

Apprenticing by the ‘Corporation’ families

Deborah mentions research done into the apprenticing of the younger sons of gentry in Surrey. Banbury is not a ‘gentry’ place: look to villages such as Deddington, Aynho and Farnborough for their sons. In the town, tradesmen formed the hierarchy. Even Banbury’s one armigerous family, the Halls, formerly of South Newington, were, one suspects, coming down in the world. Anthony Hall, the head of the family, married the daughter of the unforgettably named Organ Nicholls, Mayor in 1641-2; his nephew Richard, son of his younger brother Richard Hall, was apprenticed to Roger Craven of the Skinners Company (1620), father or son becoming an ‘upholder’ dying in 1644.

For the men and families who mattered in seventeenth century Banbury, look to the Corporation. Once elected one of the six Burgesses, progressing by seniority to promotion as Alderman, you were in place for life.

However, the same custom applied to tradesmen as it did to the gentry. The eldest son was trained in and inherited the family business. The second son was apprenticed to provide him with a separate livelihood. Of the 48 boys whose order of birth has been ascertained, 22 were second sons. There were nine youngest sons.

As many as fourteen were in fact eldest sons, but with several there were reasons for this departure from the norm. John Bree’s father (1638) may have suffered in Banbury’s fire of 1628. Thomas Vane’s father (1664) was a servant to Sir Richard Chamberlaine of Wickham in the parish of Banbury.

In Parsons Lane, Thomas Sutton’s father (1671), also Thomas, was vintner at the Reindeer, and did not have security of tenure (the inn still belonged to the Knight family). John Barnes’ father (1678) was victualler at the Poleaxe. Samuel Welchman (1688) was son of Edward, baker of the famous cakes, by his second marriage; there were four elder half-brothers, and only one younger brother. In any case, his father had died in 1685.

Richard Welford’s father Thomas (1699) was sergeant-at-mace to the Corporation, though this was hardly a full-time job; he did have a trade as a glover. Mr James Wheatley, father of Nathaniel (1683), had died in 1666. Two others whose fathers had died were locally apprenticed: Edward Southam (1713) at Oxford, Edward Style(s) (1717) at Coventry.

During the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I Banbury was dominated by the Knight family: John Knight (d.1587) and, even more, by his son William (1558-1631). They owned extensive property in the town and had built the Reindeer. William went to Merton College, Oxford, followed by the Inner Temple. Twice Bailiff, he was instrumental in the