

1 Approaching Rye

The youngish woman who was at the centre of the rumours circulating in Rye in 1607 was not in other ways a central figure in the town. In fact she was a newcomer, as well as poor. She may, therefore, have been unknown to many of the inhabitants, until her blabbing tongue set off a train of events in September of that year. Susan Swapper was a catalyst, reopening old conflicts in the town to which she and her husband Roger were strangers. At least, this is what the evidence suggests—the Swappers were not mentioned in the town's records before that autumn, when she was examined by the magistrates, and as recently as 1604 there had been someone else living in the house which they rented in the Butchery.

Where did they come from? If they were really called *Swapper*, they must have materialised out of thin air, because *Swapper* is not a name. Or at least not a name used by anyone else. It is not in any of the name dictionaries, nor in the International Genealogical Index (which indexes a large proportion of the English baptism and marriage registers), apart from three people who are probably the children of this couple, and, much later, half a dozen who suddenly materialise in 19th century Ontario. One local historian clearly had problems with the name because he rendered it *Snapper*, although there is no doubt about the spelling. A variation which makes more sense is *Swaffer*, which they were called by Roger's employer, a gentleman named George Taylor. He was likely to know, because—as I shall suggest below—he may have been acquainted with Roger before they came to Rye, and because George himself came from the precise point in Kent where the name *Swaffer* is said to have originated—Willesborough, near Ashford.

Historians of Kentish names assure us that the name *Swaffer* or *Swafford* derives from *Swatford* or *Swatfield Bridge*, which was where the old Roman road crossed the River Stour in Willesborough, on its way from Canterbury to the Weald. There are certainly Swaffers on 18th century gravestones in Willesborough churchyard, and a large group in one corner of the tiny churchyard of nearby Sevington (whence the M20 can now be heard roaring over the hedgerows). Three *Susan Swaffers* were later baptised in neighbouring Kingsnorth in the 1730s. Indeed all the 16th and 17th century Swaffers in the IGI come from Kent, apart from a handful from London, and another handful from a village in Cheshire. A more fanciful suggestion makes *Swatford* the ancient river crossing of the

Kentish tribe of *Swaefa*, who were led by the King of Kent, *Swaefheard*! We seem to have moved all the way from granting this rather marginal couple no forbears at all, to raising the possibility of a grand and ancient ancestry.

Leaving such fancies aside, what is more certain is that the town clerk of Rye, who wrote down their name as *Swapper* (even when quoting George Taylor), would not have been well acquainted with Kentish names, since he came from Berkshire. He may have been the first person to write down their name in Rye. It is also possible that *Swapper* and *Swaffer* sounded similar—both *swape* and *swafe* were apparently used to refer to a pumphandle.

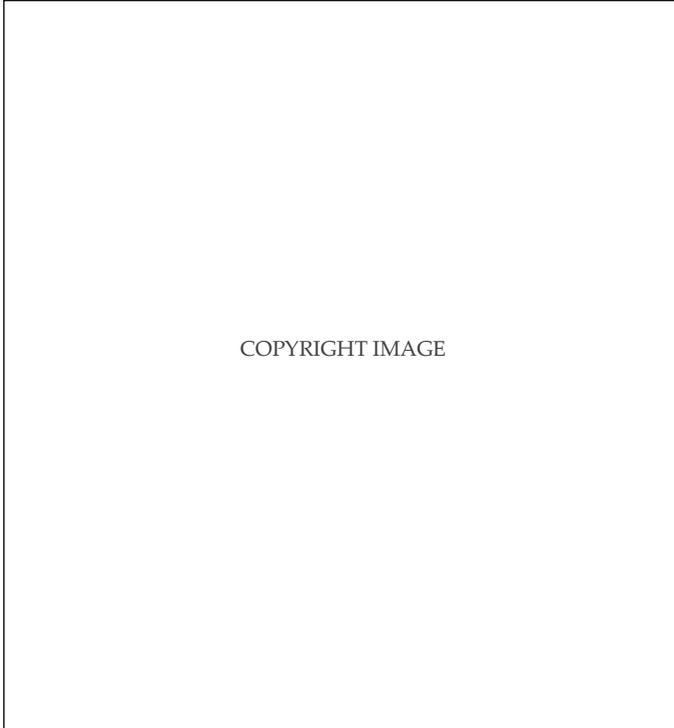
Even if *swapper* was not a common *name*, it was a common *word*, and there are several senses in which it might have been used as a nickname. It meant a thumping great lie—what we call a *whopper* today. Was Susan being mocked for telling whoppers—*swappers*—around the streets of Rye? Some witnesses certainly suspected her of twisting the truth. Roger could also be described as a *swapper* in another sense. *Swap* basically meant to *strike*—thus, you cut corn with a *swaphook* (and, incidentally, a swathe of corn was a *swaff*—but that was cut with a scythe!). So perhaps it was an appropriate nickname for a sawyer who travelled round chopping wood for other people. A *swapper* was also a large man—perhaps somebody whose *swaps* you should avoid! Was this descriptive of Roger—or was the joke, rather, that he was so *small*? Whether or not any of these meanings attached themselves to the couple, the name *Swapper* stuck—we find a *Jane Swapper*, presumably the daughter of Susan and Roger, marrying in Rye in 1633.

If we hypothesise that their name was really *Swaffer*, I can suggest where they came from: the village of Headcorn, in the Kentish Weald, which was 16 miles due north of Rye as the crow flies, and a few miles west of Willesborough. Here lived another Roger Swaffer (also known as *Swafford*), who could well have been our Roger's father, judging by the dates at which his children's baptisms were entered in the parish register. True, these did not include a *Roger*, but there are many gaps in parish registers, and it was very common for an eldest son to be named after his father. If *Swaffer* was an unusual name, *Roger* was not a common first name either (but curiously, George Taylor had two siblings called *Roger* and *Susan*). Roger's birth might, also, have been registered in his mother's natal parish, since mothers sometimes went to their parental home to give birth to their first child. In which case we could surmise that he was born about 1566, since six siblings (of whom two died) were baptised at

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roughly two-year intervals between 1568 and 1578. So an origin has been reconstructed for Roger, but Susan's forbears remain a mystery, since no record of their marriage has survived (they probably married in her village).

Below is an early 17th century map showing *Hedcorne, Willesborow* (top left and right respectively) and *Rye* (bottom):



Detail from John Speed's map of Kent

The map is fairly accurate, but disconcerting because the villages appear to be set in the middle of nowhere—they are not connected by a network of roads, as in modern maps. The arteries of this map are, instead, *rivers*—a much more practical method of getting from one place to another at this period. The trees indicate wooded areas (mostly the High Weald, described below).

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To the north of Rye, the land rose into a country of wooded hills and streams. This was the *Wild* (or *Weald*, as we know it today), which was dotted with small, scattered farms, each surrounded by small, irregular fields. These in turn were bounded by narrow strips of trees and brushwood known as *shaws* where pigs rootled in the undergrowth. Here the villages were not compact like those on the Downs to the West, each presided over by church and manor. There were no common fields, divided into strips rented or owned by villagers, nor common sheepflocks like those roaming the sheepwalks on the tops of the Downs. Few manorial customs regulated the rights and obligations of the inhabitants of the Wild.

In the past, according to the contemporary William Lambarde, the Wild had been

nothing else but a desert, and waste wilderness, not planted with towns, or peopled with men...but stored and stuffed with herds of deer, and droves of hogs only.

A 'desert' was a wilderness. The land was indeed shunned by many of the larger gentry, because the heavy clay soils were too labour-intensive and cold to make the growing of wheat a profitable enterprise. By the 17th century, however, the Wild was becoming well-populated with smallholders and artisans—or even over-populated, judging by the complaints about cottages being erected on the waste. For if it was not good farming country, it had those essentials of early modern industry—wood and water. Wood was required for fuel (coal being a recent innovation) as well as for such products as barrels, spoons, dishes, baskets, buckets, furniture, house frames, roof shingles, arrows...the list goes on.

Industrious people might devise many different employments with which to make a living in the Wild. In the summer, cattle farming engaged those who had some land (the grassland was rather too rank and damp for sheep), and woodworking and manufacturing were common activities in the quieter winter months. Some by-employments were also provided by the two major industries which flourished in the Wild—iron production (for which charcoal was required in large quantities) and clothmaking. Ingenuity brought rewards—though few can have been as versatile as the *Archimedes of Wadhurst* (as he was denoted in the parish register), who

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was by trade a glover, a joiner, a carpenter, an instrument maker, a curious workman for jacks, clocks, pieces, stoves and vices for glaziers

Those who were not so ingenious might, however, find it hard, because they had to make enough from these employments to be able to buy wheat or other cereals for bread, when their own cereal production was inadequate. Bread was the mainstay of their diet—at least half a labourer's wages was spent on it.

Contemporaries were often suspicious of the inhabitants of such woodlands—not only of the criminals harboured in the areas of dense forest, but also of the smallholders and artisans in the cleared areas. *The people be given much to rudeness and wilfulness*, according to a report to the Privy Council in 1587; the authors therefore recommended the provision of more justices in the area.

people bred amongst woods are naturally more stubborn and uncivil than in the champion countries [*i.e. fielden areas*]

commented another writer. Any mention by contemporaries of the characteristics of the inhabitants of woodland regions conjured up unfavourable comparisons with those of the contrasting, fielden, regions.

John Aubrey related such differences of character to what the inhabitants ate (a common viewpoint), and thence to the soil from which the food originated. He noted sourly of a similarly *dirty, clayey country* in Gloucestershire, and of parts of Wiltshire, that the

Indigenae, or Aborigines, speak drawling; they are phlegmatic, skins pale and livid, slow and dull, heavy of spirit: hereabout is but little tillage or hard labour, they only milk the cows and make cheese; they feed chiefly on milk meats, which cools their brains too much, and hurts their inventions. These circumstances make them melancholy, contemplative and malicious... and...they are generally more apt to be fanatics: their persons are generally plump and feggy: gallipot eyes, and some black: but they are generally handsome enough. It is a woodsere country, abounding much with sowre and austere plants, as sorrel, etc which make their humours sour, and fixes their spirits.

What these people needed, according to Aubrey, was more hard labour, like those engaged in arable farming:

On the downs... where 'tis all upon tillage, and where the shepherds labour hard, their flesh is hard, their bodies strong: being weary after hard labour,

they have not leisure to read and contemplate of religion, but go to bed to their rest, to rise betime the next morning to their labour.

The *dirty, clayey country* described by Aubrey specialised more in dairying than the Weald, but otherwise it shared with it the usual features of a wood-pasture economy: cattle farming and whatever industries were supported by local resources (both had clothmaking districts).

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Aubrey was writing at the end of the century, so when he referred to *fanatics* he may have been thinking of the proliferation of religious radicals during the Civil War. Pastoral areas are known, however, to have fostered independent-mindedness in religion, and evidence of radicalism in the Weald goes back a couple of centuries, increasing from the end of the 15th century. Such *lollards* (as they were dubbed) wanted more direct communication with God than was made possible by the Church—to be able to read the scriptures in English, to pray without relying on the mediation of priests, and without using the intercession of saints. It was more an attitude than a set of doctrines, though one belief was commonly held—that the consecrated bread did not literally become the body of Christ, but was only a symbol—a *remembrance of his passion*. It typified their opposition to mechanistic rituals. They held meetings to discuss the scriptures, and were encouraged and guided by travelling evangelists, who provided a link between lollard communities in different parts of the country.

The Wealden lollards, like those elsewhere, sometimes expressed themselves in earthy and abusive language—one said he would no more wish to hear the mass of a bad priest than that of a barking dog. They also evinced a variety of more or less eccentric and extreme views—such as that Christ was a man as others are and not divine, or that the soul is only breath. A few of those who refused to recant suffered the ultimate punishment—death by burning.

The protestant Reformation introduced few novel beliefs to these radicals, and they already had contacts with protestants on the continent before Henry VIII initiated his early reforms. In particular, some of the inhabitants of the clothing township of Cranbrook were corresponding with one of their number who was in Antwerp, assisting William Tyndale to translate the Bible into English. The clothiers had long-established trading links with Antwerp.

There were again religious martyrs from the Weald during Queen Mary's reign, although the martyrologist John Foxe had to gloss over the occasional extreme belief that did not quite fit within the confines of mainstream Protestantism—such as rejection of the Trinity. One extremist from Headcorn (where the Swaffers came from), John Fishcock, did not hold with the rejection of the Trinity, but went so far as to want to separate himself from those whom he considered ungodly.

By the late 16th century, some of the more godly inhabitants of the Weald had introduced their own distinctive indicator of popular piety. Ben Jonson may have located his preposterous character *Zeal-of-the-Land Busy* in the town of Banbury, but it was actually in the Weald where such names appear to have originated and were most numerous. So we have *Repentance Coperthwaite* of Cranbrook, and *Smallhope Bigge* of Tenterden. In Rye also, a few parents gave their children such names—for example *Renewed Wood*, and *Hopewell Gill*.

Not all the inhabitants of the Weald were godly. In fact, these may well have been spurred to greater fervour by the ungodliness of their neighbours. Take the Swaffers. Roger was no John Fishcock. In fact he was called a *wicked liver* by one of the godly in Rye, and Susan was called *lewd* by another (meaning *unlettered, ignorant, rude*, and consequently, perhaps, *ribald* and *lascivious*—but the latter was not the core meaning, as we think of it today). And Susan was certainly not averse to the old rituals, judging by her use of *measuring*. This involved taking the length of someone in ribbon or other material, and using it in a ritual—usually to cure them of some illness. For example, there was a widespread custom in the Middle Ages of taking the length of a sick person in a taper, coiling it in front of the statue of a saint, and lighting it. This offering made a connection between the saint and the sick person (particularly useful if you could not write their name), thus invoking the saint's power to bless and cure the invalid. Susan used measuring in a similar way, but the power that was being invoked was more ambivalent than that of a saint.

Such beliefs were much more widespread in the downlands to the west, an area that was as notorious in the later 16th century for the *old religion*—Catholicism—as was the Weald for godliness. I would just like to briefly introduce this region, which was so interdependent economically with the Weald, and yet was such a contrast in many ways. We will return very shortly to the nitty gritty of *why* and *how* the Swaffers came to Rye.

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Near the western border of Sussex, north of Chichester, were the large estates and seigneurial households of some of the richer gentry and nobles. They held to a type of Catholicism that was

less concerned with doctrinal affirmation or dramas of conscience than with a set of ingrained observances which defined and gave meaning to the cycle of the week and the seasons of the year; to birth, marriage and death...[Here] the liturgical cycle merged indistinguishably with the cycle of hospitality. At Easter or Christmas there would be a large company and sung Masses.... Here was a religion of communal observance and mutual obligation, binding the living to one another and to the dead.

This was a type of Catholicism that was well suited to the downland economy. The complex farming methods required close co-operation to manage efficiently the shared fields and communal sheepflock. Mutual dependence, and the importance of reducing strife, was particularly apparent at harvest-time, when so many hands were required for the harvest that labourers were drawn in from elsewhere, including the Weald. Disloyalty at this time—in the form of withdrawal of labour—could jeopardize the following year's profits. The rituals of Catholicism, that emphasised (among other things) reciprocity between God and man, and peacefulness and reciprocity between neighbours, reinforced the more earthy rituals of drinking and festivity that were thought to encourage *good neighbourhood*.

Some of these Sussex catholics defied the protestant status quo by refusing to go to the parish church, and the occasional landowner even went so far as to harbour a popish priest in the inner recesses of their mansion. But the most influential catholic magnate in the region, Viscount Montagu, managed to persuade Queen Elizabeth of his loyalty even after the Pope had released all English catholics from allegiance to her. In 1588, when Philip II of Spain was about to unleash his crusade against England, she permitted Lord Montagu to turn up at Tilbury with his catholic troop of tenants and neighbours, to help defend the country against the catholic threat from abroad.

Good neighbourhood, hospitality, loyalty—all words associated in contemporary ballads with the golden age of *Merry England*. But the later sixteenth century was a hard time for the small arable farmer. If he did not grow enough surplus wheat to tide him over years of bad harvests—of which there were several in the 1590s—he had to buy wheat when prices were high, and this would have been exacerbated by the relentless rise in wheat prices during the 16th century (5-fold on average, driven by

increased demand and expanding population). Unlike the Weald, these small farmers had nothing to fall back on if their profits from sheep-corn husbandry were inadequate—there were no opportunities for other types of employment. Consequently, the compact little villages in this part of Sussex were not as well-populated as they had been, and a few were empty—sometimes with only the manorhouse occupied, or inhabited by farm servants.

The larger landowners, on the other hand, found the same price rises profitable, and an incentive to consolidate their holdings. They helped fill the voracious maw of London, which devoured ever larger quantities of wheat, as its population expanded at least 3-fold during the 16th century. Wheat was shipped coastwise from Chichester and Arundel to London, and also to other ports on the south coast. Rye was another large consumer of wheat, because, being surrounded by water, none of its population were engaged in agriculture (unlike most towns). In bad years, wheat was also disembarked at Rye to feed its Wealden hinterland.

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Roger Swaffer the elder brought up his family in a low-lying part of the Weald known as the *Vale of Kent*. Here the clays were soggy, although also more fertile, than in the High Weald to the south, where, amongst the numerous streams, were concentrated most of the ironworks and clothmaking (and religious radicalism). The focus in the Low Weald was more on cattle farming and woodworking, and these were the activities engaged in by Roger and his sons.

He must have been reasonably well off in 1595, since he is described as a *yeoman*; his son William was simply described as a *sawyer*, like our Roger, his supposed brother. *Yeoman* was as much a description of status as of occupation, so their occupations may in practice have been similar. The only other information we have about William is that other people were twice indicted for assaulting him with apparently no blame being attached to him. One explanation might be that he held some position of responsibility in the village—perhaps a constable, or sidesman. Being beaten up was a perennial hazard of holding minor offices.

Perhaps the epithet *yeoman* no longer truly described the old man's circumstances, however, because only 8 years later he had fallen on hard times. It was ordered by a county magistrate that he be

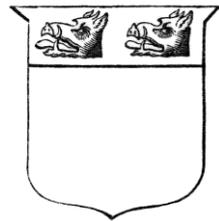
charged with the maintenance of his daughter's child, as grandfather of the child. ...He is unable to do this because of his age and want of ability, as the parishioners of Headcorn have certified to the justices, [and it is therefore] ordered that the said Roger shall contribute 2d weekly toward the sustenance of the child, during his life or until the child is self-supporting.

The daughter's husband had presumably died (if the child had been a bastard, the father would have been asked to pay). An obvious cause of hardship to Roger senior would have been the terrible harvests of 1596-7, when Wealden smallholders would have had to buy wheat, and other cereals for their bread, brought from outside the region at sky-high prices.

It was only a few years after this that Roger and Susan Swaffer arrived in Rye. So it was probably hardship that drove them to try their luck in this bustling port. Other inhabitants of the Weald may also have been migrating out of the area during the 16th century, because the number of people baptised exceeded the number of those who were buried there. By contrast, Rye attracted migrants like moths to a candle, because it promised much—wages were quite high, and it was still busy enough to offer much employment in the service industries, providing for merchants, and travellers taking the Channel crossing.

There may also have been more personal reasons for coming to Rye—Susan's sister lived there, and Roger's future employer, George Taylor, was a dealer in wood (Roger being a sawyer). George seems to have specialised in exporting *billets*, which were short lengths of wood used for firewood (wood was the town's main export).

George was a son of John Taylor, gentleman, of Willesborough, whose coat of arms consisted simply of two boars' heads (most appropriate for a Wealden gentleman, though the lack of any other emblems suggests a lack of distinguished predecessors). His stepmother was the daughter of a Rye jurat (i.e. alderman), so he may have been well-acquainted with the town when he moved into the house in the Butchery owned by the mother of his new wife, Anne, in 1603. He was always referred to respectfully as *Master Taylor*—indicating his gentle status—and he later demonstrated his ability to pull strings in high places when necessary. Few other inhabitants were given the title of *Master*, apart from the mayor, jurats and town clerk, who were given it by virtue of their offices. Curiously, the Taylor household paid no more in tax after George



and Anne's marriage than before—suggesting that no expensive items of furniture, objects of silver or gold, or jewels were added to the contents.

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The big downside to living in Rye—as the Swaffers were soon to experience—was the unhealthiness of the surrounding saltmarshes, where malaria (*ague* or *marsh fever*) was endemic. Everyone in Rye would have experienced the ague (the word derives from *fièvre ague*, acute fever, but was used almost exclusively to refer to malaria). Even a seasoned inhabitant like the wealthy merchant Samuel Jeake, living in the town at the end of the century, suffered frequent agues. One bout that lasted fully 8 months he recorded in meticulous detail, in order to study its astrological causes; it released its hold when *Spring coming on apace, and nature [i.e. his body] growing stronger, it finally expired on May 2 [1671]*.

Many more people died in Rye than were born there. Romney Marsh was *one of the most deadly places in the country*, according to a modern expert, and even at the start of the 20th century it was found that the *anopheles* mosquitoes which carry the disease were present *in as great numbers as I have ever seen in tropical countries, and are more numerous than in any other locality I have examined in England* (this type of mosquito particularly favoured brackish water).

In earlier centuries contemporaries did not need experts to tell them about the deadly effects of marsh fever, even if they had different ideas about its causes. An 18th century commentator explained that

the large quantity of stagnating water... engenders such noxious and pestilential vapours, as spread sickness and frequent death on the inhabitants... the sickly countenances of them plainly discovering the unwholesome air they breathe in

16th century theories of causation were similar:

All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats on Prosper fall, and make him
By inch-meal a disease!

William Lambarde in the 17th century thought the area *evil in winter, grievous in summer, and never good*.

In Rye, conditions on a crowded hilltop that had no natural springs contributed to the unhealthy environment. All the water had to be piped

from the surrounding hills, and there were seemingly endless payments made by the corporation for canvas and wax to mend the pipes.

When a vagrant tried to account for his presence in Rye by saying that he came *to see the fashions of the day*, he presumably meant travellers passing through, not the inhabitants, because very few gentry lived in this unhealthy place (apart from the maverick George Taylor), even though it may have been the largest town in East Sussex in the 1560s and '70s. Most local gentry had their town houses in the county town of Lewes, which was located among salubrious hills on the border between the rolling chalklands to the west and the Wild to the east. They could hunt in the woods, attend the Quarter Sessions (presided over by those gentlemen who were Justices of the Peace), and send their merchandize for export down the river Ouse to the new port of Newhaven. At Lewes market, smallholders from the Wild came to sell their wood, and farmers from the downlands came to sell their wheat—each had essentials that the other lacked.

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The Swaffers had little choice of where to settle—Roger had a young family to support and needed work. We never learn how many children they had, let alone their names—only that they had more than one. The *Jane Swapper* who got married in Rye in 1633 was presumably their daughter.

When they travelled from Headcorn to Rye, the first few miles would have been over muddy tracks, but from the quay at Small Hythe, near Tenterden, they may well have sailed down the Rother in one of the narrowboats known as *lighters* that plied the navigable rivers in the region, because Susan's sister Elizabeth was married to a lighterman named Nicholas King. Normally lighters carried not people but Wealden goods downriver to Rye (wood, cloth, iron), either to provision the town, or to be exported further afield. On the return journey upriver, they carried such necessities as wheat, and also wool and dyestuffs (madder, brasell, woad) for the clothiers.

As the Swaffers sailed south through the Rother Levels—the river sweeping round the Isle of Oxney in a wide curve—and then straight

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down to Rye, the countryside on their lefthand side changed from wooded hills to the flat, wet lands of Romney Marsh, stretching out to the horizon. Not many people lived in this unhealthy region, apart from the *marsh lookers*, who were employed to watch the grazing animals. There were few even of these in the winter, but in the spring, herds of cattle and sheep started to appear, driven from different parts of the south-east to fatten on the new, succulent grass. This land was enriched by occasional doses of silt brought in by the sea, which made it the most valuable in Sussex and Kent—*wealthy but not healthy*, as a contemporary put it. The closeness of London enhanced its value, with much of the fattened stock (some of which had been bred as far afield as Wales and the North) being sold to London butchers, sometimes through agents (butchers) living in Rye or other local places. The butchers were an influential group in Rye.

Rather than sailing round the hill on which Rye perches to the Strand, which was where the larger ships disembarked, the lighter may have pulled in just north of the town, where the ferry from East Guldeford—a village on the edge of the marshes—crossed the Rother. Then it was a short walk down the causeway and into the walled town at the Landgate, passing under the portcullis that had been installed in the mid-16th century (replacing an older one).

The Swaffers' destination—if this had been decided in advance—was a part of Rye known as the Butchery. Here a market was held on Wednesday and Saturday mornings for all produce other than fish (which had its own market on the Strand). Bread, butter, cheese, eggs, meat, fruit in season, tallow, hides, cattle and horses were sold in the market, as well as, on occasion, such products as sickles, edgetools, seeds, coverlets, shoes, laces and glasses. Some of the market stalls were set up under the Court Hall, which had an open ground floor, as was typical of Sussex town halls (see plate 4). Above it was the room where the mayor and aldermen—who were known as *jurats* in Rye—together with the freemen, held their fortnightly assemblies. At these assemblies prices were set, officers elected, summary punishments



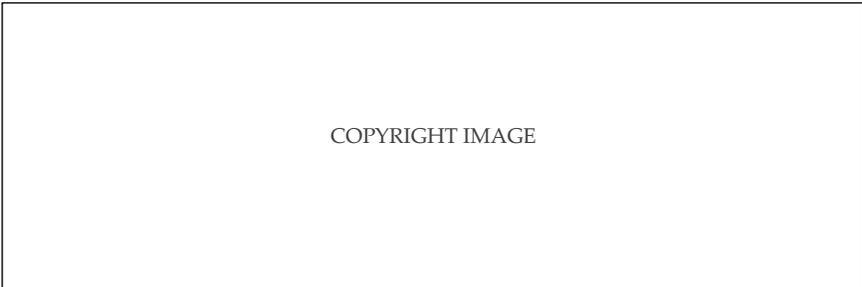
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ordered, relations with the outside world discussed, decrees passed, and many other functions dealt with relating to the corporation of Rye.

The freemen (also known as the *commonalty*) were a privileged body of men who, as well as taking part in the government of the town, had trading privileges—in particular, paying half as much in the way of customs duties on goods passing through the port as non-freemen. They constituted about a third of tax-paying householders—there had been at least 149 freemen when the town was prosperous. A man did not have to pay for his freedom if his father had been free when he was born, but others—if they were accepted by the corporation—paid for the privilege (40s for strangers, about the same as a year’s wages for a servant, or 20s for residents). The mayor (with the consent of the jurats) could also bestow one free admission to the commonalty per year. Each year the freemen chose one of the jurats to be mayor, and the mayor chose new jurats from amongst the commonalty if there were any vacancies (maximum twelve)—only occasionally did jurats *not* continue to serve until they died or retired.

About a third of households were too poor to pay any tax—these included the Swaffers. And then there were those who too poor even to be described as *householders* in the burial register—how many there were of these can only be guessed.

The Swaffers moved into a house just down the road from the marketplace and Court Hall (house *c* in the drawing below), next door but one to the Taylors (house *a*). It was owned by Anne Taylor’s mother, Widow Bennett, whose late husband had been a butcher. She also owned the house in between, which was let to a sailor and his wife (house *b*). Two of the houses were fronted by shops—presumably butchers’ shops (see plate 5 for similar shops, with counters in front of the open windows). You can see the arches of the Court Hall in this extract from Jeake’s map (south is at the top; the full map—almost—is shown on p. vi).



The Swaffer's house was medieval in layout, with a *hall* which was the main living area, and next to it a *parlour*. Banish all thought of Victorian parlours—the 16th century parlour was an unheated room that was just smaller and more private than the hall, and therefore a suitable room in which to talk—from the word *parler*. It was probably also used for sleeping and storage, and Susan would keep her spinning wheel in it.

There is no mention of a kitchen, which does not necessarily mean it did not exist—but they may have done all their cooking on the hearth in the hall. The smoke would have escaped through a smoke-bay or chimney; if they had a chimney, it would have been a hazardous wooden one, bricks being little used because they were so expensive (and stone was out of the question).

The hall would originally have been open to the roof, but above it and the parlour had been built two or more chambers, as was commonly done in the 16th century, and there was a garret above these, where hemp was stored. Also in the garret were *weasels*, according to Roger—perhaps hunting mice in the packs of hemp (or possibly in the thatch—but thatched roofs had been forbidden in a 16th century byelaw, because of the danger of fire). One chamber was not let to the Swaffers—Susan said that Anne Taylor kept them unlet so that the *spirits could walk there*.

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The Swaffers probably enjoyed a couple of years in Rye of comparative well-being—Roger had work, chopping firewood for George Taylor (amongst other jobs). But then in the cold winter of 1606-7 they both became ill, and this precipitated an extraordinary series of events, beginning with the arrival of spirits. The mayor and jurats (aldermen) of the town became alarmed, and interrogated Susan and others about the spirits the following autumn. I will tell the story as Susan told it, with some input from other witnesses (or to be more precise, it is the town clerk's version of what was said, because he wrote most of it down).