

THE INFLUENCE OF LONDON ON THE MIDDLESEX COUNTRYSIDE AT THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

1587 marks the building of the Elizabethan Manor House at Southall, and in this time of anxiety over its future it is right that we should cast our minds back to those dim and distant days in an endeavor to determine what influences were at work on the village communities of Middlesex, and on Southall in particular, at the end of the sixteenth century in order to try to find an explanation for the building of the Manor House.

Sixteenth century England was and remained a predominantly agrarian country. Nine-tenths of the people earned their living on the land, and the remaining tenth retained some connection with it and there were few entirely urban people. London alone was a town in the modern sense, with a population perhaps twenty times that of the next town in the realm, Norwich.

In general the size of the labouring population was increasing, and by the end of the century the consequences of the expansion of the working population were far reaching. As the number of labourers increased the pressure on land also increased, and smallholdings were either divided up amongst children, and subdivided again till they shrank to mere curtilages, or else bequeathed to the elder son alone, so that the younger children were left propertyless. This led to a growing army of landless, or almost landless, labourers dependent on wages alone for their livelihood, often forced to wander from place to place till they found employment, or else to hire themselves out at the autumnal fairs held in many market towns. At the same time, largely because the development of commercial farming and the process of regional specialization in agriculture greatly intensified the demand for seasonal and occasional labour, a new population of migrant labourers gradually came into being, principally recruited from among the ranks of these disinherited peasants. Moreover, the enclosure movement and the dissolution of the monasteries had set many labourers adrift from their moorings; and the expansion of urban areas, especially London, attracted an increasing influx of labourers from rural parishes all over the kingdom.

At the same time, the increasing numbers of the upper and middle classes who visited London signified a more conscious sense of national identity. Hundreds of the nobility and gentry were brought together by the growing part played by Parliament in the nation's affairs. Court duties, offices and sinecures attracted others. Younger sons came to be apprenticed in the City or to learn law at the Inns of Court, young bloods went to gamble and carouse and see the play. Coming up beside the nobility and the more affluent gentry was a growing nucleus of London merchants whose wealth overshadowed that of all but the greatest landowners. Most Londoners were still countrymen by birth, and their native county was still their proper home.

For the year 1534 the population of London has been estimated at 60,000, no more than that of modern Worcester. In 1582 it was probably about 120,000 - the size of modern Norwich. In 1605 it was somewhere about 250,000, or rather less than half the size of present day Dublin in a country twice as large and one and a half times as populous as modern Eire. The growth and expansion of London was an astonishing phenomenon and it frightened many contemporaries, but though it expanded relatively more quickly than other parts of the kingdom; absolutely its growth was much smaller than the rest of the country. Its increase of some 200,000 persons between the reigns of Henry VII and Charles I was probably paralleled by an increase of quite one and a half millions, or between 50 and 75 per cent, in that of the whole country; and it is doubtful whether the population

of London reached 7 per cent of the whole population of England and Wales at any time between 1500 and 1640.

Though larger than most cities in Europe, London was still as closely bound to the countryside as any, relying on the adjacent farms for the food brought into its markets, on local quarries and forests for building materials, and its inhabitants, a fair number of whom held land outside the walls, looked at the world through the eyes of countrymen. The woodlands and fields were at hand; hunting was part of their daily life and the privileges of the chase in Middlesex were among the most valued of their civic rights. Just beyond the city walls were pleasant walks where the artisan could go with his dog to course rabbits and the apprentices could play games and climb trees.

Of the quarter of a million inhabitants of London at the turn of the century, some 76,000 lived within the walls of the City itself, still a picturesque but unhygienic jumble of merchant houses, half-timbered, gabled, red-roofed, many arranged in the form of courts, with ancient churches whose towers looked down to the Thames. There the wharves, filled with shipping, stretched along a frontage a little over a mile long. This formed the southern boundary of the City area. The northern boundary was the medieval city wall, still in good order in 1600, which circled and enclosed it in the shape of a bow, joining the river frontage at its west and east ends. The great ditch beyond was blocked in many places with the refuse which Londoners traditionally dumped beyond the wall. So was the Fleet River, which came in from the north and crossed Fleet Street; though the Lea, entering from the east, was a valuable source of water and transport. This rich and smelly profusion was linked to the alleys, inn-yards, hospitals and churches of Southwark and the parishes of Lambeth and Bermondsey along the south bank by only one bridge, London Bridge, carrying its grotesque burdens of houses and shops. Hence the need for hundreds of boatmen to ferry passengers across the Thames.

As the congestion within the walls grew, people were spilling over into the extra-mural parishes, especially into the 'Liberties' between the old wall and the Bars (or gatehouses) beyond. There were 'Bars' at the Temple, Holborn, Smithfield, Shoreditch and Whitechapel. These 'Liberties' already contained far more people than the City itself, 113,000 by 1605 - and building was going on rapidly. Another 36,000 lived in the out-parishes beyond the Liberties, many of them Irish, Scotch, French and Dutch immigrant artisans. All this eastward conglomeration and its overflow south of the river accounted for well over eighty per cent of the people inhabiting the parishes known as London.

Their occupations were mainly in trade, handicrafts and money, or in the shipping that crowded the new frontage, down even to the 3,000 Thames watermen who worked the 2,000 small wherries on the river. Numerous workers were engaged in transferring cargoes to hoys and lighters, or in the coal trade and the industries such as lime-burning that depended upon it. Some were craftsmen and tradesmen who built, fitted and supplied the ships, but there were many others whose means of livelihood were much less reputable, and the maze of courts and alleys off the Ratcliff highway teemed with ale-houses, brothels, unlicensed pawnshops, and the dens of those who engaged in the pilfering and smuggling that took place on an enormous scale.

Tudor London devoured people - life in the City was so unhealthy that the population showed scarcely any natural increase but grew almost entirely by immigration; it devoured foodstuffs, pushing the tentacles of its victualling organisation even further along the coasts and up the river valleys and raising prices wherever they penetrated; it devoured trade so greedily that at the middle

of the century it was handling four-fifths of the country's commerce, while the out-ports languished; its merchants allied with the rural cloth-industry against the provincial cloth-towns, and at the same time imported those foreign wares, like the fashionable felt hats, which drove other native craftsmen out of business. Provincial producer, trader, consumer, all were threatened by this monstrous growth which cancer-like seemed to doom the country to slow extinction. These, however, were its growing pains.

In 1581 so desperate had the City's need for water become, that the City Corporation granted to Peter Morris, a German, the right to erect a water-wheel under the 'first arch' of London Bridge. This produced power which pumped water from the Thames through wooden pipes to the City conduits. A similar undertaking at Broken Wharf (by Saint Paul's) was carried through in 1584 by Bevis Bulmer.

As early as 1580 the dangers of overcrowding were causing alarm. A proclamation of July 7th. of that year runs:-

"The Queen's Majestie, perceiving the state of the Citie of London... and the suburbs and confines thereof to increase dayly by access of people to inhabite the same, in such ample sort as thereby many Inconveniencies are seene already but many of greater necesitie likely to follow...by good and deliberate advice of her Council...and other the grave wise men in and about the Citie, doth charge and straightly command all mannor of Persons, of what qualitie soever they be, to desist and forbear from any new buildings or any house or tenement within 3 miles of the gates of the said citie of London...where no former house hath bene known to have been in the memorie of suchas are now living and also to forbear from letting or setting or suffering any more families than are only to be placed or to inhabit from henceforth in any one house that heretofore hath been inhabited."

However, London remained a great slum, overcrowded, poverty stricken and diseased, which like a giant mantis spider killed off thousands of those who were drawn in fascination towards her. By 1600, with more than three quarters of all English trade going through London, the capital city had become a magnet attracting to itself rich and poor alike from all over the country, as well as religious refugees from the Continent. London, therefore, was not only a centre of 'conspicuous consumption' connected with the Court, the nobility and high fashion, represented by the activities of the goldsmiths and other purveyors of luxuries; but also a centre of mass consumption.

To meet this growing demand for food, the Tudor farmers had either to increase the area of land under cultivation or the efficiency of their methods. The sixteenth century saw no very spectacular extension of the area of land under cultivation. The alternative was therefore an increase in efficiency, and there was little doubt, contemporaries agreed, that enclosed and consolidated farms were more productive than holdings worked under an open field system. The farmer with an eye to the growing food-market of London would thus seek to engross and enclose so as to increase his production and profits; and moreover the magnetic power of London showed itself in a high degree of specialisation.

In 1545 an Act was passed to enclose the whole of Hounslow Heath, dividing it between the various parishes and hamlets of Isleworth, Brentford End, Heston, Hounslow, Twickenham, Teddington, Hampton, Hanworth, Feltham, Bedfont, Cranford, Harlington, Harmondsworth and Stanwell. Each parish allotment was to be separated into three, two parts being for arable, laid out in 20 acre

furlongs with strips for each tenant, and the third being kept as common pasture. The Heath had already been surveyed when the Act was passed and more preliminary steps seem to have been taken towards making the allotments, for at about that time there was trouble at Isleworth when people set up gates, presumably in furtherance of the inclosure, though against the commissioners' orders. Whether allotments were ever formally made or not, no records of inclosures have been found except at East Bedfont and Hampton, and possibly at Whitton. However, at about this time, boundaries were agreed and the Heath apportioned among parishes.

Malt and meal were dispatched to London in large amounts from the numerous market towns of Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Surrey and Buckinghamshire. The markets of Middlesex included those at Brentford, Edgware, Staines and Uxbridge, in addition to those at London and Westminster; though the Brentford and Uxbridge markets were tending to specialise in corn, and it is this crop upon which the topographer, John Norden, laid great stress in the following very convincing account of the County.

"Myddlesex," he writes, "is a small shire, in length not twentie myles, in circuite (as it were by the ring) not about [sic above] 70 myles, yet for the fertilitie thereof, it may compare with any other shire; for the Boyle is excellent, fat and fertile and full of profite: it yieldeth corne and graine, not onlie in abundance, but most excellent good wheate, especiallie about Heston, which place may be called Granarium tritici regalis, for the singularitie of the corne. The vaine of this especiall corne seemeth to extend from Heston to Harrow on the Hill, betweene which, as in the midway, is Perivale, more truly Purevale. In which vale is also Northold, Southold, Norcote, Greeneford, Hayes, etc. And it seemeth to extend to Pynner, though with some alteration of the soyle. It may be noted also how nature has exalted Harrow on the Hill, which seemeth to make ostentation of its situation in the Purevale, from whence, towards the time of harvest, a man may beholde the fields round about, so sweetly to address themselves to the siccle and sith, with such comfortable abundance of all kind of graine, that the husbandman, which waiteth for the fruits of his labours, cannot but clap his hands for joy, to see this vale, so to laugh and sing.

"Yet doth not this so fruitfull soyle yeeld comfort, to the way-fairing man in the wintertime by reason of the claiesh nature of soyle; which after it hath tasted the Autumn showers, waxeth both dyrtie and deepe; But unto the cuntry awaine it is as a sweete and pleasant garden, in regard to his hope of future profite, for:

"The deepe, and dirtie loathsome soyle
Yields golden gaine, to painfull toyle."

"The industrious and painfull husbandman will refuse a pittance, to droyle in these golden puddles."

To the south of the 'brick earth' belt the original economies of the villages still aimed at subsistence. The meadows bordered the Thames, and at a slightly higher level were open arable fields on which the members of the community held scattered strips of land. Most of this land was between 25 and 50 feet above sea level, below the gravel terrace that occurs roughly north-west of a line from Hampton to Hounslow. The arable land was therefore comparatively well watered but above flood level. The open fields of Isleworth lay to the north and west of the town. Between Worton, Whitton

and Hounslow the land was partly enclosed by 1635 and some of it, on the edge of the Heath, may never have been under open field cultivation; though complaints of enclosure are heard from the fifteenth century.

In fact the chief changes in the medieval pattern revealed by Moses Glover's map of 1635 of the 'Hundred of Istelworth' were the larger enclosures for parks at Osterley and Syon Hill and to a lesser extent round Syon House, as well as in the old park to the south of Isleworth. In 1635 the village of Heston consisted of a few houses grouped around a cross in the road opposite the church and stretching a little way up the road to the north. The only large house was Hallplace, in the angle of Heston Road and Church Road. There was a distinct gap between the main village and Heston End, which was about the same size at the far end of New Heston Road, North Hyde, where there was a medieval farm house, consisted of a few cottages on the edge of the common. The hamlets of Sutton and Lampton were about the same size as Heston and Heston End. Scratage consisted of a few cottages and there were a few houses at Worton and Whitton Dean.

In 1635 Hounslow contained very few houses outside the High Street. The town extended from just west of the track (now Kingsley Road) over Lampton Field as far as the manor-house and chapel, where the main roads forked. Five inns are marked on Glover's map - 'King's Head', 'Rose', 'Wheel', 'Swan' and the 'George'. Most of the Houses in Isleworth lay in 1635 round the two squares, North and South Streets, Church Street, and the nearer part of Twickenham Road. There were few buildings north of Duke's River except the Church, Rectory, Vicarage and Dairyhouse. Within the built-up area there were many gardens and the houses were widely spaced. The charity school was already in Lower Square, near Town Wharf, and the Moat House still stood between Church Street and North Street on the probable site of the old manor-house.

By this time Brentford had become the centre of the country around, and it is depicted by Glover as a flourishing country town, the number of wharves along the backwater between the Brent and the Thames testifying to the industry of Brentford and to the great use of water transport. Also shown are its market, brewery and timber-yard. It was during this period that the market place of Brentford was becoming so restricted by its "narrowness and stragtness" and "by reason of the continual throughfare...of travellers through the same, whereby the said street became altogether unfit and inconvenient for the purpose..." that the townsmen had to remove the market place to a new site in "the orchard and backside of...the Crown" inn.

Local farmers either dealt direct with merchants and drovers frequenting the central London markets, or disposed of their produce in local towns like Brentford, or perhaps Uxbridge, knowing that these were only transit camps and that the bulk of the food sold there was ultimately destined for London. In the area between Hounslow Heath and the Colne Valley, calves were fattened for the London butchers; but the metropolitan livestock trade drew from a larger area than the traffic in grain, and in fact three graziers of Middlesex and Hertfordshire purchased steers at Coventry to stock their grounds at Cowley, Harmondsworth and Rickmansworth.

However, the sources of London's dairy produce were less diverse, and even at the very end of the sixteenth century London was said still to be fed "principallie...from some few shires near adioyninge". Milk was supplied by the dairy farmers of Middlesex, and their wives conveyed butter, eggs, milk, cheese and bacon to the London markets twice or three times a week. Norden described

the way in which the metropolis influenced the life of the country folk of Middlesex in the following passage:

"Not medlinge with the higher sorte, I observe this in the meaner, and first of such as enhabyte near the Thames, they live either by the bardge, by the wherrye or ferrye, by the sculler or by fishinge, all which live well and plentifullye, and in decent and honest sort releve their famelyes. Such as live in the inn countrye, as in the body or hart of the Shire, as also in the borders of the same, for the most part are men of husbandrye, and they wholly dedicate themselves to the manuringe of their lande. And theis comonlye are so furnished with kyne that the wyfe or twice or thrice a weeke conveyethe to London mylke, butter, cheese, apples, peares, frumentye, hens, chickens, egges, baken, and a thousand other countrye drugges which good huswifes can frame and find to get a penny. And this yeldeth them a large comfort and reliefe.... Another sorte of husbandman or yoman rather ther are, and that not a few in this Shire, who wade in the weedes of gentlemen...who havinge great feedinges for cattle, and good breede for younge, often use Smythfelde and other _tyke places with fatt cattle, wher also they store themselves with leane. And thus they often exchange, not without great gayne.... Ther are also that live by carriage for other men and to that ende they keepe cartes and carriages, carry meale, milke, and manie other thinges to London, and so furnish themselves in their returne with sundry men's carriages of the countrye, wherby they live very gainfully."

In the neighbourhood of London the expansion of the market under the stimulus of population growth also led to the creation of a market garden industry which by 1650 caused a 'minor revolution in the ordinary citizen's diet'. There had been a trickle of produce - cabbages, cauliflowers, turnips, carrots, parsnips and fruit - from the gardens and orchards of the gentry of Essex and Kent from the early years of Elizabeth's reign; and market gardening or the art of 'gardening for profit' developed rapidly in the late sixteenth century - mainly in the 1590s - with the encouragement and active participation of Dutch and Flemish immigrants. The areas around London which specialised in this activity can be gauged from the addresses of members of the Gardeners' Company, which received its first charter in 1605, and quickly grew in importance. Some of the centres of market gardening were Westminster, Lambeth, Battersea, Fulham, Putney and Brentford, and, in the opposite direction along the Thames, Whitechapel, Stepney, Hackney and Greenwich. These were all districts with easy access to the river, which enabled market produce and the dung which was essential in large quantities for this kind of intensive cultivation, to be transported by water. Sludge from the river Colne was also used as a fertilizer, being transported up to eight or ten miles.

By 1635 the open field farmers were taking part and helping to raise the trickle of market garden produce to a stream of 'some proportions'; an aldermanic report of 1635 speaks of 24,000 loads of roots — no doubt carrots, parsnips and turnips, being sold annually in London and Westminster. Soon a labour force of some 1,500 would be employed on this new cultivation, while the husbandmen and yeomen who specialised in cattle fattening for Smithfield market on the marshes and meadows along the river banks rose to become gentlemen farmers.

Historians are therefore wont to attach great importance to the influence of London in promoting the growth of a commercialised agriculture in the sixteenth century. Greater knowledge of farming

and marketing in different corners of England, however, suggests that all towns exerted a powerful influence within their regions, and that London was only one, though the most influential, among many. Nevertheless, in describing the economy of the Home Counties immediately north of London, there is no reason to minimise the role of London. All the main roads and rivers converged upon the capital. Many of the villages had in their midst a good proportion of London citizens as residents and landowners who were constantly travelling to and fro.

It can also be shown, however, that important as these advances were, supply could not keep pace with demand, and the City's appetite grew faster than the country's ability to satisfy it. So there were complaints that the needs of London were met by 'pinching the bellies of the poor' in the country. Between 1520 and 1620 every fourth year, on average, was marked by deficiency tending to dearth, and alternating with famine came plague and pestilence. In 151-2, 1602 and 1603 the outbreaks of plague were serious especially in London.

However, London society was not completely one-sided. In 1547 compulsory rate assessments were begun in order to support the poor and handicapped; and the City had its Christ's Hospital for children, its St. Bartholomew's and St. Thomas's for the sick, its Bridewell for vagrants, its Bethlehem for the insane; further the City Companies regularly bought and stored grain which in time of dearth was released at less than the market price.

Local circumstances of weather and harvest caused the metropolitan corn trade to vary in a kaleidoscopic pattern, but its extent was largely determined by the availability of water transport. The uninterrupted growth of river and coastal traffic was vital to the entire economic life of the country. Without the supplies of food and materials brought in both up and down the Thames, the phenomenal growth of London would have been impossible.

Quite apart from the fact that dozens of new London market places were formed in this period, while the older ones became "unmeasurably pestered with the unimaginable increase and multiplicity of market, folks", a whole community of factors and drovers came into being to serve the London market - travelling up from the country, or traversing the provinces in search of cattle, corn and fruit. In the Jacobean age London drew its supplies of broadcloth from the west country, worsted cloth from East Anglia, kersies from Yorkshire, coal from Newcastle, cheese from Cheshire, and wheat from the home counties.

Although there was a steady permeation of the countryside by London retailers purchasing for resale in their shops, it is impossible to measure and easy to exaggerate the novelty, rapidity and efficacy of the responses to the growing London market, for it must always be remembered that outside the immediate vicinity of London few save yeomen and gentlemen were in a position to take advantage of the expansion of metropolitan demand; while for every commercially managed farm there were perhaps a hundred peasant holdings still cultivated in the traditional manner. The territories in which London's influence was intense thus resembled islands or pockets of countryside, surrounded by areas in which its effect was of little importance.

Nevertheless, quite apart from the far-flung influence of its demand for consumer goods, one must not overlook the fact that London, as the fountain head of privileges, the centre of government, the site of the principle law courts, the seat of the great trading companies, the crux of the land market, the main repository of trading capital, and the primary source of credit, was the inevitable controller

of much of the economic activity in other parts of the land, and the narrow bottleneck through which textiles produced in the remotest areas passed for shipment abroad. It is therefore not surprising that London, as the most important distributing point for woollen manufactures, was also the chief centre of the wool stapling trade, with its headquarters at Leaden Hall and Barnaby Street, and the largest port in the kingdom.

In spite of poor communications, traders were travelling all over the country knitting even the remoter counties into the general pattern, and as overseas trade increased London became a huge warehouse from which foreign products were distributed throughout the length and breadth of England. The dominance of London was felt - and often resented - all over the country. One writer commented bitterly that "no gentleman, can be content to have either cap, coat, doublet, hose or shirt made in his country, but they must have their gear from London"; and the merchants of Bristol complained to James the First that it was "as if God had no sons to whom He gave the benefit of earth but in London".

Trading occupations in London were numberless, rising from those chapmen and pedlars suspect of J.P.s and housewives, the city hawkers of cat's meat, rhubarb or slippers, through the ranks of the broggers, bodgers, factors, jobbers and crimps to the great men who governed the twelve great livery companies, handled vast deals in corn, coal, salt, spices, cloths and lent money to the government. London was the centre of the nation's trade and of the finishing industries, and it attracted not only what it needed for itself but increasingly materials and manufactures for redistribution. The great specialised markets —Billingsgate for fish, Southwark and Leadenhall for leather, Blackwell Hall for cloth - expanded; warehouses, retail shops, workshops, breweries and glasshouses multiplied. London furnished most of the capital for industrial development and soon most of the richest men in the land would be City men.

Thanks to the Tudor peace, to the establishment of law and order and standard weights and measures, to greater internal communication, the home market expanded steadily. - London merchants slowly penetrated into spheres hitherto monopolised by local trading oligarchies. Its rapidly expanding population offered a vast market for goods from the rest of England, and by 1600 London handled seven—eighths of English trade. In London the domestic market merged into the foreign and a high proportion of exports were sent to London before going abroad. Such was the extent of foreign trade that the French ambassador, De Vaisse, wrote of the Thames in 1597: "from Greenwich to London it is a magnificent sight to see the number of ships and boats which lie in anchor, insomuch that for two leagues you see nothing but ships that serve as well for war as for traffic". Near at hand sat the Privy Council and Parliament, which increasingly regulated the foreign trade of England as a whole. The wool trade, corn trade, the movement of bullion and coin, imports and exports, and the shipping industry, were a few of the economic activities that were already the subject of official intervention, prohibition or encouragement.

Along with the corn Londoners needed for food and drink, the coal they needed for their houses and industries constituted England's earliest and largest need for those bulk cargoes that had brought the growing Dutch merchant fleet into being; and it does not seem difficult to realise that the biggest increase in shipping in the years before the Civil War was in the coastal trades, especially in the coal trade between the North East coal ports and London.

As timber prices soared, coal became more popular, and 'sea coals' from Newcastle were poisoning the London atmosphere long before the Queen's reign was over. At the same time a 'cartel' of London coal merchants came into being, which instituted a system of intelligence by which they knew whether supplies at Newcastle were plentiful or scarce, and whether a coal fleet was at sea or held back by contrary winds; and they used their knowledge to 'rig' the market with a view to manipulating prices.

The century before 1640 saw a considerable industrial expansion based on a rapid development of coal production, from about 200,000 tons a year to 1,500,000 tons. More coal meant a bigger London, more breweries, more soap and sugar boilers, more salt pans; and a bigger London and more industries meant a bigger demand for coal. Use of coal in industries such as smelting, brick making, soap boiling, glass blowing, dyeing, salt refining and brewing called for heavy expenditure on furnaces, pans and vats. Industry was ceasing to become primarily the affair of the small master craftsman and the free miner; the London capitalist and the enterprising landowner played an increasingly important part. A London brewery in James I's reign had a capital of £10,000.

The milling industries of Middlesex, though, still relied on water—power at this time, but considerable finance came from London businessmen, especially from those who had bought estates in the county. Sir Thomas Gresham, for example, put the lakes in Osterley Park to great use for mills, including both paper and corn mills. The Duke of Northumberland's river was first constructed in the 1540's, being designed to reinforce the stream driving Isleworth mill by water brought from the Colne; and Norden described a copper and brass mill which stood on the Duke's river in St. John's Road between Isleworth and Worton where many 'artificial devices' were in use and which claimed to employ processes for making copper plates which had never before been used in England. Other mills in the district in use about this time included a paper mill and a sword mill.

The expansion of these trades and industries was reflected in the increasing wealth of London; and in the great subsidy of 1543/4, the last comprehensive assessment before the lay subsidies became something of a farce, London paid fully thirty times as much as Norwich, the wealthiest city in the provinces, and well over forty times as much as Bristol, the third city of the kingdom. Even the suburb of Southwark, across the river, paid more tax than Bristol. London contributed as much on that occasion as all the other towns of England put together, from Norwich down to smallest place that functioned as a local market centre for its own countryside. Relatively speaking, Elizabethan London took a larger place in the economy of the nation than the London of the twentieth century.

The very fact that much of this increased wealth was mercantile wealth can be demonstrated by a study of the charitable bequests of the London merchants. Of the money devoted to poor relief, education and religion, the merchants gave well over half the considerable sums involved, whereas in sharp contrast the upper gentry and lower gentry combined contributed less than one tenth.

London recruited her merchant class to a marked degree from the younger sons of small landed families in the provinces. They may have been landless in the strict sense, but it was a considerable help to have the backing of several hundred paternal acres and doubtless some liquid capital. Nonetheless, the merchant class was constantly changing in composition, losing successful members to the landed class and recruiting from the same class, though possibly at a lower level.

The physical proximity of Court and City was one of the most potent factors making for this social mobility and larger measure of economic freedom. Favoured servants and courtiers might obtain valuable export licences and monopolies; and while the great livery companies were becoming symbols of social prestige and charitable organisations, domestic trade became increasingly the province of individual merchants. Many of these were relative newcomers. Of fifty-three Lord Mayors of London between 1591 and 1640 more than half were countrymen. These and many others reflected the common practice by which the younger sons of the gentry, and even occasionally of the peerage, for whom no estate or profession could be found, were apprenticed to trade. In fact as early as 1635 there were-nearly 1200 persons resident in London who described themselves as gentlemen, the great majority of whom were engaged in trade or in some professional occupation.

Apprenticeship, however, took time, and for a young man of gentle birth the fastest ways of moving up the social scale were the lotteries of marriage with an heiress, Court favour, and success at law. The first of these was probably the commonest method of upward movement for gentlemen. The second could lead to dizzy heights of wealth and grandeur, but was only open to a tiny handful of the horde of aspirants. In the third, though, the top positions were very rewarding, and as a result the numbers of lawyers grew by leaps and bounds. There was a 40 per cent increase in those called to the bar between the 1590s and the 1630s, and at the same time there were complaints about the proliferation of attorneys and solicitors. An official survey of 1633 stated that the number of attorneys enrolled in the Court of Common Pleas had risen from 342 to 1383 since 1578. The prospects for a young lawyer were without limit and some became wealthy men who left substantial estates to their heirs.

The net result was a steady rise in the standing of the merchant and professional classes in the eyes of the gentry. As a social group, the mercantile elite can be bracketed with the greater gentry; they had very little in common with the main body of the urban middle class. Many of them were knighted by James I, some even became peers; they were often Members of Parliament. Most of them acquired landed estates, especially in the counties near London, and their descendents in effect became established members of the gentry or even the nobility. The *Awsiters* were of course typical of this class, being London merchants, lawyers and aldermen.

Hence we have seen that by the end of the sixteenth century the rising, socially successful merchant was no novelty. The wealthy medieval merchant had become to be regarded as of more or less equal status with the rural knight. The two classes had frequently intermarried, and moreover, London merchants had combined trade with their position as manorial lords in Middlesex for some considerable time. It is equally clear, however, that groups of London businessmen who acquired estates were speculators who intended to resell them at a profit in smaller parcels. One contemporary wrote, "the gentry in Middlesex seem sojourners, rather than inhabitants therein. It is not strange that of thirty - three fore - named families (in 1433) not three of them were extant in the shire 160 years after, in 1503.... I impute the brevity, as I may term it, of such gentry in this county to the vicinity of London to them, or rather of them to it."

Nonetheless, although the merchants of London might have bought their country estates with speculation in mind, they certainly built their country houses to last; and in the home counties, where proximity to London - the home of the court, as well as an insatiable market for grain and

foodstuffs - prompted a steady flow of money and new ideas into the countryside, there was a market change in the medieval scale and pace of new building. This is especially true of the rebuilding of the great house which received its impetus from the court and was much accelerated after 1570, though of course in the areas with the richest soil and the best access to markets a steady advance in wealth and standards of domestic life had begun before this time.

More commonly new manor houses adhered to the traditional design of a hall range with one or two cross-wings of two storeys with garrets, the facade was symmetrical and its ends gabled. One authority suggests that the years 1575 to 1625 saw more country house building than any other fifty year period in our history. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that standards of medieval building had been highest in the south-east of England, and many small manor houses of medieval origin were brought up to date at this time. They required first and foremost more chambers, both for storage of expanding farm produce and sleeping accommodation. The first way to improve both the amount of accommodation upstairs and the access to it was to insert a chamber over the open hall. This necessarily meant building a chimney stack in the hall to replace the open hearth which had been a common feature in old houses of all sorts. Opportunity was also taken to build a framed staircase, either within the hall range or adjacent to it; from the staircase both storeyed wings could easily be reached. No misgiving was felt at the necessity of using chambers as passage rooms leading to other parts of the upper floor. The chamber over the hall was often used only for storage either of grain or linen, since the hall chimney made it dry; moreover, being the latest addition to the house it had no customary place in the pattern of home life. The position of the fireplace varied, though it was most commonly at the upper end of the hall, but naturally the traditional arrangement of a fireplace on a lateral wall still persisted. The other novel arrangement was to sacrifice the through passage by placing the chimney stack in it, perhaps under the influence of the idea of the axial stack.

It is in this general context that the building of the Manor House in Southall should be considered. Whether it was in fact a new building in 1587, or a rebuilding of an earlier structure - perhaps of the 'Wrenns' - can only be a matter for speculation at the present, until something definite is proved. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Southall's Manor House is one of the few remaining examples of an Elizabethan gentry house, and despite substantial alterations made in the eighteenth century, it still reproduces much of its former appearance. Much of the original timber and brick-work still exist. Moreover, the Manor House represents one of the few surviving links with Southall's past. It is therefore of the utmost importance that its preservation is secured for posterity. Let us hope that some solution can be found that will do just this.