The History of Myddle

by RICHARD GOUGH

CALIBAN BOOKS

PREFACE

Professor Hoskins has written in the facsimile original edition of *The Antiquities and Memoirs of Myddle*:

> "Gough's *History of Myddle* . . . sounds like the narrowest kind of parish-pump history one could possibly imagine, of interest only to devoted local historians in Shropshire. It is in fact a unique book. It gives us a picture of seventeenth-century England in all its wonderful and varied detail such as no other book that I know even remotely approaches. If History is, as has once been said, the men and women of the past talking and we overhearing their conversations, then Gough's history of his native parish, written between the years 1700 and 1706, is History . . . A whole countryside, an entire society, comes alive in our minds, in a way that no historian, however skilled, can possibly evoke . . . this remarkable book is . . . one of the most entertaining books ever written in English, unique in our literature."[1]

Given the outstanding quality of Gough's work, why is the book not more widely known amongst historians and the general public? The answer lies probably in the nature of the original edition — not only is some of its content antiquarian in nature, but so is much of its style and lay-out. The aim of the present edition is to eliminate material of purely antiquarian interest, and to re-arrange presentation and style of the original — in particular spelling, which has been modernised throughout — so as to make it much more accessible to the modern reader. I have retained all biographical material, as it is the biographies which give the book its central fascination. No alterations have been made to Gough's language, for that is a part of the delight of his writ-

ing. Readers who wish to know more about the original are fortunate in having it readily available in the facsimile edition.

In my introduction I have sought to bring out the quality of Gough's writing — particularly the stories and anecdotes about his contemporaries — by quoting extensively from the text. I have discussed the book from the point of view of the social historian and historical sociologist, and have compiled a detailed subject index, so that anyone who wishes to know more about marriage, the family, the treatment of children, disease, violence, drunkenness, religion, love and a host of other topics in the seventeenth century, can turn to the index at the back of the book. But its main importance is Gough's unique history of a seventeenth century village community, bringing to life his contemporaries in such a vivid and entertaining fashion.

INTRODUCTION

Myddle is in Shropshire near the Welsh/English border, and had a population of about six hundred people at the end of the seventeenth century. It was situated in a woodland area and its economy was almost entirely agricultural, with a heavy emphasis on cattle-rearing; most of its population were small freeholders or tenant farmers, although by the time Gough wrote his book nearly a third of the men of the village had become labourers. Today Myddle is a quiet, peaceful place, a typical English country village. The idealisation of the countryside has led many to see this peacefulness as the dominant historical characteristic of village life, the title of one of Flora Thompson's books — *Still Glides the Stream* — perhaps epitomising this feeling. The romantic treatment of the English countryside has buttressed this image, and there is much in current ideology which points to a harmonious and serene traditional rural community, in order to condemn the perceived violence and disintegration of modern urban life. Gough's writing completely shatters this picture of a rural idyll, but in doing so, enriches our appreciation of the reality of our social history in a uniquely instructive way. Here is Gough on a sequence of events that occurred in Myddle and its neighbourhood:

> There was one Clarke, of Preston Gubballs, who had formerly been tenant to Sir Edward Kinaston, of a tenement in Welsh Hampton, and was indebted for arrears of rent, due to Sir Edward; whereupon he sued out a writ against this Clarke, and sent a bailiff to arrest him; and because Clarke had some lusty young men to his sons, therefore Sir Edward sent one of his servants to assist the bailiff, if need were. Clarke was cutting peat on Haremeare Mosse; Sir Edward's man stayed in the wood in Pimhill; the bailiff went towards Clarke, and being beaten back by Clarke's sons, Sir Edward's man came

> with his sword drawn, and swore he would make hay with them. But one of Clarke's sons, with a turf spade, which they call a peat iron (a very keen thing) struck Sir Edward's man on the head, and cloave out his brains. The bailiff fled; Clarke was rescued; and his son fled, and escaped. The coroner was sent for and by appointment of Sir Humphry Lea, the inhabitants of Myddle paid the coroner's fees. Clarke's son escaped the hand of justice, but not the judgment of God, for he that spilled man's blood, by man shall his blood be spilt, for when all things were quiet, and this thing seemed forgotten, Clarke's son came into this country again, and lived at Welsh Hampton, where a quarrel happening between him and one Hopkin, his next neighbour, about their garden hayment, as they stood quarrelling, each man in his own garden, Hopkin cast a stone at Clarke, which struck him so directly on the head, that it killed him. How Hopkin escaped the law, I have not heard; but vengeance suffered him not long to live, for a quarrel happened between him and one Lyth, a neighbour of his, as they were in an alehouse in Ellesmere, in the night-time, which quarrel ended in words, and Hopkin went towards home; and not long after Lyth went thence. The next morning Hopkin was found dead in Oatley Park, having been knocked on the head with the foot of a washing stock which stood at Ellesmere meare, which foot was found not far from him. Lyth was apprehended, and committed to prison on suspicion of the murder . . .

Three men were killed, two of the killers themselves being murdered in turn. The first homicide occurred because of a dispute over non-payment of rent, the second because of a garden quarrel, and the third as a result of an alehouse brawl. All the disputes were in themselves trivial, and what is remarkable is that three such killings should be linked one to the other in such a small community. These were not isolated incidents however, as Gough mentions a total of ten homicides in the course of his narrative, and although these did not all occur in Myddle itself, it is inconceivable that such a level of violence could occur in a modern rural community

or an urban area of equivalent size. But before I go on to discuss comparative homicide rates, I wish to illustrate the nature and type of violence in this seventeenth century rural area by further quoting from Gough's narrative. The following account of a murder of a young servant maid has tragic and comic qualities, and reminds us that Gough was both a contemporary of Pepys and lived near, both in space and time, to Shakespeare himself. The murderer's name was Hugh Elks, and

> he was an ill man — for he, knowing that a neighbour of his who lived in Eyton had a considerable sum of money in the house, this Elks and some other of his companions came to Eyton on the Lord's day at time of morning service, and having visors on their faces, they came into the house and found there only one servant maid who was making of a cheese, and this Elks stooping down to bind her she saw under his visor, and said, "Good Uncle Elks, do me no harm," and upon that he pulled out his knife and cut her throat. His companions being terrified at the act fled away to Baschurch Church, and Elks seeing his companions were gone fled likewise and took no money, and for haste shut the door after him and left his dog in the house, and came to Marton, but stayed not there, but ran to Petton to church whither he came sweating exceedingly a little before the end of service.
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> When people came from church to Eyton, they found the girl dead, and Elks' dog in the house almost bursting with eating the cheese. They followed the dog, who brought them to Elks' house, and upon this, Elks was apprehended on suspicion.

We will see later in this introduction that theft was common in seventeenth century Myddle, although the above incident seems to have happened in the sixteenth century. "Good Uncle Elks" was presumably not a relative of the maid servant's, but the term was an adopted one (made familiar by anthropologists), i.e. was an expression of a particular kind of

a close community relationship. This murder like the three previously discussed was a crime of passion, enacted in the heat of the moment out of spontaneous feelings of rage and aggression. The people of Myddle were capable however of much more deliberate, dispassionate and cold acts of murder, as is shown by an anecdote of Gough's about the attempt of three Myddle wives to rid themselves of their husbands through poisoning. A certain Thomas Hodden, husband of Elizabeth Hodden

> died, leaving his wife a young wanton widow, who soon after married with one Onslow, a quiet, peaceable man; but she soon grew into dislike of him, and was willing to be shot of him. There were other women in Myddle, at that time, that were weary of their husbands, and it was reported that this woman and two more made an agreement to poison their husbands all in one night; which (as it is said) was attempted by them all; but Onslow only died; the other two escaped very hardly. This wicked act was soon blazed abroad and Elizabeth Onslow fled into Wales, to her father's relations; but being pursued, she was found upon a holiday, dancing on the top of a hill amongst a company of young people.

In spite of this being a description of a murder, the reader cannot but be fascinated by the account of Elizabeth Onslow "dancing on the top of a hill amongst a company of young people" when apprehended. So even here where the quality of deliberateness is to be found, the spontaneity of her reactions in the aftermath has a very seventeenth century ring.

There was only one other murder of the total of ten that could be described as cold-blooded, and this involved another member of the Elks family.

> There was one Thomas Elks, of Knockin, who had an elder brother, who married and had one son, and soon after died and his wife also, and left the child very young.

> The grandmother was guardian to the child. This grandmother was mother unto Thomas Elks, and was so indulgent of him, that she loved him best of any of her children; and by supplying him with money to feed his extravagances, she undid him. But when she was gone poor, and could not supply him, he considered that this child stood in his way between him and the estate, and therefore contrived to remove him: and to that end he hired a poor boy, of Knockin, to entice the child into the corn fields to gather flowers. The corn was then at highest. Thomas Elks met the two children in the fields; sent the poor boy home, and took the child in his arms into the lower end of the field where he had provided a pail of water, and putting the child's head into the pail of water he stifled him to death, and left him in the corn.

But much more typical of homicide in Myddle was the following incident. A young maid was a

> servant to a gentleman who lived near Wellington, and as this young woman was holding water for her master to wash his hands in the kitchen, he cast a little water from off his finger into her face, which her mistress (who was present), seeing, and conceiving it too familiar an action, she in a rage took up the cleaver, and gave her such a blow on the head that she died.

This was the only other murder committed by a woman in Gough's account; like today, most murder and physical violence was committed by men. But the homicide rate was much higher for both men and women in the seventeenth century than it is today. It is impossible to calculate the rate for seventeenth century Myddle with any precision, as Gough does not always tell us when murders took place, and whether all the victims were living in Myddle at the time. According to recently published work, the homicide rate in thirteenth century England was in the range of 9 - 47 annual homicides per 100,000 population,[2] while other research indicates a rate for the sixteenth/seventeenth century period of 5 - 18 per 100,000.[3]

The rate for Myddle appears to have been as high as that found for the thirteenth century, but whatever the precise levels of homicide, it is clear that they were very much higher in all these periods than they are today. The homicide rate in Great Britain during the period 1930 - 59 was 0.4 per 100,000, and there has been little change in recent years.[4] Thus homicide in pre-industrial England — the thirteenth to the seventeenth century — was at least ten times as great as it is today, and may have even been a *hundred* times at particular periods. Certainly the number of violent murders described by Gough for his small rural community confirms the findings of research based on more statistical techniques.

Violence did not of course always result in death, and Gough describes a number of aggressive incidents of a non-fatal kind. He often mentions them in passing as if they were fairly commonplace, and almost murderous attacks were treated as if they were merely everyday incidents. An example of this occurred when Robert Morrall met his father-in-law William Tyler:

> Old William Tyler was his utter enemy, and often threatened to be his death, but Morrall was too hard for him. They met accidentally at a stile in Houlston, and discoursing friendly, they sat down on each side of the stile; but Tyler having a halter in his hand, cast it about Morrall's neck and drew him over the stile, and was likely to have hanged him: but Morrall by his strength and agility freed himself, and did not forbear to beat Tyler severely.

Tyler was obviously a very violent man who was capable of the most extreme acts of aggression, although he never actually murdered anyone as far as we know. But this violence was not limited to a few individuals, but was culturally sanctioned and at times could explode so as to almost engulf and involve the whole community. Gough was fascinated by

Tyler's personality and gave several pages to his exploits and personal history; the following incident described at length illustrates the communal nature of violence. Tyler owed money to a Mr. Bradocke, who had unsuccessfully attempted to serve a warrant on him.

> Afterwards Mr. Bradocke sent his tenant, William Byron (a little man, but stout of his hands), to serve Tyler with another warrant. Byron came (upon Sunday) to Myddle Church to morning prayer (for in those days all writs and processes might be served on the Lord's day). William Tyler came to church with a good backsword by his side, which then was not usual. After service, Byron stood at the church stile; and as soon as Tyler was gone over the stile, Byron leapt on his back, and cast him down. Many of Tyler's companions, and some women of his relations, came to rescue Tyler; but the high constable, Mr. Hatchett, a bold and discreet man, was present, some say on purpose, and he quieted the people. Roger Sandford, of Newton (who married Mary Bradocke, aunt to Mr. Bradocke), was there, with his servants and friends, to assist Byron; and one William Hussey, servant to Roger Sandford, came to assist Byron; and Tyler got Hussey's thumb in his mouth, and worried all the flesh to the bare bone: but Hugh Suker, a weaver, standing by with a pike-staff in his hand, put the pikes into Tyler's mouth and wrenched open his teeth, and released Hussey. At last Tyler was set on horseback, and Byron leapt up behind him to hold him there, and William Hussey led the horse, and thus Tyler went toward the jail. But the consternation and lamentation of Tyler's friends, especially the women, was such as I cannot easily demonstrate . . .
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> All the company followed William Tyler out of town; and at the town's end there, upon a bank near the pinfold, stood John Gossage and several others of Tyler's drunken companions, with a pailful of ale. Gossage cried, "Ah, Will! art going to the jail?" Tyler said, "It is too true." Then says Gossage, "Come, boys; fall on!" but Tyler cried, "Hold, hold. It is to no purpose;" so they took him away. When they came a little below the Lea Hall, the miller of the windmill met them, carrying a sword on his shoulder, with the hilt behind him; Tyler

> put his hand in the hilt of the sword and drew it out, and struck at Hussey; but Byron soon pitched him beside the horse, and took the sword from him. Byron would not give the sword to the miller; and Hussey carried the naked sword in his hand, and led the horse; and so Tyler was brought to jail.

The story speaks for itself and is so rich in detail, that we can only touch on some of its sociological implications. The explosion of violence was contained by the presence of the high constable, although Tyler himself stopped his friends from using violence on his behalf after he had been arrested. We are in a different cultural world to that of today; Gough's world is that of Shakespeare's, a world that has not yet been "civilised", a world in which the Englishman of today — polite, tolerant and non-violent — would find very frightening. But Gough's social world is one of blood and roses — violence, but also of lamentation, loyalty, sadness and love — social intensities which English communities of today certainly lack. With Gough we are not in Freud's world of civilization and its discontents, but are in an era of passionate acting out of impulse and feeling. The language is rich in colour and feeling, and there are passages in Gough's writing which could be mistaken for the work of Shakespeare.

Freud believed that the acting out of intense feelings of violence was associated with a relative absence of neurosis, in particular freedom from clinical states of depression and melancholy.[5] This is based on the theoretical assumption that aggression not expressed outwardly is invariably turned inwards against the self, and that feelings of depression are the result of self-punishment and self-hatred. Several sociologists — including Durkheim — have pointed to the inverse correlation between homicide and suicide rates, i.e. the more murder, the less suicide, and vice versa.[6] This conclusion has come in for a certain amount of criticism in recent years,

mainly on the grounds that such an inverse correlation does not hold in some societies studied.[7] However, most of the exceptions are for non-European societies in which additional cultural factors appear to be acting to complicate the analysis. In European societies Freud's theory seems to fit rather well, and in particular, Catholic countries have (at least until very recently) high homicide but low suicide rates, and Protestant countries the reverse. Seventeenth century England was still "Catholic" from this point of view, and certainly much of Gough's book could easily be mistaken for a description of Ireland and its historical culture until very recently. There were only two definite cases of suicide in Myddle as described Gough, although there was a third ambiguous case of a man who was suffering from grief due to his brother's death, who was soon afterward found dead in a well in his garden. Even if we count this as a case of suicide, the rate seems to have been very low compared to modern experience. Suicide rates were quite low generally in England in the pre-industrial period— varying between 0.6 and 4.0 annual suicides per 100,000 population,[8] compared to about 9.0 per 100,000 today. Whereas suicide is about ten times as common as homicide today, in Myddle homicide was about four times as common as suicide, and this was probably fairly typical of the country as a whole.

The suicide that did occur in Myddle seems to have been linked with violence, as is seen in the following case, which was one of the two unambiguous cases. A certain Clarke was son in law to Richard Wolph, and Clarke's wife having died he,

> by fair and flattering speeches, persuaded the old man to deliver all his estate to him, on condition of being maintained while he lived. Clarke having now got an estate, followed his old way of drinking; and when he came home drunk, he would so abuse the old man, that he made him a weary of his life; and, therefore, in a

> melancholic fit of grief, he went on foot to Wem, and bought poison, which he eat up as he came homeward; and when he came home he was extremely sick, and vomited exceedingly: he told what he had done, and would fain have lived; but no antidote could immediately be had, so he died. The coroner's inquest found him a *felo de se;* and he was buried on Myddle Hill, at that crossway where the roadway from Ellesmere to Shrewsbury, called the Lower-way, goes over cross the way that goes from Myddle toward the Red Bull, but was removed next night: and some say he was interred in a rye field of his own, which is over against John Benion's, in that corner of the piece next the place where Penbrook's gate stood.

The traditional practice of burying a suicide at the crossroads was followed in this instance, although the corpse was reburied privately the following day.

Why was there so much violence in Myddle and other seventeenth century English communities? One answer perhaps can be found in the sanctioning of violence by the government of the day and the relevant local authorities; hanging was of course practised and two of the ten persons responsible for the homicides mentioned by Gough were dealt with in this way. The possible deterrent effect of hanging must have been weakened by the frequency with which murderers escaped this form of punishment: two of the ten escaped detection, three successfully pleaded benefit of clergy — which in effect was a privilege of the rich — one languished in prison until released by the parliamentary authorities during the Civil War, and the fate of two is unknown. There is little evidence anyway that hanging or capital punishment has any deterrent effect, and the violence sanctioned by the authorities is more likely to have increased homicide. Several hangings are mentioned by Gough, but they are usually for quite trivial offences such as horse stealing, theft, and in one particularly pathetic case, a boy was hung for helping in a prison escape. Institu-

tions such as the pillory helped encourage violence; this can be illustrated by the treatment of one Clarke, a Roman Catholic, who had been heard to utter threatening statements about the Church of England. After having been put in the pillory

> The people, by pelting him with eggs, turnips, carrots, stones and dirt, used him so hardly, that the under-sheriff took him down, for fear he should be killed outright. The people followed him to the jail door, and pelted him all the way. He lay some while sick and sore at Shrewsbury, and after he was brought to Ellesmere and there put to stand on the pillory, where he found the like favour from the under-sheriff, and the like hard usage, or worse, from the people; and hereupon the high sheriff wrote a letter to the judge, and acquainted him what he had done, and with all told him, that he could promise to put Clarke upon the pillory at Oswestry, but could not promise to bring him alive from amongst the enraged Welshmen; and thereupon the rest of the punishment was remitted.

Another factor in the high level of violence was almost certainly the amount of drunkenness and general consumption of alcohol. At least three of the ten homicides involved very heavy drinking, and we have seen how violent incidents of the kind associated with William Tyler and his friends were linked with drunkenness. Gough's pages are full of accounts of drunkenness and alcoholic drinking, the first alone having twenty-three entries in the subject index. Mentions of ale-houses and inns proliferate, and a common theme is the economic ruin of families and individuals through debt on account of drink. Drinking was not confined to men, and there are several references to women going to the local alehouses, some obviously on a day-to-day basis (women appeared to have been free of some of the social constraints imposed on them

in the later Victorian period — Gough himself admired women of "masculine spirit"). He moralizes on occasions about the evils of drink, but was capable of great sympathy for certain individuals partly ruined in this way. The following story shows him at his best, weaving a delightful mix of the comic and tragic, revealing at the same time a central feature of seventeenth century social life.

> Thomas Hayward the second was a handsome gentleman, a good country scholar and a pretty clerk. He was a person well reputed in his country and of a general acquaintance. He was just and faithful in affirming or denying any matter in controversy, so that less credit was given to some men's oath than to his bare word. He was well skilled in the art of good husbandry. His father left him a farm of thirty pounds (fee simple) in Newton-on-the-Hill and the lease of this farm in Balderton. He had eight pounds (land in fee simple) left him by an uncle in Whixhall. He married with Alice, the daughter of Mr. Wihen, high school master, in Shrewsbury. He had a good fortune with her in money, besides houses in town of considerable yearly value. She was a comely woman, but highly bred and unfit for a country life, besides she was shrewd with tongue, so that they lived unquietly and uncomfortably, and their estate consumed insensibly.
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> He had little quietness at home which caused him to frequent public houses merely for his natural sustenance, and there meeting with company and being generally well beloved he stayed often too long. His intimate friend was Mr. Hotchkins of Webscott, and indeed there seemed to be a natural sympathy between them for they were both of them very just honest persons and well beloved — but their deportment when they were in drink was very different for Mr. Hodgkins could go but not speak, and Mr. Hayward could speak as well and seemed to be more acute and witty in his drink then at other times but could not go.
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> This Thomas Hayward sold and consumed all his estate and was afterwards maintained on charity by his eldest son.

Addiction to drink and the local ale-house was not confined to the poor and the culturally rough; in fact the distinction between a respectable middle class and a rough working class did not properly emerge until the nineteenth century.[9] The segregation of social classes also probably did not arise until the same period, and the easy relationship between people of different social statuses was partly a function of cultural spontaneity (including drinking) mentioned earlier. An example of this lies in the relationship between Thomas Jukes and Sir Humphrey Lea.

> Thomas Jukes was a bawling, bold, confident person; he often kept company with his betters, but showed them no more respect than if they had been his equals or inferiors. He was a great bowler, and often bowled with Sir Humphrey Lea at a bowling green on Haremeare Heath, near the end of the Lea Lane; where he would make no more account of Sir Humphrey, than if he had been a plough-boy. He would ordinarily tell him he lied, and sometimes throw the ball at his head, and then they parted in wrath. But within few days, Sir Humphrey would ride to Newton, and take Jukes with him to the bowls; and if they did not fall out, would take him home and make him drunk.

The familiar mixture of aggression, drunkenness and sociability is to be found in this anecdote. It also illustrates the relative social openness of a community like Myddle, and this may have been partly a function of it having been in a woodland area. Contemporaries believed that woodland communities were particularly prone to violence; for example, Norden wrote that "the people bred amongst woods are naturally more stubborn and uncivil than in the champion counties", and Aubrey saw the woodlanders as "mean people (who) live lawless (with) nobody to govern them, they care for nobody, having no dependence on anybody."[10] This was because settlements were scattered in woodland areas — there was a

total of seven townships (hamlets) within the parish of Myddle, plus the chapelry of Hadnall — and they tended to have a large number of freeholders and independent small farmers; this can be contrasted with champion villages, where the population tended to be concentrated into a single nucleated village under the control of the local squire.

An additional factor in the case of Myddle was that it was a marcher lordship, created to deal with border violence between the Welsh and the English. The marcher lord was given certain summary legal and military powers, including the power of immediate execution of Welsh raiders and criminals transgressing local laws. This institution was no longer in being when Gough was writing, but it may have left a tradition of violence in its wake. An instance of this was the heriot custom in lordship marches; the heriot on entering the lease of a farm was "the best weapon" — and the availability of personal weapons was associated with many of the incidents of violence described by Gough.

But the use of personal weapons in violence was not confined to border areas and they were worn almost universally at about this time. At the end of the sixteenth century William Harrison wrote:

> ". . . seldom shall you see any of my countrymen above eighteen or twenty years old to go without a dagger at least at his back or by his side . . . Our nobility wear commonly swords or rapiers with their daggers, as doth every common servingman also that followeth his lord and master."[11]

Little is known about the history of personal weapons — as far as I know virtually no research has been done on this important social historical subject — but it is probable that the wearing of such weapons declined mainly in the eighteenth century. This appears to have coincided with a dramatic fall in the

homicide rate,[12] and both probably began to decline at the very beginning of the eighteenth century after Gough had completed his work. I suspect it is no accident that this was the period when the industrial revolution was getting underway, although what was cause and what was consequence is difficult to disentangle. Such a major topic is clearly beyond the scope of this introduction, although we might notice in passing that the decline of homicide and the outward expression of aggression occurred at the same time as the growth of puritanism (in particular Methodism), which Weber saw as instrumental to the development of capitalism.[13]

One special factor in the creation of violence during Gough's lifetime was of course the Civil War. Gough gives a number of accounts of incidents in the Civil War, some of which were based on personal experience, and it is this personal flavour which brings to life so vividly his narrative. An example of this was when he witnessed Robert More trying to recruit men for the king's army:

> I was then a youth of about eight or nine years of age, and I went to see this great show. And there I saw a multitude of men, and upon the highest bank of the hill I saw this Robert More standing, with a paper in his hand, and three or four soldier's pikes, stuck upright in the ground by him; and there he made a proclamation, that if any person would serve the king, as a soldier in the wars, he should have fourteen groats a week for his pay.

It is often because Gough knew the participants — or at least knew of them — that he was able to bring out the human side of a war which has often been treated in an abstract fashion. Listen to the following description of an incident between royalist and parliamentary forces; a certain Scoggan was made governor of a garrison placed at Abright Hussey:

> I remember the soldiers fetched bedding from Newton for the use of the soldiers there. They took only one

> coarse bed hilling from my father. A party of horse, of the parliament side, came on a Sunday, in the afternoon, and faced this garrison, and Scoggan, standing in a window, in an upper room, cried aloud, that the others heard him say, "Let such a number go to such a place, and so many to such a place; and let twenty come with me:" (but he had but eight in all in the house). And Scoggan, seeing one Phillip Bunny among the enemies, who was a tailor, born in Hadnall, he took a fowling gun, and called to Bunny, and said, "Bunny, have at thee!" and shot him through the leg, and killed his horse. The parliament soldiers took up Bunny, and departed.

Gough certainly makes us question some of our preconceptions about the Civil War period. The association between puritanism and parliamentarianism comes in for a shaking by the following story:

> Mr. Mackworth made Captain Hill (a prodigal drunken fellow, who before the wars was a pitiful barber in this town) lieutenant of the castle. But the townsmen and garrison soldiers hated him; and therefore as soon as there was a prospect of the return of King Charles II they conspired against him; and one of the townsmen sent for him out of the castle to drink with him at the Loggerheads, an alehouse hard by; and as soon as he was gone out of the castle, the soldiers shut the gate and cast his clothes and boots over the wall, and immediately the town was in an uproar; and Hill for fear of his life fled away that night and I never heard more of him.

A drunken barber made the lieutenant of a parliamentary garrison, and ejected on the advent of the return of the king — it is this type of evidence which leads to the re-writing of history books. But how reliable is Gough as an informant? Where it has been possible to check him against other sources, he has been found to be highly accurate.[14] He had the habit of repeating himself without realising it, and this allows us to check on his internal consistency; most of the repetitions are trivial and have been eliminated from the edited text, but in

order to let the reader compare one duplicated story for himself, I give the following important passage which will be found in alternative form on page 118.

> Robert Hayward the eldest son of Thomas Hayward and Alice his wife, was set apprentice to a refiner of silver in London. (I have heard him say that his father gave only the price of an old cow with him.) His master was a dissenter and was one of that sect which are called millenarians, or fifth monarchy men. After the restoration of King Charles II, the men of this sect were persuaded or rather deluded by their teachers and ringleaders, that now the time was come that Christ's Kingdom was to begin on earth, that they must provide themselves of arms and fight for their Lord and King against Antichrist; that they need not fear, although they were but few, for one of them should chase a 100, and 100 should chase 10,000, and by such persuasions these poor deluded people made an insurrection in the city, which being showed to his majesty and his council, the king commanded that his life guard and the city militia should be sent to suppress them. I heard it reported that in the streets of the city they fought very desperately, and some were killed but many wounded on both sides. At last the city militia got some behind them, and some came upon them through cross streets, so that being encompassed about on all sides they were forced to lay down their arms and cry quarter; the prisons in London were filled with them. Robert Hayward was one of the prisoners. Some of the ringleaders were executed and some of the rest were fined, and those that had nothing were set at liberty.

Although both accounts give more-or-less the same version of the uprising, the above is more detailed on the degree of resistance and the tenacity of the rebellion. In the text account "they were all pardoned except their ringleader who I think was hanged", whereas in above "some of the ringleaders were executed". Gough was probably at his least reliable when he had no direct personal experience of the event described, and

fortunately for us, most of his stories relate to the arena of his own personal life, i.e. the community of Myddle.

I mentioned at an earlier point the prevalence of theft in Myddle — thirteen pages in the text mention the subject — and not surprisingly most of the goods stolen were agricultural produce. I quote the following story at length as it illuminates a number of sociological themes in the one passage. A certain Reece Wenlocke

> was descended of good parentage, who were tenants of a good farm, called Whottall, in Ellesmere Lordship. But the father of this Reece was a bad husband, and a pilfering, thievish person, and this son, Reece, and another son, named John, who lived at Bald Meadow, in this parish, were as bad as their father. They never stole any considerable goods, but were night walkers, and robbed orchards and gardens, and stole hay out of meadows, and corn when it was cut in the fields, and any small things that persons by carelessness had left out of doors. Reece had a cow, which was stolen away, and it is reported that he went to a woman, whom they called the wise woman of Montgomery, to know what had become of his cow; and as he went, he put a stone in his pocket, and told a neighbour of his that was with him that he would know whether she were a wise woman or not, and whether she knew that he had a stone in his pocket. And it is said, that when he came to her, she said, thou hast a stone in thy pocket, but it is not so big as that stone wherewith thou didst knock out such a neighbour's harrow tines. But the greatest diskindness that he did to his neighbours was, by tearing their hedges. And it is reported, that he had made a new oven; and, according to the manner of such things, it was at first to be well burnt, to make it fit for use, and this he intended to do in the night. At that time William Higginson dwelt at Webscot, and he had a servant, named Richard Mercer, a very waggish fellow. This Mercer did imagine that Reece would tear his master's hedges to burn the oven; and as he walked by a hedge, which was near Reece's house, he saw there a great dry stick of wood, and took it home with him, and bored a hole in the end of it with

an auger, and put a good quantity of powder in it, and a peg after it, and put it again into the hedge. And it happened, that Reece Wenlocke, among other hedgewood, took this stick to burn in his oven; and when he cast it into the fire in the oven, it blew up the top of it, and set fire on the end of the house. Reece went out and made hideous crying, fire! fire! William Higginson, being the next neighbour, heard him, and called Mercer, but he said I know what is the matter; however, they went both down to the Meare House, but Reece had put out the fire that was in the end of the house, and the oven was broken to pieces.

The combination of theft, humour and violence makes compelling reading, although it is easy to forget the ruthlessness involved in blowing up someone's house as a part of a practical joke. The theft which took place seemed fairly indiscriminate, and if we are worried today about the level of burglary and theft, we can take historical comfort in how much more our ancestors were prone to this particular problem. Gough's mention of the wise woman of Montgomery is his only reference to a contemporary belief in magic, although various beliefs which we would now consider superstitious (for example, the linking of pigeons with disease) are referred to. Some social historians have stressed the importance of witchcraft beliefs, but this is for other areas of the country and for an earlier period of the seventeenth century.[15] Its complete absence in Myddle is somewhat surprising nonetheless, particularly when it is remembered that Gough was capable of taking his history back a hundred years or more to before when he was born (the practise of oral history was obviously very strong in the village).

Ruthlessness was not confined to acts of personal violence, but could extend to personal relationships within the family. A certain Samuel Downton had contracted a great deal of debt, mainly through drink, and had come to run an alehouse.

> After some years this Samuel Downton and his wife (having sold some of their household goods) got away from Cockshutt in the night-time and left all their children behind them — four of which were after maintained by the parish of Ellesmere. They went into Staffordshire and there he went a begging like an old decrepit person and she carried a box with pins and laces. But after awhile she got a new spark that travelled the country and went away with him, and then this Samuel came again to Alderton to his son Thomas who maintained him during his life.

The harsh treatment of children seems to have been rare going by the evidence provided by Gough; they were occasionally deserted as in the Downton family, and sometimes (as we have seen) violence was used against them. But there are as many references to indulgent treatment of children, and this perhaps explains in the main why so many children were prepared to maintain and take care of their aged parents (there are eight pages in the text in which this is mentioned). Gough does mention however hostile reactions of children towards their parents; for example, one of the disputes resulting in homicide started when Charles Hesketh used "very scurrilous, abusive, and undutiful language towards his parents."

Fairly frequent mention is made of desertion and separation between marriage partners, such as occurred between Samuel Downton and his wife. Flight was a common response to unresolvable situations (Ireland was frequently mentioned as a place that people ran to in difficulty) such as a marriage breakdown; the other common reason for running away was in order to avoid responsibility for an illegitimate child. Illegitimacy appears frequently in Gough's pages (sixteen pages in the text include references to it), and the following gives a flavour of his treatment of the subject. William and Margaret Challoner had

> three daughters, two of which are as impudent whores as any in this country; one of them has two bastards, and she being run out of the country, they are both maintained by the parish. The other is now (Jan. 20, 1701) great with a bastard, and at Christmas last was sent by order into Wem parish, where her last service and settlement was. She has fathered it on Stephen Formeston, her uncle's son, and he has fled.

According to the local parish register, only about one per cent of all baptisms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were of illegitimate children,[16] but this figure is very unreliable when set against Gough's evidence. Probably many illegitimate children were never baptised, and this should make one very wary of using these statistics uncritically.[17] Gough himself did not mention all examples of illicit sexuality in Myddle; the Anglican ecclesiastical court charged Arthur Davies and Jane Morris in 1699 and 1700 with "living together in open fornication",[18] and although Gough refers to them after they were married, there is no mention of any sexual impropriety.

Not surprisingly, venereal disease appears more than once in Gough — there are three pages of the text which mention it. Disease and illness were very common in Myddle at this time, and although there is no systematic treatment, we do get an invaluable insight into the subject. The symptoms of rickets and scurvy are described, and the presence of these illnesses indicate that inadequacies of diet were present. Both diseases were however extremely rare, and other evidence in Gough's book suggests that most people were adequately fed — meat appearing to be a central part of the staple diet. (The overconsumption of meat may have been a reason for the case of scurvy.) The most serious disease at this time appears to have been "fever", and there was at least one damaging epidemic outbreak in Gough's time (the exact cause of this fever is unknown — it was probably typhus). Plague had appeared in Shrewsbury, and Gough mentions certain individuals catching

and dying from it in London — but by this period it was mainly an urban disease, on the point of disappearance. There are three mentions of smallpox, and although it was very widespread at this time, it was still a relatively benign disease — its virulence only really increased at the beginning of the eighteenth century. There is a frequent mention of childlessness and this may have been because of the prevalence of diseases like smallpox, because even in mild form it is capable of producing infertility. Lameness appears fairly frequently, often due to the accidents which were a common hazard in seventeenth century Myddle. Illness was treated by doctors and apothecaries, although probably only the wealthy used their services to any extent; much more common was the practice of amateur medicine, and women seemed to have played a significant role in this, particularly in surgical operations (this may have been associated with their roles of midwives). Gough does give an example of what we might call magical medicine; one woman tried to cure her illness through the "King's Touch" — this was the practice of people being touched by the king when he was touring the countryside, in the belief that he had charismatic powers of cure — sadly with the lady in question, the cure was unsuccessful.

If Gough is at all a reliable guide, mental illness was extremely rare at this time; there was only one case of what might be called a psychotic illness, and one other case of what we would now call mental defectiveness — although Gough describes the sufferer much more evocatively, in calling him an "innocent". Of course there were people displaying neurotic symptoms, but these seemed to have been less frequent than they are today. Melancholy is mentioned on four pages, but given the number of people mentioned in the book, this does not appear to have been a common complaint. This is consistent with the relatively low suicide rate, and it would there-

fore seem that people living in this seventeenth century community were less afflicted by the various forms of mental illness. This may have been due partly to their ability to express openly their most intense feelings — including those of aggression — in an open social context. Another factor might have been to the close-knit nature of the community; this is most strikingly illustrated by Gough's own knowledge of the people in the village — who today could know so much about so many people in the community in which they live?

We should not exaggerate however the absence of personal problems at this time; there are frequent mentions of unhappy marriages, quarrels and violence. One major problem that many people had to face was poverty and destitution. Gough mentions in passing the practice of paupers being made to wear a paupers' badge — a P sewn onto their clothing — which reminds us of the harshness of seventeenth century life, particularly in the treatment of the poor. Admittedly, Gough tells us that there were virtually no parish poor in his father's time — the payment of the poor-rate was virtually non-existent — but there were clearly people in great destitution, with mentions of begging and children being forced to maintain their aged relatives. Bankruptcy and debt were very common, often as we have seen on account of drink, but also due to the vagaries of trade and commerce. Many merchants and tradesmen are said to have gone bankrupt — Gough tells us that they "broke" — and this was frequently because of a chain reaction of bankruptcies. This subject is most often mentioned in connection with people living in Shrewsbury and other local towns, but in this connection London looms surprisingly large in the lives of the people of this small rural community. But London was the centre of prosperity as well as bankruptcy, and a number of poor people are said by Gough to have made their fortune by emigrating to that place.

The rise and fall in prosperity of tradesmen and merchants is a theme which is mirrored in the surprisingly large amount of social mobility. Nine pages in the text mention cases of upward mobility, and ten downward — with an additional seven pages giving cases of general social mobility — a total of twenty-six pages. This may have been the result of the relatively open nature of the social structure of the community discussed earlier. Education was also much more common in Myddle than might be expected, with frequent mentions of schools and the teaching of both reading and writing. Myddle in this respect was a "civilized" community, and we must set this aspect of social life against the violence and drunkenness discussed earlier in the introduction. The latter emphasis could be misleading if we did not balance it out against descriptions of contrary behaviour given to us by Gough. Many people are described as peaceable, honest, just, charitable, pious, hospitable and hard-working. Most good stories tend to involve the vices rather than the virtues, and Gough himself sometimes admits that he has little to say about a particular person because of their quiet peaceableness (there are ten pages of the text with an entry in the index under the heading of "peaceable"). The conclusions we come to about the nature and quality of life in seventeenth century must ultimately be personal and based on our own values; but as happy endings are best, I will conclude by quoting at length from Gough's account of a man who he considered to have lived a virtuous and happy life. Thomas Ash

> was a proper, comely person; his father gave him good country education, which, with the benefit of a good natural wit, a strong memory, a courteous and mild behaviour, a smooth and affable way of discourse, an honest and religious disposition, made him a complete and hopeful young man, insomuch as Mr. Edward Hanmer, of Marton, was easily induced to give him his

daughter Elizabeth to wife. This was a very suitable match, for she was a lovely, proper gentlewoman, and so like to her husband in disposition, that it should seem there was a sympathy in nature between them, and therefore they lived a loving and comfortable life together. This Thomas Ash was not so much blamed for being too nice in observing the canons, as he called them, of the first counsel of the apostles at Jerusalem, in abstaining from blood and things strangled, as he was commended for avoiding that abominable sin of profane swearing. For this Thomas Ash was much in debt; but how it was contracted I cannot say, unless he was charged with the payment of portions to his sisters, and I doubt he had but little portion with his wife; however he bore an honest mind, and was willing to pay every man, and to that end he set his tenement to Edward Payne of Meriton, for raising of money to pay debts; and to shelter himself from the fatigue of duns, he listed himself soldier in the king's service in the wars, tempore Car. I, and continued a soldier until the king's forces were utterly dispersed, but never attained to any higher post than a corporal of foot. At his return, he brought nothing home but a crazy body and many scars, the symptoms of the dangerous service which he had performed, and besides, he fould little of his debts paid, for the payment of taxes and charges of repairs had taken up most part of the rent; but he being minded that none should lose by him, sold his lease to William Formeston. He had some money to spare when he had satisfied his debts, and with that he took a lease off Mr. Crosse of Yorton, of several pieces of ground near Yorton Heath, and there he built a little warm house, made a neat little garden, planted a pretty orchard, built several outhouses, and made everything very handsome and convenient, and there he and his loving wife spent their old age, though not in a plentiful, yet in a peaceable and contented condition.

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6. Emile Durkheim, *Suicide* (Routledge, 1968), pp. 338-360; A. F. Henry and J. F. Short, *Suicide and Homicide* (1964).
7. See for example, P. Bohannan, *African Homicide and Suicide* (1960). But recent WHO statistics seem to confirm the inverse relationship between homicide and suicide. In particular, traditional pre-industrial societies have high homicide but low suicide rates, whereas modern industrial societies—including Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong—have low homicide but high suicide rates. See *WHO Statistics Annual 1973-76—Vital Statistics, Causes Of Death.*
8. P. E. H. Hair, "A Note on the Incidence of Tudor Suicide", *Local Population Studies*, No. 5 (Autumn 1970).
9. See for example, Mary Thale (Ed), *The Autobiography of Francis Place* (1972).
10. Quoted in David G. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle Under the Tudors and Stuarts* (1974), p. 7. I have relied on Hey's excellent study for much of my background information on Myddle.
11. William Harrison, *The Description of England* (1968), p. 237.
12. Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 61. Homicide rates in Surrey and Sussex fell from an average of about six per 100,000 in 1663-94 to just over two per 100,000 in 1722-24 and to lower figures thereafter.
13. Following Freud, puritanism can be seen as the turning of aggression inwards against the self, i.e. through the creation of a harsh, self-punishing super-ego.
14. Hey, *op. cit.*
15. See for example, A. D. J. Macfarlane, "Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex", in Cockburn, *op. cit.*
16. Hey, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
17. The treatment of illegitimacy in Peter Laslett's *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (1977) is perhaps open to criticism on these grounds. It would be interesting to see how the new historical methodology of total reconstitution would stand up to independent assessment through the kind of information contained in Gough.
18. Hey, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

DR PETER RAZZELL