

THE debt owed by historians to the Brownes of Townend for the preservation of documents that fill thirty-one large boxes in the Kendal Record Office is immeasurable. Unfortunately no other similar family archive has apparently survived. The tendency therefore is for the history of Troutbeck to be dominated by the activities of this family. It is not easy to assess their relative economic and social status in the community or the degree to which their activities were typical of their fellow yeomen.

The township of Troutbeck in the 16th century was a close-knit community anxious to exclude outsiders¹ and to run its own affairs, despite its theoretical subordination to the manorial court at Windermere. The twelve jurymen not only reported to the manor court, they also took a leading part in the meetings of the inhabitants,² which could be attended by all the tenants. The system of communal farming³ gave all tenants a chance to participate in its supervision and to bring about necessary changes. For example, complaints to the ecclesiastical authorities about the distance they needed to travel to the parish church for christenings and funerals secured for their minister the power to dispense these rites in 1562.⁴ Disputes were settled by arbitration however long drawn-out they were⁵ and, in 1583, a determined effort was made by the inhabitants to set the township finances in order. The successful operation of such an integrated system was facilitated by the relative economic equality that existed: in 1574 thirty-eight out of fifty-six tenants had a similar holding – one of five catells, i.e. the right to pasture five cattle or the equivalent number of sheep. For this they paid 6s. 8d. rent.⁶ But the ambitions of those who sought economic advancement tended to be held in check by the system of partible inheritance.⁷

By the mid-16th century, however, the Brownes of Townend had acquired a substantial holding and enjoyed a leading role in the township. At his death in 1558 George Browne held twenty catells, having sold another five to James Braithwaite in 1537.⁸ He was chosen, in 1552, as one of the five representatives of Troutbeck helping to define the boundary with Ambleside. In 1554 he acted as one of the six inquisitors assisting the Bishop of Chester's visitation.⁹ Whether he was the most prosperous member of the community, however, is doubtful. He was certainly not the most generous. He bequeathed a mere 3s. 4d. to the rebuilding of Troutbeck chapel; a meagre sum in comparison with the £3 6s. 8d. assigned respectively by James Byrked in 1557 and John Cookson in 1561.¹⁰ Moreover, there were two chapmen, or merchants, living in Troutbeck at this time who may well have had greater resources. Both of these men, Thomas Atkinson and William Rycherson, acted with George Browne as representatives of Troutbeck in 1552. It is likely that Thomas Atkinson was making a good living as he was engaged in carrying cloth all the way to Southampton for export.¹¹ Similar evidence has not survived for William Rycherson but this man was sufficiently prosperous to employ a servant in 1561.¹² The flocks of George Browne were not unduly large compared with those of some

other tenants: he had 120 sheep in 1558; Thomas Birkhead had 112 and also kept a servant, Mabel Borwick.¹³

The prosperity of the Brownes was clearly checked in the mid-16th century by the division of their holding, in accordance with the principles of partible inheritance,¹⁴ between George's two sons, Thomas and Christopher.¹⁵ Each inherited ten catells. Despite the fact that Thomas' portion included Townend and Limefitt mill, as well, he appears to have fallen on hard times and in 1569 leased out Townend to George Robinson and his son.¹⁶ The house was still a very modest one: it comprised only a firehouse with two chambers above, a cowhouse and a barn.¹⁷ In 1574 it was George Borwick rather than either of the Brownes who had the bigger holding: he paid £1 3s. 4d. rent compared with the 13s. 4d. owed by Thomas Browne and seven others.¹⁸ Nor was Thomas one of the jurymen chosen in 1583 to regulate the township's finances.¹⁹

One of the most prosperous inhabitants at the end of the century was the chapman William Longmire who, like Thomas Atkinson before him, was carrying cloth to Southampton for export.²⁰ At his death in 1605 he not only held ten catells and a third of ten catells in Troutbeck but he also had a tenement at Limefitt owing 7s. 6d. rent and four others in Applethwaite each owing a rent of 2s. 6d.²¹ This was a time when wool prices were buoyant and William Longmire had sheep worth £90 together with cattle valued at £25.²² Even allowing for increased values at a time of inflation this indicates greater wealth than that of George Browne whose 120 sheep were worth only £14 15s. 4d. in 1558. The flock of William Longmire must have been large: William Birkhead's flock of 265 sheep was worth £38 17s. 0d. in 1607,²³ so William Longmire must have had a flock more than twice this size in 1605. There were also other tenants in Troutbeck at the end of the 16th century who had flocks similar in size to William Birkhead's, notably Stephen Braithwaite, Richard Browne and George Browne of Townfoot.²⁴ The wills of these more prosperous yeomen provide scant evidence of profits being used to provide a more comfortable lifestyle but some were keeping servants or buying small pieces of silver. When he died in 1607 William Birkhead had twelve silver spoons worth 40s. William Longmire had only two in 1605 but they were of better quality; they were worth 12s.

The sizeable flocks owned by the more prosperous tenants in Troutbeck at the end of the 16th century indicate a close link with the flourishing cloth industry in nearby Kendal. But small surpluses of wool, yarn and cloth were also sent to Kendal by the less prosperous: packsaddles, girths and wantons figure prominently in the inventories of the period.²⁵ Troutbeck may have been a close-knit community but it was aware of the opportunities of the market even if those opportunities were restricted by limited resources.

The Brownes of Townend, it is clear, were not the most prosperous family in Troutbeck throughout the 16th century. The desire for economic advancement, evident in the case of George Browne, was far from unusual. Few were able to respond on any substantial scale to the possibilities of the cloth trade but many tried to participate in it, even on a limited scale, and some enjoyed considerable success.

The 17th century offered the tenants of Troutbeck plenty of opportunities to build up their prosperity. With the rapid growth of London and the prohibition on the import of Irish cattle in 1667, Troutbeck, situated on a branch of the drove road from Scotland, was well placed to profit from the cattle trade. There was still a ready

market for wool and cloth in Kendal. The Kendal tanning industry provided an incentive to coppice woodland and to sell the bark. Even arable farming could produce a surplus if strips, or dales, were exchanged and the holdings consolidated.²⁶ Partible inheritance was largely abandoned, facilitating the building up of bigger holdings, though younger sons were often forced to move away to find employment.²⁷

In the course of the century three George Brownes held Townend, each bequeathing their holding intact and building up the family's prosperity both by the more efficient use of resources and by the acquisition of more land. The first of these George Brownes, who held the property 1587-1637, was exchanging strips in the Townfield, the bigger of the two open fields, in 1600, presumably with a view to improving his output and possibly to diversify his crops.²⁸ He built a weir above his mill at Limefitt to increase the flow of water for grinding.²⁹ By 1623 he was described as holding "divers customary messuages".³⁰ His son and namesake who held the property 1637-85 bought William Longmire's third of ten catells at the Fold in 1648 and in the following year half of the corn mill, together with kiln, and half of the fulling mill at Troutbeck Bridge. In 1674 he bought the Lane tenement from George Birkett and the manor of Baysbrowne. By 1675 he was looking further afield, acquiring property in Yorkshire.³¹

Their growing prosperity was enough in itself to arouse jealousy and hostility in a community in which relative equality had once been the norm but the methods used by the Brownes aroused bitter and widespread opposition.

It is hardly surprising that the younger sons regretted the abandonment of partible inheritance. George Browne (d.1637) tried to offset the result by securing from his eldest son and successor during his lifetime, a promise to pay money from the tenements he inherited to his other brothers. But after his death his eldest son and namesake denied the existence of such an undertaking. One of the brothers died in 1637 but in 1646 the other two sued their brother George in Chancery accusing him of "divers cruell and wicked threats and menaces" aimed at impoverishing them.³² The claim made by George that they had taken advantage of a loss of memory and understanding he had suffered four or five years previously seems decidedly dubious in view of the fact that he lived to the ripe old age of 90! At least the brothers managed subsequently to acquire property in the neighbourhood: Thomas at Drummermire Head and at Townhead and William at Orresthead.

The building of a weir above his mill at Limefitt not only improved the efficiency of the mill; it enabled George Browne to catch 400 fish in 1614. It did, however, impede the movement of the trout and salmon to and from Lake Windermere and consequently aroused the ire of the manorial lord who was no less than King James I. Summoned before the Court of the Exchequer in 1615 George Browne had the temerity to deny the right of his lord to the fish of the river; an assertion, the lawyers claimed, that "never any customary tenant heretofore did offer the like".³³

Although George Browne fought this case essentially in his own interests the other tenants were probably not unsympathetic since the king was attempting to alter the favourable nature of their tenure.³⁴ It was another matter, however, when attempts were made by his grandson to improve the profits from agriculture. Market opportunities were making it increasingly difficult to maintain the communal system of farming and the acceptance of the interests of the community. In 1686 the

tenants of Lowest Hundred, one of three Hundreds created to preserve communal pasturing, collected enough money to instigate a case in Chancery against George Browne and another tenant for overstocking the Hundred. These areas, they claimed, had been created to prevent the “oppression” of the pasture. George Browne, therefore, was contravening custom for his own private gain.³⁵ He was building up his herd of cattle and was still keeping a sizeable flock of sheep. In 1672 he had 229 sheep to grease³⁶ and the following year he had 74 stones of wool stored in his garner.³⁷ The enclosure of the open fields of the Heald and Townfield proceeded slowly and on the whole peacefully by the mutual exchange of strips. In 1696, however, George and Rowland Browne and Elizabeth Thompson were accused of “notoriously breaking” into a close belonging to George Longmire.³⁸ The Brownes now regarded arable crops as a commercial asset and were determined to maximise the yield even to the extent of taking over a neighbour’s enclosure. They were also buying in barley to increase their sales of malt. In 1677 George Browne complained that the 3s. 4d. he received for each of the 120 bushels of malt was “the most I get”. He sold 240 bushels in 1682 and in 1693 got £56 12s. 0d. for the sale of malt.³⁹ By the turn of the century he was selling malt in Ambleside, Grasmere and Patterdale.⁴⁰

The antagonism aroused by the commercial ambitions of the Brownes was not limited to their immediate neighbours. In the 1650s George Browne had a long drawn out dispute with the bailiff of Troutbeck Park Farm, William Birkett, who accused George, his son and Richard Browne of breaking down his fences, destroying his crops and using dogs to chase his sheep, killing some and driving others to “places unknown”.⁴¹ The source of the trouble was George’s claim that William had granted him rights of pasture at Dalehead in the north of the Park as long as he was in charge; a claim denied by William. The dispute became so bitter that the two attacked each other, each claiming that their life was “despaired of” by the injuries inflicted by the other.⁴²

In the course of the same century the Brownes were also trying to increase their prosperity by gaining sole control over coppices in which tenants had originally held dales as they held strips in the Open Fields.⁴³ The desire to make a maximum profit from the sale to the Kendal tanners of the bark from these oak coppices resulted in too frequent cutting, causing Alderman Wilson of Kendal to complain, in 1694, that the wood inside the bark sent by George Browne was “very inconsiderable” and fit only for firewood.⁴⁴

The awareness of market forces and the determination to take advantage of them is evident enough in the case of the Browne family in the 17th century. But was their attitude exceptional in Troutbeck?

There were certainly other families anxious to profit from the flourishing tanning industry and they were prepared to challenge the rights of their manorial lord to do so. Nor did the fact that their lord was Queen Catherine of Braganza deter them. In 1688, led by George Browne, twenty-one of them challenged in Chancery her right to the bark of oak trees.⁴⁵ There was a good market for bark not only in Kendal but also in their own township: tanners like George Birkett were among the most prosperous inhabitants. At his death in 1662 he had goods worth £241 18s. 0d.⁴⁶ The goods of few tenants amounted to more than £100.

The desire to profit from good cattle prices and the sale of wool and cloth to

Kendal was reflected more in frequent overstocking of the pasture than the acquisition of numerous tenements. In 1653 only five tenants had three tenements.⁴⁷ Already in 1630, however, the manorial court at Windermere threatened a fine of 6s. 8d. against anyone exceeding their stint.⁴⁸ George Browne was not the only tenant in Lowest Hundred in trouble in 1686. James Cookson was accused of pasturing 10-12 times the number of animals allowed by his stint.⁴⁹ There were a substantial number of inhabitants whose cattle were now worth more than their sheep and a few had abandoned sheep rearing altogether. Others, however, had specialised in sheep rearing to the exclusion of cattle⁵⁰ and there is little doubt that good profits could still be made from the cloth trade. The value of sheep increased in the early 17th century and the houses in Troutbeck were reckoned to be “better builded” because of the trade in cloth.⁵¹ Chapmen, or mercers, were flourishing: Christopher Birkett (d.1676) was buying extra land⁵² and in 1665 James Wilson had wool and hemp worth £40 12s. 0d., and cloth, tobacco and other goods worth £32 in his shop.⁵³ Others were apparently operating wool collecting centres: Miles Borwick had wool worth £16 13s. 4d. in 1665.⁵⁴

Enclosure was only proceeding slowly⁵⁵ and the value of the tenants’ crops rarely exceeded £10 when an inventory was taken at their death.⁵⁶ Efforts were being made, however, even by the less prosperous, to improve their output by liming the soil. In 1640 the carpenter Matthew Birkett ordered his wife and son to ensure that all the lime in his kiln was “sett upon the ground of my tenement”.⁵⁷ Any surplus that was produced in the township at the end of the century would fetch a good price: corn was very expensive in Ambleside in 1703.

The need to borrow money to tide tenants over difficult periods is evident at least as early as the 16th century when the church stock was used for this purpose.⁵⁸ By the latter 17th century there were some tenants with sufficient resources to lend. In 1675 Robert Borwick of Troutbeck Park, whose total goods amounted to only £49 15s. 2d. had £96 1s. 8d. owing to him.⁵⁹

The commercial instincts of the Brownes therefore were certainly not unique in the township. At the end of the 17th century the family was amongst the more prosperous, though assessments for the war against France, and for the school, indicate that George Longmire was marginally better off.⁶⁰ In no case, however, had any tenant acquired great wealth. Troutbeck was still a community of modest sized houses and moderate sized holdings.⁶¹ Moreover, there was still a strong desire to maintain the communal system of agriculture, as the actions of the tenants of Lowest Hundred in 1686 indicate. As late as 1764 the Townfield was described as belonging “almost to the whole township”.⁶² There was plenty of poverty and the indigent would be anxious to retain a system based on mutual consent and understanding.

The economic ambitions of the Brownes were closely linked with the desire for social advancement. George Browne was doubtless delighted, in 1623, to secure for his son the hand of Suzannah Rawlinson, daughter of Thomas Rawlinson of Grisedale Hall, and it was hardly surprising that the marriage contract provided for the likely extension of the small house at Townend.⁶³ A downhouse, or kitchen, was added soon afterwards.⁶⁴ A similar policy was followed by George’s grandson who arranged in his turn the marriage of his son in 1656 to Ellinor Fearon, who was descended from two good Cumberland families: the Fletchers of Moresby and the

Senhouses of Netherhall. Extensions to the property followed again. The barn was rebuilt in 1666 and by 1674 the house had at least six hearths. By 1692 it had a parlour (the present library), a study and a buttery, with six or seven lofts above.⁶⁵ One of these lofts was over the buttery: there was both a lads and lasses loft (George had seven children) and a felons loft. The outbuildings now included a brewhouse, a garner and a stable, as well as the barn. As the house grew, so did the degree of comfort. George's table in 1656 could be laid with five silver spoons and a silver bowl,⁶⁶ and four servants were being employed in 1669.⁶⁷

By this stage the Brownes were trying to imitate the gentry. There were no families in Troutbeck who merited that status, in the sense that they were sufficiently prosperous to lead a leisured life and, indeed, the Brownes were still working farmers. But by 1668 George Browne had assumed the title of "gent." in an attempt to distinguish himself from his less prosperous neighbours.⁶⁸

There is no doubt that the Brownes played a prominent role in the community throughout the 17th century. In 1605 his father, also George Browne, was chosen by the inhabitants of Lowest Hundred to be one of their three representatives helping to define the boundaries of the Hundred⁶⁹ and his importance in the township was recognised by his appointment as deputy bailiff of the Richmond Fee.⁷⁰ This position was also held by his son in 1665⁷¹ who was also High Constable of the Kendal Ward⁷² and kept his felon's loft to assist that work. It was his name that headed the list of those tenants challenging the Queen's right to oak bark in 1688.⁷³

The Brownes of Townend, however, were not the only yeomen of Troutbeck in the 17th century to have social aspirations. The use of the title "gent" by Henry Heblethwaite of Ecclerigg antedates its use by George Browne by some forty years.⁷⁴ James Cookson, George Browne's fellow offender in 1686, was described as having built himself a "mansion" at Skelgill.⁷⁵ His will, drawn up in 1671, refers not only to his ancient tenement of Drummermire but also to other messuages he had bought or exchanged.⁷⁶ Other inhabitants had servants, though Stephen Braithwaite in 1606 and George Birkett in 1662 had only one.⁷⁷ In 1665 the chapman, or mercer, Christopher Birkett shared with George Browne the job of deputy bailiff. He was not only buying additional land⁷⁸ but was likely to be living in a sizeable house, having acquired a library of two hundred books by 1694,⁷⁹ sixty more than Benjamin Browne, who inherited Townend in 1703. The Hearth Tax returns of 1674 list a Christopher Birkett as having four hearths in his house as opposed to George Browne's six.⁸⁰

There were a few other inhabitants who had houses of a comparable size to Townend in 1674, notably George Longmire whose house had five hearths. The Longmire family was certainly prominent in the township in the earlier part of the century. In 1619 George Longmire was one of those in bond for the payment, by Troutbeck, of its share of the money which had to be paid for the confirmation of its privileged tenancy.⁸¹ He was also chosen in 1624 as one of two arbitrators in Highest Hundred to help settle a dispute over the maintenance of the lanes.⁸² The Borwick family were highly regarded in the township in the same period. Three members of the family were involved in the division of the Hundreds in 1605⁸³ and Miles Borwick acted as joint arbitrator with George Longmire in 1624.

The Brownes of Townend, therefore, appear to have been one of a small group of relatively prosperous tenants in the 17th century whose property and status were

marginally, if at all, greater than other members of this group. Despite their social pretensions their younger sons had to be content with modest careers. The George Browne who died in 1703 set up his second son, Richard, with £30 as a weaver in Kendal; Henry, his third son, enlisted in the ranks of the army and the youngest, Daniel, was reported by his brother Richard in 1699 to have left his master and to be idle and unemployed. Unless he joined the army he was likely to starve. The Brownes tried to use influential friends to secure jobs for their younger sons but they gave most of them little financial help and did not foresee any great prospects for them.⁸⁴

George Browne was succeeded by his second son Benjamin in 1703, his eldest son, another George, having died in infancy. Benjamin was well placed to further the family's ambitions. He had worked closely with his father for a number of years and soon showed his aptitude for taking advantage of economic opportunities.

In every field he followed and improved on his father's work. A new barn was erected at the Lane; the soil was regularly limed; additions were made to his kiln at Limefitt and improvements were carried out at the mill at Troutbeck Bridge.⁸⁵ He was purchasing turnip seeds as early as 1718.⁸⁶ The traditional close contact with the Kendal cloth industry was retained; he maintained a flock of over 200 sheep, supervising the spinning and weaving of the wool and sending harden cloth to Kendal.⁸⁷ The size of his herd was increased⁸⁸ and the value of his cattle sales soon outweighed those of his sheep. In 1724-5 his cattle realised 87% of his livestock sales.⁸⁹ He responded to the growth of the Furness iron industry and its desperate shortage of charcoal by purchasing more oak coppices: he had acquired High Ibbtholme and Oakathorpin by 1711 and Scalehow and the Hagg by 1714.⁹⁰ In 1714 he received £170 for the wood from three of his coppices.⁹¹ Much of the bark was still being sent to Kendal but Benjamin found another, possibly more lucrative, coppice in Patterdale.⁹² In his own opinion he was a man of "considerable estate" and he was looking for property far beyond the boundaries of his township. By 1735 he had bought the Sun Inn at Lancaster.⁹³

The Brownes were not the only inhabitants to respond to the possibilities afforded by the market in the early 18th century. Given the scarcity of charcoal the woodgrowers could hold out for good prices and the woodmongers, who controlled the whole process of handling the wood from cutting it down to the stripping of the bark and production of charcoal, could make a healthy profit. The woodmonger William Birkett of Lowood, who handled most of the wood of Troutbeck and much of that of the surrounding area, made a profit of 15% in this period. By 1750 his profit had risen to 30%.⁹⁴ Only those with extensive woodland could expect an annual income from their wood sales but in 1737 John Cookson received £105 from his.⁹⁵

The high prices of grain in the early 18th century encouraged the more enterprising tenants to maintain and even improve their arable output. In 1716 the grain owned by George Birkett was worth £30 out of the total value of his goods of £140. Robert Cookson's grain was worth nearly a quarter of his goods in 1734⁹⁶ and nearly twice as much as his sheep. The woodmonger William Birkett, like Benjamin Browne, was experimenting with the growth of turnips, as the recipe for turnip bread in his accounts testifies.⁹⁷ If turnips had been a rarity in Westmorland at the end of the 17th century, as Pringle maintains,⁹⁸ it was apparently no longer the case.

Overstocking on the communal pasture continued to be a problem in the early

18th century. The tenants of Lowest Hundred had to extend the stint, originally imposed only in the summer, to the winter as well.⁹⁹ By the end of the century they were trying to combat the continuance of the problem by appointing two forest keepers instead of one.¹⁰⁰ The desire for profit was apparently overriding the interests of the community.

A similar commercial awareness is evident in the attitude of the tenants to the sale of bark. In 1717 they joined with those of Applethwaite to oppose the attempt of the Kendal tanners to prevent the export of bark to Ireland. They argued that the supply of bark in North Lancashire and Westmorland exceeded the demands of the tanners; therefore export must be allowed to keep up prices.¹⁰¹ Their claim that the sale of bark provided the main profit of several hundred landowners is distinctly dubious but their preparedness to take concerted action to protect their economic interests is clear.

Borrowing and lending, as already mentioned, had been part of the lives of these modest yeomen for long enough. By the early 18th century some tenants, notably the Brownes of Beckside, were making a profitable living from it, investing some of those profits in land and acquiring other properties from those unable to repay their debts. In 1724 the debts owed to William Browne, most of which had been made on the security of land, exceeded the total value of the goods owned by Benjamin Browne the Younger when he died in 1747.¹⁰²

The desire for profit, therefore, seems to have been fairly general among the tenants in the early 18th century and the presence of carriers such as James Birkett, owner of the Black Cock, and George Walker of Lowwood must have facilitated the movement of goods out of the township.¹⁰³ While some prospered, however, others fell into debt having to sell some or all of their land. In 1744 twenty-seven tenants were paying less than 1s. 8d. rent.¹⁰⁴ Others had become subtenants. Although still among the most prosperous, the Brownes of Townend were little, if at all more wealthy than some others. When an assessment was made for flagging the chapel in 1708 the amount paid by Benjamin Browne was very similar to that paid by John Longmire and George Birkett.¹⁰⁵ Benjamin paid £1 12s. 9d. in rent in 1706 as opposed to the £1 2s. 2d. paid by John Longmire.¹⁰⁶ Such comparisons are, however, only of limited value. Benjamin held property outside Troutbeck and John Longmire may well have done so. In 1747 the goods of the younger Benjamin Browne, to whom his father had handed over control of the family property, amounted to £242 15s. 0d.¹⁰⁷ Those of William Browne of Beckside in 1724 totalled £346 17s. 0d. and John Wilson had goods worth £300 2s. 0d. in 1742.¹⁰⁸

The social pretensions of the Brownes of Townend grew apace in the early 18th century. The house had 19 windows by 1714 and a new wing had been added by 1739.¹⁰⁹ Benjamin sold all his old pewter and bought new; he sent away as far as Wigan for fine spoons. His library of 142 books included one entitled *A Gentleman's Calling* and another describing "An Elegant and Compendious Way of Writing All Manner of Letters". He pandered to his personal vanity by buying three wigs in 1727 and was sufficiently obsessed with the idea of aping the gentry to buy a cast-off coat of Lord Lonsdale's.¹¹⁰ As soon as he inherited the property in 1703 he designed a coat of arms¹¹¹ quartering on it a double-headed eagle! It is hardly surprising that the lawyers of Chancery regarded this extrovert as "chief of the chapelry" and the prominent part played by Benjamin in the township meeting and in providing a link

between Troutbeck and the parish church¹¹² seems to justify the dictum. He was sufficiently well thought of in the area to be used by Elizabeth Otway of Ambleside in sorting out her affairs and this he successfully accomplished.¹¹³ He also followed the family tradition in holding the prestigious offices of High Constable of Kendal and bailiff of the Richmond and Marquess Fees.¹¹⁴ His younger sons were provided with greater career prospects than their predecessors: not only was his second son, Benjamin, sent to London to train as a lawyer; Richard became an excise officer and Christopher, the youngest, an apothecary in Kendal.

The social aspirations of Benjamin Browne, however, sometimes ran counter to the interests of the township. The appeal made by him to the Archbishop of York for permission to erect a pew in the chancel, which ignored the customary right of the salaried men to assign such seats, resulted in a group of infuriated tenants breaking into the chapel at night to hack down the offending pew with an axe.¹¹⁵ If their leader, William Birkett, was the woodmonger from Lowwood his actions may well have been inspired by jealousy of a man trying to assume dominance in the community. Others were primarily concerned with protecting local custom and the right to order their own affairs. The bitter antagonism aroused by the affair is undoubted: Benjamin complained that James Longmire was “full of malice and revenge against me”. Nor was his behaviour as a member of the Windermere Twenty Four and a sidesman of the parish church likely to endear him to his neighbours. He was ordered by the rector in 1719/20 to sue in the spiritual courts those failing to pay the highly unpopular wool tithe. In 1725 he extracted from his fellow tenants twenty stones of wool in payment of the tithe, condemning less conscientious sidesmen for their negligence.¹¹⁶ The tenants were increasingly reluctant to see their profits from wool sales lessened by payments to a parish church to which they were so loosely linked.

There is little doubt that other inhabitants shared the “upwardly mobile” ambitions of the Brownes of Townend. The Window Tax returns of 1714 indicate that there were three other tenants who had houses with 19 windows: James Birkett, George Birkett and Richard Robinson.¹¹⁷ James Birkett was living in Ambleside when he died in 1747 but he owned both Great House and the Black Cock Inn in Troutbeck.¹¹⁸ His goods, including the debts owing to him, were worth £188 5s. 10d. He was not a bookish man – his books were worth a mere £1 – but he had a clock with a case worth £1 3s. 0d. and plate worth £10. Richard Robinson was influential in the township. In 1692 he shared with George Browne of Townend and William Birkett the responsibility of raising the Poll Tax for the war against France.¹¹⁹ Others were assuming the title of “gent.”, notably the woodmonger William Birkett, who was highly regarded by his neighbours. He was called upon to arbitrate in disputes, appraise goods of the deceased, act as a governor of the school, and be foreman of the Troutbeck Jury.¹²⁰ In 1750 he was asked to write out an account of the custom of paying the minister.¹²¹ His clock cost him £2 3s. 6d. and in 1733 he paid 5s. 6d. to have his watch mended.¹²² The younger Benjamin Browne’s clock, however, was more valuable: it was worth £4 0s. 0d.¹²³

The limited value of the goods owned by the younger Benjamin Browne when he died in 1747 – less than £250 – makes it clear that the Brownes of Townend never acquired great wealth in this period despite their aspirations. They remained, however, throughout the period, one of the more prosperous tenants, and the

prominent role they consistently played in the affairs of Troutbeck reflects their economic stability. Other families were less successful. All the goods and chattels of James Cookson and Christopher Birkett were sold at Lowfold in 1707¹²⁴ and the property of George Longmire was broken up in 1737.¹²⁵ The responsiveness of the Brownes to market forces was by no means unusual: it was shared not only by chapmen who often had greater resources but also by other inhabitants who had a surplus for sale. The inhabitants of Lowest Hundred might have been anxious in 1686 to maintain the communal system of pasturing but the desire for profit was a constant threat to its survival and made the retention of relative economic equality increasingly difficult to maintain.

Notes and References

- ¹ They even objected to an inhabitant from Applethwaite settling in Troutbeck in 1707 (CRO(K) WD/TE 1/11/313).
- ² *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/105.
- ³ M. A. Parsons, "Pasture Farming in Troutbeck, Westmorland, 1550-1750", *CW2*, xciii, 115-130.
- ⁴ CRO(K) WD/TE 1/111/3.
- ⁵ Armitt MSS. 29, p.15.
- ⁶ P.R.O. E 178/3130.
- ⁷ This meant that the holding was divided between all the sons.
- ⁸ CRO(K) WD/TE 6/5a.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 6/3; 26/1. G. Browne, "The Advowson and some of the Rectors of Windermere since the Reformation", *CW2*, ix, 43.
- ¹⁰ Lancashire Record Office [hereafter L.R.O.] WRW/K.
- ¹¹ *Vide supra* n.3. The woollen trade, stimulated by the financial help and support of Sir William Parr of Kendal Castle, had prospered during the reign of Edward IV and probably reached the height of its prosperity in the reign of Henry VIII. The decline only began in Elizabeth's reign (Susan E. James, "Sir William Parr of Kendal: Part I, 1434-1471", *CW2*, xciii, 103; M. L. Armitt, "Fullers and Freeholders of the Parish of Grasmere", *CW2*, viii, 195).
- ¹² L.R.O. WRW/K.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Although partible inheritance was apparently not widely practised at the end of the 16th century it seems to have survived more commonly in the clothing parishes of Westmorland (A. B. Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (1978), 53).
- ¹⁵ CRO(K) WD/TE 6/5a.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6/5.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ¹⁸ P.R.O. E 17/3130.
- ¹⁹ CRO(K) WD/TE 4/XIV/105.
- ²⁰ B. C. Jones, "Westmorland pack-horsemen in Southampton", *CW2*, lix, 65-84. None of those carrying cloth to Southampton are specifically identified by Jones as coming from Troutbeck but there were chapmen known by these names living in Troutbeck and they doubtless travelled via Kendal where they are listed as bound for Southampton. In 1597 William Longmire bought a message and tenement from Christopher Longmire, a Southampton tailor, at Limefitt (CRO(K) WD/TE 7/115).
- ²¹ L.R.O. WRW/K.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.* A wanton was a rope or band used to fasten the pack on a pack saddle.
- ²⁶ The mutual exchange of strips had begun at least by the beginning of the century.
- ²⁷ Three of the five sons of George Browne of Townend (d.1703) left the township to find employment (*vide infra*).

- ²⁸ CRO(K) WD/TE 6/10.
- ²⁹ S. H. Scott, *A Westmorland Village* (1904), 146-150.
- ³⁰ CRO(K) WD/TE 4/XV/84.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 7/F160; 6/28; 6/26; 6/27a; 7/161.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 4/XV/84.
- ³³ Scott, *op. cit.*, 146-150.
- ³⁴ CRO(K) WD/TE 6/lb.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/211.
- ³⁶ A dip of tar and butter designed, it was believed, to protect against excessive wet weather and from disease.
- ³⁷ CRO(K) WD/TE 1/111/221.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, WQ1/4.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, WD/TE 11/1.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 11/2.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/181.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 1/11/15; 7/F15.
- ⁴³ M. A. Parsons, "The Woodland of Troutbeck and its exploitation to 1800", *CW2*, xcvi, 79-100.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.
- ⁴⁷ CRO(C) D/Lons 5/2/11.
- ⁴⁸ CRO(K) WD/TE 3/IX/ 18.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/211.
- ⁵⁰ M. A. Parsons, "Pasture Farming in Troutbeck", *CW2*, xciii, 124.
- ⁵¹ CRO(K) WD/TE 2/VI/113.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, GL79.
- ⁵³ L.R.O. WRW/K.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ CRO(K) WD/TE 4/XV/132. In 1764 the Townfield was still described as "belonging almost to the whole township".
- ⁵⁶ Even William Birkhead, who had goods worth £189 19s. 8d., only had cereals worth £11 (L.R.O. WRW/K).
- ⁵⁷ CRO(K) GL85.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, WD/TE 4/XIV/105.
- ⁵⁹ L.R.O. WRW/K.
- ⁶⁰ CRO(K) WD/TE 23 (School). In 1692 George Longmire had to pay £1 3s. 5½d. and George Browne £1 2s. 9½d. towards the assessment for the war against France (*Ibid.*, 3/IX/47).
- ⁶¹ Few were able to bequeath more than £100 in their will. In 1696 no Troutbeck inhabitant was qualified to serve on a jury for the Kendal barony (*Ibid.*, WQ1/4). The Hearth Tax of 1674 lists only six houses with more than three hearths (*Ibid.*, WD/RV/28/Fleming).
- ⁶² See n.53
- ⁶³ CRO(K) WD/TE 7/119.
- ⁶⁴ The National Trust Townend Guide Book.
- ⁶⁵ CRO(K) WD/TE 4/XIV/279.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7/150.
- ⁶⁷ Will of Richard Browne (L.R.O. WRW/K).
- ⁶⁸ CRO(K) WQ1/1.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 6/7.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 3/IX/5.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2/5/44.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 1/10.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/156.
- ⁷⁴ George Browne, "The Advowson and some of the Rectors of Windermere since the Reformation", *CW2*, ix, 47.
- ⁷⁵ CRO(K) WD/TE 4/XIV/211.
- ⁷⁶ L.R.O. WRW/K.

- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
⁷⁸ CRO(K) GL87.
⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, WD/TE 2/VI/287.
⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, WD/RV/28 Fleming.
⁸¹ *Ibid.*, WD/TE 4/XV/54.
⁸² *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/137.
⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6/7.
⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2/IV/125; 2/V/262; 2/V/266.
⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1/11/81.
⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8/3. According to Pringle, turnips were “quite a curiosity” in Westmorland in 1793 T. H. Bainbridge, “Eighteenth Century Agriculture in Cumbria”, *CW2*, xlii, 60.
⁸⁷ CRO(K) 3/VII/125.
⁸⁸ In 1729 he bought 18 “Scotts kine” at Penrith (*ibid.*, 8/2).
⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 20/4.
⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1/IV/241; 5/XVI/373; 3/X/15d.
⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3/X/15d.
⁹² *Ibid.*, 20/4/2.91.
⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3/11/108.
⁹⁴ M. A. Parsons, “The Woodland of Troutbeck”, *CW2*, xcvi, 87.
⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.
⁹⁶ L.R.O. WRW/K.
⁹⁷ CRO(K) WD/TE 20/4.
⁹⁸ *Vide supra* n.85.
⁹⁹ CRO(K) WD/TE 1/11/378.
¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 24 (Lowest Hundred Account Book).
¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 4/XIV/125.
¹⁰² L.R.O. WRW/K.
¹⁰³ George Walker had horses and “furniture” worth £90 at his death in 1725 CRO(K) HK 680.
¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, WD/TE 3/IX/125.
¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1/111/59.
¹⁰⁶ CRO(C) D/Lons. 5/2/11/170.
¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7/127.
¹⁰⁸ L.R.O. WRW/K.
¹⁰⁹ CRO(K) WD/TE 8/2; 1/111/300; 3/X/59.
¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8/2.
¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9/7.
¹¹² *Vide infra*.
¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 2/VII/1 *et seq.*
¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1/111/187; 2/IV/326.
¹¹⁵ M. Parsons, “Troutbeck Chapel of Ease from its foundation to 1800”, *CW2*, xcvi, 153.
¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.
¹¹⁷ CRO(K) WD/TE 3/X/59.
¹¹⁸ L.R.O. WRW/K.
¹¹⁹ CRO(K) WD/TE 3/IX/47.
¹²⁰ M. A. Parsons, “The Woodland of Troutbeck”, *CW2*, xcvi, 85.
¹²¹ CRO(K) WD/TE 24.
¹²² *Ibid.*, 20/4.
¹²³ *Ibid.*, 7/127.
¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3/VIII/30.
¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2/IV/221.