

The Increase and Distribution of the Resident Gentry of Somerset, 1500–1623

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The role of the gentry in the economic, political and social life of England in the century leading up to the Civil War of the 1640s has intrigued historians ever since R H Tawney's article on the 'Rise of the gentry, 1540–1640' in 1941 sparked the vigorous controversy of the 1950s. That controversy foundered, or in the words of the most recent historians of the gentry, Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, is 'now defunct', because it sought to assess changes in the relative wealth of the gentry in relation to the Crown and the aristocracy without having the necessary statistical information to make such an exercise meaningful. The counting of manors led into the quicksands, partly because some manors were large and wealthy, while others were tiny and poverty stricken; and partly over uncertainty about how to decide who were gentry and who were not, and over disputes as to whether an elite of rising Court gentry should be distinguished from a possibly declining group of 'mere' gentry; and particularly over how to categorise those gentry who were ennobled between 1540 and 1640.¹

Yet the fact remains that the gentry were immeasurably more important socially, economically, administratively and politically in the early seventeenth century than they had been in 1500. They dominated the House of Commons and the Commons increasingly dominated the whole country in the revolutionary years of the 1640s, though the preponderant role of the gentry in the House of Commons was not new in that decade.² Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes noted that:

in the Tudor period the gentry "swarmed" into Parliament. Not only the county seats, but those of the old parliamentary boroughs, and those of towns newly enfranchised by the Crown were taken by gentlemen. Some 80 per cent of the 372 so-called "burgesses" in the late Elizabethan House of Commons were country gentlemen.³

The social and political dominance of the gentry then had been observable for an extended period, and its causes have long exercised historians. These causes were of course manifold and complex, but it is suggested here that this dominance was a reflection not only of their possibly increasing wealth, but of their rapidly increasing *numbers*. The national estimates (which are considered in more detail below) have been treated with suspicion and it has been pointed out that only detailed local studies could build up a more reliable picture.⁴

Some earlier research for my book on the history of the Somerset landscape raised questions about the influence of *resident* gentry on the history of parochial development, and the existence of some good local records indicated that Somerset was a county where resident gentry could be mapped.⁵ The reliability of the evidence will be discussed later, but from it three sources emerged as the basis for mapping: a MSS list of gentry in 1501–02, a very complete Muster of 1569, and a full Heralds' Visitation of the county in 1623 (Maps 1, 2, and 3). From the preparation of the maps it soon became apparent that over these 120 years or so there had been a very marked rise in the *numbers of resident gentry* from a mere one in five parishes in 1502 to one in half the total in 1623. (Tables 1 and 2). The significance of this may not be immediately obvious, but the impact of newly resident gentry on their neighbourhood could be very profound, and this influence of course spread beyond the immediate neighbourhood to the county, the region, and the whole nation. So that in a sense the dramatic increase in the *numbers* of resident gentry suggests that the gentry did in fact 'rise', although not necessarily in Tawney's sense of becoming more wealthy, but by becoming much more numerous, and hence much more influential.

The influence of the resident gentry took many forms and was particularly noticeable if, as with the Cliftons at Barrington and the Phelips at Montacute (both in Somerset) it was accompanied by the building of large and imposing new manor houses, requiring the employment of much local labour, not only in the building itself, but in the supply of stones, timber, lead piping, glass and many other construction requirements; but it could extend much more widely into agriculture, the diffusion of knowledge, and what might perhaps be called a 'civilising' process. For instance, when Nathaniel Bacon (the second son of Lord Keeper Sir Nicholas Bacon) settled in a new house in Stiffkey in north Norfolk in 1578, he employed about 250 people in farming, house building, garden creation and estate maintenance. To set up in farming he built new barns, a dock (Stiffkey is a coastal parish), a water mill, a new village road system, and a large fresh water pond as a duck decoy and reed

bed for thatching. He farmed over 600 acres, had 2,000 sheep and experimented with new crops like saffron and hops.⁶

Table 1: Numbers of resident gentry in Somerset, 1502-1623

Date	Number	Increase	% of Increase
1501-2	98	—	—
1569	168	70	71%
1623	377	209	124%
1502-1623	—	279	285%

Sources 'The King's book of all the lords, knights, and gentlemen of England, 17 Henry VII' (22 August 1501 - 21 August 1502), BL, Harleian MS, 6166, ff 95-102; 'Certificate of Musters in the County of Somerset, temp. Elizabeth A.D. 1569', Emanuel Green, ed., *Somerset Record Society*, Vol. 20, 1904; and 'The Visitation of the County of Somerset in the year 1623', Frederic T. Colby, ed. *Harleian Society*, Vol. XI, 1876.

Note Between 1623 and 1642, resident gentry increased considerably, probably numbering between 415 and 460 in 1642. At an average of 438, this amounts to an increase of about 340 since 1502 - or 347 per cent; so there were roughly four and a half times as many resident gentry in 1642 as in 1502. Unfortunately the sources for 1641-2 are not sufficiently precise about places of residence to allow for mapping. See A. J. Howard and T. L. Stoate, *The Somerset Protestation Returns and Lay Subsidy Rolls, 1641-2*, Bristol, 1975; Lay Subsidy of 1641, PRO E179/172/394 and 398, 400, 401, 404, 405, 406 and 407; Assessment of 1642, E 179/172/409 and 410; and Poll Tax of 1641, E 179/172/408 and 409.

Table 2: Numbers of parishes in Somerset with resident gentry (based on the 418 parishes in the old county of Somerset in 1955)

Date	Number of Parishes	Increase	% of Increase	% of Parishes
1501-2	79	—	—	19%*
1569	132	53	67%	32%
1623	210	78	59%	50%

*If the 480 old parishes of Somerset in 1502 are used as the base, the proportion falls to 16.5 per cent.

Sources as for Table 1.

Another similar example is provided by Sir Arthur Throckmorton, who settled at Paulerspury in southern Northamptonshire, and built himself a new house in 1593. He was the son of a Tudor diplomat, Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, who had acquired Paulerspury cheaply in 1551 from king Edward VI, who much favoured him. Sir Arthur Throckmorton

was also a sheep farmer on a large scale, and amongst his numerous local purchases, he paid £56 in 1593 to buy 366 sheep, eight yoke of oxen, seven other cattle and a boar at nearby Banbury market.⁷ Like Bacon he employed many people in farming.

The building of new houses was an expensive business. Sir Arthur sold a west country manor for £2,800 to help finance it, and employed many local carpenters, bricklayers, glaziers, masons and general labourers. His park supplied posts and palings, but other timber, bricks, stones, and glass had to be purchased in the neighbourhood, stimulating local trades.⁸ Extensive hospitality was a traditional duty of the resident gentry and it was said of Frescheville Holles, a Lincolnshire gentleman, that he would 'never sett down to meals unless he had some friends and neighbours with him, and in case they came not he would send for them'⁹ This hospitality often also had a practical side. Nathaniel Bacon entertained widely amongst the north Norfolk minor gentry and yeomen, and lent them his books on agricultural improvement. Even more practically he would grant them interest free loans of from £5 to £50 to tide them over short-term cash flow problems.¹⁰

Such detailed examples of the gentry's influence on the local landscape and agriculture are rarer for Somerset, but even so there are a number of significant cases. As Joan Thirsk has noted, landowners in the later sixteenth-century were generally beginning to take a much greater interest in their estates than previously, and were often starting to farm their demesnes as 'home farms' for three main reasons; because grain prices were rising with the rapidly growing population, but rents were low and 'sticky', and, strange though it may seem, knowledge of improved farming methods was being spread by the printing (in translation) of the works of classical authors like Virgil and Columella, whose advice was in advance of current practice. Columella's advice to gentlemen that they should run and inspect their own farms and that 'there should be no neglect anywhere of experimentation in many forms' was particularly useful and relevant.¹¹

A number of the resident gentry of Somerset seem to have taken up various aspects of this advice, and examples relating to the Phelips of Montacute, the Trevelyans of Nettlecombe, the Wyndhams of Orchard Wyndham, the Pouletts of Hinton St. George, the Hippiisleys of Ston Easton, and the Prestons of Cricket St. Thomas, are given in the final section of this article, but the general atmosphere of interest in improvement is illustrated in parts of the survey of Somerset carried out in 1633 by a prominent gentleman, Thomas Gerard of Trent (then in Somerset but now in Dorset). On the intellectual side he refers to the work of Henry Lyte of Lyte's Cary near Ilchester, who had written

an 'elaborate Herball, the most exact that those times afforded'.¹² Actually Henry Lyte (c. 1529–1607) had translated and edited the Flemish *Cruydeboeck* or *Herbal* in 1578, in which he included references to the local 'Cary Bridge Pear' and the 'Somerton Pear, an excellent pear.'¹³ This is another example of foreign influences revivifying the Somerset environment.

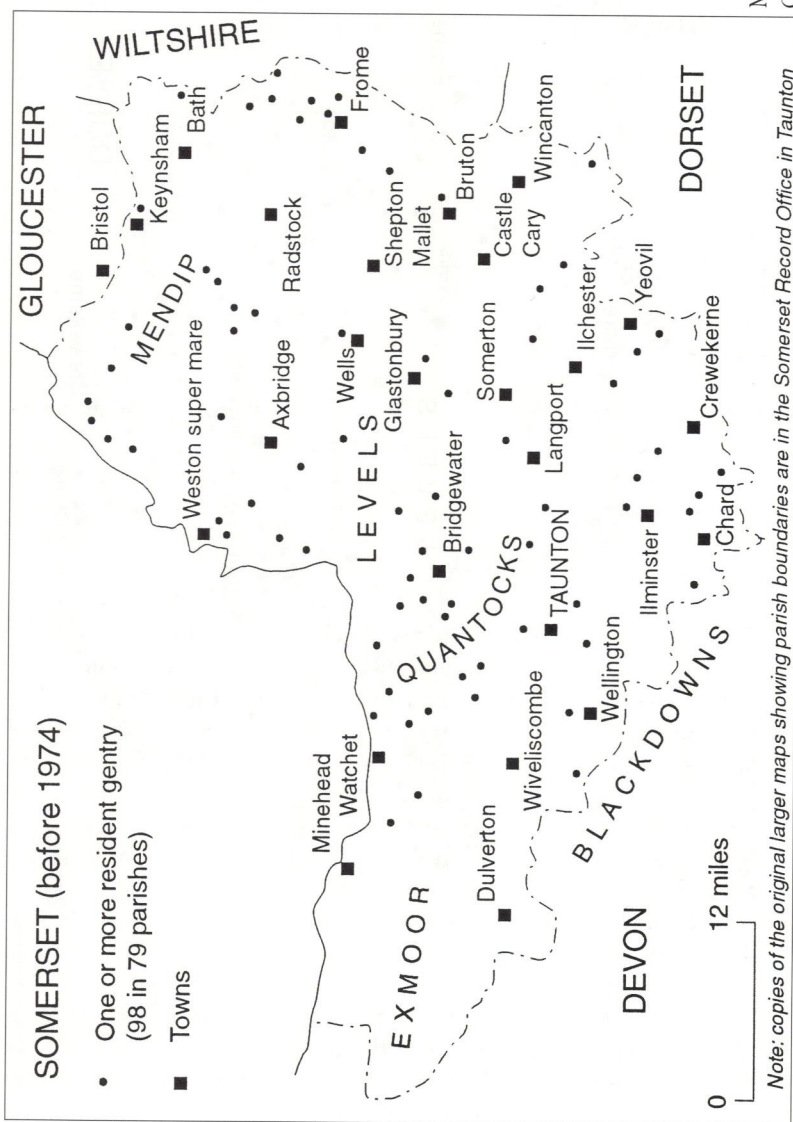
On the practical side Gerard described Sir John Farwell's property at Bishop's Hull, just west of Taunton on the river Tone,

Hence by the Riverside have ye a most pleasant and delectable walk to Taunton ... for besides the river ... you have the prospect of many fair orchards, gardens and cherry gardens, of which there are a great number hereabout, and there cherries ripe welneere as soon as at London, for the ... rich redd earth ... produceth all fruits not only in great plentye, but very early, insomuch that they have pearse and other suche fruits as soon as London¹⁴

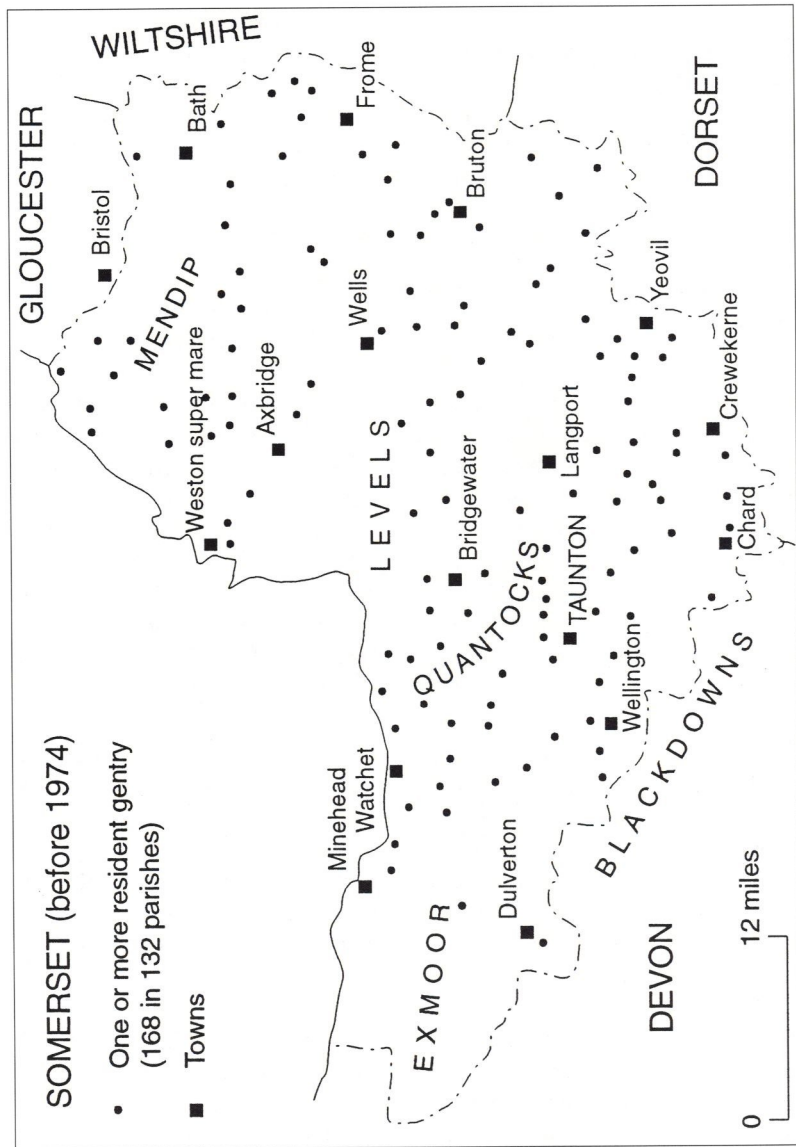
Elsewhere he had described the Portman estate at Orchard Portman nearby as 'full fraught with fruite trees of all sorts fittinge to eat and make cider of'.¹⁵ From examples such as these Gerard shows how the settlement of gentry into a neighbourhood had wide-ranging ramifications for the local economy, society, and even culture.

This article focuses on four main issues relating to the gentry of Somerset between 1500 and 1623. The first concerns an examination of the reliability of the sources used for making the maps. The second is the distribution and wealth (where it can be ascertained) of the the resident gentry in 1502. The third examines the numbers and distribution of the gentry in 1569, and considers two further issues in relation to the 53 parishes in which resident gentry were new; (i) the ownership of the land prior to the arrival of the new gentry, and (ii) the social origins of the new gentry. The fourth undertakes the same analysis for the 78 additional parishes in which new gentry were settled in 1623. The description 'new' in this context does not of course mean that these people were all new in the sense of being risen yeomen, merchants, or clothiers. Some of them were, but the majority were relations (younger brothers and sons) of older established gentry families, as will be shown below. Finally a concluding section will focus on the long-term trends between 1500 and 1623 and on the gentry's influence on the local agriculture and landscape.

It is also necessary to examine the criteria by which membership of the gentry came to be judged, for if the gentry in 1502, 1569 and 1623 were all established according to different criteria, then comparisons between them would be less valuable. At each date the gentry were



Map 1: Resident Gentry in 1502



Map 2: Resident Gentry in 1569

divided into three categories, knights, esquires and gentlemen. All had coats of arms accepted by the Heralds at the College of Arms and dependent on more or less ancient lineage; on service, military or civil, to the Crown (which could sometimes substitute for ancient lineage), and on the possession of reasonable sized estates.¹⁶ The wealthiest and most prestigious were the knights and they were expected to have had lands worth £40 a year or more in the reign of Henry VII: indeed if they had lands of that value they were supposed to present themselves at Court to be knighted, although many did not.¹⁷ Next came the esquires, who technically were supposed to be the male heirs of noblemen's younger sons or of knights or esquires of long standing, or of certain *ex officio* categories, like office holders at Court, sheriffs, justices of the peace; but in 1600 Thomas Wilson described them as:

gentlemen whose ancestors are, or have been knights, or else they are heyres and elders of their houses and of some competent quality of revenue fitt to be called to office, and authority in their County where they live.¹⁸

Finally come much the most numerous category, those who are described in the records simply as gentlemen. This was obviously a more flexible category. Many people who had made money in agriculture, industry or finance, or raised themselves in government service or in the law, wished to enter this category, and there were many stories of abuses, of bribery of the Heralds or of the making of false pedigrees. Nevertheless those who were listed as gentry in the Muster of 1569, were all recognised as such by the authors of the Muster, who were Sir Hugh Paulet, Sir Maurice Berkeley, Sir Ralph Hopton and John Horner, Esq. – all prominent local gentry.¹⁹

Likewise those who were recognised as gentry in the Visitation of Somerset in 1623 were not by any means accepted at their own valuation; no fewer than 52 aspirants were disqualified as *ignobiles*. So while it is probably true that the qualifications for acceptance as gentry in 1623 were broader than they had been in 1500, it is also true that the 377 gentry in 210 parishes in 1623 were genuine landed estate owners (with a few exceptions) who were accepted as gentry by their contemporaries and by the College of Heralds.²⁰

As Somerset was a county with a great deal of monastic and episcopal land before 1536 (the monasteries and bishoprics owned land in at least 151 parishes and probably more), it might be thought that the relatively low incidence of resident gentry in 1502 was exceptional (Table 2), but even a brief look at the national picture, suggests that this is unlikely.²¹

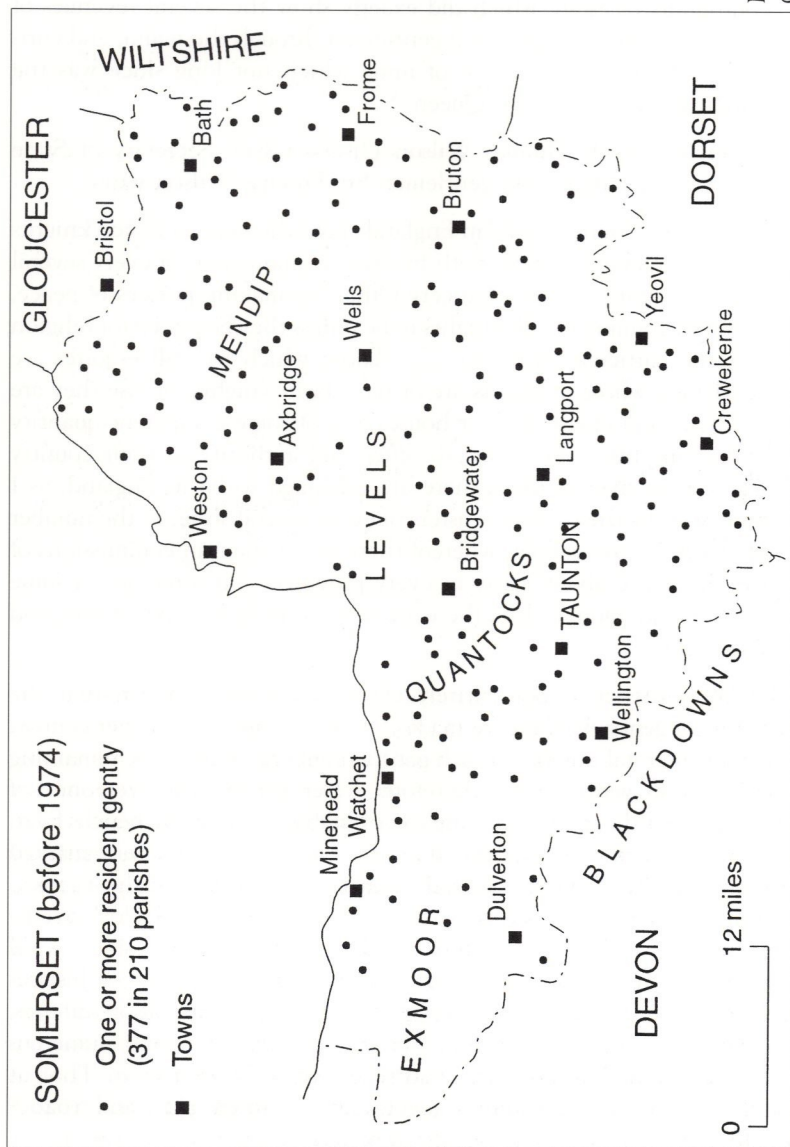
The data are somewhat limited, but in *The Age of Plunder* (1976) W. G. Hoskins wrote:

The traditional picture of the English village ruled over by a resident squire is one of the most persistent of historical myths. Suffolk, for example, had about forty-eight resident squires in the 1520s in some 500 parishes – about one parish in ten.²²

This information was derived from a study of the lay subsidy returns for the 1520s, and other counties also had low proportions, although not quite so low as Suffolk.

An examination by Julian Cornwall of the lay subsidies of the 1520s for the counties of Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and Rutland found that the figure was about 20 per cent, although for Cornwall it was somewhat higher, reflecting the different social structure of Cornwall, where a settlement pattern comprising hamlets and isolated farms produced more numerous, but smaller and poorer, manors, with proportionately poorer gentry, sometimes called 'squireens'.²³ In Warwickshire, Herald's visitations indicate that families bearing arms nearly doubled between 1500 and 1642, rising from 155 to 288, while in the shorter period from 1558 to 1642 in Yorkshire, the visitations recorded a rise from 557 to 679 (22 per cent).²⁴ Much more dramatic is the evidence for Huntingdonshire, a small county which had much ecclesiastical land prior to 1540. There, rather surprisingly, there were only nine resident gentry in 1539, but 61 by 1613 – a rise of just under seven-fold.²⁵ In Norfolk and Suffolk numbers rose also in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and fell again after 1700.²⁶

Such evidence as we have, therefore, suggests that Hoskins was right in his belief that the great majority of villages in the early sixteenth century did not have resident gentry. As to the increase in numbers in the following 100 years, the national figures, for what they are worth, also bear this out, although they suggest that the increase in Somerset may have been somewhat greater than in other counties, even though the time periods compared are not quite the same. As for the national figures, the subsidies of the 1520s suggest that there were about 200 knights at that time, and Sir Thomas Wilson in his *State of England*, A.D. 1600 believed that there were some 500 in 1600 – an increase of two-and-a-half fold. The comparable figures for the esquires and gentlemen suggest a rise from 4,000 – 5,000 to 16,000 in 1600 – an increase of 3 to 4 fold.²⁷ Heal and Holmes say that Wilson's figures are 'certainly inflated', though he was keeper of the Records from 1606 till his death in 1629, and had been employed by Lord Burghley as a 'foreign intelligencer' (less diplomatically as a spy) in the 1590s. He wrote



Map 3: Resident
Gentry in 1623

his *State of England*, A.D. 1600 for Robert Cecil (Burghley's son) the Secretary of State; and, although there is no way of knowing how much Wilson's figures may have been inflated, he seems to have been well informed. He wrote that

I have seen divers books which have been collected by secretaries and counsellors of estate which did exactly show the several revenues of every noblemen, knights, and gentlemen through the realm, and curiously collected by an uncle of mine which not long since was the principal secretary to the Queen.²⁸

This uncle was Dr Thomas Wilson (?1525–1581), Secretary of State (1577–81). Of knights and gentlemen Sir Thomas Wilson wrote,

There are accounted to be in England about the number of 500 knights as I have reckoned them, both by divers commissions of every several shire remaining in the Chancery Office for making justices of peace, of which commission all knights to be unless they be put by for religion or some particular disfavour Those which we call esquires are gentlemen whose ancestors are or have been knights, or else they are the heirs and eldest of their houses and of some competent quantity of revenue fitt to be called to office and authority in their country where they live; of these there are esteemed to be in England, as I have seen by the book of musters of every several shire, to the number of 16,000 or thereabout, whereof there are of them in commissions of the the peace about 1,400 in every province – in some 40, in some 50, some 30, more or less; these are men in living betwixt £1,000, and £500 rent,²⁹

The last sentence is not entirely clear, but seems to mean that the numbers of gentry liable to be made JPs varied from 50 to 30 per county, and that the total number of such gentry numbered 1,400. The remaining 14,600 or so gentry were, therefore, lesser gentry who were not of sufficient wealth, age, or standing to be eligible to sit on the bench. Even if Wilson's figures are exaggerated they still indicate a very marked advance on the estimates derived from the lay subsidies of the 1520s.

Wilson's remarks underline the well known fact that Tudor governments took a detailed interest in the country gentry, since royal administration crucially depended on the proper selection of Justices of the Peace, Commissioners of gaols and sewers (irrigation ditches, specially important in the Somerset levels), escheators and numerous other duties, as has been excellently shown for Somerset in Thomas Barnes's study of the county's government between 1625 and 1640.³⁰ Incidentally, in Somerset the government's dependence on the gentry

was greatly augmented by the extreme paucity of resident peers in this period. Only one – Lord FitzWarine – was listed for Somerset in 1502 (and he also had an important seat at Tawstock, near Barnstaple, in north Devon), and only two were resident in Somerset in 1641.³¹ The historian of the Civil War and Interregnum in Somerset, David Underdown, states that

it was the gentry who governed, for there was in Somerset no resident nobility to exert a sway comparable with that of the Herberts in nearby Wiltshire. Of the two local peers, Lord Poulett of Hinton St. George was ambitious enough to lead one of the county's political factions. But his peerage was of recent creation, and even with it he had less influence than Sir Robert Phelips had without one. Henry Ley, second Earl of Marlborough, was *custos rotulorum* until 1636, but took little interest in county affairs; his son, the third earl, took even less. The Earl of Pembroke (Lord Lieutenant in the 1630s) and the Marquis of Hertford were bigger men and each had broad acres in the county. But they were not residents and they were not Somerset's real governors.³²

It may be no accident that John Pym, a Somerset man with extensive possessions around his family estate at Cannington, west of Bridgwater (even though he was MP for Tavistock in Devon) rose to the leadership of the Parliamentary gentry in 1641 and retained it until his death in 1643.³³ The Somerset gentry were used to playing leadership roles.

II

It is now time to examine the sources used in constructing the maps, and to attempt to assess their reliability. In his introduction to his *History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (1791), John Collinson printed a list of 90 gentry who were resident in Somerset in the 17th year of the reign of Henry VII (22 August 1501 to 21 August 1502).³⁴

This is interesting because published lists of resident gentry as early as this are rare, but it was also frustrating because, with a few exceptions, it did not give their places of residence, nor did Collinson provide this, although his index identified some of them. It subsequently proved possible to identify all their places of residence (see Appendix and Map 1) by a laborious search through published and manuscript sources in which references to the gentry appear, such as the *Calendars of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, *Close Rolls*, *Fine Rolls* and *Patent Rolls* for the reign of Henry VII, *The Letters and Papers of Henry VIII*, *The Somerset Medieval Wills*, and *The Victoria County History of Somerset*, vols. III-VI.³⁵ The result of

the search reduced the list's 90 Somerset gentry to 82, because five of the listed gentry lived in parishes which were later transferred to Dorset, one lived in Wiltshire, and one seems to have lived in Devon, and one was dead. To the 82 survivors may be added nine fairly prominent Somerset gentry who were listed under other counties in 1502 because they had important seats elsewhere, like Richard Wake of Clevedon Court, Somerset and Blisworth, Northants; Sir Amias Pawlet (Poulett) of Hinton St. George, Somerset and Halberton, Devon; and John Pole (Poole) of West Harptree, Somerset, who was MP for Wells in 1504, and who resided at Court, being a Yeoman of the Crown, and who also owned land in Dorset. This brings the total to 91, and to these have been added seven more, who were the only ones who could be found to have been omitted from the king's list, bringing the total to 98 (excluding the seven resident in neighbouring counties). It is not of course claimed that the search for possibly missing gentry is conclusive. Some no doubt have avoided detection, but they are unlikely to be many, and it appears to be reasonable to conclude that the original list contains well over ninety per cent of the resident gentry in Somerset in 1502. This of course leaves unanswered the question of the purpose of the original list. If it could be found its provenance might throw some further light on its reliability.

The first task was to examine the manuscript which Collinson had copied. This is not the original list, but a copy (apparently made about 1601) from a Harleian manuscript described as

The king's book of all the lords, knights and gentlemen of England,
17 Henry VII.³⁶

It is beautifully written in italic script, and there is no reason to believe that it is not an accurate copy of the original. It reveals a few minor mistakes in Collinson's copy, which are shown in the Appendix. A note on the manuscript reveals that it belonged to Francis Thynne (?1545–1608) an antiquarian and historian who became Lancaster Herald in 1602, and whose father, William Thynne (died 1546) had been a courtier who eventually became Clerk Controller of the Royal household.³⁷ Francis Thynne records that he borrowed the King's book from William Wroughton, his courtier uncle. As Thynne was a herald the College of Arms seemed a possible place for the original, but unfortunately it could not be found there, nor at the Public Record Office, the Royal Library, the Royal Archives, the House of Lords Record Office, the Marquess of Bath's archives, the Bodleian and Cambridge University Libraries, and a number of other libraries and repositories; and must be presumed lost unless reposing in some remote and improbable archive.

Unfortunately, neither the catalogue of the Harleian manuscript nor Cyril Wright's *Fontes Harleiani* give any information about the original either.³⁸

That the kings of England had been keeping detailed records, not only of the peerage, but of the gentry, for quite a long time is well attested, and Henry VII's book may have formed part of that collection. For instance, it was said of king Edward IV that

the names and circumstances of almost all men, scattered over the counties of the kingdom, were known to him just as if they were daily within his sight³⁹

This policy was one of building up an affinity of supporters who were attached to the Crown by special links, receiving annuities and robes, but not salaries. This policy had been begun by Richard II (reigned 1377-1399) and continued by his successors.⁴⁰

A possibility is that the king's book of 1501-02 may have been a list of the royal affinity, but this can hardly be so, since the king's book claims to list all the resident lords, knights, and gentry in every county, and the affinity can hardly have included them all.

Another possible explanation for the creation of the king's book relates to the issue of distraint of knighthood, previously mentioned. For against some of the names in the book are listed valuations, and a marginal note states that

These which have the valewe of there living sett downe were certified to be knights of the Bathe.⁴¹

As is well known Henry VII

kept a strict eye upon his feudal dues not only levying distraint of knighthood on all who possessed £40 a year in land in 1486, 1500, and 1503, but exacting every year after 1494 penalties from those who did not become knights of the Bath.⁴²

In fact, under

Process returned against divers gentlemen for the order of knighthood, 24 Henry VII, (22 August 1508 - 21 April 1509)

are listed for Somerset, John Fitzjames, senior, William Carrent, John Marshall, Robert More, John Trevelyan, John Huntley and Giles Hill, all of whom appear in the 1502 list, except Robert More who was probably the son of John More, listed there.⁴³ So, whereas it is not certain that Henry VII kept his book for that purpose, if he did so, he would have needed as complete a list as he could get for those who might qualify

for knighthoods or fines, and this is perhaps the most plausible reason for the existence of the book.

A slight doubt as to its reliability was cast by Francis Thynne, who wrote on it that it was 'not fully perfect ... because of my knowledge there lackes many in every shire'⁴⁴ but, although Francis Thynne ought as a Herald to have been in a position to know a good deal about the gentry in 1601, it does not follow that he knew much about the gentry in 1502. If he merely assumed that all the gentry families he knew in 1601 were already resident in 1502 his opinion would have been understandable but incorrect; while if, as seems likely, he was ignorant of the considerable increase which had taken place since 1502, then his opinion can have no value. Clearly the integrity of the 1502 list is of crucial importance because it is the base from which all subsequent calculations about rates of increase are built, and there seems no good reason to doubt its basic reliability.

It would have been desirable to compare the 1502 list with the assessments for the lay subsidies of 1524 and 1525 for Somerset, and an attempt was made to do this, but unfortunately the surviving subsidy rolls are very imperfect. Of the rolls relating to the 42 hundreds and two liberties of Somerset no fewer than 29 (69 per cent) are missing, incomplete or illegible. Those that survive list 49 gentry assessed on the value of their lands, of whom 40 are families occurring in the 1502 list, and 9 are new names.⁴⁵ This is perhaps not very many after a gap of some 23 years between the two records, and again suggests that the 1502 list is fairly comprehensive.

The next record, on which map 2 is based, is the Muster of 1569, which was printed by the Somerset Record Society in 1904.⁴⁶ This muster was made during the emergency occasioned by the revolt of the northern earls, and consequently was very thoroughly done. By the statute of Winchester, of Edward 1's reign, all men between the ages of 16 and 60 had to keep armour and weapons according to their wealth. Ordered on 26 March and completed on 1st July 1569, this muster in the words of its editor

not only contains the whole county, every parish as well as every hundred ... and also a list of all the parks, and the names of all gentlemen with the armour and horses provided by or due from them. It could not be more complete and perhaps is quite unique.⁴⁷

Thus every gentleman in Somerset is listed and located except those who were under 16 or over 60, which no doubt accounts for the absence of a few well-known families, such as the Roynons of Compton Martin and the Whittingtons of Backwell. Thus the 168 gentry who were listed in

506 tithings represent a slight under-counting of the total number of resident gentry in Somerset in 1569. Even so, in terms of modern parishes, this amounted to gentry residing in 132, or 32 per cent (see Table 2); a significant increase from the 19 per cent of 1502. The gentry are quite clearly categorised in the muster, even to the extent of noting the distinctions amongst them. Each one was categorised as either a knight, an esquire or a gentleman, as for instance, Sir Maurice Barkelye, knight, of Bruton, John Brett, Esquire, of Whitestaunton and Richard Walton, Gentlemen, of Shapwick. Whether they possessed deer parks was also noted, and some indication of the armour they could provide was also given. Taken some 30 years after the dissolution of the monasteries it provides a most useful benchmark compared with the list of 1502.

Map 3 is based on the Herald's Visitation of 1623. Herald's Visitations can be of variable quality, but this one, carried out by Henry St. George and Sampson Lennard under Camden, seems to have been very thoroughly done. It lists 377 gentry in 210 parishes, and 52 others who were rejected as 'ignobiles'. All 40 hundreds are covered, with the exception of two parishes in Wellow Hundred.⁴⁸ These were Camerton, owned by the Carew family of Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, and Farleigh Hungerford, in the parish of Norton St. Philip, where the Hungerfords of Heytesbury in Wilts possessed the castle, now a noble ruin. As the family in their prime possessed 87 manors in Somerset, Devon, Cornwall, Warwickshire, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, they can seldom have been resident at Farleigh.⁴⁹ It is thus doubtful if many gentry slipped through the net, but even if they did, this would mean that the 377 gentry who were recorded (an increase of 124 per cent since 1569) would be a slight underestimate of the total number of resident gentry in Somerset.

Thus it seems that the three benchmark records – the royal list of 1501–02, the muster of 1569, and the Herald's Visitation of 1623, provide a detailed listing of the resident gentry of Somerset, and although absolute accuracy cannot be claimed for them, they are sufficiently comprehensive to be mapped and to provide a reasonably sound basis for calculating rates of growth.

III

Map I shows the locations of the 98 gentry who were resident in Somerset in 1502. They lived in 79 of the 418 parishes (in 1955) – or 19 per cent. Thus 81 per cent of the villages did not have a resident squire, slightly, but not significantly more than noted by Hoskins above. Map 2 does not reveal any specially marked patterns except perhaps the obvious one, that the resident gentry tended to prefer the more fertile and convenient

locations and eschewed the wetlands of central Somerset and the remote western moors of Exmoor and the Brendon hills. In 1502 the resident gentry were fairly thinly spread across the county, with a marked absence in the western moors and a slight clustering in the fertile triangle between Bridgwater, Taunton and Watchet. The large village of Cannington, about four miles northwest of Bridgwater was specially favoured with no fewer than six resident gentry including Alexander Pym of Brymore, the ancestor of John, whose family had been settled at Brymore since the thirteenth century; Thomas Tremayle, a prominent lawyer, originally from Devon, who held the manor of Blackmoor, which he had purchased in 1476; and Thomas Tilley, whose family had inherited the manor of Withiel in 1426.⁵⁰ Nearness to Bristol had some attractions, but Bath was not yet a magnet, being still a small country town, which had not yet become fashionable.

Of course the accident of inheritance must have been decisive for many families, but others owned numerous manors, and may have had some choice as to where they decided to make their main home. For instance Robert Brent, owner of the manor of Cossington, on the Polden hills northwest of Bridgwater, also held nine other manors as well as houses in 40 other places, when he died 24 October 1508.⁵¹ His manor of Godwinsbower was near Bridgwater and that of East Bagborough was on the Quantock hills; whereas his manors of Wrington and Overlangford, Netherlangford, Whatley, Synderland and Whatmans in the parishes of Barrington and Churchill were all on the Mendip hills about ten miles southwest of Bristol, and he could presumably have resided in any one of these had he wished to.⁵² Another family with extensive possessions was the Sydenhams. John Sydenham of Brympton, near Yeovil, who died in 1519, held some 22 manors in the county, while his relation, John Sydenham of Orchard, near Watchet, who died in 1521, held at least 14 more.⁵³ This extensive ownership is one reason why so many villages did not have resident squires, especially when taken in conjunction with widespread Church ownership, previously referred to.

An analysis of the valuations of their assessed rental income from land, given in the list, shows that the resident gentry may be divided into five groups according to their status and wealth (Table 3).

It is true that the nine knights did not have their landed income evaluated, but it is probably safe to assume that it was greater than the highest recorded gentry valuation, which was £133.20 accorded to John Trevelyan of Nettlecombe in northwest Somerset, some five miles south of Watchet. The knights and the five gentry assessed at £100 or over formed an elite group comprising 14.3 per cent of the total. They were followed by a middling group of 24 gentry, assessed at £40 to £66.60,

comprising another quarter of the total; while the remaining 60 gentry (61.2 per cent) were not assigned any valuations, and probably thus had rental incomes of under £40 a year. It should however be stressed that these assessments may well be considerable under-estimates of their real landed income, and of course take no account of other sources of income and personal wealth.

Table 3: Status and wealth of the resident gentry of Somerset in 1502

<i>Valuation</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Knights	9	9.2
2. £100 and over	5	5.1
3. £50 to £66.60	11	11.2
4. £40	13	13.3
5. No valuation	60	61.2
Totals	98	100

Sources: See Appendix

IV

Map 2, based on the Muster of 1569, presents a significant contrast to the situation in 1502. In the intervening 67 years, the number of resident gentry had increased from 98 to 168 (an increase of 71 per cent) and the number of parishes in which they resided from 79 to 132 (an increase of 67 per cent). Thus, just under one-third of the parishes now had resident gentry compared with only 19 per cent in 1502. The distribution of seats still showed a distaste for the levels and Exmoor, though the moorland parishes of Exton and Dulverton now had resident gentry. Elsewhere the more popular regions of the vale of Taunton Dean, south Somerset around Ilminster and Yeovil, and the Bath-Mendip area showed a noticeable thickening of gentry seats. The Muster records 20 parks, of which three were said to be 'in compass four miles', one of three miles, ten of two miles and six of one mile. The largest were Hinton St. George park, owned by Sir Hugh Paulet(or Poulett); and Petherton Park, and Northwood Park both owned by Sir Maurice Berkeley. All of these were of course ancient parks, and not new creations.

A number of former monasteries had been converted into country residences, among them Bruton, converted by Sir Maurice Berkeley; Witham converted by Sir Ralph Hopton, whose family had come from Suffolk; Cannington, converted by Sir Edward Rogers, of a Devon family; Sharpham Park, converted by the courtier, Sir Thomas Dyer; and Mells,

converted by Sir John Horner, of nursery rhyme fame.⁵⁴ A number of new houses had also been built, of which one of the greatest was Barington Court, a few miles northeast of Ilminster, which was built about 1558 by William Clifton, a Norwich and London merchant, who purchased the 'lordship, manor and park' in 1552, and built his fine new house (now owned by the National Trust) to replace a medieval manor-house complex, dating from 1235, or earlier.⁵⁵ The golden stones of the Ham Hill quarries in Stoke-sub-Hamdon were also beginning to be utilised in a number of other attractive manor houses like those at Brympton, East Coker, Hinton St. George, and Dillington.⁵⁶

The question of the sources of the land on which new gentry were settled in 1569 can be answered more fully by an analysis of the 77 places in which they were resident in 1569, but where there had been no resident gentry in 1502. (Table 4).

Table 4: The previous owners of the land in 77 places where gentry were newly established in 1569, but had not been in 1502

Category of previous owners	Number of places	% of places
The Church (monastic and episcopal)	35	45.5
Gentry	25	32.5
Peers	12	15.6
Crown	5	6.4
Totals	77	100

Sources: The principal sources are: *The Victoria History of Somerset* Vols III-VI, ed. R. W. Dunning; John Collinson, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset*, Vols I-III (1791); 'Somerset Enrolled Deeds', SRS, 51 (1936) 'Somerset Wills, 1501-30', '1531-58', SRS, 19 and 21 (1903, 1905); 'Medieval Wills from Wells, 1543-6, 1554-6,' SRS, 40 (1925).

That the church provided the majority of the new land (nearly half) is not surprising in view of the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, and the large amount of monastic and episcopal land in Somerset, previously referred to. That the peers and the Crown did not provide more is less expected, because both are known to have been selling land in this period. Crown land (other than former monastic properties) was sold in Brockley, Charlton Horethorne, Milverton, Nether Stowey and Wellington, but the Crown did not own all the land in these places, and it is not always clear whether the newly resident gentry had in fact bought Crown land, or land belonging to other owners. However the grants of Crown land in Somerset between 1536 and 1572 have been

analysed by Katherine Wyndham in her thesis and subsequent articles, which provide a detailed basis for the first 35 years or so of Crown alienations after the dissolution of the monasteries, when of course all the church land became Crown land.⁵⁷ A small group of gentry courtiers, who were not quite front rank politicians, purchased monastic property and amongst them were Sir Maurice Berkeley and Sir Ralph Hopton, who established their families as amongst the leading gentry resident in Somerset. Wyndham states

Sir Maurice, whose forbears had held land in the county as far back as Edward I's reign, built up a new estate at Bruton by way of one clear gift and two further grants which were both constructed on especially advantageous terms. His career had begun auspiciously. Backed both by Cromwell and his step-father, Chief Justice Fitzjames, Berkeley was already a gentleman usher of the privy Chamber by 1541 when, in return for the payment of a low reserved rent, he received Bruton Abbey and its surrounding demesne.⁵⁸

Later in Edward VI's reign he was given more Bruton land.

Ralph Hopton was the younger son of a Suffolk gentleman. He began his career in Cromwell's household whence he rose to become marshal of Henry's. Two years after his appointment as marshal he bought the site of Witham Charterhouse and eighteen months later, was given the neighbouring grange of Le Quarre. Sir Ralph added to his growing estate – on the eastern side of the county – with a purchase of the Glastonbury manor of Ditchat. Finally in 1552 Hopton received yet more Witham property within the parish of Witham Friary. Once again he had acquired an estate without payment – this time as a reward for his military service.⁵⁹

The most celebrated of the local Somerset families who acquired substantial monastic properties were the Horners, who bought the Abbot of Glastonbury's beautiful manor house at Mells, near Frome, and also the Glastonbury manors of Leigh on Mendip and Nunney.⁶⁰ They had been prosperous sheep farmers leasing from the Abbey for at least a century before Thomas Horner bought property worth £115 a year from the estates of Glastonbury, Bruton, Bath and Keynsham Abbeys in Somerset and Bruern Abbey in Oxfordshire.

Thomas, and later his nephew John, could literally be said to have had a finger in every local pie, not just the famous 'Christmas Pie' of nursery rhyme 'Little Jack Horner'.⁶¹

Multiplicity of manors can also create some uncertainty about the details of changes of ownership in the 12 places previously owned by peers, but in three of these, Barrington, Merriott and South Petherton, the details are clear. At Barrington, an ancient Crown manor, which had been held by Lord Daubeney (created Earl of Bridgwater in 1538) until his death without heirs in 1548, the manor was granted by the Crown to the Duke of Suffolk in 1552, who almost immediately sold it to William Clifton, as noted above.⁶² At South Petherton, where there several manors, the manor of Wigborough was sold in 1545 by John Bourghier, Lord Fitz-Warine and Earl of Bath, to John Brome. He died in 1558 leaving the manor to his wife, his daughter Elizabeth, and two grandchildren. Elizabeth Brome married James Compton, who appears in the Muster in 1569.⁶³ At Merriott, where there were also several manors, a property called Court Place, which had belonged to Lord Bonville, a Devon peer, was granted by his trustee, John Bevyn of Lufton, near Yeovil, to Thomas Lyte of Merriott, and then sold to John Pyne of Curry Mallet, who was however mustered at his Merriott house in 1569.⁶⁴

The remaining 25 places (about one-third of the total) had previously been owned by gentry families. Some of the gentry who were newly settled in 1569 had earlier bought their properties, like Richard Morgan of Easton-in-Gordano, near Bristol, whose family bought the manor in 1544-5 from Richard Malet of Enmore, near Bridgwater; and Thomas Hobbes of Brompton Ralph, on the Brendon hills south of Watchet, whose family (resident in Stogursey northwest of Bridgwater) had bought the manor from Thomas and Francis Moncke.⁶⁵ Other resident gentry were younger sons, nephews, or cousins of old established gentry families, like the Sydenhams of Brympton near Yeovil and Williton, near Watchet. Their relations, eight in number, had taken up residence on estates already owned by the family, but on which they had not previously resided. By 1569 there was a John Sydenham at Langford Budville, another John at Combe in Dulverton, his younger brother Thomas, at Sterte in Dulverton, George at Combe Sydenham in Monksilver, another John at Old Cleeve, Dame Ursula at Hatch Beauchamp, Alexander at Creech St. Michael and another George at Ilminster Without. No other Somerset gentry family was quite so ubiquitous and widespread as the Sydenhams.

Analysis of the social origins of the new gentry families shows more variety than the analysis of the previous owners of their properties, and is subject to more uncertainty. (Table 5).

The overwhelming majority of the new residents came, like the Sydenham relations, from families who were already gentry, usually though not always, from Somerset. There is of course some overlapping of categories.

The single courtier, Sir Thomas Dyer of Sharpham Park, near Glastonbury, was obviously also a gentleman. Conversely some of the old established gentry families, like the Fitzjames of Redlynch, near Frome, and the Tremayles of Cannington, had long been involved with the legal profession; though Justice Welsh, who was resident at Exton on Exmoor in 1569 was a newcomer.

Table 5: Social origins of gentry resident in 1569, but not in 1502 (by places)

Origins	No. of places	%
1. Peers and relations	—	—
2. Courtiers	1	1.3
3. Gentry	62	80.5
4. Clergy	—	—
5. Freeholders, yeomen, etc.	2	2.6
6. Lawyers	1	1.3
7. Merchants	1	1.3
8. Clothiers	1	1.3
9. Uncertain	9	11.7
Totals	77	100

Sources: The same as for Table 4 and F.W. Weaver (ed.) *Somerset Pedigrees, 1531, 1573 and 1591*, and *Visitation of Somerset, 1623*.

Those who had recently risen from merchant origins were scarce, although some, like William Clifton of Barrington, mentioned above, had already established themselves as gentry before 1569 and so occur in the gentry category, rather than the merchant, in Table 5. A few other families also sprang from considerable merchant wealth at an early date, like the Portmans of Taunton, who obtained nearby Orchard Portman by marriage in the fifteenth century, and the Hills, also of Taunton, who built a mansion at Poundsford Park, to the south of the town in the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ It is possible, though unlikely, that the proportion of new resident gentry coming from old gentry families would be increased by the addition of the nine residents of uncertain origins; but the very fact that these people did not appear in pedigrees, church monuments and other symbols of gentility, strongly suggests that they were not of gentry origins, but came from prosperous freeholding, yeomen or merchant families, who had succeeded in elevating themselves into the gentry by purchasing land and possibly by marriages. In two cases this can be clearly established: those of John Bysse of Doultling and John Hippisley of Cameley, southwest of Bath, whose family had moved to their main

seat at Ston Easton, nearby, before 1575. Both families had profited from the rising agricultural prices, and eventually rents, of the later sixteenth century. The Bysse family were quite large purchasers of monastic property. Wyndham notes that in 1544 John Bysse of Publow, between Bristol and Bath, bought property previously belonging to Hinton Charterhouse around Peglinch worth about £40 a year. In the same year his nephew James Bysse of Stoke Lane (then known as Stoke St. Michael) west of Frome,

acquired a slightly larger estate consisting of the manor of Batcombe, which had once belonged to Glastonbury and the Bath Abbey rectory of Englishcombe. Nine years later James joined forces with his cousin, John Bysse, junior, to buy up Bath Abbey manor of Chelworth and the small cell at Burtle which had once been attached to the Abbey of Glastonbury.⁶⁷

The status of the Bysse family rose rapidly. By 1559 James was included in the Commission of the Peace.

The Hippiseys of Cameley and Ston Easton also owned the manors of Temple Cloud and Hinton Blewett. John Hippisey, yeoman, had rented Ston Easton manor from Bruton Priory in 1525. In 1544 he bought it. His son John became M.P. for Bridport, Dorset in 1558, a J.P. in 1559, and was granted arms in 1564. He became a Master of the bench of the Middle Temple in 1567, by which time he was styled Esquire.⁶⁸ A more recent rise, however, had occurred at Beckington, a few miles north of Frome, where Thomas Long was recorded as a gentleman in 1569. His grandfather was described as 'Master Thomas Longe of Trowbridge' in a will of 1551, and his father, Henry Long, was not described as a gentleman in his will of 1558. They were almost certainly merchants, or possibly clothiers, like another resident gentleman at Beckington in 1569, Thomas Webb, who was described as of 'Beckington, clothier' in a deed of 1546 (though this may possibly refer to his father). He bought two messuages, two cottages, a close of two acres, and seven and a half acres in the common fields of Beckington.⁶⁹ He was however the only resident gentleman in 1569 who had definitely profited from industrial wealth.

V

The final distribution map to be considered is Map 3, which shows the resident gentry in 1623, based on the Herald's Visitation of that year. This again shows a significant contrast with the situation in 1569. In the intervening 54 years the number of resident gentry had increased from 168 to 377, an increase of 209 (124 per cent) and the number of

parishes with resident gentry had increased from 132 to 210, an increase of 78 (59 per cent). Exactly half of Somerset's 418 parishes had resident gentry in 1623, compared with only 19 per cent in 1502. The social influence of this considerable addition must have been profound, and their preponderance in Parliament has already been noted.⁷⁰

Compared with 1569 map, the 1623 one reveals a significant thickening of gentry seats right across the county. Even the central wetlands, the Brendon hills and eastern Exmoor had some resident gentry, and only the remote and wild parishes of western Exmoor still repelled them. The attractive rolling countryside between the Mendip hills and the Avon valley, with its good access to Bristol and Bath, and the whole fertile arc of south Somerset between Wincanton and Watchet were the regions where the resident gentry were most thickly settled. Looking at the 1623 map it is difficult to appreciate that 50 per cent of the parishes still had no resident gentry. Despite this impressive advance by the gentry, it was not quite universal; 26 parishes which had resident gentry in 1569, no longer had them in 1623, comprising just over 20 per cent of the 132 places with resident gentry in 1569. There were various reasons for this. Sometimes families died out in the male line, and heiresses moved to their husbands' homes. Other families moved their seats to other manors in their ownership. A few examples must suffice. In 1616 Henry St. Barbe, Esq. was still resident at Ashington, now in Chilton Cantelo, but by 1623 the family had moved to their Hampshire properties at White-parish and Broadlands near Romsey.⁷¹ The Hobbes family who had been resident in Brompton Ralph in 1569 had returned to their Stogursey property by 1623, and the Hawleys had left Durston for their estate at Jews in Wiveliscombe Without. Sir Henry Hawley, knight, died 7 August 1623, holding by knight's service from the king the capital messuage and lands at Jews and the manor of Halse of over 1,000 acres which he had leased to George Dodington, Esq. in 1620; and the manor and preceptory of Buckland Prior in Durston, which he had inherited from his uncle Gabriel Hawley, as well as various small properties in Cothelstone, Durston and Stoke Gregory.⁷² The Jews property seems to have been a more attractive residence than Buckland Priory in Durston, even though the latter was nearer Taunton.

The previous ownership of the land in the 94 places with resident gentry in 1623, but not in 1569 is shown in Table 6.

Compared with the situation in 1569, there was a dramatic decline in land which had formerly been owned by the church, from 45.5 per cent to a mere 4.3 per cent, reflecting the virtual ending of the sale of church properties, since the monastic lands had now nearly all been disposed of. (Table 6) In fact, the resident gentry in 1623 on former church estates

may have been tenants of the church rather than purchasers of church property. For instance in Banwell, east of Weston-super-Mare, John Irishe, John Calthorpe and William Horton may have been tenants of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. Likewise John Meddlam, Adrian Bower and his brother Edmund in Chapel Allerton, and Alexander Walker at Combe St. Nicholas may all have been tenants of the Dean and Chapter of Wells.⁷³ Not surprisingly, the great majority of the new gentry in 1623 resided on estates which had previously been owned by other gentry families (73.4 per cent) though only 34 per cent of these properties had been owned by gentry families in 1502.

**Table 6: Analysis of the former owners of the
94 places with gentry resident in 1623,
but not in 1569**

<i>Former Owners</i>	<i>In 1569</i>		<i>In 1502</i>		<i>% known</i>
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	
1. Crown	7	7.4	8	8.5	9
2. Church	4	4.3	33	35.1	37
3. Peers	8	8.5	16	17	18
4. Other gentry	74	73.4	32	34	36
5. Merchants, yeomen, etc.	6	6.4	0	—	—
6. Uncertain	—	—	5	5.3	—
Totals	94	100	94	99.9	100

Sources: Same as for Tables 1–5, and Michael J. Hawkins, ed., 'Sales of Wards in Somerset, 1603–41', *Som. Rec. Soc.*, LXVII, 1965.

Only seven places had previously been Crown property and in three of these (Dundry, Pylle and Wookey) the estates had come into the Crown's hands as a result of the attainder of the Duke of Somerset in 1551. Robert Godwin, whose family had resided in Wells for four generations lived at Wookey in 1623, and Sir Edward Berkeley, the eldest son of Sir Henry Berkeley of Bruton, resided at Pylle, where he had built himself a manor house in 1621.⁷⁴ Captain William Blanchard lived at St. Catherine's, north of Bath, which had been given by Henry VIII, about 1540, to John Malle, the royal tailor, after he had married the king's favourite natural daughter, Etheldred Dingley.⁷⁵

Only eight of the places occupied by newly resident gentry had formerly belonged to peers. For instance, the Syms family lived at Chedzoy, just east of Bridgwater, a manor belonging to the Earl of Pembroke in 1569. The Earl of Huntingdon in 1586 had sold his manor of North Cadbury

to his younger brother, Sir Francis Hastings, who built the attractive manor house there. He had no children and, when he died in 1610, his estates in North and South Cadbury were sold to Richard Newman, Esq. of Dorset, the High Steward of Westminster. Newman was non-resident in 1623, but Matthew Ewens, Esq. was living on another estate in North Cadbury. Chew Magna, a manor formerly belonging to the bishop of Wells, had passed to the Duke of Somerset, who divided it (c. 1593) and sold one half to Francis Popham and the other to Edward Baber.⁷⁶ In 1623 Francis Baber, Esq., Edward's son, was resident there. However, generally, peers' estates were not an important source of land for the newly resident gentry.

In a few cases the resident gentry of 1623 were descendants of freeholder or yeomen families who had acquired gentry status since 1569. Two examples are the Northover family of Aller, west of Langport, and the Napper family of Tintinhull in south Somerset, near Ilchester. William Northway, yeoman, acquired a long lease of the manor house of Aller, known as Aller Court, and the demesne lands in 1565, and also leased Chantry Farm in Aller from Lord Hastings in 1577.

In the absence of resident lords the Northovers became recognised leaders of the community, purchasing Chantry farm with lands of 252 acres in 1608 and receiving a grant of arms in 1614.⁷⁷

Nicholas Napper bought the inappropriate parsonage estate of Tintinhull from the Crown in 1559 and his descendant, Thomas Napper, leased the manor from the heirs of Lord Petre in 1628. His son finally bought the manor in 1673. Both manor and parsonage estates had previously belonged to Montacute priory. The Nappers carried out extensive rebuilding to the manor house in the later seventeenth century and their arms are above the round arch of the main doorway.⁷⁸

As was the case in 1569, analysis of the social origins of the gentry who were resident in 1623 for the first time, shows more variety than analysis of the previous owners of the properties, but also shows that the great majority of these newly-settled gentry came from old gentry families. (Table 7).

Again there is some overlapping of categories and some uncertainty. In the nine places where the uncertainty could not be resolved, because no details of the origins of the resident gentry could be found, the presumption must be that they had risen from yeomen, merchant or industrial families, rather than from existing gentry families. The only resident gentleman who can definitely be traced to an aristocratic family was Henry Neville, Esq. of Bathwick (just over the Avon to the east of Bath). He was a younger brother of Edward, 7th Lord Abergavenny.

(died 1589).⁷⁹ Two resident (or at any rate semi-resident) gentry were courtiers. These were Robert Henley (1591–1656) of Leigh in Winsham parish on the Dorset border a few miles south of Chard. The Henleys were said to have lived at Leigh since medieval times, presumably as franklins. Their fine manor is dated 1544, but Pevsner thought it looked as if built some thirty years later. Robert Henley was a barrister who obtained the exceptionally valuable office of Chief Clerk of the King's Bench in 1629. When he died in 1656 he had a house in Hampshire and two in London as well as Leigh.⁸⁰ The other courtier was Clement Walker, Esq., J.P. (? 1600–1651) who came of a Dorset family, and had settled at Charterhouse on Mendip in Priddy parish, shortly before 1623. He came from a family of hereditary office-holders, and inherited the Chief Ushership of the Exchequer in the 1630s. This did not stop him from being a moderate Parliamentarian in the early 1640s. However by 1645 he had fallen out with the radical puritans, whom he described as the 'godly gang', when he was elected M.P. for Wells. Imprisoned at 'Pride's Purge' of Parliament in 1648 he died in the Tower in 1651.⁸¹

Table 7: Social origins of the gentry in 1623, settled in the 94 villages without gentry in 1569

Places	No.	All categories	% known categories
1. Peers	1	1.1	1.2
2. Courtiers	2	2.1	2.4
3. Clergy	1	1.1	1.2
4. Gentry	54	57.4	63.5
5. Lawyers	3	3.2	3.5
6. Yeomen, freeholders, etc.	15	15.9	17.6
7. Merchants	4	4.3	4.7
8. Clothiers, etc.	5	5.3	5.6
9. Uncertain	9	9.6	—
Total	94	100	99.7
Total known	85		

Sources: Same as for Tables 1–6.

Some examples of newly resident gentry who established themselves from fortunes made in the law have already been given, but the most famous of these was Sir Robert Phelips of Montacute (died 1638). Though his forbears had been resident in 1569 (indeed the family first settled in Montacute in 1479, though not as gentry) the Phelips did not become lords of the manor until 1608. Sir Robert's father, Sir Edward Phelips

(d. 1614) was a prominent and important lawyer who was the builder of Montacute House (1598–1601), described by Dunning as ‘the most spectacular Elizabethan house in the county’. Sir Edward’s father, Thomas Phelps, had acquired the Cluniac Priory of St. Peter and St. Paul at its dissolution. He already owned much of the parish of Montacute.⁸² Sir Edward Phelps rose to become Speaker of the House of Commons (1604) and Master of the Rolls (1611). His grand new house (now owned by the National Trust) was symmetrical in style and lavishly fenestrated. In a survey of 1667 it was described as ‘a very faire Yellow Freestone house 3 storeys high with a faire hall’.⁸³ Sir Edward’s son, Sir Robert Phelps became in many ways the most influential leader of the Somerset gentry in the 1620s and 1630s.⁸⁴

Another example of a successful lawyer was Serjeant Edward Baber, who acquired the former monastic lands of Chew Magna, south of Bristol, after 1552, from the sequestrated estate of the Duke of Somerset. Lawyers could rise rapidly. Baber’s grandfather had died in 1527, described as a mere ‘husbandman’.⁸⁵ In 1623 his descendant Francis Baber, Esquire, was still seated at Chew Magna, and Robert Baber, gent was at Failand in Wraxall nearby and another Robert Baber was resident at Corston, just west of Bath.

Successful merchants were not very numerous buyers, but two – John Smyth of Bristol, who bought Long Ashton, and William Clifton of London who bought Barrington – were builders of prominent country houses, though both families were established by 1569. The Smyths built Ashton Court, a house with a fifteenth century core, to which additions were made in Elizabeth I’s reign and again in 1633–1635 (with considerable alterations and enlargements in the nineteenth century).⁸⁶ Dunning writes that

The Smyths, who came to Bristol from the Forest of Dean c. 1500, one as a hooper, the other as a merchant, in the next generation made money and invested in land. John Smythe, son of the merchant, died in 1556 the proud possessor of goods and money worth well over £2,000 including cash and plate worth more than half that sum, and he had land and houses in various parts of Bristol and Somerset, including a manor house and its lands in Long Ashton bought in 1545 for £920. His wealth was made (so his surviving accounts interestingly reveal) by exporting Somerset and Wiltshire wool, Welsh leather, wheat and Mendip lead to France and Spain, and importing wine, oil, iron and dyestuffs, much of which reached the local clothiers.⁸⁷

The Smyths flourished at Long Ashton into the twentieth century. William Clifton of Barrington has already been referred to. John Symes,

Esq, the son of a Chard merchant, acquired Poundisford Lodge and lands, south of Taunton, and was resident there in 1623. He married into the gentry. His wife was Amy Horner, the daughter of Thomas Horner of Mells. Richard Cole, Esq. bought Nailsea Court, south of Bristol, and was living there in 1623. He was the son of a Bristol merchant, William Cole, who had married a co-heiress, Anne Ashe, the daughter of John Ashe, another wealthy Bristol man. Their son Richard married Ann, the daughter of Sir Arthur Hopton of Witham.⁸⁸ In this way merchants used their money both to buy land and to cement their enhanced social position by marrying into gentry families.

Resident gentry who had sprung from families enriched by industrial pursuits were naturally rather rare in pre-industrial England. Only 5.3 per cent of the 1623 gentry came into that category. Vincent Bray, gentleman, of Martock (died 1642), had been a clothier, and John Sweeting of Thorncombe in Bicknoller parish, south of Watchet, was another. He had bought the manor of Thorncombe in 1609 from Alexander Brett, and had set himself up as a landed gentleman. Sweeting had considerable estates in Bicknoller as well as lands in the neighbouring parishes of Sampford Brett and Stogumber. The Sweetings remained at Thorncombe till 1772.⁸⁹ The largest social group to have risen into the gentry by 1623 were the yeomen freeholders, who had purchased new estates or increased the size of old ones. They numbered 15, comprising nearly 16 per cent of the newly resident gentry. The Byse family of Doultling and the Hippiisley family of Cameley have already been mentioned as having established themselves as gentry before 1569. By 1623 more members of these families were resident gentry: Samuel Byse at Bishop's Hull, west of Taunton, was a cousin of the Bysses of Batcombe, and was granted arms in 1580. Thomas Hippiisley was seated at Marston Bigot in Trudoxhill, south of Frome.⁹⁰ The successful yeoman families, the Northovers of Aller, near Langport, and the Nappers of Tintinhull, near Ilchester, have already been mentioned. It should however be noted that not all the yeomen who could have risen into the gentry actively wished to do so. In 1633 Thomas Gerard of Trent in his survey of Somerset noted of the large, fertile and populous southern village of Martock, southwest of Ilchester, that it was

inhabited by wealthy and substantial men though none of the best bredd; which is the cause their neighbours about them are apt enough to slander them with the title of clownes, but they care not much for that, knowing they have money in their purses to make them gentlemen when they are fitt for the degree.⁹¹

However that may be, it was the already established gentry families who provided the majority of the newly settled gentry in 1623. They numbered 54 of the 94 (57.4 per cent) and far outstripped all the other categories. They may be divided into three groups: (i) those who had come into Somerset from other counties; (ii) those who were related to the major gentry families in Somerset, and (iii) those who sprang from the families of the lesser gentry. The first group numbered 13 families (24 per cent of the 54). Examples are Edward Capel settled at Swainswick, north of Bath, who was the younger brother of Arthur Capel of Reines, Essex and the son of Henry Capel and Lady Catherine Manners, the daughter of the earl of Rutland. Edward Capel's wife, Jane (died 1631) had been the widow of Thomas Prynne, the father of William Prynne (1600–1669) the prominent Puritan M.P. who was born in Swainswick in 1600, but had moved to Lincoln's Inn, about 1621. William Jackson at Combe Hay was the son of Miles Jackson, who had come from Yorkshire, and Thomas Muttlebury, settled at Jordons in Ashill, came from a Devon family.⁹²

The second group, also numbered 13 families (24 per cent) who were relations of the greater gentry families, such as Edward Kenn of Burrington, whose grandfather was John Kenn, of an ancient family in northwest Somerset. His father Edmund had lived at Hutton, and his uncle Christopher was still at Kenn, while another uncle, also John, resided at Clevedon. Simon Sydenham, of the widespread family previously referred to, lived at Halse; while, as previously noted Sir Edward Berkeley, the eldest son of Sir Henry Berkeley of Bruton, had settled at Pylle, near Shepton Mallet. His younger brother, Sir Henry Berkeley, was settled at Yarlington, near Wincanton in the southwest of the county.⁹³

The final group numbered 28 (52 per cent) and were the most numerous group in this category. Few of them call for particular comment. Some had risen by service to more important families, like Edward Kirton, Esq. of Alford, near Castle Cary who was the steward to the marquis of Hertford. Thomas Dyke of Brompton Regis near Dulverton in west Somerset was a member of a family who later rose to great prominence in Somerset and Devon by marriage to the Acland family, and became the Dyke Aclands of Holnicote and Selworthy near Minehead and of Killerton, Devon. One of the most notable was John Pine, Esq. of Curry Mallet, who, as a radical puritan, chaired the County Committee in the late 1640s, and became for a while the most influential man in Somerset. He was described by Underdown as 'reasonably affluent and well connected, related to the Pophams, the Rogers of Cannington, and other magnate clans,' but of no particular importance before the Civil War. He was MP for Poole, in 1625–9 and 1642, and was a lawyer of the

Middle Temple in the 1630s when he became, with his uncle Hugh, violently opposed to the policies of Charles I and his courtiers.⁹⁴

VI

In conclusion, the research confirms for Somerset that Hoskins was correct in his belief that most villages were without resident gentry in the early sixteenth century, the proportion for Somerset in 1502 being 81 per cent (and still 50 per cent in 1623). It shows that the numbers of resident gentry rose from 98 to 377 – a rise of 279 or 285 per cent. The figures for 1641–2 are less reliable, but an estimate of about 438 resident gentry at that date, seems reasonable, which amounts to almost a four and a half fold increase since 1502. (see note to Table 1 for sources).

This fairly dramatic increase in the numbers of gentry seems to have been greater than has perhaps been fully realised, possibly because the celebrated controversy around Tawney's 'rise of the gentry' concentrated too much attention on the already existing gentry in Elizabeth I's reign, and obscured the rapid arrival of newly settled gentry on the scene.

The primary causes were the huge increase in the supply of land which came onto the market after 1533 with the dissolution of the monasteries and the proliferation of family settlement amongst the old gentry, whose estates, like those of the Sydenhams, were divided up as younger sons, nephews and cousins were set up in their own seats. On the demand side, the prosperity of Tudor and early Stuart agriculture (admittedly rather inflationary) seems to have been the main factor, since 80.5 per cent of the newly settled gentry in 1569 came from already established gentry families and this was still nearly 58 per cent in 1623, and 73.3 per cent if the yeomen and freeholders are added to the gentry.⁹⁵ Demand from lawyers, merchants, and clothiers, was rather less, at about 13 per cent, but was not insignificant. Interestingly, the growth in the numbers of resident gentry did not slow down after 1569, when most of the original sales of monastic land had been made, but continued at an accelerated pace. Between 1502 and 1569 the numbers of resident gentry increased by 70, or 71 per cent, but between 1569 and 1623 they increased by about 209, or 124 per cent. This was because many estates which had originally belonged to large holders, were later broken up and the pieces re-sold (sometimes several times), or sub-divided amongst heirs as gentry families proliferated.

Another aspect of the increase in the numbers of resident gentry, referred to earlier, was their influence on the local landscape and rural economy. The construction of great houses, like Montacute, Barrington, and Ashton Court, has already been mentioned, but the gentry's

influence on local farming was also varied and significant. The swing back to corn growing after its sacrifice to sheep husbandry in the earlier sixteenth century is an example. In 1632 Sir Robert Phelips had the former monastic lands at Montacute surveyed and was urged to convert more of the old sheep pastures to arable, being told he could increase his income by £300 a year if he grew more corn; for an expenditure of £66.67 on manuring and improved husbandry. He was already growing rye, wheat, barley, oats and beans.⁹⁶ Another example comes from the estate at Nettlecombe, in the hill country northwest of Taunton, which was inherited by John Trevelyan (died 1623) in 1577.⁹⁷ He improved the demesne and in a small commonplace book which he kept for 'accounts and remembrances' he noted on 20 July 1587, 'Item the tyledg uppon my hill at Brendon common sett out unto my tenants for this present year commeth unto 30sh. 8d ... the somme of the ground sett out is 17 akers on (one) yeard and 9 Roddes'.⁹⁸ He also allowed livestock from the surrounding villages of Clatworthy, Wiveliscombe, Stogumber and Monksilver to graze in his park, although he charged cash rents for this. He also planted fruit trees in his orchards.⁹⁹

Another useful improvement, which was encouraged by the gentry, was the exchange of strips in the open fields, in order to make farms more compact and easier to work. This sometimes acted as a substitute for enclosures and sometimes took place in order to facilitate them. The Wyndhams of Orchard Wyndham, near Watchet, did this on the nearby manor of Williton Regis, where 'small-scale exchanges and inclosure and improvements of marginal land are evident in the later 16th century during the tenure of the estate by the Wyndhams as lessees'.¹⁰⁰ The Pouletts of Hinton St. George in south Somerset near Crewkerne were also active in this way. 'Exchanges of land between the lord and his tenants allowed the lord to consolidate holdings' in various places. One tenant in 1565 received licence to enclose and another was given 'pasturage for oxen and cows in the park in lieu of a better settlement'.¹⁰¹ The Hippisleys of Ston Easton on the Mendip hills were also involved in the exchange of strips. In their manor of Walcombe 29 acres of strips in the east and west fields were exchanged to make more convenient holdings c. 1600.¹⁰² The planting of timber was another way in which the gentry sought to improve the value of their estates while simultaneously enhancing their beauty and that of the local landscape. There are many examples, of which one of the best is provided by Christopher Preston of Cricket St. Thomas in the south of the county near Chard, who between 1602 and 1616 leased closes for forestry out of 130 acres of former pasture with covenants to plant 40 oak, ash, or elm trees.¹⁰³

Finally, it is difficult not to believe that the large increase in the numbers of gentry did not contribute to their sense of confidence and power as they increasingly dominated the countryside agriculturally, socially and politically and used the House of Commons, in the 1640s, to challenge the Crown and the aristocracy for control of the government.

Although more radical forces partially displaced their control in the 1650s, they reasserted their dominance at the Restoration and it was maintained for the next three centuries.¹⁰⁴

Appendix: Gentry Resident in Somerset in 1502 in B. L. Harleian ms. 6166

(82 gentry in the list + 16 from other sources = 98 gentry in 79 places)

Residence Located (parishes as in 1955)

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place</i>
Arthur, John £40	Clapton-in-Gordano
Bicombe, Robert	Crowcombe
Bevine, John	Montacute
Bevyne, John	Brympton
Bluet, Nicholas £100	Stawley
*Bosgrave, John	Bruton
Bratton, Nicholas £40	Minehead
Brent, John	Bridgwater
Brent, Robert £66.67	Cossington
Birte (= Brett) Alexander	Whitestaunton
Bircke (= Brett) William	Bicknoller
Carrent, William £60	Henstridge
Champneys, Henry £40	Lullington
Champneys, Thomas £40	Selwood
Choke, John, knight	Long Ashton
Dawbeneye, James £40	Wayford
Dawbeneye, Edward	North Curry
Doddington, John	Holford
Dyker, John	Norton Radstock
Fitzjames, John £100	Bruton
FitzRichard, John	Stowey Sutton
Gilbert, Robert	Corton Denham
Gilbert, Robert £40	Queen Camel
Golge(= Gorges) Edmund, knt.	Wraxall
Gosse, William	Wembdon
Hadeley, John £40	Withycombe

Hadeley, Richard	Withycombe
Hamlyne, Alexander	Bridgwater
Harvey, John £40	Burnham
Huntley, John	Bleadon
Heyron, John	Wedmore
Hill, Giles £50	Brympton
†Hymerford, John	East Coker
†Hymerford, William	East Coker
Hody, Andrew	Stawell
Hodye, Reginald	Charlinch
June, William	Brent Knoll
Lutterell, Hugh, knight	East Quantoxhead and Dunster
Lyte, John	Charlton Mackrell
Lyte, Thomas	Charlton Mackrell
Mallett, Thomas, £66.67	Enmore
Marshall, John	Street
Mawdley, Richard	Nunney
Michell, Thomas, £40	Cannington
Moore, John	Chapel Allerton
Mylborne, William	Glastonbury
Myll, Edmund	Wells
Newburghe, Thomas, £50	Berkley
Newton, Alexander	Fivehead
††Ogan(Cogan) Richard, £50	Pitminster
Percevall, James	Weston in Gordano
Popham, John	North Petherton
Pymme, Alexander, £40	Cannington
Pyrymanne, John	Cannington
Remyone(Reynon) William	Compton Martin
Rodney, John, knight	Rodney Stoke
Rogiers, John	Wanstrow
Saintalbyn, John	Holford
Seintlowe, Nicholas	Stowey Sutton
Speke, John, knight	Whitelackington
Steyning, Edward	Selworthy
Steynton, John	Stanton Drew
Stowell, Robert, £60	Cothelstone
Stradlinge, Edward, £66.67	Bicknoller
Sydenham, John, £100	Brympton
Sydenham, John, £66.67	Williton
Tilley, Thomas, £40	Cannington
Tremayle, John	Cannington

Tremayle, Thomas, £66.67
 Trevilione, John, £133.20
 Torney, John
 Vernon(Verney) John £40
 Wadeham, Edward, £50
 Wadeham, John, knight
 Wadeham, William
 Walsh, Thomas
 Walshawe, William
 Walton, John
 Warre, Richard, £100
 Wykes, John, £40

Residence Probably Located

Seintlowe, Edmund
 Somewell (?Samwell) John

Cannington
 Nettlecombe
 Tellisford
 Stogursey
 Churchill
 Ilton
 Combe Florey
 Fivehead
 Weston super Mare
 High Ham
 Cheddon Fitzpaine
 Nynehead

Gentry with seats in Somerset and other counties, mostly listed under other counties in the 1502 list

Franceis, John
 Hungerford, Walter, knight

Newton, Thomas
 Paulet, Amias, knight

Pole(Poole) John
 Preston, John

Twynyho, George
 Wake, Richard
 Willoughby, William, knight

Middlesex & Combe Florey
 Heytesbury, Wilts. & Norton
 St Philip
 Barr's Court, Glos. & East Harptree
 Halberton, Devon & Hinton
 St. George
 Westminster & West Harptree
 Silton, Dorset & Cricket
 St Thomas
 Dorset & Frome
 Blisworth, Northants. & Clevedon
 Bere Regis, Dorset & Charlton
 Mackrell

Gentry not in the 1502 list,

Arundel, George
 Halswell, John
 Kenn, John
 Payne, Thomas
 Portman, John
 Speke, William
 St. Loe, Nicholas

West Bagborough
 Goathurst
 Kenn
 Hutton
 Orchard Portman
 Chaffcombe
 Keynsham

- Notes: * Not 'Musgrove' as in Collinson
† Not 'Hungerford' as in Collinson
†† Not 'Cogan' as in Collinson
§ Not 'Somerville' as in Collinson

Sources: The printed and ms sources are very numerous and are given in the appendix to 'The Resident Gentry of Somerset in 1502' by Michael Havinden in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vol. 139 (1997), pp. 8–13.

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101. VCH Som. IV, p. 45.
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103. VCH Som. IV, p. 135.
104. Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War*, pp. 193-94.