

#### 4. Out of the Alehouse

‘Champagne certainly gives one werry gentlemanly ideas, but for a continuance, I don’t know but I should prefer a mild hale.’

*(Jorrocks’s Jaunts and Jollities, R.S. Surtees).*

An, if not *the*, institution at the heart of the community as an imagined space and practical milieu, the village inn represented the most suitable – and most vital – arena through which to gauge (the possible) existence of a New Squirearchy within Eamesworth and the surrounding countryside. The location where I was first alerted to the prospect of a ‘nouveau gentry’ akin to that featured in those newspaper clippings and magazine articles discussed, it seemed highly appropriate in light of the public house’s elevated status within the concept of the ‘rural idyll’, and equally so in regard to its historic role as both a facilitator of communal interaction and an expression of social hierarchy. With initial reference to the work of Hugh Campbell, the nature of pubs and pub culture will be discussed prior to the introduction of Eamesworth’s ‘Six Tuns’ as fractured drinking space characterized by, and becoming of, the varied regions and practises of Squires, locals, villagers and New Squires, among others. Taking this further, and considering the explicit role of alcohol within this schema, the symbolic and material subtexts featuring as part of this scenario will be considered in relation to scripts of masculinity and the middle class as discussed by Hunt and Satterlee in particular.

##### 4.1. *The pub, the squirearchy and the rural idyll*

Rarely, argues Campbell, has any setting been mythologized to the same extent as that of the country pub. From the ‘last-chance saloon’ of the American wild-west, to the ‘crocodile wrestling mateship of a corrugated iron shed’ in the Australian outback, to the tranquil English tavern, ‘rural drinking sites have been ascribed by

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both the popular imagination and academic analysis with pronounced mythic properties' (2000, 562). Such visions, he suggests, place the country pub squarely within the nostalgic fiction of a provincial bygone age commonly referred to as the "rural idyll": As part of a 'retreat from the brutalities of urban living, where people live closer to nature in simpler and (by implication) happier lives' (Ibid). Influencing, and informed by, those lay, media and academic discourses which seek to define that which is 'rural' and that which is not (Jones 1995), films, television programmes and advertisements have tended to endorse this idyllic tradition, portraying the village pub as an arena which reflects the 'idea of being "closer to nature" and, by that fact, a more "natural" social world' (Campbell 2000, 563).

Too many, the pub is seen as one of the few remaining institutions within village life which can operate as a unifying social centre. A place where people of diverse backgrounds can freely enter and socialise at will. But, as Hunt and Satterlee demonstrate, the country tavern, in addition to operating in a cohesive manner, is also used to establish and consolidate separate group identities and maintain social boundaries (1986, 522). More than simple articulations of the local-newcomer divide we have (apparently) come to expect, exclusivity within the drinking establishments of their case-study community was acknowledged as the 'result of both the social position of their members and the culture generated by the groups themselves' (Ibid, 534). Realised and sustained through an elaborate set of practises and understandings, distinct presences were derived, to a greater or lesser extent, from a wider network of overlapping ties existing beyond the bar. Conceived of as 'structural features', the sharing of kin, neighbourhood, and occupational status is identified as a basis for (non) assembly within the confines of the public house. Instead of helping to dissolve any social barriers that might

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exist, rural drinking establishments may, in fact, have a tendency to consolidate them.

With attendance delineated according to lifestyle and a shared 'sense of social class culture', the village inn as identified by Hunt and Satterlee is quite different from that egalitarian vision held within the popular imagination and described by many earlier academics (e.g. Waddell 1975; Douglas and Isherwood 1980). But this does not, however, necessarily situate their findings as contrary to historically dominant discourses of rural belonging. Presenting the village as indelibly linked to the annual cycle of birth, life and death within their immediate environment, and, as a consequence, a more profound expression of some kind of 'natural order of things', representations of this space have traditionally been inclined to reiterate that ideology which placed a god-given aristocracy at the head of a highly stratified country community, and all that this encompasses (Everett 1994). Central to this construction as a place of association, recuperation, and celebration, the local pub is no exception.

##### 4.2. *The Six Tuns*

'The active social life of the villagers still centres on its ancient home, the inn. The old-time social distinctions have not yet vanished, and the humblest village tavern may have its "private" and "public" bars, in theory catering for "gentry" and "commoners". There may, however, be little difference between the two – indeed folk of all classes often prefer the public bar because the company is more interesting.' (Evans c.a. 1954, pp.188-189).

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With a variety of real ales 'off the wood' alongside well-stocked wine fridges, personalised tankards flanking a chromed Italian coffee machine, and a battered cribbage board sat astride a touch-screen electronic till, the Six Tuns of Eamesworth blends the old ways with the modern in much the same fashion as Evans' vernacular description, written some fifty years ago. Of the four alehouses that have existed in the village at one time or another, only the Six Tuns remains in business, existing as the de-facto gathering place for Eamesworth's various clubs, societies and friendship groups. It hosts the annual fireworks display, children's carol singing service and charity fundraiser, and is the venue for a weekly dominoes match, portraying the 'traditional' image of reliance on local clientele and the selling of beer and spirits; despite being closer in character to that which Maye *et al.* refer to as a 'reconstructed' rural pub (2005, 838).

Trading on the folkloric status afforded to a 17<sup>th</sup> century with whitewashed walls, exposed beams and a polished, rug-strewn floor, the Six Tuns is now equally dependent on the custom of 'outsiders', appealing to a sense of 'authenticity through diversity and differentiation' via the sale of regional beers, ciders and locally-sourced, high quality foodstuffs (Ibid). A successful enterprise, Friday and Saturday nights see the lounge bristling with a regular crop of drinkers and diners from both sides of the parish boundary, but there also exists a more secluded area of the tavern known as the 'Office' where visitors seldom dwell. Here stand the local farmers and the 'old faces' of the village, supping their ale alongside another collective, one that is seemingly aware of those historic roles, rules and meanings associated with those apparently exclusive zones of rural pubs. At least, this was the impression I took from a number of customers during my stint behind the bar; customers like Craig Burrett, a forty-something company director who frequented the 'Tuns' on a daily basis:

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“They’re in tonight [mentioning towards a group of men in the Office]. I don’t know why I come in here on Wednesdays ... I should know that they are always going to be in. They all sit round a table; one dips his hat and the rest all giggle! ‘What, what!’ [putting on a high pitched, upper crust accent]. It’s like a role playing game to them, the pretentious bastards. They’ve been watching Jeeves and Wooster and don’t see the piss take.”

(Craig Burrett).

Eamesworth, as a number of elderly residents led me to believe, had not played host to the gentry within living memory, and this tallied with those more formal accounts of the local area as being historically ‘open’. When considering the possibility of ‘gentryfication’, therefore, it was duly expected that the New Squirearchy would exist within the community as a form of re-invention as opposed to interactive emulation. The following conversation I had in the Six Tuns one evening with Michael Marriot, a stock-broker, farmhouse owner and resident of 11 years, therefore came as something of a surprise:

“Eamesworth was supposed to be ruled by the ABC’s, at least that is what I’ve been told. That’s the Aldertons, the Beesleys and the Coughlins. I know Bill [Beesley] ... I went to Royal Ascot with him and a couple of the boys last year and very often have a few pints in the Office with him on a Friday night. And of course, I have been introduced to Jack Coughlin ... well; he introduced himself to me as a matter of fact. He came over to me when I was in here not long after I bought the farm ... but I don’t know the Aldertons ... don’t even know where their farm is or was.” (Michael).

Jarring with my own understanding of the ABC’s as working farmers, and the village as lacking a strong feudal legacy, I pushed Michael on this subject:

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“Well, Bill and Jack are like the old squires aren’t they. They’re a bit special. They own a lot of land, figure in local council meetings and whatnot and their families have got big gravestones in the church. Plus, they drink in here ... in the Office ... and everybody seems to know who they are.” (Michael).

Amongst the individuals described by Craig as “pretentious bastards”, many held similar sentiments with regard to those farmers who stood beside them in the Office on Wednesday and Friday evenings. I put this to Jack Coughlin one afternoon while sharing a cup of tea in the kitchen of his extensive Georgian farmhouse:

“Michael’s a bit special [laughing]. I’m not a bloody squire, just a poor old farmer ... neither is Bill, though he acts a bit that way at times. I don’t understand why some think like that. Perhaps it’s just because I am the closest thing to it, and they do have these ideas about old village life don’t they? To be truthful, it’s the likes of Michael that act as though they were the landed gentry. Flashing their fifty-quid notes at the bar, always filling up the Office, going off to these here horse races in tweed suits, shooting at clay pigeons ... dressing up like penguins to go and lord it about at charity dinners.” (Jack Coughlin).

##### 4.3. *Office politics*

As an environment historically associated (whether rightly or wrongly) with ‘squiredom’, the Six Tuns had allowed for gentryfication, composed of props around which a sense of belonging could be sustained. Sharing a counter with Jack Coughlin and Bill Beesley, and adopting their terminology as apparent *bona*

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*fide* country gentlemen, Michael and a dozen or so of his associates revel in that knowledge and sense of shared experience that is drinking in the 'private' bar as a proclamation of 'countryism', and drinking in this 'Office' as an assertion of their 'localism' (Bell 1994); but this has not served to assimilate an older authority with a newer equivalent. Although on amicable terms with their peers, Michael *et al* have not inherited a space at the bar, and have no personal stake in the myths and legends that have built up around the pub in time. Nor do they seem overly interested. If the Tuns represents an essential part of their 'village in the mind' (Pahl 1970, 30), and one populated with 'friendly, smiling merrie rustics' (Hunt and Satterlee 1986, 523), they are none too keen to be regaled with tales of traditional village life. Universally unacquainted with the origins of the 'Office', it amuses Jack that these people have picked up on this turn of phrase without any real understanding of where it came from. He, on the other hand, remembers a time when the ABC's, his father among them, gathered here and agreed bidding prices on various beasts prior to auction; an activity that was never strictly above board but business all the same. It was a *real* office then, unlike now, with what Jack refers to as "pretenders" arriving on the scene to discuss shooting, dining and "the cost of their daughter's horse".

To lack an ancestral connection with the Tuns is not to deny the possibility of becoming 'a local' (although it certainly helps), and regular attendance at the pub usually guarantees acceptance for those who are both 'genuine' and aware of their status as 'foreigners'. This came to light when I spoke to Robert Forrester, a retired factory foreman and Eamesworth resident of 15 years:

"Well, I have been drinking in this pub ever since I moved into the village. It wasn't like it is now, I mean the restaurant was more important back then – than the bar that is - and very few of us came into drink on a regular

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basis. Maybe half a dozen of us, that's all. Anyway, you knew that Jack ... and Bill Faucet and that lot were proper locals. You knew they've always been around. I'm not saying I didn't ... don't get on with them. I do. I mean, I am what I am – I am not a flash bastard ... all talk, like you-know-who. And I daresay they appreciate that. But I can't be a *real* local, if you see what I mean. I haven't lived here all my life. They will say I am, and I daresay most people who come in here assume I am, but I am ... a regular who lives locally ... but not a local." (Robert Forrester).

Knowing 'your place' within the pub, or rather the feeling that others most certainly did not, became a central theme in my conversations with various members of the Six Tuns' community; as it was in those discussions that regularly took place at the bar. Here the 'you-know-who', 'faux riche', 'nouveau riche', 'green welly brigade', 'plastic farmers', 'Hooray Henrys', 'fake gentry', 'wanabee gentry', 'wanabee-lords-of-the-manor' and - on hearing the title of the research project - 'New Squirearchy', were regularly singled out as disingenuous and ridiculed by the likes of Alastair Gilling and his wife, Samantha. A skilled welder and engineer, his job took the couple all over the British Isles before they finally and settled down and started their own business on the outskirts of Eamesworth. Always keen to discuss their travels and experiences, Alastair was adamant that "them that want to be lord of the manor" could be found at the bar of every country pub in the land:

"It doesn't matter where you are; there are people like them in every pub in every village in the country. I remember when we used to live in Norfolk, and we used to drink in a pub near Holkham Hall and the Earl used to drink in there too. All the locals knew who he was ... we didn't make anything of it ... nor does he. Anyhow, we had this ex-London business-

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type who started to come in, and as soon as he found out who the Earl was he wouldn't leave him alone. Talked about his properties and tried to get all chummy. Anyhow, one night he asked the Earl about his shares and what did he think about the market ... Anyway, the Earl - who clearly didn't want to be talking about this crap in the pub - said "I don't know anything about these sort of things, I have a man who takes care of it all for me". That put the bastard in his place, I can tell you!" (Alastair).

"We have an aristocracy but you can't buy into that just by having a flash mansion or what-have-you. Some of the business types that come in here [gestured toward the Office], to villages like this and lord it about in the pub, think they are something they are not ... Newcomers and bloody pretenders. They are flash bastards. Fake." (Alastair).

With a strength of opinion common among many regular pub-dwellers, there was much to suggest the New Squirearchy were present as part of this space. On further consideration, however, there seemed little to characterise this body of drinkers as employing practises dissimilar to those elsewhere attributed to an overwhelmingly masculine, but also middle class, presence in rural pubs.

##### 4.4. *Pass the port; the role of alcohol*

Just as alcohol in itself can be fundamentally important in producing and maintaining cohesion within part of a community (Waddell 1975), it may also be used in a manner that begets discrimination and division. It is, moreover, not only the act of drinking which can produce a sense of separateness but also the styles, rituals and meanings which are associated with the consumption of alcohol. These tendencies, argue Hunt and Satterlee, become more intense when drinking

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occurs within a bounded space or place – what they refer to as a ‘drinking arena’ (1986, 524). Following Harris and Lipman, these boundaries are attributed with symbolic and material subtexts, and conceived of as serving dual purposes. As barriers, they operate to ‘constrain access and contacts between those who occupy the spaces’; as borders they represent the ‘notional edges of adjoining spaces and signify the presence of rules that also constrain access and contacts’ (1980, 419). Using this distinction between borders and barriers, Hunt and Satterlee set apart the drinking *space*, which can be created instantaneously and practically anywhere, from the drinking *place*, which possesses a ‘more elaborate material structure’ and physically separates the consumption of alcohol from outside activities (1986, 524).

With regulations concerning, for example, the appropriate time to consume alcohol and, more importantly, which individuals constitute acceptable participants, the public house is the archetypal drinking place – one that ‘may enhance even further the twin aspects of cohesion and division’ (ibid). Segregation, however, often extends beyond the pub door. While Hunt and Satterlee identified different establishments as catering for alternate, largely cohesive groups of pub-goers, the Six Tuns is itself characterised by various drinking places within; places that come into being at various times, and that are characterised by the presence of differing, but by no means stable or mutually exclusive, associations: Most notably those of ‘real locals’, ‘regulars’, ‘farmers’ and that wealthy band of ‘incomers’ who inhabit the Office on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon. Beyond their penchant for ‘rustic fashions’, however, and a preference for drinking in that area commonly associated with the gentry, there little else apparent by which to differentiate the New Squirearchy as something ‘more’ than a well-defined, male-orientated, middle class presence.

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### 4.5. *Masculinity*

Emphasising protection and provision, and the division of labour according to a 'natural order of things', the discourse of the country gentleman is highly masculine, but we should be wary when considering pub drinking practises as a persistent, nostalgic memorial to a patriarchal rural past. As Campbell reminds us, these acts may continue to legitimise male dominance within rural community life, imagined or not; and that rural pubs can actually operate as a key site where hegemonic forms of masculinity are constructed, reproduced, and secured;

'Consequently, by seeking to move beyond the rural idyll, or functionalist analysis, we must re-establish the relevance of the rural pub to the wider concerns of rural sociology. We must examine the various ways in which pubs operate as a social site, where male power is constructed in rural communities, and also the way in which symbolic notions of rurality are integral to the construction of gendered power in rural space.' (2000, 563).

Challenging the notion of manliness as a static structure or set of ideas, Campbell identifies gender as constituted performatively; that is, discursive constructions of gender are continually enacted in a fashion that 'conceals or dissimilates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler 1993, 13). Recognising public performance as only one aspect of performative gender, Campbell employs the term 'pub(lic) masculinity' to recognise 'not only the specificities of this performance as it relates to pub drinking, but also the way in which such practise is intrinsically display orientated and under constant public observation' (2000, 565). With overtly theatrical elements, they form a basis through which legitimacy and hierarchy are evaluated.

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Literally a world apart from the two small town New Zealand pubs in which Campbell undertook his ethnographic fieldwork, one would assume that there is much to separate the English village pub from its antipodean counterpart - especially in regard to an upwardly mobile echelon of the middle class. In several respects, however, the New Squirearchy bore closer resemblance to the subjects of Campbell's study than those locals and regulars who frequented the Six Tuns. This was particularly evident in their attitudes concerning the role of women as part (or rather non-part) of this environment. On a Wednesday and Saturday evening, wives and girlfriends attended the pub with the understanding that they share a bottle of wine or two in the main bar, and with the mind not to impose themselves on the Office for much longer than the time it takes for a brief "hello and how are you" with the menfolk. During the after-work drinking session on Friday night, and at the post-shoot Sunday get-together, however, it was tacitly understood that a women's presence is not permitted. For them, to arrive on the scene on these occasions was to risk exclusion, and, on occasion, be subjected to what Thomas (1978) has referred to as 'freezing techniques', which include being given a drink and largely ignored, made party to embarrassing sexist comments, and receiving conspicuous, questioning glances from those assembled at the bar. This was made clear by Tanya Parkinson, the wife of a New Squire and regular Office-dweller, on three separate occasions:

"When the wives go to the pub on Wednesday and Saturday nights, we tend to have a drink and a natter on a table away from the blokes. They tend to stand at the bar going on about their work and their new cars and all that crap. But we don't go in on a Friday evening or Sunday lunchtimes ... I mean I occasionally go and pick [husband] up on Wednesday, but I don't like going in ..." (Tanya Parkinson).

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“[On a Wednesday evening] I drop [husband] off and pick him up, and occasionally go in for one ... if I’m in the right frame of mind ... and talk to some of them ... because it’s so false. I won’t name people, but there are three in there that talk to me *because* I am [husband]’s wife... it really bugs me. And saying that, I will now only talk to them thinking ‘I don’t like you much either’ ...” (Tanya Parkinson).

“On Wednesday and Friday nights, you can go in there and they ... well, look at you as if to say ‘what are you doing here’, you know? They are like a bunch of teenage boys ... well some of them. It’s like they are coming out with these crude remarks and jokes and whatever because they *know* it upsets me ... well, most women I should imagine...” (Tanya Parkinson).

For the male contingent of the New Squirearchy – and within the Six Tuns it was overwhelmingly male – Wednesday and Friday nights are a time for, as Mark Price put it, “a time for having a pint and a laugh out of earshot”, but also for discussing and extending their business and financial interests:

“Business happens to lend itself [to the pub] ... as a product of being in there. There are people like Stephen Irving. He was saying to me the other day how he used the pub and the social side of things as a great vehicle for his business. I don’t actually think we go about it cynically, but looking back on various contracts he has got over the years, a lot have come entirely through the rugby club or through the pub. I suppose this ties into what you’re doing. Once you get a cross section of people in the pub there’ll be a lot with similar backgrounds. People who’ll be in the pub and be quite happy to talk about business.” (Mark Price).

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“... So, using Stephen as an example, there’s a chap he now knows who, just by chance happened to drink in the pub who happens to be the managing director of a local publishing company. And, you know, publishing companies and computers go hand in hand. So, 50 computer systems turn up at the publishing house along with a few freebies. I mean, I’ll meet people in the pub and we’ll talk about business and the next day I’ll get a phone call. If nothing else, if you are talking to friends in business, it helps when you bounce ideas off of each other. People who aren’t directly involved in your business, will say ‘what about doing this’, or ‘what about doing that’. So it’s a good thing. A brainstorming session or whatever you say now.” (Mark Price).

A common thread, the majority of the group head their own company or, at the very least, occupy a senior position in the financial sector; with several members having initially crossed paths in ‘the City’ during the mid-1980s boom. For the most part ladies of leisure, the ‘women’ or ‘girls’ are not considered as part of this world; an oddly romanticised world in which highly stressful, snap-shot judgments sit hand in hand with conspicuous materialism and the (often excessive) consumption of alcohol (see McDowell 1994). An important part of the decision-making process, and because wives and partners are generally excluded from these activities, the need for women to drink is, apparently, greatly reduced. Hardly unique, such a mindset is identified by Ardener (1981) as defining the act of drinking, and in turn the public house, as a symbol of male ascendancy and that, while producing solidarity amongst the male contingent of the New Squirearchy (if, indeed there was to be any other part of the delegation), it reinforced gendered division.

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### 4.6. *New Squires; or archetypal middle class pub dwellers?*

Identifying class as a distinguishing characteristic of pub-going groups within their case-study community, Hunt and Satterlee take their interest beyond differences of occupation and income. More importantly, their observations place a greater emphasis on the ways in which members of two distinct groups translate their class positions into differing practises and behaviours. Citing 'different cultural spheres' as a basis for alternate drinking practises and associative meanings their research highlights contrasting patterns of round-buying as a tendency of middle class and working class pub-goers; patterns that also constitute a fundamental difference between the New Squirearchy and other Six Tuns regulars – although the term 'working class' was found to be generally inappropriate when considering the later.

As with any assemblage, prolonged observation brought to light a number practises or 'unwritten codes' which members of the New Squirearchy uniformly adhered to, and to become a New Squire as part of the Six Tuns clearly depended upon a degree of contextual awareness incorporating the know-how to play the game. Some acts appeared obvious and non-reflexive, while others were evidently more reflexive and oblique in nature. In first instance, 'getting one in' was universally acknowledged and held as sacrosanct. With an implicit sense of trust operating at all times, it was broadly understood that every member of the group was expected to purchase a round in turn, and, on those occasions when women were present, their 'go' was the responsibility of spouse or boyfriend. In contrast to Hunt and Satterlee's own findings, however, reciprocity could not occur on a subsequent session, and the generosity of others could not be returned at a later date without risk of recrimination. Instead, on those occasions when a member of the group departed prior to the end of the gathering, it was common practise to

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either buy a round out of turn, or else leave a corresponding sum of money on the counter. To exit a session early was, therefore, to surrender any 'stored credit' in the form of drinks owed, and, in effect, burden a relative cost of absence.

Through involving themselves in a constant, reciprocal relationship, the New Squires invested time, energy and money in the group; in return they expected equivalent reparation and confirmation of clan membership. Like Hunt and Satterlee's middle class pub-goers, it 'was not only necessary for the members to possess an appropriately high income to share in the life-style of the group'; but also 'necessary for them to be prepared to dispose of part of this income through round buying to maintain their membership – that of the sociable person' (1986, 530). On occasion, when the New Squirearchy were out in force, the cost of a round often exceeded forty pounds, and on being asked for payment, those whose 'go' it was were sporadically known to balk at the cost and quiz the bar-staff as to the cost and destination of each drink. Such questioning, however, was usually assumed away from the main body of the group, as it was generally deemed improper to quibble over the odd pound or two on a bar or restaurant bill. To haggle openly was to be labelled as 'tight', often leading to clandestine conversations regarding the guilty party's character and financial well being. Likewise, if an individual broke the rules by either not endeavouring to buy a round, or consistently (and therefore deliberately) 'stepping up' when only a small number were present, then said person 'stood to jeopardise not only his group position, but also his relationship with other individual members in the group' (Ibid, 531).

Within the ranks of the New Squirearchy, failing to adhere to the rules of reciprocity within the Six Tuns could lead to exclusion from communal buying, and even from the social life of the group as a whole. This became clear one

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Sunday when an occasional member of the group was openly accused of being a 'ponce', and suffered an afternoon of ridicule as a result. This, of course, led to acute embarrassment on his part, and it was many weeks before he once again stepped over the threshold of the Six Tuns. Passing comment on his temporary absence from the Office, I was later given an account of his indiscretion by one of those who had levelled the accusation in the first instance:

"Well, its not that we don't like the bloke. He's alright as it goes. Pleasant enough. But I ... well we ... you start to notice when someone isn't putting up as far as getting a beer in. But Richard was constantly not getting a round in. He would come in, usually when most of us were already there ... get himself a drink at the other end of the bar and *then* come and stand with us. He would then be bought drinks all night and ... well he would seem to just disappear about the time it was his turn to get his wallet out. It seemed more than coincidence, and week in and week out ... you get to the point when you have to say something. It's not about the *money*, just ... decency I suppose." (Christopher Passant).

In much the same fashion as that relative newcomer who, in the course of Hunt and Satterlee's study, was excluded from the middle class groups' round buying as a consequence of not 'pulling his weight', Richard – the owner of a decorating firm - endeavoured to change their behaviour, and on returning to the Office began to 'put up' in a rather flamboyant fashion. As a result he was quickly forgiven and reinstated into the round buying practise, although he was now earmarked for sporadic jibes about free-loading and scrounging. Others, however, could not re-ingratiate themselves so easily, and having parted ways with the group on similar grounds, were unable to return to the fold as before.

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A ritual which continually served to affirm status within the group, round buying also performed a vital function as an indicator of disposal income. Universally well-paid, New Squires were characterised by their considerable spending power, enabling them to pursue a more exclusive lifestyle within and beyond the rural. As long as an individual possessed a high degree of monetary flexibility, shared similar aspirations, and were willing to participate fully in proceedings, then they seemed to have a good chance of attaining full group membership; but this had to be maintained. More than desire and a willingness to behave in a certain fashion, New Squiredom was firmly grounded in economic success, a situation that became painfully obvious during the course of the study. Financial stability when owning and operating a small to medium scale company is often a precarious thing at best, and, as such, I was made aware of a number of individuals who, as a result of a downturn in their respective businesses, were 'feeling the pinch'. A sensitive issue, it was not something to be discussed openly, nor actively pursued. Nevertheless, it apparently accounted for the disappearance of a number of New Squires from the Six Tuns on a permanent and semi-permanent basis, and the plight of one particular individual was conveyed by Tanya:

"Its not that I particularly like Andrew, I don't. But I do feel sorry for him ... It's because he's come literally from nothing, hasn't he, apparently. And he's worked his way up which is very admirable ... and he likes everyone with money ... His business is going down the pan, and it must be hard. But he isn't going out with the boys and drinking and all that. Mark Price says he can't afford it, probably. He won't be going on the bloke's holidays either. Mark reckons it could be because he is embarrassed about the business going wrong. I mean, he hasn't said anything about it, but everyone *knows*. And he knows everyone knows. He used to come down the pub and play the big man ... going on about what he was doing with

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his business and what he had bought ... but its all gone wrong and he wont come out ...” (Tanya Parkinson).

A self-imposed exile, the downturn in Andrew’s commercial interests as the proprietor of a courier firm had evidently bought about his absence from the group. Perhaps unable to pay his way, or perhaps because his perceived corporate failings had, in his mind, rendered him less able to shoulder the expenses of New Squiredom in the eyes of his piers, Andrew had, by all accounts, lost face:

“His business is going through hard times, and naturally, he hasn’t come out for a drink as usual. I suppose it could be the case that he is a bit ... well, possibly embarrassed about it. He never said his company had fallen on hard times, and we often talk about business. It might well be the case that he doesn’t have the cash as such at the moment. Its not that you necessarily haven’t *got* the money ... but if your business is having problems you don’t go out flashing the cash, going on expensive holidays ... buying new cars. I wouldn’t, and I expect that he is the same. He is not necessarily a good friend of mine. He has always seemed to have a thing about *money* and how much he has made and all that. A few of the blokes have ... but he ... well ...” (Mark Price).

This view was shared by Marcus Wynne, a farmer and sometime machinery dealer who, in being a neighbour of Mark, occasionally shared a drink and chat at the bar. A dyed-in-wool local in the sense of local lineage and nightly drinking, Marcus was quick to point out the fair-weather friendship he saw as endemic in Mark’s circle:

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“It’s like all of them. They will never tell you what they are really thinking about any of their so-called friends. It’s all about flashing the cash ... They won’t say ... admit, even, that things aren’t going so well until their business goes tits up and they disappear from the crowd. It is like they never existed. Look at Andrew, you don’t see him amongst them anymore do you?”

##### 4.7. *(New) money and squirely props*

For the majority of those who frequented the Six Tuns on a regular basis, round buying as a group affirming ritual was outwardly unnecessary, and generally confined to smaller clusters of close friends on an intermittent basis. Amongst these regulars, there was a general feeling that this trait as practised on by the New Squires was an indication of broader pretension, profligacy and perhaps even insecurity. This was put to me by Robert Forrester and Craig Burrett having witnessed one such Office dweller very publicly purchase a consignment of drinks with a fifty pound note:

“Do you know what that silly prat Andrew came out with? [Aping subject] ‘You know that ‘effin Chancellor hit the interest rate for another half percent’, and all that lot all nodded in agreement. The whole pub looked at him in total bemusement. Didn’t know what to make of him. He may own [company], but to hear that prat harping on like that you would think he owns Coca Cola. It certainly doesn’t impress me, and certainly not the people with *real* money.” (Craig).

“Yes ... There are those that have a bit of money, and those who are trying to keep up. They gamble at each others houses, shoot, go on expensive

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holidays, and some of them can't afford it. Some of them haven't got a pot to piss in. Like Andrew, I haven't seen him in the pub for a while ... It's funny, he had a nice house in Lintsworth [nearby village], but had to move into a farmhouse in Eamesworth for appearances. I'd sooner have kept the old house and had a bit of cash in my back pocket, instead of getting up to the hilt in order to have how ever many bedrooms and flash car."

(Robert Forrester).

Hearsay and idle chit-chat aside, just how Craig and Robert could be quite so sure of Andrew's ailing finances would remain a mystery. Tinged, perhaps, with the slightest trace of envy, their apparent animosity toward 'that lot' on the grounds of brash, insensitive behaviour was shared a long standing bar attendant, whose own thoughts on this subject were, in fact, largely accepted by several members of the offending party.

"They choose their path in life and make their money, but they don't respect anyone doing *menial stuff*. Be we ... the staff and that ... work every bit as hard as them. They don't ask us to pour them a drink, they summon us like we're the servants. The peasantry. They seem to have the idea that we are beneath them ... They are all in competition. Who has the biggest wad of cash in their pocket, the best car, the biggest house, the largest business. They like to show of their money." (Bar attendant).

"Well, yes. What you normally find, because I do know them quite well, some as clients, is that they don't actually mean anything by it. But I understand how their attitude can come across as arrogant, condescending and um, rude at the very least." (Luke Murcott).

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“Yes. But I think a lot of the guys are aware of that, and what’s more to the point is ... for the purposes of the tape ... they don’t give a flying fuck what someone else thinks about it ... And they talk loudly and knowingly of property and what-have-you in the pub ... And there is that feeling that it is just a little brash sometimes ... Some of it is self centred arrogance really. I suppose saying this sort of thing has wandered off the topic, but I think there are a lot of people who do strive for all of these ... we could almost call them these boxes which prove that you’re a successful person and you’re better than someone else, rather than purely for their own benefit and nothing else ... I mean, when it comes to those trappings of country life, and whether they might be sought as status symbols, at least one of our member, if you like, does everything for effect. Everything he does, it seems, is for effect.” (Christopher Passant).

Such criticism as that levelled by Christopher was not uncommon in that it extended beyond a concern with money in the literal sense, and more often dwelt on “little boxes” or assets; particularly those assets conceived of as indicative of ‘rural’ wealth. Something of a hobby, regulars like Craig and Robert would often wile away the hours debating the truthfulness of rumours as to what members of the New Squirearchy had been buying, selling and spending, eventually settling upon a finite version of events seldom corroborated by the subjects of their interest. One thing they could be sure about, however, were those trappings on display within the pub and – even more importantly – the car park.

If there was little to differentiate their pub-based behaviour as something more than male and ‘middle class’, those ‘technologies’ which played as part of their act most certainly set apart the New Squirearchy. As with any performance, this state of being incorporated certain material and non-material ‘props’, including

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phrases, clothing, trinkets and appliances, all of which portrayed certain - although not necessarily uniform - sentiments for those within the group, and those outside of the group. Linguistically, the conversation is peppered with both business-orientated slang and rural referents, including that of a “dodgy octopus” (as in owing ‘sick squid’), “tapping up” (informal business practises), “tupping up” (getting ‘one over’ on someone; metaphor relating to an animal being inseminated), “cup-shot” (inebriated) and even “townies” (urban dwellers). Aesthetically, the uniform on a weekend consisted of branded jeans, checked shirts and either brogues or ankle-high dealer boots, and, when raining, wax jackets were sure to put in an appearance. If the weather was particularly inhospitable, some of their number would also intermittently don ‘hunter’ wellingtons, replete with side fasteners and a feathered insole, although this was seen as a step too far by many of their colleagues, who could not resist a sly poke about their attire.

If wearing of three-quarter length trousers in the Six Tuns resulted in the odd snigger, especially amongst other regulars, it was not something that characterised the New Squirearchy as a whole and could not really be employed as such. Instead, it was the ownership of ‘Chelsea Tractors’ that took on a heady symbolism for those keen to denigrate the green welly brigade. Something that could not be missed by those sat at any of the front windows, a fleet of luxury four-wheel-drives - more specifically Range Rovers - rolling up the short driveway would herald the arrival of the New Squirearchy at the Six Tuns. Coming to rest side-by-side adjacent to the front porch, rather than on the extensive car park to the rear of the building, it was a spectacle that could not be missed by anyone passing through the main entrance. Never more than a year old or without a recent coat of polish, they were all decked out with personalised number plates and furnished with every possible accessory.

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An object of considerable pride among their incumbents, the pleasures and woes of Range Rover ownership was a reoccurring topic in the Office when gazing out on a fleet of vehicles that often went into double figures. Even the choice of colour was uniform; being that of blue or silver, and nothing less than the flagship 'Vogue' model was ever on display. For other regulars, therefore, Range Rovers came to represent the New Squirearchy as shorthand, as a focus for derision, and as the crass mark of otherness. This was something Thomas Baster, an operations director and Eamesworth resident of 15 years standing, had strong feelings about.

"As a local, I'd say that there is a certain group where you need a Range Rover and a big country house or you are not in the gang. As far as they behave, I think they probably feel that they are part of, um, a different set because of it. Because they have enough money. What I am trying to say is that they are trying to make themselves kingpins, appear classy ... but you can still be an oik in a Range Rover, or a Jag, or mansion." (Thomas Baster).

With an underlying cynicism, Thomas' remarks were slightly more diplomatic than those of Amy Grainger who, on being asked if membership of the New Squirearchy was premised on apparent wealth, proceeded to compare this clique with what she referred to as the "real deal".

"Yes, it so is. They are all in competition. Who has the biggest wad of cash in their pocket, the best car, the biggest house, the largest business. They like to show off their money. But they haven't. Not really. They ones I respect ... like David Cornwell [the owner of a significant car parts manufacturer], they have way more money, but they just get on with it. He sits down with you and talks to you like a person ... Just 'cos they [New Squirearchy] have a Range Rover, he has a chauffeur..." (Amy).

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Jokingly, I asked Amy if the acquisition of Range Rover was the sole prerequisite for a spot in the group:

“Yeah. They’d be like ‘he’s got money, he’s one of us. That’s it, isn’t it? Proper locals take the piss out of them because of it. They don’t like the fact that they [New Squirearchy] take over the pub on Wednesdays and Fridays. They nod at each other, but you can tell the locals and the money crowd don’t really like or respect each other.” (Amy).

If anything, the non-ownership of a Range Rover seemed more important to the local - regulars than the ownership of a Range Rover amidst the New Squirearchy. Not simply the ‘hapless bearer of symbolic projection’ (Latour 1999, 10), it acted within the scene; it effected in a very real sense. No less indispensable for assuring a New Squirearchy as part of the Six Tuns as Andrew, Stephen, or David Cornwell, it had the ability to part-dictate the unfolding of events. For some, the presence of these vehicles on the pub forecourt was in itself enough to curtail a planned foray to the bar, while others were sure to pass ready-made comments pertaining to ‘curb-climbers’ on passing through the porch - comments that were sure to be heard by New Squires and Non-New-Squires as a confirmation of their basis of belonging.

Such was the strength of ill-feeling among regular locals regarding the presence of Range Rovers at the Six Tuns as a perceived statement of wealth and superiority that, by the last quarter of the study, at least one member of the New Squirearchy had elected to purchase an alternative means of transport in an attempt to distance himself from the “kudos hunting” he saw as increasingly endemic within the group:

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“Going back ten years ago or so, we [himself and partner] owned two Range Rovers back to back ... We’d both quite liked the idea of it. We both liked the driving position, and thought ‘oh sod it, we’ll buy one’. And then we bought another one before we moved. There was a hell of a lot of work that needed doing on the house, and so we got rid of it. We cashed the money in ... The new [model] Range Rover, when looking at it purely objectively, I think they are quite a nice car. I must say going back a year or so when I was getting rid of my Porsche ... there was a feeling that ‘I could get a Range Rover’, which would have lost me just as much. The reason that I didn’t, and I feel that this is something you would be aware of ... Typically on a Wednesday afternoon, you would go down to the Six Tuns and it was a bit like a Land Rover showroom. Or, to be a little more precise about that, a Range Rover showroom.” (Mark Price).

Following a long pause, in which Mark appeared to be more carefully considering their thoughts, he continued with considerable trepidation, evidently conscious of casting aspersions in the direction of his drinking partners.

“I’m sort of reasonably friendly with a lot of guys in there who are all self employed people. A lot of them I get on with pretty well, though I can quite understand a lot of people who ... there is an aspect in me that struggles with a lot of them ... because there’s a lot of people who would just turn around and say it’s a loadsa money culture. And it doesn’t sit very comfortably with me. And that thing they have for Range Rovers, I just thought ‘oh god, no’. It really would make me seem like all of them. And, you know, it’s a shame in a way because I think it is a nice car and I like it ... Saying about not doing things for status, that’s almost an anti-

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statement, because it would actually stop me from getting one. I ... we have actually got a Land Rover Discovery.” (Mark Price).

As if caught off-guard, mindful that the ownership of any four-wheel drive without due need could lead to unwarranted accusations of his being embroiled in the ‘loadsa money culture’, Mark was quick to qualify *his* need for a vehicle of this type:

“But in fairness, it has got a tow bar on the back. We own a horsebox that it tows beautifully, and we have 4 dogs which rarely nowadays ever go in there. It is very much a utility car and it has, on occasions, been put in 4 wheel drive and gone around in the snow and across ploughed fields. I do feel that it is a genuinely used car.” (Mark Price).

#### 4.8. *Acknowledgement*

As a predominantly male band of drinkers who had come to my attention as an object of ridicule, curiosity and even abhorrence amongst other regular, ‘local’ pub-goers, I had been fairly confident that those individuals portrayed as impostors to the role of the rural gentry would not see themselves in this light. If this was found to be the case, however, and such an identity had been purposely sought or otherwise realised, I was sure that these individuals would not, on being challenged, actually profess the suitability of tags like ‘fake gentry’ and ‘New Squirearchy’ when asked to characterise their social circle. It therefore came as something of a surprise when, for most part, those branded as such were only too keen to tow this line when talking of their associates – if not themselves:

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“I think there is [a New Squirearchy]. If you look at that crowd, the crowd that goes to the pub. The people I associate with. What do they all turn up in? They wear the checked shirts ... buy the big rounds. And they’ve all bought Range Rovers. I think that from an outside perception ... I think it could be spot on. But I’ve ended up driving to the pub in my Range Rover as well. But I do have a dog”. (Michael Marriot).

Pausing to sip his coffee, Michael proceeded to clarify his position further:

I have a wax jacket and I do have the green wellies ... And going down the pub and talking about these things and what have you is obviously important to us ... well, some of us at least. If I admit it. I think that it is a bit of an escape from work and all the stresses and strains of business that I think we all suffer from.” (Michael Marriot).

Candid, and often with an air of self-deprecation, testimonies such as that of Michael confirmed the existence of a group – whether referred to as the New Squirearchy or otherwise – as part of the Six Tuns landscape accounted for in this manner; not only as an ‘other’ by others, but also amid those said to constitute this formation.

The question now was; was this little inn the sole space of dwelling, or did it operate as part of a broader, enduring network of ‘squirely becoming’ deemed necessary for the appropriate application of this collective label? With talk of charity dinners, horse races, shoots, fields and farmhouses, an ‘influence beyond’ was certainly felt at the bar – but how important were these alternative venues in all actuality? Did they really feed into and out of the public house in a sense other than the imaginary? What is more, should this be the case, did these elements

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play out in a manner considerably different than that which has been elsewhere attributed to generic scripts of masculinity and the 'middle class', as they perhaps did in the Six Tuns?