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WALTER MORRELL AND THE NEW DRAPERIES PROJECT, c. 1603–1631*

MICHAEL ZELL
University of Greenwich

ABSTRACT. *This article explores the lengthy and convoluted history of a Jacobean project to set the idle poor to work making 'new draperies'. Although the projector, Walter Morrell, convinced the Cecils, King James, and the privy council of the social and fiscal benefits of his scheme, he failed to persuade the Hertfordshire gentry. This case study in the formulation of crown economic policy, and in 'Stuart paternalism', draws upon Morrell's own detailed, unpublished treatise, as well as conventional political sources, and shows how the combination of 'commonwealth' rhetoric and progressive economic thinking could sway crown policy-making. It also demonstrates once again the limits of conciliar authority in early Stuart England. In the face of sustained provincial non-compliance, the privy council had neither the machinery nor the stomach to force the Hertfordshire elite to implement government policy and give meaningful support to a government-backed projector. And despite their inability to deal with growing rural unemployment, the Hertfordshire magistrates were unwilling to experiment with rural industry as a solution.*

'Setting the poor on work' is a recurring motif which links English poor relief legislation from 1570s onwards with the grandiloquently proclaimed objectives of a variety of patentees and projectors during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. It appears not only in legislation and political discourse but also in popular literature. In Thomas Deloney's biographical fantasy about the famous Henrician clothier Jack of Newbury (written about 1592), the title page announces the hero's most praiseworthy deeds. Alongside Jack's fabulous charity and hospitality was the fact that 'he set continually five hundred poor people at work, to the great benefit of the common-wealth'.[1] The aim of this article is to explore this theme in the writing of an early Stuart projector and visionary, as well as to examine his attempts to turn the project from dream into reality.

The context within which Walter Morrell's project to set the poor to work

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[1] F. O. Mann, ed., *The works of Thomas Deloney* (Oxford, 1912), p. 1.

making worsted textiles must be judged includes the widespread sense of anxiety about what many perceived as an expanding – and threatening – pool of unemployed poor people.[2] Responses to these anxieties – and to the reality of increasing poverty – included the elaboration of the Tudor poor law system;[3] a variety of administrative and statutory measures to enforce social order and punish vagrancy and disorder;[4] and the encouragement of emigration, which would transport some of the kingdom's 'surplus' population both to Ireland and the New World.[5] The social 'crisis' at home was described most vividly by propagandists for colonial plantations. *A good speed for Virginia* (1609) declared:

> Our multitudes, like too much blood in the body, do infect our country with plague and poverty; our land hath brought forth, but it hath not milk sufficient in the breast thereof to nourish all those children which it hath brought forth; it affordeth neither employment nor preferments for those that depend upon it. And hereupon it is that many serviceable men give themselves to lewd courses, as to robbing by the highway, theft and cousining, sharking upon the land, piracy upon the sea, and so are cut off by shameful and untimely death; others live profanely, riotously and idly, to the great dishonour of Almighty God and the detriment of the commonwealth.[6]

A concurrent concern of governments from Elizabeth's reign onwards was the stagnating overseas market for English woollens (and the consequent impact on employment), alongside the apparently burgeoning growth in imported manufactures. The desirability of reducing dependence on costly imported wares – and substituting domestic manufactures in their place – was expressed as early as 1549 in Thomas Smith's *Discourse of the commonweal*. In the 1560s, when Smith was a close confidant of Sir William Cecil, the objective of expanding domestic manufactures – both to improve the balance of payments

[2] The best known example of which is the diatribe of the Somerset justice of the peace Edward Hext in 1596 on rogues and beggars and the need for stricter punishments, and the vagrancy act of 1597: R. H. Tawney and Eileen Power, eds., *Tudor economic documents* (3 vols., London, 1924), II, pp. 346–54, 354–62. More generally see John Walter and Keith Wrightson, 'Dearth and the social order in early modern England', *Past and Present*, 71 (1976), pp. 22–42; J. A. Sharpe, 'Social strain and social dislocation, 1585–1603', in John Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 192–211; and Paul Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1988), ch. 5.

[3] As introduced in John Pound, *Poverty and vagrancy in Tudor England* (London, 1986); Slack, *Poverty and policy*; A. L. Beier, *The problem of the poor in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1983); and most recently Paul Slack, *From reformation to improvement* (Oxford, 1999); see also D. C. Coleman, 'Labour in the English economy of the seventeenth century', *Economic History Review*, 8 (1955–6), pp. 280–95.

[4] A. L. Beier, *Masterless men* (London, 1985); Keith Wrightson, *English society, 1580–1640* (London, 1982), ch. 6.

[5] On 'surplus' population and overseas plantation see K. R. Andrews, *Trade, plunder and settlement* (Cambridge, 1984); D. B. Quinn and A. N. Ryan, *England's sea empire, 1550–1642* (London, 1983); Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford history of the British empire: the origins of empire* (Oxford, 1998); Tawney and Power, eds., *Tudor economic documents*, III, pp. 257–9.

[6] Sig. B4.

position and increase domestic employment – became government policy.[7] One consequence of this broad-ranging policy – one which would inform the political culture in which Morrell operated – was the rise of the 'projector'. Projectors were individuals both entrepreneurial and public spirited, whose schemes promised to combine private profit with public benefit. Morrell was by no means the first such businessman to approach the English government with a scheme to benefit the commonwealth; inventors and entrepreneurs had been seeking patents and monopolies since the start of Elizabeth's reign for projects which promised to increase employment and substitute home produced commodities for imports. The policy remained influential in James I's reign, as the well-intentioned but unfortunate Cockayne project demonstrated.[8] The history of the fishing 'busses' project (and the tracts of John Keymer), which commanded the attention of the privy council during the same period as Morrell was seeking government approval for his scheme, also shows the council's enthusiasm for inspired projects which promised to increase employment, discourage imports, and raise customs revenue at the same time.[9]

The specific background to Morrell's scheme of about 1615 was the Tudor legislation which permitted local overseers to raise funds to organize work for the poor. The provisions of the act of 1576 'for the setting of the poor on work and for the avoiding of idleness' (18 Eliz. I, c. 3) were incorporated into the late Elizabethan poor law statutes (39 Eliz. I, cc. 3, 4, and 43 Eliz. I, c. 2). As Slack has noted, 'compulsory employment was seen as a permanent cure for a large segment of poverty'; both to punish the dreaded 'sturdy beggars' and to ensure that 'young children may be brought up and instructed in honest arts'.[10] Make work schemes were established in a variety of towns and parishes in the late sixteenth century, and the more punitive instrument to force the 'idle' poor into work, houses of correction (which were required by the 1576 act), were founded in most counties by the early 1600s. As early as 1552 the London authorities asked the crown for the old palace of Bridewell, in which they would make 'some general provision of work, where with the willing poor may be exercised; and whereby the froward, strong and sturdy vagabond may be compelled to live profitably to the commonwealth'.[11] In Ipswich, for example, Christ's Hospital (founded 1572) began to take the 'lazy drones of the

[7] On overseas trade, especially problems in exporting cloth, see C. G. A. Clay, *Economic expansion and social change: England, 1500–1700* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1984), II, pp. 13–21, 108–21; B. E. Supple, *Commercial crisis and change in England, 1600–1642* (Cambridge, 1959); on import substitution with relevant quotations from *The Discourse* see Joan Thirsk, *Economic policy and projects: the development of a consumer society in early modern England* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 13–16.

[8] The best introduction to projectors is Thirsk, *Economic policy and projects*.

[9] John Cramsie, 'Commercial projects and the fiscal policy of James VI and I', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 345–64. For a modern text of Keymer's project and advice of about 1614, which treats manufactures as well as fishing, see M. F. Lloyd Prichard, ed., *Original papers regarding trade in England and abroad, drawn up by John Keymer* (New York, 1967).

[10] Slack, *Poverty and policy*, p. 29.

[11] Tawney and Power, eds., *Tudor economic documents*, II, p. 307.

commonwealth' into its workhouse, and even tried to establish a cloth factory using their labour.[12]

Several privately initiated schemes to set the idle poor to work survive from the Elizabethan and early Stuart era which could be set alongside the project organized by Walter Morrell in Hatfield early in the reign of James I. In particular there is the scheme to employ the poor by cultivating and processing woad, promoted by Robert Payne with the backing of his patron Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton in Nottinghamshire in the mid-1580s.[13] The commonwealth rhetoric employed by Payne in a paper he drafted for the privy council – as well as the calculations and costings he offered to prove the job-creating potential of his scheme – were echoed and multiplied in a much longer treatise on the potential for expanding the manufacture of fabrics known as 'new draperies', written by Walter Morrell and presented to the government towards the close of 1616. Purely fortuitously, Morrell – a West Countryman who migrated to London – pioneered his project in the county of Hertford.

A number of local historians have examined demographic, agrarian, andw economic trends in Hertfordshire at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries: Lionel Munby, Paul Glennie, Peter Lawson, and Julie Calnan. Much of that work has been ably summarized by Steve Hindle in a recent article: the economy of Elizabethan Hertfordshire was almost totally dependent on agriculture, and, despite a few islands of pastoral husbandry, its agrarian regime was overwhelmingly based on arable farming. In addition, like most of the south-east it was an economy tied into the metropolitan market, and in addition a county subject to, in Hindle's summary, 'agrarian proletarianization, subsistence migration and an increase in the extent and intensity of poverty'.[14] Hertfordshire's population expanded rapidly during the Elizabethan period, resulting in increased numbers of unemployed and under-employed, while at the same time Hertfordshire suffered from

[12] On make work schemes see Slack, *Poverty and policy*, chs. 6–7; idem, *Reformation to improvement*, pp. 68ff; Anthony Fletcher, *Reform in the provinces* (New Haven and London, 1986), pp. 201ff; and W. K. Jordan, *The charities of London, 1480–1660* (New York, 1960), pp. 178ff; on houses of correction see esp. Joanna Innes, 'Prisons for the poor: English Bridewells, 1555–1800', in F. Snyder and D. Hay, eds., *Labour, law and crime* (London, 1987), pp. 42–122. County magistrates were again ordered to erect houses of correction in an act of 1610: 7 Jas. I, c. 4. Ipswich: John Webb, *Poor relief in Elizabethan Ipswich*, Suffolk Record Soc., 9 (Ipswich, 1966) pp. 12–17.

[13] R. S. Smith, 'A woad growing project at Wollaton in the 1580s', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 65 (1961), quoting British Library Lansdowne MS 121 no. 21. See also Thirsk, *Economic policy and projects*, pp. 3–6.

[14] Lionel Munby, *Hertfordshire population statistics, 1563–1801* (Hertford, 1963); Paul Glennie, 'Continuity and change in Hertfordshire agriculture, 1550–1700: patterns of agricultural production', *Agricultural History Review*, 36 (1988), pp. 55–75; idem, 'Life and death in Elizabethan Cheshunt', in Doris Jones-Barker, ed., *Hertfordshire in history: papers presented to Lionel Munby* (Hertford, 1991), pp. 65–91; P. G. Lawson, 'Property crime and hard times in England, 1559–1624', *Law and History Review*, 4 (1986), pp. 95–127; J. B. Calnan, 'County society and local government in the county of Hertford, c. 1580 – c. 1630 (PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1979); Steve Hindle, 'Exclusion crises: poverty, migration and parochial responsibility in English rural communities, c. 1560–1660', *Rural History*, 7 (1996), pp. 125–49, quote at p. 129.

growing numbers of poor migrants passing along its roads and squatting on its commons. The county's problems of poverty and unemployment were compounded by the fact that its agricultural economy offered relatively few employment opportunities for women and children – in contrast to other Home Counties such as Essex and Kent whose local economies were much more varied. This was a point made by Robert Payne, when promoting the employment potential of woad cultivation in the mainly agricultural Nottinghamshire. It was similarly referred to as one of the most beneficial aspects of Morrell's project to extend the manufacture of new draperies to Hertfordshire itself in 1616. From the later Elizabethan decades there is evidence that parish and county elites were increasingly anxious to control – if not totally exclude – the travelling poor from their jurisdictions, an impossible task in a county on the outskirts of London. But the county authorities – at the beginning of the seventeenth century – were fully conscious of the shire's poverty problem and apparently determined to at least control the poor. By 1625 there were as many as seven houses of correction in the county,[15] and many able-bodied men and women were idle and in need of work.

I

With that as background, it is now possible to bring to the fore the central character of this history, Walter Morrell, merchant and clothier. He is willing to tell us his own story in great detail, or at least the half of it which ends in 1616. The crucial source is a copy of 'Morrell's manufacture of the new drapery', drafted in 1616, now in the Huntington Library. It was evidently prepared for presentation to James I or to the council, in the hope that he or they would help implement the project that he had long been pursuing.[16] This remarkable text was not known to F. J. Fisher, who in 1933 merely described Morrell's project as one of a number of examples of primitive company organization.[17] The book – of nearly 30,000 words – was written to accomplish several related tasks. It is, first, a polemical discourse that trumpets the advantages of the worsteds or 'stuffs' over traditional woollens. Secondly, it gives an account of the author's long campaign to win official backing for a project to establish the manufacture of the new draperies in Hertfordshire. Finally, it contains a detailed description of Morrell's model company or corporation for 'planting' the new draperies where that branch of textiles had not already been introduced by individual clothiers. Morrell's scheme envisaged a kind of half-capitalist, half co-operative manufacturing enterprise

[15] Hindle, 'Exclusion crisis', pp. 130, 131.

[16] Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, MS 53,654 (hereafter, Morrell MS). I am most grateful to Dr Mary Robertson, Curator of English Manuscripts, for alerting me to this document.

[17] F. J. Fisher, 'Some experiments in company organization in the early seventeenth century', *Economic History Review*, 4 (1933) pp. 177–94, esp. pp. 191–4.

imposed from above. His company or corporation would have 'adventurers' and shares, but also the advantage of a crown monopoly, which would give it powers to supervise all new drapery manufacture in the county. It was at the same time 'free enterprise' and state monopoly.

To pursue this multifaceted rhetorical task, Morrell utilizes a diverse range of discursive stratagems, including traditional dialogic discourse (such as used by English Renaissance tracts including the *Discourse of the commonweal*); simple descriptive prose (in those sections describing the company's offices, powers, and rules); historical narrative prose (in which he relates the origins and progress of his decade-long campaign to win support for his project); and statistical estimates and projections (in which he tries to demonstrate the financial and social benefits of a massive investment in worsted production). The whole text is suffused with patriotic and commonwealth rhetoric, and Morrell's own part in the story is explained solely by his desire to serve king and country. His title page bears the motto, 'Not born for ourselves, but for our country.' There is no mention in the text of how Morrell might profit personally from the success of his project.

It all began, Morrell recounts, when he joined the flight of Londoners from the plague in 1603. He escaped to Enfield in Middlesex, where he happened to have inherited a house and some lands. As he resided there for most of a year, he was assessed for local rates and was stunned to be charged 24*s* 8*d* in a levy to raise money to repair the church. He asked the churchwardens why, in such a populous parish, his assessment was so high? 'Their answer was that although there were 500 households, yet 100 must bear the whole charge, 400 being scarce well able to maintain themselves.' When he considered all the advantages that Enfield possessed – with its various endowments for the poor, a free school, a great common with free firewood from the chase, as well as the situation of the place, within ten miles of London and with a great thoroughfare running through it – he concluded that the 'present poverty of the place was not like to be expelled, except if some course were taken to beget knowledge and industry in the people, to endeavour themselves in some course of trading which was not as yet exercised among them, the want whereof seemed to me the chief cause of their great poverty'. In truth, one of Enfield's great assets according to Morrell, the enormous common that was the Chase, inflated the parish's poverty problem because it attracted so many poor.[18] Morrell consulted with some of the parish's most important residents – including Sir Robert Wroth – who suggested that Morrell's project to bring industry to Enfield's poor needed to be presented to the crown and that he ask for a 'charter for the incorporating of a company' to further the project. The 'godly Mr Wroth' was an ideal patron: knight of the shire for Middlesex since the

[18] By the 1620s the Enfield vestry was successfully providing work for the poor making cloth, perhaps influenced by Morrell's scheme: David Pam, *A parish near London* (Enfield Preservation Soc., 1990), p. 108; idem, *The rude multitude: Enfield and the civil war* (Enfield, 1977), esp. p. 7 (Joan Thirsk drew this reference to my attention).

1570s, he had chaired the parliamentary committees which drafted the 1598 and 1601 poor laws, and participated in the monopolies debate in 1601 as well. He would have been considered an expert on poverty and idleness, as well as an influential politician.[19]

Morrell's project was a scheme to organize the manufacture of new draperies by the area's poor. The company would arrange the teaching of the basic textile skills, buy and distribute wool, and take responsibility for quality control. In the third year of James's reign Morrell presented his project to the king and asked for a charter. This may be the proposal set out in a document that survives in the Cecil archives at Hatfield House, headed 'A Project shewing how the poor inhabitants in and about Enfield Chase may be still employed in work, and so kept from spoiling the wood and commons there', itself undated, which was not copied into Morrell's 1616 book.[20] In it Morrell describes himself as 'a clothier and maker of stuffs', of Enfield, who is 'willing to employ and set on work so many of the said poor people as will learn the same trade'. For the project to succeed Morrell will need a 'competent stock', overseers to manage the stock and 'compel the idle people to work', and sales for the wares that are made. He admits that the wages paid to the workers may exceed the value of their output, 'until they be expert in the trade'. For the 'better settling and continuance' of the trade, Morrell requests the right to transport 'any cloth, stuff or bayes' made by the poor of Enfield, free of custom and impositions; a twenty-one-year monopoly for any new kind of cloth or stuff he might invent; and payment of 10*s* apiece for the first year's teaching of any person assigned him by the Enfield overseers. The document does not use the phrase 'new draperies', but is clearly referring to such fabrics, which in time would come to be Morrell's life's work. New drapery production was by the beginning of the century well established in eastern England, especially in Norfolk, Essex, and Kent, to which immigrants from the Low Countries brought the manufacture of these worsted fabrics in Elizabeth's reign.[21] It is from this same period, early 1606, that several proposals for bills to regulate – and reform – new drapery manufacture survive. One, which also suggested the establishment of industry in counties that had no manufactures, bears a striking resemblance to Morrell's contemporary arguments.[22]

Within a year his suit was referred to Robert Cecil, the earl of Salisbury and lord treasurer. Salisbury asked to see patterns of the cloths – Morrell calls them here 'stuffs', i.e. worsteds – which were intended for the employment of the poor. He also asked certain customs officials for their opinion about the feasibility of the project, and eventually Salisbury announced that he could not

[19] Unfortunately for Morrell he died in 1606. See P. W. Hasler, ed., *The history of parliament: the House of Commons, 1558–1603* (3 vols., London, 1981), III, pp. 658–63.

[20] Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Manuscripts at Hatfield House* (HMC, *Hatfield MSS*), pt 24, pp. 80–1: assigned by calendar to 1618, with no obvious reason.

[21] See chapters by B. A. Holderness and Luc Martin in N. B. Harte, ed., *The new draperies in the Low Countries and England, 1300–1800* (Oxford, 1997).

[22] *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* (*CSPD*), *1603–1610*, pp. 288, 311.

allow the project to proceed until he was satisfied that the 'art and skill of the said new drapery could be brought to perfection upon such idle and ignorant people'. Nevertheless, offers Salisbury, let us see if a certain number of ignorant people could be instructed in the mysteries of the new drapery, with the promise that if Morrell's dry run succeeds, he, the earl, would further Morrell's suit. To show his good will, the earl asked Morrell set up a pilot project in Hatfield, which is just a few miles up the road from Enfield, and to which Cecil had recently moved. 'If thou wilt take fifty children of the parish of Hatfield to instruct and bring to perfection in the said arts, for a precedent, I will allow unto thee £100 p.a.' So it was that in the fifth year of James's reign, articles were drawn up between the earl and Morrell to set in motion a project which had as its ultimate aim the establishment of companies to manage the manufacture by poor people of new draperies all over the kingdom.

The historical narrative in Morrell's account of 1616 can be confirmed at several points by documents that have survived independently and can be compared to Morrell's text. These include several versions of an agreement signed by Robert Cecil. One is between Cecil and Walter Morrell of Enfield, Middlesex; another between Cecil and Walter Morrell of London, merchant, and Hugh Morrell of Exeter, haberdasher. The earliest of these is probably from March 1608, the others from December 1608.[23] The agreement provides that Morrell, for a period of ten years, will instruct fifty persons in the crafts of spinning, weaving, and dyeing fustians or other stuffs; twenty youngsters – out of the fifty – would be taken on as apprentices and supported by Morrell for seven years. The rest are to receive reasonable wages for their work and to give security that they will not reveal anything of what they have learned for at least three years. Morrell will provide 'stuff and work enough to set all the said fifty persons to work, thereby to avoid idleness and for the education of them in the said trades … for the better getting of their honest livings afterwards'. He is to pay those workers who are not his apprentices 'such rates as are usually given in Essex'. The earl, for his part, is to select the fifty persons, provide premises for the work and for housing the twenty apprentices and ten looms, and pay Morrell £100 p.a. for the ten years. Within a few months the agreement was implemented: we have a letter from the Morrells to Cecil, probably written in 1609 or 1610, which speaks of some of the problems that have arisen since the scheme began to operate. They complain that some of the boys who have been taught weaving, 'but not being bound, they have been taken away by their parents'. Morrell also asks Cecil to provide them with a dyehouse and a fulling mill, as well as land for a farm, to support so large a company.[24] But before the children could be trained to the level expected, in May 1612 Robert Cecil died. Luckily for Morrell, William Cecil, the second earl, was willing to continue his father's patronage. Morrell's 1616 text glosses over the early years of the

[23] HMC, *Hatfield MSS*, pt 24, pp. 164–5; Public Record Office (PRO) SP 14/38 fos. 128–9, 125–6 (at *CSPD*, *1603–1610*, pp. 478, 477).

[24] HMC, *Hatfield MSS*, pt 22, pp. 202, 204; pt 20, pp. 286–7.

experiment. At Robert Cecil's death, three and half years into the project, the young apprentices were not yet skilled enough to be tested. By the following year, 1613, the project was in financial difficulties and Morrell owed money to a number of creditors. In June the privy council was urging his creditors to agree to a settlement with Morrell, rather than pursuing him in the courts. One woman creditor who refused to compromise was commanded to appear before the council to answer for her stubbornness, which suggests that Morrell still had supporters at court.[25]

A year further on – some time in 1614 – the Hatfield experiment was working well enough for Morrell to ask the earl to send in a commission to report on its progress. Morrell presents the alleged text of the commissioners' positive report in full. They praise Morrell for his diligence, and conclude that the project was 'likely to take effect, and to be a work of great charity and consequence, as well in relieving many poor people with the benefit of their own labour and industry [and] which will avoid idleness and prevent poverty … being a greater charity to prevent poverty than to provide for the poor who, most commonly, are bred of idleness.'[26] On the basis of this certificate Morrell was ready to go back to Westminster to pursue his original suit of 1605. He penned a new petition to the king, asking that James appoint a commission to view Morrell's work at Hatfield. They would certify 'the great benefit that would succeed unto your highness and the commonwealth by planting of those places where multitude of people live in idleness [with] the manufacture of new drapery; and also a settled government to be established for the true making of the same, for the which he hath drawn projects how the same might be effected'.[27]

The lengthy chase thus began afresh, as Morrell painstakingly attempted to translate favourable words from the king into political and legal action. Early in 1615 – while the Cockayne project was still intact – he obtained a letter from James to the lord treasurer and the chancellor of the exchequer that required them to appoint a commission of experts to examine Morrell's suit. Morrell then attended on the treasurer and the chancellor of the exchequer, to press them to carry out the king's order. He 'attended at the court at Whitehall at every assembly of the Lords of the council', where he met among many other suitors, London merchants, and provincial clothiers and woolbuyers. He came to understand that the weighty business concerned dyeing and dressing of cloth in England before transportation, and also to put down broggers and unlawful dealers in wool. But while he was there other suitors came to learn about Morrell's project, 'after which I found some that did oppose themselves against new drapery, which I so much laboured to erect'.[28]

At this point in his account Morrell breaks his narrative and inserts a dialogue between himself, an imaginary clothier who speaks for the old draperies, a merchant and a knight (who speaks the words of a reasonable,

[25] *Acts of the privy council* (*APC*), *1613–1614*, pp. 102–3.
[26] Morrell MS, p. 6.
[27] Ibid., p. 7.
[28] Ibid., p. 9.

patriotic magistrate), the purpose of which is to demonstrate the superiority of the new draperies over traditional woollen cloth:

> Before the increase of new drapery you [the clothier] would give us about 20 shillings a todd for our wool, but since so many have exercised the new drapery, we now can sell it for 30 shillings a todd, which is 10 shillings a todd profit to the commonwealth. The wool draped into stuffs leaves as much to the state by improvement as the wool draped into cloth, but as most affirm and common reason will maintain, it [the new draperies] leaveth double the value by improvement both to the poor by employment and his Majesty in his customs.[29]

The propaganda points being made, he reverts to the narrative of his patient pursuit of his project. He petitions the lord treasurer to appoint the committee of experts to examine his Hatfield enterprise, and then recommend the two parts of the wider project to the king, viz 'the planting of new drapery in counties and places that want employment for their people' and the establishment of a 'settled government' for the making of new draperies. After further delays, in June 1615 the treasurer and chancellor refer the business to the officers and farmers of the customs, who in turn appoint a committee of a dozen men, mainly Londoners, to examine Morrell's project. Morrell tells us that he addressed the committee and presented them with a 'comparative estimate' of the benefit to the crown and to the commonwealth from a certain quantity of wool being made into white cloth and the same quantity being made into new draperies. Two pages of Morrell's detailed calculations, as expected, show the latter to be much more valuable to the kingdom than traditional woollens.[30]

Morrell's 1616 estimate of the comparative benefits to be derived from old and new draperies is similar to the claims of an anonymous commentator in 1615, whose paper showing the benefits of working up the same amount of Buckinghamshire wool into old and new draperies is printed in Thirsk and Cooper's *Seventeenth century economic documents*. According to that champion of the new draperies, only fourteen people were employed making traditional cloth from three todds of wool, and their wages came to under £2; whereas the same amount of wool devoted to the new draperies – with one third used for making worsted stockings and two-thirds worsted-style cloths – employed forty to fifty people, who earned wages of £7.[31] The greater employment potential of worsteds had become commonplace by 1616. So had a notion that the production of worsteds was less exploitative than woollens, whose workforce was dependent on wealthy putting-out clothiers. In Suffolk, where traditional woollens and new draperies were both produced, the crusading minister of Bildeston, Thomas Carew, compared the woollen clothiers unfavourably to their counterparts who made worsteds. The greed of the broadcloth clothiers,

[29] Ibid., p. 15.

[30] Ibid., pp. 19–20.

[31] Joan Thirsk and J. P. Cooper, eds., *Seventeenth century economic documents* (Oxford, 1972), p. 204, from PRO SP 14/80 no. 16.

who paid their outworkers considerably less than workers in other trades (but not the makers of new drapery or 'Dutch work'), was the focus of Carew's scathing sermon, *A caveat for clothiers*, published in 1603.[32]

Morrell presents the rest of his case to the commissioners in the form of another imaginary dialogue, which tackles the problems of maintaining quality in new drapery manufacture. The 'commissioners'' speeches drive home Morrell's arguments as much as those of the spokesman for new draperies. Among other things, the 'commissioners' are made to say 'we are not ignorant that the wool draped into stuffs employeth twice the number of people as the like quantity draped into cloth'.[33] Morrell uses this format to introduce his solution to the problem of quality control: that the crown authorize each county to incorporate itself as a company governed by a master, wardens, and assistants – along the lines of London trade companies – which will organize and govern new drapery manufacture. The treatise makes no explicit reference to the existing system of maintaining quality in new drapery manufacture, the patent for searching and sealing new draperies granted to the king's cousin, the duke of Lennox, in 1605, and renewed in 1613, which was regularly abused by the duke's deputies. The patent had been the subject of complaint in parliament in 1606, and in 1610 MPs declared that disorders in its enforcement had multiplied. By 1615 they were selling seals without even looking at the cloths! Morrell's scheme for organizing manufacture can thus be read as critical of the existing situation, even if he could not explicitly denounce Lennox's operation.[34] It includes suggested ordinances for the company, and – as an example – ordinances for the regulation of perpetuanas.[35] According to Morrell, the commissioners found in his favour and he prints their positive report to the lord treasurer, dated 1 July 1615. Nothing in Morrell's scheme should have aroused the opposition of London merchants, and his regulations to improve quality control of clothmaking responded to a complaint which London export merchants had been making for decades. Among other things they find that 'the petitioner's request is very just, and the granting thereof will be very profitable both to his majesty in his customs, and also to the commonwealth in the employment of many thousands of poor people who now, for want of knowledge in these and suchlike mysteries do live in idleness and great poverty'. They also agree with Morrell that the true making of new draperies would increase their sale, and that this cannot be

[32] See Patrick Collinson, 'Christian socialism in Elizabethan Suffolk: Thomas Carew and his *Caveat for clothiers*', in C. Rawcliffe, R. Virgoe, and R. Wilson, eds., *Counties and communities: essays on East Anglian history* (Norwich, 1996), pp. 161–79, esp. pp. 166–7. On the social relations of woollen manufacture see Michael Zell, *Industry in the countryside: Wealden society in the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1994), chs. 6–7, and G. D. Ramsay, *The Wiltshire woollen industry* (2nd edn, London, 1965).

[33] Morrell MS, pp. 25–6.

[34] See William H. Price, *The English patents of monopoly* (Boston, MA, 1906), pp. 27–8; complaints against Lennox's operation in 1606, 1611: *CSPD, 1603–1610*, pp. 306, 336; *1611–18*, p. 69; as a grievance in parliament: Elizabeth Read Foster, ed., *Proceedings in parliament, 1610* (2 vols., New Haven, CT, 1966), II, pp. 268–9.

[35] Morrell MS, pp. 28–35.

accomplished 'without a government' since there is no law regulating abuses and deceits in new drapery. They agree that 'wool converted into new draperies doth bring almost twice as much profit to his majesty as the like quantity of wool doth being draped into cloth; and employeth twice so many poor people in work'.[36]

Things appeared to be going well for Morrell, but he had to petition the lord treasurer yet again, to act on the recommendations of his own committee of experts. The second book of Morrell's treatise begins with 'the humble petition of Walter Morrell of Hatfield, clothier' to the earl of Suffolk, asking him to forward Morrell's suit, among other ways by requesting the support of the magistrates of Hertfordshire. On 5 July 1615 Suffolk wrote to Morrell's patron, the earl of Salisbury, requesting that he summon his deputy lieutenants and any others he appoints to examine Morrell's project and suggest what they think should be in the charter for the new draperies company. According to Morrell, Salisbury personally appeared at the Hertford quarter sessions to ask the magistrates to consider Morrell's project. The magistrates felt they could not, in view of the immediate demands of sessions business, reach a conclusion then and there, and so agreed to meet and discuss Morrell's project at a later date, and then give their answer to the lord treasurer. In the meantime they asked Morrell to provide them with more detailed plans and costings for his scheme, some of which Morrell copies into his book.[37]

From these it becomes clear that Morrell envisaged that, at the least, the production of yarn for new draperies would be established in every parish and that it would raise enough money to hire an experienced spinster to teach people her trade, which Morrell calculated at £5 p.a. The professional spinster would instruct ten people for a year, after which those ten would instruct ten more local inhabitants, in a pyramid scheme that would result in 310 persons being instructed in five years – all of whom could thereafter maintain themselves in work. The company would take up each parish's yarn and re-sell it to worsted weavers, only paying the parish overseers for the yarn a year in arrears. The company would distribute wool to each parish that took part in the scheme, and there would be a company/county treasury to hold the money, and buy and distribute wool. Spinners would be paid at the rate of 18*d* per week (or just 3*d* a day, no more than the traditional clothiers paid spinners in Suffolk). The initial stock of the company was to be raised by the offering of shares or adventures to local investors, to be drawn from the county gentry and others. The Hertfordshire magistrates met once at the Middle Temple in London to discuss Morrell's plans, and again at Hertford in November 1615. At this meeting a dozen Hertfordshire JPs agreed to recommend Morrell's scheme to the lord treasurer, but inserted their own conditions, viz. that no one benefit from the project but native Hertfordshire inhabitants, that none be allowed to take part in governing the trade but people approved by the county

[36] Ibid., pp. 35–6.

[37] Ibid., pp. 38–40.

bench at general sessions, and that they be consulted again when it came to draft the charter of incorporation.[38] Morrell was on hand to receive their letter of approval, and he took it back up to London and added to it yet another petition to the privy council, asking them to recommend his project again to the king, without whose approval there could be no charter. This petition went to the council in the winter of 1615/16, and was successful. At the end of March 1616 the council backed Morrell's scheme and asked the attorney-general, Sir Francis Bacon, to draw up a charter for Hertfordshire, after he consulted again with the Hertfordshire magistrates about the details of the patent. This letter survives in the privy council register and tallies with the text in Morrell's book of late 1616.[39]

Bacon drafted a charter and obtained Salisbury's nominations for the wardens and assistants of the new company. The earl volunteered to be the company's first master, and Bacon agreed to be one of the four wardens. Francis Bacon, it may be recalled, had been a loyal follower of the former earl, Robert Cecil, and a defender of a traditional, activist, commonweal position.[40] The other three wardens and twenty-four assistants were mainly Hertfordshire magistrates, and Morrell was named clerk of the company. In December 1616 Salisbury and Bacon wrote to the rest of the men nominated as officers of the company, asking them to assemble themselves as a company and to raise funds to pay the charges of passing the grant under the great seal. The letter is not so much a command as a request that the Hertfordshire magistrates implement the scheme and go to work with Morrell: 'we are desirous in these respects to approve of his service and to commend it to you as useful for the contriving and carriage of this work in that part thereof which may fall within his element'. The patent finally passed the great seal in March 1617.[41] But, as will become evident, Morrell was not home and dry yet.

Much of Morrell's second book is taken up with increasingly detailed ordinances for the establishment of companies in counties without new drapery manufacture. Among them is the delicate issue of shares in the company, which Morrell suggests should be between £2 and £100. There are sample ordinances which lay out procedures for ensuring quality control in the weaving, dyeing, and dressing of cloths. It is the work of someone who clearly understands the technicalities of clothmaking, and how frauds and poor workmanship can occur, but who also seems obsessed with creating bureaucratic structures. Having produced ordinances to prevent abuses in manufacture, he sets out another scheme to maintain quality by ensuring that manufacturers never are tempted to reduce standards because of temporary falls in demand for their cloths. This is to be accomplished by establishing a bank which will buy up

[38] Ibid., pp. 41–4. [39] *APC, 1615–1616*, pp. 464–5; Morrell MS, pp. 46–7.

[40] See Slack, *From reformation to improvement*, p. 59, and J. Martin, *Francis Bacon, the state and the reform of natural philosophy* (Cambridge, 1992).

[41] PRO C66/2112 no. 6 of 12 Mar. 1617: all the JPs who signed the Nov. 1615 letter in favour of Morrell's project (except two who had died) were named as officers in the patent, along with several others; Dec. 1616 letter at Morrell MS, p. 52.

cloth in slack periods, thus maintaining both employment as well as the price of the cloth. There are detailed ordinances for the bank, which among other things will also require investors or adventurers if it is to operate successfully.[42]

Morrell's enthusiasm for bureaucracy is carried further in the third and final book, with his proposals for preventing the export of English wool and yarn overseas and regulating the internal wool market. These involve the establishment of a central registry of wool, which would be supplied with annual reports on how much wool was grown in every parish, to whom the grower sold his wool, and certificates that the buyers of wool were themselves genuine manufacturers of cloth and not merely buying for resale. The book concludes with yet another rhetorical dialogue between interlocutors representing conventional interest groups, including the manufacturer of new draperies, the old-fashioned broadcloth clothier, a landowner's bailiff, and a farmer. Their discussion is rounded off by a detailed calculation of the comparative gains in terms of employment and income of two notional parishes of 4,000 acres each, one mainly arable and the other predominantly pasture. The pastoral parish provides employment for about 100 persons, while the arable parish – which he divides roughly into twenty farms of 200 acres each – gives employment to 400 persons. The initial calculations show that the pastoral parish earns more gross profit than the cereals parish – simply because it pays out far less in wages. Morrell then reminds both farmer and grazier that neither has much to boast about, because neither has factored in the cost of maintaining their unemployed population, which Morrell estimates at 1,500 people, young and old, between the two parishes. But, the solution is at hand: instead of selling the 1,180 todds of wool, which would fetch £1,575, employ those 1,500 people making new draperies. Morrell offers a detailed calculation of the costs and benefits of setting these people to work making a range of new draperies – including worsted stockings from a third of the wool. The stuffs they make should be sold for over £10,500, whereas the costs of maintaining 1,500 people (at an average of £5 each) plus the cost of the wool comes to just £9,075.[43] Thus, setting the poor to work making new draperies has more than paid for their upkeep, ended their idleness by teaching them all a skill, and earned the kingdom extra revenue by exporting manufactures instead of wool that would be made into cloth by England's rivals. With this disarmingly simple, but persuasive, example, Morrell has apparently demonstrated the validity of his case with numbers that any politician could understand. For the project to have reached the stage of royal and conciliar approval, Morrell must have been even more persuasive in person than he appears to be in the 1616 text.

With the granting of a royal patent by early 1617 it seemed that Morrell had at last covered all the bases, and would soon succeed. More than a decade had passed since his first proposals were put to the king. With James's support, the treatise concludes, the manufacture of new drapery would soon ensure

[42] Morrell MS, pp. 68–74.

[43] Ibid., pp. 89–94.

the employment of many thousands which now live in idleness [and] within a few years our new drapery should revive and flourish until the fame thereof had so much overspread the earth as ever had our old drapery … we should see the wealth of our country yearly increase to the strengthening of our land, the daunting of our enemies and the enabling of our poor people to live of themselves.

Morrell's unquenchable optimism knows no bounds: on the last page of his book he promises that if his project is accepted he would reveal a new project, with three laudable aims. 'The first is means whereby food may be made plentiful and the land improved and the yearly revenue augmented; the second, how timber and wood may be preserved, and building and firing sufficiently supplied; the third how his majesty may be supplied with treasure and the subject not oppressed.'[44]

II

But the charter and the treatise of 1616 did not mark the end of a long campaign, merely a milestone in what was to be a crusade which lasted a further fifteen years. There is no autobiographical narrative to take us through the later stages of Morrell's struggle, but only scattered state papers and letters from Hertfordshire. Although the project was apparently given the go-ahead in 1616 – with the incorporation of a company to plant the new draperies in Hertfordshire – by 1618 the privy council was moved to write to the JPs of that county, noting that since the grant of the charter 'there hath appeared some coldness and neglect in entertaining it, contrary to what was expected'. It asked them to use their power to see that the grant was executed, and to reimburse Walter Morrell for his charges and pains in this task.[45] Also dated 1618 is a letter from the Hertfordshire magistrates which recites at length local objections to the new drapery project. 'It is distasted by the country in respect of the extraordinary stock which is to be raised to set up this new trade through the country, which cannot but amount to many thousands'; the time is unfit to start the new trade because 'corn, the only commodity of that country, is of so small price'; 'it is thought very strange that this county of Hertford should break the ice to all the residue of the kingdom in a matter of this charge and difficulty'; that 'whereby the county of Hertford doth consist for the most part of tillage, it hath better means to set their poor children on work without this new invention than some other counties, viz. by employing the female children in picking of their wheat a great part of the year, and the male children by strayning before their ploughs in seed time and other necessary occasions of husbandry'; and that 'the better sort of gentlemen and yeomen have no inclination to enter into the society intended by the project'; and finally they doubt the claims about the new draperies' profitability: although it is claimed

[44] Ibid., p. 99. Schemes to improve the king's revenues were widely canvassed after 1610, and vetted by royal commissioners appointed in 1612: Joan Thirsk, 'The crown as projector on its own estates', in R. W. Hoyle, ed., *The estates of the English crown, 1558–1640* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 300.

[45] *APC, 1618–1619*, p. 43.

that converting wool into drapery 'will yield 13s 4d from what is otherwise 1s, it is feared by the country that this show of extraordinary gain will prove like the trade of those alchemists, which to multiply 6d to 12d are occasioned to spend ten times the value thereof'.[46]

In the same year the earl of Salisbury appointed new deputies to oversee the training of fifty persons in clothmaking at Hatfield, evidence that Morrell's original operation was still in business.[47] But even at Hatfield there were problems. Certain residents complained that Morrell's mill and its watercourses were causing local flooding, and others were up in arms that Morrell had converted a corn mill into a fulling mill. Morrell was forced to write to the earl to defend himself from local backbiters: since he has spent so much in working for the general good, he hoped that the earl will not allow anyone to injure his interests.[48] There is also evidence of the scale of poverty and unemployment in Hertfordshire about this time from the information that at the urging of the visiting assize judges, Hertfordshire JPs and local officers apprenticed no fewer than 1,526 children in 1619.[49]

However, in spite of their objections to Morrell's scheme in 1618, privy council pressure persuaded the Hertfordshire elite to make a start with the project. We only learn about the magistrates' limited concession from their reply to another quite brusque council letter of February 1620. The council reminds them that 'often addresses have been made unto you recommending the furtherance of a manufacture and trade of new drapery, which notwithstanding has been long delayed and not proceeded in with that diligence and forwardness as a work of that consequence doth deserve'. They are asked 'to set that business on foot and to settle the same now at last'.[50] The deputy lieutenants' lengthy and politic reply protests that the reason why the new drapery scheme was not established according to the 1616 letters patent was the 'want of a stock to raise materials, and to maintain so many officers as were found to be necessary'. The lieutenants recount how they tried to raise the money 'by assembling ourselves within our several divisions, where we did our best endeavour to persuade the better sort of gent and yeomen to contribute to the same, who utterly refused unless they might be secured of their principal to be repaid them howsoever the project should succeed'. They were 'utterly discouraged' to invest anything because of the 'ill success' of the Hatfield venture, in which £100 p.a. had been spent for many years 'and yet few instructed in the trade and the burden of the poor there since then much increased'.

Finding no hope in that approach, and having, 'as we conceived, no power by law to impose any such charge upon the country' within the patent, they

[46] PRO SP 14/96 fo. 71 (*CSPD*, *1611–1618*, p. 525).
[47] HMC, *Hatfield MSS*, pt 24, p. 236.
[48] HMC, *Hatfield MSS*, pt 22, pp. 114, 105; pt 24, p. 237.
[49] 1624 Grand Jury complaint, quoted in Calnan, 'County society and local government', pp. 232–3.
[50] *APC*, *1619–1621*, p. 132.

proposed to Morrell that instead of the company envisioned by the patent they establish a less ambitious pilot scheme. They suggested setting up trial schemes in eight towns, where they felt they had power to compel the residents to contribute to a stock for setting the poor on work. Morrell, they say, agreed to this and gave directions to the poor law overseers in those towns how to set up manufacturing. Since then the deputy lieutenants say they have held many meetings, expended resources and done their utmost to further the project, 'until, out of the general complaints of most of the inhabitants of the said towns, we found the same generally distasteful, by reason of the heavy burden, the work not affording wages whereupon the poor might find themselves bread'. Also, whereas the projector undertook that the poor children could be taught their work in two or three weeks, they have found that having paid for the teachers, the majority of the children could not be taught in twenty weeks 'to do the work so as it may be fit for vent'. As for the projector's costs and charges, the lieutenants reminded the council that the county had not asked Morrell to undertake any such project, nor promised to pay him any costs. Indeed, they 'know not how to move the country to *any* contribution towards his charge', and humbly desire, on the behalf of the county, 'that your honours will be pleased to disburden them of this project, which by experience hath been found not beneficial nor fit for that country'. Instead, they have reduced most of the costs of the trial scheme by binding most of the poor children to local farmers. 'We found the country the rather willing to take the said children apprentices to husbandry, for they did hope in so doing they should be eased of this project which they much feared might prove both very troublesome and chargeable to them.'[51] At once the county magistrates have rubbished Morrell's enterprise as a practical fiasco, while explaining away their lack of political and financial support by claiming that, try as they might, they failed to persuade ordinary gentlemen and yeomen to invest.

It is not known in how many Hertfordshire towns the pilot projects to teach new drapery manufacture were established in 1618. One was at Berkhamsted, where there is evidence of traditional clothmaking in the decade before Morrell's project. In November the tenants and inhabitants of Berkhamsted wrote to their lord, the prince of Wales, to thank him for a gift of £100, which he had sent them 'for the better encouragement & prosecution of the manufacture already begun'. This is evidence of the crown's tangible support for Morrell's project, even if the generous donation was intended also to secure the town's backing for the prince's local enclosure scheme.[52] The burghers of Berkhamsted indeed agreed to the prince's enclosure from the local woods, but, sadly for local manufacturing, his bribe was misappropriated; it emerged by

[51] PRO SP 14/115 fo. 19 (*CSPD, 1619–1623*, p. 143).

[52] On Berkhamsted see H. Falvey, '"Most riotous, routous and unlawfull" behaviour: enclosure and unrest in Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, 1618–1642' (Master of Studies diss., Cambridge, 1999), to whom I am obliged for this important reference: letter to Prince Charles: Herts. Archives and Local Studies (HALS) D/Ex 652/83.

1627 that instead of applying the £100 towards a manufactory for setting the poor to work, the inhabitants used the money to defray their expenses in obtaining a new charter and to supplement poor relief funds. Even where there was some tradition of clothmaking, Hertfordshire inhabitants were not eager to participate in Morrell's enterprise. Indeed, on the basis of the Berkhamsted evidence it is doubtful whether anything tangible was ever begun, despite what the deputy lieutenants told the council in 1620. Duchy of Cornwall records speak of 'the £100 given by the king when he was Prince towards the setting up of a manufacture in his highness' town of Berkhamsted, which hitherto they have neglected to do'.[53]

The whole business – both Morrell's request for reimbursement and the Hertfordshire magistrates' request that the council close down the project and with it any financial demands that might be made on them – was heard by the privy council on 9 May 1620, when 'certain gentlemen' of Hertfordshire attended to claim that Morrell's scheme should be dropped because he had already 'declined the intent and purport of his patent' by agreeing to the gentry's more limited pilot scheme. The council decided to ask the attorney-general to deal with the legal issues and examine both Morrell and the magistrates about what had happened in the county.[54] Unfortunately, the outcome of that process is unknown, and thus we are in the dark about whether any or all of Morrell's enterprise carried on in Hertfordshire in the early 1620s. Despite its strong words, the council evidently lost interest in the matter.

Within a year the political and economic climate changed dramatically, as the European-wide trade crisis of 1621 knocked the bottom out of the English export trade, and poor harvests and high food prices in the early 1620s severely reduced domestic demand for cloth. Parliament met that year, and there were contentious debates over monopolies and on the state of the cloth trade, as well as a bill or bills introduced to regulate the manufacture of new draperies. This was exactly what Morrell had been promising to do through his corporations. The privy councillor Sir Robert Heath had requested advice on standards of new draperies from three centres of manufacture, Norwich, Colchester, and Exeter, and the bill presented in April 1621 regulated the length and breadth of serges and perpetuanas, as well as setting up overseers or searchers in every town where worsteds were made or sold to inspect and seal cloths.[55] Why the bill failed is unclear, but it is likely that the legislative initiative came from the government, and that Morrell drafted at least one of the bills. At least that is what he claimed two years later in a letter to Cranfield (who spoke for the bill in 1621).[56] That the government still favoured Morrell's ideas is also suggested

[53] HALS D/P 19/25/7; Duchy of Cornwall Book of Orders 1626–35 fo. 40. I owe these references to Heather Falvey.

[54] *APC*, *1619–1621*, p. 188.

[55] W. Notestein, F. H. Relf, and H. Simpson, eds., *Commons debates*, *1621* (7 vols., New Haven, CT, 1935), II, pp. 294, 296; text of bill at VII, pp. 197–201 (from PRO SP 14/121 nos. 34–5); *CSPD*, *1619–1623*, p. 256.

[56] *Commons debates*, *1621*, II, p. 294 n. 1 (referring to an HMC transcript of Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone (CKS) U269/1/504): 'I drew a bill and preferred it to the House for that

by their reappearance in the 1622 report of the privy council committee on the decay of cloth exports. Among its recommendations was 'that where there is yet no law made concerning the new draperies, that some plain rules may be prescribed for the true making, dyeing, dressing and pressing of those stuffs which, being observed, may bring them into request again'.[57]

The 1622 committee – and the council as it turned out – were also enthusiastic about another of Morrell's central ideas. Its report recommended that 'a corporation in every county be made of the most able and sufficient men of the same, whereby they may be authorized to look carefully to the true making, dyeing and dressing of cloth and stuff in every shire'. Morrell's scheme of clothmaking companies for each shire, managed by the leading gentry, became government policy in 1622, and features in both the official reports of 1622 and in privy council thinking up to 1625. Equally reminiscent of Morrell's proposals from 1616 are the committee's recommendations that every effort be made to prevent the export of wool and yarn from England, Scotland, and Ireland, and that 'we improve our native commodities in their use and vent, whereunto our manufactures do chiefly conduce; and of these above others our new draperies'.[58] Morrell may not have convinced the gentry of Hertfordshire of the practicalities of his plan for employing their idle poor making new draperies, but he had undoubtedly made a significant impact on government thinking in the years after 1616. In the early 1620s the council was receiving reports of thousands being thrown out of work, of hundreds of looms unoccupied and of imminent threats to public order. In that situation almost any suggestion for reviving trade and increasing employment must have looked attractive.[59] Worsteds became the flavour of the year in 1622. The new, high-powered commission on trade which was appointed in late 1622 moved to implement some of the former committee's recommendations. There was a new proclamation against wool exporting in July 1622,[60] and the commission began to receive replies to its circular letter which sought provincial opinion about the manufacture of new draperies and how they should be regulated. The Suffolk JPs, for example, replied that they thought no one without an apprenticeship should be allowed to set up as a new drapery manufacturer, but that it would be imprudent to suppress those already in the trade who are unapprenticed, since they make up two-thirds of all manufacturers.[61]

The commission consulted the main centres of new drapery, Norwich,

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purpose, and some other bills for other public business which I applied myself with all carefulness and great charge, although to no purpose.'

[57] Ramsay, *Wiltshire woollen industry*, pp. 147–53; MS copies at BL Stowe MS 554 fos. 45–9 and Cotton MS Galba E.i. fos. 390–1. [58] Ramsay, *Wiltshire woollen industry*, p. 151.

[59] On the trade and employment crisis of the early 1620s see generally Supple, *Commercial crisis and change in England*, esp. ch. 3.

[60] P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin, eds., *Stuart royal proclamations* (Oxford, 1973), no. 229.

[61] *CSPD*, *1619–1623*, p. 379.

Colchester, Canterbury, and Sandwich, and made two recommendations: first, that the regulations for size and quality of new draperies already prepared by Norwich corporation be applied generally, and second, that committees of able and knowledgeable men in every county or corporate town be set up to supervise the enforcement of such regulations: i.e. a scheme which drew upon Morrell's ideas for county companies. The Norwich regulations were promulgated by the privy council in 1623.[62] The commission also picked up and repeated without hesitation what had become conventional wisdom – and what Morrell had been arguing since 1615 – that new draperies yielded twice as much employment as traditional clothmaking.

From about this time there survives another general proposal for county corporations by Walter Morrell. Headed 'A ready course propounded for the establishing and certain settling of the manufacture of all manner of draperies', and dated December 1622, it sets out a plan for chartered corporations in every county, in which the powers of each county company would be those already set out in the charter granted to Hertfordshire. The particulars of manufacture, including 'sorting wool, combing, spinning, weaving, dressing, dyeing, sealing, vending, and employing the poor' are to be found 'at large in a book heretofore collected by Walter Morrell for the true performing of every several part of drapery'. This was a detailed handbook on clothmaking, described as containing more than eighty folios, which has not survived.

This 1622 proposal shows Morrell still participating in government policy-making during the period of the commission on trade, although the Hertfordshire experiment had collapsed in the face of local opposition. And local opposition certainly remained. In March 1623, Walter Morrell of Hatfield, gent., was presented to the Hertfordshire quarter sessions for diverting the watercourse of the River Lea, 'so that it overflowed onto the lands of diverse inhabitants of the town of Hatfield'.[63] By this time it had become clear to Morrell that although the trade commissioners favoured his proposals in principle, they were unwilling (or unable) to use their authority to make his project a reality. So in early 1623 he delivered yet another barrage of petitions to explain and promote the project. This time they went to Lionel Cranfield, now lord treasurer, and to the king again. The letters reveal Morrell's frustration that in spite of many favourable judgements of his scheme, it was no closer to fruition than it had been in 1615. He recalls that in 1619 he had obtained 'a reference from his Majesty' to the council, instructing them to help 'settle' the corporation. Yet 'the parliament [of 1621] then approaching, I was referred to the same'. After the bills he preferred to the House failed, he was told to apply to the commission on the decay of trade. Later, he testified before the new commissioners of trade, 'who determined to proceed with my proposition', and yet having attended on them for three months 'they have not

[62] *APC, 1623–1625*, pp. 40–1, 248; draft commission report: PRO SP 14/155 nos. 53, 52.
[63] *Hertfordshire County Records*, 5 (1928), p. 28.

entered into it at all'. As all other avenues have failed, he begs Cranfield 'that I may be dispatched and no longer deferred or referred, the rather because I have already procured above thirty references, orders and reports approving the same proposition'.[64] The 1623 petition to James similarly tries to evoke the king's sympathy by recalling Morrell's long and painful campaign to win favour for his project: 'This service hath been referred and deferred above fifteen years. And your petitioner in the prosecution thereof hath spent above 2000 pounds.' If only the king will use his authority to establish the corporations, 'your majesty may suddenly employ all your poor people that want work; and may supply and relieve your petitioner for his invention, pains and charges, and yet nothing drawn from your Majesty'.[65]

Both of Morrell's 1623 petitions also try a new rhetorical tack to persuade the crown to act. Rather than wait for parliamentary legislation, 'the remedy, and reformation is only to be had by the uncontrollable power of his Majesty's prerogative'. The making of new draperies could be 'settled through the kingdom in one year by his Majesty's prerogative royal, without help of a parliament'. All that was needed was that the king incorporate county corporations to implement Morrell's scheme, establish local commissions with powers to enforce ordinances to be drafted for each company, and issue a proclamation that compelled the well-off in every county to pay for and maintain a certain number of looms and employ a certain number of people to produce cloth (as Robert Cecil had done many years before). Every earl was to maintain ten looms and fifty people, or allow the county corporation £100 p.a. to do the same, with smaller contributions to be levied on lesser landowners: knights were to maintain one loom and five people, or contribute £10 p.a.[66] Perhaps Morrell hoped that by using the language of prerogative rule his petition would be more in line with the political slant he believed to be popular at court in the period after the 1621 parliament. But sadly for Morrell even his appeals to the king's prerogative royal, for the moment, fell on deaf ears.

There is a gap of several years before we hear of Morrell again. In early 1625 the government finally settled on Morrell's (and the commission's) plan for setting up county corporations. The commission sent books of incorporation for companies to oversee the new draperies in Hertfordshire, Middlesex, Berkshire, Devon, Dorset, and Shropshire to secretary of state Edward Conway in late February 1625,[67] followed by a long letter in praise of Morrell and asking that the king make him some reward. They say they have found him:

> a man of great skill and experience about the true making of all woollen commodities, but especially of the new drapery … He hath travailed so many years to his no small charge in the searching and finding out of all the best ways to make all kinds of new draperies … they hold his knowledge and judgement in them not inferior to any other, and have use[d] his advice in the settling of the corporations which we lately

[64] CKS U269 (Sackville papers) 1/504 dated 12 Feb. 1623.
[65] CKS U269/1/OE 890 dated May 1623.
[66] CKS U269/1/504, 890; quotation from 890.
[67] *CSPD, 1623–1625*, p. 484.

recommended to you; besides he is to carry them down to the several shires and to give his help and direction to the gentlemen there for the right and true making of all stuffs … [and] giving his attendance continually upon the commissioners, who many times are occasioned to use his service in many emergent accidents concerning trade. Upon these reasons we pray you to move his Majesty to bestow on him £40 per annum during his life … And he being born within the county of Devon is very desirous to have it paid out of the customs arising within the port of Exeter.[68]

In early March 1625 Conway replied to the commissioners of trade; he returned the letters patent signed by the king, who agreed that Morrell deserved recompense, but he referred the details of Morrell's rewards to the lord treasurer and chancellor of the exchequer.[69] A few days later, and before the grants passed the great seal, James was dead.

III

As we know now, Morrell's grand scheme died with him. But initially it seemed that Charles I's government would pursue the plan. On 15 April 1625 the king's pleasure was that the patents for the incorporation of a company for the better ordering of new draperies in Hertfordshire and other counties should pass the great seal by immediate warrant, 'for avoiding of charge', and apparently they did.[70] Letters patent were granted to establish thirty-two county corporations for the new draperies, with powers to raise stocks of raw materials, to issue regulations concerning clothmaking and to search for infractions of those regulations, and to inflict punishments on offenders. The basic clauses of these charters have long been known, through their inclusion in Thirsk and Cooper's *Seventeenth century economic documents*.[71] They could have been drafted by Walter Morrell: the preamble sets out the great benefit of woollen manufacture to the kingdom; how failure to enforce high production standards is responsible for 'the present decay' in new draperies; how his Majesty is minded 'to restore the new draperies to their perfected state' and to encourage their production; and that the best way to do this is to entrust 'the principal men of quality in every county with the oversight and governance thereof; and that to incorporate them is the best and safest course'.[72] The rhetoric is reminiscent of Morrell's 1616 treatise, although it differs slightly from the original formulation in its emphasis on local magisterial leadership of the county corporations. Morrell had not originally specified that the JPs make up the governing body of the corporations, although there are later interpolations in the Huntington Library manuscript which insert 'all that be in commission' where the original text had not been so specific.[73]

[68] PRO SP 14/184 fo. 79 (*CSPD, 1623–1625*, p. 485).
[69] PRO SP 14/185 fo. 20 (*CSPD, 1623–1625*, p. 490).
[70] PRO SP 16/1 fo. 82 (*CSPD, 1625–1626*, p. 9).
[71] At p. 222, quoting PRO SP 16/1 no. 24; also BL Add. MS. 34,324.
[72] PRO SP 16/1 fo. 29 (*CSPD, 1625–1626*, p. 4).
[73] Morrell MS, p. 27.

Another aspect of Morrell's 1616 project appears to have been considered in 1625 or 1626, for among the state papers is 'a proposal for preventing the exportation of wool, by establishing a register of all wool grown' – a structure included in the third book of Morrell's 1616 text.[74] And, when the commission of trade in 1626 investigated the farmers of the customs for charging excessive duties on perpetuanas and serges, they asked Walter Morrell to advise them.[75] But nothing more is heard of the county corporations. I have not been able to find evidence that any of the 1625 corporations were actually established, despite my continuing search. According to J. P. Cooper they 'came to nothing owing to the war',[76] but that may only be the reason why the central government lost enthusiasm for the project. Even without the wars of the late 1620s and its attendant financial demands, the project would probably have been stillborn, for there is no evidence of any local interest or support, in Hertfordshire or any other county. It is therefore not surprising that the state papers and the privy council registers are silent on the project in the years immediately after the 1625 incorporations.

Morrell does not turn up again until the end of 1631, when Walter and his brother Hugh submitted a petition in which they promise to offer useful advice to the commission on trade about the recent decay of trade, and to 'advance his majesty's revenue'.[77] More substantial is a petition from Walter Morrell of Hatfield to the king, which recounts the long history of his campaign to win support for his new draperies project; how it won the approval of both James I and his present majesty, but that it has still not been put in execution. He begs the king to refer the business to a number of named privy councillors, including the lord keeper and the lord treasurer, and includes a two page long précis of his scheme. In the late king's reign, Morrell says, many proposals were made for the public welfare, but problems have now increased rather than decreased, as the several proclamations for the employment of the poor, preventing transportation of wool and corn and for distribution of corn in this time of scarcity all showed. A second attachment recites the aims of his project: to provide the poor with work, to improve the value of wools by manufacturing, to establish county corporations for the increase of clothing and providing work for the poor, to give gentry a quicker sale for their wool, and to bring order to textile manufactures.[78] Morrell feels he has to explain from scratch the project which was legally established back in 1625, but then for all practical purposes forgotten. Perhaps he tried again in 1631 because of the nationwide crisis in trade and food supply. Many thousands were thrown out of work in 1630–1, and the council heard reports of impending disaster from provincial magistrates – a repeat of the crisis of 1621 and 1622. Sadly for Morrell, his

[74] *CSPD*, *1625–1626*, p. 523, cf. with Morrell MS, pp. 80–4.

[75] PRO SP 16/44 no. 25 (*CSPD*, *1625–1626*, p. 522).

[76] J. P. Cooper, 'Economic regulation and the cloth industry in seventeenth century England', in his *Land*, *men and beliefs* (London, 1983), p. 209; and see PRO SP 16/10 no. 66.

[77] PRO SP 16/204 fo. 33 (*CSPD*, *1631–1633*, p. 197).

[78] PRO SP 16/533 fos. 155–9 (*CSPD*, *Addenda*, *1625–1649*, p. 430).

project was not taken up again by the crown, as it had so enthusiastically been in the early 1620s.

The company for the new draperies was not resurrected in Hertfordshire, and it is not even certain that the Hatfield clothmaking enterprise survived. No one solved Hatfield's poverty problem: it had its own house of correction by 1626, and in 1632 the representatives of Hatfield applied to the county bench for help with their poor relief costs.[79] In 1632 and 1633 Walter Morrell of Hatfield, gent., was presented twice to the county sessions, the first time for a chalkpit which interfered with a footpath, and the second time for diverting the watercourse, 'so that the highway is much annoyed'.[80] The outcome of both these cases is unknown. That is the last we hear of him. He died in November 1638, was buried on 19 November in Bramfield, and a will for 'Walter Morrell of Bramfield, Herts., gent.' was proved in the prerogative court of Canterbury that month. With no surviving children he left his estate to his widow Anne. There are no references to clothmaking or the new draperies project.[81] It does seem that Walter Morrell, the optimistic projector of Hatfield, finally – after a campaign of more than twenty-five years – gave up in the face of both local and Westminster rejection.

IV

The moral of my tale is that no amount of court and council backing could force a project on the gentry elite of an English county, no matter how paternalistic the crown's motives. What appeared to be quite powerful support for Morrell's project to encourage the new draperies and reduce rural unemployment proved ineffectual in the face of provincial non-compliance, on the part of the 'middling sort' as well as the gentry. Even the backing of the Cecils failed to persuade the Hertfordshire gentry to implement Morrell's scheme. County benches by the mid-1610s, in Hindle's apt phrase, displayed 'an attitude of self-righteous evasiveness'.[82] Only when the crown offered something more than written endorsement could an unpopular programme be imposed on the provinces in the early seventeenth century. The inability of the Jacobean council to induce the Hertfordshire bench to support its project to establish new drapery manufacture is another instance of executive failure, on a lesser scale, but similar to the problems of enforcement during the 1620s that were noted by Derek Hirst. 'The privy council made little effort to test its power against the strength of particularism.' Hindered by the absence of its own bureaucratic machinery and memory, the council was so swamped by paperwork that delays were inevitable – as Morrell found on so many occasions. But it was not solely a problem of inefficiency; it was also one of

[79] *Hertfordshire County Records*, 5 (1928), pp. 71, 153–4. [80] Ibid., pp. 172, 185.

[81] PRO PROB 11/178/152; burial in bishop's transcript of Bramfield register: HALS 34/31 for 1637/8.

[82] Steve Hindle, *The state and social change in early modern England, c. 1550–1640* (London, 2000), p. 175.

political style. 'The council trusted too much to the effect of strong words and did not think enough of backing them up.'[83] That combination of incompetence and hot air failed to move local governors to enforce quite central planks of government fiscal and militia policy, not to mention the private schemes of government-supported projectors like Morrell.

In fact the Hertfordshire JPs' unwillingness to support Morrell's project might have been predicted. They shared neither Morrell's belief in himself nor in the financial viability of his scheme. Across the country magistrates had found work schemes both frustrating to manage and, in the main, financially unsuccessful.[84] In Warwickshire, for example, roughly one in ten parishes organized work for the poor by the 1630s.[85] Morrell's plan not only required the Hertfordshire gentry to invest their own money in a speculative venture in which they had no confidence, but it also required the establishment of an elaborate bureaucratic structure. And, even less appealing, it might have led to the proliferation of a substantial industrial proletariat in their midst. Such men – without a recognizable master, and subject to unpredictable periods of unemployment – would have represented a new and unstable element in local society; something the Hertfordshire magistrates probably felt they could well do without. The disorderly – not to say threatening – reputation of rural industrial workers would have been as familiar to them as it had been to William Cecil in the 1560s, and as it is to modern historians: 'people that depend upon making of cloth are of worse condition to be quietly governed than the husbandmen'.[86] The dislocation of the textile trade in the early 1620s, which led to widespread distress in Western clothmaking districts, would have confirmed the Hertfordshire magistrates in their original misgivings about extending clothmaking to their county. Even if economic thinking like Morrell's had become the common currency of London merchants, politicians, and economic reformers by the early decades of the seventeenth century, heroic schemes such as his new draperies corporation would continue to receive a much more sceptical reception 'north of Watford'.

[83] Derek Hirst, 'The privy council and problems of enforcement in the 1620s', *Journal of British Studies*, 18 (1978), pp. 46–66; quotes at pp. 47, 61.

[84] Fletcher, *Reform in the provinces*, pp. 213–14. But there were exceptions, such as Enfield: n. 18 above.

[85] Steve Hindle, *Birthpangs of welfare: poor relief and parish governance in seventeenth-century Warwickshire* (Dugdale Soc. Occasional Papers no. 40, 2000), p. 14.

[86] Cecil from 1564, in Tawney and Power, eds., *Tudor economic documents*, II, p. 45. More recently, Buchanan Sharp, *In contempt of all authority: rural artisans and riot in the west of England, 1558–1660* (Berkeley and London, 1980), and Roger Manning, *Village revolts: social protest and popular disturbances in England and Wales, 1509–1640* (Oxford, 1988).