



## The Grass Roots of English History: Local Societies in England before the Industrial Revolution

By David Hey



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In medieval and early modern Britain, people would refer to their local district as their 'country', a term now largely forgotten but still used up until the First World War. Core groups of families that remained rooted in these 'countries', often bearing distinctive surnames still in use today, shaped local culture and passed on their traditions. In *The Grass Roots of English History*, David Hey examines the differing nature of the various local societies that were found throughout England in these periods.

The book provides an update on the progress that has been made in recent years in our understanding of the history of ordinary people living in different types of local societies throughout England, and demonstrates the value of studying the varied landscapes of England, from towns to villages, farmsteads, fields and woods to highways and lanes, and historic buildings from cathedrals to cottages. With its broad coverage from the medieval period up to the Industrial Revolution, the book shows how England's socio-economic landscape had changed over time, employing evidence provided by archaeology, architecture, botany, cultural studies, linguistics and historical demography.

*The Grass Roots of English History* provides an up-to-date account of the present state of knowledge about ordinary people in local societies throughout England written by an authority in the field, and as such will be of great value to all scholars of local and family history.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

[A] work of profound imagination and reach that provides testimony to the continuing vitality of local and regional history. Times Literary Supplement A highly individual and admirable book ... The Grass Roots of English History is a very personal vision of what local history might be [and] as an alternative reading of our history, it deserves our attention. Reviews in History David Hey is a celebrity among family and local historians, whose books have done more than any others to form a field, to inspire research into family history and show the relevance of this to historical studies. This book goes wider, into the 'grass roots' and basis of English society in the early modern period. It displays his intellectual persona everywhere. It is highly readable, an excellent interpretative work, up-to-date, wide-ranging in themes, regions and chronology. It is especially welcome for stressing what early modern people termed 'countries': differing regions and their distinctive qualities. It will certainly promote many further scholarly enquiries along these lines. K.D.M. Snell, Director of the Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, UK David Hey's latest book is a magnificent overview of England's past, which serves to unite the worlds of landscape history, family history and local history. Dealing with subjects as diverse as the distribution and meaning of English surnames, the development of the rural landscape, the origins and growth of towns, and the character and significance of parish churches and other great buildings, Hey provides a context and framework for local studies which local and family historians, as well as the general reader, will find both useful and informative. A clear, concise and immensely readable contribution to the literature. Tom Williamson, Professor of History, University of East Anglia, UK Hey (emer., Univ. of Sheffield, UK) published seminal studies on English local history for half a century, and, sadly, passed away while this book was in production. He begins this excellent survey by noting that until the 19th century, most English folk identified with their local "country"; that is, one of hundreds of small agricultural and market communities individualized variously by their distinctive dialects, farming practices, crafts, or building styles. Tax and census records reveal that descendants of core families remained in these "countries" from 1377 to 1911. Hey describes other continuities as well as the significant changes in many such locales from the time of the Roman occupation to the eve of industrial society. Highlighted along the way are recent remarkable discoveries; for example, that castles were built largely for non-military purposes, and that some existing timber-framed buildings date to the early 13th century. Although specialist studies inform the narrative throughout, Hey's attractive prose will make the book accessible to both undergraduates encountering local history for the first time and general readers-perhaps someone preparing to visit the English countryside for the 1st or 20th time. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All public and academic levels/libraries. CHOICE

#### About the Author

**David Hey** was Emeritus Professor of Local and Family History at the University of Sheffield, UK.

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