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GENTRY AT THE CENTRE

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The Visitation of London begun in 1687, edd. T. C. Wales and C. P. Hartley. Harleian Society publications new series, 16-17 (2003-4). 2 vols. London: The Harleian Society, 2005.

The 1687 visitation of London was the last held in England and Wales. It has recently been published in two parts by the Harleian Society, edited by Tim Wales and Carol Hartley. London was easily the largest city in the nation, and the centre of politics, culture and economy.[1] As such, the 1687 visitation of London holds a dual historical importance as both the last visitation in English history, but also an account of the gentry who inhabited England's wealthiest and most important centre of population.[2] The edition draws on the visitation pedigrees, as well as various other ancillary sources, including two notebooks; one from the College of Arms, and one from the Guildhall.[3]

Henry VIII inaugurated the system of visitations in 1530, making two senior heralds, Clarenceux and Norroy Kings of Arms, responsible for making periodic visits to the counties to ensure all arms were borne with proper authority. From 1530 to 1687 most counties were visited, on average, every forty years.[4] The period in which the system of visitations was in place coincided with unprecedented changes in the social stratification of England, which led to an increased fluidity in social ranking. The buoyant land market, increased trade opportunities and the rise in importance and status of the 'professions' (for example, law, medicine and the clergy) led to changes in the determinants of gentry status.[5] This trend led to a division between

[1] London's population was *c.* 490,000 in 1700, representing 10% of the total population of England: R. A. P. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population growth and suburban expansion', in *The Making of the Metropolis: London 1500-1700*, edd. A. L. Beier and R. A. P. Finlay (London 1986), p. 39, table 1; E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England: a reconstruction 1541-1871*, pp. 208f., table 7.8.

[2] It is important to note that the 1687 visitation included only the City of London, and not the City of Westminster or any of the suburbs.

[3] For an account of the editing of the work, see C. P. Hartley, 'In the footsteps of Sir Henry St George: editing the Heralds' Visitation of London begun in 1687', *Genealogists' Mag.* 28 (2005), pp. 279-90.

[4] F. Heal and C. Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (Basingstoke 1994), p. 28.

[5] The changes in social stratification are discussed at greater length in works such as: D. Cressy, 'Describing the social order of Elizabethan and Stuart England', *Literature and History* 3 (1976), pp. 29-34; G. S. Holmes, 'The professions and social change in England, 1680-1730', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65 (1979), pp. 313-54; id., *Augustan England: professions, state and society 1680-1730* (Oxford 1984); W. Prest, *The Professions in Early Modern England* (London 1987); K. Wrightson, 'Estates, degrees, and sorts: changing perceptions of society in Tudor and Stuart England', in *Language, History and Class*, ed. P. J. Corfield (Oxford 1991), pp. 30-52.

the traditional conception of gentility as a product of antique lineage and the social reality of an influx of new families to gentry status.[6] Between 1530 and *c.* 1660 many families often went to great lengths to prove their nobility to the heralds – fictitious deeds and forged seals, for example. However, by the later seventeenth century the local response to visitations tended to be more muted.[7] Gentle status was still craved, but it was no longer deemed to be as important for it to be confirmed by the heralds, and as there were no effective penal sanctions to enforce attendance, the response to visitations waned.[8] This decline probably occurred most amongst the new gentry. Philip Styles' study of the 1682-3 visitation of Warwickshire shows that the response of the traditional landed gentry was 63.7%, whereas amongst newly risen gentry it was far lower – for example, only 24.2% amongst clergy and barristers.[9] This change in the reaction to visitations does not reduce their importance as a source for the history of later seventeenth-century England. Their utility as a genealogical source remains undiminished, and they are also valuable in illustrating changes in the perception of social status.

The visitations show one facet of the increasing efficiency and reach of early modern administration. The system and procedure of the heraldic visitation changed over time. At first, this involved the heralds and their assistants visiting gentry homes to investigate the families' pedigrees, for example by examining the arms in family chapels. However, over time, the system evolved to one where the heralds would hold several sessions in various sites around the county to which the gentry were summoned. Before this stage of the process, the heralds would have made a list of those to be examined in the county using taxation and judicial records compiled by the county authorities.[10] By the late seventeenth century, this system was operating at maximum efficiency, thanks especially to the techniques and improvements carried out by Sir William Dugdale (1605-86), Norroy King of Arms from 1660, and Garter King of Arms from 1677. It also benefited from the institution of the Hearth Tax in 1662, which was an annual duty of two shillings on every hearth.[11] The tax relied on local officials to draw up lists of householders, and the heralds would use these when planning visitations, picking out the most substantial dwellings (usually those with over five hearths) as well as those listed as gentry.

The London visitation of 1687 differed slightly in procedure. It started with the Earl Marshal writing to the Lord Mayor requesting him to prepare a list of all those bearing or claiming a coat of arms. To effect this, the Lord Mayor sent a precept to the beadle of each of the twenty-six City wards asking for a list of the gentry of the

[6] Heal and Holmes, op. cit. p. 27.

[7] Ibid. pp. 34, 38.

[8] P. Styles, 'The Heralds' Visitation of Warwickshire 1682-3', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Birmingham Archaeological Society* 71 (1953), p. 117.

[9] Ibid. pp. 127f.

[10] For an excellent account of the planning and process of a county visitation, see P. L. Dickinson, 'The Heralds' Visitation of Gloucestershire 1682-3', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 117 (1999), pp. 11-33; Styles, op. cit. pp. 96-114.

[11] For a summary of the development and collection of the Hearth Tax, see C. D. Chandaman, *The English Public Revenue 1660-1688* (Oxford 1975), ch. 3.

ward. These lists were returned to Henry St George (1625-1715), Clarenceux King of Arms from 1680, and Garter King of Arms from 1703, who was in overall charge of the visitation. In conjunction with Gregory King (1648-1712), Rouge Dragon Pursuivant from 1677,[12] and the clerk Robert Dale, a list of men to be examined was drawn up. Each was sent a summons to attend, and a notice of the visitation was placed in the *London Gazette*. All of these papers concerning the regulation and procedure of the visitation are reproduced in this new edition (pp. 571-87), along with helpful footnotes.

The visitation begun in 1687 was never fully completed. Between 23 June and 28 September that year, thirteen of the twenty-six City wards were visited (in order of the seniority of their aldermen) recording a grand total of 184 pedigrees. Seventy-five more pedigrees were added at various intervals to 1703. Most of the pedigrees produced in the original 1687 session are drawn from nine wards in the 'inner City', which tended to be small and wealthy, with four from the 'middle City' (p. xxxviii).[13] Many of these pedigrees are richly detailed family histories, and likely to be highly useful for genealogists studying early modern London. For example, the Lytcott pedigree (pp. 306-10) records nine generations of the family. However, the 259 names from the visitation begun in 1687 were a fraction of the 1,172 men registered by the visitation of 1633-4, but comparable to the 235 collected in 1664 – the latter visitation also included Westminster and twenty miles around the City (pp. xxix, xxvi). The 1687 visitation also recorded considerably more pedigrees than some other contemporary visitations. For example, the visitation of Somerset and Bristol in 1672 recorded thirty-one pedigrees, with thirty-six signing disclaimers.[14] The visitation of Dorset in 1677 recorded ninety pedigrees, the visitation of Monmouthshire in 1683 recorded eighteen, the Visitation of Warwickshire in 1682-3 recorded 113 and that of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in 1686 recorded thirty-eight.[15]

[12] Gregory King had previously been a clerk to Sir William Dugdale in the 1660s, assisting him in several visitations. It is likely that Dugdale's expertise and accuracy would have been instructive to the young King, making him an extremely able Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, well suited to the challenge of a visitation of London. King went on to become Registrar of the College of Arms in 1684, and was made Lancaster Herald in 1689. His later fame and work as a statistician and demographer would no doubt have drawn on his experiences as a herald. R. Stone, 'Gregory King and the development of economic statistics', in *Some British Empiricists in the Social Sciences 1650-1900*, edd. A. M. Cordani and G. Stone (Cambridge 1997), pp. 71-115.

[13] Categories taken from G. S. De Krey, *A Fractured Society: the politics of London in the first Age of Party 1688-1715* (Oxford 1985), p. 172, fig. 4.3. Pedigrees are from the wards of Billingsgate, Castle Baynard, Cornhill, Walbrook, Bread Street, Portsoken, Cordwainer, Tower, Bassishaw, Bishopsgate Within, Bridge, Aldersgate Within and Cheap.

[14] G. D. Squibb (ed.), *The Visitation of Somerset and the City of Bristol 1672* (Harl. Soc pubns. n.s. 11: London 1992), p. xv.

[15] M. P. Siddons (ed.), *Visitations by the Heralds in Wales* (Harl. Soc. pubns. n.s. 14: London 1998), pp. 165-231; G. D. Squibb (ed.), *The Visitation of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight 1686* (Harl. Soc. pubns. n.s. 10: London 1991), p. xv; id. (ed.), *The Visitation of Dorset 1677* (Harl. Soc. pubns. 67: London 1977), p. v; Styles, op. cit. pp. 127f.

The beadles' returns for thirteen of the City wards also survive. These give information on the occupation of each person and are broken down by precinct (pp. 589-628). However these wards, apart from the exception of Cheap, are not the same as the wards from which the pedigrees are drawn.[16] These beadles' returns are more representative of the whole of the City, with four from the inner, seven from the middle and two from the outer City (p. xxxiii).[17] They reveal that *c.* 1,800 men remained to be summoned to have their pedigrees examined. The importance of the beadles' returns lies in the fact that they show a different conception of 'gentry' from that of the heralds. The beadles were local men who would have been able to draw on personal knowledge of the neighbourhood and tax, jury and parochial records. The beadles had a far broader definition of gentility. For example, the outer ward of Cripplegate Without (pp. 615f.) shows forty-five different occupations amongst the returns, ranging from organist to cheesemonger to bodicemaker. Only six out of one hundred are specified as either 'gentlemen' or knights. The beadles probably identified them as gentlemen because of economic success, rather than noble ancestry. This enforces Styles' contention that by the later seventeenth century, ' "Gentility" was a mark of prosperity or official status and probably was not intended to convey any notion of gentility, as the Heralds understood it.'[18]

The records published here also have the potential to illuminate the socio-economic differences between the social elites of the neighbourhoods of London. For example, comparison between the beadles' returns of Candlewick ('inner City': p. 590), Lime Street ('middle City': pp. 596f.) and Cripplegate Without ('outer City': pp. 615f.) shows significant differences in occupational profile. In Candlewick over three-quarters of the returns are involved in rich retail or wholesale mercantile trading, with none in skilled or manual crafts. In Lime Street around half are involved in retail and wholesale, and in far less lucrative fields than in Candlewick (mostly textiles). Around ten percent are involved in skilled or manual crafts. Finally in Cripplegate Without, over half are involved in skilled or manual crafts, with only around twenty percent in retail or wholesale trades. The variety of occupations returned was also far narrower in Candlewick. This reinforces the familiar picture of the City of London's occupational topography of rich retail and wholesale trades concentrated in the centre, with the other trades, retailers and crafts located in the periphery.

As Wales points out in the Introduction (p. xxv), this visitation could also be profitably cross-referenced with other late seventeenth-century qualitative records for the City of London. These include the 1693 Poll Tax, the Aid of 1693-4 and the 1694 Marriage Duty Act. This is demonstrated by Wales' comparison between the

[16] The only ward for which neither pedigrees nor beadles' returns survive is the riverside ward of Vintry.

[17] The beadles' returns are from the wards of Aldgate, Broad Street, Candlewick, Cheap, Coleman Street, Cripplegate Within, Cripplegate Without, Dowgate, Farringdon Within, Farringdon Without, Langbourn, Lime Street, Queenhithe.

[18] Op. cit. p. 122.

numbers returned by the beadles in 1687 and the list of householders produced for the 1693-4 Aid (p. xxxvi, table 1). It shows that a greater proportion of householders tended to be perceived as gentry in the smaller, richer inner City wards than those in the middle and outer City. These figures obviously cannot be completely accurate, as they are only comparing aggregate totals. A wholly accurate comparison would have to utilize nominal linkage between the beadles' returns and the householders list for the Aid.

The pedigrees themselves can be used as an approach to examining the personal background of the metropolitan gentry, particularly in terms of geographical background, as most pedigrees specified the place of birth of the father. Jennifer Grant's study of the gentry of London in the reign of Charles I uses the records of the 1633-34 visitation of London, and shows that nearly three-quarters of those examined in the visitation were the first members of their family to live in London.[19] The figure is similar for the 1687 visitation; 71.4% of those examined were the first members of the family to live in the City of London. For a large part, those whose fathers were born outside London originated from the Home Counties (10.0%), the South and South-West (18.1%) and the Midlands (19.3%). There were also three pedigrees recorded of first-generation immigrants; the Tyssens from the Netherlands (pp. 23f.), the Parravicins from Milan (pp. 263f.), and the Carbonnel with Delillers from Caen (pp. 300-3). However, any such statistics gathered from the 1687 visitation would have to be used with caution, as the data set is around five times smaller, and the responses to visitations in the later seventeenth century are less likely to be as representative of the entire gentry than in the early part of the seventeenth century.

Visitations were also authorized to examine the heraldic pedigrees of corporate bodies. In London, this would involve the examination of the livery companies. However, the 1687 visitation does not shed much light on these groups. The livery companies viewed their coats of arms as significant investments: symbols of their permanence and heritage. Many of these companies had been bearing coats of arms since the early fourteenth century, with the earliest recorded grant having been given to the Drapers' Company in the mid fifteenth century. The 1590 visitation of London described the arms of companies as 'of antiquitie'. Corporate heraldry was an important part of early modern civil rhetoric, which married trade with aristocratic terminology.[20] The 1687 visitation records full details of the heraldic pedigree of only five livery companies; the Mercers', the Salters', the Leathersellers', the Girdlers' and the Cooks' (pp. 547-58). This paucity probably stems from the fact that by 1687, the arms of the livery companies were so well established that examining their pedigrees would have been far from a major priority for the heralds. Also, historically, the rights of companies to bear arms were never as disputed as were the rights of individual Londoners to do so.[21]

[19] Jennifer Grant, 'The gentry of London in the reign of Charles I', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 8 (1962), pp. 197-202.

[20] I. A. Gadd, 'Early modern printed histories of the London livery companies', in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800*, edd. I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (London 2002), pp. 37f.

[21] Ibid., p. 38.

This publication makes widely available a highly useful, and perhaps underdeveloped, historical source for the social history of early modern London. There is no doubt that visitation records, particularly by the later seventeenth century, do suffer from the problem of insufficiently representing the growing gentry families of England, as visitations became more spasmodically attended. The 1687 visitation of London also only takes into account half of the wards of the City, and no part of the suburbs. However, the pedigrees that were taken in 1687 are rich and highly detailed, giving a depth of information on family circumstances often missing from other large-scale sources. It is this feature that makes visitation pedigrees so valuable for the genealogist. The 'trump card' for the historian examining the records of this visitation is the survival of the beadles' returns. Although less detailed than the pedigrees, they provide an important source for the occupational topography of London's social elite. This edition benefits from sensitive and insightful editing throughout. From the introduction onwards, the text is carefully and painstakingly framed, referenced and indexed. The footnotes effectively highlight and elaborate points of interest and reference. Heraldic visitations are not a perfect historical source by any means, but they have the potential to be of significant utility to the historian; *The Visitation of London begun in 1687* especially so.[22]

[22] My thanks go to Dr Jeremy Boulton, who read and commented on a draft of this review.