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Worth, age and social status in early modern England

Alexandra Shepard and Judith Spicksley

Revised estimates of the pace of economic growth associated with the ‘classic’ period of industrial revolution have increasingly led historians to the conclusion that a far greater degree of expansion must have occurred prior to the eighteenth century, although this is notoriously difficult to chart.¹ This has also raised the question of whether or not economic growth in the pre-industrial period was linked to a widening inequality of wealth and income.² While such investigation is likely to fuel, rather than resolve, debates about the nature and pace of economic change in pre-industrial England, there is little doubt that the early modern period witnessed significant social polarisation whether or not this was in conjunction with overall economic growth. This is most readily demonstrated with reference to the increasing levels of poverty from the mid-sixteenth century and to estimates of real wages which showed a steady decline in the purchasing power of agricultural labourers and building craftsmen between the late-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries.³ That it also entailed extensive upward polarisation associated with the accumulation of wealth is evident

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¹ Crafts, *British economic growth*; Zanden, ‘Early modern economic growth’; Wrigley, ‘The quest’; Wrigley, ‘The divergence of England’.

² Zanden, ‘Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve’; Overton, ‘Household wealth’. We are very grateful to Mark Overton for providing us with a copy of this paper prior to its publication.

³ On levels of poverty and poor relief, see especially Slack, *Poverty and policy*; Beier, *Masterless men*; Hindle, *On the parish?* For wage rates and declining standards of living, see Peter Bowden, ‘Statistical appendix’, p. 865; Woodward, ‘Determination of wage rates’; Boulton, ‘Food prices’; Clark, ‘The long march’.

from the consolidation of larger land-holdings by landlords and their wealthier tenants in arable farming regions, and the substantial fortunes amassed by merchants engaged in overseas trade.⁴ The profits that some reaped from intensified commerce and agrarian enterprise are partly visible in the forms of conspicuous consumption associated with an expanding market for luxuries, and the ‘great rebuilding’ of rural England.⁵ The increasing value and diversity of inventoried goods also suggest heightened levels of material comfort amongst wealthier decedents at least from the later seventeenth century, if not earlier.⁶

More precise contours of the changing social distribution of wealth have, however, proved elusive. This is largely because of the absence of suitable sources on which estimates can be based. Although the lay subsidy was established as a direct tax on personal wealth, only the returns of the 1520s together with the muster survey of 1522 were sufficiently socially inclusive to allow broad analysis of the distribution of wealth. Systematic under-assessment (particularly of wealthier individuals) from the mid-sixteenth century until the tax was abandoned after 1663 renders later returns doubly limited in this regard.⁷ Taxation records affording snapshots of the distribution of wealth during this critical period are therefore limited to the 1524 subsidy returns and the hearth tax records of the 1660s, leaving a substantial gap in our knowledge of the intervening years. Probate inventories, while a good guide to the expanding diversity of goods, changing crop yields, house size and the arrangement of domestic space, credit arrangements, and the extent of by-employment, have been questioned as a reliable indicator of net wealth given that they often excluded debts owed by the deceased.⁸ In addition, it has been estimated that at least the poorest 40 per cent of the

⁴ Thirsk, ‘Enclosing and engrossing’; M. Spufford, *Contrasting communities*, Part I; Whittle, *Development of agrarian capitalism*; Grassby, ‘Personal wealth’.

⁵ McKendrick et al, *Birth of a consumer society*; Thirsk, *Economic policy and projects*; Hoskins, ‘The rebuilding of rural England’; Barley, ‘Farmhouses and cottages’; Machin, ‘The great rebuilding’.

⁶ M. Spufford, *Great Reclotting*; Weatherill, *Consumer behaviour*; Shammas, *The pre-industrial consumer*; Muldrew, *Economy of Obligation*.

⁷ Hoyle, *Tudor taxation records*; Cornwall, *Wealth and society*; Miller, ‘Subsidy assessments’; Schofield, ‘Taxation’.

⁸ Arkell, ‘Interpreting probate inventories’; M. Spufford, ‘The limitations of the probate inventory’. Cf. Overton, ‘Household wealth’.

population were unrepresented in the inventory sample, owing to their lack of sufficient goods to warrant probate administration.⁹ Further problems are posed by the massive under-representation of women in these sources and the difficulties of assessing at what point in the lifecycle estimates of personal wealth have been captured. Finally, socio-occupational descriptors were rarely recorded in tax listings and often omitted from probate records, making it difficult to assess the distribution of wealth in relation to social status and economic sector besides what can be inferred from wealth bands or the contents of inventories. It is perhaps unsurprising that early modern historians have turned to indices of wages and prices for the assessment of standards of living and economic change, although the difficulties of reconstructing reliable series over long time periods and differences of interpretation have led to conflicting conclusions.¹⁰

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a new source for the analysis of the distribution of wealth that overcomes many of these obstacles, and to use it to assess changing levels of personal wealth and its unequal distribution in relation to socio-occupational position, gender and the life-cycle between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. The analysis rests on a database of 13,686 witness responses in the church courts to a question asking them what they were worth, in goods, with their debts paid. This material has been collected from surviving series of depositions, variously dating from between 1550 and 1728, from the dioceses of Canterbury, Chester, Chichester, Ely, London, Salisbury and York, the archdeaconries of Lewes and Richmond, and from the Cambridge university courts (which adopted a similar procedure to the church courts, in relation to a wider range of business).¹¹ It will be argued that this new data supports the hypothesis that the English economy witnessed a period of steady growth from the early seventeenth century, and also shows that this was accompanied by growing inequality in the distribution of wealth, not only

⁹ Overton et al, *Production and consumption*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Woodward, 'Determination of wage rates'; Boulton, 'Wage labour'; Boulton, 'Food prices'; Clark, 'Long march of history'.

¹¹ This was enabled by a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (grant reference RES-000-23-1111), and the material gathered has been collated as a dataset deposited with the UK Data Archive entitled 'The "worth" of witnesses in the English church courts, 1550-1728'. The 'ID' numbers detailed in subsequent notes refer to cases in this dataset.

between different social groups but also between the sexes, and on the basis of age. In particular, yeomen enjoyed a spectacular increase in wealth with rates of growth that far outstripped the gains reaped by any other group. In the case of yeomen, growth was also accompanied and consolidated by a shift in the lifecycle distribution of wealth associated with long-term economic security.

I.

It was not uncommon for witnesses in the church courts to be interrogated about their worth. Besides responding to the main allegations in a cause, deponents in courts adopting a civilian procedure were often also required to answer a series of ‘interrogatories’ posed on behalf of the litigant opposing the party by whom they had been cited to appear. According to legal commentaries on church court practice, interrogatories were formulated to assess the weight to be given both to the ‘sayings’ of witnesses (testing the reliability of the evidence they gave in a particular case) and to the ‘persons’ of witnesses themselves.¹² This latter category of enquiry commonly included questions about witnesses’ relationships with the parties involved in the suit that might produce bias—such as whether or not they were indebted, employed by, or in service to the litigants, or related to them by bonds of affinity or consanguinity. Witnesses might also face more general questions about their creditworthiness, independent of the circumstances and parties involved in the suit. Such enquiries ranged from eliciting the basic biographical details concerning a witness’s age, residence history, and social, occupational or marital status, which in many courts became routinely recorded in the preamble to each deposition, to more searching questions relating to a witness’s reputation and social standing. The question of a witness’s worth often formed part of this probing, and was either posed as a free-standing interrogatory or conjoined with a range of other enquiries such as whether a

¹² Conset, *The practice of the spirituall or ecclesiastical courts*, pp. 114-15. For a general guide to the jurisdiction and procedure of the church courts in early modern England, see Helmholz, *Canon Law*.

witness had received expenses or been promised any reward for appearing to give evidence, or about how witnesses maintained themselves or made a living.¹³

The nature of witnesses' responses to the question of their worth varied between jurisdictions and changed over time. The overall majority of deponents (58.2%) answered the question with a monetary estimate of their net worth in goods, although the proportions of such responses ranged from nearly 90% of witnesses appearing in York to just under one third of those appearing in London. The proportions of monetary estimates also diminished substantially with time: of 2,047 statements of worth dating between 1657 and 1728, less than 40% included a monetary evaluation of goods. This decline in levels of monetary estimates from well over 60% of all responses prior to the mid-seventeenth century was principally owing to increasing numbers of witnesses either not responding at all to the question (19.3%) or responding with an evasive answer—with some stating that they did not know their worth (7.6%) and others that they did not believe themselves legally obliged to reveal it (5.1%). Until the abolition of the church courts in the 1640s explicitly evasive responses were largely restricted to social elites (principally gentlemen) whose refusals to answer the question functioned as an indirect expression of their status by suggesting that their worth was beyond question. After the reinstatement of the courts in the later seventeenth century a far broader social range of witnesses evaded the question, suggesting both that goods were becoming a less reliable indicator of credit in contrast to other measures of wealth and that the expectation that this kind of information should be common knowledge and readily forthcoming in court had begun to wane. Until then, however, concrete estimates of worth had been routinely provided, with only 3.7% of witnesses between 1550 and 1649 claiming that they did not know their worth, a further 2.0% explicitly refusing to answer, and only 3.2% of cases in which no answer was recorded.

Besides positive monetary estimates of worth, a common response was given by witnesses who claimed to be worth little or nothing or described themselves as poor. These responses spanned both quantitative and qualitative dimensions as

¹³ Responses to the question of how witnesses maintained themselves formed the basis of Peter Earle's analysis of women's work in London: Earle, 'The female labour market'. Church court depositions have also been used to reconstruct patterns of migration and literacy in early modern England. See Clark, 'Migration'; Cressy, *Literacy*.

declarations of either material hardship or limited legal entitlement to property ownership. Given that estimates of worth were supposed to take into account all outstanding debts, a few such statements were indicative of relative insolvency, principally reflecting the extent of a witness's borrowing rather than absolute privation. So a Kentish mercer responded in 1596 that he was 'more in debte then he hath goods to satisfie', and in 1700 Patience Frere (appearing in London) claimed that 'she has 300 li owing to her but is worth nothing her debts paid'.¹⁴ The vast majority of declarations of limited means, however, appear to have primarily expressed a lack of assets rather than problems of over-extended credit. It was not unusual for a range of witnesses who declared themselves worth little or nothing to add that they also owed little or nothing. A Cheshire husbandman stated in 1634, for example, that 'hee hath little, & oweth noethinge', while in 1607 a Kentish woman—still in service aged 32—responded that she was worth nothing 'yet is debtles'.¹⁵ Those who responded that they were worth nothing besides the most basic necessities, like the young Wiltshire husbandman who stated in 1605 that 'he hath one sheepe of his owne & little thing els', also gave an impression of extremely limited means.¹⁶ It was not uncommon to find witnesses responding starkly that they were worth nothing besides the clothes on their backs, while others claimed to have little or nothing besides what they earned in service or from other forms of waged labour; wages in these cases represented no more than a tenuous form of day-to-day maintenance rather than an asset of any substance worth enumerating as the basis of creditworthiness.¹⁷

In some cases, however, what was being expressed by witnesses declaring little or no worth was their limited *access* to goods, rather than direct hardship—although these two conditions were not mutually exclusive and often overlapped. Many of the younger witnesses responding in these terms claimed that they were worth little or nothing *yet*, and some made it clear that they anticipated some future

¹⁴ Canterbury Cathedral Archives [CCA], Canterbury, DCb/J/X.11.5, fo. 62^v [ID Canterbury 1030]; Guildhall Library [GL], London, 9065A/9 [ID London 324].

¹⁵ Cheshire Record Office [CRO], Chester, EDC 5(1634)/23 [ID Chester 552]; CCA, DCb/PRC 39/29, fo. 168 [ID Canterbury 2638].

¹⁶ Wiltshire & Swindon Record Office [W&SRO], Chippenham, D1/41/4/29[46] [ID Salisbury 434].

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of this kind of response, see Shepard, 'Poverty'.

worth in the form of portions or inheritance. A Kentish singlewoman responded in 1626 that ‘her father is liveinge & she knoweth not what he will give her, but of her self besides her fathers blessinge she is not worth much’, while a Wiltshire husbandman claimed in 1616 that ‘he is to have a bargaine after his father worth xx tie marks a yeare...And as yet is worth litle or nothinge’.¹⁸ At the other end of the age spectrum, some older witnesses declared that they were worth little or nothing because they depended on their children for maintenance—in a few cases as part of a retirement agreement in return for surrendering ownership of their goods.¹⁹ Also included in this group are the many married women who declared themselves worth little or nothing on the grounds of coverture—the common law tenet that conferred ownership of a woman’s moveable property to her husband on marriage. A common response mirrored that given by an innholder’s wife from Lydd (Kent) in 1623 who declared that ‘she is under Covert therefore hath noe goods of her owne’.²⁰ While for many such women this kind of statement of limited worth was principally a reflection of marital status rather than material circumstances, it is also clear that in some cases it was an expression of an actual lack of goods rather than restricted legal rights to them. The wife of a Wiltshire blacksmith responded simply in 1620 that she was ‘a poore woman’, while a married woman from Stepney complained in 1697 that ‘she is worth nothing she being forced to work to gett bread’.²¹ Several married women declared themselves worth little or nothing without direct reference to their marital status or to coverture, and it is often not clear whether this signified hardship or the lack of ownership (or both). Whatever the underlying cause, nearly 40% of married

¹⁸ CCA, DCb/PRC 39/38, fo. 149 [ID Canterbury 3492]; W&SRO, D1/42/30, fo. 129 [ID Salisbury 1267].

¹⁹ See for example, a Cambridgeshire widow, aged 60, who declared that she was worth little ‘for that she hath given all that shee had to her sonne to be maintayned by him duringe her life’ or the Yorkshire husbandman, aged 70, who stated that he had ‘passed a good estate in goods & leases to his sonne, & hath onely reserved his finding out of the same for his life, soe that he hath little or nothing more’. Cambridge University Library [CUL], EDR K/4/1 [Cambridge 738]; Borthwick Institute [BI], York, CP.H.2196 [ID York 1252].

²⁰ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.14, fo. 95 [ID Canterbury 1387].

²¹ W&SRO, D1/42/36, fo. 145^v [ID Salisbury 2132]; London Metropolitan Archives [LMA], London, DL/C/245, fo. 299 [ID London 1510].

women stated that they were worth little or nothing, making it the most common type of response amongst this group.

When statements of little or no worth are combined with monetary estimates they amount to more than four fifths of responses in the century between 1550 and 1650, and not quite two thirds of responses thereafter.²² Given that the great majority of worth statements date from the century prior to 1650, and that most of these involved some form of quantitative evaluation, they potentially constitute a valuable addition to our fairly limited knowledge of the distribution of wealth between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries although they also support some speculation about the post-Restoration period. However, if we are to use these monetary estimates of worth for the analysis of the distribution of wealth, it is necessary first to establish the degree to which they might have corresponded to the actual material circumstances of the witnesses concerned, and to consider the reliability of the biographical details they provided of their age and social status.

There is little reason to doubt the dependability of the ages supplied by witnesses, albeit in the somewhat general terms in which age was understood in the early modern period.²³ Ages were recorded in 97.4% of cases, often with the qualifier 'or thereabouts' indicating a rough estimate rather than a precise tally of years. This is confirmed by the preponderance of ages given in round numbers. Over one third of all witnesses stated their age in round numbers, with the thresholds of 40, 50, and 60 accounting for between 40.4% and 51.9% of stated ages within their respective decades (40-49; 50-59; 60-69), and this tendency was even more exaggerated amongst female witnesses (see Table 1). It appears that once a person approached the age of 40, decadal thresholds became more significant than an exact year count, whereas (especially amongst men) relative youth was reckoned more precisely.²⁴ While such clustering confirms that reported ages were often loose estimates gauged in relation to

²² The remainder of responses, besides a variety of evasive answers, involved either a description of the assets in a witness's possession (without assigning a monetary value to them); details of subsidy assessments; or simple declarations of marital status by married women.

²³ Thomas, 'Numeracy'.

²⁴ This was possibly due to the impact of the Statute of Artificers of 1563 which was legislated that all males under the age of 25 should be apprenticed or in service and that no unmarried female under the age of 40 should live 'at her own hand'.

decadal thresholds, as life-course markers they are nonetheless sufficient for examining the relationship between wealth distribution and the lifecycle, and they are a good deal more precise than the broader lifecycle stages that can be extrapolated from the presence or absence of references to dependent children in probate material (which is the closest alternative means of attempting such analysis).²⁵

Table 1 near here

Socio/occupational descriptors are more problematic. An ‘addition’ denoting status or occupation was recorded in the preamble to 85% of the depositions supplied by male witnesses. The much lower figure of 9.2% for female witnesses reflects the convention of categorising women according to marital rather than socio/occupational status. Occupational information was alternatively or additionally supplied in some responses to interrogatories (particularly those questioning how deponents got a living or maintained themselves), resulting in socio/occupational descriptors of some kind surviving for 90.2% of the male witnesses and 21.3% of the females. As is clear not least from the low incidence of socio/occupational descriptors amongst women deponents, the extent to which ‘additions’ corresponded to the activities by which witnesses generated a living remains questionable.²⁶ The meaning and application of status descriptors may well have varied from place to place and according to jurisdiction, and it is not clear whether they originated from the scribe or the witness him/herself (although it is more likely the latter). In addition, such labels obscure the multiple occupations and by-employments that sustained many households and so only afford a partial reflection of economic activity.²⁷ Of the 11.5% of cases in the dataset in which more than one observation of socio/occupational status was recorded, roughly a quarter (24.5%) did not correspond, suggesting either the pursuit of multiple occupations or a departure from the vocation in which a witness had once trained. However, disparity in socio/occupational descriptors occurred disproportionately amongst witnesses described in the preamble to depositions as gentlemen and those

²⁵ Cf Overton, ‘Household wealth’.

²⁶ For the difficulties of establishing female occupations, see Erickson, ‘Married women’s occupations’.

²⁷ Overton et al., *Production and consumption*, ch. 4.

claiming a craft or trade. It also occurred with far greater frequency in London, and was a good deal more prevalent from the second half of the seventeenth century. Compared with their distribution in the overall dataset, those witnesses labelled as yeomen, husbandmen and labourers in the preambles to depositions who reported disparate socio/occupational identities were under-representative of their social groups as a whole. For the period with which we are principally concerned, therefore, and for the social groups making up the agrarian hierarchy that provides our focus, the socio/occupational descriptors recorded in the preamble are as reliable as, and more consistently recorded than, any to be found in any comparable source from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

Finally, and most importantly, it is necessary to investigate what witnesses were accounting for when they gave quantitative estimates of their ‘worth’, and how accurate these might have been. Where evidence of interrogatories survive, in nearly all cases the relevant question asked witnesses to estimate their worth ‘in goods’ taking into account all outstanding debts. The question was almost always recorded in Latin (although it would have been posed to witnesses in English) as ‘quantum valet in bonis suis propriis aere alieno deducto’.²⁸ On very rare occasions in surviving cause files the question was rendered in English. In the two remaining examples from Chester, the question was styled as ‘what is he or she worthe of his owne proper

²⁸ This is the form in which it appeared in numerous legal formularies as well as surviving cause papers. For example, the ‘worth’ question was included in seven out of 24 sets of interrogatories from the diocese of Ely, dating from 1607-11, always in this form: CUL, EDR F/5/37, fos 262-306. For other examples contained within legal formularies dating from the 1560s and 1590s, see CUL, Dd.9.1, fos 117g, 323, 377; Dd.10.36, fos 11, 20. This is also the most common form of the ‘worth’ question in all the surviving interrogatories from the jurisdictions of York, Chester, the Archdeaconry of Richmond, and the Cambridge University Courts. An occasional variation in York was ‘quantum valet ad summam in bonis suis propriis aere alieno deducto’. According to Conset, it was the duty of those who examined witnesses to translate all articles and questions from the Latin in which they were penned, ‘by reason whereof, the Witnesses, especially Country-men, rarely understand them’. Conset also admonished proctors to ‘be careful of putting these Articles into too elegant a style’ less they ‘impose too severe and difficult a task upon some (pretending) Examiners, or Scribblers in the World’. *The practice of the spirituall or ecclesiastical courts*, p. 117.

goods all men paid' and as 'what [is he] worth his debts beinge paide'.²⁹ In York the question was additionally worded as 'howe much are you worth in debtless goods', 'what [is he] worthe of his owne clere goods his dettes beinge paide', and 'what are yow worthe in goodes if all your debtes were payd'.³⁰ It appears, therefore, that witnesses were routinely asked for an approximation of the net value of their moveable property when set against their borrowing and any outstanding debts.

In extremely rare instances the question elaborated beyond the standard form. Each witness in a suit heard by the Bishop of York's consistory in 1600 was asked not only to detail his worth in goods, all debts paid, but also to 'expresse wherein his said substance consisteth'.³¹ In another cause heard by the same court in 1606, the registrar was given a more detailed set of instructions to follow when enquiring about witnesses' worth: 'if he be a man, what is his trade of lieffe and what and how mutche at the moste he verelie beleveth his estaite to be worthe more then he oweth And if yt be a married woman how mutche at the moste she beleveth the estaite of her husbande and her, to be worthe more then his debtes came to, And if yt be a singlewoman whose servant she is, and what she is worthe in debtles goods at the moste as she beleveth'.³² The distinction here between the 'estates' belonging to men and, by association, married women, and the 'goods' belonging to single women, suggests that some monetary estimates of worth may have included more than the net value of moveable wealth—a point to which we will return below. However, in our survey of hundreds of interrogatories enquiring about witnesses' worth, we have found only two examples in which land was specifically mentioned. One was in a testamentary case heard in the archdeaconry of Richmond in 1608 in which each witness was asked, 'of what yearelie lands or revenewes he is or hath for his better mainteynance and what he is worth in lands or goods his debts clerely discharged'.³³ The other appeared in a tithe cause in which each witness had to state 'what he is worth in his proper goods or Lands all his debts to every one dylie paied'.³⁴ These were unrepresentative of

²⁹ CRO, EDC/5/1595/66; EDC/5/1625/33.

³⁰ BI, CP.H.2905; HCCP 1564/3; CP.H.662.

³¹ BI, CP.H. 5018.

³² BI, CP.H. 218.

³³ Lancashire Record Office [LRO], Preston, DRCh 8, Richard Sharples.

³⁴ CRO, EDC 5(1613)/21.

questions asked in other causes in these series as well as in all the other jurisdictions surveyed here, and the inclusion of goods even in these unusual formulations means that not a single interrogatory enquiring about worth survives that did not refer to worth in goods.

In the majority of cases all that remains is the witness response to the question of worth, rather than the question itself. In nearly half (49%) of all cases in which witnesses supplied a monetary estimate, they specified explicitly that this referred to their worth in goods, although proportions stipulating goods varied across jurisdictions, which may have been an outcome of scribal convention. By contrast, many estimates were recorded far more laconically. The response of a Wiltshire spinster in 1594, for example, was typically inscribed as ‘valet xx s ere alieno deduct’.³⁵ Others were simply recorded, for example, as ‘valet x li’. In every instance that such a response can be matched to a surviving interrogatory it is clear that the witness was being asked to estimate the value of his or her goods, and therefore it seems safe to assume that all such statements imply worth in goods. In causes involving several witnesses, many of whom gave monetary estimates of their worth, it is not unusual to find variation in the way these were recorded—with goods not consistently specified but nonetheless implied by the reference to them in some statements since all the witnesses would have been responding to the same set of questions. Only in one of the cases, it seems, was this lack of attention to detail addressed, causing the clerk recording depositions in an adultery cause to insert a reference to goods as an afterthought in the testimony of Samuel Wilson, a Rochdale shoemaker: ‘hee is a shoemaker by trade and is worth >in goods< his debts beinge payed five pounds’. The only other witness in the case could not answer ‘what hee is worth in debbles goods for hee hath lately taken a livinge and nowe doth not owe above tenne pounds’; his reply, nevertheless, was couched within the same conceptual framework.³⁶

As in this last example, a few witnesses supplying this kind of response (or the clerk recording it) elaborated either the process of evaluation or the material basis of monetary estimates of worth in goods. So a Wiltshire plasterer declared that he had ‘ii kine ii horse beasts xii sheepe vi cocks & hens together with other implements of

³⁵ W&SRO, D1/42/12, fo. 76 [ID Salisbury 776].

³⁶ CRO, EDC 5(1635)/72 [IDs Chester 606, 607].

houshold' and that he was 'worth his debbles goods x li', and a Yorkshire tailor responded that he was worth more than £3 in goods, 'which consisteth in monye goods & apparell & he hath one Cowe worth xl s'.³⁷ Similarly, the wife of a Kentish husbandman estimated her husband's worth at 40s. 'and better' in goods, 'having a couple of kyne a mare and competent houshold stuff to...their necessary uses', while a widow appearing in the same court likewise estimated her own worth at 40s., adding that 'her Cheifest estate consisteth in houshold stuffe and in netts'.³⁸ The goods appraised therefore typically included working capital alongside clothes and household stuff, encompassing production as well as consumption items.

Of those witnesses who evaluated their worth in monetary terms, a very small proportion (3.5% of the overall sample) did so with specific reference to assets other than goods. The majority of these involved references to landholding and various other forms of income generated by trade, capital, annuities or 'livings' that were assigned an annual cash value. So, for instance, Roger Lott declared in Canterbury in 1572 that 'he is a husbandman & hath of his owne lands abowte xl s by the yere', Ambrose Sutcliffe, described in 1665 as a clothworker from Halifax, claimed that he enjoyed 'a cleare estate in land worth x li', while in 1666 a Wiltshire vicar stated that 'besides his vicarage he hath a lease hold worth 40 li and upwards'.³⁹ In London in 1671 Mary Bently declared her worth in the form of capital, saying that her father had 'putt out thirty pounds at Interest to her use', and in 1675 John Wood of Rye Hill in Epping stated he was living 'upon his owne Estate which is worth about 50 li per Annum'.⁴⁰ Nearly a third of such statements were made in conjunction with or in addition to monetary estimates of worth in goods, suggesting that they were mostly treated as an alternative and comparatively peripheral measure of worth in court rather than regularly functioning as a substitute for worth in goods. So, for example, when appearing as a witness in York, a carpenter responded both that he was worth more than 40s. in goods and that 'he hath a lease of a farme or tenement wherin and wheron

³⁷ W&SRO, D1/42/19, fo. 7 [ID Salisbury 107]; BI, CP.H.5018 [ID York 1654].

³⁸ CCA, DCb/J/X.10.15, fo. 51 [ID Canterbury 730]; DCb/PRC 39/37, fo. 69^v [ID Canterbury 3349].

³⁹ CCA, DCb/PRC 39/6, fo. 145^v [ID Canterbury 2233]; BI, CP.H.2570 [ID York 1454]; W&SRO, D1/42/62, fo. 3 [ID Salisbury 1371].

⁴⁰ LMA, DL/C/236, fo. 238^v [ID London 1251]; GL, 9065A/8, fo. 205^v [ID London 173].

his estate doth Consist together with his trade' which combined he valued at £3 6s. 8d. per annum.⁴¹ Worth in goods (after the deduction of debts owing and owed), therefore, was the standard measure of witnesses' wealth adopted by the church courts.

There are several reasons to suggest that witnesses' assessments of their worth in goods were sufficiently reliable to support analysis of the distribution of wealth. It is clear that from the perspective of the courts, witnesses' estimates of their material worth were expected to bear some credible relation to the value of their goods. Witnesses were placed under oath, and could be interrogated on the perils of perjury as part of their examination. Hints of scribal scepticism towards some assessments are betrayed by the inclusion of 'as he believes', she 'supposes' or 'conceives', or 'as he says' alongside a few statements of worth. While it does not necessarily inspire confidence in the accuracy of such statements, this very scepticism suggests an expectation of plausibility. Suspect estimates could be subject to further scrutiny and disputed through formal exceptions and additional interrogatories, and this was one means by which a witness's evidence, if not an entire cause, could be discredited. This only occurred in a handful of cases, however, since when discrediting tactics were adopted they usually targeted wider indicators of a witness's dishonesty, poverty, or ill-fame, rather than focusing specifically on the veracity of his or her monetary estimate of worth.⁴² In the very few instances when a witness's worth in goods was specifically discussed by other witnesses examined in the same case, over-estimates by the witness were suspected as frequently as under-estimates. So, for example, while the yeoman John True, aged 38 when he appeared before the London Consistory court in 1627, claimed to be worth at least £100 with his debts paid, Joan Stephens, a domestic servant examined in the same suit, claimed that True and his wife were 'verie poore and needie persons and of no worth or Credit and [with] noe house to inhabite in'. She further stated that while she was a servant in the household

⁴¹ BI, CP.H.1367 [York ID 1923].

⁴² The creditworthiness of 4.6% of witnesses who gave statements of worth was specifically brought into question in some way during the course of litigation. The worth of witnesses' goods was often discussed in order to confirm their relative poverty through the establishment of certain poverty thresholds, rather than to dispute a witness's own assessment of his or her worth. For a fuller discussion, see Shepard, 'Poverty'.

where the Trues lodged, they borrowed money and ‘begged’ faggots and coals from her, appeared ‘verie bare and mean in Clothes’, and ran up debts with chandlers for their basic fare of bread and beer.⁴³ By contrast, a Cambridgeshire loader who in 1594 declared himself worth 20 Nobles (£6 13s 8d) ‘and more’ was appraised by his labourer co-witness at the far greater sum of £100 with his debts paid.⁴⁴ It was, however, extremely rare for other witnesses to comment directly on the monetary worth of other witnesses, occurring in only fourteen cases in the entire sample, which suggests that in the overwhelming majority of causes it was not deemed necessary or worthwhile to dispute the precise monetary details of witnesses’ self-evaluation.

Scribal deletions and corrections show that some witnesses revised estimates of their worth while formulating a response, which is at least suggestive of spontaneous, if not accurate, reckonings. Clearly a few witnesses hedged in response to the question of their worth. On being examined in the archdeaconry of Lewes, a Sussex gentlemen appears initially to have declared ‘he is worth x li every man paid’ which was deleted and replaced with ‘iii li every man paied’ which was in turn substituted with ‘it concerneth not the matter therefore he sayeth that he is not bound by lawe to answer’.⁴⁵ It is less clear in the case of most revisions to monetary estimates of witnesses’ worth whether they resulted from scribal error or witness prevarication, and so such evidence is not a reliable indicator of any tendency to over- or under-estimate. In addition, the direction and incidence of revisions was pretty evenly spread throughout the sample: of 105 cases where two sums are discernable (the second resulting from the deletion of the first) the revision was upwards in 40% and downwards in 60%.⁴⁶ Both upward and downward revisions were evenly spread throughout the wealth scale and related to final estimates of worth that ranged from nothing to £500. Such revisions may have occurred for a variety of reasons: it is possible that some downward revisions were designed as conservative estimates of worth rather than indicative of an initial over-estimate. So, for example, one Kentish gentleman who admitted in 1577 to being assessed for the subsidy at £5 in land

⁴³ GL, 9189/2, fos 17^v, 102 [ID Lon 964].

⁴⁴ CUL, V.C.Ct.II.1, fos 57^v, 58^v [ID Cambridge 186].

⁴⁵ West Sussex Record Office [WSRO], Chichester, Ep II/5/4, fo. 64 [ID Chichester 100].

⁴⁶ This excludes examples in which the deleted sum is insufficiently clear or may have been a result of scribal error, e.g. ‘xx li’.

valued his goods first at £40 and then at the ever implausibly lower figures of £20 and finally £10.⁴⁷ The downward revision of an estimate by a London widow in 1638, by contrast, may have been in response to the scribal scepticism implied by ‘shee conceiveth herselfe worth x li’, which sum was then substituted with 40s.⁴⁸

There is nonetheless plenty of evidence to suggest that witnesses were expected to undertake a genuine reckoning in court. This is implied by some of the responses by deponents who claimed they could not estimate their worth. A London leather-seller declared in 1597 that ‘he kepeth no book of his damages & therefore knoweth not what he is worth’ and a Stepney haberdasher claimed in 1627 that ‘he doth not certainly knowe his estate, because parte of it is abroad in debts’.⁴⁹ A Kentish blacksmith responded in 1621 that he did not know how much he was worth ‘for he hath not yet cast up his reckonings’, while a Sussex yeoman declared that ‘he is in manye suites & hath much dealinge with many persons, and therefore he knoweth not what he is worth of his owne proper goods’.⁵⁰ It is possible that denying the ability to undertake a reckoning was an evasive tactic—made explicit by a Kentish carpenter who responded in 1692 that ‘he doth not know what he is worth his debts paid nor would he tell if he did’.⁵¹ However, even if such statements were strategic they still confirm the expectation of a plausibly accurate assessment, based on the value of a witness’s net material worth.

Problems associated with estimating worth principally stemmed from the difficulties some witnesses had accounting for complex credit relations rather than evaluating the worth of their goods. Some witnesses providing a monetary account of their goods specified that it was based on their current exchange value which could be readily appraised. Amongst witnesses appearing in Salisbury a weaver declared himself worth 40s. in 1596 for ‘so much his goodes would yeld if they were sett to be solde in open markt’, and a husbandman in 1603 stated that he was ‘worth 10 li &

⁴⁷ CCA, DCb/J/X.10.18, fo. 8 [ID Canterbury 785].

⁴⁸ GL, 9065A/7, unfoliated, 13 April 1638 [ID London 768].

⁴⁹ GL, 9065A/2, 192^v [ID London 115]; 9065A/6, unfoliated, 12 Feb 1626/7 [ID London 648].

⁵⁰ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.14, 26^v [ID Canterbury 1358]; WSRO, Ep III/5/1, fo. 53^v [ID Chichester 1057].

⁵¹ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.21, fo. 210^v [ID Canterbury 1837].

for so much his owne goods may be sould in the markett'.⁵² In a few cases deponents distinguished between their general creditworthiness and the value of their goods. A Wiltshire butcher claimed in 1605 that his *credit* was worth £40 and that he was 'able to pay every man his owne' after which he was worth 20 Nobles.⁵³ In a few instances witnesses talked more loosely of their credit in lieu of their worth such as John Barrowe, appearing in Chester in 1612, who responded that 'hee Cannott tell what hee is worth [but] saith his word will be taken for a hundreth pounds'.⁵⁴ The expectation nonetheless would have been that such claims were rooted in material worth, not least since the ultimate sanction against defaulting debtors was to distrain their goods. Such judgements about the value of goods were commonplace in a culture of appraisal in which the assessment of material worth was critical to key rites of passage such as marriage negotiations and probate evaluation as well as to daily relations of exchange.⁵⁵

That some witnesses' estimates of worth may have lacked precision should not discount their reliability as loose indices of credit, therefore. Rather than undertaking a detailed account down to the last shilling or pence (they were not, after all, being asked for an inventory of their goods), most witnesses giving monetary estimates spoke in round numbers. Although more than 8,000 witnesses provided positive monetary evaluations of their worth, between them they only cited 104 cash referents covering a very broad range from one farthing (a quarter of a penny) to £8,000—and this includes duplication of the same amounts specified in different denominations, such as 20 Marks and £13 6s. 8d. Besides frequently specifying common amounts, 18.7% of witnesses giving a monetary account of their worth added qualifiers such as 'more than', 'at least', 'almost' or 'scarcely'. Some declared they were 'not worth' certain amounts (which, in all cases, were small sums—such as when a Kentish grocer claimed in 1588 he was 'not worth a peny').⁵⁶ Just over one per cent of witnesses providing monetary estimates spoke in terms of alternatives, like the

⁵² W&SRO, D5/22/3, fo. 25 [ID Salisbury 1]; D1/42/22A, fo. 5v [ID Salisbury 251].

⁵³ W&SRO, D1/42/23, fo. 34^v [ID Salisbury 270].

⁵⁴ CRO, EDC 5(1612)/23 [ID Chester 268].

⁵⁵ Ingram, *Church courts*, ch. 6; O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, ch. 6; Spaeth, 'Constructing order'; Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*.

⁵⁶ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.1, fo. 224^v [ID Canterbury 859].

Yorkshire farmer who in 1668 responded that he was ‘worth 30 or 40 li in debbles goods’.⁵⁷ Two qualifiers constituted the vast majority: 71.1% of witnesses qualifying a monetary estimate added ‘more than’, while a further 9.1% added ‘at least’. This implies that the monetary values cited by witnesses were mostly minimum values that functioned as significant credit thresholds that were gauged through rough and ready estimates of material wealth.⁵⁸

The accuracy of witness estimates as measures of wealth is best gauged, however, through various points of comparison with other observations of material assets both in general and through particular kinds of record linkage. The responses of witnesses who were examined more than once, either over the course of a single suit or in connection with different disputes, offer one such opportunity for comparison. Links have been established for 543 witnesses who made multiple appearances. Of these, 341 gave monetary estimates of their worth on more than one occasion, making it possible to chart the degree of disparity between serial valuations which is detailed in Table 2. As might be expected, the level of consistency between monetary estimates was higher the shorter the distance in time between them. Of 140 witnesses who were examined more than once on the same day, and who gave a monetary estimate of their worth more than once, only one declared divergent figures. This was a Dover glover, who was called by opposing parties in the same cause to give evidence on 1 January 1623. The response to the question of his worth that was recorded during his examination on behalf of the plaintiff was unusual, combining the claim that he did not know the worth of his goods which were valued at 20s.⁵⁹ On his second appearance, this time for the opposing party, he valued his goods at £20.⁶⁰ It is possible that the disparity in this case was due to scribal error and that both estimates should have been either in pounds or shillings in which case they would have matched. In any case, it is an exceptional example. Both the high levels of uniformity

⁵⁷ BI, CP.H.5492 [ID York 1762].

⁵⁸ The wider qualitative significance of these values as markers of socio-economic status will be examined in detail in Alexandra Shepard, *Worth, social status and the language of self-description in early modern England*, currently in progress.

⁵⁹ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.14, fo. 92: ‘nescit quantum valet in bonis propriis aere alieno deduct xx s’ [ID Canterbury 1385].

⁶⁰ CCA, DCb/J/X.11.19, fo. 135 [ID Canterbury 1792].

between valuations made within a short period of time and the fact that monetary estimates varied increasingly with age strongly suggests that witnesses' calculations were loosely consistent with their actual material wealth.

Table 2 near here

In some cases, witnesses were asked to detail any subsidy assessment in addition to an estimate of their worth, and just under 5% of our sample provided both. Questions about witnesses' subsidy status were sometimes itemised separately from the question of worth, but more frequently occurred in conjunction with it. Witnesses in a cause heard by the diocese of Chester in 1637, for example, were asked for an estimate of the value of their goods, everyone paid, and whether they were taxed in the king's subsidy book and if so at what rate.⁶¹ Similar examples of interrogatories survive from York and the archdeaconry of Richmond, and there are instances of witnesses referring to the subsidy in all jurisdictions surveyed here where there are no surviving cause papers besides depositions. The criteria specified in interrogatories for evaluating 'worth' were similar to those governing the assessment of goods for the lay subsidy. The principal means by which the subsidy was assessed by the mid-sixteenth century was on the basis of the capital value of moveable possessions including coin, plate, the stock of merchants and retailers, household stuff, livestock and harvested grain, but excluding unharvested crops and personal clothing. This was calculated to include debts owing to the taxpayer, but exclude debts owed by him.⁶² However, the assessments for the subsidy were notorious for under-evaluation. According to Roger Schofield's estimates, most subsidy assessments of goods during the reign of Elizabeth I reflected only 10 to 40% of the value of a taxpayer's material worth as captured by probate valuations.⁶³ If monetary estimates of worth undertaken in court were at all accurate, we would expect them substantially to exceed any subsidy assessments based on goods.

⁶¹ '[Q]uantum valeat in bonis suis propriis aere alieno deducto et an taxetur in libro subsidii regii et ad quam summam', CRO, EDC 5(1637)/16.

⁶² Hoyle, *Tudor taxation records*.

⁶³ Schofield, 'Taxation', p. 248. See also Braddick, *Parliamentary taxation*, ch. 2.

This is amply confirmed from a number of perspectives. Nearly three quarters (73%) of the witnesses who declared they were not assessed for the subsidy while providing a monetary estimate of the value of their goods assessed the latter at or above the £3 subsidy threshold. So Thomas Strowd, a Berkshire husbandman, declared in 1594 that ‘hee is a poore man, having a great household of children, & is not worthie to come into the Subsidie booke, yet worth v or vi li’.⁶⁴ This once again confirms the links between subsidy assessment and status that in quantitative terms had long been outdated by inflation. Yet, many who declared that they were not assessed for the subsidy also admitted far higher levels of wealth: a fifth of witnesses in this group claimed to be worth between £40 and £500—values which far exceeded the maximum levels detailed in subsidy listings. In addition, the few witnesses who gave a monetary estimate of their worth in goods alongside the assessment of their goods for the subsidy mostly admitted a substantial disparity between the two figures. This both underscores the high degree of underestimation involved in subsidy assessments and implies that statements of worth were a much more realistic approximation of moveable wealth. Sixty-five witnesses gave details of their subsidy assessments in goods as well as an additional monetary evaluation of their worth in goods. The subsidy assessment given by over two thirds of these was a fraction—ranging from 0.6% to 30%—of their disclosed worth in goods. In 19 cases, however, witnesses gave matching estimates, such the Yorkshire husbandman who responded in 1573 that ‘he is worth iii li of clere goods and is so much cessed in the quenes majesties booke of subsidies’.⁶⁵ It is probable that in most such cases this was a strategy adopted by witnesses to evade the question of their worth in goods, or at least to substitute an alternative measure—as in cases when witnesses gave details of their subsidy status alone without elaborating any further about their worth in goods. It should be noted, however, that 13 of the 19 witnesses who gave matching evaluations of their goods as assessed for the subsidy and for the purposes of responding to the question of their worth appeared in the diocese of York, making it possible either that the statements of witnesses examined in York were more closely associated with the subsidy or that the subsidy was more accurately assessed in the north east. However, a greater number and proportion (18 out of 34) of the witnesses appearing in York who

⁶⁴ W&SRO, D1/42/12, fo. 38 [ID Salisbury 765].

⁶⁵ BI, CP.G.1651 [ID York 560].

said they were not rated for the subsidy also gave estimates of their worth in goods that exceeded the minimum threshold of £3, once again suggesting that witnesses' estimates in response to the question of their worth were more often treated separately from the processes of subsidy assessment.

This is further confirmed by independent linkage of witnesses' worth statements with their assessment for the subsidy using records of the Exchequer. Such linkage was undertaken for witnesses from Kent appearing in the Canterbury courts using a sample of subsidy listings from the early seventeenth century.⁶⁶ Subsidy assessments were identified for 48 witnesses who gave statements of worth within ten years of their inclusion in a subsidy listing.⁶⁷ Of these, 34 were assessed on the value of their land whereas when they appeared in court all but two specified their worth in goods (with a mean value of £124 18s). In these cases the statements of worth declared in the church courts were undertaken according to separate criteria than subsidy assessments. In the few cases in which witnesses' estimates of their worth in goods given in court can be compared with subsidy assessments also made on the basis of goods, the latter represented an even narrower fraction of the value declared in the church courts than that openly acknowledged by witnesses detailing both their worth in goods and their subsidy assessment when examined. According to this independent linkage, the value of goods assessed for the subsidy constituted between 1.2% and 10% of that declared by witnesses in response to the question of their worth in court. In addition, many witnesses declaring substantial monetary worth in excess of the minimum subsidy threshold did not appear in the subsidy listings for their parish.

Witnesses' monetary estimates of worth can further be contrasted with independent assessments of moveable wealth undertaken for the purposes of probate

⁶⁶ The subsidy listings consulted relate to the grants of 1606, 1610, 1621, 1624 and 1628. National Archives, E179/249/7, E179/127/547, E179/127/567, E179/127/562, E179/127/571, E179/127/593, E179/127/573, E179/127/588, E179/125/327, E179/128/613, E179/128/629, E179/128/608, E179/128/632, E179/128/637.

⁶⁷ That assessments for the subsidy remained constant over lengthy periods of time is suggested by multiple appearances of a few witnesses in a series of listings spanning more than two decades, during which time their assessment remained the same. In the analysis here, witnesses who appeared on multiple listings have only been counted once, and the linkage has been made to the listing occurring closest in time to the witness's examination in court.

administration. One general point of comparison is furnished by inventoried material wealth, as detailed in Tables 3 and 4. The data in Table 3 is derived from calculations of mean and median inventoried wealth from a range of published sources, whereas the data in Table 4 has been constructed using the ‘charge’ from a series of probate accounts indexed by Peter Spufford.⁶⁸ Although inventoried wealth and statements of worth do not provide directly equivalent estimates of wealth, their comparison is nonetheless instructive. The goods accounted for in probate inventories amounted to a decedent’s *gross* moveable wealth since debts owed by the deceased were only rarely listed, whereas estimates of worth given by witnesses in the courts were expected to correspond, albeit more loosely, to *net* moveable wealth. In addition, the social range of witnesses appearing in court was wider than that represented by inventory samples. A significant proportion of witnesses declared themselves worth little or nothing, or estimated their worth below the minimum thresholds above which probate administration was mandatory (40s. or £5, depending on the period and the jurisdiction), whereas inventoried wealth excluded at least the poorest 40% of the population on the grounds that they had insufficient goods. These disparities should result in higher levels of median inventoried wealth than median worth, especially at the lower end of the social hierarchy.

Tables 3 and 4 near here

This is the case for nearly all the comparisons shown in Tables 3 and 4. The figures for median worth have been calculated on the basis of all positive monetary estimates provided by witnesses but exclude declarations of little or no worth, which exclusion marginally offsets the disparity arising from the broader social reach of the witness sample. Nonetheless, in most instances, median inventoried wealth was higher than median worth, which is to be expected—and which suggests not only that worth statements were a more accurate representation of net moveable wealth for a broader range of the population but also that they might prove a useful corrective to

⁶⁸ The ‘charge’ in a probate account was the total sum of inventoried goods, and so was the equivalent of total inventoried wealth. We are very grateful to Peter Spufford for allowing us to use his database ‘England’s Accounts’ for this analysis. For his published index to this material, see P. Spufford (ed.), *Index*.

levels of inventoried wealth. The only exceptions are the gentry and yeomen in the Kent sample compiled by Overton *et al.*, and the yeomen in the Wiltshire sample of accounts. The discrepancy in Kent can be explained by the fact that the median wealth calculated in the Overton study relates more narrowly to *material* wealth, excluding leases and debts owed to the deceased—which, at least in the latter case, would have been accounted for in witness estimates of worth.

Given the inevitable disparities generated by the fact that probate inventories detailed gross rather than net wealth, we might expect a closer match between worth statements and probate accounts. Margaret Spufford has advocated the use of probate accounts as a more reliable measure of wealth than inventories, since they included the payments of debts owed by the deceased, enabling an estimate of the net worth of an estate by subtracting the ‘discharge’ (all expenses owed by the estate) from the ‘charge’ (the total value of inventoried wealth).⁶⁹ However, probate accounts also include a range of other expenses such as the cost of care during the deceased’s final illness, funeral costs, and expenses occurred administering the estate and providing for children in their minority.⁷⁰ Subtracting the discharge from the charge does not give an accurate picture of an individual’s net material wealth *at death*, since the discharge could make substantial inroads on an estate that was no longer generating income, but the net material wealth of the deceased (rather than the estate) can be reconstructed by solely subtracting the debts owed by the deceased at the time of death from the charge. Our final means of exploring the accuracy of witnesses’ monetary estimates of their worth, therefore, is through comparing them with net material wealth at death calculated from probate accounts that can be linked to witnesses within five years of their appearance in court.

This has been undertaken for witnesses appearing in the diocese of Canterbury, made possible by the large numbers of both worth statements and probate accounts surviving from Kent. However, despite the density of the source base, attempting such linkage was not unlike the proverbial search for needles in haystacks. Although potential links were established for over 250 Canterbury witnesses, only 46 probate accounts could be linked to witnesses supplying monetary estimates of worth within five years of their appearance in court. This sample represents only 1.8% of all

⁶⁹ M. Spufford, ‘Limitations of the probate inventory’.

⁷⁰ Erickson, ‘An introduction’; Bower, ‘Introduction’.

witnesses who gave a monetary estimate within the same period (1589-1638). It might also be objected that five years constitutes too great a lag between a witness's estimate and the comparable snapshot of net material wealth provided by a probate account, especially given the findings relating to repeat appearances detailed in Table 2 above, although it should be noted that the probate administration process often took at least one year and often much longer, meaning that the delay between the date of *death* and the date of the worth statement would have been considerably shorter than five years.⁷¹ Nonetheless, the small sample size and the problem posed by the time lag means that it is not possible to draw firm conclusions from this material although it does provide the basis for some brief speculation.

In only five of the 46 cases were witnesses' monetary estimates of their worth reasonably consistent with their net material wealth at death (i.e. with the former representing between 80% and 125% of the later). The remaining monetary estimates of worth were either more or less than these proportions in roughly equal measure, suggesting at least that as a general rule witnesses' declarations of worth were neither consistently above nor below their means. Where clearer patterns do emerge, however, is in the relationship between social status and the tendency of the worth statement towards over-estimation when compared with net material wealth at death. On the basis of subsequent accounts, gentry witnesses show a greater propensity than any other group to over-estimate their worth when appearing as witnesses in court; it is also clear in a related tendency that the higher a witness's statement of worth the more likely it was to be an over-estimate of the net material wealth of that individual at death. This is in direct contrast to subsidy assessments which were understated in relation to wealth and status. The claims of gentlemen in court, however, while not always substantiated by material wealth, would have been underpinned by substantial landed wealth, and so it is likely that their statements of worth functioned as shorthand indices of credit—or the amount at which they might be trusted on the basis of both moveables and real estate. The monetary statements of worth given by other social groups or those worth £40 or less were more closely related to their material wealth at death, and as likely to under- rather than over-estimate it. This suggests the

⁷¹ Where periods of time during which children of the deceased were maintained were specified in an account, these were subtracted from the time lag between the worth statement and the date of the account.

greater significance of material wealth as an index of credit for those below the gentry—interestingly including yeomen many of whom also enjoyed considerable landed income (although it should be emphasised that this was different from the land ownership that distinguished the gentry).⁷² Finally, over-estimations of worth at the lower end of the wealth spectrum were more likely indicative of relative economic vulnerability rather than security (as in the case of gentlemen), and suggest that men of relatively small substance may either have claimed credit beyond their means when they appeared as witnesses in court or, more likely, have been more vulnerable to short term vicissitudes in their fortunes reflected in the disparity between their statements of worth and subsequent probate accounts.

Approached from a variety of angles, therefore, it seems that the monetary estimates of worth that witnesses supplied in court were loosely reliable gauges of their wealth as evaluated for the assessment of credit. In the vast majority of cases this appears to have been firmly based on the value of moveables; except in the case of gentlemen, landed wealth and other assets generating an annual income were judged as a form of maintenance rather than security for credit and therefore did not figure in assessments of ‘worth’. While not precise measures of moveable wealth, and lacking the detail to be found either in probate inventories or accounts, statements of worth are sufficiently reliable guides to the credit of different witnesses, as anchored in their net moveable wealth. The monetary estimates they supplied functioned not only as indices of credibility in court but must also have served as shorthand markers that underpinned the assessment of credit in a society that conducted the vast bulk of exchange on relations of trust.⁷³ Like inventories and accounts, statements of worth do not capture real estate, but as a relative measure of wealth pertaining to a broad social reach of witnesses whose age range is also known, witnesses’ estimates of their worth in goods afford a novel perspective on the distribution of wealth in early modern England.

II.

⁷² See also Overton, ‘Household wealth’.

⁷³ Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*.

The sample we are using for our analysis comprises a subset of the overall dataset, which has been selected according to the following criteria. First, all evaluations in which witnesses referred explicitly to a form of worth other than goods have been excluded, while all statements that specified goods have been included along with those that consisted solely of a monetary value without detailing its basis on the assumption that goods were implied in these cases. Monetary evaluations of goods that were specified as a subsidy assessment have been excluded, along with the few estimates that were qualified with ‘less than’ or ‘almost’, or prefaced with ‘not worth’. When alternative sums were provided by a witness (for example, ‘she is worth £3 or £4’) the average value of the two has been taken (in this case, £3 10s.). All monetary estimates have been rendered into pounds and recomputed to 1550-1559 levels using decadal averages calculated from the price index of goods compiled by Mark Overton from a series of probate inventories taken between 1550 and 1750.⁷⁴ Secondly, our subset also includes the statements of all witnesses who claimed to be worth little or nothing or poor, which have been entered as zero, except married women, whose declarations of little or no worth on the basis of coverture can be read as expressions of limited access to goods rather than direct measures of wealth. Thirdly, our analysis will focus on five 25-year periods covering the years for which the numbers of statements are most robust (1550-1681). This results in a sample of 9,399 evaluations of worth.

Despite attempts to create a balanced sample, the subset that we have compiled remains unevenly distributed over time and place. The volume of business processed by the courts as well as the appearance of the interrogatory enquiring about witnesses’ worth was most substantial between the 1580s and the temporary abolition of the church courts in the 1640s.⁷⁵ With the exception of London the volume of business never recovered its pre-1640 levels, and the question of witnesses’ worth diminished in frequency and significance after 1660. As a result, the material

⁷⁴ Overton, ‘Prices’. This has been favoured above the Phelps Brown Hopkins index, since it relates directly to the exchange value of moveable goods (the basis of estimates of worth given by witnesses in court) rather than a notional basket of consumable which was more vulnerable to short-term fluctuations in grain prices.

⁷⁵ Litigation continued in Canterbury until 1649. The Cambridge university courts were not affected.

collected is most richly concentrated between 1580 and 1640 although this does not preclude some comparison with earlier and later decades. The regional distribution of cases also does not remain constant over time, and it is impossible to assess the extent to which the geographical origins of witnesses are representative either of the population of the jurisdictions surveyed here, or the population of the country as a whole, although we have attempted to construct a sample (as far as record survival permits) that includes cases from disparate local economies, urban and rural. As is clear from Table 5, there is a northern bias in the first and final quarter, and a south-eastern bias in the middle three quarters, although this is balanced by a more constant proportion of cases drawn from the more south-westerly Salisbury diocese. The distribution of witnesses between urban and rural parishes (based on their stated place of residence) remains more constant, although London is underrepresented—both in terms of its growing national significance and in terms of the structure of the dataset—in the third and fourth quarters (see Table 6). How these aspects of the sample structure effect our findings, where relevant, will be discussed more fully below.

Tables 5 and 6 near here

Because married women have been excluded from our subset, the gender ratio is heavily skewed towards men. Singlewomen, widows, and those women with no indication of marital status comprise 10.8% of the sample, appearing in slightly higher proportions in the final two quarters than earlier. Their representation is greatest in London (21.3%) while they are most dramatically absent from York (4.9%). The proportion of women in the other jurisdictions ranges from 8.1% to 14.2%. The socio/occupational structure of the sample remains relatively constant between jurisdictions and over time, particularly during the middle three quarters of our analysis. This has been charted for the three largest subsets (according to jurisdiction) and the overall sample of 9,399 cases, in Table 7. Almost half (45.2%) of those witnesses without socio/occupational descriptors are women, which diminishes the potential distortion posed by unknown occupations. Women are, by contrast, entirely absent from all the other socio/occupational categories in Table 7 besides the gentry (0.7%) and ‘craft/trade’ (1.7%). Amongst male witnesses, the overall proportion of gentry and yeomen witnesses increases slightly with time while the proportion of

husbandmen and labourers diminishes. In the case of husbandmen, this decline has been exaggerated by the lack of occupational descriptors for York in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Nonetheless husbandmen comprise between a third and one fifth of the overall sample between 1550 and 1681. Those occupied in some sort of craft or trade also remain relatively constant, although undergoing a small increase over time, at between one fifth and a quarter of the witnesses produced. It is not possible to judge whether these gradual shifts reflect the growing propensity of litigants to choose witnesses of a higher status or the impact of title inflation (or both). Clearly the lower ranks are under-represented, but they were by no means excluded, and their representation remains sufficient for our purposes across the subset analysed here.

Table 7 near here

Finally, the age structure of our sample remains remarkably stable between jurisdictions and for the duration of the period 1550-1681. The mean age of all the witnesses in the sample is 43.6, just slightly above the median of 41, and there was little variation from these figures between places and over time, apart from a slight tendency towards younger witnesses in the predominantly urban subsets of London and Cambridge and Ely (both with a mean age of 39.2), and higher proportions of older witnesses in the northern jurisdictions of York (with a mean age of 49.7), and Cheshire and Richmond (with a mean age of 46.2). The age structure of the witnesses in our sample above the age of 24 also appears to be reasonably representative of the national picture constructed from family reconstitution, barring the marginally lower proportions of witnesses in the 24-44 age range and the higher percentage of witnesses aged 60 and above, as shown in Table 8. The minor bias towards older witnesses is the product of the importance of longevity in causes involving custom such as disputes involving non-payment of tithes or levying of sums for church repairs.

Table 8 near here.

Like all aggregates, our sample is far from perfectly representative of the larger population, particularly in terms of gender and social status—although with

regards to the latter it has a far deeper reach than any other body of early modern material containing observations of wealth, and it is also reasonably representative of the age structure of the population aged 25 and above. It contains a degree of regional variation, urban and rural. While it can support little more than speculation about overall levels of economic growth between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, it is certainly sufficient for analysis of the distribution of wealth between social groups and across the lifecycle over a period of critical socio-economic change early modern England.

III.

What light, then, do statements of worth shed on the nature and pace of economic change in early modern England? Overall, analysis of our sample does suggest a period of growth that was secured from the early seventeenth century, adding weight to recent conclusions that England witnessed a modest yet significant degree of growth in the early modern period (particularly in contrast to the rest of western Europe).⁷⁶ As shown in Table 9, overall mean worth increased steadily in real terms from 1550, nearly quintupling over the course of the period. The upward trend in median worth was both more modest and less linear, dipping in the last quarter of the sixteenth century—possibly in response to the crisis years of the mid-1580s and 1590s—before recovering in the early seventeenth century and expanding thereafter. The growth in overall mean and median worth may simply be attributable to an increased tendency on the part of litigants to cite wealthier witnesses, which hypothesis is given weight by the fact that gentry and yeomen gradually comprised growing proportions of witnesses in our sample, while the relative numbers of husbandmen and labourers diminished over time. However, the proportion of witnesses stating that they were worth little or nothing or describing themselves as poor also grew over the same period, and the slight increase in the proportion of gentry witnesses could be attributable to title inflation, particularly in London. Whether or not it was a direct outcome of economic growth, therefore, it is clear that an extraordinary degree of polarisation occurred in levels of wealth, not least reflected

⁷⁶ Zanden, ‘Early modern economic growth’; Overton ‘Household wealth’.

in the massive elongation of the range of values cited by witnesses in the century following 1550, from £160 to £1,186 (in real terms). The distribution of wealth remained highly positively skewed throughout the period, while its dispersion from the mean widened dramatically between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, both for the sample as a whole and within different social groups. The growing inequality in the distribution of wealth over time highlights the degree to which the benefits of any growth were highly unevenly concentrated, creating significant gulfs both between and (to a lesser extent) within different social groups.⁷⁷

Tables 9 and 10 near here

Yeomen experienced the most spectacular rise in both mean and median worth which increased nearly tenfold between 1550-74 and 1625-49. This brought them level with the gentry's median worth by the second quarter of the seventeenth century, although the extent of the overall increase in the worth of both these groups is exaggerated by the over-representation of data from York in the first of our periods and from Canterbury in the middle three periods. The proportions of different social groups from these dioceses are shown in Table 10. The overall figures mask some significant regional differentiation in levels of worth amongst the yeomen and gentry. The greatest and most sustained increases in yeoman worth occurred in Wiltshire and the south-east, especially amongst the 'cereal barons' of the Kentish downs, and this growth accords with contemporary perceptions of this social group as upwardly mobile and profit-driven.⁷⁸ In the north-east changing levels of yeoman worth mirrored rather than converged with patterns of gentry worth and saw a minor decline between 1600-24 before rising tenfold by the mid-seventeenth century. The median worth of yeomen appearing in York peaked at £20.00 in 1625-49, whereas their counterparts appearing in Canterbury, Lewes and Salisbury, as well as Chester, enjoyed the far higher level of median worth of £50.00 in the same period. The overall drop in the mean and median worth of yeomen in the period between 1657 and 1681 is owing to the virtual disappearance of yeomen amongst witnesses in the south-east between these dates, resulting in the disproportionate influence of the lower

⁷⁷ Zanden, 'Tracing the beginning of the Kuznets curve'.

⁷⁸ Thirsk, 'Agriculture', p. 77; Campbell, *English yeoman*.

levels of worth claimed by yeomen in the north. This is compounded by a downturn in the median worth of northern yeomen in the period between 1657 and 1681 to £10.58, possibly reflecting the downward trend in agricultural prices from the mid-seventeenth century and the diminishing returns of farming in the rural parishes of the north-east in contrast to standards of living in marketing centres.⁷⁹ It is also possible that in the south-east the diminishing number of yeomen witnesses was a direct result of the sustained rise in their worth that may have produced a shift in the meanings of occupational descriptors as wealthier yeomen both became restyled as gentlemen and the use of the term ‘farmer’ became more common. As levels of yeomen worth in the south-east increasingly converged with the thresholds associated with gentry worth the status and rank of yeoman may well have lost its distinct cultural purchase.

The gentry also saw significant gains over the period, with the consolidation of their median worth at or above £50 by the beginning of the seventeenth century after more than a threefold increase between 1550-74 and 1600-24. This increase is partly attributable to the higher representation of the south east in our sample over time (see Table 10) since gentry worth was also regionally differentiated, with higher levels of mean and median worth in the south than in the north-east, with the exception of the period between 1624 and 1649 when the median worth of gentry witnesses appearing before York matched that of their southern counterparts at £50.00. While the median worth of gentry and yeomen coincided in the southern jurisdictions in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, the mean worth of gentry remained consistently higher than the mean worth of yeomen, and increased nearly sevenfold (in real terms) over the course of the period. In addition, distinctions between the two groups would have been maintained by the gentry’s land-owning capacities, and by the likelihood that a greater proportion of their material worth comprised capital assets and status symbols rather than the means of production.

The growth experienced by groups below yeomen and the gentry was both more modest and more erratic. The median worth of crafts- and trades-people doubled in real terms over the century after 1550 (after a dip in the last quarter of the sixteenth century), before dropping back marginally again in the quarter between 1657 and 1681. Despite a more steady (although similarly modest) increase, their mean worth remained below the mean worth of husbandmen in all but one of the quarters,

⁷⁹ May F. Pickles, ‘Agrarian society’.

although such comparisons are not particularly revealing given the variety of occupations included in the ‘craft/trade’ category. Of those more common occupations that can be traced across the period, listed in Table 11, only clothworkers exceeded the mean and median worth of husbandmen. Notwithstanding the diversity of this group, the median worth of crafts and trades people varied very little according to region or urban or rural setting with the exception of London. The peak in median worth for this group occurred earlier in London (between 1600 and 1624) than in any other urban centre or rural region, and the median worth of crafts and trades people in the capital exceeded that of crafts and trades people elsewhere until the 1625-49 quarter before sinking below the overall trend for this group after 1657. In the same period, the median worth of rural crafts and trades people continued to grow and exceeded that of their urban counterparts.

Table 11 near here

The median worth of husbandmen remained far more constant over the period covered here, showing only marginal growth in real terms after a slight dip between 1575 and 1599. The comparatively extensive growth in the mean worth of husbandmen was matched at the other end of the spectrum by increasing numbers declaring themselves worth little or nothing and admitting dependence on wage labour, suggesting that this group was becoming more polarised over time. By contrast, regional difference was limited and diminished over time—at least in relation to median worth which remained between £5.00 and £6.00 in the north-east and south after the first quarter of the seventeenth century (reducing the distorting effect of the shifting proportions of cases from these dioceses). Although there was some very modest overall growth in the median worth of husbandmen, the comparative insecurity of subsistence farming from the later sixteenth century clearly placed them at a relative disadvantage to yeomen and afforded very few opportunities for upward social mobility. In the quarter after 1550 there was little to separate either the mean or median worth of these two groups, and the range of values cited by husbandmen was actually a great deal wider than the relatively narrow range of estimates given by yeomen. Unlike yeomen, however, who were the only group not to suffer a setback in median worth during the difficult decades of the 1580s and 1590s, husbandmen experienced a decline in median worth, despite a growing proportion

drawn from the marginally wealthier south east, before achieving only very modest growth during the first half of the seventeenth century. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century the median worth of yeomen was ten times that of husbandmen and, as we have seen, in the process the worth of yeomen in the prosperous south-east had become aligned with that of the gentry.

The most poorly placed in all this were labourers, servants and women. Overall, the mean worth of labourers went into a steady decline from after 1550-74, before undergoing some growth between 1625-49 and 1657-81. Labourers in urban settings were better-off than labourers in rural parishes at both the beginning and end of the period, but experienced a more precipitous decline to a nadir of median worth of £0.68 in the 1600-24 period before attaining a relatively large increase to £2.60 between 1657 and 1681—possibly attributable to the first increase in real wages since the early sixteenth century.⁸⁰ The median worth of rural labourers in both northern and southern dioceses remained much more constant at a little over one pound (in real terms) from 1575-99 until 1657-81.⁸¹ The worth of servants also remained at consistently low rates throughout the period. The median worth of male servants was negligible, remaining largely static between 1550 and 1681, and their higher mean worth than labourers was owing to the influence of a few wealthy outliers in elite service roles. The relative poverty of servants by contrast to labourers (in terms of their median worth) was heavily influenced by their comparative youth: the average age of male servants was 27.6, whereas the average age of labourers was 47.5. Differences in age may also explain the lower median worth of female servants since their average age of 23.9 was lower than that of male servants. However, it is likely that gender was also at work, given the relative poverty of singlewomen in general (with an average age of 25) and widows. Although the few widows appearing between 1550-74 enjoyed a mean worth higher than that of all men in the same period (£7.81 compared with £7.03), widows' mean worth subsequently declined in contrast to that of men which increased steadily to £34.38 in 1657-81. Widows' median worth

⁸⁰ Woodward, 'Determination of wage rates'.

⁸¹ 'Rural' labourers comprise 75.3% of those labourers in our sample for whom a parish of residence is recorded.

also diminished over the course of the period from being above that of labourers to being on a par with female servants and singlewomen. Also significant is the growing proportion of each of these groups declaring themselves worth little or nothing, and women and servants were more likely than any other group to describe themselves as ‘poor’.⁸²

Another way of illustrating the divergence in levels of worth is by charting the changing distribution of worth between different wealth bands over time (Tables 12 and 13). Most striking is the increasing proportion of witnesses worth little or nothing or less than £1.00 (in real terms) over the course of the period, from 18.6% in the first quarter to 30.4% in the final quarter. At the other end of the wealth spectrum, the proportion of witnesses citing values at or above £100.00 increased from 0.1% to 7.3% in the century after 1550, and by the final quarter 64% of the total worth cited was held by witnesses worth £100.00 or more. The concentration of greater shares of wealth amongst smaller proportions is also suggested by the distribution of worth according to deciles, as shown in Table 14. As the levels of worth rose amongst the witnesses at the top end of the wealth spectrum, so an increasing proportion of worth was channelled into fewer hands: whereas in the first quarter less than half of the total worth declared was held by the richest 10% of witnesses, by the final quarter this had risen to nearly three quarters.

Tables 12-14 near here

The ages supplied by witnesses makes it possible to chart the distribution of wealth according to the lifecycle for the period between 1550 and 1650 when the age data is fullest. Table 15 indicates that the distribution of wealth across the lifecycle remained more constant in the century after 1550 than the distribution of wealth between social groups, although there were some shifts that are worth noting. The median worth of the youngest cohort diminished over time, albeit with some fluctuation, particularly by contrast to the increase in median worth experienced by the 25-34 age-group. The greatest gains in median worth over time, however, were enjoyed by those aged 45 and above, although, with the exception of those aged 65 and above, the increases were not that much in excess of the overall levels of growth

⁸² Shepard, ‘Poverty’.

over the same period. The peak of lifecycle worth was 45-54 in every quarter except the first quarter of the seventeenth century, during which median worth was highest for those aged 55-64. That the median worth of those aged 45-54 was also matched by the 55-64 age-group in the final quarter suggests that, with time, increasing numbers were better able to sustain higher levels of wealth for longer after their mid-40s.

Table 15 near here

These general figures, however, mask the degree to which the distribution of wealth over the lifecycle differed between social groups. Table 16 lists the mean and median worth of different socio/occupational groups over the course of the lifecycle during the first half of the seventeenth century. Yeomen are once again clearly distinguished from the other social groups, in this case by having the most pronounced variation in the distribution of worth over the lifecycle with more than a fivefold increase in median worth separating the first age-group from the peak phase enjoyed by the 45-54 age-range, followed by a decrease of more than half into old age. Table 17 allows easier comparison of the shape of the lifecycle distribution of worth by showing the ratio of median worth for each age-group to the median worth of the 45-54 age-group. While all social groups experienced a marked increase in worth between the first and second age ranges, only in the case of yeomen and crafts- and trades-people did the lifecycle distribution of worth conform to the inverted U-shape characteristic of modern Britain.⁸³ This suggests they were able to achieve a degree of lifecycle accumulation of wealth before this either became depleted with age or passed on to the next generation (or both). By contrast, the distribution of worth over the lifecycle for other groups was much more even after the age of 25. In the case of gentry, the peak in lifecycle distribution of worth occurred in the 25-34 age-range and diminished slightly thereafter, although given the omission of real estate from statements of worth, this pattern is unlikely to be representative of the relationship between wealth and age in their case. The flatter distribution of worth over the lifecycle amongst husbandmen is more reflective of their comparative inability to accumulate much substance during the middle decades of the lifecycle. The earlier peak in lifecycle worth in the case of husbandmen and labourers was also

⁸³ Rowlingson, Whyley and Warren, *Wealth in Britain*.

probably a result of lower levels of investment in education or training amongst these groups which would have delayed the acquisition and accumulation of wealth amongst yeomen and craftsmen.⁸⁴ Labourers experienced the latest peak in lifecycle distribution of worth which most likely reflected their inability to accumulate resources during the middle decades (particularly in relation to the burdens of child-rearing) and their need to retain as much wealth as possible as a source of support in old age in the absence of any certain relief.

Tables 16 and 17 near here

It is clear, therefore, that differences in the lifecycle distribution of worth added to the factors distinguishing social groups, giving some shape to the expanding range of values claimed by each social group which created differentiation of wealth within as well as between them. This also appears to have been related to the growth experienced from the first half of the seventeenth century. As shown in Figure 1, the shape of the life-cycle distribution of worth changed dramatically for yeomen alongside their exceptional gains in median worth over time. Whereas in the period between 1550 and 1599 median yeomen worth had been very evenly distributed over the lifecycle, the gains they experienced over the first half of the seventeenth century were disproportionately distributed amongst the middle decades, resulting in a marked lifecycle curve, creating another critical distinction between yeomen and husbandmen. By the first half of the seventeenth century, yeomen appeared to have gained the ability to rise well above a baseline of wealth in their middle decades, linked to a greater period of dependence for their offspring and possible investment in their training and education. It is likely that this also reflected inheritance strategies through which yeomen were able to protect their personal estates at least until their mid-fifties while endowing their children with real assets or the income derived from them. As suggested by Figure 2, the flatter lifecycle distribution of worth experienced by husbandmen in the first half of the seventeenth century, while compounding the gulf between them and yeomen, was nonetheless an improvement on their circumstances between 1550 and 1599. Although husbandmen achieved similar levels of median worth (in real terms) at the peak of their life-cycle at 35-44 across the

⁸⁴ Kearl and Pope, 'The life cycle in economic history'.

whole century, in the earlier period they were unable to sustain this peak beyond the age of 45, and their worth in old age plummeted to comparable depths associated with the 15-24 age range. The lifecycle distribution of worth amongst crafts and trades, by contrast, remained more consistent throughout the same period, although they were better able to sustain the peak in median worth over two decades by the early seventeenth century compared with a shorter-lived and less dramatic peak in the 35-44 age range in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Figures 1 and 2 near here

* * *

Statements of worth provided by witnesses in the church courts provide tentative confirmation that the seventeenth century was a period of overall economic growth in England. More conclusive is the evidence that this was accompanied by a widespread expansion in the unequal distribution of wealth. Servants and women experienced an overall decline in median worth between 1550 and 1681, and labourers suffered very mixed and extremely limited fortunes until the period between 1657 and 1681. The modest gains enjoyed by husbandmen and crafts- and trades-people were dwarfed by comparison with the dramatic expansion in the median worth of yeomen which reflects their growing investment in working stock that was critical to the development of agrarian capitalism. While experiencing some gains in real terms, husbandmen became poorer in relative terms as a gulf opened up between them and their wealthier yeomen counterparts.

Polarisation also occurred within groups as well as between them, which is clear from the ever widening ranges of values cited by all groups with the exception of women. This is partly attributable to regional differentiation—particularly in the case of yeomen who were especially well placed in southern jurisdictions compared with the north-east. The experience of labourers, too, varied according to whether or not they worked in an urban or a rural setting. Age also played a significant role in shaping the distribution of wealth, although this likewise differed between social groups, adding to the disparity between them while varying the distribution of wealth within them. Yeomen, again, displayed the most distinctive shift from the relatively even distribution of worth across the lifecycle to a clear inverted-U shaped curve

associated with both sustained investment in training and education in youth and wealth accumulation linked to longer term security in both middle and old age. The peak in lifecycle worth was not only lower amongst other groups but also could be more short-lived, suggesting the difficulties of sustaining consistent levels of credit throughout adult life for most. Without knowing more about the childbearing histories and household structures of witnesses, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the inability to sustain or recover peaks in lifecycle worth were attributable to insurmountable demands of childrearing or the choices of inheritance practices, but the pattern of lifecycle worth enjoyed by yeomen by the early seventeenth century can be interpreted as a sign of their relative security as well as prosperity. As the distribution of worth amongst husbandmen was becoming less varied by region or by age over time, while nonetheless more widely polarised both as increasing numbers became dependent on wage labour and as the distribution became more positively skewed by a few wealthier outliers, so the distribution of worth amongst yeomen became increasingly shaped by age and regional differentiation, adding to the marked divergence in husbandmen and yeomen's fortunes between 1550 and 1650.

According to witness statements of worth, therefore, in the southern counties reviewed here the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods saw the unprecedented 'rise of the yeoman' with this group enjoying growth in median worth over the course of a century that outstripped inflation by a factor of ten and consolidated its secure distribution over the lifecycle. This suggests that the profits accumulated from expanding agricultural production associated with larger, enterprising farmers should not be underestimated by historians.⁸⁵ Furthermore the extraordinary benefits reaped by yeomen, although not gained at the direct expense of husbandmen, nonetheless opened up substantial and insurmountable differences between these two groups, while the relative plight of those who depended primarily or solely on their labour was compounded until the later seventeenth century. While supporting a picture of overall economic growth, therefore, worth statements also confirm the degree to which it was accompanied by and compounded the unequal distribution of its benefits.

⁸⁵ Cf. Allen. *Enclosure*.

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Figure 1. Yeomen's median worth by age, over time

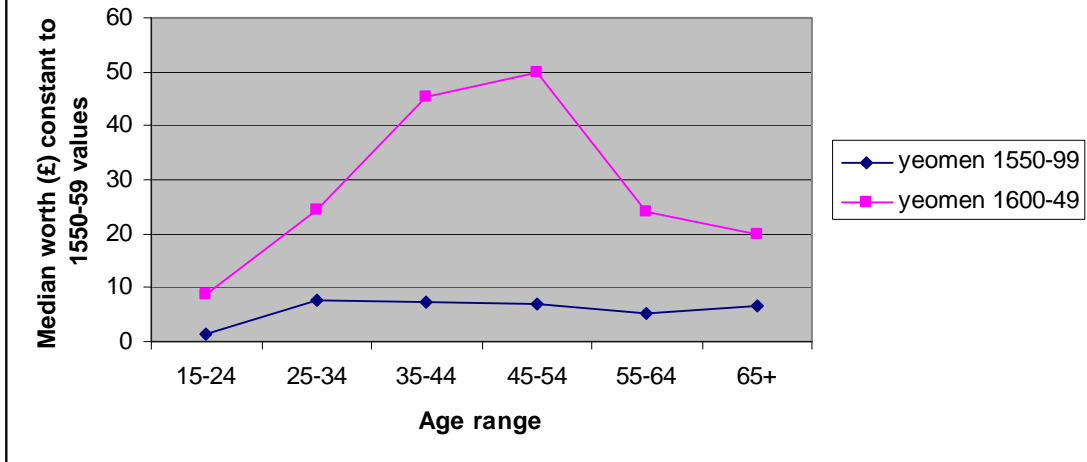


Figure 2. Median worth of husbandmen and crafts/trades by age, over time

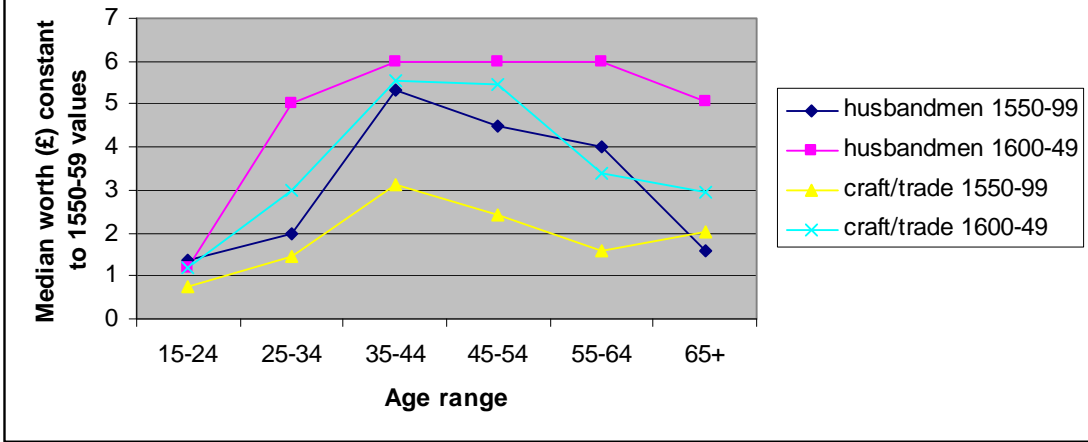


Table 1. Proportion of witnesses with their age recorded in round numbers

Stated Age of Witness	Men	Women	All
20 as % of 20-29	8.6	14.7	10.7
30 as % of 30-39	27.5	36.2	29.6
40 as % of 40-49	40.1	46.4	41.5
50 as % of 50-59	38.6	47.7	40.4
60 as % of 60-69	50.2	59.9	51.9
70 as % of 70-79	36.4	35.7	36.3
80 as % of 80-89	59.9	36.3	60.6

Table 2. Relationship between multiple monetary estimates of worth given by witnesses examined more than once, according to the length of time between statements

Delay between statements	% showing a match	% showing an increase over time	% showing a decrease with time	TOTAL (%)
Same day	99.3	0.7	0.0	100
1-7 days	83.8	10.8	5.4	100
8 days to 1 month	75.0	6.3	18.8	100
1-6 months	60.7	17.9	21.4	100
6 months to 1 year	55.0	30.0	15.0	100
1-2 years	40.7	33.3	25.9	100
2-5 years	42.4	36.4	21.2	100
More than 5 years	15.7	52.9	31.4	100
TOTAL	69.0	18.5	12.5	100

Table 4. The ‘charge’ of probate accounts compared with witness estimates of worth

	Charge			Estimated worth of witnesses		
	<u>Wiltshire</u>			<u>Salisbury</u>		
	<i>Mean (£)</i>	<i>Median (£)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (£)</i>	<i>Median (£)</i>	<i>N</i>
Gentry 1604-80	277.47	118.28	32	241.22	100.00	52
Yeomen 1611-81	119.19	69.42	48	134.98	66.67	195
Husbandmen 1602-81	63.05	42.28	48	40.03	20.00	358
	<u>Kent</u>			<u>Canterbury</u>		
	<i>Mean (£)</i>	<i>Median (£)</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean (£)</i>	<i>Median (£)</i>	<i>N</i>
Gentry 1601-81	239.92	139.50	188	173.82	100.00	152
Yeomen 1607-81	236.28	163.84	427	147.67	100.00	314
Husbandmen 1616-81	80.85	61.24	176	31.48	10.00	364

Table 5. Distribution of cases between jurisdictions by 25 year periods, 1550-1681

Jurisdiction	1550-74		1575-99		1600-24		1625-49		1657-81		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Cambridge & Ely	0	0.0	197	14.2	151	4.4	130	4.1	39	6.3	517	5.5
Chester & Richmond	0	0.0	26	1.9	93	2.7	303	9.7	77	12.5	499	5.3
Canterbury	156	18.8	478	34.6	1596	46.5	1223	39.0	47	7.6	3500	37.2
Chichester & Lewes	0	0.0	217	15.7	383	11.1	339	10.8	4	0.7	943	10.0
London	85	10.2	157	11.4	121	3.5	131	4.2	66	10.7	560	6.0
Salisbury	37	4.4	193	14.0	544	15.9	581	18.5	169	27.4	1524	16.2
York	554	66.6	113	8.2	544	15.9	430	13.7	215	34.8	1856	19.8
TOTAL	832	100	1381	100	3432	100	3137	100	617	100	9399	100

Table 6. Distribution of witnesses between urban and rural parishes by 25 year periods, 1550-1681

Place of residence	1550-74	1575-99	1600-24	1625-49	1657-81	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Rural	73.1	63.9	65.7	62.9	63.4	65.0
Total urban	26.9	36.1	34.3	37.1	36.6	35.0
Urban excluding London	21.7	29.0	31.6	34.3	28.0	31.0
London	5.2	7.1	2.7	2.8	8.6	4.0

Table 7. Socio/occupational distribution of witnesses within jurisdictions and over time, 1550-1681

Socio/occupational status	Jurisdiction	1550-74	1575-99	1600-24	1625-49	1657-81
		%	%	%	%	%
Gentry	Canterbury	0.6	3.8	6.0	4.8	0.0
	Salisbury	2.7	0.0	4.0	3.3	7.7
	York	5.2	8.8	3.5	7.4	7.9
	All jurisdictions	4.1	3.0	4.7	4.2	6.0
Yeomen	Canterbury	1.9	7.3	13.8	12.3	4.3
	Salisbury	2.7	8.8	13.6	17.9	19.5
	York	11.2	24.8	10.8	22.3	17.7
	All jurisdictions	7.9	9.6	13.4	14.2	15.9
Husbandmen	Canterbury	28.8	23.4	22.3	20.2	19.1
	Salisbury	35.1	38.3	36.2	37.0	23.7
	York	38.8	21.2	8.6	19.5	27.0
	All jurisdictions	34.0	24.1	22.3	23.8	21.6
Labourer	Canterbury	9.0	3.3	2.8	2.9	2.1
	Salisbury	8.1	3.6	0.6	1.4	1.2
	York	5.2	5.3	4.6	7.2	2.8
	All jurisdictions	6.1	3.8	2.4	2.7	2.4
Craft/trade	Canterbury	18.6	21.3	28.5	30.0	21.3
	Salisbury	13.5	18.1	25.4	21.5	27.8
	York	17.7	19.5	10.3	24.0	19.5
	All jurisdictions	19.1	24.8	24.1	25.9	26.9
Other	Canterbury	17.4	16.8	16.8	15.9	23.4
	Salisbury	10.9	13.1	10.3	9.4	10.0
	York	14.7	9.8	9.1	10.8	17.7
	All jurisdictions	17.0	17.7	14.8	14.4	16.8
No descriptor	Canterbury	23.7	24.1	9.8	13.9	29.8
	Salisbury	27.0	18.1	9.9	9.5	10.1
	York	7.2	10.6	53.1	8.8	7.4
	All jurisdictions	11.8	17.0	18.3	14.8	10.4

Table 8. Age structure of witnesses aged 25 and above, compared with data from family reconstitution.

Time period	Age groups					
	25-44		45-59		60+	
	W (%)	FR (%)	W (%)	FR (%)	W (%)	FR (%)
1550-74	20.1	26.2	11.2	12.4	11.4	7.8
1575-99	23.2	26.6	10.5	13.0	8.2	7.4
1600-24	23.8	27.4	12.9	12.8	11.1	7.8
1625-49	23.5	27.3	14.2	13.7	11.4	8.0
1657-81	25.1	29.4	15.7	15.1	12.8	9.2
1550-1681	24.2	27.4	13.4	13.4	11.3	8.0

W = witnesses from worth sample (N = 8106)

FR = figures adapted from Wrigley *et al.*, *English Population History*, p. 615.

Table 9. Worth in £ (constant to 1550-1559 values) by gender and social group

		1550-74	1575-99	1600-24	1625-49	1657-81
Total sample (<i>N</i> = 9399)	Mean	6.95	9.14	20.42	26.99	30.20
	Median	3.20	2.18	3.41	5.00	5.29
	Range	160.00	363.50	1186.00	1186.00	577.00
	SD (£)	12.32	24.76	57.04	68.98	75.23
	CV	1.77	2.71	2.79	2.56	2.49
	Skewness	0.91	0.84	0.89	0.96	0.99
	<i>N</i>	832	1381	3432	3137	617
Gentlemen (<i>N</i> = 404)	Mean	19.84	26.74	101.51	95.49	135.05
	Median	16.00	8.00	59.30	50.00	52.90
	Range	79.21	337.00	1186.00	1186.00	529.00
	SD (£)	17.04	54.71	161.48	175.74	164.47
	CV	0.86	2.05	1.59	1.84	1.22
	Skewness	0.68	1.03	0.78	0.78	1.50
	<i>N</i>	34	41	160	132	37
Yeomen (<i>N</i> = 1202)	Mean	7.96	18.59	51.71	73.89	33.88
	Median	5.34	7.27	23.92	50.00	10.58
	Range	32.00	337.00	598.00	750.00	452.80
	SD (£)	7.24	35.36	86.72	109.82	56.95
	CV	0.91	1.90	1.68	1.49	1.68
	Skewness	1.09	0.96	0.96	0.65	1.23
	<i>N</i>	66	133	461	444	98
Craft/Trade (<i>N</i> = 2305)	Mean	6.16	6.83	11.23	16.33	16.54
	Median	2.40	1.40	2.99	5.00	3.54
	Range	80.00	337.00	239.20	296.50	423.20
	SD (£)	11.77	21.95	21.89	33.00	43.76
	CV	1.91	3.21	1.95	2.02	2.65
	Skewness	0.96	0.74	1.13	1.03	0.89
	<i>N</i>	159	342	826	812	166
Husbandmen (<i>N</i> = 2260)	Mean	6.43	7.63	12.55	15.24	25.69
	Median	4.00	3.37	5.93	5.00	5.29

	Range	160.00	89.86	296.50	296.50	283.00
	SD (£)	11.21	11.98	21.76	29.73	55.52
	CV	1.74	1.57	1.73	1.95	2.16
	Skewness	0.65	1.07	0.91	1.03	1.10
	<i>N</i>	283	333	765	746	133
Labourers	Mean	1.64	2.62	2.67	2.46	3.77
(<i>N</i> = 288)	Median	1.58	1.35	1.36	1.03	2.60
	Range	8.00	16.00	29.65	30.00	21.16
	SD (£)	1.77	3.95	5.18	4.36	5.59
	CV	1.08	1.51	1.94	1.77	1.48
	Skewness	0.10	0.96	0.76	0.98	0.63
	<i>N</i>	51	53	83	86	15
Male servants	Mean	2.55	2.14	4.18	7.97	4.07
(<i>N</i> = 360)	Median	0.80	0.67	0.60	0.74	0.81
	Range	16.00	44.94	59.30	333.34	21.16
	SD (£)	4.10	5.92	9.01	34.60	5.94
	CV	1.61	2.77	2.16	4.34	1.46
	Skewness	1.28	0.74	1.19	0.63	1.65
	<i>N</i>	27	72	145	100	16
Female servants	Mean	1.75	0.59	1.08	1.85	1.00
(<i>N</i> = 278)	Median	0.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Range	15.80	4.04	27.24	59.30	11.32
	SD (£)	3.57	0.93	3.22	6.95	2.99
	CV	2.04	1.58	2.98	3.76	2.99
	Skewness	0.80	1.90	1.01	0.80	1.00
	<i>N</i>	22	43	81	102	30
Singlewomen	Mean	1.03	1.73	4.33	2.73	2.34
(<i>N</i> = 384)	Median	1.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Range	2.66	40.44	204.30	59.30	52.90
	SD (£)	0.99	7.03	20.04	9.03	8.96
	CV	0.96	4.06	4.63	3.31	3.83
	Skewness	-0.52	0.74	0.65	0.91	0.78

	<i>N</i>	8	33	117	190	36
Widows	Mean	7.81	4.38	5.20	9.11	5.57
<i>(N = 405)</i>	Median	1.60	0.87	1.19	1.19	0.00
	Range	72.00	67.40	59.80	177.90	56.60
	SD (£)	18.19	11.58	12.14	23.25	12.89
	CV	2.33	2.64	2.33	2.55	2.31
	Skewness	1.02	0.91	0.99	1.02	1.30
	<i>N</i>	15	64	134	155	37

SD is the standard deviation; CV is the coefficient of variation. Skewness is calculated using the Pearson measure $[3(\text{mean}-\text{median})/\text{standard deviation}]$.

Table 10. Distribution of witnesses between jurisdictions by socio/occupational groups and gender over time, 1550-1681

		Jurisdiction				
		Canterbury	Salisbury	York	Other	All
		%	%	%	%	%
Gentry	1550-74	2.9	2.9	85.3	8.9	100.0
	1575-99	43.9	0.0	24.4	31.7	100.0
	1600-24	59.9	13.8	11.9	14.4	100.0
	1625-49	44.7	14.4	24.2	16.7	100.0
	1657-81	0.0	35.2	45.9	18.9	100.0
	1550-1681	43.1	13.6	26.5	16.8	100.0
Yeomen	1550-74	4.5	1.6	93.9	0.0	100.0
	1575-99	26.3	12.8	21.1	39.8	100.0
	1600-24	47.7	16.1	12.8	23.4	100.0
	1625-49	34.0	23.4	21.7	20.9	100.0
	1657-81	2.0	33.7	38.8	25.5	100.0
	1550-1681	34.2	19.1	23.5	23.2	100.0
Craft/Trade	1550-74	18.3	3.1	61.6	17.0	100.0
	1575-99	29.8	10.2	6.5	53.5	100.0
	1600-24	55.1	16.7	6.8	21.4	100.0
	1625-49	45.2	15.4	12.7	26.7	100.0
	1657-81	6.0	28.3	25.3	40.4	100.0
	1550-1681	41.8	15.2	13.9	29.1	100.0
Husbandmen	1550-74	15.9	4.6	76.0	3.5	100.0
	1575-99	33.6	22.2	7.3	36.9	100.0
	1600-24	46.5	25.8	6.1	21.6	100.0
	1625-49	33.1	28.8	11.3	26.8	100.0
	1657-81	6.8	30.1	43.6	19.5	100.0
	1550-1681	34.0	23.8	19.0	23.2	100.0
Labourers	1550-74	27.5	5.9	56.8	9.8	100.0
	1575-99	30.2	13.2	11.3	45.3	100.0

	1600-24	53.0	3.6	30.1	13.3	100.0
	1625-49	41.9	9.3	36.0	12.8	100.0
	1657-81	6.7	13.3	40.0	40.0	100.0
	1550-1681	38.5	8.0	33.7	19.8	100.0
Male servants	1550-74	18.5	3.7	63.0	14.8	100.0
	1575-99	36.1	22.2	4.1	37.5	100.0
	1600-24	43.4	18.6	11.1	26.9	100.0
	1625-49	40.0	11.0	10.0	39.0	100.0
	1657-81	0.0	49.9	18.8	31.3	100.0
	1550-1681	37.2	17.5	13.6	31.7	100.0
Female servants	1550-74	18.2	18.2	36.3	27.3	100.0
	1575-99	46.5	9.3	2.3	41.9	100.0
	1600-24	49.4	11.1	6.2	33.3	100.0
	1625-49	38.2	8.8	5.0	48.0	100.0
	1657-81	20.0	20.0	16.7	43.3	100.0
	1550-1681	39.2	11.5	8.7	40.6	100.0
Singlewomen	1550-74	12.5	0.0	50.0	37.5	100.0
	1575-99	30.3	9.1	6.1	54.5	100.0
	1600-24	45.3	15.4	8.5	30.8	100.0
	1625-49	43.7	15.8	8.9	31.6	100.0
	1657-81	36.1	25.1	19.4	19.4	100.0
	1550-1681	41.7	15.6	10.4	32.3	100.0
Widows	1550-74	53.3	0.0	20.0	26.7	100.0
	1575-99	35.9	17.2	6.3	40.6	100.0
	1600-24	53.7	9.7	3.8	32.8	100.0
	1625-49	49.7	10.3	7.1	32.9	100.0
	1657-81	16.2	10.9	32.4	40.5	100.0
	1550-1681	45.9	10.9	8.6	34.6	100.0

Table 11. Worth in £ (constant to 1550-1559 values) by occupation

Craft/trade		1550-74	1575-99	1600-24	1625-49	1657-81
Clothworker (<i>N</i> = 169)	Mean	5.53	13.85	18.31	17.42	20.47
	Median	5.34	10.11	6.98	6.30	10.58
	Range	14.22	67.40	68.10	177.90	51.84
	SD	3.67	18.83	22.51	26.56	18.28
	CV	0.66	1.36	1.23	1.52	0.89
	Skewness	0.16	0.60	1.51	1.26	1.62
	<i>N</i>	15	12	58	66	18
Tailor (<i>N</i> = 340)	Mean	5.40	4.27	6.38	9.02	5.03
	Median	1.99	1.45	2.97	2.50	2.65
	Range	16.00	29.08	59.30	129.00	21.16
	SD	6.10	5.38	10.20	19.45	7.24
	CV	1.13	1.26	1.60	2.16	1.44
	Skewness	1.68	1.57	1.00	1.01	0.99
	<i>N</i>	22	57	130	110	21
Shoemaker/cordwainer (<i>N</i> = 151)	Mean	3.22	7.14	6.64	9.64	13.76
	Median	2.00	1.35	1.35	2.77	2.83
	Range	10.66	134.80	68.10	100.00	56.60
	SD	3.50	24.00	11.78	17.98	17.39
	CV	1.09	3.36	1.77	1.87	1.26
	Skewness	1.05	0.72	1.35	1.15	1.89
	<i>N</i>	10	31	51	48	11
Weaver (<i>N</i> = 219)	Mean	2.33	2.22	9.39	12.73	12.49
	Median	1.60	1.35	1.58	2.96	2.83
	Range	10.53	13.48	237.20	237.20	84.90
	SD	3.03	2.73	28.01	31.50	21.12
	CV	1.30	1.23	2.98	2.47	1.69
	Skewness	0.72	0.96	0.84	0.93	1.37
	<i>N</i>	15	31	78	74	21

Carpenter/joiner (<i>N</i> = 199)	Mean	7.33	6.39	7.92	17.61	14.37
	Median	2.40	2.18	2.97	3.96	5.77
	Range	80.00	26.96	59.30	296.50	57.70
	SD	17.85	7.29	12.15	43.77	19.37
	CV	2.44	1.14	1.53	2.49	1.35
	Skewness	0.83	1.73	1.22	0.94	1.33
	<i>N</i>	19	25	71	71	13
Blacksmith (<i>N</i> = 152)	Mean	4.98	3.65	10.78	12.15	8.76
	Median	0.80	1.35	5.93	2.58	5.29
	Range	12.53	14.54	68.10	100.00	26.45
	SD	7.23	4.44	16.92	21.77	9.01
	CV	1.45	1.22	1.57	1.79	1.03
	Skewness	1.73	1.55	0.86	1.32	1.16
	<i>N</i>	3	21	58	53	17

Table 12. Percentages of witnesses within wealth bands, 1550-1681

	1550-1574	1575-1599	1600-1624	1625-1649	1657-1681
	%	%	%	%	%
0	9.9	15.4	12.8	19.1	24.8
<£1	8.7	9.6	6.5	4.9	5.6
£1-<£2	23.1	23.8	19.4	10.6	0.0
£2-<£5	17.7	15.7	15.4	9.6	20.3
£5-<£10	20.9	13.8	11.5	12.8	11.3
£10-<£40	17.9	16.9	21.2	23.4	20.4
£40-<£100	1.8	4.2	9.5	12.4	10.4
£100-<£200	0.1	0.1	2.0	4.0	2.6
£200-<£500	0.0	0.1	1.4	2.5	3.9
≥£500	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.8	0.8

Table 13. Percentage of total worth within each wealth band, 1550-1681

	1550-1574		1575-1599		1600-1624		1625-1649		1657-1681	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
<£1	0.8	82	0.5	212	0.1	438	0.1	598	0.2	160
£1-<£2	5.3	72	3.6	133	1.2	224	0.5	153	0.0	36
£2-<£5	8.3	192	6.2	329	2.4	665	1.0	334	1.9	0
£5-<£10	19.7	147	11.0	217	3.6	528	2.5	302	2.1	131
£10-<£40	44.7	174	34.5	191	19.7	395	14.3	400	12.0	73
£40-<£100	18.4	149	28.5	234	28.2	728	24.0	733	19.8	132
£100-<£200	2.8	15	2.1	58	13.2	326	17.7	388	11.9	67
£200-<£500	0.0	1	13.6	2	19.8	68	22.8	127	37.4	17
≥£500	0.0	0	0.0	5	11.7	47	17.1	77	14.7	25

Table 14. Proportion of total worth held by decile groups, 1550-1681

Decile	1550-74		1575-99		1600-24		1625-49		1657-81	
	%	C	%	C	%	C	%	C	%	C
Top	47.9	47.9	61.6	61.6	66.5	66.5	65.5	65.5	70.3	70.3
9 th	19.1	67.0	16.4	78.0	17.6	84.0	18.5	84.1	16.0	86.3
8 th	11.1	78.1	9.0	87.0	7.5	91.5	8.0	92.0	6.5	92.8
7 th	7.7	85.9	5.8	92.8	4.0	95.5	4.1	96.1	3.3	96.1
6 th	5.6	91.4	3.2	96.1	2.2	97.6	2.1	98.2	1.8	98.0
5 th	3.2	94.7	1.6	97.7	1.3	98.9	1.2	99.5	1.0	98.9
4 th	2.3	97.0	1.6	99.3	0.7	99.6	0.5	99.9	0.9	99.8
3 rd	2.2	99.2	0.7	100.0	0.4	100.0	0.1	100.0	0.2	100.0
2 nd	0.8	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0
Bottom	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0

% = percentage of total worth held by decile group

C = cumulative percentage

Table 15. Worth in £ (constant to 1550-1559 values) by age-group

Age		1550-1574	1575-1599	1600-1624	1625-1649	1550-1649
15-24 (N = 1000)	Mean	3.11	4.78	6.26	8.26	6.71
	Median	0.80	0.34	0.89	0.00	0.30
	Range	93.33	89.86	204.30	355.80	355.80
	SD (£)	11.87	14.64	18.98	30.79	24.11
	CV	3.82	3.06	3.03	3.73	3.59
	Skewness	0.58	0.91	0.85	0.80	0.80
25-34 (N = 1865)	Mean	6.30	7.04	16.38	20.76	15.24
	Median	2.40	1.45	2.99	5.00	2.99
	Range	80.00	134.80	598.00	500.00	598.00
	SD (£)	11.68	14.58	44.61	46.53	39.85
	CV	1.85	2.07	2.72	2.24	2.61
	Skewness	1.00	1.15	0.90	1.02	0.92
35-44 (N = 1898)	Mean	9.02	10.08	27.24	31.84	24.08
	Median	5.27	3.64	5.98	6.67	5.93
	Range	160.00	337.00	598.00	750.00	750.00
	SD (£)	15.85	29.12	71.05	77.73	65.36
	CV	1.76	2.89	2.61	2.44	2.71
	Skewness	0.71	0.66	0.90	0.97	0.83
45-54 (N = 1508)	Mean	8.13	13.67	25.35	35.80	26.05
	Median	5.34	4.50	3.99	10.00	5.93
	Range	80.00	363.50	1186.00	593.00	1186.00
	SD (£)	11.98	36.01	76.67	72.37	67.41
	CV	1.47	2.63	3.02	2.02	2.59
	Skewness	0.70	0.76	0.84	1.07	0.90
55-64 (N = 1434)	Mean	6.99	8.25	23.81	37.69	24.31
	Median	4.00	3.37	4.54	10.00	5.00
	Range	80.00	80.00	504.05	1186.00	1186.00
	SD (£)	11.81	12.56	53.74	102.31	69.54

	CV	1.69	1.52	2.26	2.71	2.86
	Skewness	0.76	1.17	1.08	0.81	0.83
65+	Mean	4.59	11.66	13.48	23.48	15.87
(N = 861)	Median	1.60	3.37	2.97	5.93	3.41
	Range	32.00	337.00	299.00	500.00	500.00
	SD (£)	5.63	36.79	27.59	50.98	38.22
	CV	1.23	3.16	2.05	2.17	2.41
	Skewness	1.59	0.68	1.14	1.03	0.98

Table 16. Mean and median worth in £ (constant to 1550-1559 values) by age and social status, 1600-1649

Age	Gentlemen		Yeomen		Husbandmen		Craft/Trade		Labourers	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
15-24	59.02	5.93	34.66	8.90	7.56	1.20	6.51	1.03	1.20	0.30
25-34	101.48	59.30	44.81	24.46	11.69	5.00	12.30	2.97	1.72	1.00
35-44	100.03	55.45	81.39	45.40	14.79	5.98	15.97	5.00	1.91	1.19
45-54	101.25	50.00	76.88	50.00	15.50	5.98	14.76	5.00	3.71	1.20
55-64	125.85	51.60	60.13	23.92	17.88	5.98	13.73	3.41	2.79	2.13
65+	57.52	50.00	43.10	20.00	11.64	5.08	10.90	2.97	3.41	1.11

Table 17. Ratio of median worth for each age-group to median worth for 45-54 age-group, by social group, 1600-1649

Age	Gentlemen		Yeomen		Husbandmen		Craft/Trade		Labourers	
	Ratio	<i>N</i>	Ratio	<i>N</i>	Ratio	<i>N</i>	Ratio	<i>N</i>	Ratio	<i>N</i>
15-24	0.12	17	0.18	32	0.20	143	0.21	159	0.25	9
25-34	1.19	47	0.49	138	0.84	330	0.59	419	0.84	33
35-44	1.11	74	0.91	205	1.00	320	1.00	439	0.99	29
45-54	1.00	62	1.00	192	1.00	287	1.00	290	1.00	26
55-64	1.03	61	0.48	207	1.00	239	0.68	220	1.78	41
65+	1.00	26	0.40	121	0.85	164	0.59	133	0.93	28