Household & Family Session 1 – Community and Kinship

Continuity and Change

The Early Modern period is generally considered to cover the years 1500 to 1800: a time of great political, economic and social change,

Between 1500 and 1860, England moved from a relatively insignificant medieval economy situated on the fringe of Europe to become the powerhouse of world trade and the Industrial Revolution, and the centre of a growing empire.

However, continuity was a feature of many aspects of the lives of most English people throughout the period. Although an Englishman's primary loyalties were to his family, community and county of his birth, which he would often refer to as his "country", there was a growing sense of national identity.

In about 1500, an Italian visiting England remarked: **(Quote 1)** *"The English are great lovers of themselves and of everything belonging to them, they think that there are no other men than themselves, and no other world but England; and whenever they see a handsome foreigner they say that he looks like an Englishman".*

Although there was an increasing movement of people from the countryside to the towns, England remained a predominantly agrarian society until the beginning of the 19th century. Throughout the period, at least three quarters of the population lived in villages or townships of less than 200 inhabitants. **(Table 1 on Screen)**

Proportion of England's population living in towns with more than 5,000 population

1521	1671	1751	1801
5.25%	**13.5%**	**21.0%**	**27.0%**

By the end of the 16th century, about 5% of England's population was living in London, the largest city in Europe. Only a dozen or so other towns had more than 15,000 inhabitants. By 1800, London was home to over 10% of English people and about a quarter of the country's population was living in cities or towns, drawn from the countryside by opportunities for employment and advancement. **(TABLE 2 on Screen)**

Population of London 1521 to 1801

1521	1640	1801
55,000	**475,000**	**922,000**

Population Growth

England's population quadrupled during the Early Modern period.
(TABLE 3 on Screen)

Population of England 1521 TO 1801 ***(in millions)***

1521	1551	1571	1601	1621	1651	1671	1701	1721	1751	1771	1801
2.20	3.01	3.27	4.11	4.69	5.22	4.98	5.05	5.35	5.77	6.44	8.66

The changes in population were sometimes gradual, at other times dramatic.

Various factors played their part, such as life expectation at birth.
(TABLE 4 on Screen)

Life expectation at birth 1571 to 1771

1571	1671	1771
41.7 years	**28.5 years**	**35 years**

Mortality rates through plague and other diseases reduced in the 16th century and by 1571 life expectancy at birth had reached 41.7 years. England's population more than doubled between 1521 and 1621.

However, rapid population growth resulted in widespread poverty which, combined with privations due to a period of poor harvests, war and the reoccurrence of plague in the expanding towns, meant that life expectation and population growth dropped substantially during the next hundred years.

Age at first marriage was another factor that affected population growth.
(TABLE 5 on Screen)

Average Age at First Marriage 1551 TO 1801

	1551	1601	1651	1701	1751	1801
Males	**29.3**	**28.0**	**28.0**	**27.3**	**26.2**	**25.9**
Females	**26.4**	**26.0**	**26.6**	**25.8**	**24.7**	**24.1**

A relatively high average age at first marriage helped slow the rate of population increase during the 17th century. Disruption of marriage plans during the period of the Civil Wars, combined with higher mortality due to warfare, famine and disease actually led to a temporary fall in the population during the second half of the century. **(REFER TABLE 3 on Screen**)

Population growth speeded up again from the mid-18th century, due partly to a substantial lowering of average age at first marriage.

Social Status

Today's division of society into three broad classes *(the upper, middle and working classes)* is inappropriate to early modern England.

William Harrison wrote in the 1560s, in his "Description of England": **(QUOTE 2)** *"We divide our people commonly into four sorts, as gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, and artificers or labourers. Of gentlemen, the first and chief (next the king) be the princes, dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts, and barons: and these are called the nobility; they are also named lords and noble men; and next to them be knights and esquires, and simple gentlemen. ... Citizens and burgesses have next place to gentlemen, who be those that are free within the cities, and are of some substance to bear office in the same... Our yeomen are those, which by our lawyers are called Legales Homines, free men borne English, and may dispend of their own free land in yearly revenue, to the sum of forty shillings sterling ... The fourth and last sort of people in England are day labourers, poor husbandmen, and some retailers, copy holders, and all artificers."*

The Great Chain of Being

At the beginning of our period, society was still ordered by the medieval patriarchal hierarchy known as **"The Great Chain of Being"**, a more detailed version of the list in Harrison's "Description of England".

ILLUSTRATE THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING ON SCREEN

1. The Sovereign

The King or Queen, through Divine Right, was at the head of the State, as God's chosen administrator on earth and equivalent to the father of the Nation.

2a. The Nobility

The nobility comprised the hierarchy of peers;- the princes; dukes; marquesses; earls; viscounts and barons. There were around 50 peers in 1500. By 1800, the number had increased to more than 180...

Admission to the nobility and continuance in its ranks was controlled by the Sovereign, and secured by hereditary succession. The King or Queen could create peerages for loyal servants, but could also extinguish the titles of traitors by attainder.

The practice of purchasing peerages from The Sovereign was common throughout the Early Modern period.

2b. Bishops

Archbishops and bishops ranked alongside the nobility and attended the House of Lords.

3. Knights

Though some men continued to be knighted for service in battle, the military origins of the Orders of Chivalry were fading.

There were been between 350 and 600 knights at any one time in the 16th century. Two knights from each shire county attended the House of Commons.

4. Esquires and simple gentlemen

Esquires and "simple gentlemen" were entitled to a coat-of-arms. Anyone of free birth with land worth £10 or more a year, or with at least £300 in moveable goods could be registered by the heralds. There were 15,000 esquires and gentlemen in 16th century England.

Renaissance Humanism created the concept of "gentility", and the old status of the gentlemen being a man who held land in return for service to his lord was replaced by the idea of a person with wealth and leisure enough to have the capacity and virtues necessary to govern the community, rather than having to work for a living.

(Quote 3) As **Harrison** put it in his “Description of England”:
"Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, who so studieth in the university or professeth physick and the liberal sciences, or beside his service in the room of a captain in the wars, can live idly and without manual labour, and thereto is able and will bear the charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called 'master', which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen."

5. Citizens and burgesses

Burgesses were the freemen of a borough, holding land and engaged in a trade, craft or profession within the borough. Boroughs had a high degree of administrative independence, regulated by the burgesses themselves. The role of cities, boroughs and towns grew as the nation's economy became increasingly focused on industry and commerce. Each borough sent representatives as members of the House of Commons.

6. Yeomen

The class of yeoman was a distinctive feature of early modern English society. In legal terms he was a freeman with land holdings worth more than 40s a year, and so qualified for a parliamentary vote.

A period of rapid price inflation during the 16th century benefited men who held enough land to produce a surplus. Many poorer farmers fell into debt, particularly following a succession of bad harvests in the 1580s and 1590s and their wealthier neighbours acquired their tenements, a practice known as "engrossing" that created the class of yeomen farmers.

(Quote 4) Unlike gentlemen, yeomen physically worked their own land. **Harrison** described them as follows: *"Yeomen have a certain pre-eminence, and more estimation than labourers and artificers, and commonly live wealthily, keep good houses, do their business, and travail to get riches."*

(Quote 5) Sir Thomas Smith added that yeomen: *"by these means do come to such wealth, that they are able and daily do buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, and after setting their sons to the schools, the Universities, to the law of the Realm or otherwise leaving them sufficient lands whereon they may labour, do make their said sons by these means gentlemen."*

The term "yeoman" was not applied solely to tenant farmers. In some communities it was a title given out of respect by his neighbours. Examples from North East England include references to a yeoman blacksmith, yeoman-husbandman, yeoman-water carrier and even a yeoman-labourer.

By the end of our period, mass production made a variety of goods available to families beyond the ranks of the gentry. But some commentators frowned on the luxuries afforded by the "middling sort".

(Quote 6) In 1801, **Arthur Young** complained about the lifestyle of some of the wealthier yeoman farmers in Northumberland that would have been celebrated by Sir Thomas Smith two hundred years earlier:

"Sometimes I see a piano forte in a farmer's parlour, which I always wish was burnt; a living-in servant is sometimes found, and a post-chaise to carry their daughters to assemblies; these ladies are sometimes educated at expensive boarding-schools, and the sons are often at the University, to be made parsons. But all these things imply a departure from that time which separates these different orders of being (gentlemen and farmers). Let these things, and all the folly, foppery, expense and anxiety that belong to them, remain among gentlemen. A wise farmer will not envy them."

7a. Husbandmen, cottagers and labourers

Husbandmen were tenant farmers with holdings worth less than 40s a year. These, together with the artificers, or craftsmen who were not burgesses in the towns, formed a solid backbone to English society in the period. As inflation grew, it became increasingly difficult to remain an independent small landholder and many men had to make their living through wage labour.

As the name suggests, a cottager was a tenant who held only a cottage and adjoining small plot of land = a "toft and croft".

(Quote 7) As **Smith** explained, the great bulk of 16th century English householders comprised: *"day labourers, poor husbandmen, yea merchants or retailers which have no free land, copyholders, all artificers, as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons, etc. These have no office nor authorities in our commonwealth, and no account is made of these but only to be ruled, not to rule other, and yet they be not altogether neglected. For in cities and corporate towns for default of yeomen, they are faine to make their inquests of such manner of people. And in villages they be commonly made Churchwardens, alecunners, and many times Constables."*

7b. Parish Priests

Parish priests ranked alongside these lowly husbandmen and labourers.

8a. Servants and Paupers

Finally came the classes of persons who were not included in William Harrison's list, but who actually made up the great majority of the population of England in the 16th century.

Servants, as non-householders, were effectively "non-persons" in the Great Chain of Being. They were the responsibility of their master, who accepted and treated them as part of his family within the household. The term "menial" literally means "within the walls" of the household.

Downturns in the economy due to bad harvests or commercial recessions threw many men out of work for periods of time in the second half of the 16th century, which created a growing underclass of landless paupers that comprised perhaps a quarter of England's population at the time..

8b. Women

Women, except those who were able to adopt their husband's rank and the few who ran their own businesses, were also generally considered as "non-persons".

(Quote 8) This view is illustrated by the words of **Sir Thomas Smith**: *"Bondmen be taken but as instruments and the goods and possessions of others. In which consideration also we do reject women, as those whom nature hath made to keep home and to nourish their family and children, and not to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear office in a city or common wealth no more than children and infants."*

English Society and Administration

During the Early Modern period, the great majority of English men and women lived in a very localised world. Few people had experience of anything that lay further than a day's ride away.

Local government and justice were administered through the **shire or county**, to which the local inhabitants felt a special sense of belonging, frequently referring to it as their ***"country".***

Each county was represented by two Members of Parliament, chosen in the County Court by freeholders whose income from land exceeded 40/- per annum. Sheriffs and justices of the peace were appointed by the Crown from among the knights of the shires and the county gentry.

The main unit of administration was **the parish**. Parishes varied greatly in size: For example, Norfolk was divided into 660 parishes, of which more than 40 were within the city of Norwich, while Yorkshire, which was twice the size of Norfolk in area, had only 459, Northumberland about 140 and Lancashire only 64 parishes.

Most of England's population lived in villages or small townships consisting of a cluster of cottages and farmsteads with the church at its heart and the manor house close by.

The lord of the manor held jurisdiction in the manor Court and often selected and financially supported the parish vicar or rector.

Here is an example of the social makeup of a village in the late 17th century. (**Table 6 on Screen)**

The Social Structure of a Village in 1676 (Goodneston-next-Wingham, Kent)

	Households	People	Servants
Gentry	**3**	**27**	**15**
Yeomen	**26**	**151**	**34**
Tradesmen*	**9**	**35**	**2**
Labourers	**12**	**38**	**0**

Tradesmen included;-
2 Carpenters; 2 Brickmakers; 1 Weaver; 1 Shoemaker; 1 Tailor; 1 Grocer

Parish Notables

The parish notables, who were vital to governing their local community, were chosen by and usually came from the ranks of the local elite.

Some 70% of parish churchwardens, jurymen and overseers were gentry or yeomen, while husbandmen provided up to 60% of the lowlier parish officers such as constables and sidesmen. **(Table 7 on Screen}**

Social Category of Parish Notables in Terling, Essex 1590-1700

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Unknown
Churchwardens	**9.7%**	**55.9%**	**20.4%**	**1.0%**	**13.0%**
Sessions jurors	**8.3%**	**55.0%**	**23.9%**	**0.9%**	**11.9%**
Constables	**11.8%**	**38.2%**	**50.0%**	**0**	**0**
Sidesmen	**0**	**33.3%**	**60.0%**	**0**	**6.7%**
Overseers of the poor	**23.1%**	**57.7%**	**15.4%**	**0**	**8%**
Vestrymen	**35.9%**	**51.3%**	**12.8%**	**0**	**0**
Manorial jurors	**1.9%**	**50.0%**	**36.5%**	**5.8%**	**5.8%**

Group 1 = gentry

Group 2 = yeomen, wealthy craftsmen

Group 3 = husbandmen, craftsmen

Group 4 = labourers, poor craftsmen

Administration of government

Unlike most Continental monarchs, the king or queen of England had no standing army or state police, and had to rule under the constraints of law.

The political nation was small. Members of Parliament were elected by only a small proportion of the population, the gentry and the 40/- freeholders. However, as inflation increased, the number of men who were eligible to vote grew as the value of their landholdings increased. For example there were only 179 registered 40s freeholders in Nottinghamshire in 1561, but this had grown to about 1,000 by 1612. By 1640, perhaps 40% of the adult male population had been enfranchised through the effects of inflation.

There was no large state bureaucracy in England. Queen Elizabeth I employed only about 1,200 permanent paid Crown officials, representing one royal officer for every 3,000 inhabitants, compared with 40,000 in France, or about one per 400 of the population.

Throughout the Early Modern period, government in England relied heavily upon unpaid officers, such as the justices of the peace appointed by the Crown in each county, and the churchwardens, sidesmen and vestrymen, the jurors in the quarter sessions and manor courts, the

overseers of the poor and the constables selected by the local elite in each parish.

During this period, the parish vestry administered and delivered many of the functions we would expect today to be responsibility of parish, district and county councils. This meant that the churchwardens, sidesmen and vestrymen and the other parish officers held a substantial level of control in their local communities.

However, Elizabethan and Stuart parliaments produced “stacks of statutes” covering everything from regulation of alehouses to relief of the poor and it was impractical to expect these laws to be enforced effectively and uniformly throughout the country by an army of unpaid local officials.

In the second half of this session, we shall look at how the law was administered, the changing attitudes towards the poor and the role of the Church in the household and community.

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

The Legal System – Secular Law Courts

There were three types of secular law court in England:

i. The Common Law Courts

The *central courts* of King's Bench, Common Pleas and Exchequer were located at Westminster and were concerned mainly with matters such as property disputes and recovery of debt.

The *Assizes* were held twice a year in each county, and dealt with major felonies such as murder, rape, burglary, robbery, riots and coin-clipping.

The *Quarter sessions or petty courts* were presided over by a local Justice of the Peace, who decided cases of lesser felonies and misdemeanours including disorderly conduct, assault, unlawful playing of games, the regulation of alehouses, bastardy and petty larceny. The cases were usually presented to the court by parish constables or juries.

In country areas, the petty sessions were often held in inns.

(Quote 9) In 1700 **Timothy Nourse** complained of business conducted: *"amidst the smoking of pipes, the clattering of pots, and the noise and ordure of a narrow room filled and infected with drinking and a throng: the magistrates should sit aloft, and conspicuous upon the Bench, and not be obliged to hold a glass in one hand, whilst he signs a warrant with the other."*

ii. Equity Courts

A number of special Equity Courts were developed during the Tudor period. These included the courts of Star Chamber, Chancery and Requests. They were often speedier than the common courts and were used, by those who could afford them, as means of settling quarrels and disputes over debts or regulations.

iii. Local Customary Courts

The ancient borough, hundred and manor courts dealt with everyday offences like boundary disputes, marketing offences, regulation of landholding and petty local offences.

They provided easily-accessible channels for resolving interpersonal disputes and neighbourly tensions within the local community.

In the 16th century, the manor courts probably heard at least ten times as many cases as the common courts.

The Church Courts

The ecclesiastical courts of bishops and archdeacons dealt with matrimonial and testamentary disputes, defamation and quarrels between neighbours, acts of immorality and church attendance.

They were often branded "bawdy courts" because of their concern with sexual offences, particularly during the period of puritan supremacy in many communities from the late 16th to the mid-17th century.

Church courts could not touch life, limb or property, so punishments took the form of public penance in Church for the majority of cases or excommunication for the most serious offences.

(Quote 10) From **The Salisbury Journal,** 28th December 1789: *"Lewes, December 21st - Last Friday, one Woodridge, a carpenter, at Petworth, in this county, having married his late wife's sister, they both did penance together in the Church at that place."*

Because of the relative lack of effective sanctions, the emphasis was on compromise and arbitration, rather than punishment. The church courts were popular because they were less expensive and more easily accessible than the secular courts.

At the height of puritan power following the execution of King Charles I, Parliament enacted statutes regulating many aspects of everyday life. The Church courts were abolished, but acts of immorality came under even closer scrutiny and were dealt with in the secular courts. Draconian laws were introduced that made incest and adultery punishable by death, and fornication by three months in gaol. However, the punishments were so severe that juries rarely convicted people from their local communities who were brought before them.

The Church courts were re-introduced with the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, but became increasingly concerned with regulating church attendance and religious conformity and were used less for the prosecution of petty crimes.

Good Lordship

At the beginning of our period, a man's primary purpose was to promote the well-being of his family and community. To further this aim, families of all ranks were open to a variety of external influences including their kin, their neighbours and their local community.

For the landed elite, "good lordship" was an exchange of patronage and support given in return for respect, advice and loyalty.

(Quote 11) The custom continued among the aristocracy and greater gentry into the late 16th century, when **Lord Burghley** advised: *"Let thy kindred and allies be welcome to thy table, grace them with thy countenance and ever further them in all honest actions".*

(Quote 12) In 1611, the Memoranda Book of **James Bankes of Winstanley** recorded: *"My dear children ...., I would advise you in God's most holy name that you would not in any way deal hardly with any tenant ...., that is to say, I would have every man to enjoy his tenement during his lease and his wife's life, so after to his son if he have one, ... and to be very kind and loving unto your tenants and so they will love you in good and godly sort."*

Throughout the Early Modern Period, the different levels of English society formed distinct cultural and social groups: the Court aristocracy – the knights of the shires and county gentry, often referred to as "the better sort" – the parish elite, merchants and professional people, small property owners and yeoman farmers, described as "the middling sort" - wage earning labourers - and the destitute.

Each of these groups had its own moral system and patterns of behaviour, and adopted new values and practices at different speeds.

By the 17th century, the middling and the better sort were beginning to adopt new ideas of individualism. The role of the great household and the "good lord" began to decline and the benefits of kinship connections were limited to the more immediate family, such as uncles or fathers-in-law.

The idea of "good lordship" had almost died out by the 18th century and the gentry were more concerned about the cost of the ancient customs.

(Quote 13) In 1753, **Sir Joseph Banks** complained: *"This is the day of our fair, when according to immemorial custom I am to feed and make drunk everyone who chooses to come, which will cost me in beef and ale near £20"*

However, some lords of the manor continued the carry out their traditional paternal role in providing customary acts of charity and supporting local festivities well into the 19th century.

(Quote 14) For example, according to the **Berwick Advertiser** of 2nd January 1841: ***"****Lord and Lady Frederick Fitzclarence, of Etal House, with their accustomed liberality, generously distributed among the villagers, on Christmas Eve, a considerable quantity of excellent mutton, and a corresponding number of loaves of bread."*

There was one occasion when the traditional hospitality of the "good lord" continued to be relevant - that was at the time of each parliamentary election.

(Quote 15) As **the Earl of Cork** commented grudgingly:
"Our doors are open to every dirty fellow in the county that is worth 40 shillings a year; all my best floors are spoiled by the hob-nails of farmers stamping about them; every room is a pig-sty, and the Chinese paper in the drawing room stinks so abominably of punch and tobacco that it would strike you down to come into it."

Kinship and Marriage

The household was the basic unit of early modern English society and its status was determined entirely by the rank of the head of the household. As we shall see in future sessions, the household often consisted of more members than just the immediate family. The family itself was part of a wider kinship network, which was an important influence during the first half of our period, in particular.

Until the mid-1640s, marriage among the propertied classes was a collective decision involving family and kin. Marriage meant entry into a network of kin relationships, not just a personal arrangement between bride and groom. As **Mary, Countess of Warwick** put it in the early 17th century: *"I was married into my husband's family".*

But, for some, kinship was regarded as a potential burden.

(Quote 16) In 1671, when gentleman merchant John Verney considered marriage to a Miss Edwards, **her father** told him that she: *"brought in no kindred with her, neither of great persons to be a charge by way of entertainment, nor of mean to be a charge by way of charity and their neediness".*

However, for the majority of the population throughout our period, kinship ties played little part in marriage plans, although the influence of kin did play an important role in social advancement and job placement.

Kinship, clientage and patronage remained useful in politics, and in appointments to public or Church offices, throughout our period.

The need for capital and reliable business associates meant that kin connections also remained beneficial commercially for the parish gentry and the urban merchant class, The practice of investing with, and borrowing from kin continued well into the 18th century, until replaced by joint stock companies and the growth of local banks - a familiar theme to enthusiasts for the Poldark saga!

Control in the Community

For most of the population, the greatest influences over family life were the neighbours and the local community. In particular, the rise of Puritanism in the late 16th and early 17th centuries led to closer scrutiny of neighbours and increasing community interference in moral matters.

Puritanism spread most easily among the better educated and the middling sort who became gradually detached from the attitudes and lifestyles of their poorer fellows and less tolerant towards promiscuity and perceived disorder.

As most of the parish officers were recruited from the puritan-leaning middling sort, they were determined to use the law courts aggressively to promote their puritan values and preserve moral order in their community. **(Table 7 on Screen)**

Community supervision was closest in villages and much looser in larger towns where the influx of migrants made close scrutiny impractical.

"Vagabonds and Beggars"

There was a period of rapid population growth in England between 1560 and 1650. The consequent land shortage and a succession of disastrous harvests in the 1580s and 1590s tipped the balance between subsistence and destitution for many tenant farmers. Wealthier yeomen farmers prospered by enclosing common land or taking on the tenements of their less fortunate neighbours, a process called "engrossing".

The increasing numbers of "masterless men and women" - vagrants and migrating poor turned off their land and looking for work - fuelled fears of disorder and anxiety of the "world being turned upside down".

An Act of Parliament was introduced in 1571, "Against Vagabonds, Rogues and Mighty Valiant Beggars", stating that all parts of the Kingdom were *"presently with rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars exceedingly pestered, by means whereof daily happeneth horrible murders, thefts and other outrages."*

Householders were forbidden to take "inmates" - lodgers who had no proper ties of kin or service – and vagrants were treated harshly.

(Quote 17) For example, on 20th August 1571, the constables at Southeley, Nottinghamshire reported to the local Justice of the Peace: *"Isabell Cotton, Anne Draper, John Draper taken at Normanton as vagrant persons, examined, whipped and punished and after sent from Constable to Constable the direct way to Bolton in Lancashire where they were borne and dwell."*

Poor Relief

Before the Reformation, support for the poor had come from the lord of the manor or charitable individuals, the Church (a quarter of parish tithes were paid to poor relief), the guilds in the towns, or from kin and neighbours.

A series of Poor Laws were enacted, during the reign of Elizabeth I to meet the changed economic circumstances. These enforced the taxation of householders in the parish who were considered able to pay to support their poorer neighbours.

Justices of the Peace were told that they: *"shall by their good discretions tax and assess all and every the inhabitants, dwelling in all and every city, borough, town, village, hamlet and place known ... to such weekly charge as they and every one of them shall weekly contribute towards the relief of the said poor people."*

Perhaps one third of the inhabitants in the parish were relying on support from the Poor Rate paid by the other two thirds of householders.

"The Impotent, Deserving and Underserving Poor"

(Quote 18) The Elizabethan Poor Laws created different categories of "impotent", "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, as described in **William Harrison's "Description of England", published in 1587** *"With us the poor is commonly divided into three sorts, so that some are poor by impotency, as the fatherless child, the aged, blind and lame, and the diseased person that is judged to be incurable: the second are poor by casualty, as the wounded soldier, the decayed householder, and the sick person visited with grievous and painful diseases: the third consisteth of thriftless poor, as the rioter that hath consumed all, the vagabond that will abide nowhere but runneth up and down from place to place, and finally the rogue and the strumpet."*.

(Quote 19) In 1596, **Edward Hext complained to Lord Burghley:**
"For God is my witness I do with grief protest I do not see how it is possible for the poor countryman to bear the burdens duly laid upon him, and the rapines of the infinite numbers of the wicked wandering idle people of the land….. And I may lustily say that the infinite numbers of the idle wandering people and robbers of the land are the chiefest cause of the dearth, for though they labour not, and yet they spend doubly as much as the labourer doth, for they lie idly in the ale houses day and night eating and drinking excessively."

The Act of Settlement of 1662 attempted to address the problem by making it the duty of the parish to support for life the poor people born there, or resident there for more than a year and a day. The Act enabled parish officers to use force to return paupers to the parish where they were legally last settled.

18th Century Attitudes to the Poor

A period of higher commodity prices in the 18th century resulted in a great deal of suffering among the rural poor in many parts of the country.

(Quote 20) A report in the **Adams Weekly Courant** of 19th August 1766 shows how the community of Sherborne, Dorset tried to support the poor in time of crisis:
"On Saturday last, the inhabitants of this town bought wheat by a contribution, and sold it to the poor at 7 shillings a bushel, which is about 3 shillings under the market price; and it is proposed to continue it every market day until the harvest."

In echoes of present times, many of the "better sort" considered that the poor were largely responsible for their own misfortune.

(Quote 21) Sir Frederick Eden remarked, in 1746:

"There seems to be just reason to conclude that the miseries of the labouring poor arise, less from the scantiness of their income (however much the philanthropists might wish it to be increased) than from their own improvidence and unthriftiness".

Parish officers were instructed to use even harsher measures to reduce the burden on the parish rate to the barest minimum.

(Quote 22) A case of abuse by a Parish officer was reported in **the Manchester Mercury** of 30th July 1782:
"At the Derby Assizes, a Bill of Indictment for a misdemeanour was found against a Parish officer who, in order to be rid of a pauper, put him into an open cart at eleven o' clock at night in the month of January last, drove him seventeen miles from the Parish, and at day-break left him exposed on the Highway. The poor man was fourscore years of age, very infirm, blind and helpless, and died within a week after this treatment. It seems the Overseer was the youngest man in the Parish, and in this matter obeyed the directions of the Vestry meeting, otherwise he would have been indicted for murder. It is hoped that the humanity and self-interest of parishes will be alarmed and put upon their guard by the unhappy and expensive consequences of such inconsiderate and illegal measures."

The Cost of Poor Relief

In 1680, £532,000 per year was paid out in poor relief. By 1780, this figure had risen to £2 million per year and in 1800, some 28% of the population was in receipt of poor relief.

The Church and the Family

The Church was another major influence on the family in the Early Modern period.

Even after the Reformation, much of the old Church system in England remained in operation, including the Bishops' Dioceses, Church Courts and the collecting of tithes from householders in each parish.

Attendance at the parish church was compulsory from 1559 to 1690, but the spread of literacy in that period led to more private reading and meditation, and to the head of the household inheriting much of the priest's authority, leading daily family prayers and Bible readings.

(Quote 23) Sir George Sondes' family and household attended church twice on Sundays but:

"All the week after, it was my constant course to pray with my family, once if not twice every day; and if I had not a chaplain in my house, I performed the office myself".

(Quote 24) The practice of family prayers declined during the 18th century and in1778 **James Boswell** complained:

"There is no appearance of family religion today, not even reading of chapters. How different from what was the usage in my grandfather's day or my mother's time".

The Church and Community Customs

Throughout the 16th century, it was still common for church buildings and grounds to be used for festivities such as wedding dances and church-ales that were held to raise funds to maintain the church fabric or support widows and other charitable objects.

(Quote 25) Sir Thomas Overbury saw no problem in this and thought the average English villager: *"allows of honest pastime, and thinks not the bones of the dead any the worse for it, though the country lasses dance in the churchyard after evensong."*

(Quote 26) William Piers, the Bishop of Bath and Wells recommended such festivities as beneficial:
"For the civilising of the people, for their lawful recreations, for composing differences by meeting of friends."

Although the Reformation brought an official end to the celebration of saints' days, the observing of the feast days of local saints continued in some parts of the country.

(Quote 27) The Cheshire Puritan **John Bruen** complained in 1602:

"Popery and profaneness, two sisters in evil, had consented and conspired in this parish, as in other places, to advance their idols against the Ark of God, and to celebrate their solemn feasts of their popish saints ... by their wakes and vigils, kept in commemoration and honour of them; in all riot and excess of eating and drinking, dalliance and dancing, sporting and gaming, and other abominable impieties and idolatries."

The spread of puritan values among the parish elite in many parts of the country threatened traditional revels and feasts. The "elect" considered themselves entrusted by God to resist sin and disorder in whatever form and the definition of "disorder" often became confused with "social control".

Prosecutions in the Church courts for "disorder" included crimes such as playing bowls, dancing on Sunday, scolding and quarrelling at a common table.

The authorities in some towns and parishes banned church-ales, plays and other revels. In Stratford-on-Avon, in 1619, a handful of Puritans imposed a range of restrictions, and demanded the Maypole be taken down and made into fire-fighting ladders!

(Quote 27) William Fennor commented: *"They have got all the town together by the ears, which is the true office of a Puritan."*

(Quote 28) Sir Thomas Overbury wrote a verse mourning the passing of the traditional festivities:

"Happy the age, and harmless were the days,
(For then true love and amity were found)
When every village did a May Pole raise
And Whitsun-ales and May-games did abound"

In our area, events such as the celebration of St. Cuthbert's Day, the Berwick May Fair and the Tweedmouth Feast are examples of the survival of ancient Church-based customs.

Even towards the end of our period, traditional festivities were still being observed in some districts, although clergymen viewed them with mixed feelings.

(Quote 29) In 1790, the **Reverend Macaulay** commented:

"The people of this neighbourhood are much attached to the celebration of wakes: and in the annual returns of these festivals, the cousins assemble from all quarters, fill the church on Sunday, and celebrate Monday with feasting, with music, and with dancing.

The spirit of old English hospitality is conspicuous among the farmers on these occasions. But with the lower sort of people, especially in the manufacturing villages, the return of the wake never fails to produce a week, at least, of idleness, intoxication and riot.

These and other abuses, by which these festivals are so grossly perverted from the original end of their institution, render it highly desirable to all the friends of order, of decency, and of religion, that they were totally suppressed."