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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniel C. Beaver. *Hunting and the Politics of Violence before the English Civil War.* Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xii + 173 pp. $95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-87853-1.

Reviewed by James Robertson (University of the West Indies, Mona)
Published on H-Law (October, 2009)
Commissioned by Michael J. Pfeifer

Hunting and the English Civil War

This tantalizing study engages with the English Forest Laws, the distinct law code covering the royal forests and primarily designed to protect the king's deer, in the twenty years before 1642. Why did these jurisdictions prompt so many riots as the nation divided between Royalists and Parliamentarians? Daniel C. Beaver has trawled through the files of the Forest Courts to present four case studies where he fills out the courts' procedural records with depositions generated in suits before the Court of Star Chamber or participants' family papers. This approach generates plenty of detail demonstrating the local impacts of forest law, a medieval institution that weighed hard on territory under its jurisdiction.

These studies engage with the prestige that surrounded hunting and venison, while disputes that simmered in the 1630s and exploded in 1642 highlight royal interference in a core strand in gentry culture. Investigating the questions of honor invoked in a succession of local quarrels offers a fresh perspective on local communities' decisions to attack royal forests as King Charles I's Personal Rule crumbled into civil war. Some of the book's most tantalizing references sample later royalist critiques of postwar societies that demeaned the honor of hunting. *Newmarket Heath*, a pamphlet play from 1649, jeered at the misadventures of some London merchants on a hunting trip who mangled the archaic jargon of the hunt before getting their come-uppances, with an alderman breaking his neck and the Lord Mayor hanged in a tree. In this royalist fantasy, the humor centers on the snob appeal of deer hunts whose rituals provided shibboleths for gentry and aristocratic culture. A further pamphlet from the 1660s, "The Court and Kitchen of Elizabeth, Commonly Called Joan Cromwell," grumbled that the civil wars had cheapened the aristocratic monopoly of venison, as a prestigious dish became just another meat.

It is clear that the king's deer were difficult neighbors. This had been so through the Middle Ages. In the 1630s, the royal forests continued to protect deer for the king's "princely recreation and delight of hunting and chasing," which imposed additional constraints on farming such areas (p. 62). Livestock that grazed in the woods were to be removed for the "fence month" or "forbidden month" of the fifteen days on either side of Midsummer's Day to leave the deer undisturbed after their fawns were born (p. 70). Under forest jurisdiction, gathering firewood, felling timber, keeping dogs whose front toes had not been amputated, or erecting fences that blocked wandering herds of deer were all offences. Clashes were inevitable, even without factoring in poaching, itself feeding a wider appetite for venison–and here a book on the forests that does not index "Robin Hood" only addresses some of the cultural resonances of hunting in English culture. Beaver highlights local consequences of the revived enforcement of the Forest Laws during the 1630s. Showing that as King Charles limited new peerages or knighthoods, alternative strategies for social display became sought after, with aspiring aristocrats and gentry securing grants making their estates deer parks, which delivered prestige but imposed new regulations onto their neighbors. Novel applications of ancient privileges provoked squabbles and skirmishes.

All these case studies highlight the nuisance value of the forests and their laws to neighboring communities. Monopolizing the honor of the hunt to one family could infuriate its gentry rivals. Attempts to close access to neighboring villages' livestock threatened poorer householders' survival and prompted communities to rally against overzealous administrators by invoking their own ancient traditions. The stories explored here mostly consider gentry and farmers' grievances, though at Windsor Forest, where challenges from local gentry

were less prominent, clashes occurred with another constituency, townspeople from neighboring Windsor.

The discussions are solidly grounded in local landscapes, with each case study including a clear local map. They consider local ecology and the ways neighbors understood it. The benefit of a succession of closely delineated reports is that they can challenge the preconceptions that academic readers bring to them. There is plenty here to illustrate gentry neighbors jockeying for local prestige, with the Temple family's success in securing a grant of a deer park in Buckinghamshire provoking nighttime hunting raids by young men from neighboring gentry families. What remains unexpected is that in 1642 the family who led the midnight raiders declared for King Charles, while Sir Peter Temple, MP, was for Parliament. In Waltham Forest, an ancient royal forest in Essex, the rights inherited by the tenants of Cheshunt, a manor formerly belonging to a much-favored medieval monastery, excluded their common lands from the surrounding forest as a privileged "purleu." The tenants' cherished privileges to hunt and to graze their beasts over midsummer were challenged by local gentlemen holding forest offices who sought to extend the forests' jurisdictions. A forest official's authority allowed a would-be enclosing landlord to initiate Star Chamber prosecutions when his tactics provoked communal resistance, which then generated fascinating testimony about the value the local community put on their ancient privileges. Here, though, we find that a local clergyman who encouraged the villagers was an advocate of Archbishop Laud's high Anglicanism. In a third instance, attempts to tighten up the local administration of the royal forest at Windsor Great Park clashed with long-established poaching networks that sent venison to London via Windsor. The public facade of obsequious gift giving by municipal officials overlaid these same individuals' trespasses in the surrounding royal forest. All these local tensions exploded in 1642.

Finally, Gloucestershire, a region explored in Beaver's *Parish Communities and Religious Conflict in the Vale of Gloucester, 1590-1690* (1998), presents a particularly bloody massacre of deer in 1642 to highlight the shifting balance between local values and central authority in the 1630s. Corse Lawn Chase belonged to Lionel Cranfield, first Earl of Middlesex. The evidence gathered here suggests that the Earl, a London businessman before he became King James's disgraced ex-royal treasurer, not only turned his residual court contacts to account to secure a new grant of chase status for this estate, but then also alienated his local servants by a penny-pinching management style while offending all his Gloucestershire neighbors too. Middlesex's activities demonstrate how reviving the Forest Laws could fulfill local gentlemen's nightmares about a parvenu buying into their society. Efforts to enforce anti-poaching laws led to the Earl's replacement of established officials with newcomers, some of whom were Catholics, while he overreacted to small-scale wood stealing by dragging offenders off to the Star Chamber in London. In a sustained exercise in bad lordship, the Earl alienated the local farmers so that they lined up with the region's gentry who poached deer in coverts that disgruntled gamekeepers did little to defend. As the royal regime that the Earl had invoked to support his innovations crumbled, plenty of Middlesex's neighbors joined to massacre his deer.

What remains striking about each of these reconstructions is that while there were distinct contexts for each dispute, everything seemed calm through the 1630s before erupting in 1642. King Charles's administration supported individual officials when they applied the Forest Laws, allowing them to threaten offenders with hearings before the royal court of Star Chamber, whatever the novelty of their claims or however minor the victims were. These prosecutions generated the archival troves that permit Beaver's reconstructions, but this style of central government, far more than the Forest Laws or other archaic jurisdictions, then helped provoke all the lists of grievances about the king's prerogative and the interminable committees that characterized the Long Parliament's opening stages.

A six-page conclusion leaves little space to weave together all the fascinating threads displayed here. An effort to locate these grassroots disputes within academic discussions on the ways that English societies splintered in 1642 does note parallels with Andrew Wood's studies of the lead miners of the Peak Country in Derbyshire. But the absence of any consideration of the late Allan Everett's discussions of local gentry communities and the fault lines where these fractured as the country slid into war is regrettable, both because so many of the issues that Beaver discusses bear on the tender interface between family honor and community values at the center of such choices and because Everett also noted that counties, including royal forests, proved particularly vulnerable to disruptive grants of authority from the center.[1] Beaver's comments focus instead on the ease with which news from London reached local societies.

This volume highlights the perceived novelty in the enforcement and delegation of the Forest Laws during the 1630s, though there is less discussion of how Caroline practice actually contrasted with earlier royal administrative styles. We are offered images of James I's

projection of paternal kingship to farmers in the vicinity of Windsor, promising them good lordship and a sympathetic hearing for their customs, but we also see instances of his exclusion of offences against the Forest Laws from general pardons. A bigger question, given King James's own reorganization of many conventions for his royal hunts, would be in the local-level contrasts that his rule offered with the last twenty years of Elizabeth's reign. How had these facilities been run as the royal Diana aged? When administrative innovations were provocative, how far was King Charles reaping where his predecessors had sown?

Readers will come away from this study informed about a shadowy jurisdiction with the potential to trouble local economies and gentry value systems alike. The stories reported here offer excellent material for lectures. I am not so sure that this monograph will fulfill the ambition expressed in Beaver's introduction to offer the specificity of micro-historical analyses in a format that can work in the classroom, but the book should succeed in his further goal to prompt readers to recognize that the "forests were more than museums of law" and then encourage them to venture into these spaces to explore "political awareness in England" (p. x). *Hunting and the Politics of Violence* looks likely to earn a place on postgraduate reading lists and prompt further research. Readers will look at the royal forests with a heightened awareness of their distinct law, culture, and experience, as well as an increased awareness of the significant place that hunting continued to play in visions of English society.

Note

[1]. Allan Everett, *The Local Community and the Great Rebellion* (London: Historical Association, 1969), 22.

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Citation: James Robertson. Review of Beaver, Daniel C., *Hunting and the Politics of Violence before the English Civil War.* H-Law, H-Net Reviews. October, 2009.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25585

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