the faces of the poor. Unequal power relations could find softer expression: the gift of cash, food or fuel in a cold winter or a period of dearth. Intercession with other authority figures to secure dismissal of law cases brought against poor neighbours. The grant of long, secure leases to copyholders might result not just from the growing assertiveness of the latter, but also from a genuine belief on the part of the lord in values of paternalism, decency and charity towards the poor.

All of of this was tied up in the concept of what contemporaries called 'gentleness' and 'kindness'. Underpinned by the Scriptures, this sense of social duty was an important source of gentry identity and for those gentlemen and women who transgressed that perceived duty, poorer folk could be assertive in reminding them of their rupture of social standards. This was a form of cultural hegemony – a way of securing the active consent of the governed, binding them into a social contrast in return for ceding a certain space and sense of entitlement. But it was also much more than that: the paternalist ideal was underwritten by an emotional economy. The visceral nature of social relations – emotions such as fear, anger, affection, disgust, kindness, responsibility - alongside perceived senses of right and entitlement – deserve much closer attention.[19] And, in the end, the endlessly unpredictable messiness of everyday life, along with hornery inability of human beings to observe supposed social boundaries, could create friendships that crossed social boundaries. In his history of his home village of Myddle, for example, Richard Gough tells the story of two big boozers, a commoner called Thomas Jukes and a knight called Sir Humphrey Lea. Of Jukes, Gough remembered that 'he was a bauling, bould, confident person: hee often kept company with his betters, but shewed them noe more respecte than if they had beene his equals or inferiors'.[20] They would play at balls, drink, fall out, and then a few days later make up and head back to the alehouse. Histories of social relations that focus upon grim class conflict miss these messy nuances and unpredictable complexities. The task for historians is

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[17] J.D. Walter, 'The social economy of dearth in early modern England' in J.D. Walter and R. Schofield (eds.), Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern Society (Cambridge, 1989).

[18] M. Hailwood, The Honest Tradesman's Honour: Occupational and Social Identity in Early Modern England', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society (6th Series), 24 (2014). For an arresting study, se L. Lamphere, 'Work and the production of silence', in G. Sider, and G. Smith (eds), Between history and histories: the making of silences and commemorations (Toronto, 1997), 263-83.

[19] For a brilliant intervention, see H. Taylor, '"Branded on the Tongue": rethinking plebeian inarticulacy in early modern England', Radical History Review, 121 (2015), 91-105.

[20] R. Gough, The history of Myddle (London, 1981), 97.

to try to capture these everyday complexities while retaining a sense of the deeper social structures that underwrote everyday life. Yet, for all our grand theorizing, social history suggests that there will always be awkward women and men like Thomas Jukes and Sir Humphrey Lea. They have a history too.

Social structure
And so to social structure. Individual community studies – the classic example is Wrightson and Levine's study of the Essex village of Terling – have pointed to growing social polarization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[21] This pattern has received very powerful confirmation in Alexandra Shepard's hugely important recent monograph, Accounting for Oneself. This book – probably the single most significant piece of work on early modern English social and economic history in a decade - uses court records to get at the ways in which differing social groups understood their level of wealth – and hence their place in the pecking order.[22] She finds clear evidence of that, in the south-east and East Anglia, middling-sort yeomen came to see themselves as of far greater worth (financially and socially) than their poor neighbours. Related stinting of common rights and restrictions of gleaning likewise deserve intensive study focussing on their shifting periodization and geography. It would be good to know more about the pattern prior to 1550 – systematic study of early Tudor lay subsidies is one method, especially where combined with local listings. Whatever sources and methods are employed, though, social polarization in the fifteenth century cries out for a significant study. The geography of social polarization is also worthy of attention.

Critically, historians need a closer assessment of the development of landlessness and of different forms of proletarianization. It is starting to become apparent that a larger proportion of the rural population was dependent upon wage labour much earlier than has been assumed – the Lay Subsidy of 1524/5 – used by in village studies to chart the distribution of wealth – seems routinely to have under-counted the very poor. Closer studies of village society in the 1520s suggest a significant 'dark figure' of the unregistered poor.[23] More finely-tuned studies of late medieval and early Tudor social structure are therefore needed. This is true both of urban and rural communities. Pound's classic study of the social structure of Norwich, for example, is highly revealing – using the 1524/5 lay subsidies, he shows the extent of social polarization within the city in the early Tudor period, producing a picture of a deeply divided place, with a large number of very poor folk (many of them weavers concentrated in slum accommodation in the northern quarter) over whom a small group of very wealthy urban oligarchs attempted to maintain control.[24] How distinct was Norwich in these terms? And how far back in time did that pattern of polarization go?

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[21] K.E. Wrightson and D. Levine, Poverty and piety in an English village: Terling, 1525-1700 (New York, 1979).

[22] A. Shepard, Accounting for oneself: worth, status and the social order in early modern England (Oxford, 2015).

[23] A. Wood, The politics of social conflict: the Peak Country, 1520-1770 (Cambridge, 1999), 45-52.

[24] J. Pound, 'The social and trade structure of Norwich, 1525-1575', Past and Present, 34 (1966), 49-64.

Alexandra Sapoznik's chapter in this volume has a special place here. The extensive geographical spread of iron mining and smelting made it a key industry from the earliest date. By the early modern period, the kinds of communities supported by such activities – in the Sussex and Kentish Weald, for example, or in the Forest of Dean (covered in this volume by Simon Sandall) had acquired a reputation as 'dark corners of the land', cut off from gentry authority. Of course, we are dealing here with the crude stereotypes of the industrial elite. But how did these communities regulate themselves? Social historians of the law have shown its ubiquity at the local level across England. In the Forest of Dean, institutional arrangements were relatively formal, with the Mine Law Court holding jurisdiction over the industry. But elsewhere both ferrous and non-ferrous mining and smelting arose organically and only gradually (if at all) developed institutional arrangements.

Riot and rebellion
The records of Star Chamber, which commence (in a fragmentary form) in the reign of Henry VIII and run through to 1641 are – for all their fragmentary survival and opaque description by earlier archivists – a key source for understanding the nature, scale, timing and geography of protest. The records for the Caroline period are virtually non-existent. Very good finding aids exist for the Jacobean Star Chamber (National Archives class STAC8) and so that body of material has attracted a great deal of attention. In contrast, the finding aids for Elizabethan Star Chamber (National Archives class STAC5) are woefully inadequate. This is significant, because it would seem that it was in that latter half of the sixteenth century that – in East Anglia and the south-east – wealthier villagers started to turn their back on the leadership of popular protest. This corresponds with Alex Shepard's startling findings noted above concerning changing ideas of self-worth amongst yeoman in these two regions.

The records of Star Chamber for the 1509-1558 period (National Archives classes STAC2, 3 and 4) are better catalogued and so are more open to geographical analysis, or the pursuit of change over time, or thematic studies; yet they remain little explored.[25] The Star Chamber archive is especially important because, amongst other areas, it held jurisdiction over the prosecution of riotous offences. This has allowed historians to use the Star Chamber records – fragmentary as they are – to draw a rough picture of the geography, extent, leadership and social basis of enclosure rioting across England. One very significant finding from the work of Roger Manning is that enclosure riots in East Anglia fell from 12 per cent of the total in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI to only 3 per cent of the total by the reign of James I. Finer analysis of the precise geography of that rioting within the East Anglia shows that the vast majority of the Jacobean disturbances took place in the fenlands, as a result of the attempts

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[25] An exception is the study by Roger Manning, Village revolts: social protest and popular disturbances in England, 1509-1640 (Oxford, 1988), which often misunderstands individual cases and in its statistical analysis misses out a large body of material. Yet it remains the only attempt to chart large-scale patterns of litigation at Star Chamber over the 1509-1625 period, especially as regards rural protest. A more careful and detailed look at the changing geography of agrarian protest would be very welcome.

to drain the fens.[26] In contrast, enclosure rioting in the period 1509-58 in East Anglia was concentrated deeper in the region, in the arable and sheep-pasture regions of Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex – that is, precisely those counties caught up in the East Anglian insurrections of 1549.

In contrast to John Broad's dismissal in this volume of the historical significance of 'peasant' rebellion, the large-scale rebellions of 1381 and 1549 had profound consequences for the long-term development of English society. The events of 1381 helped to break feudalism, at a time at which it was already weak. The events of 1549 helped to provide the grounding for the growing domination (on a macro scale) of agrarian capitalism and (within village micro-politics) of middling sorts. While Broad marginalizes rebellion and popular politics, I think that closer study of the large-scale insurrections of the period (1381; 1450; 1497; 1536-7; 1549; 1607, along with smaller-scale village and town protests at moments such as 1517, 1525, the 1550s, 1586 and the 1590s) reveal a huge amount about the changing texture of social relations and in many cases had profound implications for economic development. And these were emphatically not 'peasant' insurrections. Mostly, they were led by aspirant middling men (both from town and country), and their rank-and-file was made up of rural industrial workers, agricultural proletarians and industrial workers. 'Peasants' these people were not. In any case, it was a name that the women and men of 1549 would have bridled at – 'peasant' had already become a derogatory term by that time – witness Hamlet: 'What a rogue and peasant slave am I'. (Hamlet, 2.II.520) For historians of the post-1450 period, I think that 'peasant' is a term that we can do without.

In a book I published in 2007, I suggested that, in the face of social polarization (and also, possibly, the attraction of Calvinism to propertied groups), the yeoman elite of East Anglia removed themselves from the leadership of popular protest.[27] The basis for this shift was the growing tendency to see poorer neighbours not as 'Christ's poor' – as fellow neighbours within a Christian community – but rather to see them as a social burden, as immoral, a threat to the village order. This division amongst the commons removed the basis for joint action and led to the collapse of the tradition of popular rebellion. Empirically, I was skating on thin ice: much of what I had to say represented educated guesses. It would have been important, clearly, to have been able to look at how the pattern of protest changed during the reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603), since this is where the transition was occurring. But the absence of good finding aids meant that I was unable to carry out this task.

There is, therefore, something a black hole in the history of popular protest in the Elizabethan period. Until such a time as the records of Elizabethan Star

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[26] C. Holmes, 'Drainers and fenmen: the problem of popular political consciousness in the seventeenth century', in A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (eds), Order and disorder in early modern England (Cambridge, 1985), 166-97; K. Lindley, Fenland riots and the English Revolution (London, 1982). The geography of Jacobean Star Chamber cases concerning enclosure riots within the East Anglian region is discussed in A. Wood, Riot, rebellion and popular politics in early modern England (Basingstoke, 2002), 82-89.

[27] A. Wood, The 1549 rebellions and the making of early modern England (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 5.

Chamber become accessible (and archivists in the National Archives are working on new finding aids that would open up this class of material), perhaps the only way forward is to carry out focussed micro-studies of protest and social relations in well-sourced villages or neighbourhoods. In any case, the records of Star Chamber represent a vital – and for the 1509-1603 period - underexplored body of material. Here, there is potential for a good number of doctoral projects, journal articles and probably also some very revealing monographs.

For all its weaknesses, the records of Star Chamber at least allow us a partial glimpse of the changing nature and geography of rural protest between 1509 and 1625. The nature of rural protest between the 1381 rebellion and the accession of Henry VIII, by contrast, remains only thinly studied. One question concerns late medieval opposition to enclosure.[28] Recent work by Christian Liddy has suggested that, in urban centres, the 1480-1520 period saw intense conflict over use-rights on urban commons.[29] What was the state of such protest in rural communities at this time, and earlier? Liddy was able to use borough records in order to shed real light on his subject; in contrast, manorial records would seem to be generally less revealing. But are they? Jane Whittle has used manorial records to provide a detailed picture of participation in Kett's rebellion.[30] She was also, through her painstaking work on Norfolk manor courts over a longer period, able to excavate examples of strikes and the undermining of labour regulation.[31] Similar studies have provided evidence of a lordly offensive after the Black Death followed by a rise in peasant resistance which gradually, mostly with little drama, ground down serfdom.[32] But we need a richer sense of the micro-politics of social conflicts in rural England for the period 1381-1509.

One of the most significant achievements over the past generation of early modern social historians has been to reconceptualise the nature of the 'political'. From 1989 onwards, seminal pieces by Keith Wrightson and Patrick Collinson encouraged a new generation of early modern social historians to break down divisions between politics and society, reconceptualizing politics as fundamentally about three things: power, space and resources.[33] This approach

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[28] C.F. Richmond, 'The transition from feudalism to capitalism in the archives of Magdalen College, Oxford: a note', History Workshop Journal, 37 (1994), 165-9

[29] For early modern conflicts over town commons, see H. French, 'The common fields of urban England: communal agriculture and the "politics of entitlement"', in R.W. Hoyle (ed.), Custom, improvement and the landscape in early modern Britain (Farnham, 2011), 149-74; for a l

[30] J. Whittle, 'Lords and tenants in Kett's Rebellion 1549', Past and Present, 207, 1 (2010), 3-52.

[31] Whittle, J., The development of agrarian capitalism: land and labour in Norfolk, 1450-1580, (Oxford, 2000), 286.

[32] M. Muller, 'Conflict and revolt: the Bishop of Ely and his peasants at the manor of Brandon in Suffolk, c.1300-1381', Rural History, 23, 1 (2012), 1-19; idem., 'The aims and organization of a peasant revolt in fourteenth-century Wiltshire', Rural History, 14, 1 (2003), 1-20.

[33] P. Collinson, De Republica Anglorum, or, history with the politics put back in (Cambridge, 1989); K.E. Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (eds), The experience of authority in early modern England (Basingstoke, 1995). Resources are key to the development theorist Adrian Leftwich's theorization of politics, work that was

was materialist without being Marxist. Importantly, it also broke open boundaries between society and economy, enabling us to write a history of economic life which was at the same time a history of neighbourhood, reciprocity, conflict and identity. A number of the essays in this collection, most notably that of James Bowen on common rights and cottages in early modern Shropshire and William Shannon on woodland resources in Lancashire, builds on and complicates that inheritance in ways that are fresh and illuminating. What is especially satisfying in both pieces is the combination of fresh archival material with a rich sense of local place. A similar sense of place is evident in Simon Sandall's essay on the Forest of Dean, which offers the sharpest sense in the volume both of the conflictual nature of custom (neither plebeian nor elite, custom represented an available discourse that could be claimed by a variety of contending groups) along wih a strong sense of the ways in which customary ideals informed social identities.

Coal: the organic energy economy

Coal represented many things in early modern England: it represented heat, smoke, pollution, some flickering light by which to read or to conduct conversation, and of course, it represented harsh, demanding labour. The fuel economy of late medieval and early modern rural communities deserves closer study. I want here briefly to develop one important example, that of the perhaps surprising economic interface between coastal East Anglia and the northern coalfield around Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Alex Brown's piece in this volume demonstrates the extensive use of coal within the regional market of the north-east from a surprisingly early date. By the early sixteenth century, coal shipments from Newcastle were arriving in greater numbers not only in the major Norfolk ports of King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth, but also in the small fishing community of Blakeney on the north Norfolk coast. These shipments had profound consequences for the economies of these communities, and for those inland areas that traded with them. In the case of Lynn, internal river networks fed coal into Huntingtonshire and Cambridgeshire; Cambridge colleges were heated with coal by the fifteenth century. Yarmouth trade fed the fuel needs of England's second city, Norwich, quite possibly from the early sixteenth century. Coal shipments into small ports without an adjacent river network such as Blakeney probably reached a less extensive hinterland, but will have given that village a particular distinctive appearance and source of domestic heating. The study of the north-east coal trade therefore illuminates an important driver in the growing market integration and commercialization of the English economy.

Of course, the growth of London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would have been impossible without a massive increase in Newcastle coal shipments. Within the rural economy, this had a number of effects. Most obviously, it resulted in the early industrialization of the northern coalfield of County Durham and Northumberland, breeding proletarianization, massive

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influential upon Wrightson's assessment of parish politics. See his Redefining politics: people, resources and power (London, 1983).

landscape change, and intense conflict over mineral rights.[34] These village disputes over coal mining rights remain fully to be explored: the records are available to write a very detailed study – in gentry family archives as well as in equity court litigation (for example, the central Exchequer court; Star Chamber; and the Palatinate courts of Durham).

The expansion of the northern coalfield created a new kind of rural community: the industrial village. Different in texture to the proto-industrial weaving communities of regions such as the Stour Valley, or the handicraft manufactures of Hallamshire or the Forest of Arden, the proletarian mining villages of the north-east were, at a startlingly early date, already established as fully industrial societies. And the coal that they produced, moved on waggonways to the Tyne, then onto ships from that great port down the east coast, and finally shifted to London or down inland river networks, altered the fuel economies of villages and small towns hundreds of miles from the northern coalfield. Intensive work on inventories, borough records and port books would enable us to chart the development of this energy economy, one that E.A. Wrigley has seen as a fundamental element in England's early industrialization and sustained demographic take-off.[35] And we ought not to concentrate on the northern coalfield alone. Inland coal industries were also emerging in the late medieval period in areas such as Lancashire, north-east Cheshire and the West Midlands. The inhabitants of Tudor Stockport, for example, were burning coal extracted from nearby Bredbury, on the Cheshire 'panhandle' that reached into the Pennine uplands. Here, too, there is evidence of growing market integration, albeit over much shorter distances.

For those communities that did not lie close to a navigable river or to an emergent coalfield, the primary source of domestic heating remained either peat or firewood; for the really desperate, homes were heated by burning animal dung. Access to the firewood and peat was dictated by local custom – specifically, the rights of firebote and turbary. Here, too, there is widespread evidence of intense conflict over fuel rights – conflicts that were just as intensely felt and fought as disputes over pasture rights on common land.[36] Following the publication of E.P. Thompson's *Customs in Common*, customary rights have recently received much attention, reigniting a subject that had seemed relatively dormant following seminal work by Tawney and the Hammonds. Yet there remain significant lacunae. Work by Shaw-Taylor has, perhaps unsurprisingly, shown that by the time of large-scale parliamentary enclosure in eastern England, labourers in smaller communities had largely lost rights to pasture animals.[37] Yet the precise chronology of this shift – micro-political in character –

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[34] The key study is D. Levine and K.E. Wrightson, The making of an industrial society: Whickham, 1560-1765 (Oxford, 1991).

[35] E.A. Wrigley, Continuity, chance and change: the character of the industrial revolution in England (Cambridge, 1988).

[36] For a very long-term local struggle, see R.W. Bushaway, '"Groveley, Groveley, and all Groveley": custom, crime and conflict in the English woodland', History Today, 31, 5 (1981), 37-43.

[37] L. Shaw-Taylor, 'Labourers, cows, common rights and parliamentary enclosure: the evidence of contemporary comment, c.1760-1810', Past and Present, 171 (2001), 95-127 For an overstated version of the same argument, see S. Birtles, 'Common land, poor relief and enclosure: the use of manorial resources in fulfilling parish obligations, 1601-1834', Past and Present, 165 (1999), 74-106.

remains to be fully explored. In particular, this will involve attention to enclosure disputes and stinting. Yet pasture rights were not the only form of customary entitlement; a fuller understanding of, for example, fuel rights will illuminate the interaction of economic and social relations within the village polity, bringing up issues to do with senses of entitlement and social conflict.

Town and country
One of the unfortunate effects of the development of urban history and of agricultural history has been a tendency – amongst both social and economic historians – secondarily to identify themselves as either urban or rural historians.[38] This is not helped by the separation of these fields within influential journals that deal (mostly) with the economic and social history of the medieval and early modern periods – for all their many virtues, titles like *Urban History*, *Agricultural History Review* and *Rural History* by their very nature are predicated on the maintenance of an urban/rural distinction.

What I am emphatically <u>not</u> suggesting is that historians should not write histories of individual villages or rural neighbourhoods, or of towns and cities. Nor am I suggesting – it would be crazy to do so – that there was no difference between the texture, rhythm, or politics of urban and rural life. My point is that historians should write about town and country with a much sharper sense of the dynamic interrelationship between the urban and the rural. We need clearer studies of the market integration of town and countryside. Within highly urbanized regions (such as the south-east and East Anglia) and localities adjacent to towns and cities, we need studies of migration patterns that are alive to the push/pull effect of the city alongside the demands of lambing and harvest season, as labourers moved into the city in the winter and out again to the countryside in the spring. Urban perceptions of the rural – and rural perceptions of the urban – ought to replace cultural historians' urban bias.

But it is sometimes hard to escape established patterns of historical writing, especially where these are implicit or unstated. This has certainly been true of both urban and rural studies. Work on towns and cities tends to refer, in an almost colonial manner, to what they call the rural 'hinterland'. Similarly, most rural studies tend to ignore the importance of towns and cities in driving economic and social changes. The one notable exception to this is Levine and Wrightson's study of Wickham, in the northern coalfield, in which Newcastle looms as a constant presence over the lives of the villagers.

Let us focus, for a moment, on the ciy of Norwich, for which exceptionally good records survive. Mid-Tudor Norwich people spoke of the 'men of the countrith' as though they were a separate category, yet the borough records are full of examples of rural folk coming and going to the city – trading in the many markets, drinking in the hundreds of alehouses, visiting family, gossiping, spreading seditious words. And the landscape of medieval and early modern cities was much more agricultural than we might imagine today. Much of

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[38] A very important exception to this is the work of E.A. Wrigley. See in particular his essay 'A simple model of London's importance in changing English society and economy, 1650-1750', in E.A. Wrigley, <u>People, cities and wealth: the transformation of a traditional society</u> (Oxford, 1987), 133-56.

Norwich within its walls was made up of gardens, orchards, and playing fields such as the Gildencroft in the poor weaving parish of St Augustine's, where young men went 'camping' – that is, played football – just as rural lads kicked balls about on 'camping fields' in villages such as Stiffkey.[39] Cunningham's 1558 map of Norwich shows cultivated fields came right up to the city walls. This is confirmed by legal papers concerning the suburbs of the city, such as Lakenham and Eaton. Importantly, those extra-mural fields were actually within the city, in that they fell within the jurisdictional boundaries of Norwich as set by its charters. Medieval and early modern cities weren't defined by the people who lived there in terms of relative population density, occupational specialization, or any of the other markers beloved of urban geographers. Cities were defined by their charters, documents that were lovingly preserved within locked and bolted oaken chests in guildhalls (remember that rural communities, too, took care to preserve the documentary basis of their customary rights). Horses were everywhere. Come market day, the streets would have been crowded with sheep, pigs, cattle, and great wains crammed with grain, vegetables, cheeses and fruit. Wherries from Yarmouth were laid up at the docks in Conesford and alongside Pigg Lane, dockers unloading coal that had been hacked from the mines of villages like Whickham in County Durham, and shipped down the east coast from Newcastle in big collier ships to Yarmouth (those same colliers returned to Newcastle loaded with Norfolk and Suffolk grain to feed hungry mouths in the north-east – another example of symbiosis of town and countryside, this time between otherwise distant regions).[40] And engirdling Norwich on its northern and eastern approach was Mousehold Heath, the massive area of common land on which Kett's rebels had gathered in 1549. Sometimes referred to as a 'peasant rebellion', there were many urban men and women amongst the Norfolk rebels. Significantly, Mousehold was intercommoned by a series of adjacent rural settlements, as well as by the inhabitants of the city.

So, in terms of the texture of everyday life, the agricultural experience would have been everywhere within cities – even in London. And rural communities were likewise heavily influenced by urban communities. Small towns such as Cirencester – here studied by David Rollison - were especially important, still sitting in the network of minor roads that had been established by the Romans, they represented important trading centres and sources of capital, together with centres of sociability (alehouses; passing players; town and village gossip; political news) for rural people as well as townswomen and men.[41] This swirl of

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[39] D. Dymond, 'A lost social institution: the camping close', Rural History, 1, 2 (1990).

[40] N.J. Williams, The maritime trade of East Anglian ports, 1550-1650 (Oxford, 1988) 50-68, 138-80. For the broader argument about the growing interdependence of what were emerging as economically distinct regions by 1650, see P. Hudson (ed.), Regions and industries: a perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain (Cambridge, 1988). That growing interdependence is a key theme in K.E. Wrightson, Earthly necessities: economic lives in early modern Britain, 1470-1750 (New Haven, Conn., 2000).

[41] R. Fleming, Britain after Rome: the fall and rise, 400 to 1070 (London, 2010), 13-15. Fleming suggests that the collapse of this network of small towns led to the crisis of late antiquity in Roman Britain, as the large country villas that had fed the commerce of the towns turned inward, becoming more like big gentry estates – or even slave plantations, perhaps –than outward-facing suppliers to a market. It is worth remembering that much of the road network within England in the 1350-1750 was Roman in origin.

conversation, bargaining, exchange of ideas, goods and money was known to contemporaries as 'traficke'.[42] And it was what bound what was otherwise a patchwork of local 'countries' and 'neighbourhoods' together, holding it together as a polity, a culture, an economy and – increasingly – as a nation.

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[42] D. Rollison, 'Exploding England: The Dialectics of Mobility and Settlement in Early Modern England', <u>Social History</u> 24, 1 (1999), 1-16.