

## SOCIAL HISTORY

### Social Structure and the Life of the Community

From the Middle Ages three major influences affected the lives of Corby's inhabitants. First, the parish's distinctive landscape and its inclusion within Rockingham Forest meant that most villagers were not wholly reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods. Woodland surrounded the village and its open fields, providing Corby's residents with a more diverse range of plants and other natural resources than could be found in many champion districts. Opportunities thus existed for those with little or no arable land to make a living by grazing a few animals, gathering fuel and foodstuffs, poaching, craftwork, and labouring; in short, to improvise a living by what was known in the 16th and 17th centuries as 'shift'.<sup>1</sup> Those enjoying rights of common at Corby -- usually called commoners<sup>2</sup> -- were aided in their exploitation of the parish's varied landscape by the second major influence on local society: the lack of resident lordship.

Corby was ancient demesne of the Crown, which probably brought little practical benefit, but was a significant feature in the community's cultural life, especially following Queen Elizabeth's charter of liberties to the village in 1584. More importantly, the Crown granted the manor to high-status, non-resident lay lords, who were mostly content to manage their estate from a distance and not to intervene too closely in the lives of their tenants. Leadership in the village thus devolved upon the wealthier inhabitants and parish officers, who showed considerable capacity to cooperate in organizing the cultivation of the open fields, in resolving disputes, and in defending the community's common rights against the inclosing activities of landlords. Inclosure of field and forest occurred late at Corby, in 1831 and 1837 respectively. The survival for so long of extensive common rights created the conditions for Corby's development as an 'open' village.

From the 17th century many of the characteristics associated with 'open' communities can be identified at Corby: a growing population, lack of control over settlement, small farms, a large number of freeholders, the growth of rural industry, self-governing village organizations, and the development of Nonconformity.<sup>3</sup> Corby's openness

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<sup>1</sup> S. Hindle, On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c. 1550--1750 (2004), 15--16.

<sup>2</sup> For a definition, J.M. Neeson, Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700--1820 (1993), 55--7, 297--9.

<sup>3</sup> B. Short, 'The Evolution of Contrasting Communities within Rural England', in B. Short (ed.), The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis (1992), 30.

to migrants, to new ideas and economic opportunities, and its freedom from close seigneurial supervision, was the third major influence on its social development. Until inclosure, its inhabitants enjoyed a large measure of independence, though many also endured considerable poverty. The combination of all three influences -- landscape, lordship, and social structure -- was, too, an important factor in determining that Corby was the site of rapid industrialization in the final decades of the 19th century.

### The Middle Ages

A distinctive feature of medieval Corby was the enormous growth of its recorded population, from 11 heads of household in 1086 to 144 adults in 1377, which may represent a five or six-fold increase of the total population from around 50 to 260--300.<sup>4</sup> Almost certainly numbers were even higher in the early 14th century, before the ravages caused by famine and plague. That the parish was able to absorb such a large increase owed much to its patterns of land use and farming. The arable acreage could be expanded by taking back into tillage the unused ploughlands mentioned in Domesday Book, while the woods and plains of Rockingham Forest provided grazing for livestock and a wide variety of natural resources.<sup>5</sup> Population growth on that scale, which was perhaps twice the national average, must have resulted largely from migration, though nothing is known of its extent or duration. It was probably encouraged, however, by the lack of a resident lord and therefore limited seigneurial oversight of settlement development, subdivision of holdings, and subleasing.<sup>6</sup>

Lords were infrequent visitors to medieval Corby. Successive kings sometimes stayed near by, at Rockingham or Geddington,<sup>7</sup> but may have only passed through Corby while hunting in the forest.<sup>8</sup> The village was not completely off the beaten track, however: an inquest was held there by the escheator in the late 13th century, and another (into an

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<sup>4</sup> Above, intro. (population); cf. E. Miller and J. Hatcher, Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change 1086--1348 (1978), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Above, econ. hist. For an extended discussion of land use and farming in the similar environment of Whittlewood Forest in southern Northamptonshire, R. Jones and M. Page, Medieval Villages in an English Landscape (2006), 105--54.

<sup>6</sup> For the economics of subdivision and subleasing, B.M.S. Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century', Past and Present 188 (2005), 45--60.

<sup>7</sup> For assemblies at these places under William II and Henry II, J.R. Maddicott, The Origins of the English Parliament 924--1327 (2010), 72, 92, 104. Royal visits to Rockingham are also mentioned in C. Wise, Rockingham Castle and the Watsons (1871), 4--17.

<sup>8</sup> Royal hunting lodges in Rockingham Forest were maintained at Brigstock, Geddington, King's Cliffe, and Rockingham: King's Works, II, 815--18, 902, 943--4, 969--70.

unlawful killing) by the county's sheriff and coroner in 1300.<sup>9</sup> Manorial officials of the Braybrookes and Latimers may have resided, and from the 13th century regular courts were probably held.<sup>10</sup> William Latimer (d. 1304) was one who took a close interest in his estate at Corby, but there is no evidence that he was resident,<sup>11</sup> and the family remained most closely associated with their native county of Yorkshire.<sup>12</sup> A later lord John Neville may have visited Corby in 1406.<sup>13</sup>

Most inhabitants were tenants of the main manor and cooperated in the cultivation of the open fields, which must have generated a sense of communal identity, as well as the usual rivalries and petty disputes. The complaint made by Allen Good that William Strode had unjustly taken his land, heard by the manor court in the mid 14th century, was probably typical.<sup>14</sup> Divisions of wealth and status no doubt existed between those families with customary holdings such as half-yardlands, who were most committed to arable farming, and smallholders whose livelihoods were more dependent on common rights. But no evidence of serious conflict among villagers has been found.<sup>15</sup>

Medieval Corby does not seem to have been a particularly prosperous place, a characteristic it shared with many other communities in Rockingham Forest.<sup>16</sup> But the village's taxable wealth, on which judgements of medieval prosperity usually rest, may not take account of all the economic opportunities that came from living in the forest. An assessment of only £2 2s. 4d. in 1334, the equivalent of 127 inhabitants paying just 4d. each (compared with 144 paying the same amount each in 1377), suggests considerable exemption or evasion.<sup>17</sup> Corby was not excluded from the growing commercialization of medieval English society. Though distant from large towns, successful village markets were established at neighbouring Rockingham and Weldon in the 13th and 14th centuries, which continued after 1600.<sup>18</sup> Illicit sources of wealth included poaching and tree-felling, which may

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<sup>9</sup> Cal. Inq. p.m. II, 182; Cal. Inq. Misc. I, 638.

<sup>10</sup> Above, econ. hist. (medieval demesne); below, local govt.

<sup>11</sup> Complete Peerage, VII, 464, describes William as 'of Corby', citing Abbrev. Plac. 199. The source does not imply residence, however.

<sup>12</sup> Complete Peerage, VII, 460--77; New DNB, s.v. Latimer, William.

<sup>13</sup> Cal. Inq. p.m. XXIII, 243; XXVI, 312; above, manors.

<sup>14</sup> NRO, FH 292, ff. 2v.--7; above, econ. hist. (medieval tenants).

<sup>15</sup> For social tensions created by inequality at nearby Brigstock, J.M. Bennett, Women in the Medieval English Countryside (1987), 50--1.

<sup>16</sup> C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox and C. Dyer, Village, Hamlet and Field: Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England (2nd edn, 2001), 138; above, econ. hist. (medieval tenants).

<sup>17</sup> Subsidy 1334, ed. Glasscock, 215; Poll Taxes 1377--81, ed. Fenwick, II, 204.

<sup>18</sup> Everitt, 'Marketing of Agricultural Produce', 473, 475; above, econ. hist. (medieval tenants).

have contributed to the influx of migrants.<sup>19</sup> Another newcomer to the village was the mason William Arnold (d. 1503), attracted probably by the opportunities for quarrying, who left a house and land in Corby but requested burial in his native Routhwyk.<sup>20</sup>

### The 16th and 17th Centuries

In the 16th century Corby remained a relatively populous village, marked by considerable economic and social divisions. One of the wealthiest taxpayers in 1525 was John Arnold, almost certainly a descendant of William the mason.<sup>21</sup> Uncharacteristically, however, the family did not remain in the parish for long and the name disappears. A distinctive feature of this period was the social continuity provided by the establishment of a number of long-standing families, including the Rowatts and Whites. Migrants to Corby tended to stay, leading to a doubling of the population by 1670.<sup>22</sup>

Villagers' wills in the mid 16th century were largely conventional. Cash bequests to the parish church were common, though Edward Bailey (d. 1546), assessed on goods worth a modest £2 in 1525, also left 4d. towards the repair of Corby's stone bridge.<sup>23</sup> Inhabitants witnessed each other's wills and some acted as godparents to their neighbour's children. The Henstocks and Colliers, for example, were linked in that way. Bequests to family and friends were mostly of horses, cattle, and sheep, reflecting the importance of these animals to the local economy and to the commoners' way of life. Household goods, such as Emma White's (d. 1545) hemp and flaxen sheets, brass pot, and coffer, were often fairly humble. A number of those making wills at this time called the parish 'Corby Woodland', providing an unusual insight into contemporary perceptions of the village's physical and cultural milieu.<sup>24</sup>

From the 1580s Corby belonged to aristocratic families which, though still non-resident, lived much closer to the parish than their predecessors.<sup>25</sup> In 1576 Sir Christopher Hatton purchased nearby Kirby Hall, and in 1584, shortly after he acquired Corby manor,

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<sup>19</sup> G.J. Turner (ed.), Select Pleas of the Forest (Selden Soc. 13), 33--4, 80, 96, 108--9; TNA: PRO, E 32/74, m. 3a; above, econ. hist. (medieval tenants).

<sup>20</sup> NRO, Early Wills, f. 155v.; above, econ. hist. (quarrying). Routhwyk, and its St Mary's church, has not been identified. The element 'roth' meaning 'red' or 'clearing' is also found at Rothwell: PN Northants. (EPNS), 118--19.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/155/160; above, econ. hist. (farming in 16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>22</sup> Above, intro. (population); econ. hist. (farming in 16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>23</sup> NRO, Northants. Wills, 1st ser. I. f. 102; TNA: PRO, E 179/155/160; below, relig. hist.; local govt.

<sup>24</sup> NRO, Northants. Wills, 1st ser. G. ff. 17--18; I. ff. 82, 102, 134, 136 and v., 139, 184; Northants. Clergy, XII, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Above, manors.

Queen Elizabeth granted that the 'men and tenants' of Corby should be quit of the customary dues of 'toll, pannage, murage, and passage', and other exemptions enjoyed by ancient demesne manors. Though largely symbolic, the charter was a significant element in Corby's developing sense of community, identity, and self-governance, and may have been issued to allay villagers' concerns at the manor's acquisition by a powerful courtier. Likewise, it was probably no coincidence that Corby's tenants successfully petitioned Charles II to confirm the charter in 1670, when the manor passed from the Hattons to the equally powerful Brudenells.<sup>26</sup>

The villagers' fears of their lords' intentions were well founded. Sir Christopher Hatton inclosed the open fields at his manor of Holdenby and also at Kirby, where the village was subsequently deserted.<sup>27</sup> At Corby the demesne may have been consolidated into discrete blocks, as shown on the earliest map of the estate compiled for the lord of the manor Robert Rich.<sup>28</sup> In 1638 the 1st Baron Hatton successfully petitioned for the disafforestation of a 60-a. piece of demesne called Dibbing furlong, which was a prelude to its attempted inclosure. Hatton erected fences and hedges around it, but they were pulled down by local people, who claimed to have enjoyed rights of common there 'time out of mind'. An attempt to inclose Thackley Green was also violently resisted, and both pieces of land remained uninclosed until 1831.<sup>29</sup>

The inhabitants' fierce determination to prevent inclosure was an indication of the vital importance of common rights to their economic survival. By the 17th century Corby's population was growing rapidly, and much of the increase was probably due to the arrival of craftsmen and commoners who depended on unstinted access to the forest and generous stocking of the fields.<sup>30</sup> Among the able-bodied men named on a militia list in 1638 were the husbandmen William Henstock and Richard Collier, members of long-standing Corby families, but also less familiar figures such as the baker William Chambers and the mason John Simpson.<sup>31</sup> Farmers and tradesmen both took part in the anti-inclosure protests of 1639. Those implicated included the prosperous Henry Allen, who was probably descended

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<sup>26</sup> NRO, Map 5636, letters patent of Charles II (6 July 1670) confirming Elizabeth I's grant of 2 Dec. 1584. For further discussion, S. Percival, *Corby Pole Fair and Queen Elizabeth's Charter* (1922), 5--10: copy in NRO, ROP 231.

<sup>27</sup> D. Hall, *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (NRS 38), 275, 298; K.J. Allison, M.W. Beresford and J.G. Hurst, *The Deserted Villages of Northamptonshire* (1966), 41--2.

<sup>28</sup> NRO, Map 2644; above, manors; econ. hist. (farming in 16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>29</sup> NRO, FH 2859; *ibid.* Bru. I.iv.14--15; *ibid.* incl. award and map; above, econ. hist. (farming in 16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>30</sup> Above, intro. (population); econ. hist. (pasture).

<sup>31</sup> NRO, Misc. Photostat 1455.

from the taxpayer of 1525 William Allen, and whose house in its own garden was marked on the map of 1616.<sup>32</sup> Also involved was the chandler William Reisby, member of another long-standing family, and the weaver John Burrows, whose father Christopher may have moved to the parish in the early 17th century.<sup>33</sup>

Although Henry Allen vigorously opposed the lord's inclosure of commonable land, that did not discourage him from seeking to inclose land in his own interests. In 1637 he was presented in the manor court for fencing a close called the Spinney to the 'common damage and nuisance of the inhabitants'.<sup>34</sup> Others, too, sought personal advantage by encroaching on demesne or tenant land, by failing to maintain hedges and watercourses, and by other breaches of rules and obligations, thereby provoking tensions. Paradoxically, the same people were responsible for issuing by-laws in the manor court, which were intended to ensure that the open fields and commons were managed for the benefit of the whole community. The manor court was the setting for a constant round of minor struggles between individual gain and the common good.<sup>35</sup>

Many of Corby's families were related by marriage. The husbandman William White (d. 1664), for example, left goods to grandchildren belonging to the Reisby and Chambers families.<sup>36</sup> Villagers were not wholly parochial, however. Wills commonly show contacts with neighbouring places, including Great Oakley, Gretton, and Weldon.<sup>37</sup> In 1636 bakers from Kettering, Oakley, Stanion, and Weekley were fined at Corby manor court for breaking the assize of bread.<sup>38</sup> Debts owed to Corby farmers and tradesmen hint at marketing networks. Henry Rowlett (d. 1655) was owed a total of £17 10s. from five men living at Corby, Weldon, and Rockingham.<sup>39</sup> National events also occasionally impacted on local society. During the Civil War Corby was probably inconvenienced by rival troops of Royalist and Parliamentary

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Bru. I.iv.14--15; *ibid.* Map 2644; TNA: PRO, E 179/155/160. In 1611 Allen held a 'fortypenny place' and three half-yardlands: NRO, Bru. I.iv.6.

<sup>33</sup> NRO, Bru. I.iv.14--15; *ibid.* Peterborough Wills, Book H, f. 299; TNA: PRO, E 179/155/160; A.W. Alexander, *Handloom Weavers of Corby* (Corby Hist. Soc. 1968), 11.

<sup>34</sup> NRO, Bru. I.iv.3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*; Bru. I.iv.6.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Peterborough Wills, Book N, f. 102.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Book H, ff. 43, 252, 299; *ibid.* Joan Fetch of Corby 1 Jan. 1724.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Bru. I.iv.3.

<sup>39</sup> TNA: PRO, PROB 11/248 (Rowlett, 1655). For other examples, NRO, Peterborough Wills, Book H, f. 299; *ibid.* Box 10, no. 2999 (John Yeomans, 1716).

forces passing through the parish to and from Rockingham castle, though little specific evidence survives.<sup>40</sup>

By the late 17th century Corby was an increasingly diverse society, its inhabitants practising a wide range of trades and crafts, many of which were closely associated with the keeping of livestock and the ready availability of wood.<sup>41</sup> A focus for the community may have been the village's five licensed alehouses, and a local feast was mentioned in 1682--3.<sup>42</sup> Most villagers lived in small cottages lit by a single hearth. Only 20 houses (a sixth of the total) were taxed on two or more hearths in 1670.<sup>43</sup> Some cottages were subdivided, while others included outbuildings or annexes occupied by subtenants. In 1632 a 'tenpenny place' was 'recently separated' from Thomas Bull's house for the use of John Shelton. Peter Pridmore lived in another such 'tenement', which was mentioned when a house and half a yardland were sold in 1693.<sup>44</sup> A tax levied in 1691 was paid by 83 inhabitants, raising a total of £87 4s. Apart from the earl of Cardigan and the rector, who contributed well over a third of the sum, only a fifth of those named paid £1 or more, and two thirds paid 10s. or less.<sup>45</sup> Though opportunities to make a living were widely available, Corby remained a place mostly populated by the relatively poor.

### The 18th and 19th Centuries

Resistance to inclosure continued to feature as a theme of Corby's social history after 1700, when residents joined together in defence of their common rights. In the early 18th century a group of 23 villagers, including members of the long-standing Bailey, Reisby, Rowlatt, and White families, agreed to nominate six of their number to negotiate with the earl of Cardigan's steward over the lord's plans to inclose an area of woodland.<sup>46</sup> Daniel Eaton's letters to his master show Corby's copyholders to have been shrewd and hardnosed in their dealings on this issue. Though outwardly willing to resign their common rights on 'reasonable terms', the copyholders seem to have made a series of elaborate demands and

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<sup>40</sup> Wise, Rockingham Castle, 70: the Parliamentary garrison's 'foraging expeditions, and the frequent attacks by the Royalists, caused terrible destruction in the neighbourhood of the castle'.

<sup>41</sup> Above, econ. hist. (rural trades).

<sup>42</sup> NRO, FH 293/7, victuallers' recognizances 1690; *ibid.* 79p/138/1; below (18th and 19th centuries). An alehouse at Corby was mentioned in 1657: J. Wake (ed.), Quarter Sessions Records of the County of Northampton (NRS 1), 192.

<sup>43</sup> TNA: PRO, E 179/157/446, m. 50.

<sup>44</sup> NRO, Bru. I.iv.3; *ibid.* YZ 4802; above, econ. hist. (farming in 16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>45</sup> NRO, M(TM) 456.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Bru. O.vi.4.

alternative proposals, which probably had the desired effect of frustrating the negotiations and preserving the status quo. Certainly the woods in question were not inclosed until 1831, and attempts to obstruct villagers' access by other means evidently failed. Eighteen months after talks began, agreement still had not been reached. Eaton showed a grudging respect for their determined obstinacy, mentioning in another context that 'it will be almost impossible to subvert ... their resolution'.<sup>47</sup>

Most of Corby's inhabitants were tenants of the Brudenells, and some were dependent on the employment the lord provided, but as the negotiations over inclosure reveal the earl and his steward did not have the power to overawe village society. Relations between lord and tenants seem mostly to have been good, but occasional signs of resentment can be discerned. A condition of some leases required householders to maintain one of the earl's hunting hounds, an obligation that was not always fully observed. In 1727 Eaton threatened those tenants who 'did not do the dogs justice' with breach of covenant, and later accused two others of starving the hounds in their possession. Villagers retained the capacity to infuriate and surprise. On one occasion Eaton went to Corby to hire labourers to work at Deene, but found that three quarters of them had gone the 4 miles to Great Easton (Leics.) to join in the local feast. Another time he reported that a formerly reliable Corby chapman had absconded without paying for the lord's wood: such men were so numerous that 'these things will sometimes happen, notwithstanding all our care'.<sup>48</sup>

The broad distinction between those tenants with substantial holdings of open-field land and cottagers dependent on common rights, inherited from the Middle Ages, persisted until inclosure, though precise categories are difficult to draw.<sup>49</sup> In 1737 the earl of Cardigan collected rents from around a dozen principal tenants, including members of the Bailey, Bullivant, Collier, Hammond, Reisby, Rice, Rowlatt, and White families.<sup>50</sup> Some evidently prospered, such as Thomas Rice (d. 1772), whose inventory was worth over £373 and shows him living in some comfort. Furniture in the 'best chamber' included a feather bed and bureau, a clock worth over £2 was on display in the parlour, while the pewter was kept in the hall. His wealth derived chiefly from the grain, wood, livestock, and agricultural equipment

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<sup>47</sup> Letters of Daniel Eaton, 42, 44, 62, 82, 113--15, 118, 123--4; NRO, incl. award and map; above, econ. hist. (18th century to parliamentary incl.).

<sup>48</sup> Letters of Daniel Eaton, 83, 99, 102, 129. The Corby feast was mentioned in 1730: NRO, 79p/148.

<sup>49</sup> Above (Middle Ages).

<sup>50</sup> NRO, ZB 1056.

which made up more than half the value of his inventory.<sup>51</sup> Another successful yeoman farmer was William Rowlett (d. 1796) who held a sizeable 68 a. of land in the open fields.<sup>52</sup>

Open-field farming was not, however, the dominant occupation in 18th-century Corby. Most villagers made their living from a combination of agriculture, trades and crafts, and commoning. William Hammond (d. 1751), for example, combined the roles of farmer and publican.<sup>53</sup> Men such as the weaver John Burrows (d. 1721) and the shoemaker John Deane (d. 1711), who kept a breeding mare and cow, a few sheep, and a fattened pig ready for slaughter, were probably typical.<sup>54</sup> Of 63 able-bodied men given occupational descriptions in 1777, only four were called farmers and one was a landlord. Nine others were labourers, who may have worked in the open fields, 4 were servants, and 45 were engaged in trades and crafts, mostly weaving.<sup>55</sup> By-laws suggest some social tension in this period resulting from competition for sheep pasture.<sup>56</sup> Certainly considerable social differences must have existed between the parish's wealthy farmers and tradesmen such as Deane, whose inventory was worth only £16.<sup>57</sup> Those disparities probably widened, moreover, as inhabitants who could afford to expand their property holdings did so in anticipation of benefiting from the eventual inclosure of the open fields.<sup>58</sup>

Several families rose to prominence during the 18th century. One of the most notable was the Meadowses, who were minor tenants of the Brudenells in 1737.<sup>59</sup> An active land market at Corby enabled the family to accumulate property. In 1742 Richard Meadows acquired 10 a. in the open fields from William Chambers.<sup>60</sup> Further purchases and leases followed, and in 1812 John Meadows paid more than £20 in land tax, a considerable sum.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> R. Moore-Colyer, 'The Small Landholder in Northamptonshire: Corby c. 1700--1850', Northants. P&P 52 (1999), 67--8, citing NRO, Peterborough Wills, Thomas Rice of Corby 21 Jan. 1773.

<sup>52</sup> TNA: PRO, PROB 11/1274 (Rowlett, 1796).

<sup>53</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Small Landholder in Northants.' 61, 68, citing NRO, Peterborough Wills, William Hammond of Corby 16 Sept. 1751.

<sup>54</sup> NRO, Peterborough Wills, John Burrows of Corby 20 Jul. 1721; Peterborough Wills, Box 9, no. 2611 (John Deane, 1711); above, econ. hist. (18th century to parliamentary incl.).

<sup>55</sup> V.A. Hatley (ed.), Northamptonshire Militia Lists 1777 (NRS 25), 19; Moore-Colyer, 'Small Landholder in Northants.' 60--1; above, econ. hist. (rural trades).

<sup>56</sup> NRO, Bru. I.iv.8, court of 1742.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Peterborough Wills, Box 9, no. 2611 (John Deane, 1711).

<sup>58</sup> Moore-Colyer, 'Small Landholder in Northants.' 61--4.

<sup>59</sup> NRO, ZB 1056.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Bru. I.iv.8.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* Corby Land Tax 1812; Moore-Colyer, 'Small Landholder in Northants.' 62--4; below, relig. hist. (glebe).

At inclosure three members of the family were awarded a total of around 55 acres.<sup>62</sup> Social change resulting from the buying and selling of land should not be exaggerated, however. Much property also descended by inheritance, enabling successive generations of long-established families to remain in the village. The custom at Corby in the 18th century (and probably from the Middle Ages) was ultimogeniture, by which the youngest son inherited the family holding.<sup>63</sup>

Migration to and from Corby continued in the 18th century, as it had in previous centuries, and most likely followed earlier patterns. Marriage was a common reason to move, and marriage registers sometimes give the place of origin of brides and grooms. Those for 1700--50 demonstrate that Corby residents married inhabitants of neighbouring villages such as Caldecott (Rut.), Cottingham, Deene, Deenethorpe, Gretton, and Weldon, and others from slightly further afield, including Lyddington (Rut.), Oundle, Stanground (Hunts.), and Weekley. Around a tenth of marriages were of this type, though in at least a quarter of cases (and possibly many more) both partners already lived at Corby.<sup>64</sup> Marriage was one means of migration, apprenticeships were another. In the early to mid 18th century men and women most often left Corby to work for tailors or weavers in Brigstock, Kettering, and Weldon, usually for seven years or until they were aged 21 or 24. In the late 18th and early 19th century it was more common for them to be apprenticed to framework knitters at Leicester or Wigston Magna.<sup>65</sup> Families and employers often provided networks of mutual support, which in this period were supplemented by friendly societies. One established at Corby had 60 members in 1803.<sup>66</sup>

Inclosure in the 1830s did not immediately transform Corby's social structure. Apart from the lord and rector, those who benefited most from the commissioners' award included members of already prosperous long-standing families such as the Rowlatts. Other beneficiaries, including the Dixons, Grays, and Meadowses, had emerged and thrived during the 18th century as customary tenants and parish officers.<sup>67</sup> Although they lost their rights of common grazing, many of these men continued to farm, holding acreages of similar size to those of their 18th-century predecessors. Thus, in 1851 John Rowlatt farmed 62 a., Austin

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<sup>62</sup> NRO, incl. award.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Bru. I.iv.8. A will of 1530 also demonstrates that the custom of Borough English was practised: Serjeantson and Longden, 'Northants. Churches', 301.

<sup>64</sup> NRO, par. reg. transcript, which mentions 115 marriages from 1700 to 1748. In 13 cases either bride or groom came from outside the parish, in 28 cases both partners were from Corby, and in 74 cases both partners were outsiders or no information was given.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 79p/183/1--24; 79p/185.

<sup>66</sup> Poor Abstract, 1804, pp. 346--7.

<sup>67</sup> NRO, incl. award; *ibid.* Bru. I.iv.8; below, local govt.

Dixon 96 a., Robert Gray 50 a., and Thomas Meadows 78 acres.<sup>68</sup> A few cottagers also survived, such as William Brawn, descendant of a pre-inclosure commoner, who held just 3 acres. Many of Corby's traditional tradesmen and craftsmen remained too, including bakers, butchers, carpenters, shoemakers, smiths, and tailors.<sup>69</sup> The village's population rose after inclosure, suggesting continued economic opportunities, peaking in 1851. But many inhabitants were increasingly reliant on wage labour, and by 1871, when a third of heads of households were farm labourers or servants, the old commoning way of life had largely passed away.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the end of commoning, inclosure did not mark a decisive break with the past. The Rowatts were only one of several long-standing families still resident in 1871.<sup>71</sup> Trends evident before inclosure continued afterwards. Corby was the centre of an early 19th-century association for prosecuting thieves and felons from the local area, and by 1847 a police officer for the district was stationed there.<sup>72</sup> Other institutions were even older. The felons' association met at the Cardigan Arms, one of several public houses established in the village. Although the number of premises may have fluctuated over time, from the late 17th century up to five licensed victuallers regularly traded at Corby.<sup>73</sup> Three public houses were mentioned in 1818,<sup>74</sup> and by the mid 19th century five public houses were located along the village's main streets: from east to west the Black Horse, Nag's Head, White Horse, Cardigan Arms, and White Hart.<sup>75</sup>

The pubs may have been where memories of Queen Elizabeth's charter were perpetuated, or more likely where they were revived at a time of perceived social change. Corby's Pole Fair, held every 20 years, during which inhabitants paid a fee to enter the village or, if they refused, were consigned to the stocks, was by tradition a remnant of the privileges granted by the queen in 1584, but was probably a 19th-century invention.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> TNA: PRO, HO 107/1744.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.; NRO, M(TM) 456; *ibid.* ML 788; *ibid.* 79p/137; *ibid.* incl. award; Whellan's Dir. Northants. (1849), 797; PO Dir. Northants. (1847 and later edns).

<sup>70</sup> Census, 1801--71; TNA: PRO, RG 10/1506; above, econ. hist. (parliamentary incl. to 1870).

<sup>71</sup> NRO, Bru. ASR 69.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* YZ 7401; PO Dir. Northants. (1847 and later edns).

<sup>73</sup> NRO, FH 293/7--9, 11--17, 21--5; above (16th and 17th centuries).

<sup>74</sup> NRO, ML 788; Pigot's National Commercial Dir. (1830). They were the Black Horse, Cardigan Arms, and White Horse.

<sup>75</sup> Whellan's Dir. Northants. (1849), 797; PO Dir. Northants. (1847 and later edns); OS Map 1:2500, Northants. XVII.3 (1886 edn).

<sup>76</sup> The fair was first recorded in 1862: Percival, Corby Pole Fair, 12; R. Sismey, Corby: A Pictorial History (1993), no. 33.

Another supposedly ancient custom of obscure origin was the auction of the town lands by 'pin and candle', whereby the bidding proceeded until the flame's heat dislodged a pin inserted into the candle wax.<sup>77</sup> Such traditions, even if invented, probably encouraged social cohesion. Until industrialization, however, the village seems to have changed only slowly. A few large houses were built by prosperous local farmers, but there was no major influx of gentry or professionals. In 1871 most residents continued to work as farmers, labourers, and tradesmen.<sup>78</sup>

## Education

In the early 17th century the rector's brother may have served as parish schoolmaster.<sup>79</sup> However, no formal educational provision was made in Corby before the 19th century.<sup>80</sup> An Anglican school later linked to the National Society was probably established in 1815, and was almost certainly the 'free school' mentioned in 1849, which was 'built against the chancel of the church' and supported by the earl of Cardigan.<sup>81</sup> It closed in 1871. An undenominational school linked to the British and Foreign School Society opened in purpose-built premises in 1834 paid for by former resident William Rowlatt, and continued in 1870. Sunday schools were attached to both institutions.

### Corby Anglican (later National) School

Eighty boys were admitted to the school in 1815, though only 57 appeared on the register, divided into three classes.<sup>82</sup> In 1819 the school was supported wholly by subscription and educated 40 to 60 boys, and a further 60 girls on Sundays. The master was paid 15s. a week and the mistress £8 a year. The absence of an endowed school meant that many of the poor were excluded. But though they lacked the means of getting an education,

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<sup>77</sup> 'A Corby Custom', Northants. N&Q, old ser. V (1894), 160; below (poor relief).

<sup>78</sup> TNA: PRO, RG 10/1506.

<sup>79</sup> Northants. Clergy, VIII, 115.

<sup>80</sup> D. Harding, 'Some Aspects of the History of Education in Northamptonshire during the 18th Century' (Newcastle Univ. Master of Educ. thesis, 1969): copy in NRO. Sources cited include episcopal visitation books which often mention schools: NRO, X 639--42; *ibid.* ML 577--86.

<sup>81</sup> NRO, 79p/205, class register 1815--16; Whellan's Dir. Northants. (1849), 797; below (this section).

<sup>82</sup> NRO, 79p/205. For other registers (1816--22) and records of school work and attendance (1815--22), *ibid.* 79p/206--16.

nonetheless they 'would be glad to obtain them'.<sup>83</sup> The school continued in 1833, when it taught 32 children of both sexes daily, and 60 on Sundays. Money was raised both by subscription and by fees of £1 a year from those parents who could afford them.<sup>84</sup> In 1851 the rector called it a National school, supported by the lord, clergy, and principal parishioners, and attended by 90 children daily and on Sundays.<sup>85</sup> It remained privately run and did not receive a government grant.<sup>86</sup> Its status as a National school was confirmed in 1871, when it was attended by 27 boys and 28 girls.<sup>87</sup> It closed soon afterwards, though a Sunday school continued to meet in a building on Church Street.<sup>88</sup>

### Corby British (Undenominational) School

In 1831 William Rowlett (d. 1840) undertook to establish a school in his native Corby.<sup>89</sup> He was a prosperous merchant then living near Ringwood (Hants.). In 1833 a site was secured by purchasing a house and a quarter of an acre of land on the corner of High Street and Meeting Lane, which had formerly been Rowlett family property but then belonged to the Meadowses. The house for the schoolmaster was repaired at a cost of £75 and a new school built for £500. Rowlett assumed all expenses and made an endowment in his will to provide £110 a year, on condition that the British and Foreign School Society took over the school's management. The building opened in 1834, and was divided into a boy's room and girls' room, seating 88 and 66 children respectively. Until 1860 the school was free, but charges were then introduced for those parents who could afford them, raising around £10 17s. a year. Total income in 1860 from fees, subscriptions, and Rowlett's endowment was £122. Also in 1860 the school received a government grant of £58 11s.<sup>90</sup> Average attendance in 1867 was 95, rising to 106 in 1871. In 1875--6, when 134 attended, the

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<sup>83</sup> Educ. of Poor Digest (Parl. Papers 1819 (224), ix), II, 646. Some children were funded by the overseers: below (poor relief).

<sup>84</sup> Educ. Enq. Abstract (Parl. Papers 1835 (62), xli), p. 660.

<sup>85</sup> NRO, ML 587; Slater's Dir. Northants. (1850).

<sup>86</sup> The school was not even mentioned in 1867: Return of Parishes (Parl. Papers 1867--8 (114), liii), pp. 298--9.

<sup>87</sup> Returns relating to Elem. Educ. (Parl. Papers 1871 (201), lv), pp. 280--1.

<sup>88</sup> NRO, GK 1164; OS Map 1:2500, Northants. XVII.3 (1886 edn).

<sup>89</sup> NRO, GK 1164, pamphlet entitled 'A Brief Account of the Establishment and Enlargement of the British School (Rowlett's) at Corby prepared for Re-opening on 7 June 1881', on which this para. is based.

<sup>90</sup> Educ. Grant to Each Parish (Parl. Papers 1862 (101), xliii), p. 43; Return of Schs. (Parl. Papers 1862 (186), xliii), p. 73.

school's income from its endowment, subscriptions, and government grant was £215.<sup>91</sup> In the late 19th century the school was enlarged to accommodate Corby's growing population.<sup>92</sup>

### **Charities and Poor Relief**

Occasional bequests to the poor were made by Corby's wealthier inhabitants in the 16th and 17th centuries. Richard Peers, Corby's rector (1542--59), left 12d. to every poor man in the village, and Gilbert Layburne (d. 1595), rector of Cottingham, left 6s. 8d.<sup>93</sup> James Hide (d. 1611) ordered 5s.-worth of bread to be distributed at his funeral, Henry Rowlatt (d. 1655) left 4d. each to the village's 10 poorest widows, and the rector John Twigden (d. 1658) gave a total of £8 to the poor.<sup>94</sup> A husbandman John Parker (d. 1628) seems to have endowed a charity, requesting the churchwardens and overseers of the poor to distribute £10 a year on the feast of St Thomas the Apostle, but, if so, it was later lost.<sup>95</sup> The earliest endowed charity to survive was Francis Clifton's (d. 1714), who left a house and 1½ a. of open-field land to the overseers, the rents from which were distributed to the poor each year at Candlemas (2 Feb.).<sup>96</sup>

In 1656 the overseers entered into a bond for £5 6s. with the chandler William Reisby, who undertook to provide employment for poor inhabitants.<sup>97</sup> By the early 18th century, in order to cut the cost of relief, poor labourers were regularly examined, and in some cases removed, under the settlement laws (originally passed in 1662).<sup>98</sup> In 1715 the overseers raised over £60 in poor rates from the earl of Cardigan and other parishioners,

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<sup>91</sup> Return of Parishes 1867, pp. 298--9; Returns relating to Elem. Educ. 1871, pp. 280--1; Return of Pub. Elem. Schs. 1875--6 (Parl. Papers 1877 [C 1882], lxxvii), pp. 196--7.

<sup>92</sup> Kelly's Dir. Northants. (1898 edn).

<sup>93</sup> Northants. Clergy, VIII, 207; X, 227. Corby was one of many places remembered by Thomas Bukke of Northampton in the late 15th century: D. Edwards *et al*, Early Northampton Wills (NRS 42), 85.

<sup>94</sup> NRO, Peterborough Wills, Book H, f. 43; TNA: PRO, PROB 11/248 (Rowlett, 1655); PROB 11/275 (Twickten, 1658).

<sup>95</sup> TNA: PRO, PROB 11/154 (Parker, 1628).

<sup>96</sup> 23rd Rep. Com. Char. 286. For an account of the money's distribution at Candlemas 1820, NRO, 79p/200.

<sup>97</sup> NRO, 79p/169.

<sup>98</sup> Corby's parish papers include settlement certificates 1698--1792, settlement examinations 1737--1819, removal orders from the parish 1704--1842, and removal orders to the parish 1735--1840: NRO, 79p/177/1--45; 178/1--13; 179/1--30; 180/1--9. For discussion, Hindle, On the Parish?, ch. 5 ('Exclusion').

most of which was paid out to 'collectioners' in regular receipt of parish relief.<sup>99</sup> By the 1730s Francis Clifton's house was let to the parish as a workhouse (in 1830 for £2 a year), into which many of Corby's poor were admitted.<sup>100</sup> The house was located south of the church on the corner of Church Street and Townside Road.<sup>101</sup>

In 1772 an agreement was made between the overseers and the farmer John Meadows, who undertook to maintain the parish's poor for an annual payment of £78.<sup>102</sup> A similar agreement was made the following year with the weaver Edward Lattimore for £73. Lattimore had free use of the workhouse, which was to be maintained at the parish's expense, and was paid weekly to feed and clothe the inmates, whom he intended to employ at a low wage.<sup>103</sup> These schemes were an attempt to keep down the costs of poor relief, which by 1776 exceeded £112 a year, rising to more than £184 a year in 1783--5.<sup>104</sup> However, the decline of the weaving industry following the outbreak of war with France in 1793 led to even greater unemployment and distress. Annual spending on Corby's poor more than trebled to £565 in 1803, when 50 persons (including 5 children) received regular out-relief, 15 were maintained in the workhouse, and 45 received occasional relief, in all about 18 per cent of the population.<sup>105</sup>

From 1805 to 1817 Corby's poor rate was levied on average every three weeks at 1s. 6d. in the pound, and by 1813 over £900 a year was spent on relief.<sup>106</sup> Costs rose further to more than £1,100 in 1818 and remained at about that level during the 1820s, peaking at £1,215 in 1821.<sup>107</sup> Payments by the overseers included school fees for poor children.<sup>108</sup> The earl of Cardigan provided field gardens on the waste in an attempt to alleviate distress, many of which were taken by unemployed weavers.<sup>109</sup> A scheme to employ 18 of the village's

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<sup>99</sup> NRO, 79p/148, overseers' account book 1715--42. For other account books 1802--31, *ibid.* 79p/149--56.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 79p/148; 23rd Rep. Com. Char. 286.

<sup>101</sup> NRO, incl. award and map.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 79p/165; Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 14. An inventory of the workhouse's goods was drawn up at about the same time: NRO, 79p/168.

<sup>103</sup> NRO, 79p/166; Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 14.

<sup>104</sup> Poor Abstract, 1777, p. 415; 1787, p. 641.

<sup>105</sup> Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 14; Poor Abstract, 1804, pp. 346--7; Census, 1801.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 15; Poor Abstract, 1818, pp. 304--5. For poor rate books 1805--22, NRO, 79p/144--7.

<sup>107</sup> Poor Rate Returns (Parl. Papers 1822 (556), v), p. 116; (1825 (334), iv), p. 150; (1830--1 (83), xi), p. 135.

<sup>108</sup> NRO, 79p/158/3. For other overseers' receipts and bills 1704--1857, *ibid.* 79p/158/1--2, 4--6.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 79p/134--6; Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 15.

weavers by a carpet manufacturer based at Market Harborough was accepted by the vestry in 1827--8 and continued in the 1830s, but was not a long-term solution to Corby's problems, and in 1834 the cost of poor relief reached £1,357.<sup>110</sup>

In 1830 Clifton's charity raised £8 a year from the lease of the workhouse and two parcels of land in the open fields.<sup>111</sup> In 1834 formal responsibility for Corby's poor passed to the new Kettering poor-law union, and the parish workhouse later closed.<sup>112</sup> The building was replaced by six cottages which, with the allotment awarded at inclosure, raised more than £23 in rents in 1873.<sup>113</sup> Also at inclosure in 1831, about 1 a. in the former South field was allotted to the rector, churchwardens, and overseers of the poor, which was used to endow a charity called the Town Lands.<sup>114</sup> This was later administered with a similar amount of land (called the Church Lands) which anciently belonged to the churchwardens.<sup>115</sup> The Town Lands may have been leased using the method known as 'pin and candle', but the charity's foundation probably did not mark the origins of that custom.<sup>116</sup> Both the Town Lands and Clifton's charity continued in the 20th century, and were augmented by the cash bequests of local residents Richard Gray (d. 1853) and Thomas White (d. 1862), which were invested in stocks.<sup>117</sup> In 1871 around 34 of Corby's inhabitants (about 5 per cent of the population) were paupers.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> NRO, 79p/172/1--6; Alexander, Handloom Weavers, 16--20; Poor Rate Returns (Parl. Papers 1835 (444), xlvii), p. 132; above, econ. hist. (weaving).

<sup>111</sup> 23rd Rep. Com. Char. 286.

<sup>112</sup> Youngs, Admin. Units, II, 297; below, local govt.

<sup>113</sup> Char. Digest (1873), 14--15: copy in NRO, ZA 9555; OS Map 1:2500, Northants. XVII.3 (1886 edn).

<sup>114</sup> NRO, incl. award.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 79p/203/1--2.

<sup>116</sup> Lands belonging to the parish and churchwardens before inclosure may have been leased in that way: NRO, ML 788; 23rd Rep. Com. Char. 286; above (18th and 19th centuries).

<sup>117</sup> Char. Digest (1873), 14--15; NRO, ZA 4236, Char. Com. report 1938.

<sup>118</sup> TNA: PRO, RG 10/1506.