

## A PETITION OF 1683

*ANALYSIS BY JIM MAY, COMMENTARY BY ROGER LEA*

When Sutton Coldfield became a borough in 1528, it seemed to be passing from medieval feudalism to modern democracy. The new Corporation had 25 members — a Warden (mayor) and Society (corporation) - elected from a population of less than 1,000, so it must have seemed impossible for the Corporation to be unrepresentative. However, the members of the Corporation were elected for life, and any vacancies were filled by nominees of the corporate body. Since the corporation managed valuable resources and property, members were tempted to use their office for private gain, and even if they were scrupulously honest, their neighbours who were excluded from membership began to suspect them. Sometimes things reached such a pass that inhabitants appealed to higher authority to put a stop to perceived abuses on the part of the Corporation. One of the most contentious issues was the felling of timber to raise capital — often this was done in the Sutton Park woods, where the felling of trees tends to cause an outcry to this day.

Sutton had very extensive commons, probably over 8,000 acres (including the Park) at the time of the Charter. The Charter contained a clause permitting anyone to take in up to 60 acres of the commons and build a house there, paying a nominal rent. However, this was rescinded by a special Commission in 1580, partly because of malpractice by members of the Corporation, but also because the inhabitants could see their rights of common becoming less valuable as large tracts of the less barren parts of the commons were fenced off. With the growth of population in the early 17th century the commons became more fully exploited, and so the actions of the Corporation were more closely examined.

William Wood and other inhabitants complained to the Court of Chancery in 1682, and secured an injunction prohibiting any activity on the commons which interfered with the rights of common of the inhabitants at large. The injunction was evidently framed in such a way as to prohibit the practice of lot acres, as described in the document. Everyone was entitled to an acre of common land to cultivate for 5 years; it would then return to common and another acre would be allotted. The fields

referred to were unmarked divisions of the common, and they were set out for each of the Quarters of Sutton in proportion to the number of inhabitants in each quarter, no-one getting more than one acre. A subsistence holding at the time was about 15 acres, so the petition perhaps exaggerates the suffering of the inhabitants, but nevertheless the lot acre was a valued right in Sutton up to the time of the Enclosure.

Whatever the particular incident which led to the court case, the inhabitants who brought it clearly did not intend to stop the practice of lot acres. It may have been unfair of them to blame the solicitor for the mistake, but the signature of William Wood, the leader of those who sought the injunction, on the petition, shows they wished to put things right. They joined with the Warden and Society in this petition, in spite of having taken them to court the previous year. Peace and prosperity were no doubt restored, even though the Corporation continued to manage the woods and allow encroachment on the commons — Mr. Jesson of Langley was allowed to make Lindridge Pool in 1698, and Simon Luttrell at Four Oaks took in 48 acres for his park by Act of Parliament in 1756.

More interesting than the petition itself is the list of signatures attached to it. They do not appear to be in any particular order. Perhaps the Warden and Society head the list, but the names of the various Wardens for the late century, most of whom would have been members in 1682, are scattered throughout the list. Although Katherin Scott was the widow of a former Warden, the Corporation did not admit women — her name appears at the beginning, among the top gentry, between Leicester Grosvenor of Moor Hall and John Addyes, the next owner of Moor Hall.

The petition claims to be signed by the majority and by the most substantial of the inhabitants. The 1674 hearth tax lists 311 households, and there are 145 names on the list, which is good by local government standards; only 84 of the names appear in the 1674 hearth tax, so there must have been considerable migration to and from Sutton. Of these 84, 44 had more than one hearth to be taxed, just over half, whereas in 1674 107, just over a third, had two or more hearths, so many of the petitioners were of the more substantial rather than of the poorer sort. There is also a good distribution through the whole of the town. Using the hearth tax as a guide, Hill and Little Sutton was the most populous Quarter, with 32% of the households, followed by Great Sutton Quarter with 24%, and 15% each for Maney and the Wylde Quarter, Moor and Ashfurlong Quarter, and Walmley

and Beyond the Wood Quarter. Of the 110 petitioners whose Quarter can be identified, the percentages are: Hill 32%, Sutton 24%, Maney 17%, Moor and Walmley 11%.

Many of the petitioners could not write their own names, but made their mark and asked someone to write their name beside it. Of the 145 names, 67 are signed and 78 made their mark; using this as a basic indication of literacy gives a figure of 45%, which is quite respectable for the 17th century. Many of the literate ones were gentry - 21 of the names were gentlemen (out of 74 where status is known) —but not all of them were literate. Of the rest, 21 were tradesmen, including weavers, smiths, millers, mercers, innholders, nailers, and shoemakers, while another 25, mostly yeomen and husbandmen, were engaged in agriculture.

Only two of the names were given up as unreadable. But several of the others are doubtful. Most of them were also in one of the other sources, as listed in the attached table, but some were not. Thomas Keene was not an inhabitant, but had strong family connections here, and if not inhabitants, the following also had local connections: Thomas Bennett, Thomas Cooke, Henry Parker, and Joseph Saunders. Perrier and Saxton are tentative renderings of hardly legible names, while mystery surrounds the second George Sacheverell, the one at the bottom of the column being in a totally different hand from the one at the top. The document is in the William Salt Library at Stafford, County Record Office ref. 50/B/27/56, and is a valuable addition to our sources of information on the population of Sutton in the 17<sup>th</sup> century — others are the parish registers, the probate records, and the Hearth Tax returns, all transcribed and indexed at Sutton Library. The Hearth Tax returns were published as *Quarters of Sutton* in 1981. Lists of the Wardens are given in the histories of Sutton by Miss Bracken and Riland Bedford, Joseph Mason's year of office beginning in November 1682 helping to date the petition to 1683.

## THE PETITIONERS - WHO THEY WERE

In the following table, the petitioners are listed in alphabetical order followed by an indication of whether they marked their name (x) or signed it (.). Then follow columns showing status and district, if known, and the number of hearths given in the hearth tax returns. If the person was ever Warden, the year is given in column W, while the other columns show whether or not the name appears in particular records: R = parish register;

T = hearth tax; P = probate records (wills and inventories)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Forename</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Quarter</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>P</u>
Addyes	John		gent	Maney & W	6	1674	y	y	y
Addyes	Thomas sen.		gent	Maney & W	6	1668	y	y	y
Agott	John		husbandman	Sutton			y	n	y
Alport	William		yeoman	Maney & W		1679	y	n	y
Ashford	Richard	x	yeoman	Moor & A	1	1705	y	y	y
Ashford	Thomas	x	labourer	Hill	1		y	y	y
Asplin	Samuel	x		Little S			y	y	n
Beck	William	x		Little S	1		y	y	n
Bennett	Edmond			Beyond W	2	1687			
Bennett	Thomas						n	n	n
Bently	George	x	chandler	Sutton	1		y	y	n
Best	Phillip		yeoman	Greaves			n	n	y
Birch	William	x		Little S	1		y	y	n
Birch	Edward	x		Little S			y	n	n
Bird	Richard	x		Pool dam			y	n	n
Blakesley	Thomas						y	n	n
Bradshaw	William						y	n	n
Cartwright	Kathrin	x	wid. (miller)	Hill			n	n	y
Cartwright	John		Cordwainer	Sutton	5		y	y	y
Cater	George		gent.	Moor & A	2	1685	y	y	y
Cheatle	Thomas			Sutton	1		y	y	n
Clifton	Thomas		Dyer & Shearman	Sutton	2		y	y	y
Coarte	Christopher	x					y	n	n
Cockersall	Benjamin		yeoman	Maney & W	1		y	y	n
Cooke	Thomas	x					n	n	n
Cooper	William	x	nailer	Little Sutton	2		y	y	y
Cooper	John	x	gent	Sutton	12	1681	y	y	n
Cooper	Ralph		gent	Little S.	4	1671	y	y	n
Cooper	Thomas		gent	Little S	1	1707	y	y	n
Cooper	Charles			Sutton	2		y	y	n
Cottrell	Margret	x	widow	Maney & W	1		y	y	n
Dixson	William	x		Walmley	2		y	y	n
Dixson	Edward	x		Walmley			y	n	n
Dodd	George		gent				y	n	y
Eagles	John			Hill	2	1684	y	y	n
Farmer	John		yeoman	Maney	2		y	y	y
Farmer	William	x	blacksmith	Sutton	2		y	y	n
Gilbert	George		husbandman	Greaves	1		y	y	y
Griffin	Robert	x	labourer	Sutton	1		y	y	y
Griffin	Samuel	x					y	n	n
Grosvenor	Leicester		gent	Moor Hall	11		y	y	y
Halfpenny	John	x	tailor	Hill	1		y	y	n
Halfpenny	John			Four Oaks	2		y	y	n
Halfpenny	Richard	x		Hill	1		y	y	n

<u>Name</u>	<u>Forename</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Quarter</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>RTP</u>
Halfpenny	Robert	x		Hill			y n n
Hall	Mary	x	wid. yeoman	Ashfurlong	2		n y y
Hall	John	x		Wylde Green	1		y y n
Hargrave	William	x		Little S			y y n
Harris	Benjamin		labourer	Maney	1		y y y
Hawksford	Mary	x	wid. husbandman	Maney	1		y y n
Heath	James	x		Maney	1		y y n
Hely	Eli	x					y n n
Honeyborne	James		shoemaker	Redway Cop Lane	1		y y n
Honeyborne	William	x	bachelor	Ashfurlong	1		yy n
Honeyborne	Thomas						yn n
Howes	Mathew	x		Sutton	1		
Jackson	John			Sutton	1		
James	George	x	husbandman	Maney/Sutton	2		
James	John		husbandman				yn y
Jeffery	Samuel		grinder - blade mill	Maney	1		yy y
Jesson	Thomas		mercier	Sutton	3	1701	yy y
Jones	John			Moor & A	2		yy y
Keene	Thomas						nn n
Kendrick	John	x	yeoman				yy y
Kendrick	William	x					yn n
Knight	Ann	x					nn n
Leese	James	x		Walmley & B	3		yy n
Leigh	Samuel		gent	Sutton			yn y
Lewis	James	x	poor	Hill Hook	1		yy n
Lines	Thomas	x		Ashfurlong			yn n
Martin	James sen.	x	Royal Oak	Sutton	3		yy n
Martin	James jun.	x	poor		1		yy n
Martin	Valentine	x	poor	Sutton	1		yy n
Mason	Joseph		Warden			1682	yn n
Meadew	John	x		Wigginshill			yn y
More	Michael	x		Moor & A	3		yy n
Mosse	Daniell			Sutton	3		yy y
Mylles	Thomas			Sutton	4	1683	yy n
Norris	Ralph	x	blind	Hill			yn n
Norris	Abraham						yn n
Parker	John	x	weaver	Sutton			nn y
Parker	Henry	x					nn n
Parker	Thomas	x					yn n
Parkes	Edward			Hill	1		yy n
Parkes	John			Hill Hook			yn n
Parton	Thomas			Wishaw			yn n
Patterton	Thomas	x	yeoman	Walmley	1		yy y
Pearsall	William	x		Sutton	2		yy n
Pemberton	Abraham		gent	Beyond the Wood	4	1657	ny n
Perrier	William						n n n
Pickerill	William		Park keeper	Driffold	1		Y y n
Powell	Joseph		gent.	Moor & A	6	1658	y y y
Power	John	x	millier	Sutton			y n n
Rainer	Mary		widow	New Shipton	4		
Reeve	Thomas		cooper				y n y
Renalls	Henry		yeoman	Sutton			n n y
Richards	William	x	weaver	Walmley	1		y y y
Ridding	Thomas	x		Ashfurlong	1		y y n

<u>Name</u>	<u>Forename</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Quarter</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>RTP</u>
Riddings	John		gent.	Sutton	2		y y y
Roads	John	x		Hill Hook	1		yy n
Rogerson	Richard		mercier	Sutton	3		yy y
Rogerson	Robert		innholder	Sutton	5		yy y
Rogerson	Samuel		gent				yn n
Sacheverell	George		Esq	New Hall	17		yy y
Sacheverell	George						
Saunders	Joseph	x					nn n
Saxton	Ann	x	widow				nn n
Scott	Katherin		wid.of gent.	Ashforlong	6		yy y
Simcox	John	x					yn n
Smallwood	Sarah	x	wid of John	Little S	1		ny n
Smallwood	Richard	x		Hill Hook			yn y
Smith	Richard	x	yeoman	Little S	1		yy y
Smith	John	x		Little S	1		yy n
Smith	William			Little S			yn n
Stanyer	Richard		husbandman	Manor Hill			yn y
Steevens	John sen.		weaver & clerk	Sutton	1		yy y
Steevens	John jun						yn n
Steevens	Josiah						yn n
Taylor	Daniell	x	yeoman	Little S			yn y
Taylor	William	x	gent	Little S	2	1672	yy y
Taylor	Thomas	x					yn n
Thorley	William	x	husbandman	Four Oaks			yn Y
Turner	Henery			Maney & W	2		yy n
Turner.	Ralph	x		Hill	2		yy n
Undrell	William		locksmith	Wylde Green			yn y
Veasey	Margret	x	wid. of gent	Maney	4		
Veasey	Christopher	x	husbandman	Maney			yn y
Veasey	John	x	gent	Sutton	2		yy y
Veasey	Raphael	x		Maney	2		yy n
Veasey .	John jun.	x		Maney			yn n
Walker	William	x					yn n
Walldern	Thomas	x		Little S	1		yy n
Watson	William		Rector	Moor&A (The Pa	10		yy y
Watton	William			Sutton	1		yy n
Watts	Joseph						yn n
Webb	Thomas			Hill			yn n
Whyle	John sen	x	Nailer	Moor & A	1		yy y
Whyle	John.jun.	x	husbandman	Moor & A			yn n
Wignall	John	x	husbandman	Sutton	2		yy n
Willcox	Thomas	x		Hill	1		yy y
Wood	William		gent	Peddimore	2	1662	yy y
Woodshaw	John			Hill	1		yy y
Wright	Thomas		gent	Little S		1691	ny n
X	John	x					
Y	Edward H	x					

To the right hon<sup>ble</sup>

Lord Bishop of the great Seal of England

The humble petition of the Warden & the greater number & more of the freeholders of the  
Parish of Sutton Coldfield in the County of Warwick & of the  
greater number & most substantial freeholders of the same Parish

Sheweth

That whereas William Wood gent<sup>l</sup> & some others of the Inhabitants & freeholders of  
the said parish of Sutton Coldfield in or about the year 1680 in the third & fourth years of the reign of  
Your Majesty Charles the second the said Wood & others did & doth complain like this his Majesty's  
against the said Warden & Fellowship of the said Corporation the said Wood & others doth  
complain that the said Warden & Fellowship doth make  
& doth make a great number of cutting of wood & otherwise in certain Lands & tenements which are in the said parish  
Injunction of the said Warden & Fellowship to the said freeholders, that the said Wood & others  
doth doth further show unto your Majesty that the said Warden & Fellowship doth doth  
the nature of the said parish, nor the great benefit & advantage which did accrue to the Inhabitants thereof in  
& more especially to the poorer sort of people by the said Warden & Fellowship doth doth  
were every year cut out & allowed to all the said Inhabitants both rich & poor proportionably for  
there to their great benefit & advantage did stand on Injunction out of the said Wood & others  
of Complaint not only to stop the cutting of wood & other waste which ought not to be made  
but also to stop the Tillage upon the said Common & Waste grounds which was to the mind & intent  
of all or the greater part of the freeholders which were the then Complainants, & contrary to the mind & intent  
of all or the greater part of the freeholders in general - Nevertheless in obedience to the said  
Waste grounds have been forbidden ever since the said Injunction was granted to the said Warden & Fellowship  
in general & almost to the utter mind & undoing of the poorer sort of people for want of wood

Wherefore your petitioner humbly pray & begs of your Majesty that the said Injunction may be order of  
that the said Wood & others doth doth  
& may be returned touching & concerning the said  
matters & things in the said Injunction subject to the said Wood & others  
For your Majesty's & your Majesty's servants

Joseph Wilson Warden  
Richard H. H. H.  
Thomas H. H.  
A. R. H.

Thomas H. H.  
William H. H.  
One H. H.

John H. H.  
Christopher H. H.  
William H. H.  
Thomas H. H.

The humble petition of the Warden and the greater number and most substantiall of the Fellowship of the Corporation of Sutton Coldfield in the Countie of Warwick and of the Greater number and most substantiall Freeholders and inhabitants thereof

Humbly Sheweth

Unto you Lordship that whereas William Wood gent and some others of the inhabitants and Freeholders of The said parish of Sutton Coldfield in or about Hillary Terme in the three and thirtieth yeare of the raigne of our soveraigne Lord King Charles the second that now is did exhibit their Bill of complaint into this honorable Court (as justly they then might) Against the then Warden and Fellowship of the said Corporation thereby setting forth that the said Warden and Fellowship did make And commit wast spoyle and destrucion by falling of woods and otherwise in certaine Lands and tenements wherein the said Freeholders Have a joynt interest with the said Warden and Fellowship to the prejudice of the said Freeholders, And thereupon did pray an Injunction out of this honorable Court to stop the making of any such wast spoyle and destruction for the future, And your petitioners Further shew unto your Lordship that the Sollicitor in the said cause for the said Freeholders (not knowing or considering The nature of the said parish, nor the great benefitt and advantage which did accrew to the Inhabitants thereof in generall And more especially to the poorer sort of people by Tillage upon the Common and Wast grounds in the said parish wherein fields Were every yeare sett out and allotted to all the said Inhabitants both rich and poore proportionably for tillage and getting of Corne There to their great benefitt and advantage) did obtaine an Injunction out of this Honorable Court grounded upon the said Bill Of Complaint not only to stop the falling of wood and other waste which ought not to be made contrary to a decree of this Honorable Court formerly made but alsoe to stop the Tillage upon the said Commons and Wast grounds contrary to the minde and intent Of all or the greatest part of the Freeholders which were the then Complainants and contrary to the mind and intent of all the Rest of the Freeholders in generall — Neverthesse in Obedience to this Honorable Court all Tillage upon the said Commons and Wast ground hath been forborne ever since the said Injunction was granted to the great losse and prejudice of all the Inhabitants In generall and almost to the utter ruine and undoeing of the poorer sort of people for want of Corne.

Wherefore your petitioners humbly pray and beg of your Lordship That the said Injunction may by order of This Honorable Court bee dissolved only as to the hindring and stoping of tillage and getting of Corne And may be confirmed continue and stand in force as to the secureing the woods and all other Matters and things in the said Injunction conteyned, And your petitioners shall ever pray for your Lordships health and hapnesse And subscribe your Lordships most humble servants.





Joseph Mason Warden  
G. Sacheveverell Esq.  
Wm. Watson Rector  
Leicester Grosvenor  
Katherin Scott widow  
John Addyes  
Ralph Cooper  
John Riddings  
John Parker  
William Honnibome  
George Dodd  
Samuall Rogerson  
Thomas Honeybome  
James Honeybome  
John Jackson  
James Leese  
Abraham Norris  
John Veasey  
Benjamin Cockersall  
Margret Veasey  
Thomas Reeve  
John Smith  
Thomas Cheatle  
Kathrin Cartrick widow  
Ralfe Turner  
John Hall  
Margret Cottrell widow  
Thomas Webb  
John Woodshaw  
John Halfpenny  
Richard Halfpenny  
John Roadds  
Edward Parkes  
Thomas Ashford  
William Hargrave  
Josiah Steevens  
William Taylor  
Daniell Taylor  
William Bradshaw  
Thomas Walldern  
William Beck  
James Lewis  
Samuel Asplin  
William Birch  
John James

Robert Griffin  
Richard Ashford  
Thomas Willcox  
John Meadow  
John Powers  
John Jones  
'Thomas Keene  
Richard Bird  
Daniell Mosse  
Thomas Blakesley  
William Farmer  
Joseph Watts  
William Walker  
Valentine Martin  
James Martin sen.  
James Martin jun.  
Thomas Wright  
Henry Renalls  
John Steevens sen

John Agott  
John Kendrick  
John Whyte sen.  
John Whyte jun.  
Mary Rainer widdow  
James Heath  
William (Periam?)  
George Cater  
Henery Turner  
Henry Parker  
William Undrell  
Thomas Parten  
William Wood  
Raphael Veasy  
John Veasy jun.  
John Farmer  
Thomas Addyes sen  
Mary Hauksford  
Will. Pickerill  
Richard Stanyer  
Benjamin Harris  
George James  
William Dixon

Charles Cooper  
Thomas Mylles  
William Pearsall  
Tho. Jesson  
Mathew Howes  
George Bently  
Ely Hely  
John Parkes  
Tho. Cliftoon  
Joseph Saunders  
Richard Rogerson  
Joseph Powell  
Sam Leigh  
Christopher Veasey  
Rob. Rogerson  
William Watton  
Samuel Jeffery  
John Steevens jun.  
William Alport  
John Wignall

Michael More  
Thomas Patterton  
Edward Dixson  
William Richards  
Phillip Best  
Abraham Pemberton  
Edmond Bennett  
Thomas Bennett  
George Gilbert  
Thomas Cooke

John Cartwright  
Christopher Coarte  
William Cooper  
Thomas Ridding  
William Kendrick  
John Cowper  
Tho. Cowper  
John Eagles  
Thomas Taylor  
Ann Knight widdow  
William Thorley  
Edward Birch  
Robert Halfpeny  
John Simcox  
Richard Smallwood  
John Halfpenny  
Thomas Lines  
Ralph Norris

**Col. 1 cont'd.**

Thomas Parker  
John -(x)  
Sarah Smallwood  
Ann Saxton widdow  
Richard Smith  
Samell Griffin  
George Sacheverell  
Edward H-(y)  
Mary Hall widdow

**Col.2 cont'd.**

William Smith.

