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## **Dearth and the English revolution: The harvest crisis of 1647-50**

‘The *price of food* [is] *excessive*’, wrote the Leveller John Wildman from London in 1648, ‘and *Trading* [is] decayed’.<sup>1</sup> It would, he thought, ‘rend any pitifull heart to heare and see the *cryes and teares of the poore*, who professe they are almost ready to famish’. ‘While our divisions continue, and there be no settlement of the principles of *freedom and justice*’, he insisted:

trading will but more decay every day: Rumours and feares of Warre, and the *Army* coming now into the *City*, makes Merchants unwilling to trust their goods in the *City*, and exchange beyond sea falles, and there will be no importing of goods, and then there will be no exporting and so the staple commodities of the kingdom which maintains the constant trade, will not tend to the advantage of the *labourers*, and then most of the poore in the kingdom which live by *spinning, carding, &c* will be ready to perish by famine.

Wildman had heard some Wiltshire clothiers, gathered at the Saracen’s Head in Friday Street, protesting that

trading was so dead, that some of them, who set at work formerly a 100 did not now set at work above a dozen or the like, and that the poor did gather together in troops of 10, 20, 30 in the Roades, and seized upon Corne as it was carrying to market, and devided it among themselves before the owners faces, telling them they could not starve.

Wildman was accordingly convinced that ‘a suddain confusion would follow if a speedie settlement were not procured’.<sup>2</sup>

Wildman’s vivid analysis of the relationship between harvest failure, economic slump, political crisis and popular protest is proof enough that those who lived through the distracted times of the late 1640s were well aware of the interpenetration of economic and constitutional dislocation. It is surprising, therefore, that historians have made so little attempt to take seriously the harvest crisis of the late 1640s.<sup>3</sup> While the dearth episodes of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (especially those of 1586-7, 1594-7, 1622-3, and 1629-31) have stimulated considerable historiographical interest, that which followed from the first of five harvest failures after 1646 has attracted no equivalent study.<sup>4</sup> In part, this failure is a function of the demographic orthodoxy, established by John Walter and Roger

Schofield in 1989, that England had ‘slipped the shadow of famine’ by the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> But it is also due to the conventional compartmentalisation and periodisation of seventeenth-century English history, in which the historiographies of politics and of the economy are kept at arms length and 1640 has generally been regarded as a watershed in the landscape of social and political change, beyond which lies a valley settled by another community of scholars exploring alien historical problems and working on unfamiliar sources.<sup>6</sup>

The consequences of these historiographical conventions for our understanding of the mid-seventeenth-century crisis have been profound. First, although the period 1647-50 is familiar as one kind of turning point—the failure to achieve settlement with the king; renewed civil war; military *coup d’etat*; regicide; the abolition of the monarchy and of the House of Lords; campaigning in Ireland and Scotland—it is not generally appreciated that those events occurred against a backdrop of profound economic and social dislocation which resulted in appalling distress.<sup>7</sup> As the vicar of the Gloucestershire parish of Hartpury noted in 1647: ‘We suffer dearth, if Warrs renue/Twixt the twoe Kingdomes, Both shall rue’.<sup>8</sup> Second, it is striking just how little we know about the economic significance of the interregnum, which is often omitted from the historiography of social change, creating a strange distance between the literatures on public policy in general, and on responses to dearth in particular, for the periods before 1640 and after 1660 (and arguably even after 1700). Although we have long been familiar with the classic dearth years, the crisis of the late 1640s has been curiously neglected both as a demographic episode in itself and in relation to its implications for the nature and development of popular political culture, and especially of Edward Thompson’s celebrated ‘moral economy’ of the poor.<sup>9</sup>

To revisit the harvest crisis of 1647-50 is therefore highly desirable. This paper offers a reassessment of this episode by reconstructing the nature and scale of the dearth and evaluating the character and effectiveness of public policy responses. In particular, it exploits the evidence of a large number of petitions and orders surviving in the quarter sessions papers of Cheshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Somerset and Wiltshire to analyse the

significance of popular agency in encouraging magisterial intervention in the grain market.<sup>10</sup> It will suggest that, in prompting the magistracy, in the absence of any conciliar directives and often against its better judgement, to practise market regulation of the kind stipulated by the Elizabethan and early Stuart dearth orders, those poor consumers who signed these petitions played a decisive role in mitigating the effects of high prices. These years, indeed, arguably represent the point at which the impulse to regulate the marketing of grain, rarely (if at all) shared by the magistracy itself, shifted from the crown to the crowd. Popular agency, it will be suggested, was all the more successful in these years because it spoke to contemporary fears that the indigent would be tempted to ally themselves with any political faction which promised redress of their grievances. Although the republican MP Arthur Hesilrige famously complained in 1659 that the vast majority of Englishmen were indifferent to the nature of their government so long as they could ‘plough and go to market’, those consumers who pleaded for market regulation frequently characterised themselves not only as poor and distressed but also as well-affected to the parliamentary regime which had been established *de facto* as the authority of the crown collapsed.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, they deployed an idiom which in the early 1640s had been synonymous with ‘honest’ or ‘godly’, but which by the late 1640s had crystallised around a set of social and political values—sincerity, candour and simplicity amongst them—which were recognised by their friends and their enemies alike.

In their staunch support for Parliament against the King, the ‘well-affected’ had an uncompromising attitude towards royalists, and regarded themselves as duty-bound to raise the moral tone of governance in the provinces.<sup>12</sup> By the late 1640s, this kind of rhetoric had become *de rigueur* for all those sectional interests who sought redress of a wide range of grievances from the parliamentary regimes.<sup>13</sup> Self-ascription as ‘well-affected’ also helped the petitioners pre-empt the charge that their criticism of local governors was simply a cover for royalist subversion and resistance. Indeed, the letters published in the newspapers of the period emphasised above all the subversive political implications of popular despair. It was reported from Newcastle in June 1649, for instance, that ‘the poorer sort of people being in great necessity’ were exclaiming that ‘their condition cannot be worse (whatsoever befall

them) than it is at present', and would fall in with either royalists or Presbyterians in search of redress.<sup>14</sup> In Tadcaster (North Yorks.), meanwhile, 'most of the meaner sort' were 'forced to pawn their bedding or sell their wearing apparell' to make ends meet, and were prepared 'to crye up a Kingly government or any other, that may give present ease to them'.<sup>15</sup> By the following August, the story that the hungry poor would join even 'an army of Turks or heathens come to ease them of their burdens' was commonplace, variously reported as current in Lancaster and in Worcester.<sup>16</sup> As early as March 1649, *The Moderate* was voicing more sinister anxieties: '*either take some care to ease, or relieve*' the poor, it warned, '*else their necessities will enforce them to be rich and level what they never intended*'. That this was not wishful thinking by the editor of the Leveller newspaper is confirmed by the subsequent comment of *The kingdomes faithful and impartiall scout* that 'if the Lord puts it not into the hearts of the Parliament to take some speedy course for the care of the people', 'we shall then fear nothing but confusion, and many will turn Levellers upon necessity'.<sup>17</sup> One of the most significant distinguishing features of the rhetoric of despair in these years, therefore, was the identification of an alternative political order to which the hungry might subscribe. In 1649, the regime was new and insecure, facing threats from both right and left, and was confronted with the very real possibility that hunger might be a factor in determining political allegiance.

## I

The consensus amongst the leading agricultural historians of the early modern period is that the dearth of the late 1640s was calamitous. 'Bad weather ruined the harvests of corn and hay for five years from the autumn of 1646 onwards', reports Joan Thirsk, 'and every succeeding year until the harvest of 1651 exacerbated the problems left by the previous one'. Grain crops were destroyed by summer rains in 1648 and by summer drought in 1649, and the frosts of the particularly harsh intervening spring were so devastating to the winter corn crop that livestock perished in the fields.<sup>18</sup> This amounted, argues W.G. Hoskins, to 'the worst of the "bad runs"' of harvests of the seventeenth century.<sup>19</sup> The impact on prices, and (in turn) on the purchasing power of the poor, was catastrophic. While the Phelps Brown/Hopkins

series for the price of foodstuffs rose by 43 per cent from 574 in 1645 to 821 in 1649, the Beveridge English annual average wheat price rose by more than 35 per cent above the trend established by a thirty-one-year moving average not only in 1647, but again in 1648, and yet again in 1649. To Peter Bowden, this episode represents the 'final paroxysm' of the Tudor and early Stuart price revolution.<sup>20</sup> Three of these years, accordingly, figure in Wrigley and Schofield's list of the points at which real wages fell most seriously below trend, as measured against a twenty-five-year moving average: by 19.1 per cent in 1647-8; by 23.6 per cent in 1648-9; and by 24.6 per cent in 1649-50. These represent, respectively, the seventeenth, eighth and sixth most serious depressions of the entire early modern period.<sup>21</sup> The effect on real wages was particularly marked in London, where the late 1640s, during which the cost of living rose by about one-third peaking in 1648-49, represented the 'worst crisis' to punctuate the sophisticated standard of living index calculated by Jeremy Boulton.<sup>22</sup> Nor was Scotland, where prices rose steeply in most places with the harvest of 1648, immune. The 'crisis of crops 1647-52' was one of only two episodes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when 'Scottish food prices were exceptionally high for an unusually long time'.<sup>23</sup>

The statistical evidence from throughout Britain can be supplemented by vivid reports of the impact of harvest failure in contemporary accounts, most famously in the diary of the Essex clergyman Ralph Josselin, who reported from Earls Colne as early as 15 September 1646 that the wheat harvest was 'exceedingly smitten and dwindled and rank'. By 24 October he was concerned that butter, cheese and meat were 'very dear' and that the price of corn was 'rising'. The following May (1647), 'all things continued excessive dear', and by August provisions were 'scarce to be gotten for our money'. By February 1648, the impact of two consecutive harvest failures was evident, it being 'a sad dear time for poor people'. After the harvest failed a third time, Josselin reported in January 1649 'the great dearness of every thing' and noted that 'men expect it will be dearer and dearer'. By September 1649 he observed that 'the rate of things continueth dearer and is likely to increase' and by November that 'the times were wonderful hard'. In December that year, he noted the devastating effect of the protracted dearth both on the conduct of the indigent and on the ability of the

charitable: 'beggars were many, givers [were] few'.<sup>24</sup> Josselin understood these calamities in terms of the doctrine of judgements, the interpretation usually deployed by the officers of church and state both to explain the catastrophe of harvest failure and to reinforce a social order perceived to be especially fragile in conditions of dearth: they were providential punishments visited on a sinful populace by a wrathful God.<sup>25</sup> He accordingly engaged in a cycle of fasting, repentance and charity to distressed strangers and poor neighbours alike, organising a congregational collection for Lancashire 'which is much afflicted with famine and pestilence' in July 1649; and giving away 'a meal's provision in meat broth or money to the poor' every week from December of that year.<sup>26</sup> He was all too aware of the potential for crimes of necessity, and especially for attacks on private property: in November 1649, he noted, 'the times were very sad in England so that men durst not travel and, indeed, rich men were afraid to lie in their houses, robbers were so many and bold'. With a mounting sense of anxiety, he recorded that 'men knew not how to carry monies and many gentlemen's houses were set upon and pilfered'.<sup>27</sup> Some of Josselin's concerns were echoed in the correspondence of the Verney family, whose Buckinghamshire estates were blighted not only with drought and frost but also with cattle plague and sheep rot in these years, leading some of their tenants to complain that they were 'much impoverish'd' by 'murrain and dearth'.<sup>28</sup>

By the spring of 1649, moreover, reports of dearth from many parts of the realm were punctuating the news-books; from Tewkesbury (Gloucestershire) in mid-March; from Poole (Dorset) in early April; from Somerset and from Chester in late April. As might be expected, it was worst of all in the lake counties: the number of indigent families was estimated at 18,000 in Westmoreland and 30,000 in Cumberland. Thousands were apparently straggling towards Newcastle, a city described that very year as 'an Aegypt to all the shires of the north (in time of famine) for bread'. 'All quarters of the country' wrote William Gray in 1649, 'come with money in their purses to buy grain to feed their families this summer'. But there was little to offer in a town where 'corn is very dear' and the resident poor were 'almost ready to starve'. In Hambleton on the Lancashire coast, fears of starvation had apparently become reality by early May when parishioners were reported 'dead for hunger'. In all these places,

correspondents reported that necessities were dear and that labour was cheap; that women and children were driven to beggary to stave off starvation; and that fear of famine stalked market town and rural parish alike.<sup>29</sup>

Parliament itself was kept informed through more formal channels. Bulstrode Whitelocke reported in April 1649 that the commons had received ‘letters from Lancashire of their want of bread so that many families were starved’; and from Newcastle ‘that many in Cumberland and Westmoreland died in the highways for want of bread and diverse left their habitations travelling with their wives and children to other parts to get relief, but could have none’. The committees and justices of the peace of Cumberland certified that ‘that there were 30,000 families that had neither bread nor seed corn, nor money to buy either, and they desired a collection for them, but much too little to relieve so great a multitude’.<sup>30</sup> The Commonwealth regime was, therefore, certainly aware of the seriousness of the problem: in April 1649, the council of state referred to the ‘great necessity and dearth’; and William Clarke, secretary to the council of the army, was informed that the county of Denbighshire had no bread for its inhabitants and that ‘corn cannot be gotten for money’.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the army itself was exacerbating this desperate situation, for Cromwell’s campaign in Ireland necessitated shipments of vast quantities of wheat from the ports of Bristol, Chester and Milford Haven during the summer of 1649.<sup>32</sup>

It is therefore no surprise that these years saw the revival of long-standing polemical debates about the relative significance of divine displeasure and human greed in causing dearth; about the evils of profiteering; and about the advantages and disadvantages of market regulation. Charles Fitz-geffrey’s *A Curse Against Corne-hoarders*, reissued in 1647, provided a classic restatement of the doctrine of judgements, especially in his view (very frequently rehearsed in the past by the clergy at the command of the bishops) that the hand of God would be turned aside only when the populace repented and abhorred sin.<sup>33</sup> But the *Curse* was also an influential apology for magisterial intervention in grain marketing, and especially for the punishment of racketeers and middlemen.<sup>34</sup> ‘God hath not sent want of bread’, Fitz-geffrey argued, ‘but covetousness hath caused cleanness of teeth. God hath not

smitten us with blasting, nor sent Caterpillars, nor Cankerwormes, but the Divell hath raised up Caterpillars and Locusts, those Catchers at the Dearth of Corn' who 'make a private gaine out of a publike detriment'. Other pamphleteers of the period similarly rehearsed the biblical idiom deployed in the books of Joel and 2 Chronicles (and in some translations of 2 Corinthians) to condemn those caterpillars who consumed the harvest, an image that might be figuratively applied to the rapacious, the extortionate and the corrupt.<sup>35</sup> In an anonymous dialogue of 1647, the protagonists 'Mr Hord the meal-man and Mr Gripe the broker' unwittingly disclosed 'the unjust and oppressive practises of those caterpillers' who deliberately drove up the price of grain.<sup>36</sup> In 1648, the radical lawyer John Cook published his remarkable *Unum Necessarium*, among other things a re-statement of the view that although 'famine [was] of God's sending', 'scarcity [was] of some men's making'. 'Ingrossers, [who] make a dearth, and cruell misers', he fulminated, were 'the caterpillars and bane of this kingdome'.<sup>37</sup> Fitz-geffrey accordingly stressed the virtues of market regulation: 'as blessing shall be on the head of them who sell their corn willingly, so shall it be' on the heads of those magistrates 'who cause them, or compelle them to sell, who are unwilling'.<sup>38</sup>

There is ample evidence, therefore, that corn was in short supply in the late 1640s, and that, however much they might disagree over its causes, contemporaries were well familiar with the distress created by dearth. The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure are nonetheless convinced that starvation was not widespread. In 1647-8, with real wages over 19 per cent below trend, Wrigley and Schofield suggest that the national death rate actually *fell* by over 11 per cent, and that even when living standards deteriorated further, mortality continued to fall: in 1648-49, with real wages almost 24 per cent below trend, by over 6 per cent; and in 1649-50, with real wages almost 25 per cent below trend, by almost 12 per cent.<sup>39</sup> This optimistic reading of the *national* mortality profile initially seems to be confirmed by the Cambridge Group analysis of the proportion of parishes in observation which experienced a 'crisis', for which they adopt a relatively 'hard' measure, using a 'flexible' rather than a fixed ratio between observed numbers of burials on the one hand and an estimate of the underlying trend which takes into account the 'variability

of the burial series' on the other'.<sup>40</sup> On this stringent, and arguably restrictive definition, the proportion of parishes in which crisis mortality was evident had frequently exceeded 15 per cent in the dearths of the late sixteenth century, and briefly did so again in that of the early 1620s, but never rose above 5 per cent during the late 1640s.<sup>41</sup> Using a rather 'softer' measure, however, Brian Outhwaite argued that the impact of the mid-century crisis might not have been attenuated as the Cambridge Group would have us believe. By measuring the proportion of the 302 widely-scattered parishes in observation in 1594 in which burials rose 50 per cent or more above an eleven-year moving average of burials in the same parish, Outhwaite suggested that the dearth of the late 1640s had only marginally less severe an impact on mortality than the harvest failures of the late Elizabethan period.<sup>42</sup>

Outhwaite's scepticism is further reinforced by doubts about the reliability of the demographic data in the late 1640s. Indeed, the confidence with which even the Cambridge Group express their estimates of national mortality rates in the late 1640s is belied by the widely-acknowledged defectiveness of burial registration in this period. Although by no means as 'staggering' as deficiencies in the quality of the registration of marriages, it is nonetheless striking that the proportion of months under observation with defective registration of burials rose during the late 1640s to a maximum of 34.1 per cent in 1650 and returned to its pre-civil war levels only after the Restoration.<sup>43</sup> The same was probably true in Scotland, where although there is evidence of starvation in Argyll and the northern lowlands, the scarcity of parish burial records in these years of civil and ecclesiastical dislocation militates against precise measurement of either the scale or spread of mortality crisis.<sup>44</sup> Given these evidential deficiencies, it should not be too readily assumed that the Malthusian trap had been safely sprung by the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Whether a hard or soft definition is adopted to identify mortality crises, it is likely that their *aggregative* impact was slightly more muted in the late 1640s than had been the case over the previous century. Given that localised differentials in English mortality levels would be ironed out in Wrigley and Schofield's national aggregates, those crises which did occur probably represented regional clusters rather than a national pattern. This, of course, is

to say nothing of the more complex problem of whether contemporaries themselves were confident at any point in the seventeenth century that the spectre of starvation could no longer haunt them. Even if the late 1640s might, in retrospect, successfully be slotted into a trajectory of agricultural improvement, it is clear that contemporaries felt themselves vulnerable to harvest failure well in to the second half of the seventeenth century, and probably beyond. If revisionist historiography has alerted us to the possibility that hindsight might have costs as well as benefits for the plausibility of political and constitutional narratives, economic historians should be equally aware of the teleological fallacy. It nonetheless seems probable that however hungry they were in the late 1640s, the poor in the overwhelming majority of parishes were somehow prevented from starving. Limitations of space preclude any sustained discussion here of the undoubtedly significant role of informal relief in general, or the 'social economy of dearth' in particular, in these years.<sup>46</sup> And although both the pattern of quarter sessions orders issued by the Warwickshire magistracy and the scale of pension payments made by the overseers of three Norfolk parishes have been used to emphasise the resilience, perhaps even the success, of the interregnum poor relief system, it nonetheless remains true that there has been no systematic study of the form and nature of parish-level poor relief in these years. Until the suggestive studies of Beier and Wales are confirmed by detailed analysis of the ordinary and extraordinary payments, the latter perhaps including provision of grain, made by parish officers in the late 1640s, it seems premature to generalise about the effectiveness of the Elizabethan relief statutes in mitigating the effects of harvest failure.<sup>47</sup> The following discussion therefore concerns itself exclusively, and therefore somewhat artificially, with the nature and impact of market regulation.

## II

By the late 1640s, the reintroduction of the dearth orders, those 'sprawling sets of good intentions' through which the Elizabethan and early Stuart regimes had sought to manage the grain supply on six occasions between 1587 and 1630 was politically impossible.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, market regulation on this model was tainted by association with the

prerogative paternalism of the 1630s, and was probably regarded as undesirable as early as 1637-8, when high prices provoked a surge in mortality but the Caroline privy council suppressed the reflexes of its itchy trigger finger and refrained from any attempt to regulate the grain market.<sup>49</sup> With the dearth orders out of the question, therefore, parliament resorted in August 1648 to a campaign of public fasting and humiliation. Noting that bad weather was likely to affect the harvest so badly that 'general Dearth and Mortality' was a real possibility, the commons 'set apart a Day for Solemn Humiliation, and Seeking of the Lord, for averting this and other his most heavy Judgments'. They did not, however, combine the spiritual medicine of repentance with the secular medicine of direct relief in kind that had been so successfully co-ordinated by the bishops during the late Elizabethan campaign for general hospitality.<sup>50</sup> Parliamentary rhetoric, at least if the newsbooks of the period are to be believed, was by April 1649 growing increasingly indignant about profiteers grinding the faces of the poor at a time when 'their labour is cheaper and food twice dearer than formerly' and engrossers buying up the 'granaries of the nation' to the 'utter undoing of the poorer sort.'<sup>51</sup> Even so, the only practical measures attempted by central government were both dilatory and weak: the suspension of all grain exports in March 1649<sup>52</sup>; and a 'limp measure' (which may not, in fact, have been a genuine response to dearth) suppressing all unlicensed dealers in meal and flour in October 1650.<sup>53</sup> Other than that, the Council of State fell back on what was effectively a star chamber strategy, requiring Attorney-General Prideaux to initiate exemplary prosecutions of engrossers of corn, though it was fully conscious of the public relations value of such show trials. In its proceedings against Robert Green of Ipswich in May 1649, for instance, the council expressed its wish that 'the poor people may see that care is taken of them in time of dearth'.<sup>54</sup>

Only in the early Spring of 1649 did parliament seek to intervene directly in the grain market. On 19 March, in an initiative which seems to have been prompted by a petition from the 'well affected of the county of Leicester', the commons ordered JPs to see that 'the Stocks of every Parish be so supplied, as the Poor in the several Parishes may be relieved with Corn, and other Necessaries', and to enforce the 1552 statutes against engrossing.<sup>55</sup> Speaker

William Lenthall communicated the order to the county justices, and although he prefaced it with the comment that parliament was 'very sensible and compassionate of the sad condition which the poor are brought unto by these hard tymes', the 'good meanes' which he thought would bring them 'speedy and effectual reliefe' specifically included only the Elizabethan poor laws and ignored altogether the Edwardian marketing statutes.<sup>56</sup>

For most counties, however, Lenthall's initiative was too little too late, with many magistrates having taken independent initiatives to mitigate the rigour of harvest failure during the preceding two winters. As might be expected, the principal targets of magisterial action were *forestallers*, who intercepted goods before they reached the public market and bought them privately with the intention of driving up the price; *regrators*, who bought up foodstuffs in order to sell them again at a profit in the same or a neighboring market; and *maltsters*, who converted barley to malt to meet the insatiable demands of the brewing industry at a time when grain for foodstuffs was in short supply. As we shall see, however, there was a current of popular opprobrium directed at magistrates themselves, especially those who tolerated these abuses through negligence, corruption or self-interest. Indeed, it is clear that county magistrates had been prompted into action long before the Commons urged them to prevent and punish the engrossing of grain.

### III

Analysis of quarter sessions order books and sessions files suggests that in fact the magistrates enforced several aspects of a policy closely resembling the Elizabethan and early Stuart dearth orders as early as 1647-8, the central government's resounding silence on market regulation notwithstanding. The Essex JPs insisted at Easter 1647, for instance, that corn-dealers should not come to market before midday to allow poor consumers to make the first purchases.<sup>57</sup> The most systematic policy was, however, enforced in Wiltshire, where at both the Midsummer and Michaelmas sessions of 1647, the bench forced corn merchants to bring grain to market; forbade corn-masters from selling by sample 'within doores or out of the markets'; restricted the first hour's purchases in the markets to 'the poore people and

others which buy for their owne necessary provision'; prevented any purchased grain from being converted into malt without the express permission of the justices; and authorised searches of any loft or house 'for the discovery of any corne or grayne forestalled and bought out of open market or ingrossed contrary to lawe'. These orders were repeated the following January (1648), when those who furnished the markets of Hindon and Warminster were specifically commanded to sell one-eighth of the supply to the poor at the preferential rate of four shillings per bushel, undercutting the market price by 20 per cent.<sup>58</sup> Price-fixing of this kind went well beyond the subsidised grain-sales that had been introduced in previous dearths<sup>59</sup>; and it far exceeded the powers conferred on magistrates either by statute or by the dearth orders.<sup>60</sup> Even so, both orders were confirmed at the Salisbury assizes in March 1648 by Serjeant John Wilde, who also stipulated that 'two peckes out of every sacke of barley bought and sold was to be served in to the use of the poore' and insisted that two supervisors be appointed in every market town to see these policies implemented.<sup>61</sup> By the following July (1648), however, the grand jury despaired of effective enforcement and opted instead for the suppression of all purchases by maltsters until after the harvest.<sup>62</sup> Grain policy was, it seems, to remain a matter of concern on the western circuit into 1650, where justices Nicholas and Rolle repeated and extended Wilde's orders on the regulation of malting and aleselling from Cornwall into Devon because of the continuing 'great scarcity of corn by convertinge of barley into malt'.<sup>63</sup>

This fall-back position, amounting to the micro-management of the purchase and sale of barley, the bread-corn of the poor, was to become the preferred solution almost everywhere. In April 1650, the Hertfordshire justices insisted on the very close scrutiny of the conduct of maltmakers in the markets of Hertford and St Albans. Well into 1650, similarly, the Wiltshire bench was receiving character references on behalf of those seeking licenses to deal in corn, including one from fifty-three inhabitants of Great Marlow (Bucks.) that Henry Penny of Bisham 'hath for many weeks since the dearth of corn in these parts, supplied the poor with barley at a cheaper rate than they could buy it in any place near them, who, had he not so done, would have been in Extreme distress'. Nor was it unusual for the Wiltshire bench

to license dealers on the condition that they sell only to poor people: Michael Stanmore of Ford was licensed in 1648 to take only fourpence per bushel profit for the carriage and grinding of barley and to buy and sell in standard measures.<sup>64</sup>

The policy was only slightly less thoroughgoing in Cheshire, where in August 1648 the magistrates regulated badgers and maltsters more tightly and in January 1649 banned them from the county altogether. When licensing was reintroduced later in 1649, the justices insisted on securing letters of testimonial from the chief inhabitants of each parish; and once licensed, regulating in microscopic detail the amount of grain each maltster might legitimately buy from month to month. Their lack of confidence in the licensing policy was, however, obvious: they insisted on the personal supervision of the markets by local magistrates, and when subsequently reminded by the clerks of the market that grain was being forestalled precisely in order to keep it out of the marketplace, they authorised searches initially of corn-masters' barns and subsequently of all their property, including both their houses and gardens.<sup>65</sup> Intensive regulation and licensing on this model was also practised in Lancashire from 1648. In the hundreds of West Derby and Leyland, licenses to deal in corn were cancelled and malting was prohibited. Here too, however, there were concerns that most abuses of the grain trade took place privately, so a policy of systematic household searches was introduced. The constables of Salford were ordered to search all houses and barns to identify those who held more corn than was necessary for themselves and their families, and to force them to bring it to market for sale 'at reasonable rates to the poor people'. The Hertfordshire bench insisted in July 1650 that dealers were to sell their grain, butter and cheese to 'the poorer sort of people' only at the same rates they themselves had paid in the open markets.<sup>66</sup>

Searches of the kind envisaged in Wiltshire, Cheshire and Lancashire were also carried out in Huntingdonshire, from whence survives a series of certificates of the grain held by the inhabitants of several parishes in the hundred of Toseland.<sup>67</sup> This exercise in information-gathering was evidently highly systematic and for seven parishes was tabulated into thirteen columns, recording the householder's name; the number of persons resident; the

number of acres to be sown (subdivided into barley; pease and beanes; pease; and oates); the bargains for sale that had been struck; and the quantity of grain remaining in the barn (again sub-divided, this time into wheat; rye; malt; barley; oats; pease and beanes; peas; and beanes).<sup>68</sup> The returns reveal that in this part of East Anglia there was little corn to be had at any price: in Ellington, for example, all eight of the listed householders were certified as having no grain surplus; while of the fifteen householders whose grain stocks were assessed in Easton, ten had 'none to spare'. In Woolley, thirteen inhabitants were listed, ten of whom were recorded as having 'nothing to spare but wants'.<sup>69</sup> The certificates also reflect the magistrates' interest in identifying forestallers: among them is a list of writs of summons to those who had illegally bought grain in the parishes of Upwood and Little Raveley.<sup>70</sup>

Engrossers were evidently brought to justice elsewhere, often with the help of informers. The four informers active at Wiltshire quarter sessions during the winter of 1647-48 presented thirteen cases of engrossing involving twelve-hundred quarters of harvested grains and 120 acres of growing corn.<sup>71</sup> But there were even bigger fish to fry at Kent assizes, where in the late 1640s Richard Hollomore repeatedly brought informations against engrossers, especially those who had forestalled significant quantities of wheat.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, the sixteen engrossers prosecuted at Kent assizes between July 1649 and August 1650 were allegedly guilty of marketing abuses in Maidstone and Rochester which over the course of two years had involved over 10,000 quarters of grain to the value of almost £20,000.<sup>73</sup> Informers also seem to have been active elsewhere: there was a burst of informations against engrossers of corn in the North Riding in the years 1648-50; and the Cheshire bench sanctioned the activities of informers once again in 1652.<sup>74</sup> All this is to say nothing of the re-energization of the long-standing campaign about alehouses. This was evident from as early as 1646 in Wiltshire, but spread to Somerset by January 1647, and to Hampshire and Essex by 1649.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps for the first time, therefore, alehouse 'regulation had acquired a national dimension'. The constable of Bury (Lancs.) reported in 1649 that alehouse-haunters were complaining that the laws on malting, brewing and tipling had been 'new modelled and cromwelysed'.<sup>76</sup>

One possible explanation of the chronology of market regulation in the late 1640s is, therefore, that long before Speaker Lenthall reminded county magistrates of their obligations towards the poor at a time of high prices, the gentry instinctively knew how to respond to the threat to social order implied by harvest failure. To assume that the magistracy spontaneously adopted policies which imitated the market regulation implied by the dearth orders (even in the absence of royal proclamations to that end) would, however, be a serious mistake. There is widespread evidence to suggest that the magistrates were not moving to regulate the markets anything like as efficiently as poor consumers would have liked and that at least some justices understood the crisis less as a matter of threat than one of opportunity.

#### IV

The survival of a significant number of popular petitions about the failure of the magistracy to regulate the grain market in line with customary expectations during the harvest crisis of 1647-50 makes possible an invaluable case study of the ways in which social policy could be transformed by popular participation.<sup>77</sup> It is, of course, true that petitioning had long been a strategy adopted by poor consumers in time of harvest failure. When dearth was superimposed upon trade depression in the cloth-working towns of Essex in 1629, for instance, the bench, meeting at Chelmsford that Easter, received petitions from both the 'inhabitants' and the 'weavers' of Braintree and Bocking. Indeed, these complaints were part of a wider campaign of public pressure involving what was effectively a mass demonstration of distress. The magistrates subsequently reported to the privy council that 'neare unto 200 persons' had followed them 'from place to place, movinge us for commiseration and urging present answer'. Only by negotiating with the clothiers and chief inhabitants and by promising 'some speedie provision to be made for them', could the magistrates persuade the crowd to disperse.<sup>78</sup> A subsequent clothworkers' petition of July 1629, transcribed for the deputy lieutenants but not itself surviving in the sessions rolls, appears to have been drawn up when 'seaven score' weavers from Coggleshall came to Braintree 'thinkinge to finde the magistrate there, and made a petition to lay forth their grievances'.<sup>79</sup> More remarkably still, Sir John

Oglander noted from the Isle of Wight in 1630 that his determination that 'something must be done in a dearth to give the common people content' had occasionally resulted in large-scale negotiations: 'I have had 300 with me in a morning', he remembered, 'and have pacified them well'.<sup>80</sup> Although petitions of this kind are often referred to by magistrates, the texts of the complaints themselves rarely survive in quarter sessions archives before the late 1640s.<sup>81</sup> The following discussion analyses the numerous petitions which were sent to county magistrates during these desperate years. It will suggest that petitions certainly did sting county justices into enforcing the Edwardian statutes against forestalling and regrating, and even seem to have stimulated subsidised grain sales and more extensive searches and enquiries into grain supply on the model of the dearth orders. To that extent, those who subscribed to the petitions helped moderate the rigour of harvest failure.

The geography of these petitions is itself very significant. In part, of course, our knowledge of them is conditioned by the relatively poor survival rate of quarter sessions materials for these years. Although it is tempting to blame the white noise of archival attrition for the apparent silence of those areas, most obviously Cumberland and Westmorland, which had traditionally been vulnerable to dearth and even to subsistence crisis, it is equally possible that these areas were quiescent because they lacked a pre-existing tradition of market regulation to which petitioners could appeal. The significant wave of petitions from other pastoral areas, especially Lancashire and Cheshire, suggests that poor consumers further to the south had clearer expectations of magisterial conduct at times of high prices.<sup>82</sup> But even within the familiar well-documented counties, there are some significant omissions: the orders of the Staffordshire and Warwickshire benches, for instance, make no reference at all to petitions in support of market regulation, and although the Derbyshire sessions files contain large numbers of petitions for poor relief, explicit reference to dearth (let alone to its most desirable remedies) is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>83</sup> The patchy survival of the petitions may well reflect the larger politics of the campaign. The magistrates being criticised in Lancashire, Somerset and Wiltshire were predominantly royalist, many of whom had continued to license the making of malt and the selling of ale even as the price of grains rose exponentially. Those

who were godly and well-affected to parliament, as in Warwickshire, by contrast, appear to have escaped censure.<sup>84</sup> More generally, the diminishing social status of those who served on county commissions may well have created space for dissent, even for criticism. Although social upstarts and political radicals came to dominate many county benches in the months after the regicide, it had been accepted in some counties as early as the mid-1640s that outstanding social status could no longer be the main criterion for office.<sup>85</sup> There is also the related question of the geography of petitioning *within* counties, which was most often organised at the centres of specific marketing areas, such as those associated with Warminster (Wilts.), the largest granary in a region of densely populated corn-deficient cloth districts; or Bruton and Wincanton, the two small towns in eastern Somerset from which, it was estimated, nearly seven thousand labourers and artisans obtained their weekly meal.<sup>86</sup>

The petitions with which we are concerned were overwhelmingly manuscript rather than printed, and were submitted to local authorities, usually county quarter sessions or assizes. Those which survive are probably only a minority of those submitted, though many others may well have formed the basis of subsequent grand jury presentments, a tendency encouraged by Sergeant Wilde as he rode the western Circuit in the autumn of 1648. The Cornwall grand jury, for instance, informed him at Launceston on 11 September of the 'great complaint and cry of poor people' who were 'like to starve for want of bread', and that the dearth had been exacerbated because those maltsters living in corporations (and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the county magistrates) had continued malting 'without resrainte tendinge to the great consumsion of corne and enhaunceinge of the price thereof'. When he reached Exeter three days later, the Devon grand jury expressed their concern both about 'the ympunity of sturdy beggars, the virmin of the common welthe' and about the urgent need to relieve the aged and impotent poor in 'this tyme of dearth and scarcerty'.<sup>87</sup> Wilde had a reputation for issuing inflammatory assize charges to prompt grand juries to formulate presentments, but his colleagues elsewhere were similarly assiduous in encouraging the formalising of petitions into prosecutions: Chief Justice Bradshaw insisted in Cheshire in 1648 that although petitioners' allegations against engrossers were plausible, their grievances

must be formally presented by the grand jury so that the guilty parties could be punished by due process.<sup>88</sup>

There were, of course, other petitions which found their way directly to the Council of State, such as that submitted in September 1649 by Robert Hitchin complaining of the marketing abuses committed in Lancashire by 'men of great estates and interests'.<sup>89</sup> Others still, such as *A True Representation of the Present Sad and Deplorable Condition of the County of Lancaster*, which was issued in London in May 1649, gained national currency by virtue of publication'.<sup>90</sup> Many were products of orchestrated campaigns, along the lines suggested by the anonymous author of *Two knaves for a penny* in 1647, who wished that 'some persons would meet together in some convenient place, to consider of a Petition' to prevent the 'unjust and unconscionable practise' of forestalling, and to 'provide for the due supply of the markets with corn by the Farmers'.<sup>91</sup> This certainly seems to have been the case with those manuscript petitions, which were frequently signed by large, and often by very large, numbers of individuals who made up significant proportions of the populations of the parishes and hundreds in which they originated: thirty-nine from Hale (Cheshire) in January 1648; forty-four from Moulsham and Chelmsford (Essex) at Easter 1647; fifty-five from Astbury (Cheshire) at Easter 1646; and 353 from the four Somerset parishes of Batcombe, Bruton, Shepton Mallett and Wincanton in January 1649.<sup>92</sup> Thirty-three inhabitants of Westbury (Wilts.) remarkably claimed in January 1648 to speak on behalf 'of the pore above 500' in the region. There were apparently *eight hundred* signatories to a petition, which has not itself survived, submitted to the Lancashire justices at Manchester in January 1647.<sup>93</sup> Generically these petitioners tended to refer to themselves as the 'inhabitants', often as the 'poor inhabitants', sometimes even (like the inhabitants of the hundred of West Derby in the summer of 1648) the 'poore distressed people'.<sup>94</sup> More specifically, however, petitioners from Hale (Cheshire) in January 1648 described themselves as 'the well-affected inhabitants in the township'; and those who subscribed to a petition to the Somerset bench at Wells in January 1649 regarded themselves as 'well affected and poore distressed people'.<sup>95</sup>

The identity of a small minority of those who co-ordinated the petitioning campaigns with which we are concerned is easily reconstructed, in part because they were writing in an official capacity. A significant subset of petitions originated with the clerks (sometimes misleadingly referring to themselves as the overseers) who were responsible for policing the markets in provincial towns, an office whose powers had been revived by a royal proclamation of 1619.<sup>96</sup> In the summer of 1648, for instance, the clerks of the market at Nantwich petitioned both as 'inhabitants and on behalf of the poor of our town', while their colleagues at Middlewich were 'moved by the pitiful complaint of the poor in our towne for the scarcity and want of bread'.<sup>97</sup> In articulating popular grievances in this way, the clerks were continuing a tradition of criticism which had occasionally incurred the wrath of the magistracy: the clerk of the market in Essex, for instance, had fallen foul of both the justices and the grand jury as a result of his criticisms of deficient market regulation during the dearth of 1622.<sup>98</sup> Clerks of the market often ran a gauntlet of intimidation and collusion created by magistrates and jurymen alike, and might accordingly find themselves accused of extortion. Thomas Ingledew, clerk of the markets in the North Riding, filed a sequence of informations against those he thought guilty of engrossing corn in the late 1640s, only to find himself charged with fraud and dismissed.<sup>99</sup> Given the sensitivities of the office, the alliance that was struck at Easter 1649 when four of the clerks of the markets in Cheshire were joined in a petition to the chief justice by no less than forty-nine clergymen, is all the more interesting. Together, these men claimed nothing less than to speak on behalf of 'all the poore throughout the whole county of Chester'.<sup>100</sup>

This last example reminds us of the very significant role of the clergy in co-ordinating these campaigns. Individual clergymen might, of course, take the initiative. Nathaniel Lancaster of Tarporley (Cheshire), for instance, intervened at Easter 1649 on behalf of two of his parishioners who had been presented for buying and selling corn illegally. These men, he insisted, were not culpable: they 'want corne themselves' and 'sell with all expedition at home or at Chester what they can spare from their owne necessary use'.<sup>101</sup> James Bradshaw, minister of Wigan, confederated not only with the mayor and bailiffs of the

town but also with four other Lancastrian clergymen to compose a graphic petition describing the county’s sufferings, which also functioned as a charitable brief for these ‘afflicted and distressed parts’. It was not unknown, moreover, for groups of clergy to bring together very large numbers of signatories to support appeals to the county justices. Particularly impressive in this respect was the combination of eight hundred ministers and parishioners who petitioned the Lancashire justices at Manchester in January 1647.<sup>102</sup>

In other cases, the godly zeal of the laity can be detected behind criticism of unlicensed malt-making. Edward Curll, the parliamentary sequestrator for the Somerset hundred of Catsash, orchestrated a campaign, waged at the Wells sessions of January 1649, against the ‘nurseries of hell the alehouses, and their abettors, maltsters who for private gain care not to undoe a kingdome’, which was evidently related to his feud with the presbyterian William Strode.<sup>103</sup> Curll’s vitriol, expressed in a petition heard by the Somerset justices at a critical juncture of social, economic and political crisis, demonstrates the infusion with radical protestantism of the long-standing suspicion of malt-making.<sup>104</sup> ‘Humbly expecting’ the justices’ ‘charitable assistance in so just a cause’, Curll’s confederates pleaded for remedy of ‘the high prices of all sorts of graine and victuals now already amongst’ them, it ‘being but one quarter past’ the harvest. Dearth, they lamented, had been compounded by ‘the scarcitie of worke in most of [their] employments’ and they feared that without the intervention of the magistracy the situation would deteriorate further. They accordingly identified three specific grievances which the justices must redress lest their poor families be ‘remedylessly cast away’. First, there was the ‘multiplicity of licensed alehouses indirectly set up and [others] unlicensed numberless’, which had been tolerated despite previous assize orders.<sup>105</sup> Alehousekeepers, they bewailed, ‘like drones do consume what the poore do dearly want’, and their brewing, continued by ‘sighting commands and laughing at authoritye’, was ‘a great cause of [their] present and insuing insupportable miseries’. Alehouses, they insisted, were ‘the kingdoms bane’: ‘nurseries of all sortes of wickedness and disorderly and unlawful meetinges and plottinges of mischief’. Second, moreover, the alehousekeepers were in collusion with maltsters, those ‘rich men having other meanes trades & employments’, who

'buy in great quantities of barley timely in the yere which soonne raises the price of that and all other graines and being maulted it cannot make bread'. Third, and finally, there were wholesale marketing abuses: 'forestallers engrossers and hucksters' drove up grain prices to their own 'commodity' and the 'undoing of the poore'; and the neglect of standard weights and measures permitted both bakers and alehousekeepers to 'sell what and howe they will'. All this amounted to a conspiracy, in which local officers were implicated by virtue of their very neglect of magistrates' orders, designed to 'starve their pore distressed brethren'. The appeal drew to a close with a dramatic statement of the scale of the petitioners' distress: 'slight us noe longer wee beseech you, our leane cheeks and cry pleade for pittie'. And it concluded with a veiled threat of its likely consequences: 'boundless' hunger had already given rise to such 'foule offences as yet are without control' and 'want of bread' would surely create 'further mischiefes'.

The identity of most of those who subscribed to such petitions was probably as obscure to contemporaries as it is to historians reading them at a distance of three-hundred-and-fifty years. Only exhaustive record linkage between petitions and parish archives would convincingly disclose the social profile of subscription. It was precisely in those cases where petitions were anonymous, however, that an anxious magistracy was particularly keen to establish the circumstances of their composition. As we shall see, one particularly inflammatory petition submitted to the Wiltshire bench in the winter of 1647-8 provoked magisterial interrogation of 'the mayor [of Westbury], the constables of the hundred, the ministers and the rest of the most sufficient' in the region, several of whom had purportedly signed it.<sup>106</sup> The investigation identified five subscribers who regretted signing so 'improvidentlie' and who protested, somewhat implausibly, that they had neither contrived nor, indeed, 'so well understood' the 'indiscreete and calumnious phrases and expression inserted' in the document.<sup>107</sup> A sixth suspect, the Westbury clothier John Gibbs, explained that he had only 'upon further consideracon' realised that it had been 'stuffed with approbrious terms' and concerned 'things whereof he was no way noweing nor sensible'.<sup>108</sup> The trail eventually led back to one John Gun, a 'verie poor man' with ten children, who

confessed in Salisbury gaol to having 'importuned to have the petition drawne'.<sup>109</sup> The mechanics of its actual composition were revealed by another prisoner, Anthony Cropper, who explained that he and Robert Nevell, 'a poore miserable man who was not so much desirous as myself', had 'importuned a scribe' to write it.<sup>110</sup> These Westbury weavers were evidently desperate men, their poverty leading them to stretch complaint into criticism.

All of which brings us to the language of protest. The most prominent leitmotif of the petitions was *despair*. The desperate plight of the poor was often described generically. As early as Easter 1647, the 'poore inhabitants' of Chelmsford and Moulsham exclaimed that they were 'in much distress and ready to perish'. By the summer of 1648, the clergymen of Cheshire reported that poor of that county were 'very likely to starve, perish and famish'. In the winter of 1647-48, the inhabitants of Westbury (Wiltshire) conveyed their 'deep sence of the present and ensuing misery of the pore'.<sup>111</sup> Elsewhere, petitioners were only slightly more explicit. The inhabitants of Hale (Cheshire) reported in January 1648 that 'many doleful and hideous lamentations' flowed from the mouths of poor people 'who sadly complaine that they cannot buy corne in the markettes for money'.<sup>112</sup> 'It would melt any man's heart', argued the mayor, minister and bailiffs of Wigan, 'to see the numerous swarms of begging poore, and the many families that pine away at home, not having faces to beg'. Worse still, they reported, 'paleness, nay death', had 'appeared in the cheeks of the poore', and it was not unusual 'to hear of some found dead in their houses or highways for want of bread'.<sup>113</sup> The idiom of despair invites a degree of scepticism, which was probably as forthcoming among contemporaries as among recent historians.<sup>114</sup> But desperation was a function not only of economic circumstances, but of political frustration forged in ideological conflict. The latent temptation to succumb to despair in the face of the wrath of a vengeful God was doubtless encouraged by the sheer difficulty of mobilising the paternalism of a magistracy whose priorities all too evidently lay elsewhere.

Despair accordingly encouraged some petitioners to use politically sensitive language. By October 1649 the Cheshire bench were being warned that 'the poore (sensible of the late *famine*) [were] lamentably complayinge'. 'All or most' of the poor in the county of

Cheshire, it was said, 'were feareful [of] or foreseeing a second or continued *famine*'. The Lancashire justices were informed that '*famine*' was 'much feared' among the poor; and the mayor, minister and bailiffs of Wigan reported that 'famine' was but one of the scourges visited on the county by a wrathful God.<sup>115</sup> As these examples suggest, petitioners were rather less nervous than the officers of either central or local government about the political electricity generated by the word *famine*: to accept that there was a *dearth* (that is, high prices) was one thing, to concede that dearth had led to *famine* (that is, starvation) was to imply that the state and its officials had lost control of the situation.<sup>116</sup>

In explaining this calamity, the petitioners drew heavily, though (as we shall see) by no means exclusively on the rhetoric of providence. 'Blessed be the Lord', exulted one petition from Cheshire at Easter 1648, for the fact that there was 'sufficient & enough of corne and victuals in the county'.<sup>117</sup> As this example suggests, however, such rhetoric was deployed as a springboard from which to launch criticism of the conduct of the corn-masters. Various petitions accordingly flirted with the idea that only a combination of divine and magisterial action could be efficacious in remedying the dearth. The poor, it was argued, would always be at pains both to thank God for his mercy and bless the magistracy for their enforcement of laws against market abuses. Conditions would worsen, insisted the Somerset petitioners of January 1649, 'without Gods great mercy'. The justices' actions would only be effectual, they suggested, 'with Gods assistance'. Magisterial intervention was appropriate, they argued, because rulers and ruled had 'all one maker'. Although justices should perform the duties expected of them both by men and by God, 'God may have the glory' in the relief of the poor.<sup>118</sup> Others feared that to forget the role of providence in providing plenty was to risk the renewal of divine wrath: 'to our sorrow and certen misery', complained thirty-eight petitioners from Cheshire in the Autumn of 1649, 'the goodness of God in our late continued livelihood' is 'forgotten and the late famine' is 'not remembered'.<sup>119</sup>

In its most extreme form, of course, the providential reading of harvest failure expressed the doctrine of judgements. There is sporadic evidence that this doctrine had been internalised among the populace, for it was occasionally referred to in the petitions. The

parishioners of Lancashire, for instance, warned the Manchester justices in 1647 that 'the wrath of almighty God is threatened at this present to this cuntrye and nacon', and that it had been provoked by the 'odious sinnes of the Cuntrye and Kingdome'. Whether this agenda reflected the influence of the numerous clergymen who were co-signatories to the petition remains unclear. *The True Representation of the Present Sad and Lamentable Condition of the County of Lancaster* similarly observed in 1649 that 'the hand of God is evidently seen stretched out upon the county, chastening it with a three-corded scourge of Sword, Pestilence and Famine all at once afflicting it'.<sup>120</sup> Some parish ministers were, however, less than convinced that the populace were coaxed into repentance and obedience by the anger of a vengeful God. In 1649, Samuel Smyth, minister of Syderstone (Norfolk) bewailed the 'unchristian contentions', 'unneighbourly jarres', 'base idleness', 'beastly drunkenness' and 'excessive ryott' that were common even amongst 'such as receive collection' even 'in tyme of want and scarcity'. 'Poor people', wrote Ralph Josselin when 'all things were wonderfull deare' in December 1649, 'were never more regardles of God then nowadays'.<sup>121</sup>

Some petitioners, indeed, quoted the doctrine of judgements back at the authorities, in effect to challenge it. In a particularly skilful formulation, the 'well-affected' inhabitants of four Somerset parishes protested in 1649 that 'the greatest cause of our suffering *sin only excepted*' was abuse of the grain market.<sup>122</sup> This was, in effect, to argue that although God had sent the famine as judgement, its effects had been worsened, perhaps even provoked, by racketeers and middlemen. It was but a short step from here to argue that the very sins God wished to punish were those committed by forestallers and regrators. Hence the widely-shared view that the Lord had blessed the land with plenty only for man to hoard it in his covetousness. Thus the poor of Canterbury exclaimed that 'God be thanked for the fact that there was plenty of corne in the county of Kent'. But they added a very significant qualification to this orthodox providential reading of the causes of dearth: distress could be alleviated only if 'farmers and corne mongers were compelled by order of law to bring [plentiful corn] to market'.<sup>123</sup>

The petitioners therefore shared a general understanding, also emphasised in the newsbooks, that scarcity (harvest failure) was a *necessary* but not in itself a *sufficient* cause of dearth (high prices).<sup>124</sup> 'Scarcity', insisted the clergymen of Cheshire in 1648, was 'no cause' why 'corne and victuals were not solde at a more reasonable rate'. In Kent in 1649, it was argued, 'there is none or very little corne brought to the market of Canterbury'. In Chelmsford and Moulsham (Essex) in 1647, the poor inhabitants could not afford to buy grain, the prices driven up because 'there are so many loaders that buy it up by whoole loades and carry it away and so make corne at such an excessive rate, *although there is corne enough*'.<sup>125</sup> In Middlewich (Cheshire) it was reported in 1648 that rather than being brought to market, corn was being 'sould privatly at home to breadbakers and none else and soe the poore are forced to have it upon their termes or else starve'.<sup>126</sup> In arguing that this was an artificial dearth, effectively a dearth without scarcity, the petitioners were deploying a discourse which had been rehearsed by the magistracy, to rather different purposes, in previous crises.<sup>127</sup> Poor consumers easily recognised the villains of the piece and called for the rounding up of the usual suspects. Thus the clergymen of Cheshire who wrote on behalf of their poor brethren in 1648 argued that 'this unnecessary dearth is occasioned by the multiplicity of those monstrous maltmakers breadbakers alehousekeepers and forestallers of markets all of which privately pass into the country where they buy whole bayes of barley and other corne'. They were echoed by the 'poor distressed people' of the hundred of West Derby (Lancashire) who blamed the 'present exceeding dearth of corn' not only 'superfluous alehouses' but on the 'great number of maltsters [and] badgers together with regrators and forestallers'. The principal forestallers in an around Nantwich were the dairymen, 'who rented the richest groundes lying hereabouts' yet never brought their cheese or butter into the market place, selling it instead 'to factors for London or other places'. Indeed, these men were coming to market only to make purchases 'for their own provision', buying up butter, cheese and milk 'in greate quantities'.<sup>128</sup> In Canterbury, it was the covetous corn merchants, another group explicitly disparaged by the poor as 'caterpillars', who had allegedly boasted that 'a bushel of corne wilbe worth a bushel of silver'.<sup>129</sup>

Little wonder then that the poor were simply priced out of the market. By the early summer of 1648 prices in Nantwich were 'so inhaunched as the poore mens purses will not extend for a necessary supplye of barley corne or other commodities'.<sup>130</sup> By January 1649, the parishioners of Warrington, Wigan and Leigh were reporting the distress in the markets of south Lancashire where many poor people who had bought beans 'had much adoe to buy barlie to mix therewith for their houses use'.<sup>131</sup> The most vivid account of what such 'engrossing' meant for the poor as they sought to purchase victuals in the market place comes from Chelmsford (Essex) at Easter 1647, where middlemen were inflating prices by as much as one-third. 'When market day comes and we send our wives to the market crosses to buy a peck of corne', the petitioners explained, they could not 'comparse it being in soe poore a condition'. Millers, bakers and dairymen were particularly culpable. 'If we goe to the miller for meale', they complained, 'if he pays 4s.6d. a bushall wee pay 6s., if they pay 6s. we pay almost 8s. so that our money will not reach to buy meale we being in so low an estate'. Bakers were allegedly breaking the assize of bread, producing loaves which 'are made less than penny or half penny whitebread and also in both howsehold and boulted bread in respect of just quantitie or weight'. 'If we goe to the baker', they reported, 'we have not 20 ounces of bread for 2d.'. And it was the same for dairy products too: 'if we goe to the Butter hill we cannot have a dish of butter under 18d'; and 'if we goe to buy cheese the engrossers that in time of years bought cheese by whoole loades will not sell any that they bought for 2d. halfe-penny under 4d. halfe-penny a pound, and potted butter that in time of yeare they bought for 4d. they will not sell under 6d. halfe-penny'.<sup>132</sup> In emphasising the weakness of their position in the market place, the petitioners were echoing the long-standing magisterial trope that there was no point bringing produce to market if the poor had no money to buy it.<sup>133</sup>

One solution was, the petitioners insisted, the closer regulation of the malt trade.<sup>134</sup> The licensing of maltmakers, it was argued from Knutsford in 1649, was 'the meanes to preserve many thousand soules from starving by want of breade'. If the licensing of malsters continued in years of dearth as it had done in years of plenty the state of the county would have been 'most wretched'. The effective regulation of malting would ensure that the

poore could 'eate and be satisfied' and the 'number of them almost numberless lessened'. Only then would there be neither 'leanness of cheakes nor complaining in our streates for bread'.<sup>135</sup> Maltmakers, it was frequently alleged, only prospered by exploiting networks of patronage and association. Many of the petitioners were only too aware that the proliferation of unregulated malting, brewing and baking had been possible only because of the complacency or, worse still, the connivance of the magistracy. This too was a tradition with deep roots.<sup>136</sup> Because magistrates were unpaid, they were vulnerable to the charge that there was a tension between their civic responsibility to execute good governance and their private self-interest as landlords and producers (especially of wool and of foodstuffs). The very same gentlemen who were expected (in their role as magistrates) to protect the poor at times of food shortage had a vested interest (in their role as corn-merchants, rentiers and farmers) in keeping grain prices high in order to secure returns on their investments.<sup>137</sup> Networks of patronage and association might well compromise even the most conscientious of magistrates as they wrestled with the conflicting priorities of the service of the crown and the good of the commonwealth: how far should they temper their concern over the balances recorded in their stewards' account books with sensitivity to the desperate and occasionally threatening complaints of the poor? This was a question which had been asked of parliament in 1621, when the commons had debated a bill, probably prepared by Francis Bacon, to prevent maltsters, brewers and tipplers from being appointed to the commission of the peace.<sup>138</sup>

The failure to legislate on this issue meant that outright corruption might prevail. In January 1648, thirty-three inhabitants of Westbury (Wilts.), purportedly including both the mayor and the minister and claiming to speak on behalf of more than five hundred of their poor neighbours, openly dared to criticise the magistracy for their failure to control the malt trade and in particular for completely ignoring a previous petition pleading for intervention. Through the 'underhand mediating of subtill caterpillars', they argued, the bench had continued to licence malt-making by men of 'great means and sufficient trades'. Indeed, the petitioners went on, the magistracy had a vested interest in doing so: 'we easily conceive', they wrote, that 'many of your worships [are] cornmasters' and that 'you have to your own

ends rather aggravated than extenuated’ the ‘miserie of the poore’. They pleaded once again that ‘all partialitie be abandoned whereby equitie may take place soe that we may not be affamished through colour of justice’.<sup>139</sup> Several features of this petition are remarkable, not least its closing metaphor for the visceral impact of magisterial corruption and its open allegation that the justices themselves were implicated in the grain trade.<sup>140</sup>

The Westbury complaint seems to have touched a raw nerve. Of the twelve named maltsters who were suppressed at the following sessions in response to a subsequent petition from the inhabitants of Warminster, at least two had been the subject of informations alleging marketing abuses in the preceding two years.<sup>141</sup> The belated removal of their licences suggests that the allegations made in the Westbury petition were not without substance. The Wiltshire magistrates would not, even so, countenance the accusation that they were feathering their own nests in collusion with corn-merchants, and expressed their outrage that ‘many ill affected people’ had ‘contrived and sett their handes’ to such a ‘scandalous’ petition ‘taxing this court with injustice and impartialitie in their proceedings’.<sup>142</sup> After a thoroughgoing investigation, the magistrates secured humble apologies from seven of its signatories who confessed to ‘indiscreete calumnies’ concerning the magistrates’ slack regulation of the grain market. All of them pleaded for forgiveness, sometimes in expansive terms. John Gun explained that he was ‘heartilily sorie for that hee so inconsiderately (through misinformacon & often importuning) did write so ignominious a petition’ and promised to be more cautious in the future. Anthony Cropper confessed it to be ‘a double greife to his soule’ that he had ‘so inconsiderately’ incurred the justices’ ‘displeasure’ and besought the bench in ‘the bowels of mercie to consider that we are punished with povertie’ and that ‘his wife and tender children are in distress and like to perish through want’. He pleaded that the magistrates would, with their ‘wonted lenitie’, ‘commiserate the distresse of the poor’ and concluded by promising that he ‘would be more tender’ with the magistrates’ reputations. Cropper’s abject apology is a clear indication that, receptive as it was to the complaints and cries of the poor, the magistracy would not tolerate open accusations of corruption.<sup>143</sup> Despite the contrition of these public humiliations, however, the words of the

petition could never be bottled up again. The fact that the allegations were 'regretted' did not imply that they had never been made.<sup>144</sup>

The threat of direct action, moreover, lay behind much of this discourse. Sometimes, the point was made subtly. The underemployed broad-weavers of west Wiltshire, for instance, euphemistically reminded the justices in October 1647 that 'we have hands and our pressing miseries will enforce us not to be long idle'.<sup>145</sup> One of the Wiltshire justices was informed in July 1648 that there was likely to be 'much trouble with the poor people' of Mere, whose 'crye [was] so greate' because corn was 'either not to be had or else beyond the reach of the labouring man'.<sup>146</sup> Elsewhere, complaint was less restrained. The clerks of the market in Middlewich reported in the summer of 1648 that when less corn than was expected was delivered for sale 'the pore were very harsh with us and thought it to be our fault'. Sir George Booth had heard rumours of 'verie evill consequences' if the Lancashire justices did not crack down on the nefarious activities of almost three dozen maltsters who were driving up the price of barley in Warrington market during the winter of 1647-8.<sup>147</sup> By August 1649, the House of Commons was being warned that the Lancastrian poor could 'no longer bear the oppression to have the bread taken out of the mouths of their wives and children' and had threatened that 'if any army of Turks came to relieve them, they will join with them'.<sup>148</sup>

Desperation of this kind occasionally bubbled almost to the surface and at times approximated to an explicit statement of the social theory of necessity, the view that crimes of desperation were justified if the alternative was starvation.<sup>149</sup> The 'many thousand poor tradesmen' who petitioned parliament in January 1648 on the grounds that they were 'ready to famish through decay of trade' warned that 'necessity dissolves all laws and government and hunger will break through stone walls'.<sup>150</sup> Petitioners from Somerset even alluded to the foundation text of the authorities' discourse of forbearance: in Matthew 4:1-4, Satan had urged Christ to 'command that stones be made bread' only to be met with the response that 'man liveth not by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God'. But the Somerset petitioners were evidently dissatisfied with this injunction that, in the absence of bread, the starving should feast on faith. Their reading of St Matthew's gospel

bore the hallmarks of an 'adversarial', perhaps even of an 'insurgent', literacy, for they closed their petition with the bald statement that that they could not be expected to eat stones: 'water we can and must drink but stones we cannot eat'.<sup>151</sup> A more materialist rejection of the authorities' conventional injunctions to patience in the wake of harvest failure would be difficult to find. The force of such views was recognised even by the barrister John Cook who wrote in 1647 that 'the poor will not be famished, if they can by any means prevent it'.<sup>152</sup> The Essex magistrates, meanwhile, were warned by the inhabitants of Chelmsford and Moulsham that 'the poore in the towne [had] thought to goe and take away the goods' from the middlemen who were driving up prices. They nonetheless sought compromise. 'Rather then there should be a meeting', explained the petitioners, employing an interesting euphemism for confrontation, 'we thought it better to acquaint your worships with our condition hoping that you would take some order for it'.<sup>153</sup> Negotiation along these lines was not, however, always on the agenda elsewhere in Essex, as analysis of the county's records of criminal justice has suggested. 'The outcome of the familiar problems of harvest failure and economic depression' in the late 1640s, argues James Sharpe, was a 'rise in recorded crime'.<sup>154</sup>

Crimes of necessity were, similarly, not only projected but actually committed in Wiltshire, where some of the few food riots known to have occurred in these years took place in 1647 and 1648. Two carriers complained in July 1647 that in transporting corn and malt into the county from Bristol they had been 'surprised and the said corn and malt taken from them by a turbulent multitude'. Popular action of this kind only exacerbated the dearth because, the carriers alleged, they were disheartened and discouraged from trading so that 'many poore people in those parts are in great distress'.<sup>155</sup> The magistrates were subsequently warned in January 1648 by the inhabitants of Warminster that unless malting was more closely regulated, the (sadly unspecified) 'uncivill actions' they had recently witnessed would be repeated, a warning that provoked an anxious county wide order about the prevention of tumultuous assemblies.<sup>156</sup> These fears were vindicated in the spring of 1648, when a serious riot took place at Bulkington (Wiltshire), although it is not particularly well-documented. It allegedly involved 'divers lewde persons' who 'arose in a tumultuous way & tooke corne

from the owners coming from market' and led to the arrest of twenty-six individuals, two of whom were imprisoned.<sup>157</sup> It was reported in London in January 1649 that clubmen were plundering for corn in the Severn valley. Carts carrying grain to market were violently attacked in the Basingstoke area of Hampshire in late January 1650, only for the perpetrators of the riot to be sprung from gaol when subsequently apprehended and imprisoned.<sup>158</sup> There was also a riot about taking toll corn for the poor in High Wycombe (Buckinghamshire) in the Autumn of 1650.<sup>159</sup> All this is to say nothing of excise riots, a phenomenon which became increasingly common in the late 1640s as resentment of the economic burdens already imposed on an overtaxed nation shaded into moral outrage at what was perceived as a tax on the earthly necessities of ale and beer.<sup>160</sup>

## V

The harvest crisis of the late 1640s is therefore significant for a number of reasons, both demographic and political. To turn first to the demographic context, it will never be entirely clear how common starvation was in these years, although it is arguable that the problem of defective burial registration calls into question the confidence, first expressed by Appleby and subsequently elaborated by the Cambridge Group, that the threat of famine had emptied by the mid-seventeenth century. The period during which, in certain regions at least, mortality in England fluctuated with the quality of the harvest may well, as Outhwaite suggested, have extended to, and perhaps even beyond the mid-seventeenth century.

The remarkable fact that famine was generally (if not completely) forestalled in the late 1640s doubtless owed something not only to increasing agrarian productivity (which may have been significant even by the mid-seventeenth century) but also to better integration between local agrarian economies.<sup>161</sup> Market integration on this scale was achieved largely by those very middlemen whose conduct provoked such ire in the petitions of the later 1640s.<sup>162</sup> By and large, an unrestrained market in grain permitted farmers and corn-masters to fill an increasing number of bellies, and only required magisterial intervention (regulating exchange entitlements, fine-tuning transfer payments, micro-managing the sale of barley) in intermittent

episodes of local distress. At first sight, therefore, the hostility shown towards the agents of market integration seems paradoxical, perhaps even wrong-headed. It was those who abused the opportunities presented by the market, however, rather than the marketing system upon which the vast majority of consumers perforce depended, who aroused the ire of petitioners and rioters alike.<sup>163</sup> It is nonetheless significant that these complaints were increasingly localised, generally confined to those areas—small market towns which were not only distributing grain in the immediate region but also bulking grain for onward passage to larger urban centres; heavily-populated corn-deficient wood-pasture villages which could not compete with urban demand—which represented the two weakest points in the developing structure of a nascent market economy.<sup>164</sup>

It was, therefore, in the interstices of the developing national market that regulation was most urgently required, especially in years of high prices. The sophisticated management of dearth in these areas in the late 1640s is all the more impressive given both the severity of the sequence of harvest failures and the political incapacity of central government. That the markets were provided with subsidised grain was almost certainly a function of local magisterial initiative, the response of the parliamentary regime being both dilatory and weak. As far as poor consumers were concerned, however, the magistrates had acted with neither celerity nor force. Their lassitude was condemned with highly emotional and occasionally inflammatory rhetoric, some of it explicitly critical of the doctrine of judgements and of the conduct of the corn-masters. For most of those who subscribed to the petitions of the late 1640s, dearth was perceived to be less a consequence of providence than of covetousness, a sin which was rife among maltsters and dealers in corn and actively connived at by a magistracy whose public duties were compromised by their self-interest. The tone and content of these petitions evokes the rhetoric with which the privy council, so critical of the failure of county benches to comply with the dearth orders, had condemned magisterial self-interest in the crises of the late 1590s and early 1620s.<sup>165</sup> To be sure, JPs had for several decades offered plausible excuses for their reluctance to enforce market regulation, but they were vulnerable

to the suspicion that their emphasis on the legal ambiguity and counter-productivity of the dearth orders was simply so much special pleading.<sup>166</sup>

That criticism of magisterial conduct offered by poor consumers was so strident in these years suggests that the military and constitutional crisis of the late 1640s had created the political space for popular agency. The disruption of the rhythm of quarter sessions and the diminution of the social status of those serving in commissions of the peace and county committees alike doubtless emboldened petitioners to be more forthright in their complaints about the lassitude and corruption of local elites. The experience of political conflict and mass mobilisation during the 1640s arguably provided the populace with considerable experience in the techniques and rhetoric of mass petitioning: the organisation and leadership skills which had been at play in the campaigns to subscribe in defence of the prayer book; to sign the protestation; and to mobilise the Clubmen proved to be invaluable in pleading for the regulation of the grain market at the end of the decade.<sup>167</sup> The experience of political crisis therefore seems to have augmented the repertoire of political action amongst those poor consumers who successfully mobilised the machinery of market regulation even in the absence of parliamentary initiative.

At first sight, the petitions to county magistrates with which this paper has been concerned seem only tangentially related to the popular politics of the late 1640s as they have conventionally been portrayed. The renewal of military campaigning, which might be expected to be a factor in Essex, Kent or Lancashire, went unmentioned. Nor was there any echo of claims, made frequently by the Levellers in particular, for recompense for the sacrifices made during several years of warfare. The petitioners whose voice is analysed here were, moreover, apparently unconcerned with far more thoroughgoing political solutions (including massive confiscations and shifts in resources) proposed by the soldiers, small traders and producers who subscribed to Leveller petitions to parliament.<sup>168</sup> Poor consumers were far more interested in asserting the right to subsist by purchasing grain at a reasonable price in the market place and by putting food on the table for their hungry families. These more immediate concerns were, moreover, famously disdained by the levellers, who regarded

the poor commons as ignorant and naïve in their willingness to sell their political birth-right for a 'mess of pottage'.<sup>169</sup> It is not, therefore, artificial to separate out local petitions for market regulation from those national campaigns for social and political reform. But in their criticisms of covetous corn-masters, monstrous malt-makers and over-mighty magistrates, poor consumers nonetheless took the same integrationist, relatively conservative, line as *The Moderate*, whose editorials and correspondents argued consistently throughout 1648 and 1649 that grave consequences were likely if the grievances of the poor were not redressed.<sup>170</sup> It should not necessarily be assumed, therefore, that the hungry poor did not 'turn leveller upon necessity', as the news-books of the day suggested. Despair, moreover, was particularly fertile ground for the Diggers, and it is entirely possible that even those who represented themselves as well-affected were radicalised by the experience of pleading for redress from a magistracy who were as likely to collude with as to censure engrossers of corn. When the Diggers of Iver (Buckinghamshire) complained in May 1650 that the 'great ones like Rats and Mice' not only drew 'all the treasures and fruits of the earth into their own nests and holes' but also had 'a custome to dyet the Markets, and make a dearth in time of plenty' they were talking precisely the same language as the poor consumers of Warminster, Westbury or Wincanton: 'we must be starved . . . and why? Because the rich will have it so, no other reason can be rendered'.<sup>171</sup>

The dearth years of 1647-50, finally, seem to be one of the last gasps of the paternalistic tradition of market regulation of the kind practised from the 1340s to the 1630s. That the dearth orders had not been introduced in the dearth year 1637-38 suggests that both crown and gentry had lost what little confidence they had in them by then, but this assessment was emphatically not shared by poor consumers, who seem to have enjoyed a remarkable degree of success in prompting county benches to enforce something very like them in 1647-48. Indeed, it is all the more striking that the most sweeping powers of market regulation (including what amounted to the fixing of prices, a policy of which even the radical lawyer John Cook was sceptical) were introduced in the very county, Wiltshire, where the degree of popular criticism of (and protest about) magisterial inactivity seems to have been most acute.

Perhaps then, as Thompson famously suggested, the authorities really were the 'prisoners of the people'.<sup>172</sup> Magisterial incarceration nonetheless proved to be short-lived. The crowds and petitioners of the late 1640s did not, in the longer term, succeed in creating a climate of opinion amongst the landed classes in which more sweeping powers of market regulation might become politically acceptable. The dearth orders were never officially reissued after Charles II was restored in 1660, not even in years of very high prices such as 1661-62, 1678-9 and 1693-4, though these episodes might repay the kind of detailed analysis conducted here.<sup>173</sup> When the textile regions of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire experienced dearth in 1738-41 and 1766, the magistracy were prepared to intervene only after widespread rioting.<sup>174</sup> Many magistrates had never been convinced by the justice or the effectiveness of market regulation, and had been bullied into compliance with it only by the privy council in the crises of the late 1590s, early 1620s and early 1630s and by poor consumers in that of the late 1640s. The harvest crisis of 1647-50 therefore seems to have witnessed the transmission of responsibility for the regulation of the markets from the 'political economy of absolutism' to the 'moral economy of the poor'.<sup>175</sup> This revolutionary dearth was arguably the point beyond which the crown and its local officers would inevitably be reminded of the traditions of market regulation which they had themselves invented, on which they had for so long relied, and which they had hoped quietly to forget.

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**'Dearth and the English Revolution'/Endnotes**


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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were read at seminars at the Universities of Oxford, Sussex and York; and at the North American Conference on British Studies in Boston. I am grateful to the audiences on these occasions; to Dan Beaver, Mike Braddick, Bernard Capp, Heather Falvey, Ann Hughes, Paul Kissack, Paul Slack, Naomi Tadmor, Andy Wood and Keith Wrightson, all of whom kindly read drafts; and to the anonymous referees for this journal, from whose questions, comments and references my argument has benefited immeasurably. Thanks are also due to Steve Hobbs and Gordon Jago of the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office in Trowbridge for their extraordinary patience, efficiency and attention to detail.

<sup>2</sup> Wildman, *Truths triumph*, pp. 4-5. For the context, see Ashley, *John Wildman*, pp. 46-55; and Brailsford, *Levellers*, pp. 319-31. For the relationship between political crisis and economic crisis earlier in the 1640s, see Lindley, *Popular politics*, pp. 128-37; Walter, *Understanding popular violence*, pp. 256-60.

<sup>3</sup> For fragmentary discussions, see Gardiner, *History*, III, pp. 195-6; James, *Social problems*, pp. 265-71; Everitt, *Local community*, p. 26; Underdown, *Pride's purge*, pp. 281-3; Cooper, 'Social and economic policies', pp. 126-29; Morrill, *Cheshire*, pp. 250-1; Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', 38-40; Morrill and Walter, 'Order and disorder', pp. 151, 156-7; and Fletcher, *Reform*, pp. 199-201. By far the most detailed treatments are the two local studies presented in Wrightson, 'Puritan reformation of manners', pp. 180-91; and the account, largely written up from the evidence of contemporary newsbooks, in Manning, *1649*, pp. 79-84.

<sup>4</sup> For the dearth of 1586-7, see Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 95-108; Sharp, *In contempt*, pp. 13-17; Slack, 'Dearth', p. 2; and *idem*, *From reformation*, p. 54. For that of 1594-97, see Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 109-21, 134-45; Walter, "'Rising of the people"?'; Slack, *Poverty*, pp. 122-31; Wrightson and Levine, 'Death in Whickham', pp. 143-45; 'Sharpe, 'Social strain'; and Hindle, 'Dearth'. For that of 1622-23, see Supple, *Commercial crisis*, pp. 52-72; Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 121-27; Sharp, *In contempt*, pp. 23-26, 58-63; Long and Pickles, 'Enquiry'; and

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Scott and Duncan, 'Mortality crisis'. For 1629-31, see Walter, 'Grain riots'; Slack, 'Books of orders', pp. 13-21; Quintrell, 'Charles I's book of orders'; Sharp, *In contempt*, pp. 26-31, 63-67.

<sup>5</sup> Walter and Schofield, 'Famine', p. 36. For mild scepticism on this chronology, and the suggestion of relatively widespread subsistence crisis in 1678-9, and perhaps even in 1693-4, see Outhwaite, 'Dearth', pp. 401-2.

<sup>6</sup> Wrightson, 'Enclosure of English social history'.

<sup>7</sup> But see the brief but vivid account of the economic context in which the second civil war broke out in Carlton, *Going to the wars*, pp. 311-13.

<sup>8</sup> Gloucestershire Record Office, Hartpury parish register, 1571-1743, P165/IN/1/1, fo. 29v.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the startling omission of any discussion of sixteenth and seventeenth-century developments in general, let alone those of the late 1640s in particular, in Randall and Charlesworth, eds., *Moral economy*, where the discussion leaps straight from Sharp, 'Food Riots of 1347', to Bohstedt, 'Pragmatic economy'. Cf. Thompson, 'Moral economy'.

<sup>10</sup> Besides these seven counties, searches for similar petitions were undertaken in the archives of the magistracy in Derbyshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and North Yorkshire. For a sophisticated reading of popular agency over issues of entitlement, see Walter, 'Public transcripts'.

<sup>11</sup> Rutt, ed., *Diary of Thomas Burton*, III, p. 257 (14 Feb. 1659).

<sup>12</sup> Underdown, 'Honest radicals', pp. 188-89.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes, 'Parliamentary tyranny?', pp. 67-69.

<sup>14</sup> *The impartiall intelligencer*, no. 15, 6-13 June 1649 [E.530(37)], p. 119. The letter is also quoted in *The moderate*, no. 48, 5-12 June 1649 [E.559.16], p. 533 and in *The perfect weekly account*, 6-13 June 1649 [E559[(17)], pp. 512-13.

<sup>15</sup> *The moderate*, no. 53, 10-17 July 1649 [E.565(11)], no pagination (14 July).

<sup>16</sup> *The kingdomes faithful and impartiall scout*, no. 30, 17-24 Aug. 1649 [E.532(25)], p. 229; *The moderate messenger*, no. 18, 20-27 Aug. 1649 [E.532(26)], p. 122; *A modest narrative of*

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*intelligence*, no. 21, 18-25 Aug. 1649 [E.571(23)], p. 166; and *A perfect diurnall*, no. 317, 20-27 Aug. 1649 [E.532(26)], p. 2729[?] locate the story in Lancaster. *The moderate*, no. 58, 14-21 Aug. 1649 [E.571(7)], no pagination, reports it from Worcester on 17 Aug.

<sup>17</sup> *The moderate*, no.37, 20-27 Mar. 1649 [E.548(21)], p. 375; *The kingdomes faithful and impartiall scout*, no. 30, 17-24 Aug. 1649 [E.532(25)], p. 229;.

<sup>18</sup> Thirsk, 'Agricultural policy', p. 301; Broad, *Transforming*, pp. 64-5. For Thirsk's more recent characterisation of the crisis see Thirsk, 'Agrarian problems', p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> Hoskins, 'Harvest fluctuations', p. 18

<sup>20</sup> Brown and Hopkins, 'Prices of consumables', p. 313; Outhwaite, *Dearth*, p. 20 (table 1); Bowden, 'Agricultural prices', p. 1. The dramatic peak in the prices of wheat and barley in north-east Norfolk during the late 1640s is strikingly represented in Griffiths, ed., *William Windham's Green Book*, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history*, p. 321 (table 8.8).

<sup>22</sup> Boulton, 'Food prices', p. 468.

<sup>23</sup> Flinn, ed., *Scottish population history*, p. 150; Gibson and Smout, *Prices*, p. 168. For the place of the period 1649-51 in the roll-call of subsistence crises in seventeenth-century France, see Appleby, 'Grain prices', pp. 865-6 & n.1; and for the spectacular jump in the index of wheat prices in Ireland in the years 1650-52, see Lenihan, 'War and population', p. 8 (fig. 2)

<sup>24</sup> Macfarlane, ed., *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, pp. 69 (15 Sept. 1646), 73 (24 Oct. 1646), 94-5 (23 May 1647), 101 (15 Aug. 1647), 110 (6 Feb. 1648), 152 (7 Jan. 1649), 179 (16 Sept. 1649), 185 (10-16 Dec. 1649).

<sup>25</sup> For the doctrine of judgements, see Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', pp. 27-29; and Hindle, 'Dearth', pp. 50, 55.

<sup>26</sup> Macfarlane, ed., *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, pp. 125 (9 May 1648), 129 (28 June 1648), 130 (16 Aug. 1648), 172 (8 Jul. 1649), 185 (25 Nov. 1649). In fasting and giving food as alms,

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Josselin was effectively imitating the general hospitality encouraged by the late Elizabethan privy council. Cf. Hindle, 'Dearth'.

<sup>27</sup> Macfarlane, ed., *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, p. 185 (25 Nov. 1649).

<sup>28</sup> Broad, *Transforming*, pp. 64-5.

<sup>29</sup> Manning, *1649*, pp. 80-83; Gray, *Chorographia*, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> Whitelocke, *Memorials*, p. 384[v] (30 Apr. 1649). By 22 Aug. 1649 (p. 406), the commons were hearing from Lancashire that 'the meaner sort threaten to leave their habitations, and their wives and children to be maintained by the gentry'.

<sup>31</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, 1649-50* (hereafter *CSPD*), p. 108; HMC, *Leybourne-Popham*, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Gentles, *New model army*, p. 354.

<sup>33</sup> F[-itz]-G[effrey], *God's blessing*, esp. pp. 31-33. Cf. Fitz-Geffrey, *Curse of corne-horders*. Thompson implied that Fitz-geffrey's polemic, which had begun life as a sermon preached before the Cornish justices at quarter sessions in 1630, was familiar to eighteenth-century readers. Thompson, 'Moral economy', pp. 253-4; Duffin, *Faction and faith*, p. 116.

<sup>34</sup> F[-itz]-G[effrey], *God's blessing*, p.10 even included an encomium to the 'late' [i.e. 1630] proclamation of the dearth orders, a reference which threw the parliamentary regime's failure to regulate the markets into even greater relief.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34. Cf. Dyke, *Counterpoison*, p.9; Gouge, *God's three arrowes*, p. 155. For the scriptural origins of this idiom, see (among many other passages) Joel 2: 25-26; 2 Chronicles 6: 28-29; and 1 Corinthians 6.10 (the latter rendered in the *Great Bible* of 1539 as 'Nether theues, nether couetouse, nether pyllers . . .'). These formulations represent loose translations of three or four different Hebrew words which have the effect of 'Anglicising' the nature of the pest, an insight I owe to the kindness of Naomi Tadmor. For the image of caterpillars as despoilers, pillagers and plunderers, see Edwards, 'Milton's reformed animals', 251-52 (s.v. 'caterpillar').

<sup>36</sup> *Two knaves*.

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- <sup>37</sup> Cook, *Unum necessarium*, frontispiece & p. 4.
- <sup>38</sup> F[-itz]-G[effry], *God's blessing*, p. 48.
- <sup>39</sup> Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history*, p. 321 (table 8.8).
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 646-49 (quotations at p. 649).
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 652 (figure A10.1), 653 (table A10.2). The proportion reached 16.1% in 1587-8, 17.6% in 1596-7, 18.7% in 1597 and 16.0% in 1623-4.
- <sup>42</sup> The proportions of parishes afflicted are 8% (1595-96); 12% (1596-97); 33% (1597-98); 9% (1622-23); 18.5% (1623-24); 3% (1629-30); 17% (1630-31); 9% (1646-47); 14.5% (1647-8); 8% (1660-61); and 19.5% (1661-62). Outhwaite, 'Dearth', pp. 401-2.
- <sup>43</sup> Wrigley and Schofield, *Population history*, p. 27 (& figure 1.2).
- <sup>44</sup> Flinn, ed., *Scottish population history*, p. 151; Gibson and Smout, *Prices*, p. 168.
- <sup>45</sup> Appleby, 'Grain prices', p. 882 was conspicuously cautious on this issue. For his emphasis on increased mortality in the north-west in these years, see Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 155-56 (& cf. p. 129 fig.15, where the significant increase in burials in Crosthwaite in 1646 is graphically represented). Subsequent research has, in fact, identified mortality crises in the Cumberland parishes of Bridekirk in 1647; and in both Dalston and Greystoke in 1648. Schofield, *Parish register aggregate analyses*, file numbers 50, 95, 157.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. Hindle, *On the parish?*, pp. 15-95; and Walter, 'Social economy', esp. the examples of informal relief drawn from the late 1640s at pp. 173 n. 82 (the Lancastrian landlord Sir Ralph Assheton ordering his steward to abate rents in the aftermath of the 1648 harvest failure), 175 n. 100 (the spate of help-ales in Penistone, Yorks., in 1647).
- <sup>47</sup> Beier, 'Poor relief', and Wales, 'Poverty', pp.354, 356-7. For a more sceptical reading of this evidence, see Hindle, *On the parish?*, pp. 253-4.
- <sup>48</sup> Quoting Outhwaite, *Dearth*, p. 41. The nature and genesis of the 'dearth orders', issued by the privy council in the years 1587, 1594, 1595, 1600, 1608, 1622 and 1630, is reconstructed in Slack, 'Books of orders'; *idem*, 'Dearth'; and *idem*, *From reformation*, pp. 62-66; and their origins are traced back to the mid-fourteenth century in Sharp, 'Food riots of 1347'. The

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length and complexity of these regulations militates against concise summary. Justices were to make comprehensive searches to identify stocks of grain that exceeded householder's domestic needs; to compel those householders to produce their surplus weekly for sale in the open market either to licensed dealers or to ordinary consumers in small measures; to police the numbers, credentials and activities of dealers, maltsters, brewers, alehousekeepers, bakers and millers; to guarantee poor consumers rights of pre-emption in the market place and to encourage farmers to sell grain to them at 'charitable prices' both over the farm gate and in the market place; to curb alternative uses for bread grains; to find work for the unemployed; to punish vagabonds; and to provide monthly certificates of prices in particular and of their performance of the orders in general. Extracts of the draft version of the 1587 orders are printed in Leonard, *Early history*, pp. 318-26; and a summary of the entire content of the 1587 set is provided by Gras, *Evolution*, pp. 236-40. A convenient modern edition of the full text of the 1608 dearth orders is provided in Gray, ed., *Harvest failure*, pp. 92-102.

<sup>49</sup> Outhwaite, 'Dearth', pp. 398-9. Cf. Appleby, *Famine*, p. 191.

<sup>50</sup> H. of C. *Journals*, V (1646-48), pp. 662-3 (8 Aug. 1648). For the context, see Durston, 'Public days of fasting'; and cf. Hindle, 'Dearth'.

<sup>51</sup> *The perfect weekly account*, 4-11 Apr. 1649 [E.550(17)], p. 437; *A perfect diurnall*, no. 297, 2-9 Apr. 1649 [E.529(9)], p. 2412.

<sup>52</sup> TNA: PRO, State Papers Interregnum, SP25/94/fos. 30-1 (calendared in *CSPD, 1649-50*, p. 35). For the context of this measure, see Thirsk, 'Agricultural policy', p.305.

<sup>53</sup> H. of C. *Journals*, VI (1648-51), p. 486, 23 Oct. 1650; Firth and Rait, eds., *Acts and ordinances*, I, pp. 442-4; Outhwaite 'Dearth', p. 395.

<sup>54</sup> *CSPD, 1649-50*, p. 121.

<sup>55</sup> H. of C. *Journals*, VI, p. 167, 19 Mar. 1649; Whitelocke, *Memorials*, p. 380[v]; *A perfect diurnall*, no. 295, 19-26 Mar. 1649 [E.529(1)], p. 2374. The fullest account of the Leicester petition appears in *The Moderate*, no.36, 13-20 Mar. 1649 [E.548(21)], p. 371. It may not be coincidental that Serjeant Francis Thorpe's charge to the York Assizes on the same day

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included rigorous definitions of offences 'touching the plentie of the countrey' including engrossing. *Sergeant Thorpe . . . His Charge*, pp. 29-30. Cf. 5 & 6 Edward VI, c. 14.

<sup>56</sup> The only extant text of Lenthall's letter survives in the papers of the Wiltshire magistracy. Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office (hereafter WSRO), Quarter Sessions Great Rolls Addenda, A1/110/A/52. The Somerset justices were reminded of Lenthall's letter by the assize judges at Taunton in July 1649, though the resulting order for the suppression of alehouses, the enforcement of the assize of bread, the employment of the poor and the apprenticeship of their children made no mention of the statutes against forestalling or regrating and resembled less the dearth orders issued in previous harvest crises than the Caroline book of orders (the 'Orders and Directions' of 1630) which had been more generally intended to quicken the pace of local government, especially with respect to the poor laws. TNA: PRO, Western Circuit Order Book, ASSI 24/21, fos. 144<sup>v</sup>-45<sup>r</sup>, printed in Cockburn, ed., *Somerset assize orders*, pp. 32-3 [no. 87]. Cf. Quintrell, 'Charles I's book of orders'.

<sup>57</sup> Essex Record Office (hereafter ERO), Quarter Sessions Rolls, Q/SR 332/106.

<sup>58</sup> WSRO, Quarter Sessions Great Rolls, A1/110/1648H/248; Quarter Sessions Order Book, A1/160/1, unfol. (Jul. 1647, Oct. 1647).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. the strategies adopted by magistrates in 1631, when the Essex JPs had abated corn prices by between 18d and 2s per bushel; the Suffolk JPs had urged the chief inhabitants of each parish to sell corn at four shillings a quarter below cost price; and the Cambridge JPs ensured that corn was delivered to poor householders at more than a shilling a bushel under the market price. TNA: PRO, State Papers Charles I, SP16/182/20 (Essex, Jan. 1631), 187/10 (Suffolk, Mar. 1631); 189/75 (Cambridge, Apr. 1631). At about the same time, the Kent JPs had attended Maidstone market in person and 'urged [the dealers] to bate in their ordinary prices'. TNA: PRO, SP16/186/74 (Kent, Mar. 1631). The corn-merchants who ran Faversham corporation came up with an ingenious scheme in the 1590s whereby two quarters of wheat would be sold to the poor at subsidised prices for every twenty they exported to London,

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thereby practising a paternalism which served to line their own pockets. Walter, 'Social economy', pp. 152-3; Hipkin, 'Kent grain trade', pp. 25-6.

<sup>60</sup> On the ambiguous powers to fix prices, underpinned in some respects by 25 Henry VIII, c.2 (1534), see Thompson, 'Moral economy', p. 225 & n. 3; and Slack, *From reformation*, p. 56 & n. 2. There had been a very short-lived experiment at price regulation during the crisis of 1550, when a proclamation setting maximum prices on grain, butter and cheese was revoked after being in force for less than two months. In 1586 the council had drafted but never issued a preamble for a proclamation (surviving as BL, Lansdowne MS 48/53) which fixed prices on the authority of the royal prerogative. Heinze, *Proclamations*, pp. 229-32; Youngs, *Proclamations*, p. 115. The threat to fix prices was not made again until the crisis of 1629-31. *Orders appointed*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>61</sup> *Western circuit assize orders*, pp. 272-73 [no. 1156]. The relationship between the proposed 'supervisors' and the clerks of the market remains unclear.

<sup>62</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648T/145. For the suggestion that the orders had been deliberately flouted by maltsters who either colluded with purchasers to sell barley without making the stipulated allowance or made up such allowance out of inferior grains sold in inappropriate measures, see WSRO, A1/110/1648H, redrafted as A1/160/1 (unfol., Jan. 1648). Similarly, it was reported that the dealers who had been ordered to refrain from buying corn in Chelmsford market until the afternoon nonetheless 'had their basketes full before 10 not regarding [the magistrates]'. ERO, Q/SR 332/106.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: PRO, ASSI 24/21, fos. 182r-182v.

<sup>64</sup> Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (hereafter HALS), QSB2b, fos. 107v-8r; HMC, *Various, I*, p. 122; WSRO, A/160/1, unfol (Jan. 1648); A1/110/1648H/241. For a sympathetic reading of the plight of maltsters in periods of market regulation, see Everitt, 'Marketing', pp. 584-85.

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<sup>65</sup> Cheshire Record Officer (hereafter CRO), Quarter Sessions Order Books, QJB 1/6, fos. 139r-40r, 167r-8r, 179r, 227v-28r, 240r; Quarter Sessions Files, QJF 76/2/25. This account modifies that given in Morrill, *Cheshire*, pp. 250-51.

<sup>66</sup> Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', 39; HALS, QSB2b, fol. 109v.

<sup>67</sup> BL, Huntingdonshire Petty Sessions Papers, Add. MS 34,401, fos. 208, 248-58. These certificates, surviving in a volume covering the period 26 Feb. 1639-19 Oct. 1658, are regrettably undated, but their sequencing in the volume suggests that they were drawn up in the late 1640s.

<sup>68</sup> BL, Add. MS 34,401, fos. 257r-58r. This listing in particular most closely resembles the elaborate corn surveys drawn up in earlier harvest failures under the terms of the dearth orders. See the tabulated returns in Gray, ed., *Harvest Failure*, esp. pp. 11-12, 51-62.

<sup>69</sup> BL, Add. MS, 34,401, fos. 248r-49r (Aston), 250r-51r (Ellington), 256 (Woolley).

<sup>70</sup> BL, Add. MS, 34,401, fo. 254.

<sup>71</sup> WSRO, Memoranda of Informations and Convictions, A1/115, fos. 7-15, 17-19, 31, 33.

<sup>72</sup> For Hollomore's activities in the late 1640s and early 1650s, see Cockburn, ed., *Kent indictments, Charles I*, pp. 488-549; and *idem*, ed., *Kent indictments, 1649-1659*, pp. 1-64.

<sup>73</sup> Based on an analysis of the informations in Cockburn, ed., *Kent indictments, Charles I*, nos. 133, 134, 255, 259, 260, 261, 263, 265, 266; and *idem*, ed., *Kent indictments, 1649-1659*, nos. 352-58. Some indication of the significance of this volume of grain is conveyed by comparing it with the 9,226 quarters imported into the City of London in during the month of August 1647. F[-itz]-G[effry], *God's blessing*, sig. A.

<sup>74</sup> Atkinson, ed., *Quarter sessions records*, pp. 4, 12, 18, 26, 32, 39, 44; CRO, Quarter Sessions Files, QJF 80/2/145. For the role of informers in policing market abuses, see Beresford, 'Common informer'; and Chartres, 'Marketing', pp. 496-97.

<sup>75</sup> Bates-Harbin, ed., *Quarter sessions records*, III, pp. 25-6. Cf. WSRO, A1/110/1647H/210, 211.

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<sup>76</sup> Clark, *English alehouse*, p. 177; Lancashire Record Office (hereafter LRO), Quarter Sessions Petitions, QSP/24/27.

<sup>77</sup> For a sophisticated reading of petitions as an expression of public opinion in the peripheries during the 1640s, see Zaret, *Origins*, esp. pp. 231-40; and for the political significance of petitioning in the late 1640s and in the 1650s, see Ashton, *Counter-revolution*, pp. 117-58; Hirst, 'Making contact'.

<sup>78</sup> Quintrell, ed., *Maynard lieutenancy book*, p. 252. The petitions themselves, regrettably unsigned, survive as ERO, Q/SR 266/120, 121. For the context, see Walter, 'Grain riots'.

<sup>79</sup> Quintrell, ed., *Maynard lieutenancy book*, pp. 264-5.

<sup>80</sup> Bamford, ed., *Royalist's notebook*, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> For rare examples, see the petition signed by about one hundred inhabitants of an unidentified parish pleading for the prosecution of forestallers in Wiltshire in 1615; and an unsigned petition claiming to represent the grievances of eight hundred distressed weavers in Bromham during the dearth of 1622. WSRO, A1/110/1615H/192, 1622E/250.

<sup>82</sup> It is especially striking in this respect that neither Appleby, *Famine*, nor Slack, 'Dearth', have found evidence of Cumbrian magistrates reporting to the privy council on their performance of market regulation in the crises of 1586-7, 1594-7, 1622-3 or 1629-31.

<sup>83</sup> For the Staffordshire and Warwickshire orders of the late 1640s, see Staffordshire Record Office (hereafter SRO), Quarter Sessions Order Books, Q/SO/5, unfol.; and Ratcliff *et al*, eds., *Warwick county records*, ii, pp.156-257. The petitions sent to the Derbyshire bench in the late 1640s survive as Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock (hereafter DRO), Quarter Sessions Petitions, Q/SB/2/110-161.

<sup>84</sup> Underdown, *Somerset*; Blackwood, *Lancashire gentry*. Cf. Hughes, *Politics*.

<sup>85</sup> Underdown, *Pride's purge*, pp. 29-39, 306-18; Fletcher, *Reform*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>86</sup> Walter, 'Geography', pp. 68, 70, 72; Everitt, 'Marketing', pp. 451, 493.

<sup>87</sup> TNA: PRO, ASSI 24/21, fos. 123, 124, printed in Cockburn, ed., *Western circuit assize orders*, p. 288. Wilde responded to the Cornwall presentment in March 1649 with a rigorous

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order suppressing alehouses in urban corporations. TNA: PRO, ASSI 24/21, fos. 131v-32r (this order is not printed by Cockburn). For Wilde, see Cockburn, *English assizes*, p. 243; Ashton, *Counter-revolution*, p. 118. For the grand jury as an agent in the formation of magisterial policy, see Morrill, *Cheshire grand jury*; and cf. Cockburn, *Calendar of assize records, introduction*, pp. 44-55.

<sup>88</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59. For the suggestion that grand jury presentments might be used to confer on petitions the authentic stamp of county approval, see Morrill, *Cheshire grand jury*, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> *CSPD, 1649-50*, p. 303.

<sup>90</sup> *A true representation*. For the view that printing gradually supplanted scribal modes of transmission for petitions during the 1640s, see Zaret, *Origins*, pp. 247-8; and for petitioning in print in the 1650s, see Hirst, 'Making contact', pp. 39-42.

<sup>91</sup> *Two knaves*, p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> CRO, QJF 74/1/76; 75/4/42; ERO, Q/SR 332/106; Somerset Archives and Research Service (hereafter SARS), Miscellaneous Quarter Sessions Petitions, Q\SPET/1\AA.

<sup>93</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/229; Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', pp. 38-9.

<sup>94</sup> LRO, QSP/3/28.

<sup>95</sup> CRO, QJF 75/4/42; SARS, Q\SPET/1\AA. For two Wiltshire petitions deploying the same idiom in condemning the evils of unregulated aleselling, see WSRO, A1/110/1647H/210 (the 'well affected inhabitants' of Barford St Martin's), 211 (the 'well affected inhabitants' of Standon Bernard).

<sup>96</sup> Everitt, 'Marketing', pp. 578-9; Larkin and Hughes, eds., *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, pp. 416-22 [no. 182].

<sup>97</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59; 76/2/25.

<sup>98</sup> For the complaints of the Essex justices to the council about the conduct of the clerk of the market, and his presentment by the grand jury at the Chelmsford Assizes because he had allegedly 'for two years abused the office to his own profit', see TNA: PRO, State Papers

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James I, SP14/130/13 (3 May 1622); Cockburn, ed., *Essex Indictments, James I*, p. 260 [no. 1657] (11 Mar. 1622).

<sup>99</sup> Atkinson, ed., *Quarter sessions records*, p. 45.

<sup>100</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59.

<sup>101</sup> CRO, QJF 77/1/35.

<sup>102</sup> *A true representation*; Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', pp. 38-9.

<sup>103</sup> SARS, Q\SPET/1\D. For Curll, see Underdown, *Somerset*, pp. 127, 159; Underdown, *Revel*, pp. 225, 242-3. His accounts survive as SARS, DD\WHh/136, extracts of which are printed in Batten, 'Somersetshire sequestrations'; and idem, 'Somersetshire sequestrations [Part II]'. For an example of his methods, see Ralph, *Sir Humphrey Mildmay*, p. 190. For his opponent William Strode, see WSRO, A1/110/1648H/253; Underdown, *Somerset*, pp. 18, 21, 29-30, 32-4, 143; and Underdown, *Revel*, pp. 124, 243.

<sup>104</sup> SARS Q\SPET/1\AA. The petition is subscribed with 353 names but refers also to 'many others', and can firmly be dated to December 1648 or January 1649, since it provoked the justices' order issued at the sessions held at Wells 9-12 January 1649 and printed in Bates-Harbin, ed., *Quarter sessions records*, III, p. 83.

<sup>105</sup> This was an apparent reference to an order suppressing superfluous alehouses in all the counties of the Western Circuit issued by Justice Henry Rolle at Dorset Assizes on 13 August 1646, and printed in Cockburn, ed., *Somerset assize orders*, p.13-14 [no.34] and in Cockburn, ed., *Western circuit assize orders*, p. 238 [no.1025]. Rolle's initiative referred specifically to the profanation of the Sabbath and was probably provoked by a parliamentary ordinance of 8 April 1644 stipulating the more rigorous observance of the Lord's Day. Firth and Rait, *Acts and ordinances*, I, pp. 420-22.

<sup>106</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/229.

<sup>107</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/236.

<sup>108</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/235.

<sup>109</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/269.

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<sup>110</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/234. Cf. the discussion of the role of scribes in fossilising popular grievances in ballads and seditious libels in Fox, *Oral and literate culture*, pp. 302-4, 311-12.

<sup>111</sup> ERO, Q/SR 332/106; CRO, QJF 76/1/59; WSRO, A1/110/1648H/229.

<sup>112</sup> CRO, QJF 75/4/42.

<sup>113</sup> *A true representation*.

<sup>114</sup> Everitt, 'Marketing', p. 569.

<sup>115</sup> CRO, QJF 77/3/43; Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', pp. 38-9; *A true representation* (emphases added).

<sup>116</sup> Slack, 'Dearth', pp. 7-8. For Lancastrian petitioners for poor relief referring explicitly to famine in these years, see LRO, QSP/10/14 ('utter and deadly famine' in an unspecified parish in January 1649), 23/22 ('famine' in Ormskirk, October 1649). Their contemporaries in Cheshire and Staffordshire were rather more circumspect, referring rather more delicately to 'dearth', to 'these sad tymes of dearth and scarcitye', or to the 'badness of the trade and the dearth of commodities'. CRO, QJF 76/1/62 (Easter 1648); 77/2/35, 73 (Trinity 1649); SRO, Quarter Sessions Files, Q/SR/263/13 (Eccleshall, Jul. 1648), 267/7 (Eccleshall, Oct. 1649), 267/21 (Bilston, Oct. 1649).

<sup>117</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59.

<sup>118</sup> SARS, Q\SPET/1\AA.

<sup>119</sup> CRO, QJF 77/3/43.

<sup>120</sup> Walter and Wrightson. 'Dearth', pp. 38-9.

<sup>121</sup> Norfolk Record Office, Quarter Sessions Files, C/S3/40, unfol. (1649); Macfarlane, ed., *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, p.185.

<sup>122</sup> SARS, Q\SPET/1\AA (emphasis added).

<sup>123</sup> Centre for Kentish Studies (hereafter CKS), Quarter Sessions Files, Q/SB/1/30.

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, the report in May 1649 that in order to drive up the prices of the grain they were themselves hoarding, farmers in Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Yorkshire had

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spread rumours that cheese, butter and corn imported from Holland had been poisoned.

*Perfect occurrences*, no. 123, 4-11 May 1649 [E.530(1)], p. 1021.

<sup>125</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59; CKS, Q/SB/1/30; ERO, Q/SR 332/106 (emphasis added).

<sup>126</sup> CRO, QJF 76/2/42.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, the comments of the magistracy that artificial scarcity was actually *caused* by market regulation in TNA: PRO, SP14/128/55 (Sussex, Mar. 1622, noting—in the passive voice—only the tendency of ‘pryces suddenly to ryse’ when surveys were ordered), 16/203/48 (Somerset, Nov. 1631, blaming the cornmasters’ tendency to hoard corn when dearth was threatened), 16/203/69 (Devon, Nov. 1631, blaming ‘an ignorant feare in the people in general’).

<sup>128</sup> CRO, QJF 76/1/59; LRO, QSP/3/28; CRO, QJF 76/2/25.

<sup>129</sup> CKS, Q/SB/1/30.

<sup>130</sup> CRO, QJF 76/2/25.

<sup>131</sup> LRO, QSP/23/3

<sup>132</sup> ERO, Q/SR 332/106.

<sup>133</sup> After the harvest failure of 1630, magistrates explained the ineffectiveness of market regulation in precisely these terms. The justices of Hampshire noted that ‘the poor wanting work . . . have no money to buy and so lack bread’; their colleagues in Berkshire observed that ‘the poore want work and thereby want money to buy corne whereby they are at this present in a miserable condition so that we feare what the event thereof may be’ TNA: PRO, SP16/176/36 (Jervoise to Coventry, 6 Dec. 1630), 177/52 (Berkshire JPs to the Sheriff, 28 Dec. 1630).

<sup>134</sup> On the significance of maltsters see, Everitt, ‘Marketing’, pp. 556, 584-5.

<sup>135</sup> CRO, QJF 77/3/43.

<sup>136</sup> The Leicestershire justices explained their ineffective regulation of the markets in the winter of 1630 both in terms of the corruption of the clerk of the peace who had obstructed warrants to enforce the dearth orders in order to protect his own father’s interests as a

maltster; and of their suspicions about the integrity of those jurors ('though they be no corne masters themselves but they have friends and allies') who had been empanelled to carry out grain surveys. TNA: PRO, SP16/176/56 (11 Dec. 1630). The privy council preferred to blame failures on complacent or negligent justices. *Acts of the Privy Council, 1630-31* (hereafter *APC*), pp. 172-3, 190-1. For William Lambarde's remarkable condemnation of the self-interest of the JPs of East Kent during the dearth of 1586-7, see Hipkin, 'Kent Grain Trade', p. 24: 'there be some of our selves, diverse of our frends and many of our farmers that shall be loosers by the execution [of the dearth orders] and therefore most unwillingly shall we go about yt'.

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, the case of the Canterbury magistrate Ralph Bawden, who had his own malthouse and hop garden. Clark, *English alehouse*, p. 108.

<sup>138</sup> Notestein, Relf and Simpson, eds., *Commons debates 1621*, VII, pp. 18-20. Cf. Slack, *From reformation*, p. 59.

<sup>139</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/229. The record of the Wiltshire justices in regulating the markets during previous dearths was not, in fact, impressive. In 1631, the majority of the justices of the Salisbury division simply abdicated responsibility, and the two JPs who were willing to enforce the dearth orders submitted a report which amounted to a catalogue of evasion and resistance by corn-masters and maltsters alike. TNA: PRO, SP16/182/2, 2(I). It is unclear whether the Wiltshire JPs had co-operated with the Lord Chief Justice's instructions to lower the price of corn in the winter of 1596-97. BL, State Papers, Add. MS, 32,092, fo. 145 (Popham to Wilts JPs, 12 Jan. 1597).

<sup>140</sup> Cf. the situation in Faversham (Kent) in April 1631, where 97% of corn in the liberty was in the hands of its magistrates and common councillors. Hipkin, 'Kent Grain Trade', p. 17

<sup>141</sup> For the suppressed maltsters, see WSRO, A/160/1, unfol. (Jan. 1648); and for the Warminster petition, A1/110/1648/H254. For the informations against engrossers of corn, see WSRO, A1/115, fos. 13 (Edwards vs. Shergill), 17 (Cooper vs. Chapel).

<sup>142</sup> WSRO, A/160/1, unfol. (Oct. 1647).

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- <sup>143</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/234, 235, 236, 269.
- <sup>144</sup> Cf. the attitude of the Shropshire grand jury, forced into apologising for having drawn up an inflammatory presentment against the county muster-master in 1635, discussed in Braddick, 'Administrative performance', pp. 180-85.
- <sup>145</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1647M/247. The market-dependant broadweavers of several of these cloth-working parishes (Bromham, Calne, Chippenham, Malmesbury, Melksham and Seend) had frequently sent petitions pleading for relief at times of high prices earlier in the century. WSRO, A/110/1614T/147 (1614), 1615H/192 (1615), 1622E/249, 250 (1622), 1623E/243 (1623); TNA: PRO, SP14/115/58 (1620).
- <sup>146</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648T/160. Mere, on the borders of Gillingham Forest, had been at the centre of the Western Rising of the late 1620s; and of Clubmen activity in the mid-1640s. Sharp, *In contempt*, pp. 86-89, 247-9.
- <sup>147</sup> CRO, QJF 76/2/42; LRO, Quarters Sessions Recognizances, QSB 1/300/31 (Booth to Sir William Stanley, 15 Jan. 1648).
- <sup>148</sup> Whitelocke, *Memorials*, p. 406 (22 Aug. 1649). As we have seen (p. [text at n. 88] above), this story also found its way into the contemporary press.
- <sup>149</sup> Hindle, *On the parish?*, pp. 81-92.
- <sup>150</sup> Wolfe, ed., *Leveller manifestoes*, p. 278.
- <sup>151</sup> SARS, Q\SPET/1\AA. Cf. the more circumspect attitude of the weavers of Wiltshire who informed the privy council in 1620 that although they knew that 'to starve [was] woefull to steale ungodly and to beg unlawfull' they felt that 'to endure our present estate anywise is almost impossible'. TNA: PRO, SP/14/115/58. For 'adversarial' and 'insurgent' literacies, see, respectively, Castillogne, *Patrons*, pp. 13, 60-3, 169-71; and Justice, *Writing*, pp. 13-66.
- <sup>152</sup> Cook, *Unum necessarium*, p. 2.
- <sup>153</sup> ERO, Q/SR 332/106.
- <sup>154</sup> Sharpe, *Crime*, p. 207. For the debate over the impact of hard times on the incidence and in turn the prosecution of property crime, see Hindle, *State and social change*, pp. 125-36.

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<sup>155</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1647T/188.

<sup>156</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648H/254; A/160/1, unfol. (Jan. 1648). For the long history of food rioting in the Warminster region in the 1590s, 1610s and 1620s, see *APC, 1595-96*, pp. 43-44 (PC to JPs of Wilts, 1 Nov. 1595); *APC, 1613-14*, pp. 457-58 (PC to JPs of Wilts., 7 June 1614), 652-53 (PC to JPs of Wilts., 6 Dec. 1614); TNA: PRO, SP14/129/79 (JPs of Wilts. to PC, 30 Apr. 1622).

<sup>157</sup> WSRO, A1/110/1648E/218. This episode, which was almost certainly the one reported to John Wildman (see p.1 above), has only briefly been noted in the secondary literature on popular protest. Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', p. 27 n. 15; Sharp, *In contempt*, p. 109; Underdown, *Revel*, p. 214; Sharp, 'Rural discontents', p. 259. Morrill and Walter, 'Order and disorder', p. 145 argue for the 'contraction of the geography of the food riot' in these years. Cf. Walter, 'Geography', esp. pp. 70-72.

<sup>158</sup> *Perfect occurrences*, no. 105, 29 Dec. 1648-5 Jan. 1649 [E.527(3)], p. 787; Whitelocke, *Memorials*, p. 424 (1 Feb. 1650).

<sup>159</sup> For the riots, see TNA: PRO, SP25/94, pp.451-2 (20 Sept. 1650), 486 (13 Oct. 1650). For the background, see Ashford, *History*, pp. 122-44; and Underdown, *Pride's purge*, pp. 323-4.

<sup>160</sup> Braddick, *Parliamentary taxation*, pp. 177-92.

<sup>161</sup> Appleby, 'Grain prices'; Slack, 'Dearth', p. 17.

<sup>162</sup> For a suggestive discussion of the role of badgers and other carriers in integrating commercial activity in rural Gloucestershire, see Rollison, *Local origins*, pp. 52-55.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Charlesworth and Randall, 'Comment: morals, markets and the English crowd', 201.

<sup>164</sup> Walter, 'Geography', p. 72.

<sup>165</sup> In the 1590s in particular, the council had specifically included county justices among the grain hoarders on whom continuing high prices were blamed. *APC, 1595-96*, pp. 25-27 (26 Oct. 1595); *APC, 1596-97*, pp. 80-83 (3 Aug. 1596).

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<sup>166</sup> For the reservations of the Kent JP William Lambarde during the dearth of 1586 in particular, see Slack, *From reformation*, p. 53. For magistrates' reservations more generally, see Slack, 'Dearth', pp. 10-12.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Cressy, 'Protestation'; Maltby, *Prayer book*, pp. 83-129, 181-227; Walter, 'Confessional politics'; Morrill, *Revolt*, pp. 98-111; Underdown, *Revel*, pp. 156-9, 167-8.

<sup>168</sup> *Petition of many thousands [Levellers] to the House of Commons* (1647) and *Petition of diverse well-affected persons to the House of Commons* (1648), both extracted in Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and liberty*, pp. 318-23, 338-42.

<sup>169</sup> *The moderate*, no. 14, 10-17 Oct. 1648 [E.468(2)], p. 20 (from the Mayor and Aldermen of Newcastle, 14 Oct. 1648), a reference to Genesis 25: 29-34 in which Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of oatmeal porridge or lentil stew.

<sup>170</sup> Diethel, 'The moderate', p. 275.

<sup>171</sup> Thomas, 'Another digger broadside', p. 62.

<sup>172</sup> Thompson, 'Moral economy', p. 189.

<sup>173</sup> Outhwaite, 'Dearth', pp. 395-6, 406; Slack, 'Dearth', pp. 15-16. There were, however, two unofficial issues of the book of orders in 1662 and 1758: *Seasonable orders*; [Massie], *Orders appointed*. Cf. Thompson, 'Moral economy', p. 226. For the context of the 1758 re-issue, see Rogers, *Crowds*, pp. 64-84.

<sup>174</sup> Rollison, *Local origins*, pp. 219-46; Randall, 'Gloucestershire food riots'.

<sup>175</sup> Slack, *From reformation*, p. 64; Thompson, 'Moral economy', p. 188. Cf. Bohstedt, 'Pragmatic Economy', esp. pp. 77-81 for the view that there were few, if any, continuities between the 'paternalist tradition' of the seventeenth century and the crowd actions of the eighteenth.