

## THE KENT YEOMAN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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Mildred Campbell, in the only detailed work so far published on the yeomanry, concluded that the yeoman class emerged in the fifteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The yeomen were the free tenants of the manor, usually identified with freeholders of land worth 40s. a year, the medieval franklins. The Black Death of 1348 may have hastened the emergence of the yeomanry. The plague may have killed between one-third and one-half of the total population of England, a loss from which the population did not recover until the second half of the sixteenth century. Landowners were left with vacant farms because tenants had died and no one was willing to take on tenancies or buy land at the high rents and prices common before the Black Death. In a buyer's market, it became impossible for landlords to enforce all the feudal services previously exacted. Land prices fell, and peasant farming families which survived the Black Death and which had a little capital were able, over several generations, to accumulate sizeable estates largely free of labour services.

It is taken for granted that yeomen were concerned with agriculture, men who would later come to be described as farmers, ranking between gentry and husbandmen, of some substance and standing in their communities. However, a re-examination of contemporary usages suggests that there was always some uncertainty as to what a yeoman was. William Harrison, describing English social structure in 1577, said that yeomen possessed 'a certain pre-eminence and more estimation' among the common people. They were said to 'live wealthily and travail to get riches.'<sup>2</sup> However, there are many examples of men described as yeomen who do not fit Harrison's description. The Earl of Dorset's steward reported after the Civil War that 'the poor and of a

<sup>1</sup> Mildred Campbell, *The English Yeoman* (Yale 1942), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 62.

better sort are yeomen so thievish and unconscionable. . . .'<sup>3</sup> His use of the term yeoman seems to embrace a range of social classes.

In 1585, Roger Gatton of Maidstone, yeoman, was charged at the Assizes with breaking into a gentleman's house and stealing two gold bracelets and a purse. At the end of the indictment is a note 'a boy aged ten years.'<sup>4</sup> In 1589, Thomas Chapman, Robert Wilylams, John Smyth, Francis Jeffereys and John Sewoll, all yeomen, were indicted for vagrancy at Maidstone and other places.<sup>5</sup> The same year, at an inquest into the death of Henry Smythe of Sevenoaks, yeoman, the deceased was described as a keeper for John Leonard esq.<sup>6</sup> Similarly in 1594 there was an assault on George Nasshe of Hawkhurst, yeoman, servant of Samuel Boys esq.<sup>7</sup> In 1628, Thomas Dolman, a yeoman of Canterbury, is described as 'servant' of Sir James Hales, and in 1633 John Sharpe of Canterbury was described as 'innholder, yeoman'.<sup>8</sup> None of the above sound like respected freeholders.

The sixteenth-century Kent historian William Lambarde's description of the Kent yeomanry is well known. 'The yeomanry is nowhere more free and jolly than in this shire. . . In this their estate they please themselves, and joy exceedingly, insomuch as a man may find sundry yeomen (although otherwise for wealth comparable with many of the gentle sort) that will not yet for all that change their condition, nor desire to be apparailled with the titles of gentry.'<sup>9</sup> However, Lambarde also referred to the yeomanry 'or common people (for so they be called of the Saxon word *zemen*, which signifieth common).' He seems to be suggesting that everyone under the rank of gentleman could be called a yeoman, regardless of his wealth or standing in the community. The spelling *yemen* was still common in Kent in the late sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Lambarde was a lawyer and had studied Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, so must be accepted as reliable. His opinion is supported by the evidence from the Assize Rolls and elsewhere, quoted above, but conflicts with that of William Harrison, his contemporary.

It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all yeomen were respected freeholders. Neither can it be assumed that all yeomen were involved in

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Kentish Studies U120 C4-6.

<sup>4</sup> (Ed.) J.S. Cockburn, *Calendar of Assize Records, Kent Indictments, Elizateth I*, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> (Ed.) Joseph Meadows Cooper *Canterbury Marriage Licences*, 2nd Series 1619-1660, (1892).

<sup>9</sup> William Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent* (1st edn 1570) 1970 edn, 7.

<sup>10</sup> For example, CKS PRC10/24/305.

agriculture. Of 1480 yeomen living in the Diocese of Canterbury in the decade 1611–20, 52 were in Canterbury. Some Canterbury parishes did include stretches of open country outside the city walls, but Sandwich, whose three parishes contained very little open country – the largest, St. Clement, was only 535 acres – had twelve yeomen, and Dover, whose two parishes were almost entirely urban, had thirteen yeomen. These men may have had farms elsewhere, but could not have been living in their farmhouses.

It is very difficult to estimate how many yeomen there were at one time in Kent in the seventeenth century. In 1688, Gregory King carried out a social survey of England. King was the son of a land surveyor, held the office of Lancaster Herald and worked as Secretary to the Commission of The Public Accounts. His background and experience thus gave him a good knowledge of the English countryside and landownership. The purpose of King's survey was to show who contributed to the wealth of the country, by producing goods and paying taxes and who decreased the nation's wealth by being unable to earn – children or the aged – or in receipt of poor relief. It is not known what King based his figures on, but modern historians agree that he was reasonably accurate.

King does not mention yeomen in his survey, but after gentry, merchants, lawyers and clergy he lists 'freeholders of the better sort', 'freeholders of the lesser sort' and 'farmers'. King believed that there were 310,000 of these in England, out of a total population which he estimated at 5½ million.<sup>11</sup> Thus about 5.5 per cent of the population came into the yeoman class. It is thought that the population of Kent in the late seventeenth century was about 150,000;<sup>12</sup> and 5.5 per cent of that is 8250. Recalculating leaving out King's freeholders of the lesser sort gives a total of 5175 yeomen in Kent.

In the Compton Census of 1676, clergy were required to give the total number of Anglicans, Dissenters and Catholics in their parishes. The vicar of Goodnestone next Wingham, however, chose to list his parishioners by occupation or social class. He claimed to have 26 yeomen in his parish out of a population of about 400 – 6.5 per cent of the total.<sup>13</sup> Applying this figure to the population of the whole of Kent, one arrives at a total of 9750 yeomen. The parish of Borden had a population of about 370 in 1676. In 1624, there were fifteen men in the

<sup>11</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (2nd edn 1971), 36.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Chalklin, 'The Compton Census', in (Ed.) F. Hull, *A Seventeenth Century Miscellany*, (1960) 172.

<sup>13</sup> Laslett, *op. cit.*, 66.

parish described as yeomen, 4 per cent of the total population, not allowing for any change between 1624 and 1676.<sup>14</sup> If this were to be applied over the whole county, it would produce a total of about 6000 yeomen.

If all yeomen were substantial freeholders, there cannot have been 8000 of them in Kent at any one time. There were just under a million acres in the ancient county of Kent. If this was all divided among 8000 yeomen, each would have had 125 acres – a reasonable size of farm for a yeoman, but leaving nothing for any other landholder or for urban areas, roads, waterways or common land. A search of probate records, marriage licences and assize records has produced a total of 1480 yeomen in the Diocese of Canterbury in the decade 1611–20 and 1640 in the Diocese in the decade 1621–30.<sup>15</sup> Since the Diocese of Canterbury covered about two-thirds of Kent, the total number of yeomen in the whole county at this time was probably between 2200 and 2500, or under 2 per cent of the total population.

Not all yeomen were heads of families; Mildred Campbell wrote ‘a youth who grew up in a yeoman household and had not yet settled on an occupation for himself might be known as a yeoman from the status of his family even though he himself had no land.’<sup>16</sup> This is borne out by evidence from east Kent. The fifteen yeomen of Borden in 1624 included John Lake, Thomas Lake senior and junior and Richard Lake – possibly a father and three sons.<sup>17</sup> Other probable family groupings among the yeomen of the 1620s include James, John junior, Robert, Thomas and William Sharpe of Westwell, John senior, Richard, Stephen and William Solley of Ash next Sandwich and John senior, John junior, Edward and Francis Taylor of Chillenden. There are many examples of three yeomen of the same family in the same parish in the 1620s, including the Collards of Alkham, the Emptages of St. Nicholas-at-Wade, the Hogbens of Elham, the Hornes of Deal, the Roses of Chislet.<sup>18</sup>

The concentration of yeomen within the diocese varied according to the quality of the agricultural land in each part of the region. The rich arable soils of the Isle of Thanet and the parishes to the west of the Wantsum Channel such as Herne, Chislet, Ash and Woodnesborough seem to have supported the greatest number of yeomen. The seven Thanet parishes had a total of 105 yeomen in the decade 1611–20. Assuming that all land was available for agriculture, each yeoman

<sup>14</sup> CKS P35/1/1.

<sup>15</sup> References to yeomen collected from Cockburn, *op. cit.*, Cooper, *op. cit.*, and CKS PRC10 and PRC28.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> CKS P35/1/1.

<sup>18</sup> See note 15.

would have had about 225 acres. The areas in which yeomen were sparsest are the parishes on the North Downs south-east of Canterbury and in Romney Marsh. In fifteen downland parishes<sup>19</sup> 45 yeomen shared 25,855 acres – 574 acres each. In 16 Romney Marsh parishes<sup>20</sup> 50 yeomen shared 28,493 acres – 570 each. These figures of course assume that yeomen only farmed land in the parishes in which they lived; this was not the case. Yeomen exploited the rich pasture land of Romney Marsh, the North Kent coast and Wantsum Channel. They just preferred not to live in those areas, because they were believed to be unhealthy.

A traditional view of the yeoman farmer is of the family owning the same freehold land for generations. Although some or all yeomen did own some freehold land, many also rented some or all of their land from various landlords. Of a sample of 738 yeomen studied, the landlords of 269 are known. Yeomen's landlords seem to have been of higher rank; the Dowager Countess Pembroke, the Countess of Thanet, Viscount Strangford, Lord Teynham, the Earl of Winchelsea, the Earl of Chesterfield and many Kentish knighted families including Austen, Filmer, Hales, Honeywood, Knatchbull and Oxinden are among the yeomen's landlords. (The seven landlords to whom George Fox of Eastchurch paid rent covered the entire social spectrum from the King, through Sir Anthony Palmer, Mr Cob, Mr Frowde and John Bilke to Goodman Fryer.<sup>21</sup> The seventh landlord was the parish.) Some yeomen rented land from relatives. William Court of Waltham owed £17 rent to Stephen Court and £5 to Thomas Court.<sup>22</sup> Jacob Dive of Headcorn owed £69 rent to Anthony Dive.<sup>23</sup> William Tomms of Eythorne rented a farm from his father Richard.<sup>24</sup> The number of landlords to whom each yeoman paid rent ranged from one to seven; the average number of landlords was 2.2 to each yeoman. Some yeomen were themselves landlords; Thomas Sandvidge of Newington next Sittingbourne in 1683 received £24 12s. 6d. in rent from five different tenants for houses and land in Newington, Borden and Bobbing.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Adisham, Barfreton, Barham, Bekesbourne, Bishopsbourne, Bridge, Coldred, Denton, Eythorne, Kingston, Nonington, Shepherdswell, Tilmanstone, Waldershare, Wootton.

<sup>20</sup> Blackmanstone, Brenzett, Brookland, Burmarsh, Dymchurch, Eastbridge, Fairfield, Hope All Saints, Ivychurch, Lydd, St. Mary in the Marsh, Midley, Newchurch, Orgarswick, Old and New Romney.

<sup>21</sup> CKS PRC2/21/89, 90.

<sup>22</sup> CKS PRC2/42/139.

<sup>23</sup> CKS PRC2/39/166.

<sup>24</sup> CKS PRC1/3/52.

<sup>25</sup> CKS PRC1/15/106.

TABLE I

*Amount of Rent Owed by Yeomen at Death*<sup>26</sup>

Amount owed	no. of yeomen	% of yeomen
up to £25	108	40
£25 – £50	65	24
£50 – £100	70	26
£100 – £200	45	17
over £200	16	6

Of the yeomen who died owing arrears of rent, 23 per cent owed over £100. It is not surprising therefore that deduction of rent arrears from his assets could turn an apparently wealthy yeoman into a poor one. When William Abbot of St. Laurence, Thanet, died he left goods worth £379 11s., which should have made him a substantial man. However, he died owing £109 in unpaid rent, and when this and all his other debts had been taken into account, the administrator of his estate was left with a shortfall of £30 2s. 4d.<sup>27</sup> Robert Baker of Minster-in-Sheppey left moveable property worth £556 2s. 6d., which again suggested that he was a wealthy man, but £400 of rent arrears had to be met out of his estate, which ended with a negative balance of £60 2s. 6d.<sup>28</sup> Henry Hougham of Graveney left moveable goods worth £875, which should have made him among the wealthiest men in the county outside the nobility. However, he died owing rent arrears of £566 19s. in addition to other debts, leaving his estate with a negative balance of £188 14s. 11d.<sup>29</sup>

A yeoman might farm or occupy land over a wide area. Thomas Spaine of Knowlton paid parish rates or tithes to Eastry, Nonington, Tilmanstone and Woodnesborough, indicating that he owned or rented land in all of these as well as his home parish.<sup>30</sup> Robert Tilby of Tenterden owned or rented land in Tenterden, Appledore, Brenzett, Ivychurch and Dymchurch.<sup>31</sup> Hammond Videan of Molash held land in

<sup>26</sup> The figures in Tables I-V are derived from yeomen's probate accounts in CKS PRC1, PRC2, PRC19, PRC20 and PRC21.

<sup>27</sup> CKS PRC1/8/32.

<sup>28</sup> CKS PRC2/39/3.

<sup>29</sup> CKS PRC2/36/201.

<sup>30</sup> CKS PRC2/30/119.

<sup>31</sup> CKS PRC1/11/89.

Chilham, Seasalter and Hernhill, while Richard Vidgeon of Stalisfield held land in Throwleigh, Charing and Westwell.<sup>32</sup> East Kent yeomen were fortunate in having all types of farmland available to them, and those who could rented pasture in the marshlands as well as arable land on the higher ground. Thomas Amherst of Chart Sutton, held land in Ivychurch in Romney Marsh.<sup>33</sup> William Tomms of Eythorne, a downland parish, rented marshland in Ash next Sandwich.<sup>34</sup> Peter Edmed of High Halden had pasture in St. Mary in the Marsh and Ivychurch.<sup>35</sup>

It is sometimes specified that the rent paid is for a year or half a year, but not usually what land or what quantity of land is being rented, so it is not easy to reconstruct a yeoman's land-holding, especially as freehold land is rarely described. Christopher Chalklin has suggested that most Kent yeomen's farms were between about 40 and 100 acres, but some were much larger.<sup>36</sup> In the 1640s, John Prescott of Guston had 88 acres on which he grew arable crops plus pasture for 129 sheep, 12 cows and calves and 16 hogs.<sup>37</sup> Richard Brooke of Eastchurch had a farm of 410 acres, including pasture, meadow and feeding land.<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Wakelin of Southfleet had 36 acres of corn plus pasture for 49 sheep, 10 cattle and 21 pigs, plus in his barn £184 worth of grain and fodder crops already harvested.<sup>39</sup> In the 1670s Thomas Harrison of Guston had grain and fodder growing on 149 acres of land plus pasture for 100 sheep, over 20 cows and 50 pigs and meadow on which he grew grass for hay, while Basil Harrison of Chislet had well over 200 acres in the 1680s.<sup>40</sup>

Rents of land in seventeenth-century Kent varied from 4s. an acre to 20s. an acre for the best pasture land in Romney Marsh.<sup>41</sup> In the early 1620s Thomas Knowler of Herne paid 40s. for one year's rent of four acres of land.<sup>42</sup> Richard Brooke of Eastchurch had a farm of 410 acres in the 1640s, including pasture, meadow and feeding land, for which ten weeks rent was £38 10s. – over £200 a year, an annual rent of about 10s. an acre.<sup>43</sup> William Philpott of St. John, Thanet, in the 1660s paid

<sup>32</sup> CKS PRC1/10/102; PRC1/16/19.

<sup>33</sup> CKS PRC1/9/75.

<sup>34</sup> CKS PRC1/3/52.

<sup>35</sup> CKS PRC1/10/32.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent* (1965), 231.

<sup>37</sup> CKS PRC19/2/108, 108a.

<sup>38</sup> CKS PRC1/8/59.

<sup>39</sup> CKS DRB/Pi/1662/1.

<sup>40</sup> CKS PRC27/25/15; PRC2/41/124.

<sup>41</sup> Chalklin, *Seventeenth Century Kent*, 63.

<sup>42</sup> CKS PRC20/6/118.

<sup>43</sup> CKS PRC1/8/59.

8s. an acre for a small piece of land he rented from one landlord and about 6s. per acre for 80 acres rented from another landlord.<sup>44</sup> The amount of 40s. a year, the amount of land believed to confer yeoman status in previous centuries, would thus have rented a maximum of 10 acres of land in east Kent. Ten acres was barely sufficient to support a family; a man with ten acres was not a substantial farmer, and would have had to supplement his income from farming with outside work.

The Kent yeomen have traditionally been seen as the wealthiest in the country. Contemporary proverbs support this view;

A Knight of Wales  
A Gentleman of Cales  
A Lord of the North Country  
A Yeoman of Kent  
With his yearly rent  
Will buy them out all three<sup>45</sup>

Also

All blessed with health  
And as for wealth  
By fortune's kind embrace  
A yeoman grey shall oft outweigh  
A Knight in other places<sup>46</sup>

William Lambarde attributed the Kent yeomen's wealth to the fact that, according to him, there was never any villeinage in Kent, and so the medieval Kentish peasant was able to accumulate land and wealth unhampered by burdensome labour services and restrictions on his movement. He suggested that the Kentish custom of gavelkind, or partible inheritance, may also have been a factor in the wealth of the Kent yeoman. This meant that landownership was broadly based and always expanding rather than being restricted to a few powerful landowners. Gentry estates remained fairly small and gentlemen did not build up vast estates at the expense of others, and many people at all levels of society could hope to inherit some land at some stage in their lives.<sup>47</sup>

Agriculture in Kent was also stimulated by the region's nearness to the increasingly demanding London food market and the fact that many Kent farmers had access to this market by water transport. The east

<sup>44</sup> CKS PRC1/13/91.

<sup>45</sup> (Ed.) Walter Skeat 'Dr Samuel Pegge's Ms Alphabet of Kentishisms and Collection of Proverbial Sayings used in Kent', *Arch. Cant.*, ix (1874), 117.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> Lambarde, *op. cit.*, 7.



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Kent yeoman's wealth may also be due to the variety of different types of agricultural land available within a small area. The region has good arable land in Thanet and the east, woodland and pasture in the Weald, rich sheep and cattle pasture in the marshland and more sheep pasture on the North Downs, plus fruit and hop-growing country around Faversham, Canterbury and Maidstone. Most yeomen, therefore, had access to different types of land on which they could grow a range of crops and keep different livestock. Crops grown by east Kent yeomen in the seventeenth century included oats, wheat, barley and rye, hay, timber, hops, flax, hemp, tares (a vetch or lentil-like plant), peas, beans, apples and pears. Livestock included oxen, cattle, sheep, horses, pigs, geese, ducks, hens and chickens and bees.

We know something of wages in the seventeenth century, but little about income derived from other sources such as farming and industry. Contemporary commentators suggested that £40-£50 a year was a very ordinary income for a yeoman; some might have annual incomes of several hundred pounds. Using sources such as probate inventories and probate accounts, it is possible to discover more about people's wealth in the early modern period than about their annual incomes. Inventories give the gross moveable wealth left by individuals at their deaths. The balance of a probate account gives the net value of the estate, excluding freehold property, after all the deceased's debts and liabilities had been met.

TABLE II

*Gross Values of Moveable Wealth of 695 Yeomen Dying in the Diocese of Canterbury, 1601-1700*

Inventory Value	Number of Yeomen	% of Total
Over £1000	21	3.0
£750-£1000	24	3.4
£500-£750	46	6.6
£250-£500	161	23.2
£100-£250	242	35.0
£50-£100	110	15.8
Under £50	91	13.1

The inventory values of a sample of 695 yeomen who died in the Diocese of Canterbury in the seventeenth century range from £2598 down to £6. Around 71 per cent of the 695 left moveable property

worth over £100, and were thus apparently in comfortable circumstances by the standards of the time; 36 per cent of the 695 left goods worth more than £250 and 13 per cent left goods worth over £500. Finally, 21 out of the 695 left goods worth over £1000; these were exceptional men, much wealthier than many gentlemen at the time. Many of these exceptionally wealthy yeomen lived in the rich cornlands of east Kent and especially the Isle of Thanet. They included the wealthiest man in the sample, Henry Archer of Monkton, Ezechiele Bridges of St. Nicholas-at-Wade who left goods worth £1846 10s. 4d.; Mathias Cauntis of Monkton; who had goods worth £1227 1s. 8d.; James Pattison of Chislet, who left goods worth £1294 10s. and Edward Philpot of St. Nicholas-at-Wade, with goods worth £1957 11s. 8d.<sup>48</sup>

TABLE III

*Gross Values of Yeomen's Estates by Decade*

(rounded up or down to the nearest £)

	Highest	Median	Lowest	Average
	£	£	£	£
1611-1620	1781	81	6	160
1621-1630	2599	118	12	284
1631-1640	2139	147	7	296
1641-1650	831	220	14	267
1661-1670	1442	174	13	259
1671-1680	1958	172	16	276
1681-1690	1708	196	20	270

From the 1620s onwards, both median and average values of yeomen's estates before deductions put them among the more substantial members of society. After deductions, the picture is less happy. Despite the political uncertainties of that decade, the 1640s seem to have been the most successful for yeomen. The post-Restoration period seems to have been one of steady but not spectacular prosperity.

For most of the seventeenth century, about one-third of yeomen for whom information is available did not have enough moveable assets to cover all their debts. The exception was the 1620s, when considerable economic dislocation was experienced due to the ending of the late

<sup>48</sup> CKS PRC20/7/327; PRC20/12/70; PRC20/12/295; PRC2/42/48; PRC20/12/318.

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TABLE IV

*Net Values of Yeomen's Estates by Decade*

, (rounded up or down to the nearest £)

	Highest £	Median £	Lowest £	Average £
1611-1620	447	27	-230	41
1621-1630	894	4	-290	59
1631-1640	1414	19	-500	111
1641-1650	768	71	-119	117
1661-1670	856	34	-514	80
1671-1680	1870	36	-853	77
1681-1690	601	38	-173	71

TABLE V

*Yeomen's Estates With Negative Balance After Deductions*

% in each decade	
1611-1620	31.0
1621-1630	46.0
1631-1640	34.0
1641-1650	33.0
1661-1670	36.0
1671-1680	30.0
1681-1690	33.0

sixteenth-century price rises, repeated outbreaks of plague, and war. In this, yeomen compare favourably with the population as a whole, of which around 40 per cent had insufficient assets to meet their debts. William Lambarde believed that many Kent yeomen were as wealthy as gentlemen, and this is confirmed by evidence from probate accounts. Except in the 1680s, half or more of all gentlemen in the Diocese of Canterbury for whom probate accounts are available had insufficient assets to cover their debts. In the 1680s, this proportion rose to 67 per cent.

Yeomen liked to live comfortably but not ostentatiously and, as Mildred Campbell pointed out, any surplus money was likely to be invested rather than used to buy luxuries.<sup>49</sup> Yeomen provided much of

<sup>49</sup> Campbell, *op. cit.*, 378.

the capital and sometimes also the managerial skills of much of the Wealden industry of the seventeenth century. Peter Horne of Warehorne probably operated as a part time clothier.<sup>50</sup> Thomas Harrison and Nicholas Hatton of Guston each owned shares in fishing boats.<sup>51</sup> Robert Glover of Dartford had a lease of a market stall, worth £35.<sup>52</sup> William Caffinch of Staplehurst was involved in transporting fish from Folkestone to the London market.<sup>53</sup>

Yeomen were so eager to invest as much money as they could that many were often short of ready cash. Thomas Harrison left moveable goods worth over £500 but had only £3 in ready money at his death.<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Hatton had only 10*s.*, although he left assets worth £786 7*s.* 8*d.*<sup>55</sup> If a yeoman was temporarily short of ready cash, this would not matter. Although there was no banking system in the seventeenth century, credit was easily available. William Wraight of Chislet borrowed about £50 to buy sheep in the 1680s.<sup>56</sup> In the same decade Michael Hills of Chilham borrowed £137, while Thomas Ives of Milton-next-Sittingbourne borrowed £356, a sum which his heirs had some difficulty repaying after his death.<sup>57</sup> Yeomen were as likely to be lenders as borrowers. John Prescott of Guston left only £38 5*s.* 4*d.* in cash and moveable property, but in the years before his death had been in a position to lend nearly £100 to various relatives and neighbours.<sup>58</sup> Before his death, Nicholas Hatton had lent over £600 to several people, £400 on bond, for which he could expect to receive interest.<sup>59</sup>

The yeoman was a considerable employer of local labour. Farm servants, as they were known, normally 'lived in'. They were young and unmarried, hired at Michaelmas for the year and paid quarterly with board and lodging provided. A year's wages was about 40*s.* In Goodnestone next Wingham in 1676, 14 out of 26 yeoman households had servants.<sup>60</sup> There were 34 servants altogether, so two or three seems to have been the average here. John Prescott junior had two maidservants and four manservants.<sup>61</sup> Benjamin Wakelin of Southfleet

<sup>50</sup> CKS PRC1/12/46.

<sup>51</sup> CKS PRC27/25/15; PRC27/29/237.

<sup>52</sup> CKS DRB/Pi/4/62.

<sup>53</sup> CKS PRC2/40/108.

<sup>54</sup> CKS PRC27/25/15.

<sup>55</sup> CKS PRC27/29/237.

<sup>56</sup> CKS PRC2/41/111.

<sup>57</sup> CKS PRC2/41/123; PRC2/41/152.

<sup>58</sup> CKS PRC22/16/172; PRC2/20/241; PRC20/7/164; PRC2/24/148; PRC2/25/127.

<sup>59</sup> CKS PRC27/29/237.

<sup>60</sup> Laslett, *op. cit.*, 36.

<sup>61</sup> CKS PRC19/2/108, 108a.

probably had four living-in servants.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Harrison of Guston probably employed two maidservants and up to six menservants.<sup>63</sup> Thomas Holnes, a substantial yeoman (he left moveables worth £397 13s. 2d.) who lived at Chislet in the 1670s employed three men and two women on a regular basis.<sup>64</sup> Outside labour might also be employed. Thomas Baskerville, who travelled in Kent in the 1660s or 1670s, said that Kent farmers demanded such high standards that there were not sufficient workers in Kent to perform the harvesting to their satisfaction and men had to be employed from outside the county, sometimes from as far away as Scotland or Wales.<sup>65</sup> George Fox of Eastchurch employed 'Francis, a Welshman' and Thomas Ives of Milton-next-Sittingbourne employed 'John, a Scotchman' to help with their harvest work.<sup>66</sup>

A sermon preached to the Kent yeomen in 1652 said that theirs was 'no easy, no slight, no lazy employment.'<sup>67</sup> A great variety of work had to be done. As well as wages to his living-in servants, Thomas Holnes of Chislet paid men for blacksmith's work, repairing the plough and wagon, mending the harness, shearing the sheep, weeding the wheat, reaping oats and barley, thrashing the corn, haymaking, carrying hay and wheat to Margate for sale, thatching the barn, mending the stonework of the barn, mending the fences and hedging. At least twelve different men were employed about Thomas Holnes' farm in 1678.<sup>68</sup>

The yeoman also had to be a good businessman, knowing where and when to sell his produce to the best advantage. It was not simply a question of sending all the produce to the nearest market as soon as it was harvested. Different markets specialised in different types of produce. Goods were not only sold at major market centres such as Canterbury and Maidstone; many small rural places held fairs where livestock could be sold. John Pell of Pluckley sold his cattle at Charing fair.<sup>69</sup> David Amberton of Chislet sent horses to Eastry and Reculver for sale, wheat to Reculver and Canterbury, apples to Canterbury and corn to London.<sup>70</sup> Basil Harrison, also of Chislet, sent horses to fairs at Wingham, Elham, Goodnestone and Eastry. A cow was sold at Canterbury and corn was sent to London.<sup>71</sup> Thomas Spaine of

<sup>62</sup> CKS DRB/Pi/1662/1.

<sup>63</sup> CKS PRC27/25/15.

<sup>64</sup> CKS PRC2/38/41.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Baskerville, 'An Account of Some Remarkable Things in a Journey Between London and Dover', *The Manuscripts of the Duke of Portland II*, (RCHM).

<sup>66</sup> CKS PRC2/21/89, 90; PRC2/41/152.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Campbell, *op. cit.*, 207.

<sup>68</sup> CKS PRC2/38/41.

<sup>69</sup> CKS PRC1/13/90.

<sup>70</sup> CKS PRC2/35/103.

<sup>71</sup> CKS PRC2/41/124.

Knowlton sold his grain in Dover and Sandwich, as did James Bunce of Northbourne.<sup>72</sup> Thomas Turnly of Lympne sold his grain at Dover, Hythe and Ashford.<sup>73</sup> George Sloman of Hawkhurst sent hops to London, and Thomas Harman of Appledore sent his corn there.<sup>74</sup> In their role as food producers, one should recognise the yeomen's importance not only as creators of wealth and employment in their own localities, but as suppliers of produce to the towns, especially London, thereby keeping the population fed and helping to maintain social stability over a far wider area than their own parishes.

Yeoman families had a cohesive effect upon rural society, both by establishing themselves over several neighbouring parishes and remaining within the same parishes or group of parishes for long periods. In the 1620s the Knowlers are found over north Kent from Davington to Chislet, the Rucks a little further south in Chartham, Selling, Norton and Sheldwich. The Hogbens were established in Elham, Lyminge and Acrise, the Sacketts in the Isle of Thanet and the Dennes in Ickham and Littlebourne. When yeomen's connections by marriage are taken into account, the typical east Kent yeoman must have been able to claim some kinship, however remote, with virtually every other yeoman family in the region. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Prescotts of Guston had connections by marriage with the Hambrook, Harrison, Hatton, Howson, Marsh, Swainland, Tritton and Young families of yeomen. Once established, yeoman families tended to remain in their parishes for many generations. The Prescotts were in Guston from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, as were the Hogbens in Elham and Lyminge and the Hodgeskins in Lamberhurst. Greenstreets are found in the parishes west and south of Faversham from the 1560s to the 1670s. The Roses were in Chislet over a similar period and the Solleys were in Ash from the 1560s to the 1690s. In these respects, the yeoman families of east Kent in the seventeenth century had much in common with the farming dynasties of Kent in the 1860s and 1870s, described by Alan Everitt. In fact the same families – Collards, Dennes and Kingsnorths, among others – are found in both groups.<sup>75</sup>

Alan Everitt has described how 'in areas of old scattered settlement [such as Kent] . . . we must visualise many a farmhouse as developing . . . into a community in its own right, into a little commonwealth of its own.'<sup>76</sup> Within this community, the yeoman, as its head, had influence

<sup>72</sup> CKS PRC2/30/119.

<sup>73</sup> CKS PRC1/14/20.

<sup>74</sup> CKS PRC2/41/163.

<sup>75</sup> Alan Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (1985).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

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over his own family and his living in servants. The yeoman was influential in his parish as well as in his own household. Most could expect to serve as churchwarden or overseer of the poor at some time during their lives. Of the fifteen yeomen listed at Borden in 1624, only two had not served as churchwarden and all fifteen were members of the vestry.<sup>77</sup> When the Prescotts and Harrisons of Guston chose to dissent from the Church of England in the 1660s and 1670s, half the population of the parish followed them to the Baptist Church.<sup>78</sup>

In their numbers, in the proportion of the nation's wealth which they produced and owned and in the contribution they made to the maintenance of social order and stability, therefore, the yeomanry may have been the most important social and economic class in England in the seventeenth century.

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<sup>77</sup> CKS P35/1/1.

<sup>78</sup> Jacqueline Bower, *The Congregation of the Dover General Baptist Church, c. 1660–c. 1700*, Leicester M.A. thesis (1983).