> 'He reassessed. Part of the fun of buying a house was making his townie friends pig-sick with envy, and to have rare historical documents stuck all over the bog walls would make them even pig-sicker. Nonetheless, the main game plan, as he constantly announced to everyone, including complete strangers, was to have a country estate ready for when he retired at forty, that age when all successful men retire and leave London. That was what mattered. And yet, and yet … Like many an outsider and exile he hankered after roots, longed to appropriate a past, and the brittle bundles illuminating the private history of this house, this seventeenth-century manor house, were not just abstractions to him. He had seen the documents. He had felt them … An archive that chronicled four centuries and seventeen generations of ownership by just one family who … had finally come to the end of a four-hundred-year line.'
>
> ('Stefan' in *The Valley*, Pilton 2005, 132).

Having discussed at length the importance and centrality of such rural 'props' as Range Rovers and dealer boots to the existence of a New Squirearchy in the vicinity of the village pub, it is important to now discuss how they effectively transcend iconography and the visual economy, and the manner in which these technologies circulate and organise people. The basis of what has been referred to as 'rural chic', it was the fashioning of a nouveau gentry around the more substantial Jilly Cooper-esque world of large houses, stables and fields that was more indicative of a permanent, substantive investment in the landscape. In tandem with the subtle, but occasionally forthright adoption of equine and, more pertinently, agricultural identities and practises, this firmly tied many of Eamesworth's arrivistes into the land; land being the historical basis of the power, influence and presence of a rural elite that was - and in some places still is - obligatory.

5. At the farm gate

5.1. *From seeing to being*

Considering the possibilities for the 'influence beyond', and those other 'bits' of New Squiredom which fed into, and out of, the public house, 'rural' symbols and symbolisms were evidently central to the forging of this – and other – senses of enacted belonging. Here the presence of four wheel drives, dealer boots, horses and farmsteads was felt - even *in absentia* - as facets of a broader picture; as part of an imagined geography in which dichotomies of New Squire/ local, indigenous/ parvenu and diffident/ ostentation prevailed. Their worth transcended iconography, and the implications of their being were both psychological and corporeal.

Discussing the idea of a 'visual economy', Poole (1997) calls attention to the way images serve to organise people, ideas and objects, and that this organisation involves three tiers: their production through individuals and technologies; their circulation; and the cultural resources and systems through which images are interpreted and valued. In addition to these organisational dimensions, suggests Campbell, the idea of a visual economy makes 'clear that the visual field is both made possible by and productive of relations of power, and that these power relations bear at least some relationship to wider social and political structures which are themselves associated with relations of exchange in which images are commodities" (2006, 5). The consequence of this, he argues, is that people in disparate places can be part of the same economy when they might not be of the same culture. The visual economy may, therefore, produce and promote cultural difference, and invoking this concept 'means that images cannot be isolated as discrete objects, but have to be understood as imbricated in networks of materials, technologies, institutions, markets, affects, cultural histories and political contexts' (Ibid). In short, we are drawn to consider how the visual circulates, rather than simply performing iconographic interpretations.

The theoretical basis for an altogether more stolid consideration of documentary photography and photojournalism in arenas of war and violence, a number of Campbell's observations resonated with my own experiences in the field, most notably that a 'visual economy' signals the 'practises through which a place and its people is enacted and our response made possible (Ibid). Visual performance is facilitated by, and in turn engenders, discourses in which the interplay between *site* and *sight* is crucial (see Schwartz and Ryan, 2003).

> '[visual economy] calls attention to the role of visuality in the production of geographical imaginations, and how the conditions of possibility for a political response. These geopolitical discourses structure our encounters with other human beings in space and time; the visual culture of geopolitics therefore finds its primal scene in the face of the other, making it a significant location for questions of ethics, politics and responsibility.'
>
> (Campbell 2006, 5).

At its most obvious, the visual presence of Range Rovers and 'rural chic', poignant through their association with leisure, wealth and privilege in a rural setting, partly prearranged interaction within the Six Tuns, and were effective in establishing the New Squirearchy as an immoral 'other' among regular-locals, but also as elements of institutional compliance among an alternative clique. As discernible, irrevocable connections to a broader, popularly envisaged web of rural middle class materiality, they amount to cultural, socio-economic and moral boundaries; as bricks in a wall that may, or may not, be complete.

Conceptualising the self in the postmodern ilk, neither as a given product of a class system nor as a fixed identity which the individual can simply adopt (Woodruffe-Burton 1998, 302), identity is something the person actively creates, partially through consumption (Giddens 1993). Described by Thompson (1995) as

a project actively borne of available symbolic materials, materials which the individual plaits into an inimitable account themselves, the self takes the form of a narrative. A 'life project', Featherstone characterises the postmodern consumer as 'displaying their individuality and sense of style in particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, experiences and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle' (1993, 63). Living in an increasingly rich symbolic environment within which those meanings attached to any situation or object is determined by interpretation, the consumer learns not only to develop their own, unique appraisals, but also to agree on certain shared readings (Woodruffe-Burton 1998, 302). These symbolic meanings are then used to construct, maintain and express (each of) his/her (multiple) identities (Woodruffe-Burton and Elliot 1998), some of which may partly revolve around ideas of class and that of the complete sir or lady. A desire enforced and accommodated by retailers, this is discussed at length by Frank Mort (1996) in his account of the meteoric rise of Burton's as a 'tailor of taste' in 1950's Britain, whose techniques of salesmanship centred on one clearly identifiable icon of masculinity; the image of the gentleman:

> "In manners and self-presentation this was a decidedly English world-view. It was taken as given that the gentleman always appeared correctly dressed, for clothes were a public sign of social honour. Burton's gentlemanly ideal was in part the legacy of nineteenth-century languages of class. Clothes as expressive of status, manners as visible markers of distinction, these were grounded in a vertical model of class relations."
>
> (Mort 1996, 137).

A strategy also adopted in the female sector by, for example, Country Casuals and Monsoon, the complex negotiation of aristocratic themes and an emphasis on status assiduously adapted for a broader gamut of consumers has been a perennial feature of the clothing industry. Traditionally distanced from, but clearly reliant

upon, the 'bespoke trade of Saville Row and upmarket competitors like Aquascutum or Simpson's' (Ibid, 137), a number of more 'mainstream' brands have emphasised affordable elegance. In more recent times, however, historically exclusive labels have been forced to move with the times, using their heritage to court a wider audience whilst also constantly remodelling elegance through the regular introduction of new lines and designs. As a result, what Mort describes as the 'fantasy of upper-class mores' has, for many, been upstaged by the reality, although the exact character of these mores has necessarily become cloudier and more open to interpretation.

5.2. Rural chic

Concentrating on role of clothes, 'style' and, most significantly, 'labels' as symbols, Woodruffe-Burton's work is largely concerned with what might otherwise be referred to as 'high fashion', where constant change and a focus on originality, or at least the illusion of something new or different, means that signs and symbols are transient at best (1998, 303). Could this, therefore, be the case in regard to those dealer boots, check-shirts and moleskin trousers that popped up around Eamesworth during the study were destined for spare-room closets and charity shop clothes rails at the outset of a new season and a new collection? Was it, in fact, pure coincidence that 'rural chic' reached a head during the period of the research, with the majority of tweed-clad Eameworthians merely following current trends[1] as opposed to consciously acquiring aesthetic elements of identikit squiredom? These courses of action are not so easily separated, although the subsequent passage, taken from the *Daily Mail* in the early autumn of 2005, hints toward the latter:

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[1] Although, as detailed in the first chapter, these (re)emergence of these trends initially served to rouse my interest into the possible existence of a New Squirearchy in Eamesworth and beyond.

> 'They were once the ultimate must-nots. Despite an illustrious past and a reputation for quality, classic British labels such as Daks, Aquasutum and Pringle were as fashionable as a stripped pine kitchen. The only people clamouring for these clothes and accessories were Japanese tourists and ageing Sloanes … But not any more. After years in the doldrums, they are again registering on the fashion world. Even Holland and Holland – a label for the shooting set, not a fashionista's closet – has credibility, thanks to Madonna. Modelling the to-the-manor-born look in American Vogue, she has made the knee-length tweed skirt and gamekeeper's cap must haves for this year.' (*Daily Mail*, October 17 2005, 49).

Noticing a stiffly cut Burberry ecru mac draped across the back of her chair, and a rather racy green cashmere jumper across her shoulders, I commented on Maria Honeyman's 'lady-like' appearance one afternoon over a pot of coffee. The 'look' she said, was not necessarily intended, although she had picked the two items up on a recent shopping spree in the *House of Fraser* department store, having been taken by their appearance in a number of 'girly magazines' that she regularly subscribed to. The branding had not been predetermined, nor had Maria purposefully set out to purchase these goods, and the "lady of the manor" aesthetic was not something she readily associated with either herself or her friends, bar one or two "dowdy" exceptions. It just happened to be the style of the time, and the coat and jumper would, in all likelihood, be superseded by garments of an altogether different kind "by this time next year".

One of Maria's closer compatriots, Tanya was equally keen to point out her 'shopoholic' tendencies, and made no bones about her love of designer brands and the "revolving door policy" that operated in her wardrobe. This, she intimated, was endemic among 'the girls', many of whom could take advantage of their partner's credit cards on this front.

> "Some will spend a fortune on clothes and natter on about them. 'So and so's bought this', and 'so and so's bought that'. I find it a bit trying to be honest. That said, if I see a pair of jeans I like, I will pay whatever. But I don't go out and buy sets of clothes that match." (Tanya Parkinson).

Sensing an opportunity, I raised the issue of rural chic:

> "Oh yeah, that's in at the moment isn't it? Not my cup of tea, but you can see that one or two of the girls have gone in for that in a big way. But they will probably move onto something else in no time." (Tanya Parkinson).

I asked Tanya if the same could be said about their men folk:

> "Well take [Husband]. He is quite image conscious. The women are clothes shopping constantly and chop and change, but men less so. Some of those he [husband] drinks with keep up with keep up with fashion, but less so than the girls. They are not so competitive and have to have the latest shirt or whatever, but the brand is important. They *are* conscious of how each other look and the labels they wear. They seem to conform a bit more. Whether that's because men's fashion doesn't change so much I don't know." (Tanya Parkinson).

Did they, then, go in for 'rural chic' in a purposeful manner?

> "Oh the so do! Just look at some of them. Wearing the checked shirts and all that. I suppose it goes with the big farmhouse and all of that."
>
> (Tanya Parkinson).

This perceptible preoccupation with designer labels fits neatly with theories of conspicuous consumption (e.g. Mason 1981), and the interplay between product symbolism and the consumer's lifestyle or self-concept. This is not, as Woodruffe-Burton (1998) points out, a new phenomenon, with 'luxury' brands such as Daks having been around for many years, and, if Tanya was right in her synopsis - and a brief glance across the Office provided a degree of confirmation – it remains in accordance with a proposition put forward by Grubb and Grathwohl as far back as 1967:

> 'First, the self concept of an individual will be sustained if he believes the good he has purchased is recognised publicly and classified in a manner that supports and matches his self concept … the effect on the individual is ultimately depended upon the products being a publicly recognised symbol … Goods as symbols serve the individual, becoming means to cause desired reactions from other individuals.'
>
> (Cited in Woodruffe-Burton 1998, 309).

Another function of 'exclusive' labels which, paradoxically, was dwelt upon by those who characterised the New Squirearchy as decadent and brash, was the perceived esteem of others as a result of their ability to purchase prestige goods – a trait allied to the *nouveaux riches* in LaBarbera's (1988) study of self-fulfilment. Images or symbols of consequence within our constructed realities, Featherstone (1992) also talks of a 'tendency for social groups to seek to classify and order their social circumstances and use cultural goods as a means of demarcation, as communicators which establish boundaries between some people and build bridges with others' (in Woodruffe-Burton 1998, 309). Getting it 'wrong' and failing to place ones self amid the 'right' products is, therefore, to risk disparagement and possibly exclusion from the franchise, something Tanya had

hinted at during one of our many conversations in the kitchen of her listed farmhouse:

> "I won't name names, but one of the chaps especially. He tries so hard to be like them, but he can't. I mean, he turns up and, you know, they always take the piss out of him. To his face as well. It is sad really. Either he doesn't get it or he doesn't want to get it. You'd think people would have more self respect, but there you are. I wouldn't stand for it. It's because a lot of them are snobs. They own flat in Ibiza, a massive house in the countryside, a Ferrari. And he doesn't. I don't suppose it helps that he plays the big man, and that he just isn't. But that isn't a bad thing that he isn't Mr Businessman is it?" (Tanya Parkinson).

With an identity as part of the economy of appearance, the emphasis on representation amidst New Squiredom could, it seemed, be experienced as oppressive. But, as David Chaney reminds us, it is important to recognise that 'crucial ambiguity' in seeing other's expectations purely as a limitation; as they may also 'offer an opportunity in that appearance can be exploited as a masquerade' (2002, 66).

Considering Celia Lury's work on the relationship between material culture and personal experience, the masquerade as a role of dramatisation is conceived of by Chaney as inherently creative, 'not purely in the manner of self-aggrandisement which may be a more masculine project' (Ibid), but as a series of simulations of identities which are 'in part defined by the individuals' relation to self identity, a relation closely linked to notions of authenticity' (Lury 1996, 255-256). This conceptualisation is taken by Chaney as having two central tenets:

> "The first is that appearance and representation have been made more problematic by the cultural changes of late modernity which have been described as a radical destabilisation of both the boundaries and structures of personal experience. While the second is that this does not necessarily lead to an anomic fragmentation of the moral order, but rather new ways of making relationships through a more reflexive consideration of the significance of authenticity." (2002, 66).

To Chaney's mind, the more we consider how the material culture of everyday life is being used, the more apparent it becomes that it is 'too simplistic to believe that it functions effectively as illusions that lack any personal meaning' (Ibid). That the 'semiotics of style' is being used evermore playfully, ironically and even cynically in personal experience, is also the realisation of something of a paradox. As material goods have become more crucial, 'they have in an important sense dematerialised in the multiplicity of uses and meanings to which they can be put' (Ibid, 80). Moreover, it would appear that there is also a contradictory process of extreme sensitivity to, and yet comparative indifference regarding, stylistic norms in everyday life:

> "Although fashionable codes are capable of infinite gradations and internal differentiations within any particular group, it has been assumed that the demands of fashionable conformity work to create a sort of uniform. The very attractiveness of the metaphor of uniform and its implied expectations of conformity should not, however, blind us to the way that the relativism of fashion both individualises as well as communalises." (Ibid).

Consciously or not, playfully or not, purposefully or not; the tendency to dress in the fashion of rural chic was neither uniform among those in the gentryfied set, nor confined to either sex. Prompted by the tastes and trends exhibited on the

high street, it could be more suitably described as a passing fad than a sign of allegiance to a steadfast self/ group identity. In this sense, the act of buying a tweed skirt or hunters-cut jacket does not necessarily denote an intense, prolonged emotional (or financial) investment; at least, not to the same degree as purchasing a particular type of house, or committing to the everyday responsibilities required of animals and the working landscape.

5.3. Paddocks, ponies and country piles

For Mark Price, the notion of a New Squirearchy as applied to those circles within which he operated was at once inappropriate and understandable, impersonal but well-founded. As a meaningful phrase he could, on reflection, see its basis in the pursuit of what he refers to as 'marker posts' which, according to the basis of desire, accounted for both individuality and a collective identity. This came thorough an account of his and his partner coming to own a "biggish house, a bit of land and a few horses":

> "It was nice to be able to move to a bigger house, although it was perfectly pleasant where we used to live. But there was obviously the feeling that … I say obviously, but we would have been happy if we had stayed where we were. But if there was ever the opportunity ever arose to move into a village place with lots of acres of land and the ability to maybe have some horses … and a really nice house with all the trappings, then we would take the opportunity. We were looking to move and, you know, we got details of this house … Like all estate agents, they send you everything you can't afford, and you sift through them … And to get that style of house [fifteenth century listed farmstead], it is very difficult to get hold of."
>
> (Mark Price).

> "I mean, not being greedy for the sake of being greedy …But, I would say that the desire or willingness to take on a larger place with all that goes with it, including horses and stables … I think I can put my hand on my heart and say I have not done it for status. It was never about that. There are an awful lot of people who might deny it, but who you know damn well are doing it for that reason. I *really* do like the idea of just having space round me and, aesthetically, a nice looking property which I think we are quite fortunate to have at the moment." (Mark Price).

Could 'an awful lot of people who might deny it' be found amongst his friends and colleagues? I put this to Mark:

> "Yes. The old manor houses, farms, Range Rovers, horses and guns and whatnot that were once associated with the countrified middle and upper class are like … well, they make them level in a sense. Not necessarily to me … or should I say some of us. They are like middle class marker posts. They've made it you know." (Mark Price).

> "It's almost an instinctive thing as much as a lot of people don't like to admit it. There is a desire for self improvement or betterment or however you want to put it. And it's something I feel I am guilty. But I feel quite happy with the idea of striving to get certain things in my life that I just enjoy. I say, without sort of banging on about it too much, they are things that I have probably thought about since I was a child. I have always liked the idea of having a nice big house in the countryside." (Mark Price).

Almost without exception, the acquisition of a 'significant' country property and the land to go with it had been a long-time goal for Mike, his partner, and many of those friends they had in Eamesworth, all parting with significant sums of money

for a residence with 'all the bells and whistles'. As a consequence, local estate agents like Martin Turner were reaping the rewards of a buoyant rural property market, selling farmhouses and country cottages at a "rate and relative cost" not previously experienced in his 25 year career.

A ceaseless topic of conversation among villagers, many of whom seemingly scanned the property section of the local paper on a week-by-week basis, Martin, in light of his profession, was regularly called upon to provide definitive accounts of house sales in Eamesworth and the surrounding area. Why had they been sold, who had bought them, who had lost out and, more importantly, how much did they fetch? One such occasion was at the bar of the Six Tuns, when Martin was drawn into a conversation with Jacob Malpas, a retired shop fitter and Eamesworth native who was evidently troubled by the fate of Dovecoat Farm. Believing the advertised price to be 'ridiculous' on account of the farm's ramshackle condition, Jacob was taken aback by the revelation that it had sold on value:

> "No, it's about right. You've got to consider the sort of people who are now buying these places and moving into villages around here. City boys who can't quite afford to buy a fancy country house in Essex. They can pick one up around here for half the price. It's cheap for them. Maybe not for us, but it's cheap for them … It could be falling down around their ear holes and they will love it all the more. It's authentic [laughs]. They'll spend more than they bought the house for getting it fixed up … and before you know it there will be horse brasses everywhere you look." (Martin).

A house with a couple of acres and a paddock was something, Martin assured Jacob, would *always* sell quickly, and even if his clients had no intention of getting

a horse or pony on buying the property, the possibility would soon enter their minds:

> "If they haven't got horses now, you can bet whoever gets it will have a few wandering about within a few months of moving in. Especially if they've got a daughter. She'll want to join the Pony Club with all her mates and become one of those horsey types who trot around the village all day long at weekends … getting in your way when you need to drive anywhere. They should be made to pay road tax." (Jacob).

Such a synopsis was, to Tanya's mind at least, slightly off the mark. Something of an "urban myth", such an opinion when levelled at Eamesworth's wealthier residents could not realistically result from a genuine account of the situation. On familiar terms with "a lot of these people", she was not unaware of anyone who had taken on the ownership of a horse simply "because it is the thing to do when you've got a bit of land", although there were "one or two" acquaintances who did not demonstrate what Tanya considered to be an appropriate level of interest in horses under their care.

A keen rider as a child, and having taken up the hobby again some twenty years later, the "extra outlay" required when buying a house with stables and ten acres of pasture was offset against livery fees; something Tanya described as a "financial black hole". At around £150 per week, the large sums of money involved when having someone else feed, treat and shelter a horse also figured in Patricia Coupland's decision to buy a property in Eamesworth with a large barn and two fields. Always happier watching her animals and tending to their needs than riding them, it is her daughter, Michelle, who is "more often than not" in the saddle. An accomplished show jumper, Michelle regularly competes in ranking events, with her mother towing a shiny new horse-box "around the country every

weekend". A present from her father, a dealer in new and nearly-new motor homes, Michelle is indulged by her parents in much the same way as Gillian Kemp, whose bay gelding, purchased at great expense from prized breeding stock, helped win her a podium position in a foremost national dressage competition. Unlike Michelle's parents, the Kemps are happy to continue paying livery fees in the light of their daughters continuing success on the circuit, subjugating much of the considerable day-to-day labour required of such an animal to stable-hands in order that Gillian can more fully concentrate on her training and education.

One such stable hand is Christine Wells, who has worked at the Four Winds Equine Centre for the past 8 years, during which time she has gone from part-time, schoolgirl helper to full-time member of the team, enduring 4 am starts and midnight finishes on those occasions when they are called upon to prepare a horse under their care for competition. One of nine liveries recognised by the UK Directory of Riding Schools, Trekking Centres and Livery Yards within a 15 mile radius of Eamesworth, the Four Winds Equine Centre has seen a steady rise in business over the past 5 years, and Christine recognises the value of those who imagine themselves "riding around in *Pride & Predjudice*":

> "We make a large part of our living off of that lot. A lot of these women, and before you ask it is mostly women and girls, keep their horses in livery and pay us lot to do the hard work. You know, mucking out and all that. They tend to get their husbands or daddies to pay the costs. They turn up once a week, if that, and trot about the paddock for an hour before going home. That's before half of them get bored and give it up. They do tend to be pushy though, ringing up and saying 'I want this and I want that' and won't wait for anything. Saying that, they do pay my wages – what little I get!" (Christine).

The value of the Eamesworth's equine community to local trade was also acknowledged by Roger Titterton and Gareth Sewell, both some-time agricultural labourers and general handymen. In the regular employ of "twenty or so" of the "horsey set", it is business Roger would do hard to survive without, even if this particular brand of customer has the tendency to play on his patience. An opinion shared by Gareth, who also greatly appreciated a regular supply of "cash jobs" fixing fences, trimming paddock hedges and maintaining stable blocks, the occasional late-afternoon phone call demanding "a gutter or whatever be fixed now and not next week" was something you simply had to accept as par for the course. Marcus Wynne, however, was less happy to bite his tongue, despite a strong commercial dependence on such people:

> "They want everything done at the snap of their fingers, and think they can speak to people like me like dirt and you can't always say nothing. We do get a tremendous amount of work from the horsy types around here, bailing their hay and topping [mowing] their fields. They sometimes argue over the bill, but they pay quickly. Most of them have got rich husbands, who pay a fortune for the horses and the stables just to keep the wife happy. Most of them have nothing to do all day. They have domestic help so the horses keep them occupied … Every year, we have 25 to 30 of these women we deliver hay and straw to, so we can't afford to loose their business." (Marcus).

Frustration aside, Marcus, Roger and Gareth all accredited their standing as 'local boys' as a significant factor in obtaining work from the 'horsey set' and a select band of wealthier, middle class 'incomers'. With much custom secured through word of mouth as opposed to formal advertising, even the cost of a job would occasionally appear as though it were of secondary importance to some of these people. "People always like to think that they are helping out other villagers",

suggested Gareth, smug in the belief that their loyalty to local traders was vital in sustaining the industrial lifeblood of the community. Some would even go so far as calling on him to do jobs that "they are perfectly capable of doing themselves in five minutes", although whether or not this was a thinly-veiled attempt at philanthropy, because they were "lazy buggers", or simply incapable, Gareth could not always tell.

5.4. Plastic farmers

For a number of Eamesworth's wealthier *arrivistes*, having a 'bit of land' was a direct consequence of having an interest in equestrianism, and not visa-versa. Others simply liked being surrounded by a few acres that they could call their own. Michael Marriot, perhaps in the true spirit of aristocratic eccentricity, had bought his farmhouse and 15 acres so that he create an "ideal landscape garden, race cars, fly kites, play football and generally bugger about" with his son. In a similar vein, Michael's neighbour, Arthur Kemplen, the owner of a successful specialised haulage firm, had bought Buttercup Farm because it came with a 9 acre plot and could therefore accommodate the family helicopter. Some Eamesworthians, though, took these activities as an affront to the heritage of their respective properties and the community as a whole. For Thomas Baster, it was a sad indictment of the times that the honest endeavour of "real farming stock" had been forced to make way to such "cut price playboys":

> "There's probably 3 farms left in the village. 3 proper working farms that I can think of. But there's at least another 5 or 6 farms in this village alone that aren't *farms* anymore. The last generation didn't want to be farmers and work 14 hours a day and not get any money for it. A lot of 'new money' types are buying these places and are paying x million for the

> house and the fields. But they aren't having cows and chickens and spending all their summer nights ploughing fields are they."
>
> (Thomas Baster).

In some instances, however, the acquisition of land had been accompanied with a culpable interest in agriculture and what Thomas considered to be a more 'genuine', although not necessarily 'productive', use of their property. Roy Carter, for example, a prominent investment banker and property dealer, had appropriated the services of Christian Grosvenor, a retired book-binder and enthusiastic horticulturalist, for the sole purpose of growing fruit and vegetables in the grounds of his 12 bedroom mansion.

Other recently seated Eamesworthians were more 'hands on' in their approach, like James and Janet Kilbride, who's sprawling fifteenth century cottage and 35 acres had been procured on the back of successful careers in the antiques and wine trade respectively. An extremely generous, well spoken couple, it had been Janet's childhood dream to buy a small farm and raise rare breeds of sheep – Ryelands and Oxford Downs in particular. Towing their prized "woollybags" to livestock shows all over the country behind an old, but beautifully maintained, Series III Land Rover, Janet had a rudimentary grasp of animal husbandry but always "had the sense" to consult Marcus Wynne on more "serious issues like swayback [2] or grass staggers [3]". Mark Price also sought the advice of neighbouring farmers on how best to maintain his land, although his enthusiasm to get his 'hands dirty' was viewed as highly amusing in these quarters.

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[2] A lack of muscle control in young lambs brought about from a lack of copper in the diet.

[3] A sheep collapses or throws a 'staggers fit' due to low magnesium and/or calcium levels in the bloodstream.

An occasional visitor to local farm auctions, Marks' interest a 1950's Fordson Major tractor at a sale in nearby Goddington had provided much entertainment for Jack Coughlin. An honest enquiry insofar as Mark intended to use the machine for the purpose of mowing, chain harrowing and inserting posts (via special attachment) around his pastures, the fact it had a 'cracked block' (engine fault) had completely eluded him until it was pointed out to him by a sympathetic bystander. Although Jack had assured Mark that he would have "let him in on it in due course", it perhaps went to show that "such things were best left to them that know what they're doing" – no doubt aware that his friend and fellow farmer, Nathan Moorgate, was currently contracted for all mechanised work required of Mark's holdings.

Like Mark, Tanya had also struck up a friendship with the majority of those farmers whose' land bordered with her own, and constantly sought advice and opinions regarding the upkeep of her "estate" – even on those occasions when she knew "perfectly well" what she was doing. Here, obsequiousness in the form of deference toward their agricultural credentials had seen their opinion of her shift from suspicion, amusement and bemusement to grudging respect and, in some cases, genuine affection:

> "Lovely person. And she takes a real interest in how things should be done. And she is not at all like some of these 'ladies that lunch' types around here. She isn't at all afraid to get her hands dirty. She'll help you out with anything and is always keen to learn … I mean, she's not a proper *farmer*. Never can be. [Her partner] makes sure she doesn't have to work for anything, so it's not her job. Her life, even. It's a … hobby for her. She's isn't lying in bed worrying about how much wheat will fetch per ton this year, and doesn't get up at four in the morning when its lambing … But she does *care*." (Marcus Wynne).

Always keen to stress her countryist credentials as a person who, as a child, had spent her evenings and weekends walking the family dog through fields, woods and country lanes, and, as an adult, "knee deep in muck and animal crap", Tanya was terminally conscious of being "lumped" in with an "ignorant townie lot" who had also bought a sizeable country retreat, but, quite unlike her, knew "sod all about what was going on in the countryside". With a number of her closest friends to be found among "that lot", Tanya ardently disassociated herself from this crowd as someone who constructively engages with the landscape, and took great pleasure in reminding them of this fact:

> "I love it. I'll come back to the farm really … rebelling. I'll say to them 'don't come too near because I stink of sheep shit' and they go 'arghh!' If I have been helping out with Nathan [Moorgate] and the sheep, I often have to say 'look, I've gotta go to school and pick the kids up'. So I run to the car. I'm sure when my friends come up to me at the school gate; they are thinking 'Tanya you reek'. And I probably do smell. But there is more to life. I've got no-one to impress anymore. If they like me they like me, if they don't they don't." (Tanya).

Despite a fierce independence and strong sense of personal responsibility for the upkeep of the land, livestock and lodgings that surrounded her, Tanya was, on reflection, drawn to acknowledge a privilege of choice shared with her newly-landed associates which fundamentally differentiated herself from Marcus, Nathan and the broader farming fraternity:

> "At the end of the day, I don't *have* to do anything … I have Ted, who is always here who is not so much a gardener … he does wonderful things like the electric and the plumbing and everything. He's more like a

> handyman that cuts the grass. There is always so much to do. One of the animal shelters broke the other day so he mended that yesterday morning, and he'll cut a tree down and things like that … I also pay Tamsin to come and help with the horses, because that means I can ride out … And I also have an ironing lady, and Carmella … she is the cleaner … But to keep a house this size, to keep it tidy and do the grounds … there aren't enough hours in the day … It does take a long time, and it's about priorities really. We are lucky enough to think 'well, we can afford it'." (Tanya Parkinson).

5.5. An agricultural (non) identity?

Passing into the ownership of those without agricultural backgrounds, and more often than not destined for a purpose other than primary production, the fate of Eamesworth's acres in the hands of the New Squirearchy was a cause for concern among several local farmers. Where Tanya and Mark had done much to circumvent hostility on this front by regularly seeking advice from – thus entrusting a degree of control with – their farming neighbours, many of their contemporaries did not pursue this course of action, and as a consequence were subject to disapproval. Particularly evident at county show grounds, agricultural auctions and other farm–orientated events, it was animosity that Marcus Wynne could relate to:

> "You can tell them apart. It is not just that I know every farmer in these parts, you can just tell those who are playing at farming. Rich, retired and fancy a day out. The way they dress, what they go for and how they bid for it." (Marcus).

> "Playing at farming?" (Interviewer).

> "Yes. Playing. I don't begrudge them buying up farm and farmland … well, actually, yes I do. They can pay good money and outbid us. Okay, so they might contract us in for the working of it or the management side of things, but as often as not they don't *do* any thing with it when they've got it. They might stick a few horses or sheep on it, but they are not *farming* it. They have taken the land out of production if you like … It isn't honest. It is our job to *use* the land to feed the country. That is what we are supposed to do." (Marcus).

Concerning the (in) appropriate use of the soil as what Thompson refers to as the 'quintessential productive enterprise of the human species' (1994, 47), Marcus' argument was very much a moral one; one grounded in the notion of agrarian stewardship and a firm belief in the farmer as the rightful keeper of the land.

Complementing and qualifying the productionist ethic as a balance between conservation, sustainability and output, the 'agri-ruralist' discourse as mobilised by Marcus is a combination of 'ruralist' and 'agrarian' rhetoric, portraying the farmer as 'carrier of an economic activity essential to the vitality of the countryside' (Frouws 1998, 59), and as principle creator of the rural as a 'social, economic and cultural space' (Salmona 1994)[4]. Recently, however, this particular vision has come under threat in the form of a political shift toward agricultural multi-functionalism, allied to the restructuring of the subsidy system and the introduction of schemes intended to combine 'technology-intensive agriculture, landscape and nature management, agri-tourism, agro-forestry, energy production, and so on within the confines of rural areas of the future' (Frouws 1998, 60). However, it has become increasingly evident that many farmers have resisted change on the basis of an anticipated loss of identity traditionally

[4] Although it is no longer feasible to perceive the rural exclusively as an agricultural domain, even among those most committed to the agri-ruralist discourse. (Frouws 1998, 59)

conferred through existing commercial behaviour. Here, argues Burton (2004), the practise of production has been incorporated into the ethos of being a 'good farmer', imbued with social/ cultural rewards as a prevalent feature of contemporary farming culture.

Described by the American agriculturalist Leopold (1939) as "the owner's portrait of himself" , the condition of the farm landscape is identified by Burton as being the principal criteria by which a farmer is judged to be 'good' or 'bad' by their peers. Seeing themselves 'first and foremost as food producers' (Burgess *et al.* 2000, 125), the physical appearance of the crop (or animal) and crop yield per acre (weight/ quality per animal) are the critical factors in this interpretation; highly visible to the assessment others as a permanent 'front stage' activity (Burton 2004, 201). A term coined by Erving Goffman (1959) in his 'dramaturgical' take on symbolic interactionism, such exchanges form 'part of the individual's performance which regularly function in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those that observe the performance', as opposed to those more truthful activities that take place 'back stage' beyond the gaze of a given social group (in Burton 2004, 199).

Although the concept of symbolic interactionism should be applied with caution insofar as it has a tendency to cast behaviour as a enduringly self-conscious consideration of collective appraisal and consequence, it does have value in developing a fuller understanding of the symbolism of apparently utilitarian action.

> 'While productivism and its consequences for the landscape may represent to us the excesses of an over subsidised agricultural industry, for many farmers it represents a picture of good farming practise, displayed in a manner that enables the farmer to obtain social status and recognition

> within the community as a 'good farmer' and to judge the credentials of others.' (Burton 2004, 208).

Grounded also in 'past acts', with any farm being a cumulative, predominantly intergenerational effort, the farmer represents not only themselves, but also has a duty to equal or surpass the achievements of their forebears. Thus, in lacking a familial or industrious connection with the land, and in augmenting an economically and symbolically unprofitable use of their fields and pastures, the practises of the New Squirearchy were taken as an affront by those by those who continued to take their custodial responsibility toward these assets seriously. For this reason, their claim on the land was not entirely accepted by a number of local farmers who they did not see it as 'earned' in terms of input and/ or what was expected of it. In some cases, long standing farmers were less inclined to respect the rights of these unconventional owners; at least, this was Michael Marriott's experience in regard to one of his neighbours, a cattle dealer and "well known face in the village":

> "A couple of months ago I was asleep in bed, and I woke up to find a load of cattle had broken through some fencing and made their way into the field at the back of the property. I had recently spent a lot of money having it landscaped and putting in shrubbery, and a fortune on water spraying it day and night. As you know, it was a hot summer. So I rang up Bill and all he said was "oh, that'll be alright". Well, I didn't think so. He did get round here in the end, and do you know what? As soon as he got here the first thing he did was tell me how he shouldn't keep cattle because there is no money in them and this, that and the other. At the time, I had no wish to know about Bill's declining agricultural prospects; I just wanted the bloody cows out of my paddock and away from my shrubbery."
>
> (Michael Marriot).

Following a brief interlude in which the kettle was set to boil on a plush green Aga range, Michael continued:

> "Following that, I filed an insurance claim for damages which amounted to an awful lot of money. Bill though, he was utterly at a loss. He simply couldn't understand how anybody could spend so much money on shrubbery. "Surely it just grows" he said. I quickly put a new fence up after that, because it became clear to me that farmers have the understanding that if you want to keep their animals off your land, then it's your problem and not theirs. Having put up a fence of wood and barbed wire, Bill came across the field and said – and he was laughing – "here boy, anyone would think I am keeping bloody Lions in this here field"… Well, you've got to laugh haven't you." (Michael Marriot).

Luke Murcott also had experiences of a neighbouring farmer being a "bit free and easy" with his land and, like Michael, was willing to put up with this where possible in the interests of peace and harmony – but there "would be a limit", nevertheless:

> "I was out back one day when I noticed two blokes walking across my fields with shotguns. I ran up – a bit nervous – and said "what are you doing?" They said they were ferreting. I said "who gave you permission?" They said "[adjacent farmer] said you wouldn't mind if we walk across you land". I told them that it would have been fine otherwise, but as they didn't ask me – the landowner – they better leave this time. Its funny how [adjacent farmer] presumed to tell them it was okay. I know he doesn't mean anything by it, but times have changed and you can't tell people what they can and can't do on other peoples land. I don't care if he has farmed here for years ... but there you are." (Luke Murcott).

Far from acrimonious, but rather light-hearted differences of opinion, these incidents highlighted a tension between the outlook of the farming community and their new, moneyed neighbours in respect to the fitting use of the Eamesworth landscape. On occasion, however, genuine ill-feeling surfaced, with serious ramifications for those involved. This was certainly the case when Nigel Blackledge, a corporate hospitality specialist and property speculator, moved into Horvath Farm and, in the course of revamping the house and grounds, felled a large number of trees that were subject to a conservation order. Following a case brought by South Bedfordshire District Council, who acted on information supplied by 'concerned members of the public', Nigel was both fined and ordered to pay costs having pleaded guilty at a hearing in Luton Magistrates' Court. His claim of ignorance, however, was hotly contested by a number of local residents – including at least three farmers - long before the conviction was passed down from the bench, and it was their written remonstrations that may, or may not, have resulted in Nigel's summons:

> "Have you heard about Nigel's inspection? Someone evidently rang the conservation people. He's got the right hump about it, and because he was told to harm the trees in any way he is just as likely to do the exact opposite. He doesn't like being told what to do, and he has already supposed to have cut a couple of trees down…" (Gareth).

> "I went down their and he [Nigel] told me about the trees. The officer took pictures and whatnot, and then told Nigel not to chop them down. He told me that he "doesn't care and fuck 'em". The problem is, Nigel and all that lot think they are about it all and can get away with anything. They think that because they have a bit of money they can break the rules, but they can't." (Marcus).

> "It's bloody typical. You should only buy a place like that if you are going to look after it. For the good of the nation, like. I was of a mind to ring the council and tell them myself." (Robert).

A story that made front page in the local newspaper, and elicited a sizeable response in the *Letters to the Editor* column in the following weeks, the plight of the 'Horvath Hazels' was, for many, a testament to the licentious behaviour of many a wealthy *arriviste*, underscoring an apparent belief that money could belie responsibility for their assets:

> 'Madam – I was pleased to read the 'stern' punishment dished out to Nigel Blackledge following his illegal removal of 15 trees. How he must have cried after finding out that he had been fined £500 and had to pay £500 costs by Luton Magistrates' Court. My goodness that will certainly put these manor owners off chopping down trees. I have always been a believer that that those who are fined by the courts should be punished in a way that is appropriate to them … That's why it infuriates me to see footballers on millions of pounds a years fined £500 for speeding – it doesn't punish them at all. So to read in your newspaper that the owner of Horvath Farm was punished so leniently was the icing on the cake.'

Cast in the same decadent vein as that other media bogeyman - the overpaid Premiership footballer – Nigel, more than any of his fellow Office dwellers, was looked on with disdain by a great many Eamesworthians as a prime example of the arrogant, extravagant, culturally moribund *nouveau riche* that was currently laying claim to rural Britain. Variously referred to as "Blackledge of Eamesworth", or, in the case of one particular respondent, the "Van Hoogstraten [5]

[5] Nicholas Van Hoogstraten, a well-known property tycoon who has received a degree of notoriety as the result of an ongoing dispute with the Ramblers Association regarding rights of way

of Aylesbury Vale", Nigel – by way of a workman's chainsaw – fulfilled the role of local villain and ne'er-do-well for many villagers, but without the background or breeding required of the classical roué. In this sense, Nigel was somewhat unique, and the lack of respect he was seen to afford his estate as an historical, communally significant document was perhaps exaggerated and clearly isolated among the squirely clique; the majority of whom - like 'Stefan' in the opening paragraph of this chapter – 'hankered after' a noble history that is the 'English country house', and 'longed to appropriate' an aristocratic past in this manner. At best, however, this appropriation was a selective re-interpretation, symbolic of wealth, but not as a manifestation of local power in the political sense; whether spelt with a big 'P', or a little 'p'.

5.6. A landed elite, or elite with land?

In the case Janet Kilbride, Mark Price, Tanya and to a lesser extent Roy Carter, their designs on rural living were more akin to those of 'smallholding' or 'hobby-farming' than an aristocratic presence. To use a definition developed by Davies, who considered part-time farming in the early post-war period, these people 'farm for a motive other than profit, and are not, therefore, dependent on agriculture for a living' (1953, 83). Considering these themes more fully, Holloway (2000) points to the work of a number of North American scholars, including Mage (1975), Layton (1980) and Daniels (1986), who, in the process of examining the structure of hobby-farming, describes how 'hobby-farming is dependent on sufficient non-farming income to support recreational farming, and how non-monetary gains (e.g. prestige, recreation) and a sense of spiritual attachment to farming and farm land use are particularly significant to those involved' (Holloway 2000, 2). Yet,

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surrounding his estate near Uckfield, Essex. Calling Ramblers "perverts" and "the absolute scum of the Earth", Van Hoogstraten was referred to as an "emissary of Beelzebub" by a High Court Judge during a case in which he was found guilty of blocking footpaths with barbed wire, padlocked gates and industrial units.

with the majority of those farmhouses, manor houses and – for want of a better word – mansions dotted around Eamesworth being separated from the bulk of their lands on, or prior to, their passing from agricultural to 'lifestyle' interests, there is a significant break with the historic tendency of rural elites to consolidate these holdings for commercial, and in turn political, purposes.

An investment that was almost entirely emotional and dependent on profits garnered from alternative business ventures, the majority of those 'new money types' who had purchased tracts of agricultural land in the Eamesworth area were operating according to an altogether different logic than the majority of their theoretical antecedents. A condition specified by Francis Fulford; one of the increasingly isolated squires 'of the old sort', his family has sat on the same acres for over 800 years:

> "They buy because they are making a statement about how rich they are. The estate and house are a luxury to them, not a profit centre. We have to make ours pay." (Quoted in Mitchell 2004, 1).

For the likes of Janet, Tanya and Mark, commercial success – or a fruitful personal engagement - had brought forth a reward in the form of acreage; for the squires of old, acreage was itself the root of accomplishment, bringing wealth, power and the means for conspicuous self-indulgence; a point clearly made by the Fifteenth Lord Derby.

> "The objects which men aim at when they come possessed of land may be enumerated as follows: 1) political influence; 2) social importance, founded on territorial possession, the most visible and unmistakable form of wealth; 3) power exercised over tenantry; the pleasure of managing, directing and

> improving the estate itself; 4) residential employment, including what is called sport; the money return – the rent." (Quoted in Paxman 1990, 22).

A highly illuminating order of priorities, clearly accentuating what Paxman refers to as the 'primary connection between political and social power and the soil'. Of great symbolic importance, supporting a socio-political order that depended on the belief in the countryside as a space of agriculture (Short 1991), land was the basis of what Woods (2005) refers to as 'resource power', not only in terms of agrarian production but also in respect to tenant and rent:

> 'One of the rocks on which the upper classes rested was the belief that land was safe. Money invested in anything else was likely to do the dirty on one, but it was impossible for land to burn down, or be stolen, or blow up, or sink at sea. It was irremoveably there and one could rely on it. This belief was one of the main reasons why people invested in land, often to the exclusion of everything else, and why it was the most prestigious form of investment. Anyone who owned land had a permanent stake in the country.' (Girouard 1978, 300).

Considering those prerogatives of land ownership as outlined by Lord Derby, few parallels can be drawn with the objectives of Eamesworth's current crop of wealthier residents. Undoubtedly, land remains a clearly identifiable form of prosperity, and many of those with significant holdings certainly take great stock in 'managing, directing and improving' their surroundings. This administration is often undertaken according to the aesthetics of 'country-house romanticism' as so clearly defined in such publications as *Country Life* which, suggests Girouard, has

always had an audience in 'country-loving businessman' (Ibid 303) [6], but this is not of a scale requiring a significant, dependent local workforce.

The majority of those individuals widely accredited with New Squire (anti) status relied on domestic help, and some, including Roy Carter, Michael Marriot and the Kemplens provided living quarters for full-time staff, but none routinely profited as agricultural employers or from agricultural tenants. That said, a fair few respondents identified land in the Eamesworth area as a sound investment in terms of resale to real estate speculators and property developers, while the majority generally believed that the rise in rural house prices would continue well into the future, easily recouping their initial investment if and when they decided to move elsewhere. Profit, however, seemed to be of little immediate concern for most, and a commercial interest in the soil most certainly did not provide the means with which to support themselves, although, for a select few, the decision to buy a farm was as much a financial decision as a lifestyle choice; one designed to aid their children in the long-term.

5.7. Death and the landscape

Since its introduction by Pitt the Younger's Tory government of the late 1700's, death duty in all its various guises[7] has long been a primary cause of the break-up of large estates. A burden that really began to loosen the establishment's economic grip on the British countryside in the 19th century following increasingly stringent taxation reforms levied by successive Liberal and Conservative Chancellors, it has, if anything, served to dissuade the purchase of significant domestic holdings. The possibility, therefore, that Inheritance Tax might serve as

[6] Incidentally, during the course of the research process I did not encounter a single individual who subscribed to, or claimed to have more than a passing interest in, *Country Life* magazine.
[7] On introduction, its official title was that of 'legacy, succession and estate duties'.

a motivation supplementing - or even displacing - inspirational gentryfication in the 21st century was not even considered prior to the following discussion with Silvia Threlfall; one of Eamesworth's elder stateswomen and resident of nearly 80 years:

> "Do you have a perception that people might be buying some of the larger farms and houses in Eamesworth out of a desire to live a squirely existence?" (Interviewer).
>
> "They are buying them and doing that so the government doesn't have their money … They are buying farms in particular so their kids avoid paying tax when they go. This is because they don't have to pay it for farms." (Silvia Threlfall).
>
> "So you don't think that an aspiration to become a country squire is perhaps as important, or maybe not at all?" (Interviewer).
>
> "Yes, it is partly, but I don't think that it is the main reason. I think that if they are wealthy, they are doing that otherwise they've got to pay what used to be called death duties … My son told me about this. He tried to by a smallholding nearby a while back. But that lot, they can afford that much more and so they come and buy up all of these small farms, put their money in it. They buy land and then the government can't get them."
>
> (Silvia Threlfall).

A small revelation, I set about finding the relevant facts somewhat surprised that this issue – if a relevant issue it was – had not featured in those broadsheet property supplements that had prompted the investigation.

At the time of the study, inheritance tax relief on agricultural land and property was available to anyone who buys a farm, provided certain conditions were met. As a result, a greater proportion of an individual's assets may be passed on to a benefactor if they take this form. By no means illegal, it is commonly considered to be a 'tax dodge', and for this reason was a delicate subject to breach during the course of any conversation or interview. Nevertheless, Luke Murcott, a recent arrival to 'Hawthorn's Farm', was happy to discuss these motives; motives that, as the head of a prominent local accountancy firm, he was aware of sharing with a number of local friends and clients:

> "I can't go into names and details, of course. But for a number of our clients, some of which I regard as friends of mine, it has been an important consideration. If you would like to live in a …substantial property in a village area, and care about how much you're kids will get … then buying agriculturally classified property has always been a way of handing a bit less over to the Chancellor. But, things are … or rather will change."
>
> (Luke Murcott).

With a subsequent change in the law rendering inheritance tax relief for those who leave the day-to-day running of farms to others and those who have significantly scaled down their agrarian activities applicable only to the 'agricultural value' of a farmhouse and not its market value (which is usually much greater), I returned to 'the Hawthorns' and sought Luke's opinion in light of this change. Would this cause a significant reappraisal of wealthier living arrangements in the countryside? Would this have ramifications for Luke or any of his acquaintances, professional or otherwise?

> "If you mean will we … or they … leave their farmhouses in droves then no, I don't think so. A loophole has closed, another one has not opened up.

> Most of us clearly want to live in the countryside, have a grand house and have a few acres, and I don't think that will change. And, if I am entirely honest most of those we are talking about have got enough money to leave to their kids regardless. There are other ways of avoiding death duties anyway, and as shrewd operators they will have professional advice on such matters … As for people buying these types of country properties now, I think some will be less inclined to buy a small farm than, say, a big house, barn conversion or cottage. But, you know, a lot of people like to see tractors and that buzzing about on the fields. I do." (Luke Murcott).

With a desire to see tractors "buzzing about on the fields" and "own a few acres", Luke's "rural dream" was not entirely dissimilar to that of Janet, Mark or Tanya, although – at his own admission – he was far less inclined to get "in at the sharp end" than several of his friends, clients and drinking partners. Similarly, this relative lack of enthusiasm as far as "the Lord of the Manor bit is concerned" manifested itself in Luke's absence from village affairs. Partly as a result of several "run-ins" with the Parish Council whilst living in the nearby hamlet of Dustham, his communal involvement was restricted to the annual fete and inter-village sports contest, and although he could see "where the New Squire assumption" had come from, it was "not really appropriate in his case". The material basis was in place but it had not been appropriated as - nor applied according to – a 'landed' discourse, and this, to Luke's mind - marked a fundamental difference between himself and a number of his wealthy compatriots.

5.8. Prestige … and conviction?

As Chaney reminds us, while material goods are undoubtedly of increasing importance in the (post) modern era, they have, in a sense, also 'dematerialised in the multiplicity of uses and meanings to which they can be put' (2002, 80).

Although, he suggests, 'codes are capable of infinite gradations and internal differentiations within any particular group, it has been assumed that the demands of conformity work to create a sort of uniform': The very 'attractiveness of the term uniform and its implied expectations of conformity' should not, however, 'blind us to the way that the relativism of fashion both individualises as well as communalises' (Ibid). Thus, with a varying degree of commitment to the materialities of the Office, 'rural chic', horsiculture, agriculture, rural employment, land ownership and the country pile, Eamesworth's New Squirearchy is more appropriately conceived of as a significant, (partially) cohesive variation on a theme than anatomical bloc. Without a consistent form constituting its substance, and – to draw on the terminology of Davis – 'polymorphous as regards its thematic materials', any structural frame is arbitrary to the intermediary roles of textually mediated discourses and local communities (1992, 149).

It is, notes Chaney, too simplistic to believe that materiality functions effectively without personal meaning (2002, 62), and with a varied appreciation and mobilisation of New Squiredom within Eamesworth, there is a very real need to consider the issue of intention and commitment more fully as regards to a 'degree of fit' with the emotional underpinnings of the discourse of the country gentleman. The definition of New Squiredom therefore, as a relevant, suitably christened cohort, must transcend the field, farm and gravelled driveway, and be realised as particular forms of scripted and semi-scripted political, economical, theological and moral engagements with the wider rural community. Here the village and its activities necessarily become express a dominant force that is the Squirearchy, and here the 'big house' as an expression of wealth and influence must necessarily become a central focus of social and political life as the subject of, and subject to, a deeply figurative construction; the 'organic community' (Cohen 1985).