

## 7. Elite rural networks and recreational associations

'A great follower of the hounds and racing, he excelled at every branch of sport. On one occasion he brought down 100 pheasants with 100 shots, and on another he bagged 97 grouse with 97 shots; he could put ten bullets from a duelling pistol through the ace of diamonds at 30 feet; at forty-five, after a crippling accident in the hunting field, he rode 200 miles across country in nine hours for a wager; he was a fine oarsman and brilliant tennis player, and at cricket he ranked among the six best amateurs in England. At sixty-eight he rode his own horse at Goodwood and lost by a neck. Racing was his downfall and throughout his life he could never resist a wager: in advanced age he once sat in his chair for twenty-four hours without moving in order to win a sovereign.'

*(Squire Osbaldeston; the 'Squire of all England'. Mingay 1976, 179).*

Eamesworth's new squires, then - if new 'squires' they can justifiably be labelled - are far from being an emergent body of local power-brokers bent on appropriating the leadership credentials of the vanished squire. Not seeking positions of authority and influence via formal traditional political channels, they are neither infiltrating nor establishing the fluid and dynamic networks which Woods (1998; 2005) has associated with the functioning of contemporary rural elites. They are not, observed Tom Baster, "the sort of people who know the big fish in the county". Nevertheless, the majority of the men certainly enjoyed a number of those sports, pastimes and pleasures allied to rural high-society, as this - alongside an ownership of high-end properties - has been a crucial element of the media's fascination with nouveau gentry: A fascination which has done much by way of alerting Eamesworthians to the possible rebirth of a 'hunting and shooting' set in their midst, although the suitable application of this cliché was, in reality, rather selective. Instead, a firmer set of connections could be drawn through particular public schools, associated rugby clubs and in accordance with more broad-

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spectrum, ostensibly middle-class propositions, practises and concerns, such as those relating to the environment, life-cycle and the raising of children.

### 7.1. *The passing of the hunt*

At its peak in the Edwardian era, where the popularity of the sport was such that there were almost 350 assorted packs in England and Wales alone (Horn 1992, 130), hunting was - within the cultural norms of the time - at once accepted as an activity confirming the country gent's proximity to nature and as a unifying force supported by all parts of the population (Newby 1987). Yet, with working class participation strictly regulated by an internal hierarchy which reflected and asserted the existing class structure (Woods 1997), it was patently an elite sport; something not lost on one of Eamesworth's oldest residents:

"Yes, only the well-to-do and local dignitaries as you might say were regular fixtures on the hunt. I mean, my old mate Wally Cox used to block the holes<sup>1</sup> for them and turn up at the meeting, but he didn't ride. No way. I mean the Prince of Wales rode through here in the 1930's, and I remember that now. I would have been a young lad then, around 10 or 12 ... I wasn't allowed out to watch the hunt when I was very young, you understand. Anyway, I would go down with my uncle and my grandfather and they would run across their fields, jump the low hedges and latch-gates and then off over the railway line towards Dunstable. Except one time, I remember, old Harry Brown ... now he owned a big fleet of trucks that took the sand out the pits in Leighton [Buzzard] – well *he* didn't go over the railway line with them. No, he went over a hedge and into the brook. The silly old sod

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<sup>1</sup> Obstructing the entrance to foxes' dens in order to prevent them going to ground during the chase.

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got soaked, and that made me laugh all the more. His horse was alright though, which was the important thing I suppose.” (Jim Eames).

Amalgamated with the Old Berkeley and South Oxfordshire hunts in 1970 (and more recently combined with the Garth and South Berkshire hunts) the Hertfordshire Hunt Jim watched as a child is now part of the Vale of Aylesbury Hunt, based in the hamlet of Kimblewick, twenty miles to the South West of Eamesworth. Traditionally gathering on the village green opposite the Six Tuns, from which successive landlords would emerge to fill stirrup cups with port, brandy or whiskey, the hunt has neither met nor run in the village for over 15 years.

Cut off by the completion of A505 (otherwise known as the Leighton Buzzard bypass) in late 1997, and with at least two local farmers denying access to their land, the community’s connection with fox hunting has been limited at best for two generations, and is now practically non-existent. With the last known resident huntsmen and women either dying or leaving the village over 20 years ago, and the Office stripped of its hunting paraphernalia (including an authentic, 3 foot long brass horn and photograph of a mounted Edward VIII), the chance of any future involvement in the sport is slim at best. Despite various media reports of a nationwide resurgence in popularity since the introduction of the Hunting Act in 2005 (e.g. Aslet 2007; McGee 2005), this is most definitely not the case in Eamesworth:

“We have been going to the Hunt Ball and gone to the charity dinners they hold once or twice a year, but there is nobody else from Eamesworth or hereabouts and I can tell you that for a fact. I mean, we have known one of the masters for years, so that’s why we go ... but there aren’t too many old-style country people left round here any more, and a lot of those who have

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moved in, despite their pretensions to being like that ... probably don't agree with blood sports ..." (Alistair Gillig).

An accurate assumption, the bulk of those people I encountered were either ambivalent toward the practise of hunting with dogs, or against it in principle; although there was the general feeling that it was a subject not to be broached – at least not in unfamiliar company:

"I will be honest with you, it's not the sort of subject you raise in the pub is it? For the sake of an easy life at any rate. I know most of *us* in the countryside are supposed to be against it, but I can't think of any of my friends or acquaintances that are in the slightest bit bothered about the ban. Even those that seem to want to live the country life ..." (Luke).

"I am rather uncomfortable talking about foxhunting. Like stopping development ... its one of those issues that, as a person living in the countryside – especially one who has moved in from the town - you either support in line with the wishes of *real* country folk, whoever they may be, or preferably keep your mouth shut." (Michael).

Both self-proclaimed incomers and aficionados of the 'outdoor life', Luke and Michael were conscious that, in openly opposing the right to hunt, they would significantly reduce their countryist credentials in the eyes of largely figurative ensemble of rural traditionalists. This, it transpired, was equally true of shooting, where the identity of suitable targets was divisive issue even among Luke and Michael's social circle.

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### 7.2. *A breech of conduct*

'Hunting, like cricket and sometimes bowling, brought squire and village together, [and] many a young lad acquired valuable patronage, and perhaps the entry to a good career, through making his mark in the squire's eleven. Shooting was a different story. It set the squire and his grand friends apart from the landowning classes. By law ... shooting was restricted to the superior land owning classes. The farmers disliked game preservation because the pheasants, partridges, hares and rabbits stripped their fields ... [and] the ordinary villagers were viewed with suspicion as actual or potential poachers ...' (Mingay 1976, 180).

Of all those performances that herald the emergence of the New Squirearchy in the public imagination, shooting sits alongside the purchase of a substantial country pile as a primary indicator. With the amount of certificates on issue for firearms and - more appositely - shotguns on the increase for the first time since the passing of the 1968 Firearms Act (Coleman and Kaiza 2005), and the largest 'umbrella' shooting organization in the country – the British Association of Shooting and Conservation (BASC) – now enjoying a steady annual increment in its membership base, it is a trend that has been strongly felt in the Home Counties. This was put to me by the Managing Director of Broomhill Country Club:

"We [Broomhills] have seen a significant growth in trade over the past decade and certainly over the past two-to-three years since I have taken over as director, both in terms of membership and more casual users. And, having spoken to my equivalents in some of the other, lets say equally prestigious, shooting grounds in Beds, Herts and Bucks, they are doing more and more trade each year as well. When you consider that over a million people now have shotgun licences' in the UK, that's one in sixty – at

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least half of which are probably using their guns for sport and not pest control at facilities such as ours ... And a lot of these people will be active in introducing others to the sport.”

(Managing Director, Broomhill Country Club).

It is a process that has clearly taken place as regards to the Six Tun’s New Squires, of the 13 Office-dwellers who now regularly attend Broomhills on a Sunday morning, 9 were initiated by two others; Stephen Irving and Barry Burnett. Both associates of the club for over a decade, they had been instrumental in arranging lessons for their compatriots and organising collective shoots at different ranges in and around South Bedfordshire:

“As some one who gives lessons and introduces people to the sport, as it were, I have noticed that the number of people wanting to try out clay pigeon and live shooting is definitely on the up, and the *type* of person is becoming ... well, a bit more varied. The sport is gradually becoming less snobby, and more and more people are introducing their friends ... Saying that, I can’t say that it is not an expensive hobby, and naturally that limits who can take it up as a regular activity.”

(Instructor, Broomhill Country Club).

Meeting at the Six Tuns subsequent to each session, often wearing the “clobber” associated with the sport and the identikit countryman more generally, various members of the group were conscious of the elitist tradition of shooting as detailed by their sometime-instructor, and the image they may - or may not - be portraying to other villagers as a result. This was particularly evident when one or two ‘characters’ would arrive at the pub in breeks and tweed – something that served to cause slight embarrassment for at least one of their colleagues, who felt guilt by association:

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“You say about a New Squirearchy ... it is the classic thing. You know there are people who ... I mean, there is one person who I actually get on very well with. He wears plus fours, he does do a lot of shooting ... a smashing chap and everything ... but there’s that feeling of ... But to turn up [in pub after the shoot] in your plus fours and tweeds ... That is not my idea of ... I kind of feel embarrassed ... I don’t want to sound like I am taking the piss, but who do you think he is? The Duke of so-and-so?”

(Christopher Passant).

Unapologetic for their get-up, those who were seen as “getting into the spirit of things too much” by those within and beyond their social circle were eager to point out that their squirely trappings had come as a necessary *result* of their activities, not as a precursor. This justified, for example, their ownership of land and four-wheel-drives:

“Getting a few fields meant that myself and the boy [son] could do a bit of shooting as and when.” (Luke Murcott).

“I enjoy having a pop at a few clays [pigeons]. Sometimes me and a couple of friends will get the trap out and do some shooting on the fields behind the paddocks.” (Mark Price).

“People assume we drive Range ... no wait a minute ... *Chelsea Tractors* because they are fashionable and extravagant and all of that. I will admit, they are nice motors and they cost a few bob, but some of us do actually *use* them. We take them shooting and drive across muddy fields and sling the guns and boots in the back. You need them on that front. The Merc [Mercedes Benz] would soon get stuck and covered in shit”. (Stephen).

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Priming much of the banter in the Office post-shoot, the question of extravagant shooting props was for the most part laughed off, causing little genuine friction, humiliation or antipathy. This issue of 'live' shooting, however, did - or rather would have done - should it have been discussed in the open, something that was contrary to shooting etiquette:

"The issue of 'live' sport is one that our regular members do not tend to discuss beyond technicalities. They know better. I can tell you that I have been a twice-a-week shooter for the past twenty years, but that is clays and not live sport. I haven't got it in me to shoot an animal, to be honest with you, and there are more of us than you might think. You occasionally speak to those starting out in the sport and, and one or two will say "clay discs are one thing, but real birds are quite another". So I am not the only one ... And while the number of people going on live shoots is on the up, how long that will last I don't know. I am pretty certain that ten years down the line, it will be the next blood sport after fox hunting to go."

(Managing Director, Broomhill Country Club).

A divide that was manifest in the Office, there were those who were avid game shooters, and those who found the prospect unpleasant if not distasteful, although both sides were careful to observe protocol:

"I don't see a lot of point in shooting anything that is alive if you are simply concerned with being a good shot. Clays prove that either way. I mean, I have actually shot rabbits, but only because they are a nuisance. But I wouldn't do it out of fun. But it isn't for me to tell others that they cannot shoot birds or whatever on land that doesn't belong to me ..." (Luke).



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“I enjoy pheasant shooting, and I don’t make any bones about that. I go up to Scotland a couple of times a year and shoot grouse as well ... I was invited up with a business acquaintance-cum-friend, and now I go regularly and have taken clients as well. As I said, I enjoy it, and if someone doesn’t like the idea of it then they don’t have to come along, do they?” (Michael).

Attentive to, but unmoved by, perceived feelings of his associates, Michael’s comments were indicative of the range - like the public house – being a space not only of leisure, but also a space of ‘soft’ business.

While Michael was in the minority among Office-dwellers as far as downing live birds in the company of clients was concerned, the role of shooting in general as a networking tool for the New Squirearchy both within and beyond Eamesworth was made clear to me on several occasions, and this tallied with the experiences of those owning and operating local shooting facilities, and reports in national newspapers:

“I go shooting with some of the chaps around here, but I prefer going down to Holland & Holland. They make some very good guns and are a classy outfit ... They have lots of different stands open on their corporate days, and you can go around doing different activities, which I find fun. I take my clients and pay for the day. They always have a celebrity along and, they raise a lot of money for charity. Which is nice ... It’s very much a lads day out, but it oils the wheels, so to speak.” (Michael Marriot).

“A growing number of our customers are corporate, and that is true of the industry as a whole. They are, if you like, business people on business, and we are doing more and more corporate outings, whether they be fun days,

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courting customers, thank yous or whatever. And what we have started to find is that more and more people are coming to us for tuition having been invited out clay pigeon shooting or game shooting. They don't want to turn up and look like wallies in front of their boss, so they come to us – and we are only too happy to show them the ropes. For a fee of course!"

(Managing Director, Broomhill Country Club).

"Particularly attractive to property developers, bankers, chide executives and entrepreneurs for whom it is a great networking opportunity ... it is thought that about 150 chief executives of Britain's 250 biggest companies shoot regularly, as well as many senior figures in the venture capital industries." (Bawden 2004, 11).

An exclusively male<sup>2</sup> pursuit among Eamesworth's business elite (although a number of wives and partners had been on 'family' and 'ladies' days) Michael, in particular, was emphatic that his involvement in the sport should be taken in this context: That he defined himself as an entrepreneur using shooting as a means of business networking, not as a "true-blue gun" which, he surmised, patently marked out "pseudo Lords-of-the Manor" as those not born into the scene. This he assured me, was true for the greater proportion "of others in the gang", who also used prestigious horse-races in a similar vein, without pretending to be "sheiks and trainers".

### 7.3. *Classic pretensions*

'Ascot is so exclusive that it is the only racecourse in the world where the horses own the people.' (Buchwold,1957).

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<sup>2</sup> Although, on a national scale, it should be noted that an increasing percentage of those participating in shooting are female (Woods and Elliot 2007, 11).

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Often referred to as the 'sport of kings', horseracing is popular diversion amongst Eamesworth's incumbent gentry, with both male and female elements to be found at a good many of those 'classic' meets on the calendar, whether they be on the flat or steeplechase (national hunt). Seen at Aintree for the Grand National, Cheltenham on Gold Cup week, Doncaster for the St Leger and Epsom for the Derby, Royal Ascot is without doubt one of the principle social events of the year. Whether congregating in one of the Berkshire racecourse's highly prized (and highly priced) private boxes, or joining the throng in the public enclosure, it is an outing characterised by the spending of much money and the consumption of vast quantities of champagne:

"I have gone to Ascot for well over twenty years, and always have a great time. Of course, we always end up three parts pissed, sometimes before we get there. In the old days before drink-driving, I remember me and the chaps always used to stop at a hotel on the way up there, and try and drink them out of champagne. I remember we had been drinking away in there all lunchtime and we decided to race the rest of the way. I had an Aston [Martin] DBS at the time and my mate had a Jag[uar] XJS and he ends up in a hedge trying to take me on the corner. He was alright, he got out and hopped in my passenger seat and off we went to the races and lost a fortune, same as always." (John Mennie).

"I really enjoy Royal Ascot, especially Ladies Day. I often go with my sister, because it is a bit of a meat market and we always drink way too much bubbly. Anyway the chaps always like to have a boozy day without the women, so we women like to get our own back. We go and spend all their money! [laughs]. But of course, it's not only the cost of the day itself. The specially-bought dress and hat generally cost a fortune ... But you have to look better than the other girls, don't you." (Tanya Parkinson).

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Highlighting the general air of competition that permeates the day, this was not confined to the women. Unable to deviate too much from the dress code of morning suit (and occasional top hat and walking cane) in a game of sartorial one-upmanship, members of the male contingent resorted to chartering limousines and helicopters for the 100 mile round trip, and engaged in what Craig Burrett wincingly referred to as “competitive punting”.

Signing up for the annual Eamesworth village coach trip to Ascot not long after moving into the village in order to get “better acquainted with the locals”, Craig Cabena and his wife Maria had enjoyed attending this communal get-together until, like a few of their closer friends, they opted out on the basis of it becoming an overly boisterous, dissolute spectacle:

“It used to be good fun, but we noticed that it all started to get over the top and out of hand, especially when you were on the coach and couldn’t, you know ... escape. I found it too much, and I know Craig did. Some of the people that drink in the bar [Six Tuns] ... you know who I mean [list of names], they would be well on the way before that had even got on the coach. They got cruder and cruder, and when you got to Ascot itself you could escape them and they would be shoving how much money they were spending down your throat.” (Maria).

“You started to dread the whole affair, so that is we stopped going. I would put a few quid down, no more than £20 on any one race, but some of the guys were laying down hundreds. It seemed to me that they were having a contest to see who could place the biggest bet and *loose* ... Pretending that they didn’t care ... like it was drop in the ocean to them. Pathetic.” (Craig).

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For both Craig and Maria, the decadent behaviour of a few had spoiled their enjoyment of Ascot and transformed the day into something akin to “sixth form house party”. Those accused of boyish indiscretions, however, were mostly unrepentant and steadfastly unconvinced that they had consistently undermined the enjoyment of others. Royal Ascot, they argued, was the one event on the racing calendar where drinking and carousing were “practically expected”, and while some of their contemporaries were prone to good spirits they never knowingly hurt or upset other race goers:

“Why do people choose to go to Ascot in the first place? Because it is a big social event where everybody lets their hair down. If it is sombre racing you want, then go to Towcester on a wet Wednesday afternoon. Myself, and some of the others that I drink with in the [Six] Tuns actually *do* go to other meetings ... but for a lot of people that go to Ascot it is the one meeting that they will go to in the year. If anything we are more ardent followers ...” (Luke).

With the subtext that the horseracing credentials of many of those Office-dwellers present on the Eamesworth Ascot excursion were comparatively well established, and that - by implication - they were in a better position to judge appropriate conduct, Luke was quick to call attention to the fact that he often entertained some of his “closer” clients and drinking partners at less prestigious tracks. Of the opinion that horseracing, like shooting, served as an effective (and chiefly tax-deductible) conduit through which to combine business and pleasure; these activities, he noted, now matched the golf course in popularity among his white-collar colleagues as a venue for brokering deals. This was not to suggest, however, that fairways and clubhouse had been totally supplanted on this front.

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### 7.4. *Golf*

“You get to know more of the character of a man in a round of golf than in six months of political experience.” (David Lloyd-George).

Hardly an activity that, in this day and age, could be reasonably assumed to singularly mark out the existence of would-be landed gentry, golf has nevertheless historically operated as an elite pastime. Requiring an excess of time, money and, by its very nature, a rural setting, the game became a fashionable leisure activity for the upper classes during Edwardian years (see Horn 1992). Continuing to exist as an exclusive pursuit until the mid to late 1970s (and arguably beyond) when the number of European golfers (and courses) began to rise rapidly<sup>3</sup>, it retains a firm foothold in the public imagination as being a principle apparatus through which an ‘inner circle of big business’ organizes and mobilises itself (Grunig, Toth and Hon 2001).

A staple within the ‘social embeddedness’ framework employed by many sociological accounts of mercantile and financial networks (e.g. Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Uzzi 1996), the golf course has oft been identified as a key variable in the reciprocal development of business relations; especially amid small to medium sized firms (e.g. Beaverstock 2002; Bryson *et al* 1993; Chell and Baines 2000). Here, embedding commercial transactions ‘in the fairway’ - as with the shooting range and, to a lesser extent, the restaurant and public house – promotes benefits through enacting expectations of trust and reciprocal obligation that ‘actors espouse as the right and proper protocols for governing exchange with persons they have come to know’ (Uzzi 1999, 485). Purporting to ‘good faith’, the ‘meeting of minds’ and the ‘sharing of value and good fortune’, embedding was a

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<sup>3</sup> The number of courses in mainland Europe has increased by 80% in ten years, while the number of golfers is growing by 5% annually (Charles 2006).

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process cognitively familiar to a good number of executives and entrepreneurs whom I encountered in and around Eamesworth and had on occasion served as grounds for further friendship. Luke Murcott, Mark Price and Christopher Passant, for example, had all played golf with one another, and variously with other local residents, on the pretext of business;

“Although I think it is increasingly frowned upon ... laughed at even ... doing business on the golf course. I have certainly done it in a minor, off the cuff way. You have to know someone first, and know that they play golf, but it can certainly take the strict formality out of any discussions.”

(Christopher).

“Even when you are playing as friends on a Saturday morning, for example, you are always talking about what has happened in the week, and a lot of that is business related. Considering that the majority of people I play with have their own companies, and that some of them are clients of mine as well ... it is practically inevitable we are going to discuss what is going on at work ... as well as how the wife, kids and dog is so-to-speak ... Even if we are not actually doing any business together, we ask each other advice and bounce ideas off of each other ... you know, problems with staff and tax and so on and so forth.” (Luke).

At all times a mix of business and pleasure, even when “the lads” go on one of their occasional golfing excursions to France, Spain or Dubai, the raising of clubs continues to be accompanied by the casual chatter of balance-sheets and margins.

A traditionally male-orientated forum, wives and partners were habitually absent from these extended golfing sessions. They did, however, occasionally take part

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in 'mixed days', and many of them had taken up the sport amongst themselves, playing on a more regular basis than their significant other:

"It [golf] used to be a really big thing amongst the blokes, but it is not so much now ... since the kids have come onto the scene and they have less free time ... But we do all get together and play as couples. I think it's *alright*, not great, but I know it makes my husband happy. But I have *really* embarrassed him the last few times I have gone along ... But some of the girls can play and go far more often than the men, maybe once or twice a week." (Tanya Parkinson).

Entering what Mott has described as 'one of the last bastions of retreating chauvinism' (1996, 7), they are part of a female contingent which has more than doubled since 1979 and is set to grow further (Kennedy 1997). Becoming members and associates of some of the more exclusive clubs in the south Bedfordshire region, including Woburn, Mentmore, Berkhamstead and Ashridge, they were challenging many of those oppressive gender relations that were – and in some instances still are - evident in their hallowed corridors:

"They can be quite stuffy, and you definitely get the sense that some of the older members resent you being there. But we don't care ... we sort of revel in it at times. We pay our fees, have all the gear and obey the rules ... so why shouldn't we be there? What is more, the women that are involved tend to have ... for want of a better description ... rich husbands and don't work ... That means that they tend to play in the daytime and are not clogging up the fairways on the evenings and at weekends." (Maria).

Unusual in being the managing director of her own firm, a firm which, as it happened, designed and marketed golfing apparel and equipment, Maria made



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the point that while sexual intolerance lingered within the industry, it was rarely extended to herself and her female companions by those in the company of her husband; despite their having what she described as a general air of “laddishness and competitiveness” on the tee. This was a sentiment shared by Tanya, who had found it amusing when her spouse suggested she take up golf in order to unwind:

“He [husband] is so competitive ... they all are. You wouldn’t think it is a game that men play to relax. They all seem to come back more wound up than ever. Unless they’ve won of course. The ladies are far more chilled out. It is more about having a giggle, and we go to out to lunch afterwards and maybe shopping ...” (Tanya).

Tallying with broader evidence suggesting that male golfers place a greater value on winning and skill acquisition (see Shotton *et al* 2007), golf nevertheless stood out as a tangible connection within and between both male and female contingents of Eamesworth’s wealthier would-be lords and ladies, both as an interest and in practise. Needless to say, many other villagers who were not commonly associated with New Squiredom could also be customarily found on the golf course, as they could stood on sidelines of the rugby pitch on a wet Saturday afternoon.

### 7.5. *Rugby*

‘Expansion brought with it conflict. The middle-class version of the playing field was a testing ground for moral virtues and was reserved for amateurs with spare time to play and train. The adept working-class rugger wanted to be paid, if only in the sense of compensation for the time off work and the costs of travel. But the erosion of the amateur spirit was widely lamented. Clubs insisted that ‘players’ (that is, professionals) had separate

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changing rooms from 'gentlemen' (that is amateurs) ... If not quite sacred, it [rugby] had acquired a nobility that would be tarnished by money and the urge to win at all costs. Like the medieval knight, the true sportsman sought nothing more than honour and reputation.' (James 2006, 335).

Referring to the so-called 'Great Schism' of the late 1900s, a period in which the National Rugby Union was coming to terms with the contravention of a strict amateur code forbidding the remuneration of players, this passage clearly underscores the privileged roots of rugby and its longstanding, but often difficult, relationship with chivalry and the qualities of bravery, loyalty and good judgement (Girouard 1981). Inherently tied to the gentlemanly ethic as a device for perpetuating distinctions of status and authority through rituals of social intercourse (Woods 2005a, 28), the rugby pitch, as with the golf course, once cemented as opposed to straddled the class system, but this is no longer realistically the case. In rude health, the number of people playing rugby union from all backgrounds has been rising steadily over the past decade, and match day attendances have also climbed considerably in this period (Austin 2004).

Benefiting from this surge in popularity, clubs in and around Eamesworth – most notably Dunstablians RFC and Leighton Buzzard RFC – have all experienced a growth in membership over the past few seasons, and, in regard to the latter, are enjoying the patronage of some of the community's wealthier arrivals:

"We have definitely seen a boost over the past five years, and a lot of that has to do with having a new club steward who has put a bit of oomph into the proceedings. We now have more people willing – even wanting – to be on the committee, rather than having just the same old few running things ... No disrespect, but some of the chaps on the committee now are successful local businessmen ... As well as having the money to support the

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club – not directly, but getting odd jobs done for free or cost – they know how to operate and get the best deals for the clubs money. Look at Stephen [Irving]. He has done an awful lot for the club since he has got involved.”

(Rugby club committee member).

The owner of a carpentry firm, and occupant of Primrose Cottage (a house that has been extended no less than three times in fifteen years), Stephen has played “on and off as a prop-forward with ‘the Buzzards’ for donkeys years”, and has seen both sons retrace his efforts and progress through the youth sections into the clubs’ third and fourth teams. Described as a ‘steady and committed player’, he has now hung his boots up and taken his place among the many ‘social members’ who frequent the clubhouse on evenings and weekends, and populate the many pre-match lunches that occur throughout the season.

Habitually reverting from a polite, three course meal into a feral all-day drinking session, Stephen often organised a table at these events, attending with an assortment of other local ex-players, businessmen, shooters, and farmers. Frequently incorporating a host of other Office-dwellers whose relationship with the club (and village it claimed to represent) seemed much more short-lived and momentary; this was a factor that irked some of the older faces on the scene:

“I have lived in Eamesworth for 30 years now, and I have noticed that these *faux riche* types that have moved in over the past 10 years or so have started to muscle-in on local affairs and ‘dos’ ... and they are now starting to dominate the affairs at the rugby club. Events like the annual Sportsman’s Dinner and pre-match lunches have now become a place to mingle with each other and dress up in tuxedos and ball gowns. This is something they like to do. As a consequence they have put such a demand on for these get-

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together that they are effectively displacing proper players and locals because there are not enough tickets to go around.”

(Rugby club staff member/ former player).

Of the opinion that a fair few of these characters “had not lifted a rugby ball in anger since leaving school”, it was an assumption that found itself well wide of the mark; and their connection with the sport – and with each other – became apparent one afternoon when I joined Michael Murcott and Mark Price at their table one afternoon.

Both enjoying the opportunity for a “good piss up”, but also revelling in the prospect of a good game of rugby, both Michael and Mark had attended “at least half a dozen” pre-match lunches since moving into Eamesworth, and both had also played on one of the four pitches in the not-so-distant past. Friendly with a number of club sponsors, several of whom they were on first name terms with, I asked them if they had ever considered following suit and adding their respective businesses to one of the corporate billboards littered around the ground. Being a stockbroker, Michael made the point that his trade did not utilise this form of advertising, although he was more than willing to provide a trophy and/or prize “in the spirit of getting involved”. Mark, on the other hand, had already acted as a corporate benefactor – although this was for Tring RFC, not Leighton Buzzard RFC. A current member and former player at the club, he had, like a number of his close friends, progressed into their ranks having also played in the ‘sevens’ for Berkhamstead Collegiate and, prior to this, Berkhamstead Boys School.

In what Ryan Walker, a real estate manager and former prefect, determined to be a “natural progression”, several New Squires had followed this route and continued to support these teams as financial backers, members and spectators. Another element of an increasingly visible informal, semi-exclusive network operating in

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and around Eamesworth, characterizations of the villages' nouveaux gentry as an 'old boy network' thus seemed ever-more appropriate and increasingly difficult to dismiss as over-employed cliché. Indeed, the fact that I had not spotted such a union at the outset of the study came as something of a surprise to Tanya:

"Have you not noticed ... Oh my god? They are all public schoolboys aren't they, the chaps that drink in the Six Tuns on Wednesday with [husband]. Yes, they all go out to play together at the pub, the rugby club, or the golf club - and goodness knows where else - but they met at school ... They have that air about them, don't they, although I don't think [husband] would like me saying that ." (Tanya Parkinson).

I asked Tanya to elaborate:

"They are all very similar in their attitude and way of thinking. It's a boy's network and they all back each other up and stick together. They are very guarded and close knit, and I think that is partly why they do a lot of business together. I am not saying they are like the Masons or anything like that. They are friends first and then business associates, but they help each other out ..." (Tanya Parkinson).

Identifying her husband and his cohorts as a product of that privileged arena which devised, orchestrated and formerly dominated not only the game of rugby, but the world of business and politics also, Tanya's comments were suggestive of the glue between Eamesworth's New Squires being more than that of shared aspirations and rarefied rustic lifestyles, but rather that of a 'privileged' schooling and upbringing. Like the men-about-town and country squires of old, their edifying pool and cultural mores seemed to transcend urban/rural distinctions,

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operating through an altogether wider amalgam of nodes and spaces within and beyond the countryside.

### 7.6. *Public schools*

'That's the public school system all over. They may kick you out, but they never let you down.' (Evelyn Waugh).

Defoe once noted that the squirearchy was, for the most part, drawn to live not like men of learning, but like gentlemen; 'enjoying their estates and their pleasures to the envy of nobody' (1890, 138). Yet, and rather contradictorily, he went on to argue that what made the upstarts from the world of business acceptable in the circles of the old-established gentry was the education they could afford to for their sons, and, to a lesser extent, their daughters. So, it was the newcomer's son who 'was sent early to school, has good parts and has improved them by learning, travel, conversation and reading, and above all with a modest courteous gentleman like behaviour: despise as you will, he will be a gentleman in spite of all the distinctions we can make' (Ibid. 139). Written at a time when English education was continuing to develop along alternate social and functional lines, these comments are symptomatic of the then-squirearchy's concern with grammar schools and, for a wealthy minority, public schools, universities and Inns as the principle preparation for a prospective role among the ruling class; a role that 'might be significant in the national sense, or might be obscurely parochial' (Mingay 1976, 163).

A common base cementing the membership of an homogenous if hierarchal elite, the 'great and dangerous gulf' (Ibid) this wrought between the poorly and publicly educated has, in more recent times, diminished greatly in terms of the quality - or at least the *possibility* - of learning. The prestige and potential afforded

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by a private education, however, has not necessarily declined at the same rate (see Cox 1998), and this was an undertow in both Luke Murcott and Micheal Marriot's rationale in 'going public' with their children:

"I happen to think that if financially you can afford private education, and have an option as to how you educate your child then there is every possible chance that in a class with less than 18 children he might get a better education. It can pay dividends in later life. Not just by way of knowledge, but also ... in terms of going to school with certain ... [long pause] ... types of people who might be in a position to help you later on in life. And visa versa of course ... I mean, a lot of the people I associate with went to Berkhamstead, I have happened to have fallen in with them more by chance than anything. Through business really, and I can't say I haven't benefited. Through introductions and so forth. But I might not have gotten in so easily ... if you see what I mean." (Luke Murcott).

"I hated school non-stop, so by the time I left school the idea of sending my children there [Berkhamstead] really went against the grain. But in the same way that I think that I rebelled fairly early on in my school days, I have since come round to accepting certain things in life ... even by the time I was in my mid twenties and we decided to have children. I considered private school to perhaps be the better of two evils. Certainly when they started going to school, and we were living in Hemel Hempstead at the time ... and of the available schools at the time I just felt there was no way my kids were going to go to any of them. As a consequence we started them off in a private nursery and so on."

(Michael Marriot).

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Unlike Luke, who attended a comprehensive in nearby Hitchin, Michael was the first member of his family to accrue the benefits of a private education, his parents having moved a distance of 10 miles from Amersham into the Berkhamstead suburbs in order that he could be a 'day boy' in both Berkhamstead Boys School and Berkhamstead Collegiate 'proper'.

Founded in 1541, and with alumni including Graham Greene and Lady Churchill, Berkhamstead Collegiate is a relatively exclusive institution, with strong Oxbridge connections and an exemplary academic record<sup>4</sup> at both GCSE and A Level study. With fees in excess of £1000 per pupil per term for day attendance, and around £6000 per pupil per term boarding, it is a sizeable outlay for any family, but one that Luke and Michael (and their respective partners) considered to be a worthwhile investment. Accounting for their non-involvement in the affairs of Eamesworth Lower School, it was also a key binding agent within the 'New Squire' social circle and that of their children; a great deal more so than - but intrinsically tied into - that of residential proximity, drinking venues, or rural pursuits and aspirations:

"At school I mixed with my brothers and his clan who were a few years older than myself. And that led to going to the pub with them and us becoming a close group of friends later on in life. Even some of the people I would never have had anything to do with at school itself ... we have now become quite close. Life's a bit of a leveller, and we are now good friends ... There's Ryan, obviously and Nigel. They were in the same year as my bother, along with a number of other faces you often see in the Six Tuns. There is still quite a bond there, and there probably always will be ..."

(Christopher Passant).

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<sup>4</sup> In 2003, for example, 97% of pupils achieved grade C or over in 5+ GCSE subjects.



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An historic (and now very much imagined) space of union amongst the male contingent of Eamesworth's New Squires, Berkhamstead's public schools did not, however, constitute a common ground of experience between Eamesworth's new 'ladies'. For the most part state-educated, these select institutions had brought them together only in terms of their spouses, who had, at times, marked the nature and direction of their partner's fraternising and lifestyle choices:

"Sometimes I feel as though the women are an asset ... that we belong to them. We are all in our 40's now, but I don't feel like it. Why should I have to take up something *nice* like golf or bridge with the other girls? My husband said to me "you're in your forties now and should behave and dress like this". And I thought 'Oh no I don't'. And some of the girls are the same, but others do what they are told. It sounds bloody awful but it's an image thing and I have noticed it. We meet up and they are not an inch overweight. And they are not allowed to do this, and not allowed to do that. It's so superficial sometimes." (Theresa Pettit).

Disparaging of her partner's tendency for trophyism, Theresa's concerns were shared by many others within this clique, some of whom had felt pressured into certain friendships, activities and roles on behest of their partners. Occasionally suggestive of gentility, this situation was on inspection more akin to traditional (expected) gender roles within financially comfortable circles and was, noted one observer, indicative of a belief in "the little women as child-bearer, house-keeper, and champion shoe-shopper".

### 7.7. *Lords, ladies and the role of gender*

Aside from a couple of high-profile exceptions, the majority of Eamesworth's 'New Ladies' had left paid employment on settling down with their partners. Taking on

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the preconceived supporting role of household management and childcare, several had become acutely conscious of being defined solely through their husband, his occupation, his pursuits, his wealth and – ultimately - *his* achievements. Nevertheless, in overseeing the employ of au-pairs, gardeners and housekeepers, and in keeping to an often busy social calendar, many of those women in question were equally acceptant and appreciative of their privileged circumstances.

“It is a bit of a double-edged sword, and I know I am not alone in feeling like this. I am privileged in the sense of not having to work, and being able to have cleaners and having someone to help with the children. The fact that I can fairly well do as I wish, and not worry about money over-much ... But then, you look at women on the television who have started their own businesses and are super-confident and have made a fortune and ... well I think I could do that. I am not stupid. But I don't think [husband] would like me doing that. Not out of jealousy, but I think he likes being the provider and ensuring that I can look out for the kids and the little castle when he is at work ...” (Theresa).

Evocative of those studies identifying the home as an important site where gender identities are created, expressed and recreated, Theresa's comments were steeped in an acknowledgment of those persistent ideologies of the women's (and especially mothers') place in the home, and the traditional family unit as the best possible place to bring up children (see Gregson and Lowe 1995). Echoing scholarly accounts of the home/work relationship, both capitalism (the separation of production from reproduction) and patriarchy (women's responsibility for caring work, men's privileges in employment) class and gender conflicts (see Pain *et al* 2001) were manifest in New Squiredom.

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Playing into and out of dominant socio-cultural constructions of rurality, the sustaining of highly conventional (but increasingly irregular) gender relations (Little 2002, 82) within the nouveau gentry were both practical and ideological, defining both responsibility and status. Here the belief that women's 'natural' place is at the heart of the family and, as an extension of this, the community was tangible, and the imposition of strong, hierarchal moral ideas on the behaviour of self-consciously 'privileged' female arrivistes was intermittently experienced. Louise Robinson's stint as host and 'Lady Bountiful' at the Manor Fete was the most palpable illustration of this, but there were a number of other – albeit less celebrated – cases in point.

Resonating with notions of women's desire for a career as potentially damaging to rural social relations, both Tanya and Theresa, for example, stipulated that a want for paid employment had, in contrast to female neighbours and acquaintances, better prioritized the children - but also placed them in a position to "put more into the village". In reality, however, and as with the overwhelming majority of those within this circle, they were conspicuous in their absence as far as the functioning of village institutions was concerned. In accord with those sentiments expressed in the previous chapter, the church, the village hall, the W.I etc. held little appeal to women who were unwilling to "consign themselves to old age", despite making reference to the social environment of village England as a primary reason for relocation. Instead they preferred the company of each other and in this way replicated the more exclusive elements of the country ladies' daily round; taking coffee together, going riding, frequenting gymkhanas, playing golf and, on a more ritualistic footing, attending such gender-tailored events as Ladies Day at Ascot, and the occasional Six Tuns' formal dinner dance.

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### 7.8 *Middle class marker posts*

'Predictions of the disappearance of the class system were premature: the hoped-for meritocracy that had emerged by 1979 did not demolish old barriers or sweep away any social pretensions. Arrivistes continued to proclaim their elevation by flaunting the trappings of their new status. In 1966 a thirty-two-year-old managing director of a publishing company of lower middle class origins confessed to a paranoia about 'posh people' who looked down on him. He overcame it: 'I've got my Rolls, so bugger them. Life's great.' (James 2006, 448).

A familiar face at the Six Tuns Autumn Ball, as with every other regular Office-dweller, Christopher Passant was open to the fact that he liked his wife to "look good and turn a few heads" on entering the marquee, but did not profess to ever considering her in the manner of an object or prize: As for some of his associates' intentions when it came to "some of those skinny young things they had sometimes appeared with", he was less sure. Dubious of their motivations, he was of the opinion that in some cases these (fleeting) relationships were both conspicuous and materialistic in their basis. This, Christopher maintained, was true of their day-to-day lives more generally:

"It's not only that ... but of this country squire thing and pretty much everything else ... and it makes me cringe sometimes when I am in the pub. The other thing that you've absolutely *got* to have is the villa in Spain or Portugal or Cyprus. And personally, it would be quite nice to have a place in the south of France or a ski chalet in the Alps. But really, it's almost as if, with one or two of the people I regularly go about with ... they have pushed themselves to go out and get a place abroad because all the other boys have. For instance, the other day a couple of the guys were talking

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very about this place and that place, and talking in a very ... knowing way about how the Spanish legal system works ... so everybody else might think better of them ... I feel it is a little too brash sometimes.”

Expressed as something “more than” - but still encompassing - a search for squirehood, the performed materiality of Michael and his comrades was apparently centred on the existence of what he referred to as “middle class marker posts” and an ongoing attentiveness to fashion in the wake of the cutting edge; be it technological, commercial or even this season’s must-go holiday destination.

Investing much money in foreign travel, dining out in prestigious restaurants, owning property abroad, driving exotic sports cars and motorbikes and, in some instances, maintaining yachts and helicopters, Eamesworth’s nouveau gentry revelled in products which, unlike country piles, Range Rovers and horses, are far from being ‘rural’ in any symbolic sense. Indicative of success on a broader scale, or rather in other realms<sup>5</sup> such as those of the ‘ex-pat’, ‘jet-set’ or ‘Sloane Ranger’, they nevertheless served to characterise, constitute and differentiate the existence of a gregarious nouveau riche in and around the village. A staple of conversation, there was a competitive pre-occupation with appearance of having and playing with exclusive amenities, and in being part of those provisional spaces formed and sustained by these amenities. An occasional source of anxiety, conceivably because of what William Cobbett once called the ‘shame of being thought poor’

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<sup>5</sup> Although it should be noted that elements of the squirearchy have, from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, also assumed such identities and operated through such networks. Here the growing ease of travel as afforded by turnpikes, railways and steamships meant a far greater freedom and cheapness of movement for the upper echelons of society in particular, with the general effect of loosening the gentry’s roots with the soil. By the middle years of the century, notes Mingay, landowners were finding in their Pall Mall clubs ‘the company and convenience which offered good substitutes for the former habits of visiting in the neighbourhood and entertaining at home’, while ‘Lucerne, Interlaken, and Wengen became familiar names among the cognoscente’ (1976, 177).

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among ones would-be peers (Ibid, 159), it was an unease that was alleviated by conspicuous spending:

“A couple of our members, if you like, seem to do everything and buy everything for effect. Whether it’s down to a lack of confidence or a need for recognition I really don’t know. But it seems to me that it is all done for show. Take Michael Marriot for example. When Nigel, Stephen and Billy [property speculator] got a Ferrari or Porsche, he got a bright yellow Porsche. When they started investing in property abroad, so did he. And Andrew is another case in point. When everybody started going over to Majorca as a gang; he went and bought a thirty-foot yacht in the harbour. And he never uses it much. At least not to my knowledge.” (Mark Price).

Referring to the actions of Michael and Andrew as indicative of the “working lad come good syndrome”, in coveting certain goods and associated lifestyles there were, suggested Mark, blatant class pretensions at work in the fold; despite habitual claims to the contrary. This awkward juxtaposition; the etiquette which forbids accepting the relevance of traditional measures of social stratification verses their ongoing influence as tangibly expressed in material assets, cultural achievements and accreditations; was also (rather cryptically) expressed by Christopher and, perhaps more understandably, many other villagers who did not move in their circles:

“The chaps I socialise with, I suppose there is a cross-section of society in old class terms. The majority, I would say are what you might call middle class, or even upper middle class. But then again some are not, and would say class is now irrelevant, or take the attitude that they are and always will be working class and have ... pulled themselves up by their bootstraps. Personally, I think that is very much an anti-status, status thing if you

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follow ... For example, on occasion a couple of the lads have made the odd comment about not being born with a silver spoon in their mouths. Which is probably a self-conscious reaction to the middle-class-ness of the public school element of the group. On the other hand, there are those who would only grudgingly admit to being working class, and take a rather different tack". (Christopher Passant).

"A lot more ordinary - for want of a better word - people have been able to make money in recent times. They have been able to work themselves up and buy fancy cars and places in the countryside or Spain or wherever, and I think that is good. But it is a different class of people ... a different kind of middle class. They have not inherited money and a stately pile. But there are those who came from working class backgrounds and still think of themselves as salt of the earth, and have no wish to be seen as anything different. They have the same friends as they had before and behave very much in the same way ... But there are also those who draw attention to themselves by trying to *be* the old middle or upper class, be it in Eamesworth or wherever, and in doing that they show themselves up for what they are. An oik in a Range Rover or Jaguar with a mansion. It's about of how you behave yourself, really." (Thomas Baster).

Even as an 'outsider', the matter of (in) appropriate middle class behaviour and mannerisms was one that Thomas identified as an Office-dwelling fissure, although he remained adamant that, while several could purport to being "genuinely middle class", none were (or could ever be) "old country middle class in the sense of being gentleman farmers or ex-army captains".

Observing the use of received pronunciation, or rather "the Queen's English", Thomas was not alone in making such a distinction between the ranks of the New

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Squirearchy. Here, for example, he pointed to the non-uniform presence of (an assumed) public school education and entrepreneurial/ managerial employment patterns. Referring to them as “wheeler dealers”, Thomas was one of many interviewees/ correspondents who – and quite accurately – categorised Eamesworth’s New Squires in the vein of a mercantile petite bourgeoisie. A ‘contemporary’ channel of entry in rural areas and gauge of assets of class formation as identified by Cloke *et al.* (1995), any attempts to elaborate on associated characteristics and cultural principles in the fashion of Savage *et al* (1992) were principally fruitless. While it was possible to typify membership according to labour market situations, and draw major parallels in terms of the acquisition of (‘rural’ and ‘yuppie’) positional goods, the New Squirearchy – apparent could not reasonably be set-apart in line with a ‘post-modern habitus’ as expected of private sector professionals and high-climbers. Certainly they demonstrated a healthy and extravagant mode of living, and an unfathomable mix of high and low culture, but, like the majority of local residents I came into contact with, they portrayed no overarching organizing principle beyond that of a peculiarly, but selective, gentryfied communal identity – what Eric Harrison (2006) would term a ‘lifestyle package’.

Quite clearly, Eamesworth’s New Squires are part of a much broader (socio-economic) middle class base residing in the village; and class formation, as Savage *et al*, remind us, does ‘does not take place on the head of a pin’ (1992, 13): Rather, they take place in specific spatial *contexts*, shaped by changes in employment structures which are themselves a cause and response to (middle class) spatial (re)formation. Spatial mobility, notes Phillips, is a key feature of middle class lifestyle(s), and has the ‘consequence of allowing middle-class households gradually to acquire more prestigious properties in the course of housing *careers*’ (1995, 1218). But, more than this, there has for a long time been a trend towards the investment of cultural assets in housing and the surrounding areas ‘so that the



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aesthetics of residence plays a major part in the exhibition of tastes and values' (Savage *et al* 1992, 94). At the neighbourhood level, specific conglomerations of properties have taken on particular roles, geared to different household types and stages in the lifecycle via process of gentrification, or - in the case of Eamesworth - what may suitably be described as gentryfication.

With the presence of ample farmhouses and a great many well sized, rustic period dwellings in a (relatively) bucolic setting, Eamesworth is well set for the part-communication of the 'squirely' ethos and, to some degree, the practical realisation of that 'landed discourse' beloved of the tabloid press. A visible (though highly problematic) trend in the locality, the underlying logic is far from uniform and the issue of longevity remains. While the properties in question will no-doubt remain for many more years to come as a reminder of a one-time rural hierarchy, their relationship with highly visible identikit re-creationists is one that is, perhaps, set to pass; either as a lifestyle choice or, at the very least, in terms of the individuals themselves:

"The New Squire thing is probably just a fad, or at least it just so happens that the newspapers are paying attention to it because Madonna has a gun ... As for moving onto pastures new, I think I might, for example, think about getting a dockside apartment on the Thames because it is easier to get out and about in London. Besides, there is more to do than shooting and riding horses. You can get to Spearmint Rhino [strip club] quicker, for a start [laughs]." (Tristan Baker).

"When my son has up and left, I will most probably downsize. I won't need such a big house, and I may well move abroad ..." (Luke Murcott).

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“I think that there are people that you should look to who still own the village in a sense of always having been here. The rest of us, perhaps are just passing through. And that goes for the *nouveau riche* - this New Squirearchy as you might put it – as well. When they get fed up with their farmhouses and there 12 acres, they will bugger off to their villa in Spain and the same few will stay here as they always have done ... Money doesn't come into it. They *belong*.” (Thomas Baster).

“I suppose buying a country house has marked a stage in our [groups] lives. We have all become sensible, and have left the clubbing and partying - the London years, if you like - behind us. Most of us wanted somewhere safe to bring the kids up in. And now a lot of our friends are getting villas in Spain or Cyprus which, I think was initially about making money, but some are now going in for the ex-pat thing. The kids have mostly grown up and they have now either sold their businesses or have found someone to run it for them ... So yes, I suppose living around here is a stage in our lives, but I don't think my husband and I will move out. I love England too much, and I belong in the countryside. I need my green fields, my farmhouse, my horses and my dogs.” (Theresa Pettit).

Positioning New Squiredom as subsequent to a pre-child, predominantly urban stage in an individuals existence; and prior to a post-child, possibly “ex-pat” or “downsized” retirement period, such comments were widespread and characteristic of the life-cycle/ life-course approach popular among human geographers in the 1980s and early 1990s (see Bongaarts *et al* 1987; Warnes 1992).

Correlated with mobility, income, the demand for spacious rural homes, healthier recreational opportunities and a relatively secure environment, a principle reason for the New Squirearchy's arrival in Eamesworth (and one that was broadly

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concurrent with their age and sex structure) was no different from that of many other families in the village; the notion that, as part of the countryside, it constituted a relatively 'safe place' to raise children. Commonly cited as a reason for migration into rural areas (Woods 2005, 244), the narrative of the countryside as being less exposed to the embodied dangers and undesirable cultural influences associated with urban space was one frequently mobilised in the course of interviews and discussions; although the suitability of their application was most certainly questionable, especially in the second instance. In Valentine's account of parent's motives in rural relocation, for example, one respondent remarked that children were without the pressure of having to have 'Adidas tracksuits ... and the latest videogames' (1997, 140); but the sons and daughters of Office-dwellers were, if anything, more receptive to current fashions than their contemporaries, and wanted for very little.

While present in many of those recreational spaces synonymous with the landed gentry, Eamesworth's 'New Squires' differ little from a much wider body of middle-class residents in this, and many other, countryside communities. With a penchant for 'rural' accoutrements, their tendency for conspicuous consumption nevertheless extended into wider a middle-class realm, supported by an equally analogous set of employment and educational credentials. Re-enforcing the rhetoric of a loss of community interaction brought about by in-migration and a break with traditional lifestyles (see Bell 1994), the New Squirearchy is, in this instance, perhaps *atypical* of a prominent middle-class incursion. Absent from the everyday operation of those socio-political organisations which continue to shape and define Eamesworth as a vibrant village, this wholly contradicted any revitalization of paternalistic structures as fairly suggested by such titles as "would-be lords of the manor", "nouveau gentry" or "pseudo squires".