

## SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN KENT 1480-1660

### II. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DATA

THE county of Kent accumulated during the course of our period very rich resources for the endowment of its charitable and social institutions. In total, the huge sum of £251,766 12s. was given by 6,662 benefactors. This somewhat exceeds the amount provided in any other rural county, attesting at once the wealth of the shire and the mature sense of responsibility borne by the men and women who possessed this wealth during the early modern period. It may likewise be observed that this sense of social responsibility was widely diffused in many social classes, since the number of donors for the county exceeded the total for any other rural county save Yorkshire, and the average benefaction, amounting to £37 15s. 10d., was relatively very low.<sup>1</sup>

Of the great total provided for the several charitable uses, by far the largest amount, £102,519 7s., was given for one or another form of poor relief. This very large sum, quite unmatched in any other rural county, comprised somewhat more than 40 per cent. (40.72 per cent.) of all charitable funds. Concern with the plight of the poor was marked in Kent from the very outset of our era and increased steadily as the sixteenth century wore on, with a special interest in the foundation and endowment of almshouses for the care of the wholly indigent. Thus the £44,614 3s. provided for almshouses alone in Kent exceeds the total given for all forms of poor relief in such counties as Hampshire, Lancashire, and Worcestershire, and it is only slightly less than the total in such rich counties as Buckinghamshire and Somerset. The donors of Kent were not, however, particularly notable for their interest in the many schemes of social rehabilitation which were to be attempted in the England of our age.<sup>2</sup> These essentially experimental undertakings attracted no more than £12,043 4s. of capital, or 4.78 per cent. of the whole. This proportion does not compare favourably with that in such socially advanced counties as Norfolk or Bristol, where very close to a tenth of all funds was given for these uses, but it is very similar indeed to that in the remaining rural counties comprised in our study. Nor were the benefactors of the county much

<sup>1</sup> The average benefactions in the other counties included in this study are as follows :

	£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.
Bristol	173	6	9	Norfolk	65	10	10
Buckinghamshire	51	3	10	Somerset	32	2	3
Hampshire	44	10	2	Worcestershire	66	17	10
Lancashire	110	9	10	Yorkshire	28	4	6
London	255	12	2				

<sup>2</sup> *Vide post*, 55-60, for a discussion of these charities.

interested in the many municipal needs of the age, these charitable uses commanding only £11,558 15s. of the gifts made for all purposes. This sum, amounting to 4·59 per cent. of the whole, was largely devoted to such relatively conservative purposes as the repair of roads and streets and the support of other public works.

A very large sum, amounting to £58,255 16s., was provided for the endowment of the educational institutions rapidly being founded in Kent. This total comprised slightly more than 23 per cent. (23·14 per cent.) of all the benefactions of the county, a proportion very similar to that found in the other counties examined, save for the always amazing devotion of Lancashire and Yorkshire to the need for education.<sup>1</sup> This great sum was principally disposed by its donors for the founding of grammar schools in widely dispersed centres throughout the county, creating a system of secondary education which, as we shall see, was remarkably mature well before the close of our period.

In all, the large total of £67,389 10s. was given in Kent for the many religious needs and uses of the period, though in proportionate terms this meant that only slightly more than a fourth (26·77 per cent.) of all charitable funds was provided for this purpose. Even this proportion is, however, somewhat deceptively large since approximately 67 per cent. (67·55 per cent.) of the whole amount was given during the six decades prior to the Reformation, leaving the services of the church and the care of its fabric sadly and seriously neglected during the remaining century and more of our period.

During the two generations prior to the Reformation (1480-1540), an unusually large proportion (29·59 per cent.) of the total of the charities of the county was accumulated.<sup>2</sup> This great sum, amounting to £74,494 10s., was in itself larger than the whole of the charitable wealth amassed in many English counties during our entire period. It was given by upwards of 3,000 donors, most of whom were men of humble status, and it reflects the steady piety and the conservative tenor of life and of aspiration in the Kent of this era. The central preoccupation during these years was with the church, to which £45,519 12s. was given, amounting to 61·10 per cent. of the whole of the charitable sums provided during these years. At the same time, however, the great concern of the county with its educational needs was becoming evident, since the substantial total of £13,286 10s. was

<sup>1</sup> The proportion of all charitable funds devoted to education in the several counties was as follows :

	%		%
Bristol	21·33	London	27·04
Buckinghamshire	21·26	Norfolk	23·00
Hampshire	24·84	Somerset	25·88
Kent	23·14	Worcestershire	26·77
Lancashire	41·79	Yorkshire	31·12

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* Table I (Appendix) for the details of this analysis.

given for this use, amounting to not quite 18 per cent. of the whole for the interval. There was likewise a very considerable interest in the needs of the poor of the county, £9,415 7s. having been designated for the various forms of poor relief, or 12·64 per cent. of the total of charitable funds given prior to the Reformation. Considerably more than half of this amount was provided for the outright relief of poor men, chiefly in the form of alms or funeral doles. The surprisingly large total of £6,082 13s., comprising 8·17 per cent. of the whole, was given for various municipal undertakings, of which the care of roads and similar public works absorbed almost the entire amount. Only a tiny sum, £190 8s., or 0·26 per cent. of the total, was provided for the several uses which we have grouped together under the head of social rehabilitation, though it should be noted that in other counties as well concern with these experimental enterprises tended to develop somewhat later.

The age of the Reformation (1541-1560) was one of great social and cultural unsettlement in Kent. To a degree far greater than in the other counties we have examined, charitable benefactions of any kind tended to dry up in these years as if reflecting the uncertainty which gripped men. In this interval of two decades, only £11,775 2s. was provided for all charitable uses, amounting to no more than 4·68 per cent. of the whole of the philanthropic funds amassed in Kent during the course of our entire period. There was, moreover, a most violent and dramatic shift in the structure of men's charitable concerns. In proportionate terms, the amount given for religious purposes was almost exactly halved, substantially less than a third (31·16 per cent.) of the whole having been devoted to one or another religious use. At the same time, the proportion given for poor relief increased very sharply to 43·24 per cent. of the total, while the rate of giving to poor relief, as measured in decade intervals, was most substantially increased. A total of £2,222 8s., or 18·87 per cent of the whole, was provided for education in this brief interval, of which almost the entire amount was designated for the foundation of grammar schools. A modest amount, £609 12s., which was 5·18 per cent. of the whole, was given for various municipal needs, while a still inconsiderable proportion (1·55 per cent.) was vested in the various experiments in social rehabilitation.

In Kent, as in all other counties, the structure of Elizabethan aspirations was intensely secular, while a notable increase in the amount of charitable giving occurred. During this generation a total of £45,182 3s. was provided for the several charitable uses of the county, or not quite 18 per cent. of the whole amount given during our entire period. The absorbing philanthropic interest of this period was in the care of the poor, to which socially sensitive men and women of the

county gave in all £24,048 10s. This most substantial sum represents well over half (53·23 per cent.) of all benefactions of the age and was almost wholly given for the foundation of almshouses or for the establishment of endowed plans for household relief in the various parishes of the county. A large sum, amounting to £11,465 1s., or a quarter (25·38 per cent.) of the whole, was likewise vested for the educational needs of the county in a period notable for the foundation of grammar schools in every part of the realm. But the most striking evidence of a revolutionary metamorphosis in the structure of the social aspirations of Kent was the withering away of benefactions for religious purposes. The relatively tiny total of £3,908 17s. was given for such uses during this long and prosperous interval, amounting to only 8·65 per cent. of all charities and actually being slightly less than the sum provided for the various schemes of social rehabilitation. Secularism had indeed triumphed even in the county of St. Thomas à Becket and his cathedral church.

The great outpouring of charitable wealth came in the early Stuart period, when the huge total of £93,971 4s. was provided by many hundreds of donors for the various philanthropic needs of the county. It is interesting to note, however, that the pattern of giving, the structure of aspirations, established in Kent under the last and the greatest of the Tudors was maintained with very minor changes in these later decades : it is only that the scale of giving was so much more generous. Thus the very large total of £51,950 11s. was provided for the relief of Kent's poor ; of this, almshouse endowments alone absorbed £26,060 14s. The massive sums designated for poor relief amounted to slightly more than 55 per cent. (55·28 per cent.) of the total of charities for this interval and, it should be observed, to approximately half the entire amount given for poor relief during our entire period. Great endowments totalling £25,170 7s. were poured into educational foundations, amounting to well over a fourth (26·79 per cent.) of all the benefactions of the interval, with grammar schools receiving about half this great sum. The needs of the church were still sorely neglected, since not much more than a tenth (10·11 per cent.) of all the benefactions of this generous age were made for such uses despite the more sympathetic support of the Crown and the frantic efforts of Archbishop Laud and his bishops. Not quite 5 per cent. (4·98 per cent.) of the whole was devoted to plans for social rehabilitation ; the substantial total of £2,429 10s. for workhouse endowments was by far the largest sum given to the several uses comprehended under this head.

The Civil War and the subsequent period of political unsettlement bore very heavily on Kent, as is suggested by the fact that the rate of giving, when measured by decades, declined by nearly half during this brief interval. During these years a total of £26,343 13s. was

added to the charitable funds of the county, an amount only slightly more than 10 per cent. (10·46 per cent.) of the total for our entire period.<sup>1</sup> The most notable change in the structure of giving was in the substantial increase in the proportion of funds provided, principally by Puritans, for the support of the clergy as well as for other religious uses. In all, £4,787 2s. was designated for church purposes, or 18·17 per cent. of the whole for our period. A considerably larger total of £6,111 10s., amounting to 23·20 per cent. of all benefactions during this interval, was given for the further strengthening of the educational institutions of the county, while a most marked increase is to be observed in the financing of various plans of social rehabilitation, for which the substantial sum of £3,051, or 11·58 per cent. of the whole, was provided. There was, at the same time, a decrease, both relatively and absolutely, in the dispositions made for the relief of the poor of Kent. In all, the sum of £12,013 1s. was given, or 45·60 per cent. of the whole, of which amount it may be noted not so much as a third was in the form of almshouse endowments.

There are a number of statistical comments on the great *corpus* of charitable wealth in Kent which may shed some light on the nature and quality of these benefactions. Thus we may speak of the relation existing between the capital sums provided in the county for various charitable uses and the amounts given or bequeathed for immediate expenditure. Benefactions of the latter type tended of course to be smaller in amount and partook of the nature of the casual alms so typical of medieval charity. By far the larger number of benefactors gave or bequeathed small charitable amounts of this sort, particularly during the earlier decades of our study. But it was the capital gifts—the endowments—with which men expressed their aspirations for the future and the full measure of their confidence that the institutions they were founding might help in creating a future consonant with those aspirations.

In all, the very large total of £204,799 14s. of Kent's charitable resources for our period was left in the form of capital amounts. This means that slightly more than 81 per cent. (81·35 per cent.) of the whole was provided as capital to ensure the perpetuation of the purposes which the donor held in mind. This represents a quite high proportion for Kent among the counties included in this study, though it should be noted that the difference from county to county in this respect is remarkably small.<sup>2</sup> The great benefactions from which the important social and cultural institutions of Kent were to be created

<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that included in this amount is £2,946 15s. to which no date can certainly be assigned, thus introducing a slight statistical error.

<sup>2</sup> The range for these counties, Kent being included, is from 76·83 per cent. for Lancashire to 91 per cent. for Bristol.

—the almshouses, the schools, the workhouses, the loan funds, the apprenticeship schemes, the scholarships and fellowships—were almost wholly in the form of endowments. So too the considerable amounts left for general charitable uses, for hospitals, for marriage subsidies, and for municipal uses, were principally financed by capital gifts providing a permanent income. It is remarkable that even the large sum of £52,242 7s. given for the household relief of the poor of the county was mostly (90·05 per cent.) in endowments, though, taking the whole of our period in view, nearly two-thirds (62·07 per cent.) of all individual donors providing sums for this purpose made their benefactions in the form of gifts for immediate use. It is very clear that the larger, the dominant gifts, those possessing institutional force, were made for this as for other charitable uses in the form of permanent endowments. Gifts for immediate use loom more importantly in the financing of such interests as the relief of prisoners, the care and improvement of roads and other public works of this sort, and, of course, the support of the various needs of religion.

It might be well to note that the great accumulation of charitable funds in Kent was formed both by bequests and by gifts made during the donor's lifetime. An extensive sampling of benefactions suggests, indeed, that they were nearly evenly balanced in Kent, something like 52 per cent. (51·82 per cent.) of the whole amount having been provided in the form of bequests. We may be reasonably certain that almost all the benefactions vested by bequest have been found, though we may not be so comfortably certain regarding those given during the lifetime of the donor. The larger of these latter which were to be incorporated into the fabric of charities in the county as trusts or which were sufficiently formal in character as to find their way into a variety of records have perhaps all been noted. But there remain the small, the quiet, and the casual gifts—the doubtless innumerable acts of private charity—which must forever escape our knowledge. They must have been relatively insignificant statistically, but they would have revealed the temper of a period and the nature of its charitable aspirations, since they tend to be the impulsive and not the calculated gifts.

We have sought to study with particular care the large group of capital or endowed gifts which were established in the legal form of charitable trusts. There are in all 436 such trusts about which we know a great deal, including not only the facts surrounding their creation but likewise something of their subsequent administration over what is now a very lengthy historical period. These trusts as a group possessed at the time of their creation an annual value of £4,166 2s. 6d., or an assumed capital worth of about £83,322. In other words, these trusts incorporate a considerable proportion (40·68 per

cent.) of all the capital funds given during the course of our period. It will be noted that these benefactions were relatively large, since their total capital worth amounted to almost exactly one-third (33·09 per cent.) of the whole of the charitable wealth of the county, though they were contributed by only 6·54 per cent of the whole number of its donors. The average worth of this group of trusts was very substantial indeed, being of the order of £191, though there was a very great range in their original value. In all, there were twenty-two of these trusts which were among the great and decisive charitable funds of the county, with endowments of £1,000 or more, while slightly more than a fourth of them (112) were founded and administered with original capital assets of £20 or less. The immense stimulation provided for charitable giving by the reformation and codification of the law of trusts in the great Elizabethan statute is suggested by the fact that 270 of these foundations were made subsequent to 1600 and that these trusts comprised just over 82 per cent. of the whole of the capital of this large group of endowments.

We possess full particulars regarding the precise nature of the trusteeship for 387 of this large group of trusts. Of this number there were eighty-nine in all which were vested in private and named trustees with various provisions for securing the perpetuation of the trust by the selection of new trustees by the surviving members. This was a favourite trust device employed by large donors, though a considerable number of quite small endowments were also thus constituted with trustee bodies ranging from seven in number to one huge aggregate of twenty-six. The largest group in Kent, numbering 130, were constituted by the donors as rent-charges, with fixed income for stipulated purposes payable to named officials, such as churchwardens, or to existing trusts for the better support of an institution or a charity. Municipal governments were nominated as trustees by thirty-six charitable donors and, it must be said, have given an extraordinarily skilful and devoted attention to the trusts in the many years that have followed. There were in all fifty-four of these trusts in which endowments were vested in parish officers, in a great variety of combinations, with churchwardens being most commonly designated as feoffees. Almost as many, thirty-nine in all, charged the local clergyman and some combination of parish officers with the responsibilities of trusteeship, while in three cases clergymen were vested with complete responsibility. In eighteen instances varying numbers of "substantial men" of the parish were to serve as feoffees, with a variety of ingenious provisions for securing their selection and the perpetuation of the endowments. The great influence of London is suggested by the fact that sixteen of the trusts, including most of the largest, were vested in the city companies to which the donors had

belonged, while two were administered by the universities in the capacity of trustee.

These trusts were constituted a very long time ago when the law of trusts and the instrument of trusteeship were in their historical infancy and when, as we have seen, every possible variety of trusteeship was employed by the donors of the period, ranging from the sophisticated and experienced skill of the London livery company to the economic and legal hazards for a simple rent-charge. But, sustained by the integrity of the trustee, the watchful and periodic forays of royal commissioners, and, perhaps most important of all, by the vigilance of the parish itself, these trusts have displayed a tough power of survival, while the trustees have lent an amazing fidelity to the purposes of the original donors. Of the total number of 436 of these trusts, only thirty-eight have been lost or, more often, merged, usually unwittingly and extra-legally, with other trustee funds. Moreover, most of the lost trusts were very small, a high proportion being tiny rent-charges, the range of their original value being from 2s. p.a. to £11 15s. p.a., and only six of them possessed an original capital worth of as much as £100. To state the facts in another and better way, of the original capital worth of £83,322 possessed by this group of trusts, those lost had an original capital worth of £2,403, with the result that not more than 2.88 per cent. of the value at the time of foundation has disappeared through incompetence, illegality, or the slow erosion of time. This is indeed a proud and a most enviable record of trusteeship. But, enviable as this record may be, it is by no means the whole of the accomplishment of this long line of feoffees. Despite the fact that a relatively large proportion of the assets of these charitable trusts were frozen by donors in the dangerously inflexible form of rent-charges, there has been an immense increase in capital worth. Assuming an average income of 5 per cent. on trustee funds in both cases, the original worth of £83,322 of these 436 funds has increased until at the last reporting date<sup>1</sup> the value had attained the huge total of £1,125,583, or an increase of almost fourteen times over. This increase very possibly has kept pace with the inexorable decline in the purchasing power of wealth in the long period that has intervened and is accounted for not only by the investing skill of trustees but by the immense increase in the value of land lying near the ever-spreading urban complex of London and in several other instances of investments made in the typical urban centres of the county.

Kent was a relatively conservative county, if we may take the

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that information regarding the increase in value of these funds is not always so recent as would be desired. There are several small trusts for which the last reporting date is in the early nineteenth century, though the trusts are known still to be in existence. Roughly half the latest-value dates are from the eighteen-sixties, while most of the remainder are relatively recent.

## GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DATA

contributions of women to charitable uses as a significant indication of the degree of participation which they enjoyed in the ordering and moulding of its institutions. There were in all 837 women donors to the charities of the county, comprising approximately one-eighth (12·56 per cent.) of all donors in Kent. These women gave £13,833 2s. for various charitable purposes, or a rather low average of £16 10s. 6d. for each benefactor, as compared with an average of £37 15s. 10d. for all donors in the county. The contribution of this large group of women constituted 5·49 per cent of the whole of the charitable wealth of Kent, a surprisingly low proportion in view of the mature quality of the county's institutions and its nearness to and intricate connections with London.<sup>1</sup>

The charitable interests of these women donors did not differ notably from those displayed in the county at large, save for the fact that they were consistently more deeply concerned with the needs of the poor. In all, women donors gave slightly more than half (50·32 per cent.) of their benefactions for the relief of poverty as compared with somewhat more than 40 per cent. (40·72 per cent.) for Kent in general. It may further be noted that their concern was sharply focused on direct relief, with a high proportion of their gifts being in the somewhat dubious form of alms. Women donors gave an even smaller proportion of their funds for experiments in social rehabilitation (2·73 per cent.) and for a variety of municipal improvements (3·58 per cent.) than did the county at large. They gave in total £2,328 13s. for educational uses, of which almost the entire amount was for grammar schools, this amounting to only 16·83 per cent. of all their benefactions as compared with slightly more than 23 per cent. (23·14 per cent.) for the county. And, finally, the £3,669 16s. provided by them for the various religious needs represented 26·53 per cent. of all their benefactions, a proportion almost identical with that for all donors in Kent.

It is most difficult to establish with certainty the social status of any considerable group of women donors in our period. All too fre-

<sup>1</sup> The relative importance of women donors in Kent may be compared with that observed in the other counties studied :

	<i>Percentage of all donors</i>	<i>Percentage of all charities</i>
Bristol	15·44	7·58
Buckinghamshire	13·50	13·01
Hampshire	12·17	3·92
Kent	12·56	5·49
Lancashire	11·28	6·34
London	14·88	9·14
Norfolk	12·97	9·47
Somerset	14·63	6·03
Worcestershire	12·71	5·31
Yorkshire	12·99	12·55

quently even fairly substantial benefactors remain forever cloaked in the anonymity of spinsterhood or widowhood. None the less, the records are relatively very good in Kent, with the result that we have been able to establish definitely the social status of 417 of these donors, or almost exactly half the total number. An amazing proportion of these women belonged to one or another of the rural classes, the total number being 320, while the known residence or the nature of the bequest of the half whose status is not certainly known would suggest that this rural preponderance would hold approximately true for all women donors of the county. Five of these women were of the nobility, their benefactions ranging from one in 1643 of £68 for the outright relief of the poor of the parish to a bequest totalling £720 in 1639, of which £480 was designated for the poor, £100 for a hospital, and £140 for church building. A substantial number of these women, sixty-one in all, were members of the upper gentry, though somewhat surprisingly this group did not, with few exceptions, dispose considerable charitable wealth. More than a third of the group left bequests under £10, while only six of them gave as much as £100, though it must at once be said that four of them did make substantial gifts in excess of £500. As we should expect, the women of the lower gentry constituted a somewhat larger group of seventy-six donors. In terms of the average contribution, these women were almost as generous as those of the upper gentry. The benefactions of these well-placed women ranged in amount from a gift of 6s. 8d. in 1507 to a benefaction of £620 made to the poor in 1534. The great bulk of these bequests were less than £10 in total amount, though ten of them were substantial benefactions providing £100 or more for various charitable purposes.

The poorer rural classes were likewise heavily represented in terms of the number of donors. About a fourth (23 per cent.) of the identified women donors were drawn from the yeomanry of the county. The contributions of these lowly placed women were by no means negligible, totalling £894 17s. Most were of course nominal legacies, usually for the poor, though there were two substantial benefactions of £144 9s. (1504) and £180 (1621), which quite rivalled in consequence the charities of the ladies of the upper rural classes. It is even more surprising to note that there were seventy-two women donors who were the wives or widows of husbandmen and who possessed wealth disposable for charitable purposes. These bequests were with few exceptions under 10s. in amount, with the largest benefaction from a member of this group amounting to £6 9s. And there were, finally, nine women who were widows, wives, or daughters of the rural clergy and who, with one exception, reflected the straitened economic status of the class as the erosion of Reformation and of marriage had taken their respective tolls.

## GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DATA

Urban women were not strongly represented among the benefactors of this county, though their average contribution was considerably greater than that of their rural counterparts. Thus there were only six women of the merchant class, four of whom made benefactions of more than £100, the largest of which was a scholarship endowment of £272 vested in 1568 by a goldsmith's widow. There were twenty-one women donors of the tradesman class, whose charitable gifts range in amount from 4s. (1517) to £108 (1558). There were as well twenty-nine wives and daughters of the class which we have been obliged to describe rather loosely as "additional burghers",<sup>1</sup> whose average contributions somewhat exceed that of the tradesman group. And, finally, we must note with some surprise the benefactions of forty-one urban women who were clearly members of the artisan classes. Though their contributions were relatively small, ranging from 2s. to £11 4s., it may none the less be observed that they were in average terms nearly three times as great as those of the women who were members of the yeomanry of the county.

<sup>1</sup> We have defined this social group as urban dwellers whose precise status is unknown, but who clearly enjoyed a certain measure of status or who held some civic office or dignity. Most of these men—and their wives and widows—were probably of the tradesman class. (*Vide post*, 154-155, for a further comment on this group and its contributions.)