

A Community Transformed: The Manor And Liberty Of Havering, 1500-1620

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OTHER REVIEWS

A community transformed: the manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620. By M. K. McIntosh. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. xviii+489. £50.

This excellent study provides a dynamic analysis of the royal manor of Havering in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. During this period a community of peasant farmers was shattered; it lost its sense of shared experience and purpose; economic and political power passed into a few hands; there was a shift in the focus of social control and the community became integrated into a wider context of county and nation. The perspective which Professor McIntosh is able to bring to this study through her earlier investigation of Havering in the late medieval period (*Autonomy and community: the royal manor of Havering, 1200-1500*) adds force to an argument which is persuasively presented and well documented. In agriculture a group of large-scale farmers and landowners had either bought their way into the manor or emerged from the hitherto substantial group of smaller yeoman farmers. Similar tendencies can be discerned in Romford town where a small group of craftsmen/traders (especially innkeepers) prospered while the economic well-being of the majority stagnated as a result of competition from their London counterparts. In religion disagreements about doctrine and customs weakened a sense of common outlook and purpose (p. 177); control of the vestry and of appointments to ecclesiastical livings passed into the hands of 'the better sort' - a small group of gentry and top yeomen. 'Control over social behaviour likewise changed venue, moving into the hands of the dominant houses' (p. 257). The hitherto self-governing 'liberty' of Havering had by 1620 either lost or abdicated its independence to the ecclesiastical courts, the county quarter sessions, and the central law courts. All of which is a far cry from the position in Cambridgeshire communities where apparently 'in the economic and social strains and stresses of the Tudor period the commons seem to have been more firmly at the helm: landlords and gentlemen were then the unsuccessful disturbers of the old ways'.

A second scholarly, but less positive, theme pervades this study: a recognition that 'at no time during the later Middle Ages or early-modern period was Havering-atte-Bower a typical English community' (p. 1). In a sense this is undeniable. Relatively speaking it was a huge manor stretching over eight miles from north to south, containing 16,000 acres, and having a population approaching 3,000 souls by 1620. It was located beside the Thames and proximate to London. It was, moreover, a royal manor, albeit one whose tenants 'were able to exercise unusual control over what went on... through the weakness of royal administration and the privileges of their own powerful manor court' (p. 4); indeed in 1465 they had obtained a royal charter establishing the area as a formal Liberty with its own J.P.s, coroner and clerk of the market.

Its apparent untypicality leads Professor McIntosh to suggest that the manor had more affinity with English communities in the eighteenth than with those of the sixteenth century. 'Many facets of Havering's economy and society around 1620', she writes, 'would have appeared familiar to a resident of Georgian England' (p. 406). This view is based upon two fallacies which inhibit her from drawing out the full value of her study. The first fallacy is that there has ever been a typical English community;

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David Underdown, "A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh," *Renaissance Quarterly* 46, no.1
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