

# *The Structure of the Estate,*

the Society and Political Institutions of Derbyshire  
in the Late Fourteenth and First Half of the Fifteenth Century

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Hungarian scholars made numerous comparative works on the history of Hungary and Western Europe, but many studies do not contain an explanation of the historical terminology of Western European countries. The conclusions of these studies were inexact because of the incomplete knowledge of the historical terminology of medieval England or other countries. The first aim of this dissertation is to give an exact introduction to the late medieval English terminology. Derbyshire served as a model for this research because it was not a coastal shire, therefore it is comparable to a Hungarian county. The other purpose of this work was the detailed description of the structure of the estate, society, and political institutions in Derbyshire in the late Middle Ages. The dissertation consists of three parts: (1) the settlements and the structure of the estate of Derbyshire, (2) the society of the shire, (3) the political institutions of the shire. The appendix of the dissertation includes 23 tables and 10 maps. The tables comprise the names of the settlements and the names of the lords of the fees and villages; the color maps were made to depict the structure of the estates in Derbyshire.

The first part of the dissertation, the maps and the tables of the appendix, were based on the data from the following sources: *Domesday Survey Descriptive*, *Descriptive Catalogue of Derbyshire Charters*, *Calendar of Inquisition Post Mortem*, the collection of the *Feudal History of County of Derby*, *Inquisition and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids*, *Placita de Quo Warranto*, and *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. The lists of poll taxes, lay subsidies, and lists of the tithe were useful sources for the description of the society of Derbyshire in the second part of the work. The sources of the medieval English law, charters, statutes, and the books of the medieval English lawyers were taken into consideration in the description of the social structure, and their data were important to the description of the political institutions.

The listing of the estates and their lords in tabular form was the basis for the maps. The tables contain the names of the lords of the honors, fees and villages and the dates of the sources. The estate maps and their base maps include the

boundaries of the townships, on which different colors indicate the lands of the lords and tenants.

The first step in the second part was the specification of the various groups in local society on the grounds of social status, rank, wealth, and birth. In the second step, I describe the legal and social relations among the different groups and persons. The reconstruction of social processes is the third step, including the decay of the villainage, the decline of feudalism, the evolution of the copyhold system, and the origin of the bastard feudalism.

The roles of the variously ranked groups and persons, which they played in the offices and political life of the shire, were studied in the third part of the thesis. In several statutes the English kings and parliaments prescribed the conditions for holding the different offices, for instance, wealth, land property, income, and social status had important roles in the regulation of office holding. I compared the directions of the statutes relating to the office holding with the data of the assessments.

The territory of Derbyshire (2,631 km<sup>2</sup>) was divided into six hundreds in the late Middle Ages: Appletree, High Peak, Morleston and Litchurch, Repindon, Scarvesdale, and Wirksworth. The lists of the incomplete lay subsidy included the names of 244 villages in 1327-1328. The assessment made in 1334 contains the names of 257 villages. The sources mention six boroughs in Derbyshire (Ashbourne, Bakewell, Castleton, Chesterfield, Derby, and Wirksworth), among which Chesterfield and Derby were considerable. There were seven castles in the shire in the late Middle Ages. The assessment made in 1428 included six *decanatus* and ninety-six parishes, from which four parishes were in Derby borough. The religious orders had twelve monasteries and houses.

The estate structure of the shire and the ranks of the tenants can be described on the bases of the feudal aids, the inquisition *post mortem*, the *placita de quo warranto*, and the charters. The collectors listed the estates; they applied four technical terms to specify the different types of the lands in their works. One part of the estates was known as fees, while the other part appeared as manor, village, or grange in the sources. The collectors often described the sizes of the fees giving the number of the component villages or manors. Approximately six hundred tenants possessed freeholds, but most of them were smallholders. High Peak Forest belonged to the Crown, and the forest included a castle (Castleton), a borough, four manors and at least thirty villages. The Lancaster dynasty had Duffield Forest and twelve villages in the forest, twenty manors, and five other villages. The tenants of the Lancasters held the rest of the lands of the duchy in Derbyshire. 25 knightly and esquire families formed the exclusive group of tenants at the top of society in the shire, possessing three or more fees, manors or villages. There were about 50 to 60 tenants whose families held one or two villages, manors or fees, and twenty families possessed smaller estates between a quarter and half a manor, a village or a fee. The land property of the church was not significant; nineteen ecclesiastical landowners held some granges, villages or fees.

Joshiah Cox Russel estimated the population of Derbyshire at 36,433 persons based on the data of the poll tax in 1377. A later assessment in 1563 contains

10,680 households, but it does not mention the number of the persons who lived in the households. If five persons lived in a household, 53,400 inhabitants could have lived in Derbyshire.

The social structure of the shire can be reconstructed from charters, lists of taxes, feudal aids, and subsidies. The lists of the feudal aids from 1431 contained the names of thirty-five knights, twelve of whom lived in Derbyshire; twenty-three knights held estates in this shire although their residences were in other shires. The names of eighty-two esquires were on the lists. Fifty-three lived in Derbyshire; twenty-nine esquires dwelt in the neighboring shires but held some land in this shire. The lists of feudal aids included the names of 116 gentlemen, ninety-five of whom lived in Derbyshire, but the others resided in the neighboring shires, holding only small estates in Derbyshire. The names of eighty-eight yeomen were listed by collectors, and seventy-seven dwelt in Derbyshire, the others who possessed freeholds in this shire lived in the adjacent shires.

The lists of the poll tax of Derbyshire consisting of twelve rolls contain the data of the dwellers of Castleton, Baslowe, Buxton, Derly, Glossop, Tidiswell, and Youlgrave. The taxpayers' names, occupations, and the names of their wives appeared on the lists. The list of Derby borough includes the names of 558 persons altogether. The crafts numbered over fifty; the assessors recorded the names and the taxes of 178 laborers, 39 spinsters, 12 brewers, 8 smiths, 4 ironmongers, 4 butchers, 4 bakers, 2 millers, 2 tailors.

Common law divided English society into two significant groups in the late Middle Ages: freemen and freeholders were in the first group, villains and copyholders were in the second. Most of English society still did not have free status in the fifteenth century. The upper class contained different groups: the aristocracy was at the head of the social hierarchy, the gentry was in second place, and the free peasantry holding freeholds formed the third group. The burgesses also belonged to the group of freemen, because they had free status. Members of the gentry families were interested in occupying the offices in the shires and burgesses held the offices of the boroughs; these groups were qualified to take part in the political life.

The group of the gentry was not homogeneous. It consisted of three parts: knights were in the first place, squires stood below them in the social hierarchy, and gentlemen had the lowest status in this group. The county community elected the knights of the shire and the sheriff from among the knights and the richest esquires, whose incomes were over 40£ per year. The members of the esquire families often held the office of the escheator, the coroner, and the justice of the peace. The heads of the gentleman families and the young gentlemen played prominent parts in the humbler offices; they were usually the member of the juries in the county and hundred courts or they worked as collectors and clerks under the sheriff of the shire. The educated gentlemen and esquires often worked as lawyers in the courts of the common law or in the bureaucracy of the realm. The numbers in the political society of Derbyshire can be ascertained from the statute issued in 1429 and the feudal aids assessed in 1431. This statute regulated the election of the knights of the shire; in accordance with this, that person was

a qualified voter whose income was forty shillings or more from his freehold. The rolls of the feudal aids contained the names, the incomes, the residences, and the land properties of the tenants. According to the data of the two sources, the political society of Derbyshire consisted of 114 persons: 9 belted knights, 53 esquires, 44 gentlemen, 4 yeomen, 2 clerks, and 2 merchants.

This dissertation contains a description of Derbyshire in the late Middle Ages and the explanation of the terminology relating to land holding, society, and institutions in the shire. Hungarian students and readers can understand the estate, social, and political structures of the medieval English shires by means of pattern of Derbyshire and exact comparative researches can be started with the knowledge of the medieval English terminology.