

# SEEND CONTRA NAPOLEON, 1798

BY EDWARD BRADBY

\*\*\*The lists that this document often refers to can be found at the bottom of these pages\*\*\*

On the twelfth of April 1798 the neat handwriting of the curate entered in the churchwardens' account book of the village of Seend a list of the parishioners who had 'Voluntarily Contributed in Aid of the Exertions of Government to resist the Attempts of France, who now Insolently and Openly threaten us with an Invasion for the avow'd purpose of Overturning The Religion, The Laws, and The Established Constitution of this Country'. The total of £106 4s., subscribed by 63 individuals, was indeed worthy of being recorded 'as a lasting Monument to the Zeal and Loyalty of those who stood forward in Defence of their King and Country at this important and Critical Juncture'.<sup>[1]</sup> But it has other interests for us as well; for the curate entered not only the names of the donors and the sum which each gave, but in most cases also their occupation, so that the list provides an unusually full outline for a survey of the village community at that time. The present article attempts to use the list as a starting point in order to show what individuals and groups made up that community, and what spirit prompted their collective action.

Before examining the list<sup>[2]</sup> let us briefly recall the national situation which occasioned the collection. The early months of 1798 were certainly a 'critical juncture' in our history. For five years we had been at war with France. Prime Minister William Pitt had organized a coalition of European powers (Spain, Holland, Austria and Prussia), but it had failed to make headway against the fervent patriotism and fighting spirit of the new French republican army. Our allies had dropped out of the war one by one, leaving us to fight on alone. Napoleon Bonaparte, fresh from his successful campaign in Italy, had in 1797 been made commander in chief of the army which was preparing to invade England. In 1797, in the sea battles of Cape St Vincent and Camperdown, the English fleet under Nelson had defeated the French and Dutch fleets, and for the moment held undisputed supremacy of the Channel. But no one knew how long this could last. On 20 April 1798 the king sent a message to the council informing them that 'from various advices received by his majesty, it appears that preparations for the embarkation of troops and warlike stores are now carried on with considerable and increasing activity in the ports of France, Flanders, and Holland with the avowed design of attempting the invasion of his majesty's dominions'.<sup>[3]</sup> The spreading panic had started a run on the banks, and in February the Bank of England, followed by the local banks, had suspended cash payments.

There was, however, a further dimension to the widespread fear of France. Since the 'bloodless revolution' of 1688, the English had enjoyed nearly a century of peaceful and stable government at home, under monarchs who, if they lacked charm and popular appeal, were for the most part content to let Parliament run the country. But in 1789 came the French Revolution, and our ancestors saw the struggle between absolute monarchy and the movement for democratic rights being fought out just the other side of the Channel. The movement for reform and representation in France soon degenerated into a struggle for power, and by 1793 control had passed to the 'Jacobins', who preached the doctrine of equality and fraternity, and put it into practice by guillotining their opponents. King Louis XVI had been executed and a Republic proclaimed. The Christian religion was being persecuted, and a new Calendar was adopted, in which AD 1793 became the Year 2, and the months and days all had new names. It seemed that we were threatened not only with invasion, but with the overthrow of the comfortably established order in Church and State, and the spread of 'levelling' doctrines and atheism.

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In 1797 England, fighting against revolutionary France, received two further dangerous blows. The first was that the sailors, on whom our defence depended, mutinied, first at Spithead and then at the Nore. The mutinies were put down by a mixture of concessions and firmness, and the Dutch fleet was kept off at this dangerous moment by the ruse of Admiral Duncan and his two loyal ships, who kept sending signals to an imaginary reserve fleet. The second blow was financial: the mounting cost of the war meant that Pitt was faced with a budget deficit of £19 million. He bravely decided that £7m of this must be raised by taxation; the other £12m was to be met by loans and voluntary gifts. As part of the campaign to raise this huge sum, a 'Brief' was issued by Royal Letters Patent, authorizing local churches to make collections, and this was the appeal to which Seend parishioners responded in April 1798, as they had on several similar occasions in the past (e.g. in 1678 for the rebuilding of St. Paul's cathedral, and in 1681 for the distressed French protestants).<sup>4</sup>

The List<sup>2</sup> is arranged in alphabetical order, however the amount of contributions ranged from Lord William Seymour's 10 guineas to the 1 shilling contributed by James Hams, labourer, and a glance shows that the size of contribution is a fairly accurate reflection of the individual's place in society. The highest contributors were the gentry and the clergy, whose contributions range mainly from 10 to 5 guineas, but have two interesting exceptions. The first is Major Tuffnel (so spelt in the list), who subscribes 2 guineas, but lets it known (doubtless lest he should seem not to be contributing as befits his rank and profession) that he has already subscribed to the Middlesex Militia. The second exception is the curate whose 1 guinea, compared to the vicar's 7, is no doubt a fair reflection of their respective stipends, but whose position as a clergyman justifies his place amongst the gentry, rather than among the other guinea donors, such as William Crook, the blacksmith, or Betty Brown, the landlady of the Bell.

The next group consists mainly of farmers, of whom there are 19, and their gifts range from 4 guineas to half a guinea. Included in this group are a dyer, two maltsters, a miller, two bakers, two butchers, a cheese factor, an innkeeper, a carpenter, and a blacksmith, all of whom as we know from other sources, were well-to-do-folk owning land in the parish. The final part of the list, with 22 subscribers whose donations ranged from 5s down to 1s, is made up of the small tradesmen and manual workers. There are four shoemakers, a millwright, a carpenter, a shopkeeper, a stone cutter, five cloth workers, a gardener, two labourers and four with no occupations stated. One member of this list however is a little incongruent, William Gaisford, a farmer, donated 2s 6d but since his residence was in Bulkington he may very well have contributed to that parish collection as well as the Seend collection. William was also the churchwarden for Bulkington at the time. Surprisingly that he appears on the list at all for this period since he paid no land taxes nor poor rates until later when he rented Home Farm at Innmarsh from the Duke of Somerset where he ran a small spinning factory. The final person in this part of the list is the parish clerk, Joseph Somner.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now concentrate on the individual groups in the list. Lord William Seymour was the third son of the 8th Duke of Somerset who had married Mary Webb in 1716 gaining ownership of the 'Great House' which Mary had inherited from her grandfather, John Somner, a member of a wealthy clothier family. In 1750 he gained the title of the Duke of Somerset but died 7 years later in 1757. Mary Seymour, dowager Duchess of Somerset remained resident at Seend and built what is now known as Seend Green House. A grand monument was erected in the church at Seend to commemorate her death in 1768. Lord William Seymour, in the list of contributors then rented the property from the 9th Duke and resided there until his death. Whilst resident at Seend he was the local Justice of the Peace and for 6 years, from 1770 to 1776, was churchwarden. At the time of this collection he was 74 years old. He died in 1800 aged 76.

The Honourable and Reverend Edward Seymour was his son. At this time he was probably living with his parents, but later, after the death of his father in 1800 and his mother in 1812, he moved to a house at the other end of the village street, then called the Seend Cottage even though it was a fair

sized house. Later it was renamed as Manor Cottage. After graduating from Oriel College, Oxford, he was in 1793 appointed Vicar of Fisherton-de-la -Mere (near Wylie). The registers of that parish do not record his officiating at even a single wedding between 1793 and the date of his death, and therefore seems likely that he paid the curates to perform the duties, while he lived the life of a country gentleman in Seend, where he certainly did take occasional duty.<sup>6</sup> When he died, in 1820, he was buried in accordance with his wishes, among the graves of his father's servants in the churchyard. They included George Hayward, Lord Williams, gardener, Richard Card, his groom (killed by a fall from his horse), Mrs. Neale, his cook, and Joseph Phillips. Who had been butler in the family for 46 years.<sup>7</sup> Some of them may well have contributed to the £1 5s subscribed by Lord William's servants. The extent of the Seymours' landed property may be judged by the fact that their land-tax contribution in 1798 was £76, about 28 per cent of the total of the parish.

The Awdry family were closely associated with the Seymours both as friends and by marriage. Two figure in the list. Ambrose Awdry, the fifth of that name, had inherited the Manor House and the title Lord of the Manor of Seend Row. In principle he had also inherited the lands and wealth accumulated by his ancestors who had been important clothiers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Unfortunately his father, Ambrose Awdry the fourth, who had rebuilt the Manor House in 1767, had plunged deeply into debt, probably as a result of gambling, and had been outlawed in 1783, his property being 'seized into his Majesty's hands' by the county sheriff. Therefore, when he died in France in 1785, his son inherited an estate which was heavily encumbered with debts. By letting the Manor House and husbanding his resources, he gradually restored the family fortunes, and by 1794 was able to resume his rightful place in the Manor House, having in the previous year been made a captain in the Wiltshire Militia. Peter Awdry was his younger brother, who had married Hester, daughter of Lord William Seymour. Three years before the date of the collection she had died, aged only 25, and it was not until 1813 that he was to marry again and so continue the long line of Ambrose Awdrys, His second marriage was performed by his brother-in-law, the Hon. and Rev. Edward Seymour, who later bequeathed Manor Cottage and other property to him. The Awdrys were the second largest landowners in the parish, their land tax assessment in 1798 amounting to £51, or 19 per cent of the parish total.

Major Charles Tufnell was a young militia officer who had leased Manor Cottage in 1796 and lived there (when he was on manoeuvres) with his young wife Uliana. She was the daughter of a well-known Divine, the Rev. Dr John Fowell, who after being Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford had retired to Kent, and was now Rector of Bishop's Bourne near Canterbury. One of her descendants has preserved an interesting set of letters which her father wrote between 1796 and 1799, including some which he wrote when he was staying in her house in Seend in 1797, together with young John Charles Tufnell, born in Seend and baptized in the church earlier that year, and she was with her husband in London. Apart from a brief reference in May 1797 to the 'sad work' of the naval mutiny at Sheerness, his letters give little hint of the dangers facing the country, and reflect a life in which there was such pleasant neighbourly hospitality among the gentry in the village. On one such occasion the arrival of half a doe, sent by post-coach from Kent, enables him to make presents of venison to the Schombergs and the Mayos, and he is invited to dine with them to enjoy it.<sup>8</sup>

Captain Isaac Schomberg, Royal Navy, was at the time living in Seend Lodge, which he had rented from the parish trustees since 1795, and it is surprising that his name does not figure in the list of subscribers: he is the only noticeable absentee amongst the gentry. It may be that like Major Tufnell, he had subscribed elsewhere, or he may have been absent at the time of the collection. The Manor Cottage family were also on intimate terms with their relatives, the Locke family, who owned much land in Seend, but were at this time living at Rowdeford near Devizes<sup>9</sup>. It may have been this connection which led the young couple to choose Seend for their first family home, though they may well have been influenced also by the thought that in event of invasion, rural Wiltshire was a safer are

than South East Kent. They later bought Lackham House, Lacock and brought up their growing family there.

The next name in the list we can look at is William Bragge, Esq. William was a tenant of Ambrose Awdry in a house at Church Lane from 1794-1801. This house has now been demolished. William served as churchwarden during 1795-1797 which was unusual since William Bragge had no long moved into the village.

We now return to the parochial clergy. At the time Seend (like Erlestoke) was a chapel of ease under the Vicar of Melksham. But although it was usually the vicar himself who attended the Easter vestry meeting and signed the minute nominating the vicar's warden for the coming year, a curate exercised most of the functions of the parish priest. Both vicar and curate at this time were well connected, and would have no difficulty in mixing socially with the Seymours, the Awdrys and the Lockes. The vicar was the Rev. Robert Price, LI.D.. His great-grandfather had been an eminent judge in the early years of the 18th century, his grandmother was the daughter of Lord Arthur Somerset and granddaughter of the Duke of Beaufort, and his mother was a daughter of Viscount Barrington. His elder brother was Uvedale Price of Foxley, well known as the author of *Essays on the Picturesque*, who was later made a baronet. Robert Price had studied law at Christ Church and All Souls College, Oxford, and had been chaplain-in-ordinary to the King before being installed in 1785 as prebendary of Salisbury cathedral in 1786, became Vicar of Melksham in 1791, and was also a prebendary of Durham from 1794 to 1804. From 1792 to 1795 he actually lived in Seend, probably in Manor Cottage. It was in Seend church that his daughter Jane was baptized in 1793 and his first wife buried two years later, in her 31st year. In 1797 he married again, and in 1804 left Melksham to become Vicar of Shoreham in Kent.<sup>10</sup>

The curate and writer of our list was the Rev. Joseph Mayo. He was the only child of another Joseph Mayo, who (like Robert Price) hailed from Herefordshire, but later lived in London and Windsor. Joseph Mayo the curate in the list was sent to Marlborough Grammar School at the age of five as a boarder, spending Sundays, with his uncle William Mayo, rector of Wootton Rivers who was his father's elder brother. When he was 12 year old, in 1776. He was admitted to Eton College, where he was a contemporary of the Duke of Wellington, and also of Sir Frederick Morton Eden with whom he fought on his first day in College, but later formed a lasting friendship. He graduated from University College, Oxford in 1786, went on a continental tour, and was ordained in 1787, being licensed to Huish, a tiny parish near Wootton Rivers, of which his cousin, Charles Mayo was now Rector. Shortly afterwards, thanks to the influence of his uncle William, he obtained the curacy of Seend, where he officiated from 1787 to 1807, also serving as curate to Poulshot for most of this period.<sup>11</sup>

In March 1789 he was married in Seend church to Mary Jane Gibbes, daughter of the Rector of Woodborough, his uncle performing the ceremony. A family history records that when her parents were doubtful about allowing the match, "the lady decided the point by mounting her horse one morning before breakfast and riding from Woodborough to Seend, some 12 miles away, where the nuptial knot was tied". The same source tells us that the house they occupied 'stands on the south side of the Street, as the village is entered from the West'. The house was probably that known later as Three Ways and now as 'The Hatch'.<sup>12</sup>

By 1798 Joseph Mayo's wife had borne him four children (though the eldest had died in infancy), and in the remaining nine years of his ministry in Seend she was to present him with seven more. In 1807 the Mayos and their ten growing children moved to Nibley House in Gloucestershire, where he ran a successful private school with some 40 pupils paying 50 Guineas a year. One more child was born to the Mayos at Nibley (appropriately christened Benjamin), but died nine months later. The lives of the surviving children are well documented, and provide an interesting picture of what could be expected for the sons and daughters of upper-middle-class parents in the 19th century. The four boys all did well. Two became parsons, Joseph (III) following his father's footsteps as curate in charge of

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Poulshot (1820-1823) and then serving as chaplain to Devizes prison before emigrating to the United States in 1839, while William (godson of Captain Isaac Schomberg and his wife) remained in the Salisbury diocese, serving as chaplain to St. Nicholas Hospital and the county prison in Salisbury, and ending life as Rector of Folke, Dorset. The other brothers both became surgeons: Charles entered the service of the East India Company and died of fever in the Madras province at the age of 34; George, who practised in Devizes and was medical officer for the poor of Seend from 1832 to 1837, then emigrated to Australia, where he had a long and successful career. Of the six daughters who grew up in Seend and Nibley, none ever married, and the longest-lived (who died in Bath aged 83), was 2a martyr to chronic rheumatism'. Their father spent the last 50 years of his life as Rector of Ozleworth, Gloucestershire where he died in 1851, aged 87. In his younger days he had been a good fencer, skater and oarsman.<sup>13</sup>

Next after the gentry come the farmers, who, although they do not qualify for "Esq." status, are put a little above the common herd by being designated "Farmer So and So", instead of plain "Mr.". There seems, incidentally, to be a farther shade of differentiation in the list, between, for instance, "Mr. Thomas Biggs, Cheese Factor" and plain 'Henry Scott, Butcher', but on what this is based there is no indication, unless perhaps it is age. The appearance of 19 farmers' names in a list of 63 subscribers clearly points to farming as a major source of the village's livelihood at this time. To judge the full significance of the names we need to know what proportion they represent of all of the farmers active at the time, and whether a comparison of the names of the farmers figuring in the list with those not represented may suggest some common factors. Was it the case, for example, that the subscribing farmers were mainly tenants, who might have had pressure put upon them by their landlords; or might their religious or political affiliations cast some light on their participation?

We will first try to determine the number of subscribers and non-subscribers. There is no complete list of 1798 farmers and their farms, such as is available later through census returns and electoral registers. But a good deal of evidence can be deduced from the land-tax and poor-rate assessments, both of which exist for Seend for the year 1798 and some years before and after that date, linked with the complete and accurate survey provided by the tithe map and award of 1838. In this way it is possible to draw up a fairly complete list of those who were farming enough land in 1798 to make them liable for poor-rate or land tax. The list is reproduced on the Seend parish page, and shows that there were 25 such farmers. To correlate this with our 1798 subscription list we have to make a few adjustments. Of the subscribing farmers only William Gaisford does not figure in the land-tax and poor-rates lists, and he, as explained earlier, was farming over the parish border in Bulkington. We have also to add three more subscribers' names, who were farming at the time, but are not designated 'farmer' on the list: Mrs Delamere (a widow carrying on her late husband's farm) and two bakers who also farmed, Daniel Barnes (listed as 'baker') and Edward May (given no designation). This brings to 21 the number of subscribing farmers (comparing the two lists relating to this article. Please also note that in the list of farmers and their farmed properties four of the names occur more than once). It is thus clear that the subscription list includes the great majority of the farmers: 21 out of 25 (or 22 out of 26 counting Gaisford).

Turning next to the question of tenure, it is evident that by 1798 most of the farms were gentry-owned. The list shows that 22 of the farmers worked land owned by one of the gentry, and 18 of these figure in our list of subscribers. There were, however, four owner-occupiers, all of whom subscribed, as did the tenant of one of them.<sup>14</sup> We can safely say, therefore, that this appeal met with a whole-hearted response from the local farmers, whether owners or (the great majority) tenants.

The most striking absentee is Thomas Ruddy of Seend Park Farm, and tenant of Ambrose Awdry. His land tax assessment shows that he was among the larger tenant-farmers, and he served as overseer of the poor in 1788 and 1811. He was a staunch Methodist, as was his predecessor at Seend Park Farm, Daniel Flower, and his name appears in 1802 at the head of the list of trustees for the chapel at

Seend, opened by John Wesley himself in 1775.<sup>15</sup> It is tempting to conclude that his Methodist allegiance was the reason for his not subscribing to this appeal made through the network of the established Church. Such evidence as we have, however, lends no support to such conclusion. No complete list of the members of the Seend Wesleyan Methodist Society at this time has survived; but we know the names of the 13 trustees of the chapel in 1802 and 1836, and the account-book of the Bradford Circuit lists the subscribers to the Preacher's Fund in 1803 and following years. Comparing these with our list of subscribers we can be fairly sure that George Blake, farmer, Maurice Earle, baker, and Daniel Tucker, farmer, were strong Methodists, and probably also John Earle, carpenter, and Christopher Harris farmer.<sup>16</sup> It would therefore be unwarranted to assume that members of the Methodist Society at this time were any less ready to subscribe to the national appeal than others. On the contrary, there was probably no rigid division in 1798 between the two congregations, and the Methodists would regard themselves as a reforming group within the Church of England. The original deed of 1794 stipulated that when the chapel was built care must be taken to avoid holding services at the same time as those in the village church, and John Lucas, who owned the land, promised to provide the chapel with a book of Church-of-England homilies to be read on any occasion when a Methodist preacher failed to appear.

Of the political leanings of the farmer-subscribers we have only scanty evidence. The most recent election for the knights of the shire had been in 1772, and had been fought largely on local issues. Ambrose Goddard being favoured by North Wiltshiremen in general, and backed by the Awdrys, Longs, and Penruddocks, while on the other side Henry Herbert, MP for the Borough of Wilton, and backed by his cousin the Earl of Pembroke, was favoured by the South Wiltshiremen and represented by his opponents as the rich outsider. Six of the men on our list, including four of the farmers, voted at that election (Ambrose Awdry, George Biggs, William Crook, John Haines, Edward May and Edwards Whatley), and all but one voted for Goddard, as did the other eight Seend voters; John Haines alone voted for Herbert, for what reason we can only guess.<sup>17</sup> If this vote is typical it perhaps gives evidence of solidarity of the large landowners, farmers and providers, and their attachment to the *status quo*. The country was solidly behind Pitt in the fight against France, and that would not have been an issue even if there had been an election at this time.

Of the individual farmers little is known, with the exception of Daniel Jones, who farmed Egypt, Moiety and Berrill's Lane farms for the Duke of Somerset. He was also the Duke's bailiff, with a salary of £10 a year, and a neatly kept book containing his accounts as bailiff is in the WHSC.<sup>18</sup> As might be expected, many of the other names in our list feature in his accounts: for instance, John Haines is paid for 'haling timber and other work', Christopher Seymour (4s. for a bushel of pears); carpentry is carried out by Richard Dalimere, and 'Crook the blacksmith' appears frequently. When Daniel Jones died in 1811 (aged 86) he left £10 a year, from the income of some land in Poulshot parish, of which £5 was to go to the churchwardens of the chapelry of Seend, £2 to be divided between four choir members 'who constantly attend the chapelry', £2 to the Sunday School and £1 to be divided among eight children attending 'such school as shall be under the direction of the Minister or Churchwardens of Seend'. Unfortunately the Poulshot land was soon sold, and as the new owner refused to continue the payment, it lapsed. We know that the church choir sang at Jones's funeral, for Edward Kite relates how a 'spade guinea' paid to one of the choir members - a Mr. Sainsbury - was kept by his sister, Mrs. Earle, and paid as part of the honorarium to the choir for singing at his funeral in 1824.<sup>19</sup> Kite also states that the chapel (i.e. church) choir sang at the funeral of farmer James Blake (in 1818), and that he was a Wesleyan preacher. On this occasion Daniel Tucker (our subscriber or his son) played the clarinet and George Earle (probably son of John Earle on our list) the bass viol.<sup>20</sup>

Distributed among the farmers in this part of the list, and ranking with them in the size of contribution, were a dozen men and women who could be loosely classed as 'providers'. They owed their prosperity partly to their trade, catering for the needs of a settles and largely self-contained rural community, and partly from owning land, which they might farm themselves or let out for grazing. All

of them figure in the land-tax lists either for land or for 'stock in trade', and the lists do not show any other 'providers' of comparable standing at the time: the subscribers constitute the group.

Joseph Smith the dyer (or 'blew-dyer' as he is often called in the poor-rate books) had been working at Seend Head House for over 20 years, and was to flourish there for over 20 more.<sup>21</sup> Jacob Tayler was doubtless one of the Taylers who owned Baldham Mill (just over the Seend-Keevil border) and were maltsters and mealmen in the 19th century. They also owned Badbury House in Seend. Together with the other maltster, Robert Hall, and Stephen Young, the miller, they probably served an area much wider than the village. The others can be thought of as part of the machinery by which the village provided for its own needs. There were two bakers, Daniel Barnes in the Street - where the 'Old Bakehouse' continued to provide bread and cakes until 1967 - and Maurice Earle in Seend Cleeve.<sup>22</sup> There were likewise two butchers, Henry Scott of Martinslade, who later bought Somners' Farm (now rebuilt as the Vicarage), and George Ford of what was to become Seen Row Farm in Seend Cleeve.<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Elizabeth Brown was the 'Betty Brown' who was hostess at the Bell Inn from 1794 to 1828, whose 'best beer' was advertised on a London sign-board in the 1820s, and who was commemorated by an inscription on the church wall when she died, aged 83.<sup>24</sup>

Closely related to Betty Brown was Thomas Biggs, cheese factor. Two men of this name were alive in 1798. One was her brother, who in 1795 had over to her the family business of running the Bell Inn, and was now farming in a small way, aged 54. The other was his son, aged 20, who certainly was a cheese factor in 1813. The handsome contribution of a guinea is likely to have come from the father, though I have not come across any reference to him as a cheese factor.<sup>25</sup>

Finally in this group we find a carpenter and a blacksmith, essential to a village at that time, not only for making doors and furniture and shoeing horses, but for much of the building work and repair of farm implements. The blacksmith, William Crook, qualified as a freeholder to vote in the election of knights of the shire in 1772, as did the carpenter Roger Hillier, in 1819. Hillier was one of a long line of Hillier carpenters working from Ivy Cottage, at the entrance to Rusty Lane, from about 1780 to 1958. William Crook occupied premises belonging to the parish trustees and forming part of what now is called Seend Lodge. A century earlier it had been the work-place of George Newton, who became well known as a clock-maker.<sup>26</sup>

The important place which this group of farmers and providers had in the village can be judged from the number of them who served as churchwardens and overseer of the poor, and thus had a major responsibility for administration and relief work in the parish. Of the 30 men on our list who fall into this group, 16 served as churchwarden, often several times and for long periods (e.g. Edward May, 1763-6, 1777-9, 1799-1801; Samuel Jefferies, 1799-1801, 1802-1812), and 20 served as overseer of the poor, 9 of them more than once.<sup>27</sup> As churchwardens they often served alongside members of the gentry, and the signatures (or sometimes the marks) under the minutes of the vestry meetings tell the same story. The village was administered by an unofficial but easily recognizable group of property-owning gentry, farmers and providers, who knew and trusted each other and were, in theory at least, answerable to the village as a whole through the elections and presentation of accounts at the annual Easter vestry meetings. The stability of this ruling group is further illustrated by the land-tax assessment lists; of the 29 farms which can be traced, 12 were farmed by the same family from 1791 to 1840, and in 13 cases out of the 16 in which the tax in both years is ascertainable, the sum remained unchanged throughout the period.

The tail end of our list contains 22 names of the contributors who could broadly be classed as manual workers (with the exception of farmer William Gaisford, noted earlier). They are arranged strictly in descending order of amounts contributed, with one interesting exception. This is Joseph Somner, the until his death in 1814 Parish Clerk, who contributes 10s 6d., but is placed below three contributors of 5s., one of whom is another Joseph Somner described as "Shoemaker". To disentangle the various Somners in Seend at this date is not easy, particularly as both the Joseph Somners married wives

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called Ann. It is certain that Joseph Somner the parish clerk was 13 years senior to the other Joseph. Born in 1755, he served as clerk from 1788 until his death in 1834. He qualified, by virtue of his office, to vote for a knight of the shire in 1819, and an obituary notice in the *Wiltshire Gazette* stated that he had only been absent from his duty on one Sunday in the 45 years of his term as parish clerk. The evidence of the marriage and baptismal registers suggests that at the time of which we are writing he was married but childless, while the cordwainer (aged 30) was married with four or five young children. Thus on account of age, position, and size of contribution one would have expected the elder Joseph to be listed before the younger. A possible explanation for the order adopted by the curate may be found in the fact that the younger Joseph was related to the Biggses, who were well-known members of the farming community, being great nephew of George and probably related also to William Biggs, both of whom paid land-tax in this year.<sup>28</sup>

It is not known if the two Somner families were related, nor whether either of them could trace their ancestry back to the 17th century Somners of Seend Green House or the ex-grocer gentry of Rew Farm in the 18th century. Certainly all the Somners one come across in Seend around 1800 are much lower in the social scale, and their name does not appear among the ruling group of churchwardens and overseers of the poor after 1770 (when Daniel Somner of Rew Farm completed a seven year spell of service as overseer).

The other person who might perhaps have been expected to be higher in the list is John Earle, carpenter, since he belonged to the same family as Maurice Earle the baker, who figured in our second group, and in 1819 both of them were entitled, as freeholders, to vote for the knights of the shire.

Mrs. Crook was Sarah Crook, who kept what was probably a small grocery shop from 1786 (or earlier) till her death in 1803.<sup>29</sup> Richard Shell the stone cutter played the cello in the band which accompanied the church services. The vestry book records that his son Thomas succeeded him as church cellist, and that when the organ was installed in 1830 the cello was presented to Thomas "as a gratuity from the Parish" in recognition of their having played it, father and son, for 40 years.

The position of the five cloth-workers is not easy to assess. Two of them, John Pontin or Ponton and Benjamin Milsom or Melksham, figure in the land-tax lists, suggesting that they were reasonable prosperous. James Cornick, on the other hand, was receiving relief from the parish in 1798 - unless it be another of the same name. In the previous year Sir F. M. Eden (Joseph Mayo's friend from Eton days) had published his great survey of the *State of the Poor*, and had taken Seend as one of his examples. Part of his account of the position of manual workers at this time is worth quoting: 'As the chapelry consists almost entirely of dairy farms, and consequently affords very little employment in husbandry, except during the hay-harvest, the labouring poor are very dependent on the neighbouring towns, where the cloth manufacture is carried on; but unfortunately, since the introduction of machinery, which lately took place, hand-spinning has fallen into disuse.' The result was, he explains, that the gap between the average agricultural labourer's wage of 8s. and a modest family's expenditure of 14s. could no longer be made up by the earnings of his wife and children, and they had to turn to the parish for relief. On the other hand Eden says that weavers and other skilled workmen could earn 17s to £1 1s. a week, though he does indicate what demand there was for their work. Some or all of our five cloth-workers may have been employed at Seend Head fulling mill and dye-house, or at Stephen Hillman's mill in Bulkington.<sup>30</sup>

There is little doubt that by 1798 the cloth-trade at Seend was on the way out. In 1817, when the first detailed list of tradesmen appears in the poor rate book, it contains no weavers, and the only names connected with the cloth trade are those of William Gaisford the clothier, who in 1814 had started a small spinning factory in the row of cottages next to the Methodist Chapel, and John Dean, tailor. Gaisford's factory did not prosper, and closed in 1826.<sup>31</sup> The register of baptisms from 1813 gives the father's occupation, and so provides some evidence of the employment position. A few weavers

appear in the early pages of the register, the last being in 1827, and by 1841, when the detailed census returns give the first complete picture of the population, there was not one person in Seend employed in spinning, weaving or finishing cloth.

The List ends with two men called just 'labourer'. They may possibly have been working on the Kennet and Avon canal, which was at the time being dug through Seend's northern valley.<sup>32</sup> More probably they were agricultural labourers, and the figure quoted above from Sir, F. M. Eden's survey reminds us of the need, when looking at the subscription list, to adjust our ideas of the value of money. One shilling seems a small sum to us (the equivalent of 5p), but if we relate it to the agricultural labourer's wage at the time of 8s. a week, it represents almost a day's wages, and so would be equivalent of at least £15-£20 today (c2011)

In fact manual workers in our list of contributors are by no means representative of their layer in society as were the farmers and providers in theirs. The detailed accounts kept by the overseer of the poor for this period have survived, and show that in 1798 no fewer than 70 people or families were on regular monthly relief payments (including 13 bastard children), and besides this each month emergency relief was given to another dozen or more.<sup>33</sup> Eden estimates the population of Seend at 600-700, and so it is clear that our 63 contributors were only the tip of the iceberg in respect of wealth.

A minor puzzle in this section of the list is the appearance of plain 'Mr. Edward Coles' (2s. 6d.) and of 'Richard Pritchard' and 'John little' (1s.) without even a 'Mr'. Possibly Mr. Coles was a retired farmer or tradesman. The other two were, I think, farmer-bakers, one an old man and one a young. The only Richard Pritchard who appears to fit the dates was the father of our two farmers Robert and Joseph. His mark appears in the vestry book (e.g. 1780, 1792), and when he died in 1809, having outlived his wife, he named several grandchildren in his will.<sup>34</sup> It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in 1798 he was an old man. In the will he is called 'yeoman', but as both he and his son Joseph appear under 'Stock in Trade' in the land-tax list for 1798, he was probably (like Joseph) baker-cum-farmer, and may have been living with Joseph in his old age. All the same, the small size of his contribution and the omission of even a 'Mr.' to his name are odd, and it is possible that there was another Richard Pritchard of whom there is no other local record. John Little junior (1774-1832) had married three years before 1798, and already had two baby daughters. He is called 'baker' in 1814, but in 1798 may well have been helping his father on the farm. His wife was to present him with five more daughters before their son John was born in 1814.<sup>35</sup>

Four women contributors are given no description: Mrs Brown and Mrs Dalimere are easy to place, and have been referred to above, but no other reference has been found to Mrs. Whiteing or Mrs. Bollen, though the latter name was common in Seend, and the family is probably that which gave the name to Bolland's Hill, on the road from Seend to Melksham.

Could we have looked in on a Sunday service in Seend church in 1798, we should have seen the contributors, with their families and (in the case of the gentry) their servants, occupying most of the pews in the nave, and arranged very much as they are in our list. Seats in the church were at that time bought and sold with the houses to which they were allocated, and we can get a good idea of the arrangement from the two plans of the 'sittings', one (unfortunately fragmentary) from 1727, and one from 1859. These show the gentry having the front seats of the nave (Mr. Edward Seymour in 1727 actually sitting to the east of the clerk's desk or 'reading pew'), with the farmers, carpenters, bakers, etc. ranged behind them. Some pews were reserved for the gentry's servants. Behind the reserved pews and in the gallery were the 'free sittings' (numbering in 1859 about 70 below and in the gallery 10 adults and 150 children).<sup>36</sup> To this packed and orderly congregation the Rev. Mr. Mayo doubtless read the authorization for a collection, from the elegant wooden pulpit (replaced later by the present heavy stone one). Did they pledge their support straight away? And who actually collected the money? Probably it was the parish clerk, Joseph Somner, or possibly the sexton.<sup>37</sup>

Perusal of the list has shown us a village community in which everyone had his place and knew it, and in which the gradations of rank and influence corresponded closely to those of wealth and landed property. Compared with the village of today the class distinctions in 1798 appear more openly and are more rigid. If, however, we contrast it with what had existed in France before 1789, we can detect some of the features which made it possible for English society to adapt to economic change without violent revolution. In France, under a monarch whose powers were almost unlimited, there were two privileged classes, the Clergy and the Nobles, and a "Third Estate" comprising the great bulk of the population, with no say in the government but carrying almost the whole burden of taxation (from which the other two orders were exempt). In contrast, our English village has shown a close interlocking between the gentry and the farmers and 'providers', constituting a semi-official ruling group, answerable in the last resort to the village as a whole, responsible for most of what local administration was thought necessary, and also for relief to alleviate poverty and sickness among the less privileged. Moreover, the burden of financing such relief work, through the poor-rate, was shouldered by this group, and every member of the group was assessed on the same basis. We have also seen the borderlines between the main classes tending to become blurred, through the use of the nicely adjusted scale of titles. Indeed the very continuity of the subscription list bears witness to the solidarity of the village community: true, the Lord comes first and the labourer last, but between is a continuum, with every individual's contribution carefully noted and given an equal share of space.

It was to be another 17 years before the threat of the French invasion was finally lifted, and the strain which the long war placed on the country's finances soon led to tougher expedients for raising revenue, including the first introduction of income-tax in December 1798. But the voluntary contributions to which Seend had added its mite earlier in that year, besides being a significant sign of the unity and determination of the people, did make a substantial contribution to the war effort; for Pitt was able to tell the House of Commons in December that they had exceeded his estimate of £1,500,000, and had already brought in more than £2,000,000.

## NOTES

- 1 From Original entry in the vestry book - source WSHC 1048/23
- 2 List to be found under History and Documents on Worton Page of Wiltshire OPC Project - Seend Contra Napoleon
- 3 Annual Register 1798 p.211.
- 4 Also mentioned in the vestry book
- 5 Here and further on much use has been made of Seend Land Tax Assessments (WRO A/3/15/12/298) (LTA) and to the Seend Poor Rate Accounts (WRO 1048/47 and 1048/48) (PRA)
- 6 Seend parish registers used here and later are in the WSHC (WRO1048/2); Fisherton registers (WRO522/4, 522/6. He took weddingings in 1810, 1812 and 1820 and also a burial; Devizes Museum (DM) Cuttings, II, p 265. Appointment: J Foster, Alumni Oxonienses. He voted in the shire election of 1819 as a Seend resident; electoral list in Devizes public library.
- 7 Devizes Museum Cuttings, II, p 265
- 8 Letters in possession of Miss Richeldis Wanborough of Dorchester
- 9 A letter of January 1799 refers to the death of 'our poor aunt Locke'. This was Bridgen, unmarried sister of Wadham Locke. She died aged 93: WRO 1597/3, 1597/20
- 10 Devizes Museum Cuttings II, p. 247 XXVI, p. 47; J. Foster, Index Ecclesiasticus; Le Neve and Hardy, Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae; DNB.
- 11 He celebrated weddingings at Poulshot fairly regularly from 1788 to 1805: WRO 1551/6.
- 12 C. H. Mayo, Genealogical Account of Mayo and Elton Families (2nd ed., 1908). P. 358f.
- 13 Mayo; George's appointment as MO minuted in the vestry book
- 14 John Rudman (or Redman) was an owner-occupier and also a tenant of Ambrose Awdry; Edwards Whatley was an owner-occupier and also a tenant of Locke.
- 15 Seend Methodist Chapel, 1775-1975 (Bicentenary Booklet) in Devizes Museum, Wiltshire Tracts 182
- 16 Bradford Circuit Book: WRO 1103/4; title deeds of Seend Chapel in custody of circuit minister.
- 17 1772: electoral list in the WRO. For political background, see Victoria County History Wiltshire, 5, 200f.
- 18 WRO 1332/12
- 19 Will: Schomberg, Seend Monumental Inscriptions, in Devizes Museum Misc. MSS V; DM Cuttings, II, p 265.
- 20 A succession of Daniel Tuckers farmed Pile Farm c1780 to 1885; they can be traced through LTA, census returns, and Kelly's Directory.
- 21 WRO 1090/52; poor rate accounts; LTA
- 22 In the house at the top of Row Lane. Now Greenacre, no. 781 on the tithe-map.
- 23 WRO 212B/4950; Census return 1841
- 24 E. Brady, *Seend, a Wiltshire Village Past and Present*. P. 170.

- 25 Based on parish registers, poor rate accounts and Land Tax accounts
- 26 See *Antiquarian Horology*, vol. 12, no. 4; electoral lists: 1772 in WRO; 1819 in Devizes public library
- 27 Vestry book
- 28 Parish registers; poor rate accounts; 1819cp. note 26; Wiltshire Gazette 15 May 1834; will of George Biggs, 1818 (WRO).
- 29 Land Tax Assessments; Parish Register
- 30 Sir F. M. Eden, *State of the Poor*, iii, p. 794. K. Rogers, *Wiltshire and Somerset Woollen Mills*, p. 110.
- 31 Bradby, pp. 83-84.
- 32 Ibid, p. 19f.
- 33 WRO 1084/45. Eden also mentions that the window-tax (on houses with seven or more windows) was paid by 63 Seend houses in 1797, which bears out the wealth pattern suggested above.
- 34 Will: WRO
- 35 Seend parish regs.
- 36 1727 in WRO 1048/29; 1859 in Devizes Museum, "Seend Cuttings".
- 37 A minute of 1753 in the vestry book suggests that both these functionaries were in the habit of 'going about the Parish for their offerings', though these were no doubt for their own benefit.



Seend - Contra  
Napolean List of Subs



Seend - Farm  
Occupiers and Owner