

'Hue and Cry from Town to Town': Towards a Social
Geography of Outsiders in Medieval England

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Introduction:
The Social Geography of Medieval England

The emphasis is upon the physical remains of the period, landscapes, buildings, pottery and coinage...Across this scene figures, indeed persons, move. The motives of [people] are laid bare: greed, opportunism, pride and the stimulus of achievement carry aristocrat and peasant alike to the high water marks of Medieval society, into those stagnant pools beyond the terrible barrier of the plague, and eventually, painfully, outward to new seas. [1]

This passage is taken from a review by B.K. Roberts - an historical geographer - of C. Platt's attempt to write a combined 'social history and archaeology' of England between 1066 and 1600, and it provides a useful starting point for reflecting upon the achievements to date of historical geographers working on Medieval England. Indeed, it might be argued that, for all the excellent research into the manifest distributions and morphologies exhibited by towns, villages, markets, village greens, parks and fields, [2] these geographers have tended to back away from allowing 'figures, indeed persons' to move across the scene of their studies. It might be argued that they have - in Britain at least - tended to imitate H.C. Darby's concern for the economic phenomena of past geographies, and that in the process the more indelibly human or - perhaps to be more precise - social phenomena of Medieval England have been neglected. [3]

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- [1] Roberts B K, 1981, 'Review of Platt's Medieval England', Journal of Historical Geography 7, p.203.
- [2] Recent collections including work by both historical geographers and researchers from cognate disciplines on such distributional and morphological matters are Cantor L (ed.), The English Medieval Landscape (London, 1982); Hooke D (ed.), Medieval Villages: A Review of Current Work (Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1985). And see also several of the papers in Slater T R, Jarvis P J (eds.), Field and Forest: An Historical Geography of Warwickshire and Worcestershire (Norwich, 1982).
- [3] This is not to suggest that Darby strictly excludes 'the social' from his studies, since he clearly does not, but it is interesting that he refers to his two companion works - The Draining of the Fens (Cambridge, 1939) and The Medieval Fenland (Cambridge, 1940) - as, respectively, "economic and geographical in character" (Darby H C, 1940, op.cit., p.xi). Where, we might ask, does this leave 'the social'?

This neglect has had many consequences, of course, not least of which has been the failure of Medievalists to follow historical geographers of later periods in drawing inspiration and theoretically-informed materials from social historians, sociologists and even social theorists. [4]

A few signposts towards a social geography of Medieval England can be identified, however, and these are to be found in several studies looking at residential differentiation - by occupational and other social groupings - in Medieval towns and cities, [5] and also in the path-breaking work of R.M. Smith on the interlocking demographic and social geographies of Medieval village communities. [6] This work is clearly only just beginning, and much more remains to be done before we can speak with confidence about the social geographies of urban and rural Medieval settlements, but my own interest lies not so much with these social geographies of settlements, as with the spaces, places and geographies implicated in the lives of all those various social groups who, for whatever reason, stood outside of the normal haunts and routines of Medieval society. These groups hence had only fleeting, sometimes 'parasitic' and often unhappy encounters with the peoples of regular Medieval urban and rural settlements. My 'model' for this interest is the sadly-neglected research of David Sibley, a geographer at the University of Hull, who has devoted many years to investigating the ways in which gypsies and other - as he calls them - 'outsiders in urban societies' both use spaces and places for their own ends and have their lives interfered

[4] This criticism seems to lie behind Unwin's comments regarding the need for more attention to be directed at the Medieval period. See Unwin T, 1986, 'Review of Baker and Gregory's Explorations in Historical Geography', **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers** 11(NS), p.251.

[5] See, for example, Vance J E, 1971, 'Land assignment in pre-capitalist, capitalist and post-capitalist cities', **Economic Geography** 47, pp.101-120; Langton J, 1977, 'Late Medieval Gloucester: some data from a rental of 1455', **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers** 2(NS), pp. pp.259-277. Also of interest in this respect is Langton J, 1975, 'Residential patterns in pre-industrial cities: some case studies from seventeenth century Britain', **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers** 65, pp.1-27.

[6] See Smith R M, 'Modernisation' and the corporate Medieval village community in England: some sceptical reflections', in Baker A R H, Gregory D (eds.), **Explorations in Historical Geography** (Cambridge, 1984), pp.140-179.

with by the organisation of spaces and places demanded by 'mainstream' society. [7] And it is my intention to offer a preliminary 'Sibleyesque' treatment of Medieval outsiders, which included within their number such diverse characters as the wandering entertainers - the minstrels, bards, jugglers and jesters, the itinerant hawkers and tinkers, the roaming preachers and friars, pilgrims, herbalists, outlaws and criminal gangs lurking in the forest, 'lunatic lollers', run-away 'wild men' and 'love-sick knights', vagrants, beggars and lepers. [8]

The question must arise as to how the social geography of these Medieval outsiders might be reconstructed, and at this point it is signal to consider R.M. Smith's views regarding those documentary sources from which demographic and social aspects of Medieval communities can be retrieved:

...manorial court rolls, wills, ecclesiastical court and quarter session records have seemed rather frustrating documents when compared with the clinical neatness of so many of the sources used by those working on the relatively over-researched nineteenth century. Yet these sources are vital for any detailed research into such matters as the social geography of descent systems and inheritance, the organisation of group contacts and networks in localised political

[7] The fullest account of Sibley's project is given in Sibley D, **Outsiders in Urban Societies** (Oxford, 1981). I summarise some of this research and attempt to enlarge upon the notion of a 'social geography of outsiders' in Philo C P, **'The Same and the Other': On Geographies, Madness and Outsiders** (Loughborough University of Technology, Department of Geography, Occasional Paper No.11, 1986).

[8] The chief inspiration leading me to this subject was a reading of Jusserand J J, **English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages** (Bath, 1970), which was initially published in 1889. Jusserand focuses upon what he calls 'professional wayfarers', as opposed to casual passers-by, and he then distinguishes between 'lay wayfarers' and 'religious wayfarers': "[w]ayfarers belonging to civil life were in the first place quacks and drug-sellers, glee-men, tumblers, minstrels and singers; then messengers, pedlars and itinerant chapmen; lastly, outlaws, thieves of all kinds, peasants out of bond or perambulatory workmen, and beggars. To ecclesiastic life belonged preachers, mendicant friars, and those strange dealers in indulgences called pardoners. Lastly, there were palmers and pilgrims, whose journeyings had a religious object but in whose ranks, as in Chaucer's book, clerk and lay were mingled"(p.93).

systems and the geography of deviant behaviour. [9]

This being said, Smith then proceeds to acknowledge that

[m]any of these problems can be effectively pursued without a community study in the style of histoire totale, [10]

and I would wish to add that such a movement beyond the detail of community studies is not only possible, but essential if the broader contours of the Medieval 'geography of deviant behaviour' - or outsider behaviour - are to be mapped and then interpreted. As a result, it will be necessary to produce an impressionistic account based on some familiarity with a variety of sources - parliamentary legislation; records both of miscellaneous local inquisitions and of instructions delivered by the King to specific subjects; the religious and philosophical deliberations of 'great thinkers'; contemporary poetry, literature and historical writings; as well as local customs and folklore - and, although the following is barely a first approximation to what could be achieved, I hope that it will indicate some possibilities exciting to the 'geographical imagination' [11] of historical geographers labouring on Medieval England.

[9] Smith R M, 1981, 'Review of Macfarlane et al's Reconstructing Historical Communities', Journal of Historical Geography 7, p.107.

[10] ibid..

[11] This expression is popularised in Harvey D, **Social Justice and the City** (London, 1973), esp. pp.23-27, and is also the title of Gregory D, **The Geographical Imagination: Social Theory and Human Geography** (London, forthcoming).

Outsiders and the Places of 'Merrie England'

The unit of settlement upon the English plain was the village community. It was a remarkable association because, despite all its inconveniences it repeated itself not only over a great part of England but also a great part of Europe; a thousand years from 500 to 1500, extending many of its features even into later times. Characteristic of agricultural plains that were easily settled, the village community was the systematic expression of a mode of life. 'All such establishments, though different in form - a fact due to climatic differences or to different stages of social development - are the expression of the same need. That is to centralise agricultural activity in some one place. A cooperative agreement as to dates in the agricultural calendar, and the time for certain tasks, is adopted for the advantage of all concerned'. [12]

Here, then, we encounter the picture that most of us harbour with respect to the landscape of 'Merrie England': small, compact villages nestling amid large 'open fields', the one village separated from another by dense tracts of waste and forest (much of which was the King's Royal Forest) through which muddy highways meandered, and this composite rural scene interspersed with occasional grander, proto-urban settlements where markets and fairs would periodically be held. This vision is somewhat caricatured, of course, not least because recent scholarship by Christopher Taylor and others is suggesting the 'polyfocal' rather than

[12] Darby H C, 'The economic geography of England, A.D.1000-1250', in Darby H C (ed.), **An Historical Geography of England before A.D.1800** (Cambridge, 1936), pp.189-190. Numerous academic texts have sought to 'capture' this crucial importance of the 'Merrie English' village, and to stress the intimate relationships between 'open field' agriculture, nucleated settlements, the rise of the 'manor' and the role of the local parish church. See, for example, Seeböhm F, **The English Village Community** (London, 1883); Maitland F W, **Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England** (Cambridge, 1897); Vindogradoff P, **The Growth of the Manor** (London, 1904). Useful reviews of such matters in the literature of historical geography are Mitchell J, **Historical Geography** (London, 1954), esp. Chapter IV; Roberts B K, **Rural Settlement in Britain** (Folkestone, 1977); Robinson D M, 1982, 'The villages of 'Merrie England': myth or reality', **Swansea Geographer** 19, pp.2-9.

nucleated nature of many Medieval villages, [13] but it remains a useful context against which to consider both the social geography and - as we will see - the sociology of Medieval outsiders. An initial point, though, is simply that the majority of these outsiders belonged neither to the villages nor to the early towns, since they were travellers or wanderers whose first home was on the road, in the hedgerow or by the woodland stream.

In the first part of this paper, then, I wish to identify a few - though by no means all - of these travellers and wanderers, and in so doing to indicate something of their associations with both the marginal places of forest and waste and the more frequented places of village, town, market and fair. Even a casual examination reveals that there were many shades of Medieval 'outsiderness', and - reticent as I am about providing typologies - it may be useful to distinguish between different outsider populations along two axes: one specifying whether the settled community wished to exclude or include a certain group, and the second specifying whether the outsiders themselves wished to be excluded from or included in this settled community (see figure on following page). [14] As this preliminary typology suggests, different outsider groups stood in very

[13] See Taylor C, **Village and Farmstead: A History of Rural Settlement in England** (London, 1983). A careful review of this book is Glasscock R E, 1986, 'Review of Taylor's Village and Farmstead', **Medieval Archaeology** XXX, pp. ?, where it is quibbled - in much the same vein that I made my remarks above about the 'asocial' nature of much geographical research on matters Medieval - that Taylor's "evidence is drawn from landscape, rarely from people"(p.?).

[14] It is interesting to consider the Medieval minorities that are not 'handled' well by this typology, and these fall into two basic categories: those individuals like the 'village idiot' or the anchorite/ancress living in a bricked-up cell next to the parish church, who were effectively social outsiders but geographical insiders (in that they remained within the settled community), and those individuals like hermits and other recluses who lived apart from villages and towns, but who did not wander the highways and byways (and hence had virtually no contact at all with the settled community). One of the few scholarly treatments of anchorites, ancresses, hermits and other recluses is Clay R M, **The Hermits and Anchorites of England** (London, 1914), who displays a compelling geographical sensitivity in dividing her study up according to the locational associations of her subjects (i.e. 'island and fen recluses'; 'forest and hillside hermits'; 'cave-dwellers'; 'light-keepers on the sea-coast'; 'highway and bridge hermits'; 'town hermits').

A preliminary typology of Medieval outsiders

ATTITUDES OF OUTSIDERS TOWARDS THE SETTLED COMMUNITY		Wishing to be included	Wishing to be excluded
ATTITUDES OF THE SETTLED COMMUNITY TOWARDS OUTSIDERS	Wishing to enforce exclusion	Lepers Beggars	Robbers and criminal gangs
	Sometimes wishing to enforce exclusion / sometimes wishing to encourage inclusion	Itinerant merchants and pedlars	Semi-fictional characters such as 'wild men', 'distracted knights' and the 'lunatic lollers'
	Wishing to encourage inclusion	Mendicant friars and other travelling preachers Minstrels and other entertainers	

different relationships to the settled population, and this meant that they possessed very different associations with – and hence very different experiences of – both the marginal and frequented parts of the Medieval landscape. And, in order to illustrate this finding, I will discuss in turn several of the groups named in the figure – my order of discussion reflecting not so much some a priori analytic logic, as simply decreasing 'Modern' familiarity with the categories of people under scrutiny.

Robbers and criminal gangs

There can be little doubt that 'Merrie England' was far from being a harmonious and peaceful land, and one only has to glance through the pages of the Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous to realise how often Medieval people managed to chop each other up, run each other through with knives or throw each other in ponds, often over such seemingly trivial issues as who rightfully owned a cartload of apples. [15] Many of the thefts and murders committed were not the responsibility of society's settled members, however, but were the fault of robbers and other outlaws who roamed the highways, forests and wastelands looking to set upon honest wayfarers, or who occasionally went on forays into villages and towns looking for booty. It appears that a common occurrence was for robbers to band together into fearsome criminal gangs, and May McKisack argues that

...no student of the period can fail to be impressed by the general prevalence of criminal groups or gangs, the compaignies, conspiratours, confederatours, which were the subject of so many parliamentary complaints...[I]t was the roving bands of criminals, many of them highly organised, for whom the sparsely-populated, thickly-wooded countryside afforded such ample cover, who terrorised the ordinary citizen and defied the officers of the law. [16]

[15] The Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (London, 1916–1968) consists of seven volumes, and reprints summary reports of numerous inquisitions carried out in the localities by representatives of the King between the mid-thirteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. These inquisitions dealt with a great variety of matters other than those concerning questions of inheritance and the disposal of property.

[16] McKisack M, The Fourteenth Century, 1307–1399 (Oxford, 1959), p.204.

The activities of particular gangs and their leaders have been traced by various historians, [17] and a typical 'tale' was told by a Somerset inquiry of 1380 into the exploits of one John atte Zerd, a 'common robber and leader of robbers'. [18] This inquisition revealed that on one Thursday night in 1368 Zerd had broken into the house of John Tachell in the village of Southeye, making off with a box of money, napkins, sheets and other goods, and that the following Tuesday night he and his accomplices had burned down the house of Thomas Belde in the village of Cote.

As already indicated by the quote from McKisack, these robbers and criminal gangs sought to exclude themselves from frequented places, and in so doing they were able to use the forest as a 'cover' in much the same way as - according to James Duncan, a humanistic geographer - tramps in North American cities use garbage cans and other landscape features to hide themselves from the eyes of law-enforcers. [19] McKisack hence suggests that

[t]he great forests of Medieval England must be reckoned among the most formidable obstacles to the enforcement of law throughout the land. They afforded safe refuge to innumerable fugitives from justice... [20]

[17] See *ibid.*, pp.204-205; McCall A, **The Medieval Underworld** (London, 1979), esp. pp.97-106.

[18] See **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.IV** (London, 1957), Item 138, p.82.

[19] See Duncan J S, 1978, 'Men without property: the tramp's classification and use of urban space', **Antipode** 10(1), pp.24-34.

[20] McKisack M, *op.cit.*, p.207. Life in the forest was not always easy for robbers, however, as can be seen from an inquisition held at York in 1283 (see **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.I**, (London, 1916), Item 2262, p.605), which told this gruesome story: "a shepherd called Robert Fox of Ebberston announced to Alan, son of John, Laurence de Neuton and John Blank, then foresters of Pyker(ing), that there were robbers in a place in the forest called Bykkele trying to steal his goods. The foresters ran thither and found a robber called John de Kukewold and another called Richard de Suthweld. They summoned John to come to the King's peace, but he refused and shot an arrow and nearly killed one of the foresters. So, knowing him to be a robber, they pursued him and wounded him as he fled, and had him beheaded by Richard de Suthweld according to the custom of Blachou Moor, and sent the head to Pykering Castle".

Contemporaries were perfectly aware of this state of affairs, though, and at a Hampshire inquisition of 1262 it was recorded that

[t]he timber of the King's wood in the pass of Alton, where robberies and murder are often committed and there is great danger to wayfarers, would be worth 18 marks if felled... [21]

Furthermore, an explicit attempt to improve the circumstances of roads leading through forested areas was signalled by the so-called Statute of Winchester of 1285, which

...commanded that highways leading from one market town to another should be enlarged where (bushes, woods) or dykes be, so that there be neither dyke (tree) nor bush whereby a man can lurk to do hurt within two hundred foot of the one side and two hundred foot on the other side of the way. [22]

The objective was thus to fill in ditches and clear undergrowth, but not to fell the 'great trees', and any lords failing to comply with these demands would be liable if a robbery or a murder was committed on a highway passing through his land. And there is a suggestion that this legislation was more than merely a 'dead letter', for an entry in the Calendar of Close Rolls dated 1400 divulges that one Edward Cherlton was 'in contempt of the King' for failing to clear 'woods, thickets and hays' around the high road at Swannecombe in Kent, a site notorious for 'divers robberies and murders of aliens and natives'. [23]

[21] Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.I, op.cit., Item 269, p.94.

[22] Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I (London, 1963), Stat' Wynton or the Statute of Winchester, p.97. Words in brackets have been inserted from later versions of the act, the original ms. being defaced and illegible in many places. This legislation also applied in the King's own Royal Forest and where highways passed through planned parks.

[23] See Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, Vol.I (London, 1927), Membrane 11, p.159. Writs and orders under the Great Seal addressed by the King to individuals were folded or closed up, and were hence known as 'letters close', and it is these that are reprinted in the Calendar. Prior to Tudor times they contained royal instructions for the performance of 'multifarious acts'. There are very many volumes of the Calendar, spanning much of the Medieval period, but for this paper I have simply sampled from four volumes (Henry IV, Vols.I-IV) which are easier to use than most through their contents being indexed together in one volume.

Not only did the robbers and criminal gangs strive to exclude themselves, the settled community sought for the most part to exclude these undesirables from - or at least to keep them under surveillance when they were passing through - the villages and towns of 'normal' society. And this wish to exclude and survey prompted - as we will see further on - a more general hostility to 'strangers' who acted at all suspiciously. Accompanying the Statute of Winchester and motivated by the same concern for escalating numbers of violent crimes, [24] for instance, were the Statutes for the City of London, which decreed that any person found abroad after the 'curfew' tolled at St. Martins le Grand without good reason (i.e. being a messenger working for a gentleman of repute) would be cast into a 'place of confinement' by the 'keepers of the peace', and would then be judged 'on the morrow' by the city's mayor and aldermen. [25] In addition, and just as the authorities sought to control the amount of rural, forest 'cover' afforded to wrong-doers, so the city's authorities were urged to control the amount of urban 'cover' afforded to wrong-doers by both taverns and inns. On the first count here the Statutes declared that wrong-doers

...do commonly resort to and hold their meetings and hold their evil talk in taverns more than elsewhere, and there do seek for shelter lying in wait and watching their time to do mischief, [26]

and in order to solve this problem it was insisted that all taverns should shut after the tolling of the curfew. On the second count the Statutes drew a telling equation between innkeepers who were themselves fugitives from elsewhere and the putting up of suspicious characters:

...divers persons do resort unto the city, some from parts beyond the the sea and others of this land, and do there seek shelter and refuge by reason of banishment out of their own country or who for great

[24] At the start of this act it was bemoaned that "robberies, murthers (burning and theft) be more often used than they have been heretofore"(Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit., p.96).

[25] See Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit., Statuta Civitatis London or the Statutes for the City of London.102-104.

[26] ibid., p.102.

offence or other misdeed have fled from their own country, and of these some do become brokers, hostelers and innkeepers within the city for denizens and strangers as freely as though they were good and lawful men of the franchise of the city. [27]

The solution to this problem, so the Statutes ordered, was that only 'resident freemen' of the city should be allowed to act as innkeepers, and that this occupation should thereby be closed to 'men of foreign lands or other persons whatsoever'.

Despite these rural and urban efforts to curb the activities of robbers and criminal gangs, a writ dated 1408 from the King to all his sheriffs throughout England informed them that

...by the report of many the King has true information that in every county great number of robberies etc. are now daily committed, more than in times past by thieves in excessive numbers gathering together in unlawful assemblies, in contempt of the King and breach of the peace and to the terror of the lieges, whereat he is troubled and especially because the sheriffs and men of the townships give not diligence to spy out and take thieves... [28]

Indeed, the chief instruction of this writ was that sheriffs and 'watchmen' should be more diligent in both seeking out and guarding - perhaps by using the posse comitatus (a law-enforcement party under the sheriff's control) - those 'towns, woods and places where robberies and thefts are most often committed'.

Itinerant merchants and pedlars

All manner of merchants and humble pedlars made their way around the villages and towns of 'Merrie England', and their need to be accepted into settled communities so that they could ply their trade led them to desire

[27] *ibid.*, p.103.

[28] *Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, Vol.III* (London, 1931), Membrane 25d, p.481.

inclusion rather than exclusion. Even so, the impression is that these outsiders were only welcomed by the settled community at particular times, and that at other times they could be met with efforts designed to curtail their trading or even to exclude them altogether. The times of inclusion were - unsurprisingly - those days and weeks when villages and towns held or hosted markets and fairs, although it might be noted that these were times when settlements became more generally open to outsiders of almost every variety. [29] As one historian of 'our old English fairs' informs us, for example,

[i]n bygone times it was customary in some places to ring church bells before the fair commenced. Formerly one of the bells of St. Nicholas' Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, was rung. 'The fourth bell is called the Common or Great Bell because it was tolled to convene the burgesses and for municipal business. It was also known as the Thief or Reiver Bell, from its being rung at the commencement of annual fairs to indicate that thieves, cattle reivers and banished persons generally might enter the town to trade without fear of arrest'. [30]

Similarly, at the Lammas Fair held in York an ancient custom was that, upon hearing the bell ringing at St. Michael's Church on the afternoon before Old Lammas Day, the sheriffs of the city would hand over their rods of office to individuals representing the Archbishop of York, and would thereby give up their 'power of arresting persons in the city and suburbs during the fair'. [31]

Itinerant merchants and pedlars were presumably welcome - even

[29] A complex account - with historical, literary and psychoanalytic dimensions - of the role played by fairs and markets in the meeting of the 'bourgeois imaginary' (the 'Same') with all manner of 'low and disgusting' sights, smells and people (the 'Other') is developed in Stallybrass P, White A, **The Politics and Poetics of Transgression** (London, 1986), esp. Chapter 1.

[30] Muncey R W, **Our Old English Fairs** (London, 1935), pp.162-163.

[31] See *ibid.*, p.163. Curiously enough, a contrasting example of outsiders being poorly treated at a fair is also unearthed by Muncey: [i]t has been an ancient custom at Corby Fair for every stranger entering the village to pay a small toll, or be carried on a pole to the stocks; one set of stocks being erected in Stocks Lane and the other set in the Jamb" (p.166).

expected and required - during the days of markets and fairs, but on other days they could not be guaranteed a favourable reception because of the threat that they posed to local shopkeepers and craftsmen. Thus, during an inquisition at Dorchester in 1376 - the object of which was to ascertain the services due from the tenants of the Prior of Frompton's manor at Bennecombe - it was stated that,

[i]f a smith is a stranger, he cannot demand (payment)
except what is granted by agreement, [32]

hence implying that an a priori scale of payments was in operation to govern transactions between villagers and the manor's native craftsmen. A more obvious example of opposition to what might be termed 'outsider trading' occurred in 1401 when the mercers - the dealers in silk, velvet and similar fabrics - of Lincoln compelled the King to address this notification to the town's sheriff:

[o]rder, upon petition of divers citizens of Lincoln who practise the mistery of mercery there,...[who are] assured that the custom has there been used time out of mind to cause proclamation to be made forbidding any strange or foreign mercer at his peril to sell or expose for sale any wares within the said city or the suburbs; as their complaint shews that by the custom aforesaid no such mercers ought to sell or expose for sale any wares in the public market there except in time of the fair and on the market days there limited, but that contrary to the said custom great number of them have often heretofor so done, and cease not daily so to do at other times and without the said market, to the loss and grievance of the petioners... [33]

A related matter in this respect was the King's desire to ensure that merchants did not sell at a fair after it had officially finished - after the time 'cried and published' by the person 'keeping the fair' - and a system of fines and forfeitures was specified for this offence. [34]

[32] **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous**, Vol.III (London, 1937), Item 989, p.379.

[33] **Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, Vol.I, op.cit.**, Membrane 26d, p.384.

[34] See Muncey R W, **op.cit.**, pp.8-9, who repeats the wording from two acts designed to regulate the length of fairs, one of 1328 and the other of 1331.

This matter of hostility to 'outsider traders' was considerably confused by the fact that a large number of these traders were actually 'aliens' from the Continent, many of whom were still in the employ of rich foreign merchant houses, and the outcome of this was that these outsiders were occasionally victims of Medieval racism. [35] Moreover, a number of statutes made it remarkably easy for 'alien merchants' to be imprisoned for minor offences, and so we hear in 1317 of John Houet and Walter Segard - 'burgesses and merchants of Bruges' - writing to the lords and masters of Chancery requesting both their release from a Norfolk prison and the return of their confiscated goods. [36] But this was not all, for in the early fifteenth century a statute was passed calling for 'all aliens, not being lieges, to be removed from the realm or else to make fine with the King'. [37] And one outcome of this legislation was a 'public order' problem in London when numerous natives of the city took matters into their own hands, and consequently sought to attack and threaten those 'alien' merchants who had failed to comply with the expulsion order:

...certain evildoers and disturbers of the peace have joined together in divers unlawful conventicles and assemblies within the city and its suburbs in manner of insurrection, and...intend by means of coercion and threats to life and of mutilation of limbs to inflict divers damages, grievances, oppressions and evils...on many aliens dwelling in the city and suburbs who have not complied with the proclamation. [38]

The authorities appear to have been somewhat confused in this respect, however, for a statute of 1406 was actually designed to make it easier for 'merchants alien and native dwelling without the city' to trade within London, but it is not surprising to learn that this legislation was subsequently suspended pending 'more mature examination' in

[35] The topic of Medieval 'race relations' has received little direct attention, but an interesting departure is the investigation of attitudes towards non-Christian 'infidels' embedded in Canon Law - the 'law of the universal Church during the Middle Ages' - as conducted in Muldoon J, **Popes, Lawyers and Infidels** (New York, 1979).

[36] See **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.II** (London, 1916), Item 357, p.89.

[37] See **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.VII** (London, 1968), Item 319, p.171.

[38] *ibid.*

Mendicant friars and other travelling preachers

There were numerous varieties of religious wayfarer, although perhaps the most common were the pilgrims who travelled from shrine to shrine in search of a blessing, a prophecy or a cure from sickness. There was - as Ronald Finucane has shown - a distinctive 'geography of pilgrimage', [40] but this was not so much the geography of inclusion and exclusion associated with 'true' outsider populations as a geography of the routes used by - and the distances travelled to particular shrines by - the 'normal' persons of Medieval society. Nevertheless, one member of that most famous of pilgrimaging groups - Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims [41] - was a religious wanderer who undoubtedly did stand apart from the regular places of settled society, and this was a mendicant friar called Hubert whose poverty was indicated in the Ellesmere Miniatures by 'his riding without saddle, stirrups or spurs on a miserable, small horse'. [42]

Like the 'outsider traders', the mendicant or begging friars and other travelling preachers hoped to be included by the communities through which they passed, but - and unlike the traders - they were at most times and in most places tolerated and even welcomed. Despite the fears that the King

[39] See **Calendar of Close Rolls, Henry IV, Vol.III, op.cit.**, Membrane 8, p.210.

[40] See Finucane R, **Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England** (London, 1977), esp. Chapter 9, which is entitled 'Maps and miracles: the geography of pilgrimage'.

[41] A nice point, given Finucane's geographical sensitivity, is that one commentator says this of Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales**: "[n]ot only are the stages of the route indistinctly marked, but the geography of the poem [my emphasis], though on a small scale, introduces incongruities almost as great as those of the Winter's Tale and Two Gentlemen of Verona. The journey, although at that time usually occupying three or four days, is compressed into the hours between sunrise and sunset on a April day: an additional pilgrim is made to overtake them within seven miles of Canterbury 'by galloping hard for three miles', and the tales of the last two miles occupy a space equal to an eighth part of the whole journey of fifty miles" (Stanley A P, **Historical Memorials of Canterbury** (London, 1912), p.207).

[42] See Stemmler T (ed.), **The Ellesmere Miniatures of the Canterbury Pilgrims** (University of Mannheim, 1979), p.xv and pp.10-11.

and the established Church occasionally entertained about unorthodox and even heretical views being spread by these nomads, [43] and despite the criticisms that William Langland directed at these 'parasites' through the words of Piers Plowman, [44] the keynote here appears to have been acceptance rather than rejection. An important point in this respect is that the parish priest who was supposed to nurture the spiritual life of settled communities was often very ignorant, was often an absentee who delegated his vital duties to a miserably paid chaplain or clerk, and - as H.S. Bennett puts it -

...was [often] far from being the kindly cultured patron of the village such as he has often shown himself in the past two hundred years. He was more likely to be a hard-hearted man of business, and frequently was a stranger brought into the parish by influence or by his ecclesiastical superiors, with little in common with his parishioners except his determination to overcome the difficulties incident upon Medieval agriculture, and his eye for a bargain. [45]

[43] A number of entries in the **Calendar of Close Rolls** for the reign of Henry IV bear witness to these fears, and in the **Calendar, Henry IV, Vol.I, op.cit.**, a writ of 1399 from the King to his various officers in the localities called for 'all rebellious and disobedient friars of the order (in this case the order of St. Mary of Mount Carmel in England) found in any of their bailiwicks' to be arrested and delivered to the 'prior provincial' for 'chastisement' (see Membrane 30, p.17).

[44] There are numerous editions of this famous fourteenth century 'loosely connected' allegorical poem, and I have used Wells H W, **William Langland: The Vision of Piers Plowman** (London, 1935) - which is the poem rendered into Modern English; Pearsall D, **Piers Plowman by William Langland: An Edition of the C-Text** (London, 1978) - which preserves the Old English. Langland was particularly critical of the mendicant friars, but it might be added that - except in the curious case of the 'lunatic lollers' - he was more generally opposed to both a wandering lifestyle and the practice of begging. Interestingly enough, one commentator highlights a fundamental contradiction between Langland's condemnation of secular wandering and his valuing of a spiritual wandering - a search for what theologians called the 'way'. See Martin J, 1962, 'Wil as fool and wanderer in Piers Plowman', **Texas Studies in Literature and Language III**, pp.535-548, who portrays this contradiction thus: "[t]he [wandering] mode suggests that the wanderer seeks some kind of revelation, that his [*sic*] journeying is valuable. Yet Langland satirises all kinds of wandering - most of all the wandering of the clergy, particularly that of friars and religious pilgrims"(p.546).

[45] Bennett H S, **Life on the English Manor: A Study of Peasant Conditions, 1150-1400** (Cambridge, 1948), p.33.

In these circumstances - where the parish priest was himself an outsider, and one who appeared to care little about the local populace - the wandering friars and other preachers must have seemed like a veritable 'breath of fresh air'. Since these outsiders lived by begging alms, having few possessions of their own, and preached a doctrine of 'evangelical poverty' (this was particularly true of the grey friars who followed the teachings of St. Francis), there can be little doubt that they must have been accommodated quite happily by the common inhabitants of most Medieval villages and towns. Furthermore, and as G.M. Trevelyan indicates in his famous English Social History,

[w]hether we regard these interlopers [i.e. the friars and preachers] as sowing tares in the wheat or as enriching the Lord's harvest, they played a great part in the religious and intellectual life of the nation. They carried the latest thoughts, teaching and news of the time to remote farms and hamlets, whose inhabitants never moved from the neighbourhood and could read no written word. [46]

This is actually a rather more salient claim than it might first appear, so I would argue, and it is one to which I will return in my concluding comments.

Minstrels and other entertainers

Another outsider population, and one that I think boasted a relationship with the settled community not unlike the one boasted by the religious wayfarers, was comprised of minstrels and other entertainers. The minstrels were members of an old and largely respected profession, and they flourished in spite of meeting with condemnation from Medieval moralists such as Langland. [47] And the evidence seems clear that, to

[46] Trevelyan G M, **English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria** (London, 1944), p.44.

[47] Along with his criticism of friars and other nomads (see Footnote 44), Langland attacks minstrels on the grounds that "they monopolised alms which should have been given to the needy poor"(Chadwick D, **Social Life in the Days of Piers Plowman** (Cambridge, 1922), p.72).

quote D. Chadwick,

...everywhere these wanderers were welcomed by the people. They remained a power in the land and wandered from feast to feast, since no festivity could be held in castle, home or tavern without a minstrel, who was sometimes generously paid for his services...Ecclesiastics received professional minstrels with favour and helped to support them, though Church councils looked upon such patronage with great disfavour. Kings and nobles, anxious to secure their services, included in their households minstrels who enjoyed special privileges. [48]

Thus, many minstrels experienced not just the favour of the common people, but also the hospitality and even the patronage of the wealthy and the powerful. In addition, these outsiders did more than merely entertain, for they performed a crucial role - through the words of their stories, songs and poems - in both manufacturing and perpetuating a sense of culture, history and tradition in which the people of a given region could to some extent share. And it is for this reason that Henry Buckle, the great nineteenth century historian, refers to the minstrels of ancient and more recent civilizations as

...a class of men whose particular business it is thus to preserve the stock of traditions. Indeed, so natural is this curiosity as to past events, that there are few nations to whom these bards or minstrels are unknown. [49]

For Buckle, these bards or minstrels are the earliest historians, since the past events of which they tell

...are not only founded on truth, but, making allowances for the colourings of poetry, they are all strictly true. [People] who are constantly repeating songs which they constantly hear, and who appeal to the authorised singers of them as final umpires in disputed questions, are not likely to be mistaken on

[48] *ibid.*, p.71.

[49] Buckle H T, *Introduction to the History of Civilization in England* (Revised by Robertson J M) (New York, n.d.), originally published in 1857-1861, p.165.

matters in the accuracy of which they have so lively an interest. [50]

Yet, with the increasing importance that the written word began to assume over its spoken counterpart towards the close of the Middle Ages, so the minstrel's function as historian began to be eroded; perhaps to the detriment of 'historical knowledge' itself, since the 'art of writing' - having a more timeless and placeless quality than the arts of speaking and singing - caused

...the consequent fusion of different local traditions which, when separate, were accurate, but when united were false. [51]

Buckle's thoughts here are obviously highly speculative, but if they contain even a 'grain of truth', then the geography of Medieval minstrels -

[50] *ibid.*, p.167.

[51] *ibid.*, p.174. Buckle's ideas are strangely reminiscent of those present in the 'New Science' of Giambattista Vico, an eighteenth century Neapolitan philosopher, for whom the earliest languages - and hence the earliest human self-knowledge and knowledge of the world - were 'poetic' and oral. With the demise of the 'age of Gods' and the emergence of the 'age of Heroes', so Vico goes on to argue, languages became increasingly dominated by 'prose' and writing, and this development effectively erected a barrier between humans and the 'truths' of both themselves and their world. See Vico G, **The New Science of Giambattista Vico** (Translated by Bergin T G, Fisch M H) (Ithaca, New York, 1968), originally published in 1744, and see also my own unpublished working paper, Philo C P, 1986, 'Vico, Foucault and Mills - a curious triangle', esp. pp.3-7. Vico suggests that the 'poetic' thought of the ancients was dominated by metaphor, but that later events saw the growth of metonymy or the tendency for a universal phenomena to be described using a word - often a proper name - somehow evocative of that universal (as in the case where Achilles connotes an idea of valor common to all 'strong men'). It is intriguing, then, that Buckle identifies the emergence of a similar tendency: "[i]n ancient times, for example, the name of Hercules was given to several of those great public robbers who scourged [hu]mankind, and who, if their crimes were succesful as well as enormous, were sure after their death to be worshipped as heroes...This mode of extending the use of a single name is natural to a barbarous people, and would cause little or no confusion as long as the traditions of a country remained local and unconnected [my emphasis]. But, as soon as these traditions become fixed by a written language, the collectors of them, deceived by a similarity of name, assembled the scattered facts and, ascribing to a single man these accumulated exploits, degraded history to the level of a miraculous mythology"(Buckle H T, *op.cit.*, p.168).

where these roamers travelled; where they were included and where they were excluded; who they met and who they did not - becomes extremely relevant in relation to the 'invention' and diffusion of Medieval society's knowledge of both its own origins and its own subsequent development.

There were many entertainers other than the minstrels, of course, and a complete account of this outsider population would need to mention the tumblers, jugglers, buffoons, leaders of performing bears, conjurors and 'ribalds of all kinds'. But all we really need to note here concerning these characters is that they too were excitedly received by most settled communities, but that it may have been their more vulgar and obvious activities that served to taint - by association - the moralists' interpretation of the minstrel's more delicate and socially-useful skills. [52]

Lepers

Perhaps the most distinctive outsider prowling the Medieval landscape, and not least because of an often horrific visual appearance, was the leper. Leprosy was an extremely common illness, particularly in the earlier Middle Ages, although it should be noted that a whole host of less virulent skin complaints appear to have been interpreted as leprosy by the Medieval mind. Furthermore, the interpretation of leprosy was almost always coloured by an Augustinian belief in a cosmic battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, and hence the leper's very

...existence was...a constant manifestation of God,
since it was a sign both of His anger and of His
grace. [53]

Disease theories of leprosy may not have been entirely absent, but they were usually subservient to the vision that guided an inquisition before the bailiff of Beverley in 1331, when it was commented that five

[52] This argument derives from Jusserand J J, *op.cit.*, p.119.

[53] Foucault M, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London, 1965), p.6.

individuals afflicted with the disease - John de Cattewyke and William le Taillour, for three years; John Falnewall, for two years; William de Moreby and Roger Spyre, for a year -

...were all struck with leprosy by the grace of God,
and not otherwise. [54]

And it is against this religious understanding of leprosy that we must evaluate the geography of inclusion and exclusion which shaped the lives of Medieval lepers.

Unsurprisingly, and despite such oddities as Henry III 'waiting upon them and dressing their sores', [55] lepers were the outsiders that perhaps more than any other the settled community wished to exclude from its midst. As was revealed at an inquisition held in Launceston during 1383 - the subjects of which were the liberties, quittances and customs 'enjoyed' by the burgesses of Dounehead -

[f]rom time immemorial it has been the custom that no leper shall enter within the gates of the borough to do anything, and that should he do so the mayor's bailiff shall take his upper garment and lead him outside the gates. [56]

Sheer revulsion at the physical state of many lepers must have played a part in promoting these exclusionary practices, but so too must the desire of villagers and townsfolk to avoid being tainted by both the sins that lepers must have committed and the punishment that God had accordingly visited upon these wrong-doers. [57] Michel Foucault, the author of a remarkable text on the histories of insanity and 'unreason', places an additional gloss on this desire to keep leprosy at a 'sacred distance' when he supposes that this distancing actually offered lepers a unique

[54] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Vol.II, *op.cit.*, Item 1268, p.310.

[55] See Mercier C A, 1915a, 'Leper houses and Medieval hospitals, Part I', *Glasgow Medical Journal* 83(NS), p.6.

[56] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Vol IV, *op.cit.*, Item 265, p.147.

[57] See, for example, the suggestions of Mercier C A, 1915a, *op.cit.*, p.5.

opportunity to achieve salvation on earth:

[h]ieratic witnesses of evil, they accomplish their salvation in and by their very exclusion: in a strange reversibility that is the opposite of good works and prayer, they are saved by the hand that is not stretched out. The sinner who abandons the leper at his door opens [the leper's] way to heaven...Abandonment is his salvation; his exclusion offers him another form of communion. [58]

As various historians have demonstrated, then, and as the above example of evicting lepers from Dounehead neatly illustrates, numerous complex 'rites of exclusion' were involved in setting lepers beyond the bounds of the settled world.

Furthermore, out on those blasted wastes stretching away from the city gates there appeared a peculiarly Medieval institution, the leper hospital, lazar-house, leprosarium or leper colony. In its capacity as what contemporaries themselves called a 'hospital', this institution comprised an element in a more extensive network of establishments run by minor groups of religious for the purpose of giving 'hospitality' - and occasionally medical relief - to the poor, the lame, the sick in mind and body, the traveller and indeed virtually anybody who walked through their doors. [59] Rather more could be said about these early hospitals, particularly given J.M. Hobson's thesis that they constituted one of the few Medieval sites where strangers - or outsiders - were explicitly welcomed, [60] but I will confine my remarks here to the lazar-houses.

[58] Foucault M, *op.cit.*, p.7.

[59] These curious proto-type 'social welfare' institutions have not received a great deal of scholarly attention, but see Clay R M, *The Medieval Hospitals of England* (London, 1909); Mercier C A, 1915b, 'Leper houses and Medieval hospitals, Part II', *Glasgow Medical Journal* 83(NS), pp.81-103; Hobson J M, *Some Early and Later Houses of Pity* (London, 1926); Seymour M A, *The Organisation, Personnel and Functions of the Medieval Hospital in the Later Middle Ages* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of London, 1946); Godfrey W H, *The English Almshouse (With Some Account of its Predecessor, the Medieval Hospital)* (London, n.d.). In addition, I found very useful the papers given at the conference on 'Medieval Hospitals' held at the Department of External Studies, University of Oxford, December, 1985.

[60] See Hobson J M, *op.cit.*, esp. pp.1-3.

According to C.A. Mercier some 220 different hospitals of this kind were in operation at one time or another during the Medieval period, [61] and according to Charlotte Roberts these hospitals were geographically concentrated around ports and other population centres in the south and east of the country. [62] Of more immediate interest for this paper, however, is the way in which these institutions adopted a distinctive ex-urban location pattern that presented a marked geographical expression of the leper's social exclusion. As D. Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, the premier historians of Medieval religious houses, inform us:

[w]hile and where the disease was endemic, a hospital for lepers was not an uncommon feature on the outskirts of towns... [63]

Or, as R.M. Clay relates somewhat more colourfully:

[o]n the outskirts of a town some seven hundred years ago the eye of the traveller would have been caught by a well-known landmark - group of cottages with a chapel, clustering around a green enclosure. At a glance [the traveller] would recognise it as a leper-house, and would prepare to throw alms to the crippled and disfigured representatives of the community. [64]

Indeed, in all manner of studies by both local historians and archaeologists this out-of-town geography of leprosaria is commented upon, and - to give but one example - Marjorie Honeybourne's investigation of London's leper hospitals contains this note on their geography:

[61] See Mercier C A, 1915a, **op.cit.**, p.14.

[62] See Roberts C, 'British Medieval leprosaria: a general view', paper given at the conference on 'Medieval Hospitals', **op.cit.** Roberts suggests that, following from the contagious (droplet infection) nature of leprosy, we would expect there to be a positive correlation between the number of leprosaria in a county and the population density of that county. However, using data for circa 1400 she finds little evidence of such a relationship, and detects instead a better positive correlation between the number of leprosaria in a county and the absolute total population of that county (i.e. a figure unweighted by the county's geographical area). But just how we are supposed to interpret this correlation is far from clear.

[63] Knowles D, Hadcock R N, **Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales** (London, 1953).

[64] Clay R M, **op.cit.**, p.35.

[w]ith the new [more charitable, post-Norman] outlook towards leprosy came the need for lazar houses on the outskirts of London. By the end of the Middle Ages there were ten leper hospitals, strategically located, in the London area. These were St. James's Hospital in Westminster; St. Giles's Hospital and one at Knightsbridge on the two western roads out of London; Highgate and Kingsland (near Hackney) on the roads to the north; Mile End on the road to the east; the Lock Hospital beyond Southwark on that to the south; and, farther out, Hammersmith, Enfield and Rotherhithe (Bermondsey). These hospitals formed a ring round London... [65]

To reiterate, then, the settled community's social exclusion of lepers was both reinforced and symbolised by the transmission of these unfortunates into the isolated spaces of what Foucault describes most evocatively as the 'geography of haunted places'. [66]

[65] Honeybourne M B, 1967, 'The leper hospitals of the London area', **Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society** 21, p.5.

[66] See Foucault M, *op.cit.*, p.57. Foucault's more general thesis is that the 'rites of exclusion' surrounding these 'low places' - the lazar-houses - remained even after leprosy had disappeared from the scene, and that these rites subsequently adhered to a new collection of mad people, vagrants and other social outsiders, who were themselves consigned to wastelands and isolated institutional spaces beyond the city limits. I attempt to spell out this 'geography' lying at the heart of Foucault's magisterial history in Philo C P, 1986, **'The Same and the Other'...**, *op.cit.*, esp. pp.64-66. It is interesting to note that Foucault's equation of the Medieval seclusion of lepers with the later seclusion of mad people is anticipated by Mercier C A, 1915a, *op.cit.*, who observes "how completely the method of secluding lepers was safeguarded by the forms of law. In this respect it compares not at all unfavourably [*sic.*] with the methods of secluding lunatics at the present day"(p.11).

Conclusion:

Fearing Strangers and Needing Strangers

[Watchmen should] watch the town continually all night, from the sun-setting unto the sun-rising. And if any stranger do pass by them, he shall be arrested until morning; and if no suspicion be found, he shall go quit; and if they find cause of suspicion, they shall forthwith deliver him to the sheriff, and the sheriff shall keep him safely until he be acquitted in due manner. And if they [i.e. the strangers] will not obey the arrest, they [i.e. the watchmen] shall levy hue and cry upon them, and the watchmen shall follow them with all the town and the neighbour towns with hue and cry from town to town, until that they be taken and delivered to the sheriff, as before is said; and for such arrestments of such strangers none shall be punished. [67]

Having discussed in some detail the geographies of inclusion and exclusion associated with various outsider populations, it will now be useful - by way of offering some concluding comments - to advance a few tentative generalisations about the social geography of Medieval outsiders. A first generalisation (which I do not have space to enlarge upon here) is that in the scholarly hallways of Medieval religious and philosophical theory the 'deviant' acts of people who did not conform readily to the subtle expectations and gradations of a great 'Christian hierarchy' were viewed as exacerbating Man's already 'fallen' and sinful state, and were thereby interpreted as being certain to usher increased disorder and 'unreason' into both cosmic and worldly affairs. [68] The overwhelming logic of these intellectual arguments was that outsiders were disruptive not just to the events of the here-and-now, but to the very

[67] **Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit., Stat' Wynton**, p.97. In this passage I have combined elements from two slightly different versions of the statute.

[68] This argument is pursued in some detail by McCall A, **op.cit., esp. Chapters 1 and 2**, and can be substantiated by examining numerous passages scattered throughout - for instance - Healey J (ed.), **The City of God, by Saint Augustine** (London, 1931); Entreves A P D (ed.), **Aquinas: Selected Political Writings** (Oxford, 1948).

fabric of whole creation, and that religious and secular authorities on earth should do everything in their power to eradicate the many faces of 'outsiderness' from the Medieval landscape. This being said, though, the local and everyday popular response to outsiders was probably guided less by a grand religious-cum-philosophical vision, and more by the sorts of sociological mechanisms that George Homans - a professor of sociology - identifies as fundamental to the workings of the thirteenth century English village community. [69]

This sociological account effectively takes as its starting point the small, isolated and insular villages and towns comprising the settlement geography of Medieval England, and it rests squarely upon the 'small-worldly' and close-knit nature of these communities. Indeed, it follows quite straightforwardly from Bennett's injunction for us to

...remember how circumscribed was the world in which the majority of [Medieval] people lived. Their village was their world: beyond, some ten or twenty miles led to the local shrine or the great fair, and there perhaps once or twice a year they made their way; but for the most part their lives were ground out in the perpetual round from one field to another, and so to the next. London seemed very far off - almost as far off as Rome or Jerusalem itself. Hence they were easily impressed by the 'wonders of the world' - and fact and fiction were indistinguishable to them. [70]

Whilst there is an element of caricature about this passage, and we should not forget recent evidence of greater Medieval social and geographical mobility than previously supposed, [71] it must still be the case that ignorance and superstition would have led most settled populations to be fearful of people who stood apart from their local, everyday experiences. And Homans erects this circumstance into a general sociological statement about what he calls the 'anatomy' of Medieval society:

...interactions are more frequent between fellow

[69] See Homans G C, **English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century** (New York, 1941).

[70] Bennett H S, **op.cit.**, p.34.

[71] See Smith R M, 1984, **op.cit.**

members of the society than they are between the members and other [people] whom we choose to consider outsiders. The most important thing we mean when we say that a village was a society is that the [people] of the village had upon the whole more contacts with one another than they had with outsiders, entirely aside from the question of what these contacts were. [72]

Furthermore, he supposes that

[t]he measure of the cohesion of community is its distrust of outsiders, [73]

and he illustrates this claim with examples of disagreements and actual fights between the residents of one Medieval village and the residents of another who were suspected of doing evil. Hence the villagers of the manor of Halesowen quarrelled with their neighbours in the township of Clent over both the use of commons and, at a later date, an incident when a man of Hales died from arrow wounds inflicted by a man of Clent. [74]

Whilst Homans does not extend his analysis to relationships between settled populations and the 'true', rootless and wandering outsiders that are my principal focus here, such an extension must in practice be feasible. To begin with, 'true' outsiders evidently could be a nuisance to settled communities, as can be seen from an inquisition held at Kaynesham, Somerset, in 1389, which told of how

[a] stranger came to Kaynesham and feloniously killed John Hosteler and was hanged therefor. [75]

Moreover, villagers and townsfolk would often suspect strangers of being insurrectionists, and a neat example of this emerged at a Newmarket inquisition of 1279 when it was found that

[72] Homans G C, *op.cit.*, p.403.

[73] *ibid.*, p.328.

[74] See *ibid.*, pp.328-329.

[75] *Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous*, Vol.V (London, 1962), Item 214, p.140.

[t]he jury know nobody in the town of Newmarket who has spoken evil of the King, but an informer of Norfolk called Roger de Flochworpe was on his way to Bayonne and stayed in the house of Osbert the Shepherd, where many lodge, and wrote on the door of his chamber 'anno regni Regis Edwardi septimo defensa fuit pratarum falcacio'. [76]

This finding also hints at a criticism of Osbert the shepherd for putting up suspicious characters, and in so doing recalls the complaint about irresponsible London innkeepers that was mentioned earlier. But nowhere was the hostility of settled peoples to strangers better manifested than in the Statute of Winchester, where town watchmen were called upon to look out for strangers and, if necessary, to pursue them with 'hue and cry from town to town' in order to secure their arrest and subsequent delivery to the sheriff. [77] And this was not all, for the bailiffs of large 'walled and gated towns' were instructed to ensure that all individuals lodging within the walls could be answered for by their hosts, and that anyone turning out to be a stranger or in any other way suspicious should be treated accordingly. [78] Here we appear to encounter a 'distrust of outsiders' par excellence.

There are limitations to this extension of Homans' sociological principle, however, not least of which is that a simple-minded extrapolation of this principle down the years from the thirteenth century to 1485 ignores the confusions attendant upon the gradual break-up of the fuedal order - as exacerbated by plague and by famine - and the consequential emergence of less geographically and socially insular settlements. The increasing numbers of 'bondmen made free' was chiefly responsible for this development, of course, although at least one commentator wishes to see 'peasants out of bond or perambulating workmen' as being themselves wayfarers set adrift from a network of 'small-worldly' and close-knit settlements that survived even the turmoils of the later

[76] **Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Vol.I, op.cit.,** Item 1170, p.347.

[77] See **Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit.,** Stat' Wynton, p.97.

[78] See **ibid.,** and see also many of the orders contained in **Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit.,** Statuta Civitatis London, pp.102-104.

Middle Ages. [79] There can be little doubt that this question warrants further attention, but I wish to conclude this paper by considering a second limitation to the extended Homans' principle - a limitation which is itself sociological, in that sociology is principally concerned with the phenomena causing society to 'cohere', and which also takes as a starting point the fragmented geography of Medieval settlement.

From the empirical materials marshalled above it should be clear that, even given a certain fear of strangers, settled communities did not exclude every species of outsider from their bounds. Rather, they were happy to include certain outsiders - notably the friars, preachers, minstrels and other entertainers - and it might be suggested that these communities perceived a real need for particular strangers to be received periodically into their midst. The simple conclusion, then, is that the sermons, stories and songs of these outsiders comprised one of the few routes through which settled populations could gain a picture of places and people beyond their own villages and towns. To use the terminology of modern human geography, the outsiders in question were 'agents of information diffusion' - the Medieval equivalents of letters, newspapers and telecommunications - and, to quote J.J. Jusserand, the author of English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages,

...these wanderers, who had seen and experienced so much, served to give some idea of the great unknown world to the humble classes whom they met on their way. Together with many false beliefs and fables they put into the heads of the stay-at-homes certain notions of extent and active life which they would hardly otherwise have acquired; above all, they brought to the

[79] See Jusserand J J, **op.cit.** It might be added that the lordly 'reaction' to a collapsing feudal order led to a number of statutes framed with the clear objective of keeping peasants tied to the land, and these made peasants refusing to serve their master - or departing from their master's service - a prisonable offence. Attempts were also made to prevent vagrancy, partly by outlawing beggary from most towns and villages, and partly by insisting that all travellers - all wandering outsiders - should carry appropriate papers ('letters testimonial' issued by lords for labourers or servants moving from place to place out of service; similar letters issued by bishops for religious wayfarers such as pilgrims and mendicant friars). See, for example, **Statutes of the Realm, Vol.I, op.cit.**, Statute of Labourers, pp.307-308.

land-bound...news of their brethren in the neighbouring province, of their condition of misery or happiness, and these were pitied or envied accordingly, and remembered as brothers or friends to call upon in the day of revolt. [80]

For Jusserand, therefore, Medieval outsiders of almost every hue - and not merely those who preached, told stories or sang songs - were crucial in binding together the 'land-bound' elements of the Medieval world both socially and geographically, and in thereby giving any real meaning to the concept of a Medieval 'society'. As he explains,

[a]t a period when, for the mass of [hu]mankind, ideas were transmitted orally and travelled with these wanderers along the road, the nomads served as a link between the human groups of various districts. [81]

Moreover, by challenging the 'land-bound' to pass judgment on both their wanderings and their many other extravagances, follies and rebellions, so these nomads were sure eventually to produce the reaction that Jusserand describes as a stripping away of the 'rust and superstition of the Middle Ages', and as a related 'longing for something nearer the reign of reason'. [82] In short, so he summarises,

[f]or good or evil it may be said that they [i.e. the nomads] acted in Medieval history as 'microbes', a numerous, scarcely visible but powerful host. They will perhaps reveal the secret of almost incomprehensible transformations. [83]

[80] Jusserand J J, *op.cit.*, p.12.

[81] *ibid.*

[82] See *ibid.*, pp.241-243.

[83] *ibid.*, p.243. Note that Trevelyan draws quite explicitly upon these thoughts of Jusserand's when summing up the role of the wandering friars: "[t]hese religious roundsmen, on foot and on horseback, were always on the move along the winding, muddy roads and green lanes of England; and to their peripatetic fellowship must be added the more secularly minded minstrels, tumblers, jugglers, beggars and charlatans of every kind, and pilgrims pious and worldly alike. All these wayfarers acted the part of 'microbes', as their historian Jusserand has said, infecting the stationary part of the population with the ideas of a new age and of a larger world"(Trevelyan G M, *op.cit.*, pp.44-45).

We hence arrive at what is perhaps the central paradox written into the social geography of Medieval outsiders, in that the fragmented settlement geography leading ignorant and superstitious settled 'folk' to shun strangers was also the very geography that allowed Jusserand's 'race of roamers' [84] to perform such a significant role in roping the scattered components of Medieval society together into some semblance of social and geographical order.

[84] He uses this phrase in Jusserand J J, *op.cit.*, p.241.