

merchants acted as moneylenders to both the aristocracy and gentry.

**Yeomen.** Next down the social scale were the yeoman farmers. These owned their own land, or rented large chunks of land from aristocracy or gentry. They did not claim to be 'gentlemen' and they worked their farms directly. Some successful yeomen, because they were hard-headed 'business farmers', were as rich as the gentry, but most were not. Yeoman farmers had done well in the later Elizabethan period and were to continue to prosper; some moved up into the gentry. Below the yeoman farmers were the 'cottagers' – those who had a few acres of land and also worked for yeoman farmers or the gentry.

The yeoman farmers seem to have done well between 1540 and 1640. They did not have the expenses of the aristocracy and gentry since they did not have to keep up a grand 'lifestyle' to impress others. The one expense they did take on was the rebuilding, improvement and extension of their houses. Many large farmhouses in England date from this period, known as the 'Great Rebuilding', and show how prosperous the yeomen were.



A yeoman's farmhouse at Bishopstone, Wiltshire, built in 1637.