

THE MEDIEVAL COUNTRYSIDE 16

PEASANTS AND LORDS IN THE MEDIEVAL ENGLISH ECONOMY

Essays in Honour of Bruce M. S. Campbell



Edited by
Maryanne Kowaleski, John Langdon, and Phillipp R. Schofield

BREPOLS

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INTRODUCTION

John Langdon, Maryanne Kowaleski, and Phillip R. Schofield

Pioneering figures in any branch of academic life are always treasured. Professor Bruce Campbell is clearly one of these. His publishing record has been a model of discipline and perseverance. As one can see from the bibliography of his works at the end of this volume, his research career began with a focus upon field systems and other aspects of medieval Norfolk agriculture (and particularly that of the eastern part of the county), reflecting his 1975 Cambridge doctoral thesis (in geography) under the supervision of Alan Baker, but over the 1980s his research gradually began to include the whole of England (and eventually beyond). This intention was originally signalled in 1988 with his review essay, ‘Towards an Agricultural History of Medieval England’ and, published the same year, an examination of the cultivation of vetches — a type of legume with fertilizing properties, the increased presence of which in English crops regimes over the fourteenth century was felt by Campbell to illustrate medieval propensities for agricultural improvement.¹ A key methodological decision was his shift from his original focus on court rolls to manorial accounts and eventually inquisitions *post mortem*, which could supply more strictly quantifiable data over geography and time. Part of this inclination stemmed from his original home in historical geography,² where the sys-

¹ Campbell, ‘Field Systems’; Campbell, ‘Towards an Agricultural Geography’; Campbell, ‘Diffusion of Vetches’.

² Although Campbell’s academic homes at Queen’s University, Belfast, have varied between history and geography, he is now currently Emeritus Professor in the School of Geography, Archaeology, and Paleoecology.

tematic presentation of data over substantial areas is paramount; Campbell has held to that methodological principle and rigour throughout his career.³

The first major publication to stem from this shift in focus and method was the collaborative project with Derek Keene, James Galloway, and Margaret Murphy called *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply*, which studied the relationship between London and the agricultural hinterland that kept it fed around the year 1300. Although more a regional than national study involving ten of England's counties, it clearly had the imprint of Campbell's evolving views and methodologies, the latter also evident in important articles with John Power developing mapping techniques for exploring the medieval English agrarian economy.⁴ Another critical work from this period was also Campbell's *Past and Present* article with Mark Overton comparing agrarian productivity in England over many centuries.⁵

The truly monumental work, however, was his *English Seigniorial Agriculture* (hereafter *ESA*) of 2000, which now stands as a pivotal work for understanding the medieval agriculture of England. In his rigorous analysis of crop and animal production on English demesnes (that is, the farms operated directly for lords as opposed to those of their tenants or lessees) and the patterns that agriculture imposed upon the medieval English countryside, Campbell was able to examine the profile of this type of agriculture over a two-century period from 1250 to 1450 at national, regional, and county levels. Altogether, Campbell provided a huge reservoir of information about medieval agriculture tabulated, graphed, and mapped in a clear and convincing fashion. He was also able to address many key issues puzzling historians of the medieval era. These included key statements on the importance of London in shaping English agriculture and the general economy at the time (in effect following upon *A Medieval Capital*), the production of new estimates of population for England, especially around its peak in 1300 (and yielding a surprisingly low number),⁶ and new thoughts on the nature of the perceived early fourteenth-century economic and demographic crisis. Against the flow of the literature, Campbell put more

³ As Campbell memorably said to one of the editors (about a decade ago): 'It is the data that matters; everything else [anecdotal evidence, etc.] is just words.'

⁴ Campbell and Power, 'Mapping the Agricultural Geography'; and Campbell and Power, 'Cluster Analysis'.

⁵ Campbell and Overton, 'A New Perspective'.

⁶ Campbell, *ESA*, ch. 8; see also Langdon, 'Bare, Ruined Farms?' (in this volume), where extents-for-debt data tend to reinforce Campbell's estimate of population around 1300.

emphasis on the lack of demand for agricultural products rather than agriculture's failure to supply them.⁷ Although Campbell was fully cognizant that his analysis was far from a complete picture of medieval English agriculture because direct demesne cultivation likely accounted for at best a third and perhaps as little as a fifth of all arable land around 1300 and steadily contracted after that,⁸ Campbell's analysis, even of this more limited view of agriculture, nonetheless had the admirable ability to be both extensive (that is, giving magisterial overviews) and intensive (that is, focusing upon individual examples in a very precise and detailed way).⁹ As such, he provides a critical base of information from which to analyse and compare other agricultural sectors at the time, particularly that of the peasantry.

Six years later (2006) Campbell and co-author Ken Bartley produced *England on the Eve of the Black Death: An Atlas of Lay Lordship, Land and Wealth, 1300–49* (hereafter *Atlas*). Although constructed by Campbell as a separate project, the *Atlas* might be considered a companion piece to the *ESA*, which relied on manorial accounts while the *Atlas* was a GIS-based study of inquisitions *post mortem*, surveys, or 'extents' as they were usually called, taken of the estates of recently deceased lay tenants-in-chief (those lords holding directly from the king); these documents are commonly designated in the literature simply as 'IPMs'. Manorial accounts showed medieval demesnes in action, while IPMs indicated their financial potential in recording the valuation per annum, or expected annual return, of various types of land (arable, pasture, meadow, woodland, etc.) and accoutrements (mills, fisheries, dovecotes, rents, manorial court profits, and various feudal rights) These extents gave the royal administration a sense of the monetary value of the manors and estates of the deceased tenant-in-chief, useful for setting the level of the relief (what the successor paid to inherit the estate) or the value of a wardship if the heir were a minor.¹⁰ Since the extents associated with the IPMs consistently supplied valuations of land and other sources of income, they were ideal for the wide-ranging type of historical geography favoured by Campbell. Like the *ESA*, the *Atlas* is a huge reservoir of useful information, but also one that Campbell has used to good effect to tackle important debates, perhaps no more so than in

⁷ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 429.

⁸ Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 55–60.

⁹ See, for example, his minute analysis of the crop rotations on a number of Suffolk and Norfolk manors leading up to the time of the Black Death: *ESA*, pp. 264–72.

¹⁰ Campbell summarizes the Crown's point of view in *Atlas*, pp. 17–18.

supporting John Hatcher's provocative challenge to the view of an oppressed customary peasantry, particularly in the period leading up to the Black Death.¹¹ Notable here too is the immense potential of these projects in terms of providing a jumping-off point for future work by scholars across a very broad range of topics.

After the publication of *Atlas*, Campbell has produced a number of shorter length, but also critically important studies. To select any one (or two or three or more) of these for special attention is an invidious exercise, since the relentless production of articles and chapters of superb quality has been a defining characteristic of Campbell's work stretching back to 1980 (see the list of his publications at the end of this volume), but perhaps two important themes can be isolated here. One was to place the economy of medieval England within a broader framework, as certainly his 2008 'Benchmarking' article in *Economic History Review* did with its very ambitious comparison of key economic markers (population, degree of urbanization, per capita exports, and per capita money supply) across the British Isles as a whole,¹² and he and others have just published *British Economic Growth* which measures GDP and GDP per head from 1270 to 1870.¹³

The other, perhaps even bolder project, was signalled by his already iconic 2010 'Nature as Historical Protagonist' article, again in *Economic History Review* and first delivered as the annual Tawney Memorial Lecture to the Economic History Society for 2008.¹⁴ Climate tends to be such a *deus ex machina* factor that, much like the Black Death, many scholars have been uncertain how to weave it into explanatory narratives for the medieval economy and society.¹⁵ Campbell tackles the issue head-on, drawing on the findings of dendrochronol-

¹¹ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', following upon Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage'; see also Hatcher, 'Lordship and Villeinage', this volume. The publication of 'Agrarian Problem' (2005) actually preceded that of the *Atlas*, but was very much based upon information stemming from the latter.

¹² Campbell, 'Benchmarking', see esp. p. 931 (Table 16).

¹³ Broadberry, Campbell, and others, *British Economic Growth*.

¹⁴ Campbell, 'Nature as Historical Protagonist'; the Tawney Lecture is available as a podcast: <<http://www.ehs.org.uk/multimedia/the-tawney-memorial-lecture-2008>>.

¹⁵ A point made by Campbell in his fourth and last Ellen McArthur lecture when commenting briefly upon Hatcher and Bailey's excellent book, *Modelling the Middle Ages*. Hatcher and Bailey themselves note how difficult it is to incorporate climate or even the Black Death into such models as Michael Postan's neo-Malthusian view of the medieval English economy: *Modelling the Middle Ages*, pp. 18–19 and 55–57.

ogy and ice-core analysis from Greenland to track and compare the actions of climate centuries ago with metrics about medieval agricultural performance, especially from manorial accounts that we are so lucky to have for much of the Middle Ages in England. He brings, moreover, the Black Death firmly into the narrative by examining the relationship between climate and microbes. It is a very rich brew of historical and scientific evidence, as anyone observing his Ellen McArthur lectures (available online) can testify,¹⁶ and, as in the case with his collaborative investigations into British GDP over many centuries, it looks towards a larger study, *The Great Transition*, scheduled for 2015, that seems set to be another classic, field-shaping volume.

Altogether, Bruce Campbell has produced an enviable publication record of quantity, quality, and relevance. Campbell's carefully marshalled data (and positions flowing from them) have become instrumental in how we see such fraught issues as the economic power that lords had over their tenants or how seemingly impersonal forces like climate and disease should be factored into our understanding of the Middle Ages. The strength of what is being produced today in the field is due in no small measure to his enthusiasm, commitment to quality, and sheer determination that medieval history should not be seen as some form of esoteric ephemera with little consequence for today's society. The work of Campbell (and many others) has been essentially one of demystification of a period that has long been seen as quaint and inaccessible to the popular mind; throughout, Campbell's approach and publications have been a critical impetus to this undertaking.

Perhaps most importantly Campbell has always worked hard at instilling the same spirit of enthusiasm for the field among his peers. Preeminently in this direction was his creation of the series of Anglo-American Seminars on the Medieval Economy and Society. These meetings, organized by Campbell himself on the first seven occasions and for the last four by Phillip Schofield, started at Exeter in 1983 and have been held every three years since then, typically in a suitably 'medieval' locale.¹⁷ The editors and contributors to this vol-

¹⁶ Delivered on 4, 5, 11, and 13 February 2013, Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, 8 Mill Lane, Cambridge: available online as 'The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', podcasts of the 2013 Ellen McArthur Lectures at the University of Cambridge, <<http://www.econsoc.hist.cam.ac.uk/podcasts.html>>.

¹⁷ The most recent — the eleventh meeting — being at Wells, 5–8 July 2013. It was held in honour of Professor Campbell himself, the papers from which comprise most of this volume. The previous meetings after Exeter were Norwich (1986), Chester (1989), Leicester (1992), Cardiff (1995), Witham (1998), Dublin (2001), Gregynog (nr Welshpool) (2004), Lincoln

ume all have very fond memories of these meetings, and for many of us they provided our first contact with a large number of other people in the field, a thrilling experience when it first happened and occasions for very warm fellowship after that. In short, these meetings promoted a keen sense of community among scholars in medieval English economic and social history, especially important for those of us in sprawling North America, for whom face-to-face meetings with fellow travellers in the field are far less frequent. In such a fashion, that very first meeting in Exeter brought together scholars from two 'competing' schools in medieval history, the University of Toronto and the University of Birmingham, with Ambrose Raftis from Toronto being the plenary speaker and Rodney Hilton, the distinguished scholar most associated with the 'Birmingham school', also in attendance.¹⁸ The tradition of having distinguished and preferably provocative scholars as plenary speakers at the Anglo-American Seminar has continued ever since.

The chapters in this volume represent the broader interests of the community brought together by the Anglo-American Seminar rather than focusing solely on Campbell's specific research concerns over the years, although most chapters do use his work as an important point of reference. Thus, the chapters that follow both develop themes closely connected to Bruce Campbell's research as well as those of current interest in the area of medieval British social and economic history. The first part of this volume shows how other sources, often quite unique to an institution or region, can supplement or contrast with the manorial account material so richly displayed in Campbell's *English Seigniorial Agriculture*. Philip Slavin's examination (in Chapter 1) of the 1283 detailed lay subsidy return for Blackbourne Hundred in Suffolk presents a striking example of how animal husbandry might provide unique opportunities for peasants relative to demesnes that concentrated more narrowly on grain production. In Chapter 2, Jane Whittle uses the extraordinarily well-documented Norfolk manor of Hunstanton to demonstrate how fruitfully manorial demesne accounts can be combined with household accounts to provide a sense of the complex interaction between local individuals and

(2007), and Durham (2010). Some of these meetings have led directly to publications, such as this volume and Campbell, *Before the Black Death*.

¹⁸ For some sense of how the lines were drawn at the time between the class struggle orientation headed by Rodney Hilton at the University of Birmingham and the more 'organic' model issuing from the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto led by Ambrose Raftis, see Razi's (admittedly partisan) 'Toronto School's Reconstitution', esp. pp. 141–42; Razi, 'Struggles', esp. pp. 151–52.

their families with the demesne economy, where ‘gift’ exchange intermingled with more normal labour and commodity exchanges to provide a surprisingly opportunistic environment for the well-being of peasants and their families. The last two chapters in this section approach peasant versus demesne crop-growing results from different methodological perspectives. On the one hand, John Langdon (Chapter 3), here using a landlord versus non-landlord distinction, examines extents for debt, a difficult source, but nonetheless promising in revealing relative crop productivity differences over time between greater and lesser grain producers, an exercise that might prove useful in commenting on Bruce Campbell’s revisionist pre-Black Death population estimates. Christopher Dyer (Chapter 4), on the other hand, employs the uniquely generous survival of the document known as an *estimatio bladorum* (‘estimate of the corn [that is, grain writ large, including legumes]’) on the estate of Worcester Cathedral Priory. Because the *estimationes* give rough measurements of both demesne and tithe outputs (the latter mostly from peasants), they provide a very clear comparison of cropping strategies of demesne versus peasant over the course of much of the fifteenth century.

The second part of the volume deals with the evolving relationships and potential tensions between lords and peasants. John Hatcher (Chapter 5) traces the historiography of the relationship between lords and villeins, and how the view now seems to be heading towards one in which villeins, largely through the enduring properties of custom, increasingly found themselves in a more favourable economic position against lords, even in the supposedly subsistence crisis conditions of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In a similar vein Mark Bailey (Chapter 6) seeks to show how our view of the period of about thirty years after the Black Death, traditionally seen as one of increasing tensions between lords and their peasant tenants leading up to the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, has largely been overdrawn, as the supposed determination with which lords attempted to re-exert their feudal rights and economic dominance in so many ways failed to materialize or have been exaggerated in the literature. Stephen Rigby (Chapter 7), shows how hegemonic views stressing the inferiority and subservient position of the peasantry proved remarkably enduring in intellectual writing over the Middle Ages, here by examining the writing of three well-known writers over the period from the twelfth to the fifteenth century — John of Salisbury, Giles of Rome, and Christine de Pizan. He notes, however, that the practical impact of these ideological positions upon contemporary social relations seems to have been a much more uncertain issue.

The third part of the volume is concerned with the workings of the markets within and upon various aspects of the peasant and demesne economy. Phillip

Schofield (Chapter 8) addresses the seeming weakness of lordly control over the peasant land market in medieval eastern England. As he puts it: ‘To what extent indeed did lordship in eastern England either encourage a growth in a peasant market in land or run helpless before a market beyond its control?’ He finds answers by examining the early documentation from the estates of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, hardly a timid landlord, against the backdrop of centuries-old regional patterns of free versus unfree tenures stretching back to Domesday Book and before. The late Richard Britnell (Chapter 9) provided, as he did always, a carefully-crafted chapter, here examining how lords and their officials procured ploughs, carts, and smaller items of agricultural equipment through a carefully modulated mixture of on-site manufacture and purchase on the market.¹⁹ Chris Briggs (Chapter 10) considers an example of a rural market in action, Balsham, Cambridgeshire, during the early fourteenth century, the performance of which he considers against three lordship models commonly applied to medieval English markets, concluding that the ‘consumer protection’ model is most relevant. Also significant is the role that the local populace played in acquiring a new market charter after the previous chartered market fell into disuse, and the impetus that early fourteenth-century dearth may have contributed to their actions. James Davis (Chapter 11) queries the assumption that peasant demand and supply lay behind the surge of market foundations before the plague and their fall after the Black Death as population declined. In addition to questioning the relationship between population change and village markets, he suggests that most village markets — whether chartered or not — were sites of low-level exchange that needed significant seigneurial investment to become a player in the regional marketing network.

The fourth and last part of the volume provides a broader look at peasant society. It opens with Judith Bennett’s persuasive argument (Chapter 12) that ‘unattached girls and women were the truly poor of medieval England’. Her argument has ramifications for our understanding of medieval poor relief, the strength of the ‘push’ factor in female rural-urban migration, and the origins of the European Marriage Pattern. In terms of one enduring environmental condition which both lords and peasants had to experience, Marilyn Livingstone reveals the human voices giving weather reports that are unexpectedly rich in the 1340–41 *Nonae* (or royal tax of every ninth sheaf of grain, fleece, and lamb), a resented imposition that gave rise to high levels of evasion and excuses, a very large number of the latter blaming the weather. Maryanne Kowaleski

¹⁹ See our tribute to Richard at the start of his essay.

(Chapter 14) examines peasant strategies in a different ecosystem, that is, the environment along the maritime coast, exemplifying how such societies could profitably diversify into other activities than agriculture and might indeed comprise a distinct maritime culture. Finally, Richard Smith (Chapter 15) examines and compares two well-known famine periods, 1280–1325 and 1580–1596/97, and outlines how key social and political responses were developed to ameliorate the impact of dearth between the two periods.

This volume by no means includes all those who have been deeply influenced by Professor Campbell's work and his Anglo-American Seminar initiative. His collaborative work has more recently taken on an even more comparative flavour, involving much more closely scholars from many other disciplines,²⁰ the presence of whom is not represented in this volume, but who no doubt have equally warm feelings for the achievements and friendship of a very exceptional and generous scholar.

21 May 2015

²⁰ As, for example, the very recent Broadberry, Campbell, and others, *British Economic Growth*, as well as the very interdisciplinary character shown in 'Nature as Historical Protagonist' and the forthcoming *Great Transition*.

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Part I

Lords, Peasants, and Agricultural Performance

PEASANT LIVESTOCK HUSBANDRY IN LATE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY SUFFOLK: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, AND SOCIETY

Philip Slavin

Peasant agriculture was key to the late medieval economy. The vast majority of the population — perhaps 85–90 per cent — lived or worked on the land, with over three quarters engaged directly.¹ About 80 per cent of all agricultural produce in England came from the tenant sector, leaving approximately 20 per cent to demesnes (the home farms of lords as against the lands of their tenants).² Proportionally, the agricultural sector contributed at least 60 (and probably more) per cent to English GDP *c.* 1300.³ In particular, peasants were instrumental in contributing to the production of wool at the time, widely demanded on the Continent and beyond.

¹ Estimates on this vary. For instance, recently Broadberry, Campbell, and van Leeuwen suggested that only 67 per cent of men and 57 per cent women were employed in agriculture in 1381: ‘When Did Britain Industrialise?’, p. 17. These seem unrealistically low proportions. Instead, I am relying here on a more recent estimate (78 per cent) of Richard Smith also for 1381, who kindly shared with me his forthcoming work-in-progress, ‘Reconsidering Recent Estimates of the Occupational Structure of Late 14th Century England’, Conference Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Economic History Society, University of Warwick, 29 March 2014. In any case, a higher proportion of agricultural labour would likely suit the situation a century earlier, the focus of this study, much better.

² Campbell, *English Seigneurial Agriculture* (hereafter *ESA*), p. 59.

³ This figure, again from Smith, ‘Reconsidering Estimates’, is somewhat higher than the 46 per cent proposed by Broadberry, Campbell, and van Leeuwen, ‘When Did Britain Industrialise?’, p. 23.

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Despite its significance, the livestock sector of peasant agriculture has attracted surprisingly little detailed examination from scholars over previous decades, with some notable exceptions, including an article of Michael Postan and a chapter in a book by John Langdon.⁴ This paucity of studies is largely explained by a frustrating lack of sources similar to plentiful manorial demesne accounts and the fact that scholars tend to focus on the demesne sector. Nevertheless, as Michael Postan has aptly remarked, ‘the darkness is not wholly impenetrable’.⁵ There are, for instance, significant numbers of tithe receipts, reflecting main cropping trends and patterns, particularly among the peasantry. Thanks to the meticulous work of Ben Dodds and others, we have now a much better picture about peasant agricultural production than we had some ten years ago,⁶ although, with the exception of lambs, tithe records do not provide any clear glimpse into the pastoral sector of peasant agriculture. Other sources, however, such as in Dyer’s research on *estimationes bladorum* and Langdon’s on extents for debt (both in this volume) are beginning to shed further light on the topic.

This paper deals with the peasant pastoral economy in the hundred of Blackbourne in north-western Suffolk and is dedicated to Professor Bruce Campbell’s abiding interest in peasant agriculture despite the fact that his career to date has focused mostly on the performance of demesnes.⁷ Campbell has always encouraged colleagues not to shirk the peasant (a.k.a. tenant) sector of the agriculture and has vigorously promoted comparative analyses of the two sectors. Moreover, Campbell has himself contributed a number of important studies on medieval peasantry, ranging from demographic articles to the influential and provocative 2005 paper on the ‘Agrarian Problem of the Fourteenth Century’.⁸ Furthermore, Campbell’s contribution to the history of medieval livestock husbandry, particularly on demesnes, cannot be overstated.⁹

⁴ Postan, ‘Village Livestock’; Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 172–253.

⁵ Postan, ‘Village Livestock’, p. 219.

⁶ Dodds, *Peasants and Production*; Sapoznik, ‘Productivity of Peasant Agriculture’.

⁷ See in particular his two monumental studies, Campbell, *ESA*, and Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death*.

⁸ Campbell, ‘Population Pressure’; Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’.

⁹ For instance, see Campbell, ‘Livestock of Chaucer’s Reeve’; Campbell, ‘Commercial Dairy Production’; and, most importantly, Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 102–87.

The 1283 Roll for Blackbourne Hundred

The principal source of evidence for this study is a well-known lay subsidy roll for Blackbourne Hundred, compiled in conjunction with a tax levied by Edward I in 1283 to recoup expenses incurred during his second Welsh war of 1282.¹⁰ This 1283 tax assessment, for which only the roll from Blackbourne Hundred has survived, was one in a line of campaigns of a particular form of taxation that started in 1188, the year of the ‘Saladin’s Tithe’, and operated until 1334, when a new system of collecting the taxes was introduced which dramatically altered the nature of the surviving documentation. During this time the English population was taxed no less than two dozen times at rates varying from one-sixth to one-fortieth applied to the value of a taxpayer’s ‘movables’ (mostly livestock but also grain and other goods).¹¹ The survival of lay subsidy rolls actually recording ‘movables’ is rare,¹² but at their best, as in the Blackbourne Hundred case, they can provide an invaluable glimpse not only into the structure and patterns of peasant livestock husbandry, but also peasant living standards in general.

Despite this, lay subsidy rolls have been relatively ignored, partly because of their problematic nature. First, the under-recording of tax-payers (essentially heads of households) was chronic, partly due to exemptions for poverty, which, in the case of the 1283 assessment, was anyone having movables worth less than 6s. 8d. In addition, one may speculate that a certain fraction of those liable for the tax managed to evade it, as in of the Poll Tax of 1381.¹³ A close analysis of contemporary manorial surveys and extents reveals that the Blackbourne Hundred subsidy recorded only about 65–70 per cent of the total heads of household.¹⁴ Second, the under-recording of humans implied under-recording of animals.

¹⁰ The 1283 Blackbourne Hundred lay subsidy roll has been printed, in a tabulated form, alongside with other documents, in *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell. Although the tabulation is generally accurate, I preferred to consult the document in its original form (Kew, The National Archives, E 179/242/41).

¹¹ The period between 1275 and 1334 is studied in Jenks, ‘The Lay Subsidies’. A general introduction to royal taxation is Jurkowski, Smith, and Crook, *Lay Taxes in England and Wales*.

¹² Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 188–89, gives a good sense of those currently known.

¹³ *Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381*, ed. by Fenwick, pp. xxiii–xxvi.

¹⁴ There is the *Return to Land Tenure* of 1286, covering eight hundreds in Suffolk and edited (badly) in *Pinchbeck Register*, ed. by Hervey; the Blackbourne portion is also edited (much more accurately) in *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, pp. 4–65. In addition, there are the *Recognitiones* of 1302 (see note 16). Finally, there are several manorial extents (*A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, p. 76).

It appears that draught-animals (horses and oxen) of *taxed* peasant households were under-assessed by at least 15 per cent, which likely was at least the amount, if not more, that other animals were under-assessed.¹⁵ For instance, swine were likely under-recorded by even more, not only because poorer tenants and cottagers were exempt from taxation, but also because pigs were easier to conceal, possibly by sending them into local woodland for grazing, or they were difficult to count because of the high numbers of piglets running around (reflecting the high fertility of sows, producing between seven and twelve piglets a year each, as recorded in manorial accounts). Swine appear in equally small numbers in the 1302 *Recognitiones*, a more comprehensive manorial list of Suffolk tenants paying dues to their lord, the abbot of Bury St Edmunds.¹⁶ Poultry, seemingly exempt from taxation, were not recorded at all. Finally, it is not always easy to distinguish between the demesnes of lesser gentry and peasant farms.¹⁷ Here the differentiation between the lordly and peasant taxpayer was achieved by a careful analysis of titles ('lord', 'lady', 'abbot', 'prior', and 'master' have been, naturally, assumed to have related to the demesne), names and surnames ('x, son/daughter of y' formula were assumed to have designated peasant households), as well as the structure and number of animals. Thus, I have assumed that those householders stocking a disproportionately large numbers of draught animals (especially oxen) were lords, rather than peasants. Such a counting resulted in 1358 peasant households and 35 demesnes from the Blackbourne roll.¹⁸

Here the uniqueness of this 1283 assessment over other surviving tax assessments should be stressed. The 1283 taxation was levied at a lower rate (a thirtieth) than most subsidies and had a relatively low threshold at 6s. 8d. worth of movables (compared to, say, the 1275 and 1290 lay subsidies at 15s.). In this way, the 1283 subsidy seems to have reached deeper down into the social structure of the time.

¹⁵ Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, p. 184. A much more detailed analysis is available in his Ph.D. thesis, 'Horses, Oxen', pp. 318–20.

¹⁶ The *Recognitiones* survives in an early fifteenth-century copy, written by two scribes, in two separate parts: see London, British Library, MS Harley 230, fols 56^v–64^r and 171^r–175^r. The Coney Weston and Rickinghall Inferior parts have been printed in *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, pp. 78–81 and 88–89.

¹⁷ For the problem of differentiation between the smaller demesnes and peasant farms, see Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, p. 187n.

¹⁸ Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, p. 188, gives slightly different totals of 45 demesnes and 1345 peasant households, likely due to the fact some households regarded by Langdon as 'gentry' were considered by me as better-off peasants, or 'kulaks'.

Peasant Livestock Husbandry: General Patterns and Trends

Blackbourne Hundred (or, to be more precise, 'double-hundred') was situated in the north-western corner of the county, separated from Norfolk by the Little Ouse river. In 1283 there were thirty-four parishes, and the assessments survive for all but one (Coney Weston). Collectively, the parishes covered about 66,272 acres of land, a considerable figure compared to most other hundreds in Suffolk. The hundred overlaps parts of two ecological regions: Breckland and High Suffolk. The former is characterized by sandy (and notoriously infertile) soil and heathland, conditions favouring livestock over arable farming, the latter, when it occurred, being dominated by rye and barley cultivation. By contrast, the High Suffolk region is characterized by rich and fertile clay loams, encouraging an arable wheat and oats regime. By 1283, the hundred was a densely populated area in England with a high proportion of sub-divided peasant landholdings, often less than ten acres each. This was caused by both demographic growth and local partible, rather than impartible, inheritance customs. In contrast with other regions in Suffolk and indeed East Anglia, the Blackbourne Hundred had a sizable servile population, chiefly on the manors of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, as well as a number of other ecclesiastical estates.¹⁹ The natural conditions of the Breckland region in particular, made focusing predominantly on arable farming unattractive, if not impossible. The obvious (and more profitable) alternative was animal husbandry, particularly here cattle and sheep. Local tenants profited a great deal from communal rights and regulations, as well as the irregular structure of common field systems, which allowed a ready access to pasture. In addition, the fold-course system, where peasant flocks of cattle and sheep were placed in either the seigniorial or communal folds, so that they grazed on the pasture during the day and then folded on post-harvest fallow at night, basically relieved peasants of the worry of securing adequate grazing for their animals.²⁰ Likewise, in High Suffolk peasants were allowed to graze their animals on demesne fallow. It is hardly surprising, then, that some Blackbourne households, and chiefly those from the Breckland region, could hold remarkably large animal stocks.

The Blackbourne lay subsidy roll allows the calculation of animals per taxed household. Despite the fact that the peasant animals were likely under-

¹⁹ Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 108–15; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 49–58.

²⁰ On west Suffolk field-systems, see Bailey, 'Sand into Gold', pp. 40–57; also Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 102–14.

recorded by at least 15 per cent, I have opted not, say, to inflate the taxed figures by that factor, but to stick with only what was recorded, as much of my analysis involves comparing demesne versus peasant performance rather than being dependent upon absolute levels of animals. As Table 1.1 indicates, *taxed* households had, on average, one horse, 0.2 oxen, 3.2 cattle (the ratio between mature and immature cattle was, more or less, equal, with 1.5 mature and 1.7 immature animals per household), 11.5 sheep, and 1.2 swine. (In the numbers that follow, I have not always distinguished between mature and immature animals,²¹ but have done so in the calculation of animal units.)

To appreciate the full impact of various types of animals upon the financial and ecological health of the farm, it is necessary to convert each livestock group into its respective 'livestock units', with animal types being weighted against each other according to their relative contribution to farming operations.²² From this perspective, draught animals accounted for about 23 per cent of all peasant livestock units with horses and oxen representing, respectively, 18.4 and 4.3 per cent, strongly reinforcing Langdon's observations about the popularity of horses for the region.²³ On the other hand, oxen made up about 17.7 per cent of all livestock units on Blackbourne demesnes, in contrast to the 4.3 per cent on peasant holdings, although in neither sector did the presence of oxen preclude the use of horses. In fact, out of 111 ox-keeping households, 101 stocked plough-horses and most likely employed mixed plough-teams of horses and oxen, a reasonably common feature in south-east England.²⁴ Indeed, with its greater horse versus oxen use, where oxen only comprised about 19 per cent of all peasant working animals compared with 49 per cent on the demesne, it is tempting to see Blackbourne Hundred, as in the case of East Anglia generally, as comparatively progressive agriculturally, relying much more on horses than oxen. Elsewhere in England, the share of oxen within the working animal sector was considerably higher among both tenants and demesnes: perhaps as high as 37 per cent and 63 per cent respectively.²⁵ However, it should be borne in mind that while the reli-

²¹ This explains, say, the discrepancy between the draught animals in Table 1.1, below, and those calculated by Langdon (*Horses, Oxen*, p. 188), where he included only mature animals.

²² Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 104–05. See also the notes for Table 1.1.

²³ Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 204–05.

²⁴ Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 108–09.

²⁵ Calculated from the manorial accounts database (based on a large sample of over 20,000 accounts for the pre-1350 period) and the peasant inventories database (based primarily on tax assessments and covering over 9400 households in England and north-west Wales for the pre-1334 period).

ance on horses rather than on oxen may indeed be interpreted as one indicator of relative 'progress' within the demesne sector it does not necessarily stand for such within the tenancy sector. As Langdon has pointed out, the greater use of horses by peasants seems to have been part of an overall survival mechanism in difficult times rather than an indication of agricultural progress.²⁶

Table 1.1. Livestock of taxed peasant households in Blackbourne Hundred villages, 1283.²⁷

	Horses	Oxen	Cattle	Immature Cattle	Sheep	Swine
Animal heads, recorded	1243	246	2057	2287	15,552	1632
As animal units	1429	334	2468	1830	1555	163
Units as % of total	18.4%	4.3%	31.7%	23.5%	20.0%	2.1%
Heads per household, recorded	0.92	0.18	1.51	1.68	11.45	1.20
Units per household	1.05	0.25	1.82	1.35	1.15	0.12
Coefficient of variance	0.25	1.01	0.21	0.23	0.92	0.87

Livestock units = [horses × 1.0] + [(oxen + adult cattle) × 1.2] + [immature cattle × 0.8] + [(sheep + swine) × 0.1], as from Campbell, *ESA*, p. 104; I have not attempted the analysis using the more complicated weighting figures on p. 106.

Within the non-working sector, cattle contributed the single largest share among peasants, 55 per cent of all animal units and 71 per cent of all non-working animal units. These figures were higher than those on the demesne, where non-working cattle accounted for 38 per cent of all animal units and 60 per cent of all non-working livestock units. Sheep contributed about 20 per cent to the pastoral economy within both among tenants and on demesnes. It should be noted that the numbers of peasant cattle and sheep were indeed impressive, when compared to other surviving tax assessments. Thus, *c.* 1290–30, an average taxed household in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Huntingdonshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, and parts of Yorkshire held about five sheep and one or two cattle. In this sense, Blackbourne tenants, with roughly one horse, three cattle, a dozen sheep, and a pig each, were on a par with their counterparts from parts of Sussex, as well the Chalk district of Wiltshire and the uplands of north-west Wales, where local subsidy rolls show similar and sometimes higher figures.²⁸

²⁶ Langdon, 'Use of Animal Power', pp. 218–19.

²⁷ Source: TNA, E 179/242/41.

²⁸ Calculated from the Sussex, Wiltshire, and north-western Wales portions of the peasant inventories database.

The focus on sheep farming was especially pronounced in Breckland vills. Here, an average peasant household held twenty-five sheep, accounting for about 35 per cent of all animal units. A similar situation prevailed on the demesne. Although it was not until the Black Death that most Breckland lords expanded their sheep husbandry to efficient commercial levels, some of them still kept sizeable stocks by the time of the 1283 subsidy roll. Thus, at Fakenham Magna, the flock of Abbot of Tilney included 520 sheep, while several other Breckland lords kept between 100 and 200 sheep each.²⁹ However, as we shall see below, in terms of stocking density (measured in number of livestock units per 100 acres of sown land), there is no doubt that sheep were more prominent on tenancies, than on demesnes. This is curious, since sheep husbandry was undoubtedly the most extensive form of agricultural enterprise, requiring access to very large amounts of pasture and capital to build up the flock, characteristics theoretically more suited to demesnes.³⁰

The fact that Blackbourne peasants chose to focus on non-working animals, namely cattle and sheep, hints at larger economic issues. Unfortunately, the assessments do not distinguish between beef- and dairy-cattle, but it is likely that the majority of cattle were for dairy and that only old and debilitated cows were slaughtered.³¹ Moreover, ewes were dairy animals. Dairy produce, especially fresh milk, were perishable products that could not be stored for a long time. Although processing milk into cheese and butter were common agricultural activities, very few peasants would likely have had, say, the skills of cheesemakers, and it is most likely that most peasant milk was consumed in its fresh, unprocessed form. Allowing 100 gallons per cow, 50 gallons per heifer, and 10 gallons per ewe per year, and keeping in mind that an average taxed household stocked 1.5 cows, 0.4 heifers, and 4 ewes, we arrive at the annual produce of 212 gallons of milk, equal to about 646,400 kcal. per household.³² If an average peasant household can be equated with 4.25 people, and if dairy products contributed about 12.5 per cent to the total calorific intake of each family member (or, about 250 kcal. if the daily per-capita consumption levels stood at 2000 kcal.), then it is possible that an average dairy stock of a taxed household may

²⁹ TNA, E 179/242/41, m. 4^r.

³⁰ Campbell and Overton, 'New Perspective', pp. 77–78.

³¹ DeWitte and Slavin, 'Between Famine and Death', p. 58.

³² The average yields derive from my in-progress database of dairy yields. The ratio between the yields of cows and heifers derives from marginal entries to manorial accounts from Canterbury Cathedral Priory demesnes.

have produced about 418 kcal. per diem, which exceeded the daily requirement levels by an additional two-thirds. If these estimates are not too removed from reality, then Blackbourne peasants could produce milk for both subsistence and the market. If processing into butter and cheese were involved, surplus amounts beyond subsistence would undoubtedly be smaller, but there would likely still be plenty for dietary needs plus some extra for sale, especially as some under-counting of livestock seems probable. Hints of commercialization can also be seen within the wool production sector. The presence on average of 11.5 ovids per household (assuming 9 mature and 2.5 immature animals), may have produced, collectively, about 16 pounds of wool (1.6 pounds per mature and 0.5 pounds per immature animal).³³ In 1283, if sold, 16 pounds of wool would have earned a Blackbourne peasant 4s 8d or if converted by the family itself into clothing something like two tunics. That peasant wool sales were important can be judged wool export accounts, whose high figures imply that only a fraction could have been produced by demesnes.³⁴

A critical factor in analysing sheep from the 1283 assessment is that it occurred four years after the great sheep panzootics of 1279–80, caused by scab, a highly infectious disease, which killed approximately 47 per cent of English and Welsh ovine stocks in less than a year.³⁵ Recurring attacks of scab between 1280 and 1320, which, although more localized and less intense, seriously impeded the restocking of flocks for both lords and tenants. On the demesne, it took at least twenty-five years for the pre-1279 numbers to be restored. It is unfortunate that we do not have any sense of Blackbourne tenant flocks before 1279, but it is almost certain that seigniorial and tenant flocks would have broadly similar experiences once the scab struck. Even with this panzootic handicap, Blackbourne 1283 peasant sheep operations seem impressive, and it was likely even more impressive in the pre-1279 economy.

Stocking densities, measured in livestock units per 100 sown acres, are also a key consideration. Unfortunately, the 1283 tax, like any other lay subsidy, was

³³ The age- and gender-composition of ovine flocks has been traced over 20,000 manorial accounts for the period *c.* 1208–1500, including some 1050 accounts for the years 1275–85, overlapping, roughly speaking, the 1283 lay subsidy roll. Fleece weights are from Stephenson, 'Wool Yields'. The weight differentiation between immature and mature animals is based on a small sample of over 300 accounts, in conjunction with my ongoing project on the sheep panzootics of 1279–80.

³⁴ That most wool was produced on peasant holdings and not demesnes has been claimed by Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants, and Markets*, pp. 53–54.

³⁵ I am currently working on an article dealing with this event and its consequences.

levied on movables and, as such, did not record the quantities of land possessed by each taxed household. Instead, the tax assessments recorded crops stored in houses and barns. This fact makes any attempt to approximate stocking densities challenging. One possible method is to convert the taxed crops into rough acreage equivalents. Historians disagree whether the taxed crops reflect total production levels of holdings, or only a certain (dwindling) proportion of the annual harvest. Thus, Postan asserted that all the crops found in their possession were assessed, while Willard and Langdon were (perhaps too) pessimistic to interpret them as marketable surpluses after allowances for consumption and seeding.³⁶ However, the language of the instructions given to local tax assessors imply only processed food and drink, ready for immediate consumption, was not to be taxed.³⁷ Still, much caution should be exercised, when examining the crop figures and converting them into corresponding acreage.

Assuming that crop yields on tenancy holdings were not different from those on the demesnes, we may use average late thirteenth-century demesne yields, gross of seed (that is, measured in harvested bushels per sown acre) and gross of tithe (that is, before approximately one-tenth of harvest was paid to a local church as a stand-in for their peasant counterparts). The figures are 9.5, 11.5, 12.4, 8.4, and 7.3 for wheat, rye, barley, oats, and legumes respectively.³⁸ For instance, thirty taxed households of Ashfield Magna were assessed, collectively, of 46.9 quarters of wheat, 3 quarters of rye, 72.4 quarters of barley, 49.1 quarters of oats, and 58 quarters of legumes. These quantities would accordingly derive from approximately 199 acres of sown land. Given the fact, that the 1283 assessment was undertaken sometime in late autumn or early winter, namely during or after the sowing of winter crops, it may be necessarily to

³⁶ Postan, 'Village Livestock', p. 220; Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes*, p. 85; Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 179–80. Postan, 'Village Livestock', pp. 220, 221, and 223 clearly assumes that the assessment was taken soon after the harvest.

³⁷ 'Ceo est a sauer del trentyme de leur beyns moebles ke il unt ou aueyent as utaues de Seynt Yllere, for pris [...] payn, vyn, cerueyse, cizre, e tute manere de viaundes prestes e pruvues' ('Namely, a thirtieth part of their movable goods that they have or had on the Octave of St Hilary, except [...] bread, wine, ale, cider and any kind of food prepared and ready to be consumed'). The text is printed in *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, pp. x–xi. The translation is mine.

³⁸ These means combine the lower crop yields from Breckland demesne with higher ones on High Suffolk demesnes, the two regions being weighted in terms of the total agriculture of the hundred at Breckland = 40 per cent; High Suffolk = 60 per cent. These weighted means are somewhat lower than the 'national' yields calculated by Bruce Campbell: <<http://www.cropyields.ac.uk/>> [accessed April 2014].

inflate the share of wheat and rye by 25 and 20 per cent for seed corn already taken from the recorded totals.³⁹ In addition, we should allow an additional 25 per cent or so for some three months of post-harvest processing and consumption of crops. This makes it 265 acres of tenant sown land, implying about some 398 acres of total arable land if we allow an extra half for fallow. Such totals are not unrealistic compared to those indicated in contemporary or near-contemporary extents of several Blackbourne manors, as recorded in the *Return to Land Tenure* of 1286.⁴⁰ If this method of estimating tenant acreages can be accepted, it appears that an average taxed household of Blackbourne Hundred held about 9.2 acres of arable land — certainly a plausible figure, given the fact that many, if not most, Suffolk tenants held less than 10 acres of land.⁴¹

Table 1.2. Livestock composition between tenants and demesne (percentages) and stocking densities (livestock units per 100 acres) in Blackbourne Hundred, in 1283.⁴²

	Tenants, share	Demesne, share	Tenants, stocking density	Demesne, stocking density
Horses	18.40%	18.30%	17	8.7
Oxen	4.30%	17.70%	3.8	8.5
Cattle	31.70%	19.80%	33	9.5
Immature Cattle	23.50%	18.40%	23.8	8.8
Sheep	20.00%	19.90%	23.7	9.5
Swine	2.10%	5.90%	2	2.8
Total	100.00%	100.00%	103.2	47.8
Horses as % of Working Animals	81.00%	50.80%		
Cattle as % of Non- Working Animals	71.00%	59.80%		

Livestock units = [horses × 1.0] + [(oxen + adult cattle) × 1.2] + [immature cattle × 0.8] + [(sheep + swine) × 0.1]. Stocking density = n. of livestock units per 100 sown acres.

³⁹ Proportions of the harvest invested in seeding were derived from the Manorial Accounts Database.

⁴⁰ As in the *Return to Land Tenure* of 1286: *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, pp. 4–65.

⁴¹ Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 58–59.

⁴² Source: TNA, E 179/242/41.

With some approximation of the size of tenant arable holdings, we can now calculate stocking densities, measured in the number of livestock units per 100 sown (as opposed to total) acres. As Table 1.2 indicates, stocking densities of tenant holdings were 2.2 times higher than on demesnes. This is contrary to the current literature. Thus, Wrigley, followed by Campbell et al., assumed that the stocking density of working animals was three-quarters that on the demesnes.⁴³ Allen, again followed by Campbell and his colleagues, claimed that stocking density of cattle was one-third lower on tenancy lands.⁴⁴ Wrigley has suggested that swine were at twice the density on tenant lands as on demesnes, but Campbell and his colleagues most recently claimed that the stocking density of peasant swine was four times that on demesnes,⁴⁵ while in this study swine were more strongly present on demesnes by nearly a half. It is hard to know how the 30–35 per cent of heads of household who were exempt from the tax would affect the above figures. They would both have fewer acres and fewer animal units, so might not change tenant stocking densities much at all, or, if so, towards higher stocking densities for peasants (see below).

The differences in stocking densities between tenants and demesnes are particularly apparent in the cattle sector and, to a certain extent, the horse and sheep ones. High stocking densities provided by these animals indicate that, contrary to some arguments,⁴⁶ peasants had plentiful manure to ensure sufficient crop yields for survival. However, as Campbell contended, relatively high stocking densities did not necessarily ensure that crops profited from their manure, nor did low stocking densities always correlate with low crop yields. In some cases, excessive folding of sheep could cause parasitic infection among the animals.⁴⁷ Also, over-manuring may indeed depress land fertility, resulting in attendant low yields.⁴⁸

Closer analysis indeed reveals an inverse correlation between stocking densities and acreages for both demesnes and tenants, with larger holding units tending to focus more on arable, while smaller demesnes and peasant holdings

⁴³ Wrigley, 'Transition', p. 449; Broadberry, Campbell, and others, *British Economic Growth*, p. 110.

⁴⁴ Allen, 'English and Welsh Agriculture', p. 7; Broadberry, Campbell, and others, *British Economic Growth*, p. 104.

⁴⁵ Broadberry, Campbell, and others, *British Economic Growth*, p. 104.

⁴⁶ Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society: England', pp. 553–59 and 602.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 176.

⁴⁸ Sinclair, *Systems of Husbandry*, p. 131.

were more inclined towards livestock rearing.⁴⁹ The small peasant holdings characterizing Blackbourne Hundred (and indeed other parts of East Anglia) were prominent in livestock husbandry. Here, tenants had plentiful access to pasture through common rights and regulations, as well as to the benefits of the fold-course system.

These findings stand in a sharp contrast with Postan's pessimistic conclusions regarding livestock numbers on peasant holdings, including for the 1283 assessment. For Postan, according to Malthusian principles, these supposedly low animal numbers from tenant holdings implied under-manuring, low crop yields, and therefore an increasing inability to support an expanding population.⁵⁰ While there is no doubt that there were signs of population growth and rural congestion, as well as the marginalization of agriculture and settlements, these did not preclude peasants from maintaining sufficient livestock, through continual adjustment to evolving circumstances.

Peasant Livestock Management: Environmental and Institutional Determinants

The focus on dairy and sheep farming in the livestock management patterns of Blackbourne peasants implies commercialization, which England was undergoing around the time of the 1283 assessment. In particular, the peasants were undoubtedly spurred by the commercialization of local economies. Even though Blackbourne Hundred could not boast of many markets, local producers undoubtedly utilized 'informal' markets for exchange of locally produced goods.⁵¹ It is also important to consider local environmental and topographic conditions. As we have seen, much of Blackbourne Hundred, at least in the case of tenants, tended to pastoral rather than arable regimes, as was particularly true of the fourteen parishes located in the Breckland region. As Mark Bailey has shown for the Breckland, local lords and tenants maximized profits from such marginal land by concentrating on pastoral (and in some cases, rabbit) economy.⁵² So, how do we determine which exogenous or endogenous factors most determined local patterns of livestock holding and management?

⁴⁹ The situation for demesnes is surveyed in Campbell, *ESA*, p. 179.

⁵⁰ Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society: England', p. 602.

⁵¹ Dyer, 'Hidden Trade'.

⁵² Bailey, 'Sand into Gold'.

Table 1.3. Determinants of peasant livestock size and specialization.

	Units per household				
	Horses	Oxen	Cattle	Sheep	Swine
Soil Fertility	-0.156	-0.029	-0.102	-0.421***	-0.033
Breckland location	0.272	-0.270	-0.050	0.710	-0.375**
High Suffolk location	-0.272	0.270	0.050	-0.710	0.375**
Horse units per household		0.403**	0.349**	0.199	0.104
Ox units per household	0.403**		0.149	-0.183	0.479***
Cattle units per household	0.349**	0.149		0.052	0.311*
Sheep units per household	0.199	-0.183	0.052		-0.393**
Swine units per household	0.104	0.479***	0.311*	-0.393**	
Horse share within livestock	0.491***	0.178	-0.293*	-0.516***	0.057
Ox share within livestock	0.265	0.953	-0.019	-0.312*	0.414**
Cattle share within livestock	-0.323*	-0.102	0.275	-0.837	0.309**
Sheep share within livestock	0.047	-0.281	-0.127	0.946	-0.469***
Swine share within livestock	-0.046	0.355**	0.149	-0.506***	0.959
Total acreage	-0.339*	-0.003	-0.060	-0.239	0.086
Wheat share in sown acreage	-0.122	0.020	0.338**	-0.522***	0.364**
Rye share in sown acreage	0.136	-0.196	-0.143	0.751	-0.489***
Barley share in sown acreage	-0.205	-0.074	-0.204	-0.274	-0.032
Oat share in sown acreage	0.359**	0.117	0.245	0.677	-0.231
Legume share in total acreage	-0.117	0.152	-0.118	-0.584***	0.407**
Ecclesiastical manor	0.009	-0.459***	-0.058	-0.026	-0.342**
Lay manor	-0.009	0.459***	0.058	0.026	0.342**
Market	-0.131	0.191	-0.177	-0.219	-0.073
Per capita wealth	0.262	-0.071	0.245	0.760	-0.204

*** Significant at 1%; ** Significant at 5%; * Significant at 10%

Soil fertility, varying on a scale from 1 to 5, was determined from Soilscales: <<http://www.landis.org.uk/soilscales/>> [accessed April 2014]

Table 1.3 examines the various types of livestock holdings on peasant farms as correlated against a series of exogenous and endogenous factors. First, soil fertility had a strong negative correlation with sheep, namely that the animal was associated with poor-soil parishes. This indeed stands true in the case of

Breckland manors (which had a strong positive correlation with sheep), where light and sandy soils encouraged local peasants to develop the sheep-corn system, whereby rich manure from large flocks boosted crop yields.⁵³ Conversely, Breckland parishes tended to have less swine than High Suffolk ones. The striking negative correlation between sheep and pigs in Table 1.3 indicates the degree to which the two animal cohorts were mutually exclusive. This reflects that fact that in late medieval England (and elsewhere in the north-west Europe), larger pig herds were found, as a rule, either in those areas practising intensive arable regimes, whereby a fair proportion of sown acreage was devoted to legumes (used as both fertilizing agent and feed for sty-fed pigs), or in woodland-rich regions.⁵⁴ Blackbourne Hundred had neither of these conditions. As in the rest of Suffolk and indeed most of East Anglia, Blackbourne Hundred was deficient in woodland, but, unlike some other regions in East Anglia (especially Norfolk), was not practising an intensive arable regime, which may well explain the overall lack of swine for the hundred. Moreover, the soil of the Breckland manors in particular was so infertile that it discouraged local lords and tenants from using legumes and pig manure as fertilizing agents. Instead, here they chose to focus on the more labour-extensive regime of sheep husbandry, which fit best into the constraints of this particular landscape. The Breckland area had a high correlation with sheep husbandry, although apparently not statistically significant according to Table 1.3. The correlation makes sense, however, given the significant negative correlation of poor soils, so characteristic of the Breckland, and sheep husbandry already noted.

Likewise, there seems to have been a particularized correlation between arable and livestock specialization. It seems from the regression analysis that parishes specializing in wheat, barley or legumes tended to have small sheep flocks, while those focusing on rye or oats had larger ovine populations. This geography of crops was dictated by local soil conditions. Rye and oats were the two most tolerant crops, which could be grown on more marginal land, biased towards sheep farming and characterized by extensive pasturage. Most Breckland manors fell into this category. Although there is a high correlation between oat- and rye-biased manors and sheep specialization, Table 1.3 does not indicate that this correlation was statistically significant. But then again, this correlation is highly reasonable, given the tendency of manors situated on

⁵³ Bailey, 'Sand into Gold'.

⁵⁴ White, 'Globalized Pig Breeds', pp. 100–02; Thoen, 'Birth of the "Flemish Husbandry"', p. 174; Campbell, *ESA*, p. 168.

poorer soils to specialize in sheep. On the other hand, larger swine stocks were, unsurprisingly, found on those parishes devoting a comparatively large share of their arable to legumes. This reflects the attempts of local tenants to intensify their arable economy and boost up their yields through green fertilization. This situation prevailed on the more fertile manors of High Suffolk, with the most notable examples being Hepworth, Langham, and Market Weston. Here, tenants devoted between 25 and 30 per cent of their arable to legumes and holding some three or four pigs each. Large cattle populations existed on parishes oriented towards wheat growing, including Badwell Ash, Elmswell, and Knettishall, each devoting between one-quarter and one-third of their arable acreage to this crop. Here, tenants profited from cattle manure to boost yields of wheat, a capricious crop. The same parishes stocked swine in comparatively large numbers, as has been remarked upon in the literature.⁵⁵

Where other variables are concerned, there seems to be little correlation with peasant livestock holdings. In most cases, where the figures are high enough to be considered, it appears that the correlation is, most likely, purely coincidental. Thus, the presence or absence of a market did not seemingly affect the disposition of peasant livestock. Compared to some other areas in East Anglia, the Blackbourne Hundred was relatively lacking in markets: out of thirty-three parishes appearing in the 1283 subsidy roll, only three are known to have had a 'formal' (that is, chartered) market. As mentioned above, this does not preclude a degree of commercialization: it should be remembered that by the end of the thirteenth century, 'informal' markets within both the demesne and tenancy, were still a widespread commercial institution.⁵⁶ Moreover, as we have seen, the comparatively large numbers of cattle and sheep may imply a fair degree of commercialization was displayed by Blackbourne tenants. The only endogenous variable that seems to have had a pronounced impact on livestock holdings was *per capita* taxed wealth within each parish, which was more associated with sheep than any other animal (Table 1.3). As we have seen, sheep husbandry demanded capital investment and access to sufficient grassland, more a prerogative of the well-to-do peasant class, who clearly had larger flocks. According to Table 1.3, this correlation does not seem to be significant, but there is no doubt that larger sheep flocks implied financial wealth.

⁵⁵ Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 167–68; Thornton, 'Efficiency in Medieval Livestock Farming', p. 31.

⁵⁶ Slavin, *Bread and Ale*, p. 26.

Within Parish: Gender and Status

Within each community, almost as a rule of thumb, the size and specialization patterns in livestock husbandry is highly correlated to the wealth of each household (here as reflected in the value of taxable goods). At the bottom of the livestock listings only 34 of the 1358 taxed households had no animals at all, although there is no doubt that the real proportion of 'stock-less' peasants was larger, given the 6s. 8d. exemption level and possible evasion from the tax. From there, the wealth and animal holdings of (seemingly) peasants could go very high. Thus, of thirty taxed households at Ashfield Magna a certain Gilbert, son of Andrew, had his possessions estimated to be worth £15 5s. 8d., including 6 oxen, 12 cattle, 24 sheep, and 14 pigs, in addition to 46 quarters of grain stored in his barn, considerably above the mean for the community at £4 7s. (in itself an impressive average for a late thirteenth-century rural community: thus, an average wealth of a *taxed* Breckland household, across all communities, stood at about £2 18s.).

Within communities there were also considerable differences in the composition of animal ownership across various tenant holdings. In some cases, local tenants stocked only non-working animals, notwithstanding the fact that their holdings seemingly included significant plots of arable. For instance, a certain Peter Bercator ('shepherd'), whose taxed crops amounted to 14 quarters, deriving from some 10.5 sown or 15.8 arable acres, held as many as 42 sheep (an abundant resource for manuring), but not a single draught animal, perhaps not surprising given his name. In contrast, some poorer households possessed only one draught (or riding) animal, despite the potential danger of leaving their land under-manured. Thus, Gilbert Wytyng of Rickinghall, who had only two quarters of crops and a horse, was too poor to maintain more than the single animal. Wytyng, however, was rather an exception than a rule, and most tenants possessed at least one or two non-working animals. The occasional indications of peasant arable but with the lack of animals needed to support it might be explained a temporary lack (or hiding) of animals, or of more cooperative arrangements such as sharing of animals, particularly for ploughing.⁵⁷

The uneven distribution of livestock across households does invite further questions, such as the connection between gender and livestock holding patterns. Should we necessarily expect single (whether unmarried, or widowed) women to specialize in a particular sector of livestock industry and hold smaller

⁵⁷ Gies and Gies, *Life in a Medieval Village*, p. 146; Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 229–44, is very skeptical, however, as to the extensiveness of co-aration (or cooperative ploughing).

stocks of animals than their brothers, fathers, and sons, as suggested in contemporary art and literature, which portrayed women primarily as dairymaids and shepherdesses, while horses and oxen were tended by men?⁵⁸ Although the number of females taxed was relatively small (184 out of the 1393 tenant and demesne owner total, or 13 per cent), Table 1.4 shows that there were some differences in livestock holdings between the sexes.

Table 1.4. Differences in livestock holding patterns across genders.⁵⁹

	Horses	Oxen	Cattle	Sheep	Swine	Total
Animals per male household	0.95	0.19	3.23	11.76	1.25	17.38
Animals per female household	0.72	0.14	2.96	9.5	0.86	14.18
Animals per weighted average household	0.92	0.18	3.20	11.45	1.20	16.95

It is unlikely that female tenants were engaged directly in ploughing and carting, but all the same usually held horses and, in some cases, oxen, and here it is perhaps worthwhile to differentiate between the ownership of animals as a form of capital and their physical use. Female tenants might have relied heavily upon male relatives or hired ploughmen.⁶⁰ Certainly, a handful of manorial customals and extents indicate that both male and female heads of household were required to perform various customary obligations, many of which indeed involved draught-animals.⁶¹ Although female tax-payers tended to have somewhat smaller stocks, there were several examples of remarkably prosperous women, particularly in Breckland villages, who specialized in sheep rearing. For instance, Cecilia le Reve of Sapiston had 1 horse, 6 heads of cattle, 2 pigs, and as many as 79 sheep,⁶² while similarly, Isabel de Cotton of Stow possessed 2 horses, 2 heads of cattle, and 53 sheep.⁶³ In the High Suffolk part of the hundred, Cassandra de Bosco of Badwell Ash held 2 horses, 5 heads of cattle, 4 pigs, and 28 sheep.⁶⁴ A handful of other examples can be added here.

⁵⁸ For instance, women tending sheep are depicted in the Luttrell Psalter; London, British Library, Additional MS 42130, fol. 163^v.

⁵⁹ Source: TNA, E 179/242/41.

⁶⁰ Bennett, *A Medieval Life*, p. 89.

⁶¹ Slavin, *Bread and Ale*, pp. 90–92.

⁶² TNA, E 179/242/41, m. 21^r.

⁶³ TNA, E 179/242/41, m. 6^r.

⁶⁴ TNA, E 179/242/41, m. 48^r.

In addition to the question of gender, it would be tempting to learn about the connection between the size and patterns of livestock husbandry and the social and legal status of each taxpayer, which unfortunately the 1283 subsidy does not supply. Although this gap can partially be filled by analysing the almost-contemporary tenant listings given in the so-called *Recognitiones* of 1302, pertaining to dues owed by tenants on the manors of Bury St Edmunds. Tenant animals in the *Recognitiones* appear only in two villages of the Blackbourne Hundred, Rickinghall and Coney Weston (the latter, alas, not appearing in the 1283 assessment). In addition, the *Recognitiones* list the livestock of 17 tenants from Redgrave (in mid-Suffolk), outside Blackbourne Hundred. Unfortunately, however, this document chronically under-records the numbers of free households, reporting almost exclusively unfree tenants. Thus, for Coney Weston, the 1302 listing records only 6 free households and as many as 76 unfree households, while Rickinghall Inferior reported 6 and 42 unfree households. Because of this lacuna, such exercise remains largely impossible. All the same, the listings hint that unfree peasants tended to have smaller stocks, when compared to the average figures deriving from the 1283 subsidy. On average, there were 0.9 horses, 1.5 cattle, 4.5 sheep, and 0.7 pigs per one servile household in Coney Weston, while an average servile family of Rickinghall possessed 0.5 horses, 0.8 cattle, 2.1 sheep, and 0.5 pigs.⁶⁵ At Coney Weston, 21 out of 76 servile families did not possess any stock at all, while at Rickinghall the number of stockless households was as many as 28 out of the total 42. But again, unless comparable figures for free tenants are found, no robust analysis can be undertaken.

Conclusions

Detailed thirteenth-century and early fourteenth-century lay subsidy rolls have been examined by scholars for over a century, starting with Powell's publication of the 1283 Blackbourne Hundred returns in 1910, and, as indicated above, much good work has been published on them over the decades, but it is time for a 'second-generation' approach tied to broader themes of medieval English economic and social history. It is hoped that this reappraisal of the 1283 Blackbourne Hundred subsidy, performed with a greater quantitative rigour, has started that process.

The new approach advocated here suggests a number of new interpretations in regard to the 1283 assessment. First, beyond the now well-known prefer-

⁶⁵ *A Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, pp. 78–81 and 88–89.

ence for horses among the peasantry, it appears the Blackbourne tenantry also placed much emphasis, certainly more than demesnes, on the rearing of non-working animals. This was particularly evident with the impressive flocks of tenant sheep found on Breckland manors, while High Suffolk tenants seemingly specialized more in cattle, likely for dairy.

Another analytical advance is in the matter of livestock densities. The approach adopted here indicates that peasant livestock densities were more than twice that on demesnes, driven perhaps by the need to accommodate small holding sizes. On the surface, such peasant stocking densities would appear to be excessively high, given the practical difficulties of maintaining such high numbers of animals on holdings that were likely less than ten acres on average, but tenants did have communal rights of grazing over open fields and within the fold-course system.

In this sense, we can discern a degree of the Smithian concept of labour specialization, with the demesne and tenancy sectors each stressing its comparative advantage. On the one hand, the Blackbourne lords, with their comparative advantage over land and its resources, focused more on arable production, being the primary suppliers of crops and crop by-products. The large share of working animals within total demesne livestock units, as well as comparatively low stocking densities of animals overall implies that demesne livestock was kept for the sake of arable production, to ensure sufficient draught force and fertilizing agents, but little more than that. A somewhat different picture emerges from the peasant sector. Here, Blackbourne tenants seem to have focused much more on pastoral husbandry, as it is indicated by small land holdings, the larger share of non-working animals, especially sheep and cattle, and, of course, the comparatively high livestock densities. As on the demesne, tenant arable and livestock sectors were complementary, but different in orientation. Unlike seigniorial livestock, peasant animals manured both tenant and demesne land. In this manner, peasant animals undoubtedly contributed more to demesne operations than vice versa. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that tenants supplied livestock at a greater intensity relative to their arable acreage. It seems likely, too, that they were more intense suppliers of wool, whether for home consumption or sale, likely eclipsing the demesne in this Blackbourne case by a factor of around six to one.⁶⁶ In a similar vein, we may conclude, therefore, that

⁶⁶ This is calculated assuming that Blackbourne tenant sheep livestock densities were twice (at a conservative estimate according to Table 1.2, above) that on demesnes and assuming that the proportion of tenant to demesne arable land was around three to one at the time (the

tenants were a very dominant sector in the English livestock economy. This certainly undermines Postan's pessimistic and Malthusian-influenced views about limited peasant livestock capabilities, based on the Malthusian concept of the correlation between limited landed resources and demographic crisis. Regions of small holdings clearly did not preclude large peasant livestock impacts. It is tempting to conclude that the high stocking densities in Blackbourne villages imply a non-Malthusian reality; more systematic analyses of other surviving tax assessments are needed to corroborate this point.

The interplay of exogenous and endogenous variables can affect livestock strategies as well. As we have seen, local environmental conditions had a major effect on livestock dispositions. Thus, vills following more intense agrarian regimes with relatively high proportions of legumes tended to accommodate higher numbers of swine, which were likely stall-fed rather than free range, particularly relevant in areas of scarce woodland. This seems especially apparent in High Suffolk vills, where the quality of soil was fertile enough to encourage local tenants to grow legumes for boosting further crop productivity. On the other hand, the soil of the Breckland was so infertile that it discouraged local tenants either to invest in legume production or to keep large numbers of swine. The most obvious strategy here was to profit from those animals which could sustain themselves on the vegetation from relatively infertile soils, while improving it somewhat with their own manure, hence the large Breckland sheep flocks. Under these circumstances, swine were kept on a limited scale, reflecting the fact that in agrarian regimes sheep and swine tended to be mutually exclusive.

Endogenous factors in the makeup of tenants might have important implications as well. Female tenants tended to have slightly smaller livestock holdings than males. Overall these differences do not seem overly significant, although they likely hid a variety of stratagems depending upon a woman's situation.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, no comparable exercise is possible for determining the connection between the social and legal status of the tenants and the size and patterns of livestock rearing. Careful analysis of other detailed lay subsidies and other related documents, however, is likely to point the way forward.

middle of the range indicated by Campbell, *ESA*, p. 59); in a similar fashion the dominance for non-working, perhaps dairying cattle, where livestock densities were three to one in favour of tenants, would be around nine to one.

⁶⁷ The range of these situations, involving relatively young women to widows as revealed in the lay subsidies, will be considered in another publication.

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THE FOOD ECONOMY OF LORDS, TENANTS, AND WORKERS IN A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE: HUNSTANTON, NORFOLK, 1328–48

Jane Whittle*

Introduction

Bruce Campbell has transformed our vision of medieval agriculture before the Black Death, and particularly the agriculture of medieval Norfolk. Postan had argued that early fourteenth-century agriculture was in crisis: population pressure had led to the colonization of marginal land and a chronic shortage of pasture and therefore manure; with static technology this inevitably led to lower productivity and an absolute shortage of food.¹ In contrast, Campbell presents a picture of flexible and adaptable farming systems, unusually productive for their time, created by commercially orientated lords and peasants. Adaptability, skill in agriculture, and commercialism allowed high population densities, such as those found in pre-Black Death Norfolk. However, even Campbell is gloomy about the state of the peasantry, noting the proliferation of tiny landholdings whose occupiers ‘tended to be deficient in capital, overburdened with debt, and

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¹ Postan, ‘Medieval Agrarian Society’; Hatcher and Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages*, pp. 31–52.

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unable to make full and effective use of available labour supplies.’² Manorial accounts provide the crucial evidence for these arguments, as Campbell notes ‘no single source provides fuller, more systematic, and more precise information’ on agricultural practice than medieval manorial accounts.³ The survival of these documents is probably better for Norfolk than any other county.⁴ One of the many manors Campbell added to his ‘Norfolk accounts database’ was Hunstanton in the far north-west corner of the county. This chapter takes a fresh look at Hunstanton’s manorial accounts, examining them in conjunction with rare medieval household accounts that survive from the same community. The aim is not to examine agricultural productivity, but to look at the social and economic relationships which lay behind the production and consumption of food and the commercialization of the economy. While the roots of any food economy lie in agricultural production, other aspects such as the buying, selling, and gift-giving of food, and the types of diet consumed by lords and workers are also significant. Forms of agricultural labour are a measure of commercialization, as well having implications for standards of living and the relationship between the lord and the village community. Uniquely, Hunstanton’s records allow us to examine all these elements of the medieval food economy.⁵

Hunstanton belonged to a minor, resident manorial lord in the first half of the fourteenth century. Its manorial accounts provide evidence of demesne agricultural production and the proportion consumed by the lord’s household, while its household accounts record the diet and the purchase of food stuffs, as well gifts of food from members of the local community. Both manorial and household accounts name the manorial *famuli* and hired workers employed in the harvest, and record the wages paid to them.⁶ Unfortunately only a fragment of a manorial court roll survives for Hunstanton in this period, but a manorial rental of c. 1335 does survive.⁷ This essay first looks in more detail at Hunstanton and its records, before moving on to consider three themes:

² Quoting Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, pp. 53 and 68. See also, Campbell, ‘Arable Productivity’; Campbell and Overton, ‘A New Perspective’; Campbell and others, *A Medieval Capital*; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*.

³ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 26.

⁴ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 30 (over 2000 accounts representing 220 manors 1238–1450).

⁵ Although, see also Coss, *Foundations*, on the Multons of Frampton in Lincolnshire.

⁶ *Famuli* were the agricultural servants employed on the demesne, see Postan, *The Famulus*. They were paid by the week rather than by the day.

⁷ LEST BI/3.

consumption and production; workers and tenants; and gifts and purchases of food. Each of these themes illuminates the level of commercialization, the multiplicity of ways in which lords and tenants interacted, and economic relationships beyond the manor. Comparisons are also made with Hunstanton's economy in the early seventeenth century, another period in which population growth had led to low real wages.

Hunstanton and its Records

Hunstanton lies in the north-west corner of Norfolk, on the coast near the point where the North Sea and the Wash merge. The parish contained around 1700 acres, and its medieval farming land was divided into two great arable fields, East Field and West Field, with demesne land interspersed amongst that of the tenants.⁸ Rather than following a two-field system however, Campbell found that Hunstanton operated 'the most specialized and intensive cropping system' of medieval England, his type 1, where wheat and barley were grown alongside legumes substituted for bare fallows.⁹ For instance from 1337/38–1347/48 on average only 15 per cent of Hunstanton's demesne lay fallow each year.¹⁰ Unlike the parishes just inland from Hunstanton where sandy soils dominate, most of Hunstanton's soil was highly fertile, farmed right up to the cliff edge in West Field.¹¹ The coastal location meant fishing as well as agriculture provided a living for some inhabitants. The markets that proliferated along this part of the Norfolk coast at places such as Hunstanton and Thornham must have been partly fish-markets, while the more substantial coastal communities of Heacham and Burnham also held fairs.¹² The coastal sand dunes and marshes provided such communities with relatively plentiful pasture: Hunstanton had around two hundred acres of common land of this type in the north-east corner of the parish.¹³

The Le Strange family owned Hunstanton from the early twelfth century onwards. In 1309 Baron Le Strange enfeoffed his younger brother, Hamon, with the manor and this branch of the family made their home in the Hall

⁸ Oestmann, *Lordship and Community*, p. 32.

⁹ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 269–70, 325, and 337.

¹⁰ LEST BG6, LEST BG8, LEST BG10, LEST BG13, and LEST BG14.

¹¹ See Oestmann, *Lordship and Community*, pp. 88–89, for a map of Hunstanton soils.

¹² Letters, *Gazetteer of Markets and Fairs*.

¹³ LEST OA1 (Hunstanton map 1615).

there, remaining as resident lords until the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Hunstanton Hall was located in the centre of the parish, between the two fields and next to the church. The Le Stranges of Hunstanton left a remarkable archive that combines a rich estate records with sets of household accounts for the fourteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. Detailed studies have been made of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Le Stranges.¹⁵ Selections of Hunstanton's medieval household accounts were translated by Holley, and analysed by Le Strange and Woolgar.¹⁶ No study has examined Hunstanton's medieval household accounts and manorial accounts in conjunction, however, overlooking the extent to which they overlap and complement each other.¹⁷ In fact, the manorial accounts of minor lords have been relatively neglected. Aside from the work of Richard Britnell and Bruce Campbell, the great majority of estate studies have used the accounts of monastic houses, bishoprics, and great lords.¹⁸ Hunstanton's manorial accounts suggest that the records of minor lords were more idiosyncratic than those of the great estates, but as a result, also more likely to contain additional details about lord and community.

Hunstanton's pre-Black Death manorial and household accounts stretch across the two decades from 1328 to 1348. Neither set forms in a continuous series. Household accounts survive for 1328/29, 1342/43 and 1344–46, and 1347/48, covering forty-five months in total.¹⁹ Thirteen separate manorial accounts are catalogued for Hunstanton between 1331/32 and 1347/48, but four are split or damaged,²⁰ and five are for only five to seven months each,²¹ so that only seven full years are covered. The two series overlap only in 1342–44 and 1347/48. An added complication is that the earliest documents, the household accounts of 1328/29 and the manorial accounts of 1331–34 date from the minority of Hamon Le Strange of Hunstanton II, when Hunstanton was

¹⁴ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 18–20.

¹⁵ Oestmann, *Lordship and Community*; Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*.

¹⁶ Holley, 'The Earliest Roll' (Holley's translations are not reliable); Le Strange, 'A Roll of Household Accounts'; Woolgar, 'Diet and Consumption'; see also Coss, *Foundations*, pp. 70–73.

¹⁷ Both are mentioned briefly in Dyer 'Changes in Diet', p. 30.

¹⁸ Britnell, 'Production for the Market'; Britnell, 'Minor Landlords'; Campbell, 'Complexity', pp. 241–42; Harvey, *Manorial Records*, pp. 25–40.

¹⁹ LEST NH1, LEST NH3-7, LEST NH12, and LEST supp. 23/ii.

²⁰ LEST BG3, LEST BG5, LEST BG6, and LEST BG7.

²¹ LEST BG7–11.

held by Roger de Holm.²² De Holm managed the manor of Hunstanton jointly with that of neighbouring Holme, his own residence.²³ As a result, the size of demesne arable cultivated in these accounts is approximately twice that in the later accounts, 357.75 acres rather than 168.37, although almost all the land is described as lying within Hunstanton's two great fields. The 1328/29 household accounts refer to Roger's household at Holme, whereas the later accounts are for Hamon Le Strange's household at Hunstanton.²⁴ Many of those mentioned in these earlier accounts appear in the later series. Most notably, Thomas de Sandford, a servant in de Holm's household, later became Hamon Le Strange's manorial steward.

The contents of the household and manorial accounts overlap a great deal. The household accounts are diet accounts, recording the week by week acquisition of food for the lordly household. Part of their purpose was to collect information on expenditure and the use of manorial products that could be fed into the manorial accounts. Some entries, such as the lists of harvest workers and details of their food consumption alternate between the household accounts (1329, 1342, and 1344), and the manorial accounts (1331, 1332, 1339, 1343, and 1347). And while the household accounts largely restrict themselves to the acquisition of food, occasionally straying into agricultural matters, the manorial accounts sometimes record the personal expenses of the lord and his family. As well as details of repairs to the manor house, which we might expect, manorial accounts for 1342, 1342/43, and 1345/46 include details of 'payments for the lord's clothes' and 'for clothes for the lord, lady and their daughter' listing fabrics purchased at Lynn and Norwich and work done by tailors.²⁵

Consumption and Production

As Dyer has shown, the diet of harvest workers provides a glimpse of the type of food eaten by ordinary people in medieval England, probably representing the very best food consumed by most of the peasant population rather than a normal diet.²⁶ Table 2.1 shows the diet of the harvest workers at Hunstanton

²² Hamon Le Strange I died in 1316. Hamon Le Strange II was lord of Hunstanton by 1337, was married by 1345, and died in 1361. Roger de Holm's name appears as lord in both the household and manorial accounts.

²³ LEST BG4 notes grain paid to the *famuli* at Hunstanton and at Holme.

²⁴ As stated in the headings of the respective accounts.

²⁵ LEST BG11, LEST BG12, and LEST BG13.

²⁶ Dyer, 'Changes in Diet'.

in three years during the early fourteenth century.²⁷ The accounts note that the grain was baked into bread and malt brewed into ale. The everyday meal was of bread with either cheese or fish, accompanied by ale and milk. Beef was provided for the day of the tenants' 'lovebene', their one day of customary harvest work; ham was for consumption on Sundays and again at the lovebene.²⁸ A single goose, the 'reap-goose', was provided for a feast at the end of harvest.²⁹ Food was an important form of payment to the workers. In 1344 when all the food used was given monetary values, it totalled forty-one per cent of harvest expenditure: £2 11s. 3d. was spent on food and drink in comparison to £3 13s. 3d. on cash wages.

Table 2.1. Food provided for harvest workers at Hunstanton manor, selected years.³⁰

	1328	1342	1344
Grain	2 quarters 1 bushel of mixtlyn and multure	4 quarters of 'mixture'	4.5 quarters of 'mixture' (3s./q)
Bread	—	(0.5d.)	(10d.)
Malt	2.25 quarters	4.25 quarters	4 quarters first grade (44d./q)
Beef	—	1 quarter (18d.)	(8d.) + 1 quarter (8d.)
Pork	(8d.)	—	
Bacon	1 ham	5 low-grade hams	2 low-grade hams (12d.)
Geese	1	1	—
Butter	1+ stone of butter &	1 stone (14d.)	12 lbs (12d.)
Cheese	4+ stone cheese (7s. 3d.)	8.5 stons (5s. 3d.)	8.75 stone (5s. 10d.)
Milk	17 gallons (17d.)	47 gallons (3s. 11d.)	52 gallons (4s. 4d.)
Herring	—	50 (3d.)	—
Fish	28 <i>demelton</i> & <i>doggedrove</i> (2s. + ?)	31 <i>lolle</i> & <i>lynge</i> (6s. 6d.)	49 (8s. 9d.)

Note: the grain was baked into bread and malt brewed into ale.

²⁷ Harvest diets also appear in LEST BG2, LEST BG4, LEST BG9, LEST BG11, LEST BG12, and LEST BG14.

²⁸ LEST NH1.

²⁹ Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', p. 30.

³⁰ Sources: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST NH1, LEST NH3, and LEST NH12.

The food enjoyed by workers during the few weeks of harvest can be compared with the normal diet of the lordly household. Table 2.2 shows consumption patterns during a six-month period from August 1342 to February 1343, including the food given to the harvest workers that year. As lesser lords with a single manorial property, the Le Stranges kept a modest household both in terms of numbers of people and expenditure. For instance in 1347/48 the household included fifteen people and cash expenditure on food ran to £6 10s. 10.75d.³¹ The household was smaller still in the early 1340s when Hamon Le Strange II was newly married. Cash expenditure in the six months shown in Table 2.2 ran to only £2 2s. 1.75d.³² Fish, and particularly plaice (which was plentiful off the sandy north Norfolk coast), was the most frequently purchased foodstuff in the household accounts. The larger quantity of red meat, poultry,³³ fish, and eggs consumed, and the addition of small quantities of spices, set the lordly household's diet apart from that of the local peasantry. But the absence of venison and a wider variety of wild and game birds, and the very small amount of wine consumed, set them apart from wealthier elite households.³⁴ Campbell estimates that minor lords made up ninety-five per cent of seigniorial households: most must have eaten like the Le Stranges, living relatively cheaply by relying heavily on the produce of their manorial demesnes and other local foodstuffs.³⁵

Bread was the dietary staple for both the lord's household and agricultural workers. Bread was baked every two weeks in the Le Strange household, with only very occasional purchases of bread from bakers. The household accounts of Roger de Holm in 1328/29 note different types of bread being baked from wheat, rye, and mixtlyn (a wheat-rye mix, often called maslin in the literature). For instance at Christmas in 1328 the household had 419 loaves of white bread made from 2.75 quarters of wheat; 82 loaves of wholemeal from 0.5 quarters of wheat; and 145 loaves of bread for the servants made from 1.25 quarters of

³¹ Woolgar, 'Diet and Consumption', p. 18.

³² Excluding the money spent on the workers' harvest diet.

³³ Capons, hens, and chickens were purchased live and then kept in store rather than being raised on the demesne or purchased as butchered meat. This means they are duplicated in parts (a) and (b) of Table 2.2, unlike other foodstuffs. Of the animals consumed from store, pigs and piglets provided 41% of edible meat, cattle 36%, capons, hens and chickens 10%, sheep 7%, geese 5%, and ducks 1%. Edible weights taken from Harvey, *Living and Dying*, p. 228.

³⁴ Woolgar 'Diet and Consumption', pp. 20–23 and 30–31; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 55 and 58–61.

³⁵ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', p. 11.

Table 2.2. Food consumption in the Le Strange household, 1 August 1342 to 1 February 1343.³⁶

a) Food Consumed 'of store' from the Manorial Demesne

Type	Number of Times	Quantity Consumed
Wheat	16	15 quarters 0.5 bushels
Mixture	12	3 quarters 6 bushels
Malt	12	22 quarters 1 bushel
Barley	2	4 bushels
Oats	1	1 quarter
Cattle	4	2.5
Sheep	5	5
Pigs	7	12
Piglets	2	6
Bacon hams	2	6
Geese	12	20
Capons	12	23
Hens	18	23
Chickens	39	56
Mallard	1	8
Swan	1	1

b) Food Purchased

Type: Local Agricultural Products	Number of Times (Cost)	Type: Produced beyond the Manor	Number of Times (Cost)
Milk	9 (54.25d.)	Fresh fish (various)	18 (152d.*)
Butter	4 (18d.*)	Herring	5 (24d.)
Cheese	7 (80d.*)	Plaice	45 (43.25d.*)
Eggs	23 (40.5d.)	Whelks	1 (1d.)
Bread	2 (1.5d.)	Almonds	1 (6d. for 3 lb)
Flour	1 (4d.)	Cumin	1*
Beef	14	Ground ginger	2 (5d.)
Veal	1	Liquorice & fennel	1 (1.25d.)
Mutton	12 (213d.*)	Mustard	7 (5.25d.)
Pork	6	Pepper	2 (6.25d.*)
Hens	4 (33d. for 46)	Rice	1 (1d.)
Chickens	6 (22d. for 47)	Saffron	1 (5.5d.)
		Vinegar	1 (2d.)

Note: one purchase of cheese & butter for 5d. is noted in cheese total. Meats were commonly purchased together so cost cannot be separated. One purchase of pepper and cumin for 4.25d. is noted in pepper total. On eleven occasions plaice were purchased with other fish, these purchases cost 12.5d. and have been included in the plaice total. Quantities purchased are given where they are recorded in the accounts.

³⁶ Source: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST NH3.

mixtlyn. Multure from the mill was used to make trenchers and feed the dogs.³⁷ The Le Stranges grew very little rye in the 1340s and instead used wheat and 'mixture' to bake bread. Historians have universally interpreted the 'mixture' recorded in the Le Strange household accounts as mixtlyn or maslin, the wheat-rye mix. However, the manorial accounts make it clear that 'mixture' was something else: an 'inferior mixture for the *famuli*' as it was described in the manorial accounts, the composition of which was noted each year.³⁸ It consisted largely of barley, with the addition of all the multure from the mill (presumably already a mixture of local grains), and some peas.³⁹ Its main use was indeed to pay the grain allowances of the *famuli*, but it was also used to bake bread for the harvest workers and in the lord's household. Presumably, as in the de Holm household, the Le Stranges themselves ate wheaten bread, while bread made of 'mixture' was given to servants and other workers.

Almost all the bread grains consumed by the Le Stranges and their workers were grown on the Hunstanton demesne, with very grain little purchased by the manor or the household.⁴⁰ Between 1337 and 1347 the demesne consisted of 168 acres of arable of which 38 percent was sown with barley, 21 per cent with peas, 15 per cent with wheat, 10 per cent with oats and 15 per cent lay fallow.⁴¹ It produced an average of 180 quarters of barley, 62 quarters of wheat, 53 quarters of peas and 38 quarters of oats each year.⁴² Barley was used to produce an

³⁷ Holley, 'The Earliest Roll', p. 89, and LEST NH1. Holley mistranslated wheat (*frumenti*) as 'corn' and rye (*silig.*) as 'wheat'.

³⁸ For example, LEST BG11. 'Mixtil' (mixtlyn), 'mixtur' (mixture), and 'multur' (multure) all appear in the manorial accounts but can be clearly distinguished.

³⁹ In 1342/43 it contained 31 quarters 2.75 bushels of barley, 7 quarters 5 bushels of multure, and 4 quarters 2 bushels of peas.

⁴⁰ Grain purchases are not recorded in LEST BG13 or LEST BG14. Small grain purchases of less than 5s. appear in the accounts LEST BG9, LEST BG10, LEST BG11, and LEST BG12, and a more substantial purchase of 35s. 9.5d. of grain in LEST BG8. Multure from the mill was the most significant source of grain grown outside the demesne: on multure see Langdon, *Mills in the Medieval Economy*, p. 15.

⁴¹ The size of the demesne and acreages sown and fallow are stated in five surviving accounts dating from 1337/38–1347/48: LEST BG6, LEST BG8, LEST BG10, LEST BG13, and LEST BG14. The demesne was 168.37 acres in 1337/38, 1339/40 and 1340/41, but 171.25 acres in 1347/48. In addition small amounts of tenant land (6–18 acres) were in the lord's hands each year, some of which was leased out and some cultivated with the demesne. As a result the average amount of land cultivated as demesne was 177 acres.

⁴² Averages of grain produced taken from manorial accounts: LEST BG6, LEST BG8, LEST BG10, LEST BG13, and LEST BG14.

average of 72 quarters of malt. Small amounts of other crops were occasionally grown such as rye and dredge (barley-oat mix). In 1331–33, when the larger area of demesne was farmed under Roger de Holm's management, a wider range of crops were grown. Wheat and barley dominated, but were grown alongside rye, mixtlyn, peas, beans, and *pulmentia* (literally 'pottage', a pea-bean mix).⁴³

Table 2.3 shows the uses of the grain produced in Hunstanton and recorded in the manorial accounts of 1342/43 and 1345/46. As was common in the manors of resident lords, a high proportion of these crops were used within the manor.⁴⁴ In 1342/43 24 per cent (by volume) of the grain produced was sold, contributing 31 per cent of the manor's cash income that year; the proportion was lower in 1345/46, a year with a bumper harvest. Barley was the main cash crop, but it was also the main component of 'mixture' and a significant proportion (41 per cent in 1342/43 and 57 per cent in 1345/46) was malted. More than half the malt was consumed on the manor. Wheat was predominantly used by the lord's household, where it was baked into bread. Oats and peas were also consumed in the lord's household where they were used for pottage. Some oats and peas were sold, presumably finding a ready market with local people also using them for pottage. On the demesne farm, peas and lower quality wheat and barley were fed to pigs. Oats were mainly fed to horses, both the lord's riding horses, and the four workhorses or 'stotts' which provided traction on the demesne.

The Hunstanton demesne produced a variety of livestock. The manorial accounts of 1337–47 record an average each year of eleven cows leased to a dairyman or woman, as well as forty sheep and nine lambs, thirty-two pigs and eighteen piglets, along with geese, capons, hens, and chickens. Roger de Holm's manorial economy was again more varied with more cattle, as well as ducks, swans, and peacocks in 1331–34, although no sheep recorded. Little livestock was sold, with income from demesne livestock never exceeding £3,⁴⁵ typically from the sale of a few pigs and hides from cattle and sheep.⁴⁶ As a result only 12 per cent income from demesne produce was generated by livestock, compared to 88 per cent from crops: a higher reliance on arable products than the average for lay manors analysed by Campbell for 1288–1315, where 71 per cent of

⁴³ See LEST BG4 grange account.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Totals were inflated in LEST BG10 and LEST BG11 by the sale of the lord's horses (not stotts).

⁴⁶ Campbell found a similar pattern on the small Norfolk lay manor of Hevingham Cat's in 1287/88: 'Complexity', pp. 241–42.

Table 2.3. The uses of grain in Hunstanton manor, 1342/43 and 1345/46, by volume, measured in quarters.⁴⁷

1342/43	Sown	Sold	Fed to Livestock	Paid to Workers	Lord's Household	TOTAL
Wheat	-	5.25	-	-	21	26.25
Peas	9.75	18.375	4	-	3.19	35.315
Barley	38.75	29.625	6.625	-	-	75
Oats	9.75	4	30.375	-	3.25	47.375
Mixture	-	-	-	37.44	5.625	43.065
Barley malt	-	6	-	4.25	28.125	38.375
TOTAL	58.25	63.25	41	41.69	61.19	265.38
%	21.9	23.8	15.4	15.7	23.1	99.9

1345/46	Sown	Sold	Fed to Livestock	Paid to Workers	Lord's Household	TOTAL
Wheat	11.125	3	0.125	-	26.25	40.5
Peas	12.125	2	11	-	-	25.125
Barley	33.375	19.5	22.25	-	-	75.125
Dredge	-	1	-	-	-	1
Oats	11.5	-	30.25	-	3.625	45.375
Mixture	-	-	-	35.781	6.875	42.656
Barley malt	-	15	-	5.25	41	61.25
TOTAL	68.125	40.5	63.625	41.031	77.75	291.031
%	23.4	13.9	21.9	14.1	26.7	99.9

Note: the great majority of this grain was produced on the demesne. Other sources of grain were: multure from the mill (7.625q. in 1342/43; 9q. in 1345/46); and purchases of grain (0.5q of oats for seed in 1342/43; no purchases in 1345/46).

⁴⁷ Source: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, manorial accounts LEST BG12 and BG13.

revenue was generated by crops.⁴⁸ The household accounts demonstrate that while the Le Strange household was virtually self-sufficient in their grain needs, this was not the case for livestock and meat. The manor did provide meat for household consumption (Table 2.2), but numerous purchases of beef, mutton, and pork were also made. Poultry were more likely to be purchased or received as gifts than raised on the demesne farm, but was then kept until needed and consumed from 'store'. In the six months shown in Table 2.2, ninety-three hens and chickens were purchased; forty-nine chickens, hens, and capons were received as gifts; and three capons received as rent.

In comparison to later periods, the pre-Black Death diets of workers indicate that food consumption as well as food production was very efficient, with little waste of the calories available. In the early modern period, agricultural labourers in southern England ate white wheaten bread, rather than pottage and wholemeal bread mixed with peas; they very rarely drank milk and ate meat regularly.⁴⁹ Eating white bread, beer, and meat meant a high proportion of the calories available from the crops grown were lost in processing. In comparison pottage transferred almost all the calories available in grain and pulses directly to the consumer.⁵⁰ The flexibility in bread grains used by medieval consumers also allowed diet to be adapted to whatever grains were plentiful in a particular manor or year with little waste.

Taking into account the high land productivity and possible low wastage of available calories, Table 2.4 shows how many kilocalories an average peasant arable landholding in Hunstanton, of four acres in size, could produce. It assumes peasant farmers used the same techniques, and achieved the same productivity, that was found on the demesne. Although not uncontroversial, this assumption seems reasonable given the fact demesne and peasant lands were intermixed. Dyer, in his reconstruction of peasant budgets, calculated that peasant farmer with fifteen acres would have been able to support his family in an average year, but with little surplus.⁵¹ It has been widely assumed that ten acres was the minimum size of landholding that could support a family in medieval England.⁵²

⁴⁸ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 184: the proportion of income from crops was the same on episcopal manors, but lower on royal manors (67%) and conventual and collegiate manors (55%).

⁴⁹ Muldrew, *Food, Energy*, pp. 57–116.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 398.

⁵¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p. 117.

⁵² Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare' p. 232.

This, however, is based on a third of land lying fallow each year. In contrast, Table 2.4 suggests that a four-acre holding in Hunstanton could provide the calories sufficient to support 3.2 people, or put another way, in Hunstanton's agricultural system a family of five could be provided with the calories necessary for survival by a holding 6.2 acres in size. Alternatively, if all the crops were sold, a four-acre holding would have provided a cash income of 11s. 2.2d., or 8s. 6d. once 2s. 8d. rent had been subtracted; this was the equivalent of 68 days wage labour at 1.5d. per day. Of course, Table 2.4 does not represent a full reconstruction of a peasant budget. No allowance has been made for livestock. Without livestock some manure would have been purchased, but with livestock some crops would have been used as fodder. Despite pessimism about peasant ownership of livestock,⁵³ rare peasant inventories from this period show that livestock was owned. For instance, Richard Peper of Bunwell in Norfolk had four acres of arable land and owned two cows, a bullock, eight sheep, and two horses worth 34s. in December 1331.⁵⁴ Nor has allowance been made for the cost of clothing and other expenses, or the possible income from preparing textiles, or the other forms of work known to have existed in medieval Hunstanton such as fishing, food processing, petty retailing, and specialist crafts.

Tenants and Workers

The relationship between lords and villagers in medieval England has classically been regarded as one of tenure, whereby villagers paid rent in various forms to their lord, and received land in return. In the medieval period many tenants were unfree, but it has long been known that Norfolk contained many free as well as unfree holdings, and recent estimates suggest that across England as a whole, free holdings may have outnumbered the unfree.⁵⁵ It can also be pointed out that tenure was not necessarily the only relationship between lord and tenants. Other important economic connections between lords and villagers could exist, most notably wage labour, gift-giving, and buying and selling. To understand the place of lords, tenants, and other individuals in rural economy and society, all these connections need to be considered.

⁵³ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 117–8; Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare' pp. 231–2.

⁵⁴ Briggs, 'Manorial Court Roll Inventories', pp. 6, 14, and 19. The inventory is recorded in a manorial court roll: Cambridge University Manuscripts Department, Buxton MSS 68/7.

⁵⁵ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', pp. 9, 29–36, and 43.

Table 2.4. The estimated productivity of a peasant landholding in Hunstanton.⁵⁶

	Barley	Peas	Wheat	Oats	Total
Acreage	1.52 (38%)	0.84 (21%)	0.6 (15%)	0.4 (10%)	4.0
Seeding rate per acre	4b	2.75b	3b	4b	–
Mean yields	3.6	2.9	5.1	2.9	–
Yields of this holding	21.89b	6.70b	9.18b	4.64b	42.41b
Seed deducted for next year	6.08b	2.31b	1.8b	1.6b	11.79b
Crops for consumption or sale	15.81b	4.39b	7.38b	3.04b	30.62b
Hunstanton price per bushel (JETR average price)	4.185 d./b (4.89 d./b)	3.75 d./b (4.13 d./b)	5.87 d./b (6.91 d./b)	2.72 d./b (2.99 d./b)	–
Maximum possible cash income	66.16d.	16.46d.	43.32d.	8.27d.	134.21d.
Weight per bushel	46 lb	53 lb	53 lb	36 lb	–
Kilocalories per lb	1452	1000	1520	1676	–
Maximum possible kilocalories	1,055,982	232,670	594,533	183,421	2,066,606
Wastage	105,598	23,267	166,469	18,342	313,676
Kilocalories available	950,384	209,403	428,064	165,079	1,752,930

Note: 'b' = Bushels. JETR average price is the average price calculated from Thorold Rogers, *Agriculture and Prices*, I, 230–33, for 1332–47. Prices of barley and peas only available for Hunstanton: as Hunstanton barley prices were only 85 per cent of the average given by JTR, wheat prices estimated also to be 85 per cent of JETR average; as Hunstanton pea prices were 91 per cent of the average given by JTR, therefore oat prices estimated also to be 91 per cent of JETR average. Campbell did not provide the weight per bushel of peas but modern farming guides indicate peas weigh the same as wheat per bushel. Wastage is estimated as 10 per cent overall from vermin, rot etc. (following Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 392 and 396) and an extra 20 per cent for wheat lost in milling as it could not be consumed as pottage (see Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 215). With an average requirement of 1500 kilocalories per day, 547,500 were needed to support one person per year (see Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 392–93).

⁵⁶ Sources: acreage of crops and fallow and seeding rate average taken from manorial accounts Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST BG8, LEST BG10, LEST BG13, and LEST BG14. Price per bushel of barley and peas average taken from manorial accounts LEST BG2, LEST BG4, LEST BG8, LEST BG9, LEST BG10, LEST BG12, LEST BG13, and LEST BG14. Mean yields (net of seed, gross of tithe) for Norfolk 1250–1349 from Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 318–19. Weight per bushel (except peas) and kilocalories per lb, from Campbell, *Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 215 and 392.

Hunstanton's rental of *c.* 1335 lists 213 tenants and their money rents, although not the amount of land held.⁵⁷ Of these, sixty-three were free tenants, twenty-two 'copenot' tenants, and 128 'villein and free tenants of the lord's villeinage', that is unfree tenants some of whom held pieces of freehold as well as villein land. Copenot tenures were smallholdings designed for traders and owed a small money rent of between 7d. and 0.5d.⁵⁸ In fact, all three types of tenure overlapped, as was common in Norfolk: three individuals with identical names held both free and copenot tenures, seven held copenot and villein tenures, and ten are listed as free and villein tenants (two also appeared twice in the list of villein tenants). Taking these duplicated names into account, there were 191 tenants rather than 213. The fact that most, but perhaps not all, of these tenants were resident in Hunstanton, and that three other manors stretched into Hunstanton's West Field and the village,⁵⁹ makes any estimate of Hunstanton's population tentative at best: the 191 tenant households plus the lord's household represents a minimum rather than maximum. Nonetheless, the comparison with later periods is striking. In 1524/25 the subsidy returns indicate that there were forty-five to fifty households in Hunstanton, at a time when there were forty-six manorial tenants.⁶⁰ By 1621–32 there were fifty-nine tenants, and the parish registers suggest that only four families were resident as subtenants.⁶¹ This means that the population of early modern Hunstanton was, at most, only 31 per cent of that of Hunstanton before the Black Death.

Most tenants in medieval Hunstanton must have held very small pieces of land. In *c.* 1335 the median rent paid at Hunstanton was 13d. If we assume freehold rents were 4d. per acre, and villein and copenote rents 8d. per acre, sixty-four, or 33.5 per cent of tenants, were virtually landless with less than one acre of land, while 128, or 67 per cent, held less than four acres.⁶² The average

⁵⁷ LEST B1/3.

⁵⁸ Rents of free tenants varied from 0.5d. to 16s.; and villein rents from 0.25d. to 10s. 6d.

⁵⁹ Hunstanton contained four manors: Hunstanton, Mustrell's, Snetterton's, and Lovell's; the latter two contained only 50 acres in Hunstanton and Heacham, according to Oestmann. All four had land in West Field while the whole of East Field lay in Hunstanton manor. Oestmann concludes that Mustrell's was 'significantly smaller than Hunstanton manor'. Judging from scattered information provided by Oestmann it probably contained *c.* 300 acres: Oestmann, *Lordship and Community*, pp. 29, 38, 56. Snetterton's was a submanor of Hunstanton so appears as a freeholding in the *c.* 1335 rental (with an estimated size of 48 acres).

⁶⁰ Oestmann, *Lordship and Community*, p. 156.

⁶¹ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, p. 230.

⁶² On rents see Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, p. 69; Kansaka, 'Villein Rents', p. 599. These

landholding size in Hunstanton manor was 3.9 acres. Only thirty-three tenants (or 17 per cent) held more than the 6.2 acres necessary to support a family of five (see Table 2.4). This landholding pattern was normal in Norfolk before the Black Death: evidence from nine manors across the county reveals average landholdings of between 2.2 and 5.5 acres, with the exception of Sedgeford where light sandy soils dominated and the average holding was 10 acres.⁶³ Norfolk's manorial structure means that many tenants must have held land from more than one manor, at Hunstanton and elsewhere. However, it is also clear that tenants such as these must have supplemented any income from their landholding with other activities: working on the lord's demesne was one possibility.

The great majority of agricultural work on Hunstanton's demesne was done by waged workers (Table 2.5). Customary works or 'lovebene' were provided by villeins, with no tenant owing more than one day's harvest work as their only labour service. Thus while a large number of tenants participated, the proportion of work-days provided by labour services was relatively small. 'Anlepimen' were unfree individuals who belonged to the manor.⁶⁴ They owed three day's harvest work each. In contrast the demesne's agricultural servants, the *famuli*, typically worked for five weeks over the harvest period, while hired harvest workers were employed for between three and four weeks. On average during harvest, villein tenants provided seventy-four customary works (10 per cent of the total), and anlepimen nineteen works (3 per cent) but the hired harvest workers provided 422 days of work (58 per cent). The contribution of the *famuli* was not enumerated as 'works', but specified *famuli* were named amongst the harvest workers and paid for a five week period. Assuming they worked 6.5 days a week for five weeks, they contributed 213 days worked on average (29 per cent). This heavy reliance on wage labour at harvest time is in sharp

estimates suggest a realistic 725 acres were occupied by the tenants. The parish of Hunstanton contained 1700 acres: *c.* 360 acres of demesne held by the de Holm and Le Strange families (evidence from LEST BG2); *c.* 700 acres held by Hunstanton manor tenants; *c.* 350 acres of tenant land held from other manors (see note 54 above), *c.* 200 acres of common (from a map of 1615, LEST OA1); *c.* 90 acres of miscellaneous uses: the manor site, demesne closes, roads, and paths (estimate from map of 1615).

⁶³ Williamson, 'Norfolk: Thirteenth Century', pp. 53 and 87; Campbell, 'Complexity', p. 244; Campbell, 'Population Pressure', p. 106; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, p. 191; Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare' p. 232.

⁶⁴ On anlepimen see Davenport, *Norfolk Manor*, p. 46; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, p. 39. As 'anlepimen' was used as a general description for this class of worker without the individuals being named, it should not be assumed that 'anlepimen' were necessarily male.

contrast to the bishop of Winchester's estate in 1381/82 when 85 per cent of harvest work was done by customary tenants performing labour services, 15 per cent by hired harvest workers, and the *'famuli* almost nothing'.⁶⁵

Table 2.5. The harvest workforce at Hunstanton manor, 1328–47.⁶⁶

Harvest Labour	<i>Famuli</i>	Hired Harvest Workers	Customary Works by Tenants (1 day)	Anlepimen (3 Days Each)
1328	5	10 [20.5 days]	[85]	[8]
1331	8	15 (19 days) + 11 (4.5 days)	80	9
1332	11	36 (18 days)	87	9
1333	[8]	18 (24.5 days) + 14 (5 days)	88	7
1339	6	18 (3 weeks & 4 days)	86	7
1342	6	15 (3 weeks & 4 days)	61	6
1343	6	19 (3 weeks & 4 days)	62	4
1344	6	19 (3 weeks & 3 days)	55	2
1347	3	19 [23.5 days]	[59]	[4]
Total days worked in harvest	1917.5	3794.5	663	168
% of total days	29.3%	58.0%	10.1%	2.6%
Average days worked in harvest per year	213	422	74	19

All figures taken from the household accounts and/or manorial accounts except those in square brackets which have been estimated. Estimates were calculated as the average per year of 1328–33 or 1342–47. Weeks are assumed to have contained 6.5 working days during harvest time. *Famuli* were employed for a five week harvest period which is assumed to have contained 32.5 working days.

As both the hired harvest workers and many of the *famuli* are named in the accounts, more can be said about the demesne's wage labour force than is usually possible.⁶⁷ Several features stand out: only a small proportion of the hired

⁶⁵ Farmer, 'The *Famuli*', p. 212.

⁶⁶ Norfolk, Norwich Record Office, LEST NH1, LEST NH3, LEST NH12; LEST BG2, LEST BG3, LEST BG4, LEST BG5, LEST BG9, LEST BG11, LEST BG12, and LEST BG14.

⁶⁷ Manorial accounts do not normally provide the names of workers. One other example

harvest workers came from tenant families, a number had locative surnames which suggest they travelled some distance to Hunstanton, a high proportion of women were employed, and men's and women's pay appears to have been the same. The proportion of *famuli* who came from tenant families was higher.

Table 2.6. Connections between tenants and hired workers at Hunstanton manor, 1328–47.⁶⁸

Year	Number of Named Hired Harvest Workers	Number with Same Surname as Tenants c. 1335	Number of Named <i>Famuli</i>	Number with Same Surname as Tenants c. 1335
1328	10	0	5	2 (40%)
1331	15	2 (13%)	11	7 (64%)
1332	36	6 (17%)	10	4 (40%)
1339	18	3 (17%)	6	2 (33%)
1342	15	5 (33%)	7	3 (43%)
1343	19	9 (47%)	8	4 (50%)
1344	19	7 (37%)	4	1 (25%)
1347	19	3 (16%)	3	1 (33%)
Total	151	35 (23%)	53	24 (45%)

Famuli were employed all year round as well as in the harvest: most of these workers are named in the accounts, but some were recorded by their first name or job description only. The only other agricultural workers named in the accounts were the hired harvest workers, as in Table 2.5.

Table 2.6 cross references the hired harvest workers and *famuli* with the tenants listed in the c. 1335 rental. Although the proportions varied over time, the majority of hired harvest workers were not from tenant families. Surnames were still fluid in Norfolk in this period, so the high incidence of locative surnames amongst the harvest workers suggests that many came from outside Hunstanton: 30 per cent of hired harvest worker had locative surnames compared to 11 per cent of Hunstanton tenants. Harvest workers included five members of the 'de Holland' family in 1328, perhaps from Holland in Lincolnshire on the opposite side of the Wash; a married couple named 'de Colchester' were employed

of manorial accounts naming *famuli* comes from Houghall Farm in County Durham owned by Durham Cathedral Priory: Britnell, 'Employment'.

⁶⁸ Sources: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST NH1, LEST NH3, LEST NH12, LEST BG2, LEST BG4, LEST BG9, LEST BG11, LEST BG12, LEST BG14, and LEST BI/3.

in 1343; and a woman named Emma de Lenn (Lynn) in 1343 and 1344. Most of the surnames originated closer to Hunstanton, along the coast to the west, such as Brancaster, Burnham, and Welles; south towards Bishop's Lynn, such as Dersingham, Wolferton, and Congham; or inland, such as Ringstead and Stanhowe. Others were drawn from west Norfolk but further afield such as Crimplasham, Pattersley, Gressenhall, Neckton, and Terrington.

While the *famuli* at Hunstanton were almost all male,⁶⁹ women made up 53 per cent of the hired harvest workers. These women were slightly more likely than men to share tenant surnames: 27 per cent did so, in comparison to 20 per cent of male harvest workers. Although day rates are not normally specified, men's and women's wages appear to have been the same, with men paid an average of 35d. for the whole harvest period and women paid 34d. on average. Occasionally husband and wife were employed together: William de Crimplasham and Joan his wife received the same pay in 1332/33 (36d.); while Geoffrey de Colchester (37d.) received more than his wife Joan (28d.) in 1343; on the other hand Emma de Shotery (34d.) was paid more than her husband John (30d.) in 1339. It is difficult to infer the rate of pay per day. For example, in 1331 when fifteen workers were said to have performed 295 works, their cash wage averaged 1.7d. per 'work' or day, slightly lower than the wage rates found by Clark of 1.97d. per day in 1330–39.⁷⁰ In fact actual wages paid for the harvest period in 1331 varied between 24d. and 36d., with 36d. the median and modal payment.⁷¹ In 1347/48 two male and three female workers were paid 1d. per day for between one and seven days' work at harvest time in addition to the other hired harvest workers; a normal harvest wage of 1d. per work, however, does not tally with the wages and number of works listed elsewhere in the accounts. It is possible that those paid 1d. per day were extra workers employed to do less strenuous or less skilled tasks.

Outside of harvest time no customary works were owed by tenants, and agricultural tasks were either carried out by the *famuli* or by unnamed workers hired by task. Payments for weeding crops amounted to between 5s. and 7s. 6d. each year; mowing hay 1s. 4d. to 2s. 4d., and threshing and winnowing varied from nothing to 41s. in 1347/48. These sums were relatively small in comparison to the wage payments made to the manorial *famuli*, farm serv-

⁶⁹ Three dairywomen are the only female *famuli* named in the surviving accounts, they were outnumbered by the male dairymen recorded.

⁷⁰ Clark, 'Long March', p. 99. See also Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', p. 767.

⁷¹ LEST BG2. Fractions of a pence were not paid for harvest wages.

ants employed on the demesne. Under the lordship of Hamon Le Strange II, Hunstanton typically employed six *famuli*, all male: four ploughmen, a swineherd, and a shepherd. There was also a dairyman (or occasionally dairywoman) who leased the dairy from the manor; he or she received payment in grain and could choose to join the workforce for a cash wage at harvest time. Boys were employed to assist the shepherd and swineherd, and to care for geese.⁷² As described by Postan, the ploughmen were divided equally between the better paid ‘plough-holders’ who held and guided the plough, and ‘plough-drivers’ who led the horses that pulled it.⁷³ At Hunstanton the first plough-holder was always the best paid *famuli* while the second plough-holder and shepherd were also well paid. The plough-drivers and swineherd received less. Wage payments to the *famuli* were recorded in three different places in the manorial accounts: in an entry describing other money wages paid to *famuli*, amongst the harvest wages, and in the grange accounts where their grain allowances were recorded. Grain allowances were paid in ‘mixture’, which was valued at 3s. a quarter in 1344. Thus in 1342/43, the first plough-holder, Jocius Felawe, received 3s. 8d. in harvest wages, 2s. 10d. in other money wages, and a bit more than five quarters of grain worth just over 15s. Factoring in the grain payments, all six *famuli* were paid between 15s. and 22s. for a full year’s work (Table 2.7).

In comparison to the late thirteenth century, Hunstanton’s ploughmen received a higher proportion of their wages in cash rather than grain. Thirty-two per cent of the value of their wages was paid in cash, in comparison to the 20 per cent found by Richard Britnell in his study of payments to forty-one *famuli* from thirty-two manors from across England in 1296–97.⁷⁴ On the other hand, the proportion paid in grain was higher than in later periods: by the late fourteenth century wages paid in cash only were becoming more common.⁷⁵ The use of grain to pay wages before the Black Death once again emphasizes the importance of grain in the manorial economy, used not only for consumption, but as an alternative to cash. It is unclear what proportion, if any, of these grain wages were actually consumed by the *famuli*. They received food as well as cash wages during the harvest period, and references to bread and

⁷² See Farmer, ‘The *Famuli*’, pp. 214–19, for the job descriptions of the *famuli* employed on the bishop of Winchester’s estates in 1341/42.

⁷³ Postan, *The Famulus*, pp. 16–18.

⁷⁴ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, pp. 104 and 106–07. See also Postan, *The Famulus*, pp. 45–46.

⁷⁵ Farmer, ‘The *Famuli*’, pp. 235–36.

Table 2.7. Manorial *famuli* and their wages in Hunstanton manor, 1342/43.⁷⁶

Role	Name	Wages for the Rest of the Year					Total Wage Value
		Harvest Wage	Cash wage	Weeks worked	Grain: rate of pay	Money value of grain (@3s./q)	
First plough holder	Jocius Felawe	44d.	34d.	44 weeks	1q/8 weeks & 1q/10 weeks	5q 0.5b (15s. 2.25d.)	21s. 8.25d.
Second plough holder	John de Shropham/ John de Berewyk	40d.	20d.	28 weeks	1q/9 weeks	3q 3p (9s. 3d.)	14s. 3d.
First plough driver	Thomas de Sandford	36d.	24d.	44 weeks	1q/12 weeks	3q 5.5b (11s. 0.75d.)	16s. 0.75d.
Second plough driver	Geoffrey Dockinge	36d.	24d.	44 weeks	1q/12 weeks	3q 5.5b (11s. 0.75d.)	16s. 0.75d.
Swineherd	William Stabet	30d.	18d.	47 weeks	1q/12 weeks	3q 7.5b (11s. 9.75d.)	15s. 9.75d.
Shepherd & boy	Richard Prat & boy	48d.	2d.	44 weeks	1q/10 weeks	5.5q 3p (16s. 9d.)	20s. 11d.
Dairyman	Richard le Deye	–	–	49 weeks	1q/10 weeks	4q 7b (14s. 7.5d.)	14s. 7.5d.

pottage for the *famuli* in the household accounts suggest food was provided at other times of the year.⁷⁷ If consumed the grain allowance could have supported approximately one person per quarter of grain. According to Campbell a quarter (or eight bushels) of barley could have provided 534,336 kilocalories, or enough to provide one person with 1,500 kilocalories a day for 356 days if consumed as pottage. Conversion of barley into bread by milling would have lost twenty-two per cent of the kilocalories available, but would still have provided enough kilocalories for 278 days.⁷⁸ Thus, whether or not the *famuli* consumed

⁷⁶ Sources: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST BG11 and LEST BG12. Note: the grain paid to *famuli* was 'mixture' made up of barley, multure, and peas, as described above.

⁷⁷ In 1328/29 pottage was made of beans in the household of Roger de Holm: LEST NH1. In 1342–44 in Hamon Le Strange's household it was made of oats: LEST NH3, LEST NH12, and LEST supplementary 23/ii.

⁷⁸ Campbell, *English Seigneurial Agriculture*, pp. 222 and 392–93.

some of the grain themselves, enough was provided for them to feed two or three extra people, or to raise cash through sale.

Although *famuli* were more likely to be related to tenants than were the hired harvest workers, only 45 per cent of named *famuli* shared the same surnames as tenants. Despite being employed for longer periods of time, they were nonetheless quite mobile. The longest serving *famulus* was the shepherd, Richard Prat, a tenant of an estimated 0.3 acres of villein land who appeared in every manorial account between 1331 and 1348, and was likely a married man with his own household. The other *famuli* followed a pattern of employment very similar to servants in late fourteenth-century county Durham and in early modern Hunstanton.⁷⁹ Twenty-five of the forty-one *famuli* whose names are known appeared only in a single year, and some of these did not work a full year. On the other hand, nine worked on the manor for five years or more. There was a tendency to employ men from the same families, probably brothers: fifteen of those employed shared a surname with another *famulus* employed during the period 1328–48.

Thus, although Hunstanton was very densely populated, and most tenant landholdings were very small, much of the labour on the manorial demesne was not provided by tenants and their families. Labour services existed, but in terms of days worked were greatly outnumbered by the efforts of the *famuli* and hired workers, neither of whom were predominantly drawn from tenant households. In fact, the pattern of hired labour shows none of the symptoms we would expect from an over-supplied labour market. The high numbers of women employed and indications that workers were drawn in from elsewhere suggest a need to attract suitable workers rather than an over-abundance of local labour.⁸⁰ The wages paid in the 1330s and 1340s compare favourably with those found in Hunstanton in the 1610s, another period of low real wages. Clark's national index of the purchasing power of agricultural wages was 51 in 1330–49 compared to 61 in 1610–19.⁸¹ But a Hunstanton index based on barley prices indicates that its medieval workers were better paid. The purchasing power of a day of harvest work was almost identical: it took 20 days work at 1.7d. to buy a quarter of barley in 1331–48, compared to 21 days at 8d. in

⁷⁹ Britnell, 'Employment', and Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 212–20.

⁸⁰ See Langdon, 'Waged Building Employment' pp. 115–17 and 120–23, and Whittle, 'Rural Economies', pp. 320–22, on women's wage labour.

⁸¹ Clark, 'Long March', pp. 99–100.

1619–20. However, ordinary agricultural work in medieval Hunstanton was better paid: it took 34 days to buy a quarter of barley at 1d. a day in the 1340s and compared to 43 days at 4d. a day in 1619–20. The contrast was even greater for agricultural servants: the best male servant was paid the equivalent of 7 quarters and 2.5 bushels for a year's work in 1342/43 compared to £3 which purchased 4 quarters and 1.5 bushels in 1617, while the ordinary male servant earned almost twice as much in the fourteenth century: 5 quarters and 3.5 bushels compared to £2 which purchased 2 quarters and 6 bushels.⁸² Very few women were employed by the Le Stranges at Hunstanton in the early seventeenth century, with men working on tasks normally dominated by female labourers, such as hay-making and weeding, for a woman's wage.⁸³

Gifts and Purchases of Food

Hunstanton tenants not only paid rent to their manorial lords and worked on the demesne, but also made food gifts and sold food to the lordly household. As with agricultural labour, however, the overlap between gift-givers, food-sellers, and the tenantry was imperfect. Table 2.8 compares those presenting food gifts, who were always named in the household accounts although we cannot be sure all gifts were recorded, and the sellers of food, who were not always named, with the names of tenants in the rental of c. 1335. These comparisons reveal that most of those selling food to the Le Stranges were not their tenants, and although the majority of gift-givers shared surnames with tenants, 45 per cent appear to have been unrelated.

The presentation of food gifts to elite households has been studied by Woolgar for medieval England, and Heal for the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.⁸⁴ Although gifts were made by gentry to gentry, such as the four chickens, twenty pigeons, and six rabbits presented by Lady Margaret Le Strange to her son's household on 2 February 1344, gifts from people of lower status were the great majority at Hunstanton both in the medieval period

⁸² Barley prices from LEST BG4, LEST BG8-14, and LEST P6. Average price of barley was 34.4d./quarter in 1332–47 and 171.4d. in 1619–20. See Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 214 and 229 for wages 1615–24. For medieval *famuli* the cash wage was translated into barley, and 'mixture' assumed to be equivalent to barley in price and volume. See Farmer, 'Wages and Prices', p. 791, for comparison.

⁸³ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 223–24.

⁸⁴ Woolgar, 'Gifts of food'; Heal, 'Food gifts'.

and the early seventeenth century. Food gifts in the early seventeenth-century household accounts were more numerous and various than in the fourteenth century. In the 1610s the Le Stranges received an average of 186 food gifts a year, compared to fifty-five received in 1328/29 or 104 received in all the accounts analysed in Table 2.8.⁸⁵

Table 2.8. Did Hunstanton tenants make gifts and sell food to the lord of the manor, 1328–45?⁸⁶

	Same First Name and Surname as Tenant	Same Surname as Tenant	Not Having a Tenant Surname	Total Number of Different People
Making Gifts: no.	22	15	30	67
Making Gifts: %	33%	22%	45%	100%
Selling Food: no.	5	10	37	52
Selling Food: %	10%	19%	71%	100%

Gifts of fish dominated in the medieval period, making up 71 per cent of gifts. Most commonly given was herring, usually by the hundred or ‘kimp’,⁸⁷ followed by unspecified ‘fish’ (nineteen gifts), ling (sometimes specified as fresh, twelve gifts), and ‘fish de doggedrove’ (probably cod, ten gifts),⁸⁸ and the desirable higher-status sea fish, turbot (six gifts). Poultry (capons, hens, and chickens) made up a further 21 per cent of gifts. Other occasional gifts of eggs, ducks, a swan, and a piglet were also recorded as well as the pigeons and rabbits given by Margaret Le Strange. In the early seventeenth century chickens and capons dominated closely followed by turkeys, an obvious early modern introduction to the Norfolk economy. Although fish was still given, fruit and wild birds were just as common.⁸⁹ There was a distinct seasonality to the most common medieval food gifts at Hunstanton, with ‘doggedroves’ given from February to June, herring particularly in September and October,⁹⁰ and poultry at Christmas.

⁸⁵ LEST P6.

⁸⁶ Sources: Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, LEST NH1, LEST NH3, LEST NH4, LEST NH12; LEST sup. 23/ii, and LEST BI/3.

⁸⁷ A kimp was a type of barrel.

⁸⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary Online* identifies ‘dogdrave’ as a marine fish ‘sometimes identified with the cod’. It was eaten in large quantities by the monks at Durham in the late fifteenth century: Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets*, p. 48.

⁸⁹ Whittle and Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender*, pp. 78–80.

⁹⁰ Woolgar, ‘Diet and Consumption’, p. 25.

It is impossible to know exactly why particular individuals made food gifts to gentry households. It is likely some people were seeking favour from the lord, for instance food sellers seeking custom; craftsmen and agricultural workers seeking employment; and tenants seeking leases or lower fines for land. Others may have been offering thanks for the lord allowing them access to resources; tolerating activities that might otherwise have been fined or taxed; or offering them hospitality.⁹¹ The predominance of gifts of fish raises the possibility that fishermen were expected to give fish to the lord in return for use of the foreshore for their boats and nets, although this cannot be proved. It should be noted that gifts were different from formal rents paid in kind. Gifts were recorded in the household accounts under the heading 'gifts', whereas rents in kind appeared only in the manorial accounts. So for instance the manorial account for 1342/43 records the receipt of three capons as rent at Christmas that year and twenty-eight received as gifts, while the household accounts name those making the gifts, and show that seventeen of the capons were given in Christmas week by lord William the vicar, Elver Edelyn, Alan Byngel, Richard Styward, and Sabina Bagge.⁹² Only Elver Edelyn and Richard Styward are recorded as tenants in the rental of c. 1335.

Examining the range of gift-givers' connections to the household provides some clues.⁹³ Given that it is likely that families acted together, for instance a father making a gift to encourage the lord to employ his son, this analysis was done using family surnames. Of the fifty-two families making gifts, twelve appeared only once in the records, making a single food gift to the lordly household: perhaps an unsuccessful attempt to curry favour, or one that resulted in a transaction which is not recorded. The majority, however, had other connections: twenty-seven were tenants; thirteen also sold food to the household; twelve were employed by the manorial lords; eight had received payments in cash or grain for an unspecified reason; three had received oats for their horses (suggesting some sort of service to the lordly household); and two were members of the gentry. While many had only one type of connection, eighteen had two or more. For instance members of the Horn family were tenants of freehold and villein land, employed by the Le Stranges as *famuli*, sold fish, and

⁹¹ Woolgar, 'Gifts of Food', pp. 13–14 and 16–17.

⁹² Manorial account LEST BG12 and household account LEST NH3 compared. See also Woolgar, 'Gifts of Food', pp. 8–9, and Heal, 'Food Gifts' pp. 50–51.

⁹³ This discussion uses an index of names created from the sources used in Table 2.8 plus LEST BG2, LEST BG4, LEST BG11, and LEST BG12.

received payments other than wages recorded in the manorial accounts. The Horn family seems to have benefitted in multiple ways from cultivating a good relationship with their manorial lords.

The household accounts provide glimpses of an active market in foodstuffs in and around Hunstanton and the typical range of products purchased by the lordly household (Table 2.2, pt b). Some of these were partly structured into the manorial economy, but bread, fish, eggs, chickens, and spices were all sold by free agents. Hunstanton had a dairy herd of between nine and twelve cows in 1331–48. This was leased each year for 40–45s., and in return the dairyman or dairywoman received all the milk and half the calves, as well as a generous allowance of grain (Table 2.7). The lord's household then purchased milk, butter, and cheese. For instance, in six months of 1342/3, which included large purchases to feed the harvest workers, the lord's household made twenty purchases of milk, butter, and cheese at a cost of 12s. 8.25d. It is notable, however, that the Le Stranges did not restrict themselves to buying from their own dairyman, making purchases from four different dairymen in total during that period. Hens were farmed out with the dairy in 1331–33, but not in later years. Although the manor could have raised its own hens, the Le Stranges preferred to purchase chickens and hens. Eggs were a regular purchase, in 1342 normally bought from the same woman, Matilda de Schelyngham, who was also a tenant.

As well as dairy products and eggs, Hunstanton tenants sold poultry, various fish, shellfish, butchered meat (beef, pork, and mutton), apples, bread, and candles. Half those selling seafood to the lordly household were tenants, but only two out of eleven butchers patronized were tenants. Most retailers named were not Hunstanton tenants. John de Brunham, who regularly sold candles, mustard, and ginger in 1328/29, and William de Depedale who sold salt, are likely to have come from Burnham Market and Burnham Deepdale, a few miles along the coast. Wine was purchased from a man named William at Heacham in 1344, another market centre which neighboured Hunstanton to the south. The nearest substantial town was Bishop's Lynn, sixteen miles away. The household accounts mention mustard and vinegar purchased at Lynn in January 1343, while in August 1344 almonds and sugar were bought there.⁹⁴ Nonetheless the majority of the food purchased by the Le Stranges seems to have come from the very local economy, rather than elsewhere.

⁹⁴ LEST NH3, LEST NH12.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the multiple connections between lord, tenants, and other local inhabitants in the food economy of Hunstanton between 1328 and 1348. These included not only renting land and performing labour services, but working for wages, making gifts, and selling food products. There were other connections too, such as the twenty-three craftsmen who appear in the manorial accounts of 1342–43, five of whom were tenants; and the numerous people noted in the manorial accounts of 1331–33 being issued grain ‘by the lord’s bill’ for unspecified services, payments, or sales.⁹⁵ All this points to a varied and commercialized economy, as Campbell has led us to expect. However, there is perhaps something of a contradiction in Campbell’s view of the Norfolk peasantry. On the one hand small tenants were innovators in agriculture and highly commercialized, on the other they lived a miserable existence trapped in poverty and unable to invest in improvements.⁹⁶ This study of Hunstanton has traced that contradiction back to the evidence. It seems unlikely to conceive of the sixty-seven per cent of Hunstanton’s tenants who held less than four acres as anything other than desperately poor. Only thirty-three tenants out of 191 seem to have held enough land to provide for the food needs of their families. Yet the land was exploited with maximum efficiency in turning crops into calories, displaying techniques at the forefront of medieval English agriculture. And what are we to make of the three local butchers and four dairymen who appear in a mere six months of household accounts selling meat and dairy products to the Le Strange household in 1342/43? How could a community living in desperate poverty support this number of producers and retailers of livestock products? If tenant families struggled to provide their own subsistence, why did thirty-seven of them make gifts of food to the Le Strange household? Surely tenants with scraps of land struggling to make a living would have crowded into the Le Stranges’ harvest workforce? But this did not happen; the maximum number of people from tenant families employed as hired harvesters in any year was nine from 191 tenant households. If the labour market was drastically over-supplied, why were the wages offered in the 1330s and 1340s relatively generous in comparison to the early seventeenth century? Even with the best evidence available, it is impossible to answer these questions conclusively. It seems likely nonetheless that the answer lies not just in relatively high

⁹⁵ See LEST BG2, LEST BG4, LEST BG11, and LEST BG12.

⁹⁶ Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, pp. 67–69.

agricultural productivity but in the multiple alternative sources of income such as fishing, retailing, and craftwork; and the dense network economic opportunities that high population densities generated within themselves for buying, selling, and getting by.

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BARE RUINED FARMS? EXTENTS FOR DEBT AS A SOURCE FOR LANDLORD VERSUS NON-LANDLORD AGRICULTURAL PERFORMANCE IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

John Langdon*

The 'Conundrum'

With the publication of his book *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250–1450* (2000), Bruce Campbell presented a survey of medieval farming across England over a two-century period.¹ This was a methodological and conceptual *tour de force* in examining the agriculture of the period at county (especially Norfolk), regional (especially around London), and national levels. Along with his more recent atlas of the wealth, agricultural and otherwise, of lay lords, co-authored

* This study was started over fifteen years ago and was given as a paper at the Centre of Metropolitan History at the Institute of Historical Research in London on 8 July 1999; I am very grateful to the Centre for providing the venue and doing much of the organizing for the one-day conference. Although the study's final presentation has been delayed for various reasons, it is a pleasure to present it here in tribute to Professor Campbell, since it speaks so clearly to many of his concerns. I am also deeply grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for originally funding the project — SSHRC Project 410-98-1589 (for 1998–2000) — and also to Jill Walker and Jean Korte for helping with various databases.

¹ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture* (hereafter Campbell, *ESA*).

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with Ken Bartley,² it will likely stand as *the* foundational work on medieval English agriculture.

As Campbell was fully cognizant, his data were deficient as a reflection of total agriculture in medieval England since they focused almost solely upon *demesne* operation, that is, the farms of lords as opposed to those of their tenants and lessees. Demesnes were elite farms, not only for their size — usually in the hundreds of acres³ — but also for the level of professionalization that they brought to their operations, with supervisory officers like stewards, bailiffs, and reeves being the norm.⁴ Outside demesnes, there was an even larger proportion of agricultural land — perhaps 70 per cent or so of arable land — in the hands of those we would not classify as ‘lords.’⁵ These ‘non-landlords’ ranged from rectors or vicars through merchants and other normally well-to-do persons all the way down to that class of people popularly called ‘peasants’. Debate about the agricultural performance of the lands of these other groups, particularly the peasantry, has sometimes seen them as more productive on a per-acre basis than lords’ demesnes, sometimes less.⁶

The question certainly has wider ramifications, not least for the size of population that could have been supported, particularly before the Black Death. As Campbell has written, alone and with others, on the basis of grain yields calculated from demesne accounts it is difficult to see how English society *c.* 1300 could have fed itself at the five or six or million or greater population level often cited in the literature.⁷ Some of this might have been made up by a more productive non-demesne, perhaps mainly ‘peasant’, sector, but, as Campbell estimated, such a sector would have required a forty per cent higher per acre productivity than the demesne to support total population levels around six million.⁸ At the very least, as Campbell has written about this ‘conundrum’: ‘The onus is there-

² Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death* (hereafter Campbell and Bartley, *Atlas*).

³ On lay estates, demesnes averaged at least one hundred and fifty arable acres (Campbell and Bartley, *Atlas*, pp. 90 and 94), which was likely to be replicated on ecclesiastical demesnes (Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 61–62).

⁴ With a contemporary ‘instructional’ literature to match for these officials: see esp. *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises*, ed. by Oschinsky.

⁵ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 388.

⁶ For summaries of this historiography, see Sapoznik, ‘Productivity of Peasant Agriculture’, pp. 519–20; Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 391–96.

⁷ Campbell, *ESA*, chapter 8; Campbell and others, *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 37–45.

⁸ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 404.

fore on those who wish to argue for a medieval population at peak [in England around 1300] in excess of 4.5 million to demonstrate by what means, on known patterns of land-use and productivity, it could have been fed.⁹

This study accepts Campbell's challenge by taking as its central proposition the *possibility* that extra-demesne productivity in medieval England might indeed have been significantly higher, perhaps even to reconcile the perceived gap between agricultural productivity and English population estimates *c.* 1300 just mentioned. The problem, as is well-known, is getting any sort of evidence that might approximate to manorial demesne accounts in giving information about the agricultural productivity of other than lords. Scholarly work on early modern probate inventories, which became a legal requirement from 1529, fortunately provides a model.¹⁰ Probate inventories were listings of the goods of deceased householders, including — for farms — crops, livestock, and equipment. They are a source from which grain yields can be calculated approximately and are now considered robust enough to be compared (and combined) fruitfully with earlier medieval accounts.¹¹

The search for accessible caches of pre-1500 evidence yielding similar evidence to that of the later probate inventories has to this point been disappointing. Although medieval farm inventories from peasants and others are potentially numerous, often through confiscation due to felonies and likely surviving in the hundreds if not thousands,¹² they are very scattered throughout the extant records and bringing them together effectively is very difficult.¹³ Estimating 'peasant' productivity from tithes, of course, holds great promise, but work here is still in its initial stages. Ben Dodds, estimating peasant productivity mostly from tithe cash receipts from north-east England, felt that overall production declined over the course of the fourteenth century, especially after the Black Death, a result, he argued, of exogenous (especially war, climate, and disease) and endogenous (reduced demand, labour shortage, and

⁹ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 405.

¹⁰ Especially the work of Mark Overton, Paul Glennie, and Robert C. Allen, as indicated in the notes below. For the legal requirement of probate inventories, see Grannum and Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records*, p. 71.

¹¹ See especially Campbell and Overton, 'New Perspective'.

¹² For examples, see Langdon, 'City and Countryside', p. 72n.; Hilton, *English Peasantry*, pp. 41–42. For the guesstimate as to their number, see Langdon, 'City and Countryside', pp. 71–72.

¹³ See, for example, the sample of fifty-two medieval 'peasant' inventories in Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 176–79; see also the chapter by Christopher Dyer in this volume.

lowered fertility) factors.¹⁴ Critically, however, Dodds has been reluctant to convert the production suggested by tithes to a bushel per acre basis because of the difficulty in obtaining acreages from which the tithes were drawn.¹⁵ On the other hand, Alexandra Sapoznik has produced data comparing demesne and non-demesne productivity on bushel per acre, monetary, and kcal. levels, using tithes recorded in grain on the manor of Oakington, Cambridgeshire, in the late fourteenth century; this has indicated that peasant production there was significantly higher (by about 20 per cent) than on the demesne, which she has attributed to a greater use of leguminous fodder crops by the former.¹⁶

Extents for Debt

This study is an addition to this growing body of work on the medieval agricultural productivity of lesser beings than lords, but going in a different direction than tithes, by examining records that so far have not been tapped for the purposes of assessing agricultural performance. These are extents for debt, a result of increased government involvement in the process of debt among English citizens, which was initiated legislatively from the Statute of Acton Burnell (1283) and was further developed in the Statute of Merchants (1285) and the Ordinance of the Staple (1353).¹⁷ These ‘extents for debt’, as they are somewhat inadequately termed, had two parts to them. One was indeed an ‘extent’ or survey of the entire farm — arable, meadow, pasture, wood, marsh, waste, mills, dovecotes, etc. — very similar to the inquisitions *post mortem* that have been so critical to Bruce Campbell’s work.¹⁸ But in addition the ‘extents’ sometimes included an itemization of ‘movables’ akin to later probate inventories, which included livestock, household goods, and, critically for our purposes, crops, in barns and/or fields, all of which were to be liquidated to discharge

¹⁴ Dodds, ‘Estimating Arable Output’, esp. pp. 261–67.

¹⁵ Esp. Dodds, ‘Demesne and Tithe’, p. 130, but see also Dodds, *Peasants and Production*, pp. 134–35.

¹⁶ Sapoznik, ‘Productivity of Peasant Agriculture’, esp. Tables 3 and 6 (pp. 530 and 534) for the percentage differences.

¹⁷ *Statutes of the Realm*, I, esp. pp. 53–54, 98–100, and 336–37; for a good summary of this and following legislation, see *Wiltshire Extents for Debt*, ed. by Conyers, pp. 1–5.

¹⁸ Particularly Campbell and Bartley, *Atlas*, but Campbell, *ESA* makes considerable use of them as well.

at least part of the debt.¹⁹ In the best of circumstances, where the debtor was seemingly still operating his land, this combination of ‘extent’ and inventory gave a total farming information of the sort that would not be found again in a single document until the 1830s.²⁰ The movables would be sold to discharge the debt, but on occasion the debtor’s lands — in whole or part — could pass to the creditor,²¹ suggesting the sort of predatory lending bemoaned in ‘A Gest of Robyn Hode’.²²

The process of recovering debt underlying the subsequent extents became very popular, generating considerable documentation. Martha Carlin has estimated that there are some 25,000 ‘pieces’ involving extents for debt in the C 131, C 239, and DL 23 classes at The National Archives at Kew, covering the period from the very late thirteenth century up to 1650.²³ For the fourteenth century alone, judging from the core C 131 class used in this study, there are about 50 ‘files’ with an average 25–30 pieces each, resulting in a minimum of 1250–1500 extents for debt.²⁴ Although medieval extents for debt have the potential of supplying information comparable to later probate inventories, and in a respectable quantity, they were taken in very different circumstances.

¹⁹ Initially ploughing animals were exempted, so that debtors — theoretically — could make their livelihoods while paying off remaining debt (*Wiltshire Extents for Debt*, pp. 5–6), but, as time went on, this scruple seemingly dissipated, as oxen in particular, archetypal plough animals, began to be included in the evaluation process: e.g., Kew, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), C 131/6/8, ms. 2 and 3 (1340); 131/6/23, m. 4 (1344); 131/7/13, m. 2 (1347); 131/11/4, m. 2 (1358); etc.

²⁰ For example, Overton, *Agricultural Revolution*, p. 111.

²¹ As in the case of the lands, just over fifty acres, of John Langrich of Nazeing, Essex, which were transferred to his creditor, John Fressh, in 1390: TNA, C 131/37/9, ms. 2, 3^d; see also *Wiltshire Extents for Debt*, ed. by Conyers, pp. 5–6.

²² Where the worthy knight, Richard atte Lee, nearly (but not quite, thanks to Robin Hood) lost his lands to the greedy abbot of York over a case of debt: *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, ed. by Knight and Ohlgren, esp. pp. 96–97 (lines 205–24), 100–06 (lines 325–516).

²³ Carlin, *London and Southwark Inventories*, p. ix.

²⁴ The initial files (or ‘subseries’ as the TNA calls them) — TNA, C 131/1, 2, etc. — have more than fifty pieces each, but the files after that quickly settle down to around twenty-five each. The first forty-nine of these files take the sample up to the year 1400, but eighteen of the fourteenth-century extents appear for the first time in later files, especially C 131/180–210. Some files, particularly of higher status debtors, had more than one extent: e.g., the case of Ralph de Camoys in note 36 below. The total number of extents was estimated assuming fifty files at either twenty-five or thirty pieces each.

Probate inventories generally involved the goodwill of the community to ensure that livestock, grain, and other goods would eventually be transferred to the heir or heiress, making these inventories reasonably plausible depictions of working farms.²⁵ The lands of debtors in the fourteenth century were another matter. There was a real danger that they might be plundered before the survey was taken, either by the debtor or neighbours.²⁶ As a result, the ‘bare ruined farms’ that I used in the title as a conceit taken from Shakespeare’s evocation of church ruins in Sonnet 73 was, in most cases, probably only too true. Most in fact only described the types of lands the debtor held — how many acres of arable, pasture, meadow, etc. — with the added comment that ‘X has no chattels or goods in the bailiwick of the sheriff of Y’, indicating that the movables had already disappeared.²⁷ Equally, the number of extents where the debtor had been seemingly deserted his lands in less than optimal condition was sizable.²⁸

Given this seemingly dismal state of affairs when considering the lands described in extents for debt, one might doubt whether the exercise of assessing productivity from these farms is worth doing at all. There were circumstances, however, in which an extent for debt might reflect a more normally operating farm comparable to those revealed later in the probate inventories. These tended to occur when the debt collecting process happened quickly. A good example comes from the description of two farms held by Robert Hog and John Wodeward of Radwinter in Essex, who together owed £60 to a pair of creditors, a loan contracted on 1 November 1381. It appears that Robert and John used the money to set themselves up as lessees for the Radwinter holdings, since it was recorded that neither of them ‘has lands or tenements’ in Essex.

²⁵ For the generally benevolent circumstances under which probate inventories were created, see, for example, Overton, ‘Estimating Crop Yields’, p. 366; Grannum and Taylor, *Wills and Probate Records*, pp. 71–73.

²⁶ Indeed, the Statute of Acton Burnell opined that any debtors complaining of poor remuneration received for their ‘moveable goods’ in the debt reconciliation process should receive no sympathy (nor recourse in law) because they could have sold them earlier for a better price to discharge the debt: *Statutes of the Realm*, I, p. 54.

²⁷ For example, see below for the small proportion of extents with crops in the fields or barns (around 22–27 per cent).

²⁸ A patently deserted farm occurs in the case of William de Godscote of ‘Estegodescote’ and ‘Westgodescote’ (parts of Guscott in Bratton Clovelly), Devon, who on the date of the extent (27 September 1306) left a farm with two acres of rye and twenty acres of oats under crop but with no movables at all. Here it was recorded that William’s whereabouts in Devon were not known: TNA, C 131/1/2, ms. 1 and 2. Many other similar cases could be cited.

As the extent eventually showed, Robert had forty-six acres under crop with a complement of twenty-one animals (four horses, five adult and young cattle, seven adult and young sheep, and five adult and young pigs) while John had 37.5 acres under crop and a considerably larger livestock component of 139 animals (four horses, twenty-five adult and young cattle, 104 adult and young sheep, and six adult pigs). What looks to be an attempt by the pair to achieve some sort of yeoman status did not last long. They were given until Lady Day (25 March) of the following year to repay the debt and, when they apparently defaulted, a writ *capias* was issued on 10 May 1382, and the extents for both farms were carried out on 27 May 1382, a process that went so quickly that Robert and John were taken into custody.²⁹

In this case, it would appear that the farms involved were in good fettle when the extents were taken — the large livestock holding on John's farm in particular would have been a sizable temptation for interested parties had not the extent been taken quickly. There are many other cases like this. Sometimes this may have been because of the administrative luck of the draw — that is, the creditor was quick off the mark and, say, a sheriff's timetable was amenable to quick action — or the creditor laid the ground in advance to seize a debtor's lands.³⁰ As a result, we have a spectrum of extents for debt ranging from those showing effectively deserted, stripped farms to those showing them in reasonably good shape (and where the debtors were often captured on site). Since the total number of extents of debt run into the thousands, even for the fourteenth century alone, this at least has the promise of producing evidence for land productivity similar to that from later probate inventories and also across a reasonably wide social spectrum (given that debt has never been a great respecter of status).

The Sample

A key issue, then, is where to draw the line between those extents sufficient for a productivity exercise and those which are not. This study made this distinction simply by considering only those extents with crops in the field and/or the barn.³¹ These yielded 333 extents for the fourteenth century (from 1306 up to and including 1400), 105 for the pre-plague period (up to and including 1348)

²⁹ TNA, C 131/28/25, m. 2.

³⁰ For example, perhaps as in the John Langrich case in note 21 above.

³¹ Hence eliminating most of what we might call urban inventories, for which see Carlin, *London and Southwark Inventories*.

and 228 post-plague (from 1350 onwards).³² There was a tendency for the extents to cluster around London, with 40 per cent of the 105 extents for the pre-plague period being within the ‘London Region’, as defined by Campbell et al.³³ That figure rose to 66 per cent within the London Region for the 228 extents after the plague. The counties of Kent and Essex were particularly well represented, having 11 per cent of the pre-Black Death extents in the sample, rising to 36 per cent after the plague.³⁴ In any case, these extents provided the base sample from which smaller subsets were used in the various analyses, but as these 333 extents at best only comprise about a quarter of all surviving extents, it gives some sense of how much many farms, in not recording any grain at all, likely suffered materially under the pressure of debt.³⁵ On the other hand, a sample of over three hundred inventories with such grain information, most accompanied by extents similar to inquisitions *post mortem*, is certainly better than the loose collection of medieval inventories we currently have from other

³² Another 43 with similar crop data were gathered for the fifteenth century, but were spread much more thinly over the century, as gradually the recording of the debt collection process began to lose its vigour.

³³ That is, Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, and Surrey: Campbell and others, *A Medieval Capital*, Figure 1 (p. 14).

³⁴ That the surviving extents for debt in C 131 should increasingly be concentrated around London is not surprising given the growing number of staples for handling debt elsewhere in the country (e.g., *Wiltshire Extents for Debt*, ed. by Conyers, pp. 1–3), but it also may have much to do with the greater survival of these more detailed records in the area closer to the capital. This is suggested in part by the fact that, for both the pre- and post-Black Death samples, non-landlord extents (for how the samples were divided into ‘landlord’ and ‘non-landlord’, see below) were about one and a half times more likely to be found in the ‘London Region’ (1.50 and 1.48 for the pre- and post-Black Death samples respectively) than their overall proportion in the total all-England samples for both periods would indicate. That is, the non-landlord extents were *over*-represented in the ‘London Region’ by about a 60–40 margin relative to landlord ones (if expressed out of 100), while the landlord extents were over-represented *outside* the region (by margins of about 56–44 pre-Black Death and 68–32 post-Black Death). These imbalances reflect the likelihood that non-landlord detailed extents had to be closer to the debt administrative centre of London in order to survive to our own day, while the more socially elevated debtors — the landlords — had a likelier chance of their extents surviving no matter where in the country they were taken. I am grateful to Richard Goddard for consultation on these matters.

³⁵ Dividing 333 by, in turn, 1250 and 1500 gives a range of 22–27 per cent. It should also be said, however, that many of the surviving extents were urban in nature, especially from London and area, and did not encompass farming land: Carlin, *London and Southwark Inventories*, pp. ix–xii.

administrative processes. Furthermore, the extents for debt ranged from those who had many manors in their possession to those characterized as *nativi* or bondmen.³⁶

Tempting as it was to use the distinction demesne versus non-demesne or demesne versus peasant in line with most of the literature, a looser division of 'landlord' versus 'non-landlord' farms has been preferred here. This is partly to take into account that, certainly as the fourteenth century wore on, demesnes could be leased, often among many smaller operators, thus blurring the distinction of demesne versus non-demesne. Also, the landlord/non-landlord distinction allows for a more textured range of agricultural producers than the simple lord-peasant divide. Thus, merchants, tradesmen, clerics, and other distinctly non-lordly or non-peasant figures often showed up as debtors in possession of farms.³⁷

Dividing the sample into its landlord and non-landlord constituents was essentially achieved by determining which of them were 'landlord' farms and classifying the rest as 'non-landlord'. Landlord-held farms were considered to be those held by aristocracy, that is, those landowners who were styled by their title as 'knight' or better;³⁸ or where landholdings were described as 'manors', or, perhaps most definitively, were associated with references to tenants, free or customary, access to labour services, and profits from manorial courts, indicating the sort of control over a largely subservient tenantry that we would

³⁶ Thus Ralph de Camoys, knight, had eight manors, one in Northamptonshire and seven in Sussex, 'extended' in 1327 (TNA, C 131/3/2, m. 2; 3/30, ms. 2–3), while on the other end of the scale John Brown, *nativus* of Holme-on-Spalding-Moor (Yorkshire), was involved in a debt along with his lord, Robert the Constable, so that his seemingly modest lands were surveyed in 1334 (he had an acre of rye and an acre of oats under crop): TNA, C 131/5/5, m. 3.

³⁷ There were at least eighteen such identifiable figures in the sample: TNA, C 131/2/17 (spicer, 1326); 6/20 (parson, 1344); 9/24 (merchant, 1355); 182/19 (merchant, 1361); 15/1 (merchant, 1365); 18/21 (cordwainer, 1369); 19/2 (skinner, 1370); 19/24 (chaplain, 1371); 193/37 (brewer, 1375); 24/10 (draper, 1377); 25/10 (merchant, 1378); 31/16 (goldsmith, 1383); 201/31 (merchant, 1385); 34/22 (fishmonger, 1387); 35/7 (grocer, 1387); 36/3 (pepperer, 1389); 36/9 (maltmonger, 1389); 43/10 (merchant, 1393). To these might be added those holding farms who were styled simply as, say, 'citizen of London', but not given an occupation: e.g., William Cosyn (14/21 & 16/3 [1365 and 1367]), John Pykenham (25/6 [1378]), and Walter Sibile (43/17 [1392]).

³⁸ Lay figures of greater status than knight (say earls or barons) did not appear in the sample, but ecclesiastic figures, such as abbots and priors (and one prioress; see note 50 below), certainly did: TNA, C 131/6/8, m. 2 (prior of Swavesey, 1340); 6/23, m. 4 (prior of Alberbury, 1344); 7/13, ms. 2, 5, 6 (abbot of Missenden, 1347). For similar methodological issues when dealing with tithe material from *estimationes bladorum*, see Dyer this volume.

associate with 'lords' (and their demesnes) during this particular century. Non-landlord farms, which at the top end might be in the hands of merchants, could go all the way down to people of very humble status.³⁹ Using this filtering mechanism, fifty-four of the 105 pre-plague extents (or 51 per cent) were landlord farms and fifty-one (or 49 per cent) were non-landlord farms, while after the Black Death the proportion changed from eighty-two landlord farms out of the 228 total (or 36 per cent) compared to 146 non-landlord farms (or 64 per cent). The greater proportion of landlord farms before the plague was due in part to some of the landlords having several farms under examination.⁴⁰ As expected, where the total arable component of the farm was indicated, there was a considerable difference between 'landlord' versus 'non-landlord', with the former being on average about two-and-a-half times that of non-landlord lands in the pre-plague period (an average of 183.6 versus 72.5 arable acres respectively), stretching to about four-and-a-half times in the post-plague era (193.9 versus 43.5 acres).

*Opening Gambits*⁴¹

The first order of business was simply to compare crop valuations (usually in shillings per acre) between the landlord and non-landlord sectors, with the thought that these evaluations were in effect productivity surrogates that the jurors were implicitly making concerning what the fields would yield.⁴² There are a large number of these field crop valuations in the 333 extents for debt, across a large variety of different grains and legumes, many of them mixed, such as wheat and rye (maslin) and barley and oats (dredge). For this opening

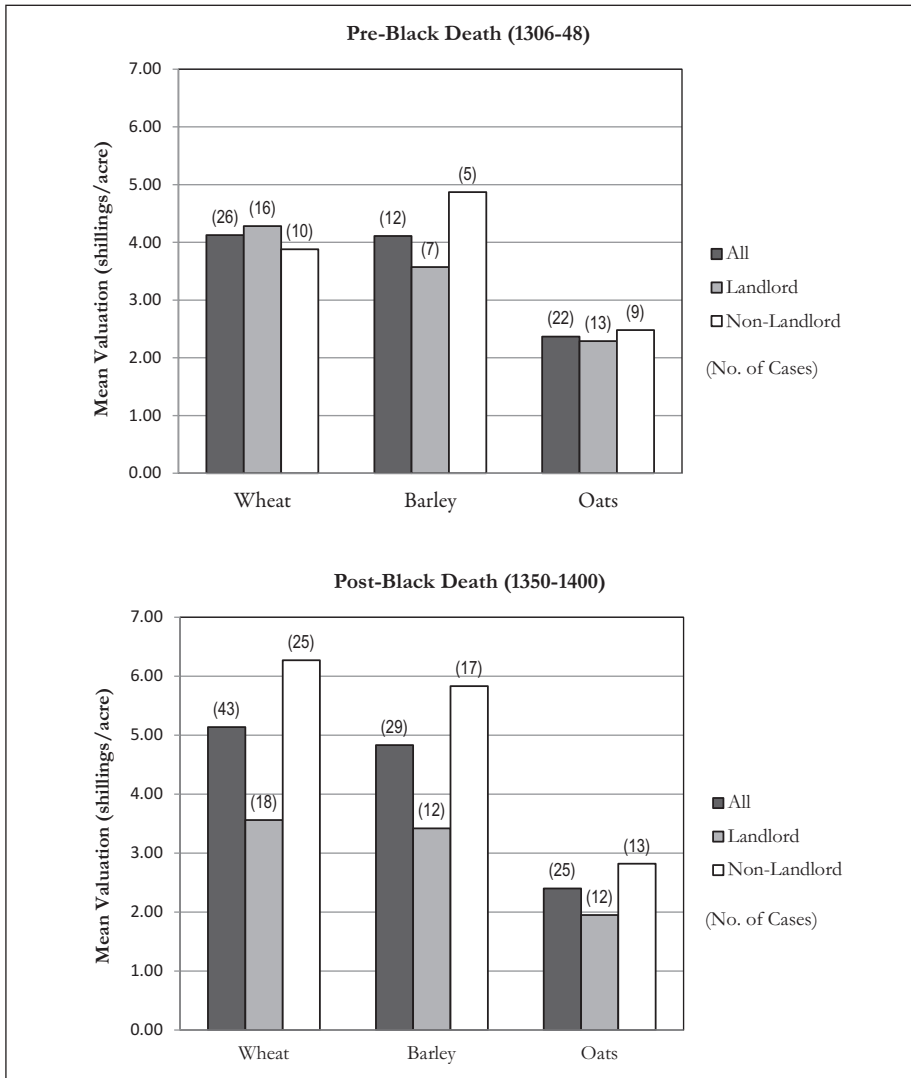
³⁹ As John Brown, *nativus*, in note 36 above; see also the extent for debt of Richard Broke of Ilford, Essex, who in 1388 was described as having seven acres of arable land held 'in bondage' of the abbess of Barking, as well as five and a half acres held freely: TNA, C 131/35/6, m. 2. In the opposite direction, merchants and the like might very occasionally have 'manors', as in the case of William Cosyn in note 37 above, who had a 'manor' at Sutton (in Rochford Hundred), Essex, which was 'extented' in 1365 and 1367: TNA, C 131/14/21, m. 2 & 16/13, m. 2. In this latter case, the land involved was considered to be in the 'landlord' category.

⁴⁰ Especially Ralph de Camoys in note 36 above.

⁴¹ The database analysis presented in this section was performed in the late 1990s. I have not redone this work, so the results are mostly those presented at the 1999 conference mentioned in the note at the beginning of the chapter, but my subsequent observations incorporate many of the very helpful comments that I received on that occasion.

⁴² On this point see Glennie, 'Measuring Crop Yields', p. 257.

Figure 3.1. Extent for debt mean crop valuations in field (June–August).⁴³



exercise, I have followed Mark Overton’s lead in only considering those valuations that were made during the months for June to August, in that they should reflect the ‘anticipated sale price valuation’ (hereafter ASPV) of the crop that the jurors felt would be realized upon eventual disposal on the mar-

⁴³ Sources: TNA C 131/1/2–C 131/49/16 and C 131/180/7–C 131/210/31.

ket rather than simply a 'cost of production valuation' (hereafter COPV) that might apply earlier in the harvest-year as the jurors estimated what were the costs — in ploughing, harrowing, manure spreading, etc. — of producing the crop up to the time that the extent was taken.⁴⁴ In order to enhance the comparison among grains for this June-August time-span, I have limited myself to the three single-genus grains of wheat, barley (both winter and spring), and oats, as shown in Figure 3.1. Inevitably, sample sizes for specific crops were at times small, as indicated by the number of cases in brackets over each bar. Nevertheless, the comparisons of the landlord and non-landlord sectors do show quite different experiences between the pre- and post-Black Death periods. In the early fourteenth century the mean (that is, average) valuations of all three crops seem to have been roughly equal between the landlord and non-landlord 'sectors', with perhaps the exception of barley, the smallest of the samples, where the non-landlord valuations averaged about 20–25 per cent higher than those for landlords, but for none of the grains, even barley, were the differences in valuations between landlord and non-landlord found to be statistically significant when *t*-tested. In the period after the plague the differences between the landlord and non-landlord sectors across the three grains was clearly in favour of non-landlords and statistically much more significant.⁴⁵

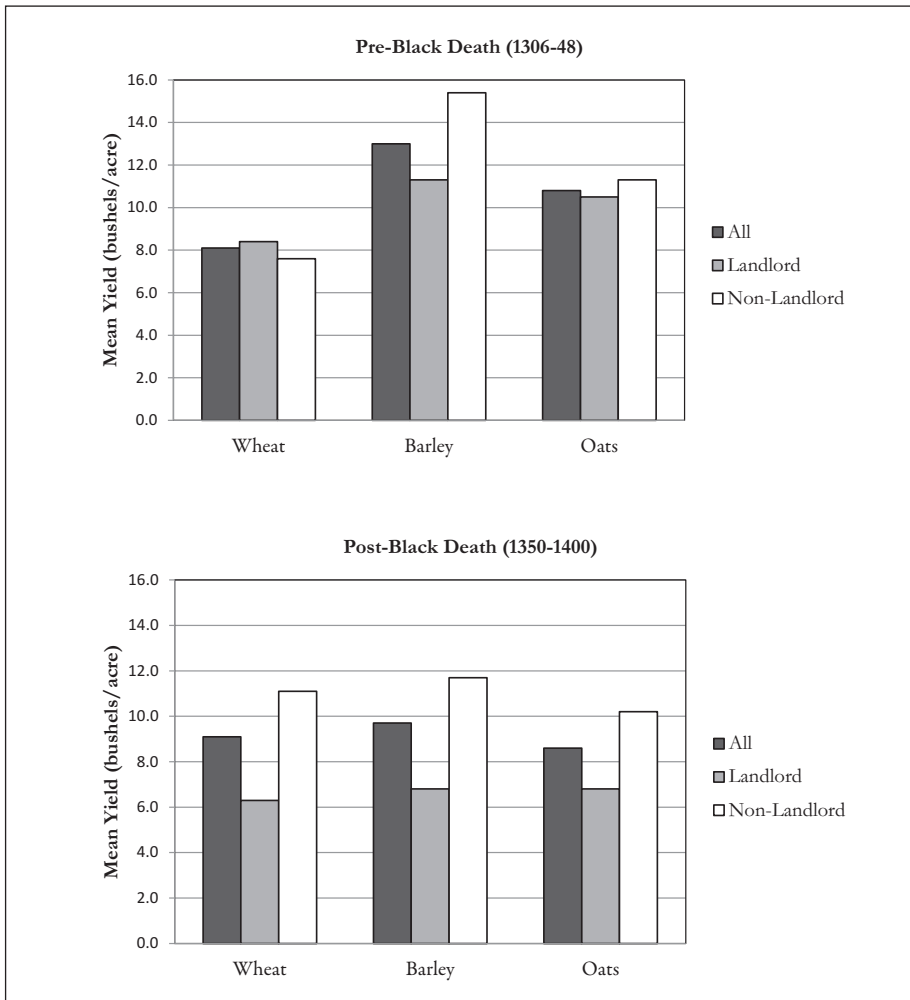
To try to get something corresponding to yield, the mean valuation for each crop in the field was divided by the mean valuation for the same crop in various barns across the sample from August to October and multiplied by eight (to convert the unit of 'quarters' in the recorded barn valuation to bushels),⁴⁶ the results being shown in Figure 3.2. It must be stressed that these must only

⁴⁴ Overton, 'Estimating Crop Yields', pp. 370–73; the acronyms are taken from Glennie, who discusses these differences in valuations very cogently in 'Measuring Crop Yields', pp. 261–64.

⁴⁵ Especially in the case of wheat, where for 1350 and after there was less than a 2 per cent probability that the difference in means between the landlord and non-landlord samples for the grain was due to the chances of sampling. The other two grains, barley and oats, were more weakly significant to below the 7 and 8 per cent levels respectively. All *t*-tests were of the two-tailed variety: e.g., Feinstein and Thomas, *Making History Count*, chapter 6 (esp. pp. 158–59, 170–73). For this study I have considered probabilities of less than 5 per cent to be significant, in line with the literature on quantitative methods generally, and probabilities of less than 10 to 5 per cent to be weakly significant.

⁴⁶ I have here used a narrower and different range of months for barn valuations than Overton, who took them from October to February (Overton, 'Estimating Crop Yields', p. 369). Because I wanted the barn valuations also to cover a three-month span, the months August to October seemed the best for getting prices in the barn that would correspond to crops newly harvested.

Figure 3.2. Extent for debt mean net crop yields (bushels/acre).⁴⁷



be considered crude approximation of yields,⁴⁸ since we do not have anywhere near the thousands of cases that those working on later probate inventories have to refine them further and to smooth out variations in the data. What we have from Figure 3.2 suggests that, for barley and oats, overall yields (landlord and

⁴⁷ Sources: TNA C 131/1/2–C 131/49/16 and C 131/180/7–C 131/210/31.

⁴⁸ It corresponds to what Overton calls a ‘first estimate of mean yield’ (‘Estimating Crop Yields’, pp. 368–69) as in equation 3 of his appendix (p. 377).

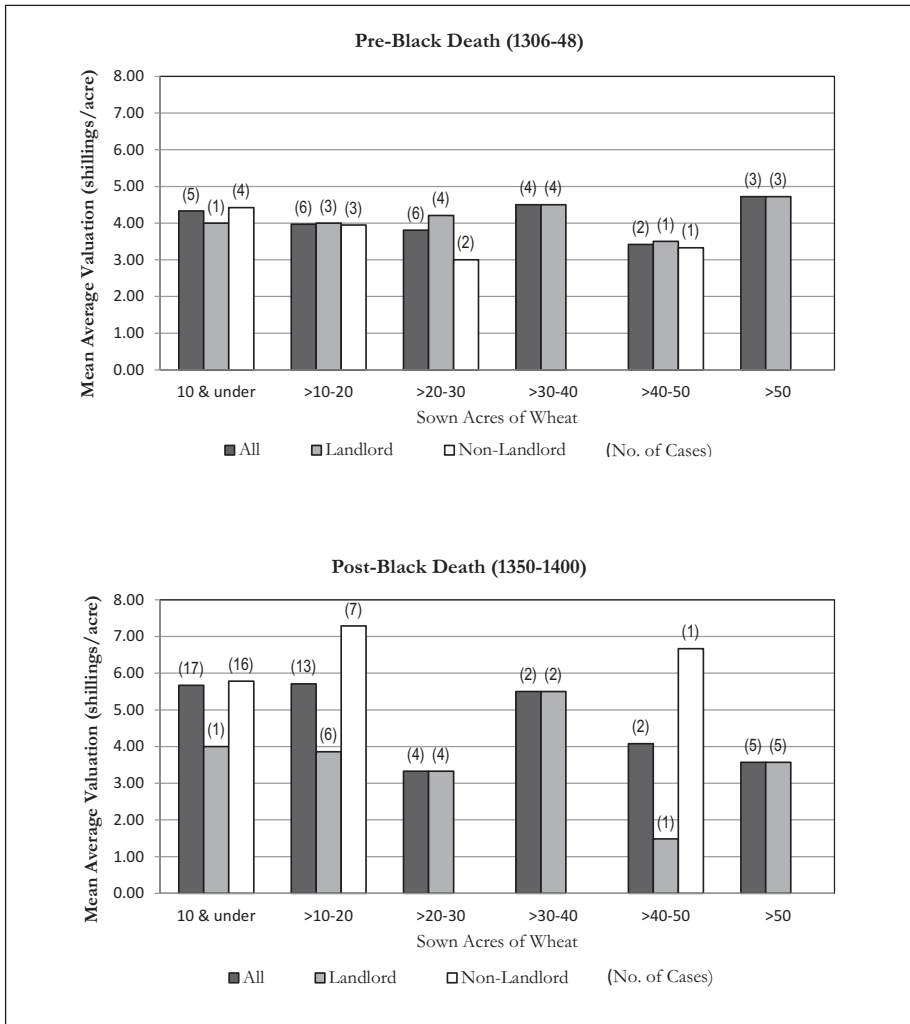
non-landlord together) declined by over 20 per cent from the pre- to post-plague period,⁴⁹ while wheat bucked the trend by having an increase of over 10 per cent. More importantly, the same widening between the landlord and non-landlord sectors from before to after the advent of the plague noted in Figure 3.1 is also indicated here. This is perhaps not surprising, since the values for crops in the field were the same as that in Figure 3.1, but it is useful to know that extending the calculation to 'yields', even in this rudimentary fashion, did not alter it.

To test the productivity issue of large versus small farms a little further, if only for one grain, it was decided to break down the wheat valuations in the fields into cohorts of the total number of acres sown with the grain and to consider these, first, from June to August (Figure 3.3) and then for all months (Figure 3.4). The rationale for the latter was that, despite the uncertainties involved, jurors might have been 'anticipating' coming harvest values right through the year (that is, employing ASPVs to the total exclusion of COPVs), as this would be more generous to the debtor by allowing (predominantly) him⁵⁰ some premium above costs of production, perhaps especially applying to non-landlord debtors, who might be more able to draw upon local sympathies.

⁴⁹ Following Dodds's even more pessimistic view for the north, where 'during the century after the Black Death production levels in the Durham area fell by up to 53 per cent': Dodds, 'Estimating Arable Output', p. 261. Some at least of this perceived decrease in the extents for debt case is possibly illusory, however, since the mean pre-plague barley and oats extent-for-debt 'barn' valuations were only 57.4 and 68.5 per cent respectively of the mean barley and oats prices in David Farmer's series for 1300–47, while in the post-plague period the mean 'barn' valuations for barley and oats were 85.2 and 82.0 per cent of the averaged Farmer prices for 1350–1400. This suggests that the pre-plague valuations for barley and oats were more underestimated in the period before the Black Death than after and, since these valuations go into the denominator of the yield calculations, would accordingly inflate pre-plague 'yields' relative to post-plague ones. For wheat, the pre- and post-plague extent-for-debt 'barn' prices, being much closer at 66.4 and 64.1 per cent of Farmer's mean wheat prices respectively, led to a different comparative result, as Figure 3.2 shows. The Farmer mean prices for the above percentage calculations were derived by averaging his 'decennial' means in Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', esp. p. 734 (Table 7.1); Farmer, 'Prices and Wages, 1350–1500', esp. p. 444 (Table 5.1); the shorter 1340–47 'decade' was weighted accordingly.

⁵⁰ Of the 333 extents for debt with crop data only three women appeared on their own: Agnes de Grenville of White Roding, Essex, in 1323 (TNA, C 131/1/48), the prioress of Gokewell, Lincolnshire, in 1358 (11/4) and Joan de Oteryngden of the parish of Newnham, Kent, in 1372 (20/25). A fourth was co-debtor with her husband (that is, John de Oddynseles and his wife, Emma, in 1326 for an extent taken at Bradwell, Oxfordshire (2/39)). For the similar infrequency of women among Wiltshire extents for debts, see *Wiltshire Extents for Debt*, ed. by Conyers, p. 8.

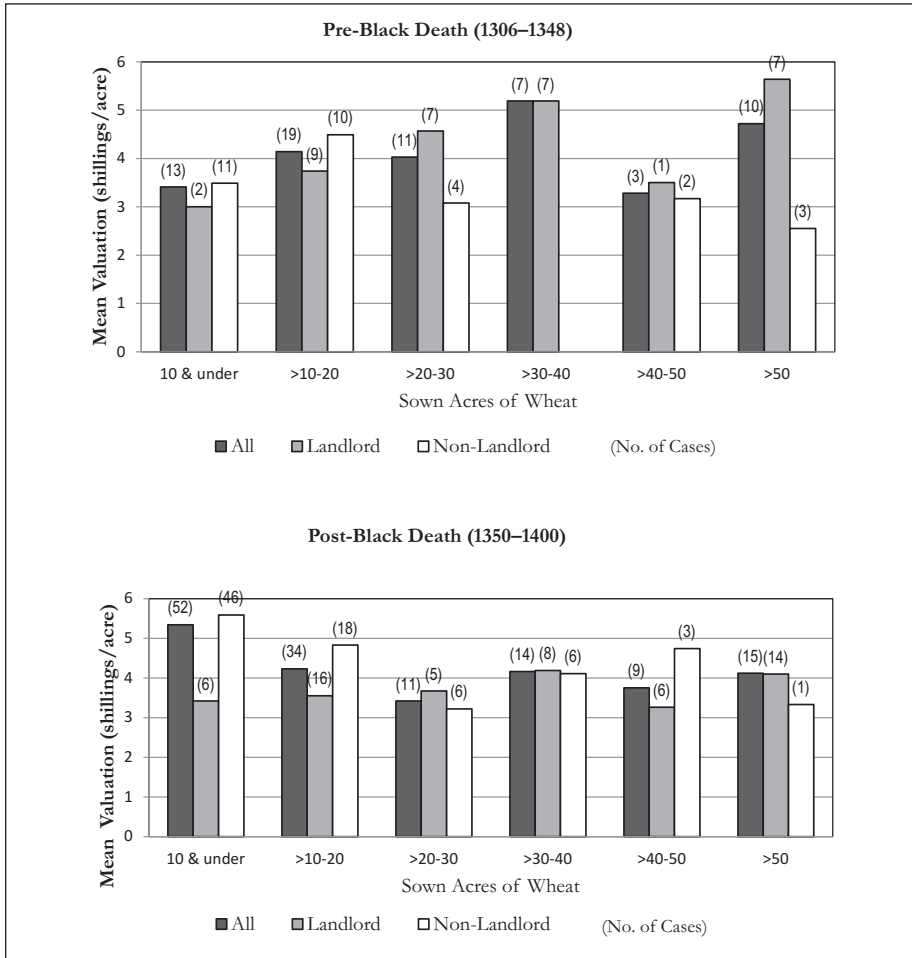
Figure 3.3. Extent for debt mean wheat acreage valuations by cohorts of acres sown (June–August).⁵¹



Although based on only twenty-six cases, the pre-plague mean valuations of wheat per acre, when arranged by ten-acre cohorts for the months of June to August in Figure 3.3, showed a reasonable stability across all cohorts and also a fairly steady similarity between landlord and non-landlord valuations. In contrast, the post-Black Death sample for June-August wheat valuations,

⁵¹ Sources: TNA C 131/1/2–C 131/49/16 and C 131/180/7–C 131/210/31.

Figure 3.4. Extent for debt wheat acreage valuations by cohorts of acres sown (all months).⁵²



this time for forty-three cases, shows the higher valuations for non-landlord farms throughout the cohort range (although this sector is poorly represented in the larger sown acreages). When looking at all months (Figure 3.4), similarity in valuations for both landlord and non-landlord sectors in the pre-plague period (now with sixty-three cases) still occurred for the two lowest sown-acre cohorts, that is, up to twenty acres, but for acreages above twenty, the tendency was for landlord valuations to be higher than non-landlord ones. There is also a upward

⁵² Sources: TNA C 131/1/2–C 131/49/16 and C 131/180/7–C 131/210/31.

trend in valuations regardless of sector as sown acreages became larger generally, again very evident for the landlord sector (except for the >40–50 sown-acre cohort, based on only one landlord case). In the post-Black Death period, with wheat valuations from all months of the year now standing at 135 cases, there is, in marked contrast to the period before the plague, an observable downward trend in crop valuations as sown acreages got larger, with the non-landlord farms clearly having better valuations, especially in the two lowest acreage cohorts.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the difference between the agricultural dispositions of pre- and post-plague England at its starkest. It seems to show a marked productivity shift from landlord to non-landlord over the course of the fourteenth century. This fits with evidence concerning the decline of landlord (or demesne) agriculture in the late fourteenth century,⁵³ but does it necessarily mean a concomitant improvement in non-landlord, and especially peasant, agriculture? Certainly Figures 3.3 and 3.4 suggest that a post-plague productivity improvement might have happened among the smaller farms represented in the bottom two cohorts (that is, up to and including twenty sown acres). Farms with wheat components of up to twenty sown acres would comprise a very healthy proportion of arable production for England overall,⁵⁴ and a productivity improvement among these lesser farmers over the fourteenth century of the order suggested in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 would certainly have an important impact in shifting the productivity balance between landlord and non-landlord.

*Anecdotal Yields*⁵⁵

When the above results were presented in 1999, it was suggested that ‘anecdotal yields’ created from smaller selections of more detailed extents for debt could be used to supplement the more aggregative analysis just performed.⁵⁶ Calculating yields from such individual extents was performed by using Robert

⁵³ For example, Campbell and Overton, ‘New Perspective’, pp. 70 (Table 5; figures for the medieval period drawn from Norfolk medieval accounts), and 74; Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 234–38 and 364–85 (from the experience of Norfolk and a selection of estates and manors elsewhere).

⁵⁴ For example, likely close to 40 per cent of arable land was in the hands of villein tenants; see Campbell’s thought on this: Campbell, *ESA*, pp. 55–60.

⁵⁵ Calculations in this section were initially worked out by hand, but more recently the data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, far more convenient for significance testing. I am grateful to Jean Korte for help in this.

⁵⁶ This point of aggregative versus individual analyses is particularly well expressed by Paul Glennie in regard to the treatment of probate inventories: ‘Continuity and Change’, esp. p. 152;

Allen's formula derived for probate inventories, which assumes that the assessors were taking into account various deductions and costs in their valuations:

$$v = 0.9(py - ty - c) - r^{57}$$

Here v is the valuation of the crop in the field (in this study converted to pence per acre), p equals the valuation of the crop in the barn (pence per bushel), y equals the yield in bushels per acre, t equals the threshing and winnowing costs in pence per bushel to get the grain to saleable form, c equals the carting costs to get the grain from the field to the barn (for units, see following), and r represents the harvest reaping and binding costs (in pence per acre). The '0.9' element in the equation represents the amount that would remain after tithes were removed.

Where I have differed from Allen (and others) is in the carting costs, which Allen assumed only applied to getting the sheaves of grain from fields to temporary ricks and then to the barns.⁵⁸ It seems more likely, however, that when jurors were making their valuations of crops in the field or barn in order to discharge debt they were thinking of prices that would be obtained at the actual point of sale, not the point of storage; the latter would only be appropriate if buyers normally came to the farm. It is much more likely that farmers generally had to take their grain to a nearby market for sale, adding considerably to the carting component of the calculation. In computing these carting costs, use here has been made of James Masschaele's calculation that land transport normally cost 1.5 pence per ton-mile in the early fourteenth century.⁵⁹ Assuming, as Masschaele does, a British ton of 2240 lbs. (avoirdupois) and a bushel of wheat of 48 lbs.,⁶⁰ then the cost of transporting wheat at least would be 0.032 pence per bushel-mile, or, say, the cost of transporting a bushel from field to barn if the trip were in fact a mile. However, if a ten-mile carting range would normally be needed to dispose of grains by sale at local markets or fairs, following Masschaele's sense that such a return-trip distance would be adequate to

see also the exchange between Allen, 'Inferring Yields', and Overton, 'Re-Estimating Crop Yields', esp. p. 932. The expression 'anecdotal yields' was in fact coined by Bruce Campbell himself at the 1999 conference.

⁵⁷ Allen, 'Inferring Yields', p. 119.

⁵⁸ Allen, 'Inferring Yields', p. 119; Mark Overton supports Allen in seeing carting costs as only applying to the barn: 'Determinants of Crop Yields', p. 299.

⁵⁹ Masschaele, 'Transport Costs', p. 271; Masschaele's data were drawn from 1296 to the 1350s (p. 268).

⁶⁰ Masschaele, 'Transport Costs', pp. 277–78.

allow access to several marketing fora,⁶¹ this would raise carting costs to 0.32d. per bushel.⁶² Masschaele has indicated that these transport costs to market would add four per cent to the sale price of grains,⁶³ and it likewise inflated the yields in our calculations below by about the same amount.⁶⁴

If a ten-mile carting cost of 0.32d. per bushel were assumed then this would adjust Allen's formula to:

$$v = 0.9(py - ty - 0.32y) - r$$

Rearranging to get y (yield in bushels per acre) produces:

$$y = (v + r) / 0.9(p - t - 0.32)$$

As an initial exercise, only those extents that supplied both valuations of crops in the fields and in the barns were considered, so that in working out yields we are at least dealing with field and barn valuations provided by the same jurors. Such extents were in fact relatively scarce in the overall sample, so the exercise was done using all months of the year and considering only wheat, the most common grain having both field and barn valuations. This still only yielded six extents for the pre-Black Death period (three landlord and three non-landlord) and another twenty-five for the period after the plague (five landlord and twenty non-landlord). These thirty-one extents fell mostly within a six-month span from December to May, which months held twenty-six (or 83.9 per cent) of the total sample.⁶⁵ It seems that it was during this period that the combination of crops both in the field and barn would be most likely.

In any case, with the data for terms v and p coming from the actual document, and r and t obtained from David Farmer's wage series for reaping and threshing for the particular year that the extent was taken,⁶⁶ it was possible to

⁶¹ '[...] a ten-mile trip would give most producers access to several different markets': Masschaele, 'Transport Costs', p. 274.

⁶² For the post-plague period, ten-mile carting costs, taking into account higher costs of labour, were calculated at 0.43d. per bushel.

⁶³ Masschaele, 'Transport Costs', p. 274.

⁶⁴ In the calculations that follow, there was just over a five per cent average rise in the calculated yield figures using the 0.32 pence per bushel carting cost figure (for ten miles travel) rather than the 0.032 figure (for one mile).

⁶⁵ The number of extents for each month, both pre- and post-plague, were, starting after the harvest, one for October, one for November, three for December, nine for January, three for February, six for March, two for April, three for May, one for June, one for July, none for August, and one for September.

⁶⁶ Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', pp. 811–17; Farmer, 'Prices and Wages, 1350–1500',

calculate yields. In the small pre-Black Death sample of six cases, the mean yield from the three landlord farms came to an average 10.57 bushels per acre compared to 5.58 bushels per acre for the three non-landlord farms. The landlord result was skewed upward by the presence of a particularly high calculation for a farm in Yorkshire of 16.83 bushels per acre from an extent of 14 January 1325. This last case, stemming from a very high crop valuation of 13s. 4d. per acre (cf. the means in Figures 3.1, 3.3, and 3.4) suggests that, even at this early date in the year, the jurors were using a more generous ASPV, looking forward to the prices obtaining at the harvest, rather than the more restricted COPV, which only recognized the value of the labour, seed, and other inputs.⁶⁷ Although the difference between landlord and non-landlord yields was sizable here, it was not statistically significant, hardly surprising given the very small number of cases.⁶⁸ As with the evidence already presented, the post-Black Death extents with valuations of crops both in the field and barn presented a very different picture. Here the five landlord farms averaged a yield of 7.68 bushels per acre, while the twenty non-landlord farms had an impressive mean of 13.26 bushels per acre, a difference that was, in this instance, very significant statistically.⁶⁹

Looking at these 'yields' in absolute terms prompts comparison from other sources, particularly from manorial accounts. For this, perhaps the best comparison is with the wheat yields generated from the estates of the bishopric of Winchester, from which an overall mean yield per acre net of tithe for wheat came to 7.00 bushels per acre for the period 1209 to 1349;⁷⁰ if tithe is included to make it comparable with the extents per debt material this raises the Winchester average yields to 7.78 bushels per acre. In this regard, *pace* the small sample sizes, the yields from the extents for debt in this particular exercise are certainly respectable, with the non-landlord performance after the Black Death being particularly notable.

A slightly expanded exercise, again for wheat only and here using only extents drawn from the months June to August, when accurate ASPV valua-

pp. 516–20. For the calculations the 'shillings' and 'quarters' in the documents were converted to pence and bushels (i.e., 1s. = 12d. and 1 quarter = eight bushels).

⁶⁷ This extent for debt was for the farm of John Fairfax at Walton, Yorkshire, with a recorded 120 acres of arable, as well as various tenant rents: TNA, C 131/2/13, m. 2.

⁶⁸ The probability of the difference being due to the chances of sampling was very high at 27 per cent.

⁶⁹ Here the probability that the difference of means between landlord and non-landlord sectors being due simply to the chances of sampling was less than 1 per cent.

⁷⁰ Campbell, *ESA*, p. 320.

tions were most likely, was performed by employing David Farmer's wheat price series as a substitute for crop valuations in the barn. Furthermore, the exercise combined Farmer's wheat price for the account-year in which the extent was taken with that from the following account-year (that is, an average of the two). This was done on the principle that the jurors during these months were not only making an evaluation of crops in the fields based upon wheat prices they had already experienced during that particular account-year but also upon prices they were projecting for the following account-year according to the perceived success (or not) of the harvest currently facing them.

The pre-Black Death sample for this particular exercise had twenty-nine cases (seventeen landlord and twelve non-landlord), which when processed using Allen's formula as modified above produced mean yields for the landlord group of extents of 9.29 bushels per acre and for the non-landlord group of 5.82 bushels per acre. This result, heavily in favour of the landlord group, was statistically very significant.⁷¹ As before, the post-Black Death sample (of forty cases — eighteen landlord and twenty-two non-landlord) demonstrated a shift in the other direction, with the mean calculated yield from the eighteen landlord cases being 7.63 bushels per acre while the twenty-two non-landlord cases now came in higher with a mean of 9.67 bushels per year, but in this case the difference was not statistically significant.⁷² Despite the ambiguity of this last result, the critical point to be made is that the direction of the trend was the same as that for the other exercises presented in this chapter — that the productivity of the non-landlord sector improved against that of the landlord sector over the course of the fourteenth century.

Conclusion

The main conclusion to be derived from this study, no matter which way the extents for debt sample was analysed, is that, after the Black Death, the non-landlord sector seemingly became more productive than its landlord counterpart. This development is more or less in line with Sapoznik's case study for Oakington, whether the reason for it is a broader application of fodder crops by peasants (Sapoznik) or, more generally, some combination of rising non-land-

⁷¹ The probability that the difference of means between the landlord and non-landlord sectors was due simply to the chances of sampling was less than 1 per cent.

⁷² Here the probability of the difference of means between the landlord and non-landlord sectors being due simply to the chances was relatively high at 13 per cent.

lord and falling landlord agrarian performance, the exact reasons for which we have still to untangle (this present study).⁷³ A vital question that remains, however, is whether this pattern was a continuity from the early fourteenth century, as Sapoznik implies in her case,⁷⁴ or a more or less complete break from it. This study strongly suggests the latter — that is, grain productivity before the plague was broadly similar across both sectors, with perhaps even an advantage going to landlords and their demesnes. To the degree that one has faith in a difficult source like extents for debt and their treatment here, it entrenches further the position of Campbell and his colleagues that such pre-plague crop productivity levels as seen on English demesnes and extended deeper into English society by this study could not have supported the optimistic population estimates of five to six million or even more *c.* 1300 so often cited in the existing literature, and that something in the four to five million range, and probably closer to four, is much more likely.⁷⁵ Campbell's 'conundrum' still exists, but its spectre will undoubtedly fade as more evidence from tithe analyses and, perhaps even better, from peasant and other non-lordly inventories taken in less fraught circumstances than extents for debt come to light, difficult as the latter are to bring together.

⁷³ Bruce Campbell has amply chronicled the general decline or at least stasis of demesne crop production over the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (except for occasional periods of rebound, such as the period 1376–95, which he calls the 'Chaucerian Anomaly'), a situation he attributes largely to relatively cool and moist climatic conditions obtaining over the later medieval period: for his latest detailed assessment on this, see 'Grain Yields on English Demesnes', esp. pp. 159–60 (for the 'Chaucerian Anomaly' designation, see p. 150). Such climate conditions should theoretically have impacted both landlord and non-landlord grain cultivation performance equally, but there were regional situations that might have shifted the balance. On p. 156 Campbell notes: 'The growth of London [at least comparatively to other parts of the country at this time], in particular, provided a powerful stimulus to farmers within a rapidly expanding hinterland to raise output and productivity.' This corresponds well with the more London-oriented distribution of our post-Black Death sample and the *c.* 60–40 over-representation of the non-landlord extents within it (see section 'The Sample' and especially note 34) and provides another dimension than just better farming techniques to explain the apparent improvement of non-landlord versus landlord crop productivity (in this sample at least). On the other hand, since Sapoznik's manor of Oakington, Cambridgeshire, with its indication of superior peasant over demesne crop productivity, was *outside* the London Region, it suggests complexities still to be unraveled.

⁷⁴ Particularly in regard to peasant cropping patterns: Sapoznik, 'Productivity of Peasant Agriculture', p. 535.

⁷⁵ See Campbell, *ESA*, Table 8.06 (p. 403), for a summary of English population estimates, not only for *c.* 1300, but other dates from 1086 to the 1540s, including his own preference for a population estimate *c.* 1300 of 4.00–4.25 million.

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PEASANT FARMING IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND: EVIDENCE FROM THE TITHE ESTIMATIONS BY WORCESTER CATHEDRAL PRIORY

Christopher Dyer*

Peasants lay at the centre of the traditional rural world: together they occupied more land than any other section of society. Their decisions about management and techniques could bring about important changes, and now, after being portrayed as stodgily conservative, they are recognized as having a dynamic potential. A dilemma faces those enquiring into peasant economies in our own day as well as those of the past. On one side we have those who presume that the market determined peasant decisions, noting that they planted crops which brought the best return, taking into account the cost of transport. On the other side, those taking a behavioural or cultural stance point out that peasants were not always very well informed about prices; in the face of unpredictable weather and fluctuations in yield they relied largely on their own crops for subsistence, cautiously opting for reliability and avoiding risk.¹ To focus on medieval peasants, although they enjoyed more independence and confidence than was once supposed, they were nonetheless living in an insecure world in which they were buffeted not just by the environment but by the demands of government and the exactions of lords.

* This paper is an expression of my admiration for Bruce Campbell, and my gratitude for the contribution that he has made to medieval economic history. The interpretation owes much to his pioneering approach.

¹ Astroth, *Understanding Peasant Agriculture*.

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We tend to view the peasantry from outside, as their lords and sometimes the state recorded their holdings and forms of tenure. Holding size and the obligations of tenants tell us much indirectly about the peasant economy, but there are many difficulties in penetrating into the hidden peasant world. As so much is known about lords' agriculture, an obvious approach has been to compare peasant holdings with manorial demesnes. This paper aims to make that comparison and then to move to an assessment of self-sufficiency and the market in peasant farming, based on the evidence for tithes and the lords' crops in Worcester Cathedral Priory's 'estimations of the corn'.

Historians have used a variety of sources to throw light on peasant agriculture. If a tenant's holding came into the lord's hands, the harvested crops might be entered into the manorial account. A peasant of Hampton Lucy (Warwickshire), Walter Shayl, had his crops recorded after he abandoned his holding in 1378, and Hilton used them as a telling example to show that peasant yields were inferior to those of the lord's demesne.² Postan argued (using tax returns) that most peasant holdings were undersupplied with animals which led to lower yields.³ Tax records have also been used to show that peasants' marketable surpluses can be linked with stratification in wealth.⁴ Useful insights into individual holdings comes from lists of possessions entered into court rolls when a tenant hurriedly left the manor, committed felony, fell into debt, or died without heirs. Before about 1450 these are the nearest our local records come to probate inventories. Inventories demonstrate the wide range of choices facing peasant cultivators, but show no consistent trend. For example some opted for a majority of winter-sown crops such as wheat and rye, while others have a preponderance of spring-sown barley, oats, and legumes.⁵ Such records have been used to argue that arable cultivation could achieve quite high levels of productivity, perhaps aided by a relatively high livestock density.⁶ Peasants might also have been able to mobilize family members as a highly-motivated work force, especially for labour-intensive tasks.⁷

Tithes, the levy of a tenth part of produce claimed by the church, were used systematically by continental historians from the 1960s, chiefly with the

² Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 202.

³ Postan, 'Village Livestock'.

⁴ Biddick, 'Missing Links'.

⁵ Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 42; Mate, 'Agrarian Technology', pp. 268–69; *English Manor*, ed. by Bailey, pp. 234–35; Dyer, 'Inventory of William Akclum', pp. 342–47.

⁶ Stone, *Decision-Making*, pp. 262–72; Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, pp. 29–30.

⁷ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 396.

aim of charting the long-term rise and fall in agricultural output.⁸ When this approach was applied to the Durham tithes, overall production (mainly by peasants) could be seen increasing up to 1311, and declined in the long term in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Detailed analysis of yearly fluctuations found that peasants changed the proportions of different types of grain as prices rose and fell to gain the best returns from the market.⁹ Tithes can also throw light on peasant livestock husbandry, wool production, the cultivation of industrial crops, and horticulture.¹⁰ We depend for tithe data on the survival of occasional tithe accounts in church archives, though they are also recorded sporadically among the returns of the ninths of 1341 and in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535.¹¹

Tithes can be used to analyse the proportions of different crops grown by peasants, and to make comparisons with demesnes. Peasant holdings were the main contributors to the total of tithe. Sometimes demesnes and tenants paid tithe together, but on many monastic estates the demesne was exempt from tithe. The main circumstance in which tithes are recorded was when a monastery or bishopric had appropriated a parish church, and gained the tithe revenue of the rectory. When the parish was the one in which a demesne was situated, the monks' officials did not need to deduct the tithe from the demesne crop. They carried the whole demesne harvest into their barns, and recorded the quantity on the back of the manorial account roll, while tithe was gathered separately from the tenants' land.

A comparison between demesne and peasant crops is possible if we have both tithe records and manorial accounts of demesne cultivation. They sometime show divergent tendencies: for example in upland parishes in north Yorkshire oats accounted for 90 per cent of the tithes but between 66 and 75 per cent of the demesne crops.¹² Similarly demesnes in north-west Suffolk grew much barley, but the peasant tendency to specialization resulted in an even higher proportion of the crop among the tithes.¹³

⁸ Le Roy Ladurie, *Tithe and Agrarian History*; Neveux, *Vie et Déclin*.

⁹ Dodds, *Peasants and Production*.

¹⁰ Dyer, *Country Merchant*, pp. 183–84; *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 291–96; Dyer, 'Gardens and Orchards', pp. 119–20 and 124.

¹¹ *Nonarum*, ed. by Vanderzee, pp. 23–34, 106–27, and 350–94, where details of tithes are especially plentiful; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, III, ed. by Caley and Hunter, pp. 224–77, contains details of tithes from the diocese of Worcester.

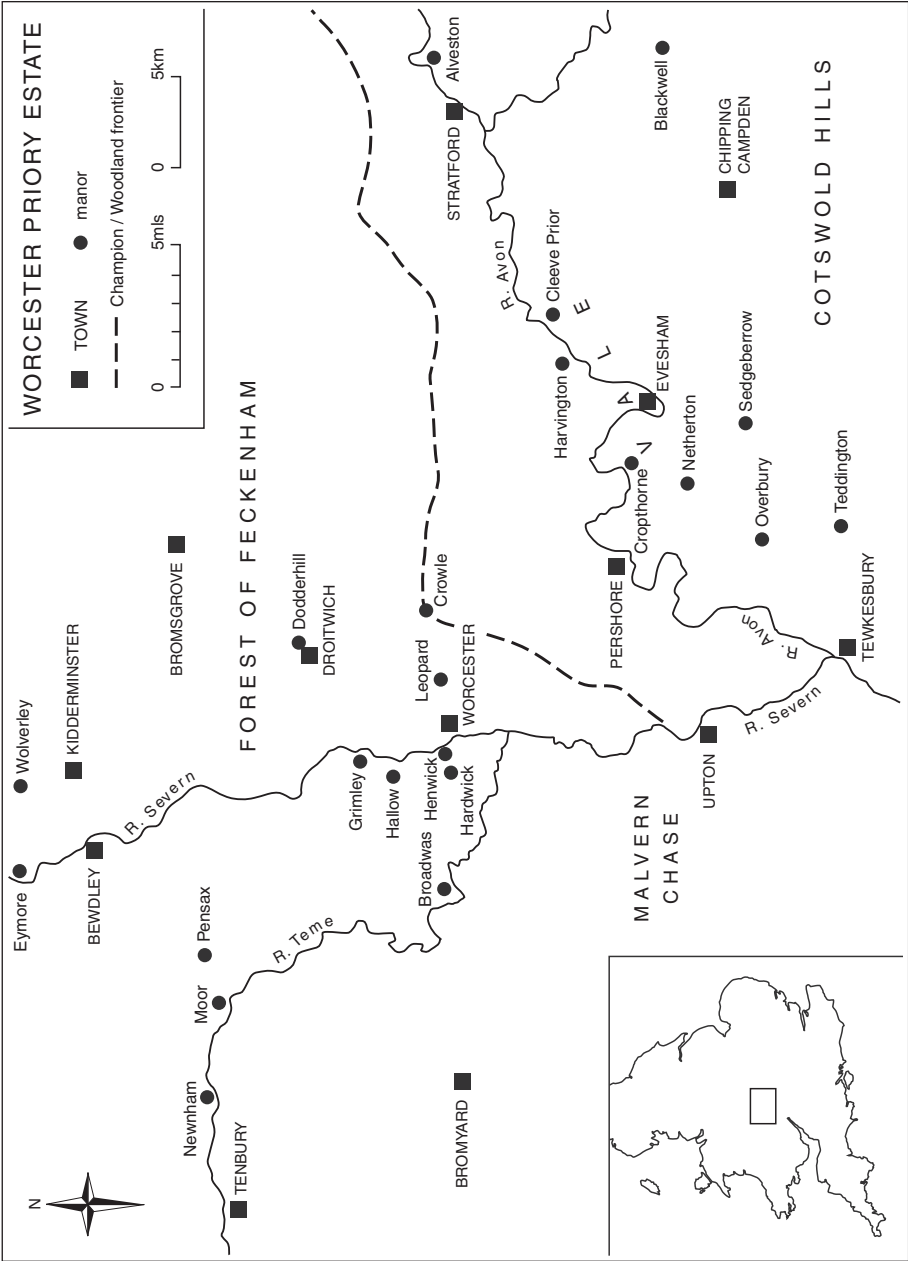
¹² Kershaw, *Bolton Priory*, pp. 63–67.

¹³ Bailey, *Marginal Economy?*, pp. 135–42.

'Estimationes bladorum' of Worcester Cathedral Priory, 1400–62

The 'estimations of the corn' were documents produced each year when the crops had been harvested and the sheaves stacked at the manorial *curiae* (centres) of Worcester Cathedral Priory. This large monastic estate was worth more than £1000 per annum, concentrated in Worcestershire. The priory usually stored the produce of the demesne and the tithe crops in the *curia*, but in separate buildings and stacks. In late September, just before the end of the agricultural year at Michaelmas, before threshing began in earnest, an official of Worcester Cathedral Priory (whose name and title are not recorded) went on a *tourn* of the estate, which took him on a circuit of the Cellarer's manors which were the largest and most productive of the monastery's lands. The official, skilled in measurement, went to the buildings and yards of each manor and estimated from the gathered crops still in straw how much corn would be extracted by threshing. He used a wide vocabulary: pile (*meia*), stack (*staccus*), heap (*cantellus*), rick (*tassus*), or he described the corn as being in wainloads, cartloads, thraves (twenty-four sheaves), or just a number of sheaves. Most of the corn was stored under cover, in barns that were distinguished by their size, position, antiquity or function (great barn, west barn, new barn, tithe barn), and in any other building which had space, such as the hay house, byre, stable, and sheepcote. Any overflow was kept in ricks (both rectangular and round) in the barton or farmyard. The official measured the heaps, and from experience or training estimated the quantity of grain that would result from threshing. In one case he saw a rick 34 feet long, 18 feet wide, 12 feet high at the sides, and 24 feet high at the apex of the thatched gable, and calculated that it contained 34 quarters (equalling 272 bushels at eight bushels per quarter) of pulse. Often he looked into a barn crammed with sheaves piled high towards the roof, and he would note, for example, that the corn reached to a point four feet above the beam, meaning the tie beam that connected the arcade posts.

The *tourn* often began in the Avon valley, at Cleeve Prior or Cropthorne (see Map 4.1), and after visiting these, and also Harvington and Netherton, the official moved south through Sedgeberrow to the east of Bredon Hill to Teddington and Overbury near the confluence of the Avon and Severn at Tewkesbury. Then he doubled back, taking note of the crops at Blackwell in the Stour valley, and (rarely) at Alveston (in Warwickshire, the only manor not in Worcestershire). He then crossed the frontier (the dotted line in Map 4.1) that divided the whole region. Behind him lay the southern and eastern champion lands he had just visited, with nucleated villages and open fields devoted mainly to corn, and ahead to the north and west were the woodlands where dis-



persed settlement, complex fields systems (with much enclosure) and a mixed pastoral and arable economy prevailed.¹⁴ He often went to the manors west of Worcester at Hallow and Grimley, followed by Hardwick and Henwick, and then fifteen miles up the Teme valley to Moor and Newnham. His final destination was usually Wolverley, out in the woods of north Worcestershire. In all he covered more than a hundred miles, and the whole operation must have lasted a week or two. At journey's end, presumably at Worcester, the *estimatio bladorum* was written, a short roll with a paragraph for each manor summarizing in a compressed entry the dimensions of the stacks and their predicted output. Each stack, rick, and pile was identified as containing demesne corn or tithes corn. Sometimes a brief inventory of demesne livestock and 'deadstock' (*staurum mortuum*: equipment such as carts and ploughs) was added. The earliest isolated document of this type from Worcester Priory, of 1289, suggests a long series stretching back well before 1400 which has not survived.¹⁵

Similar documents can be found in other monastic archives, such as those of Norwich Priory and Westminster Abbey, and the estimation of grain crops was advocated by authors of manuals on estate management and accountancy. The *Rules* of Bishop Grosseteste of around 1240 advises the lady who is in charge of an estate that she command her steward to arrange for 'knowledgeable and loyal men' to estimate all of the stacks, both inside and outside the barns, and calculate how many quarters of corn they contained. A treatise on accounting compiled in the fifteenth century but probably based on a text of the previous century preserved at Gloucester Abbey contains among other jottings a specimen calculation 'for the estimation of a barn': a pile of wheat between two pairs of crucks, in a barn, 30 feet wide, 15 feet long, and 10 feet high 'will commonly contain 40 quarters'.¹⁶

The group of eighteen Worcester documents analysed here, belonging to the period 1400–62, give estimates of demesne production, and for fourteen manors also estimate the amount of corn from tithes. The appearance of records of both demesnes and tithes in the same documents arose from the monks' policy of appropriating the rectories on their manors before 1400, which gave the

¹⁴ Yelling, 'Livestock Numbers', pp. 281–82.

¹⁵ The date and archival reference of each of the *Estimationes bladorum* are given under 'Works Cited', below.

¹⁶ Saunders, *Introduction*, pp. 13, 49, and 59; *Walter of Henley*, ed. by Oschinsky, pp. 191–99, 249–51, 393, and 475. Barbara Harvey has shown me her transcripts of the 'state of the manors' of Westminster Abbey, which include estimations of crops, made in November and December.

monks the revenues, including tithes, previously belonging to the rector.¹⁷ The manor which managed the demesne, and the parish from which tithes were collected, were administratively distinct, but usually both manor and parish lay within the same boundaries and so comparison between them is valid.

The estimations are incomplete and sometimes illegible. Their lack of precision can be appreciated from the numbers rounded in tens (10 quarters, 20 quarters, etc.) or in fours and twelves (4, 8, 12, 24, etc.). Yet these documents, for all of their faults, contain much approximate data about tithes, and enable comparisons to be made between lords' and peasants' cultivation strategies in fourteen places over more than half a century. We can put some trust in the successive estimators' skill, as they would have lost credibility among the officials managing the estate if the figures had been proved wildly inaccurate. The reeves of the individual manors would have hoped for a low estimate, as that reduced the pressure on them to deliver the maximum quantity of threshed grain, and might even have allowed them to keep part of the crop for themselves. The cellarer and the other administrators at the monastery expected high estimates, as these could force the reeves to be honest and efficient in managing the threshing process. The official making the estimate would have had his calculations audited, judging from the rather defensive excuses he offered for a low estimate: 'it did not grow well this year', or various disasters overtook the crops, in the form of floods, drought, wind, weeds, mildew, 'dew' (probably the same), rabbits, and 'beasts'. We are allowed a little scepticism about the reliability of these excuses which were probably offered by the reeves, themselves wary of criticism from auditors.

Some check on the estimates can be made by comparing them with the grain and legumes recorded on the back of manorial account rolls for the same years. For example when the barns and ricks were measured and estimated at Newnham in September 1417, 140 quarters of wheat was estimated as the demesne crop; according to the account when threshed the demesne wheat came to 117 quarters (84 per cent of the estimate). The equivalent figures for demesne oats were 71 quarters from the estimate and 67 quarters 4 bushels 2 pecks in the accounts (95 per cent of the estimate); and for tithes oats 10 quarters and 9 quarters (90 per cent). A stack of vetch estimated to contain 2 quarters when threshed was lower than the prediction by 3 bushels and 3 pecks (a shortfall of 23 per cent).¹⁸ From a scatter of examples from other manors the yield of grain recorded from

¹⁷ *Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory*, ed. by Darlington, pp. 205–06; see also *Victoria County History: Worcestershire*, III, ed. by Willis-Bund and Page, under each parish.

¹⁸ Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library (hereafter WCL), C 660.

the stacks was usually within 25 per cent of the estimation, and invariably production was below the estimate. The least accurate forecast was at Newnham in 1412–13 when 88 quarters of oats were expected, and only 60 quarters 4 bushels and 2 pecks of oats were delivered (69 per cent of the estimate).¹⁹ Perhaps in this case, or more generally, the crops had deteriorated between the estimations and the threshing, which could take months? More likely the forecast was deliberately optimistic, to put pressure on the local officials — the *estimationes* were setting a target. The auditors of the manorial accounts, having access to the estimates, were aware of the discrepancies, and sometimes demanded that the reeves or bailiffs should fill the gap. Compensation was not required for the whole of the shortfall, but the auditors chose a smaller round figure. At Overbury, for example, in 1408 the bailiff was charged 2 quarters of drage (a mixture of barley and oats) ‘to answer for part of the estimate’ because the tithe produced when threshed 96 quarters 2 bushels 1 peck, rather than the predicted total of 100 quarters.²⁰ The conclusion must be that although the estimates were imperfect, they bore a resemblance to reality, and can provide comparative information on the proportions of different crops grown on the demesne and, through the tithe figures, produced by the peasantry.

The first line of enquiry concerns the overall scale of production, and changes over time. For the demesne we are told of the crops harvested by the Priory from that distinct area of land within a manor, with one hundred, two hundred or three hundred acres under cultivation each year. The tithe total is based on a ten per cent share of the total output of the rest of the land in the parish in which the manor lay, so that 100–200 quarters of tithe implies that the parish produced 1000–2000 quarters, from 667 to 1333 planted acres if the approximate figure of 12 bushels to the acre is applied. The Appendix gives means for both demesne and tithe crops in all of the estimations, divided between records of 1400–13 and 1416–62, which are dates chosen to give two approximately equal samples. After 1416 the quantity of demesne crops fell by 23 per cent, and the tithe totals declined by 20 per cent. These totals conceal some very large differences. For example, the demesne crops of Teddington and the tithes of Newnham fell by almost a half, while two of the tithe totals increased, probably because of changes in the territory from which tithes were paid. These figures do not convey the long term decline in output which can be seen for those manors with good records from both the beginning and end of the period for which estimations survive. For example if we examine the four

¹⁹ WCL, C 659.

²⁰ WCL, C 714.

manors with data for 1400–03 and 1444–48 (Cleeve, Crophorne, Hardwick, and Teddington), the annual mean quantity of estimated demesne crops fell by 35 per cent, and the tithes were reduced by a more modest 21 per cent. Comparison across the estate shows that between 1400–13 and 1416–62 in the champion south and east demesne output fell by 22 per cent, and tithes by 13 per cent, but in the woodlands in the north and west the demesne figure was reduced by 34 per cent and tithes by 27 per cent. The pastoral agrarian landscapes were evidently becoming even more pastoral.

Low prices meant that demesne managers lacked the incentive to maximize production, as can be appreciated from the *estimationes* which occasionally record a hangover of unthreshed crops from a previous year. For example in 1412, at Moor 5 quarters out of a total of 11 quarters of demesne vetch were 'old', and 8 out of 9 quarters of the same crop were so described at Newnham. In the same year near to half of the rye at Wolverley, 24 out of 60 quarters, was said to be old. The manors apparently had enough crops for internal use (as animal feed for example) and sales of crops were delayed in the hope that prices would rise. Meanwhile the crop was in danger of losing quality and doubtless suffered damage from vermin. Demesnes reduced their output partly by converting arable land to pasture, and partly by reducing the amount of labour devoted to cultivation. They could also lease out parcels to tenants.

Did the tithe totals decline for the same reasons? Often the ups and downs in output from peasants are attributed to changes in the population, but the first half of the fifteenth century did not see a major demographic decline as the worst epidemics were over by 1400.²¹ Perhaps peasant producers were reacting like demesne managers to the same problem of low demand for corn by turning land over to pasture and devoting less labour to arable husbandry.

To show how the reduction in output would work on the ground, Cleeve Prior can serve as representative of the manors in the south and east of the region, mainly located in the valley of the Warwickshire Avon and its tributaries, including the Vale of Evesham. The modern parish of Cleeve contains 1521 acres, of which in the early twentieth century 685 acres (45 per cent) were arable. In the early years of the fifteenth century the median estimate of tithes of 70 quarters equates to gross production of 700 quarters. Using the crude yield figure of 12 bushels per acre, these crops came from 467 acres. As Cleeve worked a two-field system, half the land lay fallow, suggesting a total area of ploughable land of 933 acres. Another method of calculation is to add together the tenant holdings listed in the rental of 1420, amounting to 800 acres of ara-

²¹ Poos, Oeppen, and Smith, 'Reassessing'.

ble.²² The lord's demesne contained about 200 acres planted each year, making a total arable demesne including fallow of about 400 acres, which did not contribute to the tithe. Adding the demesne to each of the two estimates of tenant land allows us to calculate that between 79 and 88 per cent of the land, in the range of 1200–1333 acres, were being used as arable. Cleeve had a champion landscape, which survived into the eighteenth century when the nucleated village was mapped together with the extensive selions and furlongs of its open fields.²³ The village now is still surrounded by ridge and furrow, providing physical evidence of pre-enclosure cultivation. One suspects that before 1350 more than 90 per cent of its land was included in its open fields. By the mid-fifteenth century the median tithe total had fallen to 49 quarters implying an acreage of 735, which with the demesne (now with less than 400 acres of corn-growing land) would signal a reduction over fifty years in the arable proportion for the whole parish by about a third. In the early and mid fifteenth century tenants were ordered repeatedly in the manor court to cultivate their land. They were presumably using some of their selions for grazing, but also they were digging up land in the common fields to quarry limestone for making roofing slates.²⁴

In the north Worcestershire woodlands Wolverley provides a complete contrast. Its median tithe estimate of 103 quarters suggests that in the early years of the fifteenth century its parishioners cropped 687 acres each year, but in a parish of 5543 acres, allowing for fallow and demesne arable, this left more than 3000 acres of meadow, pasture, and woodland. By the 1440s crop production had almost halved, which implies that even more land lay under grass. This is an extreme example, but in general the western manors and parishes of our sample enjoyed access to a great deal of pasture, and their capacity for grazing increased between *c.* 1400 and *c.* 1450. They were also adopting new farming practices, as will be seen from the tithe data, and the court rolls report that more land was being held in enclosures.

In addressing central questions about the peasants' agricultural strategies, and their orientation towards self-sufficiency or making profits in the market, the Worcester Priory estate's evidence for declining output allows three preliminary conclusions. First, reduction in household consumption would be very unlikely at this time, as all of the evidence suggests that peasants suffered no decline in the quantity or quality of their diet. If corn production as demonstrated by

²² WCL, C 559.

²³ WCL, map no. 12 (1775)

²⁴ For example, WCL, E 45 (1406: quarrying); E 46 (1413) and E 51 (1424; uncultivated land).

tithes was diminished, it must reflect a response among peasant producers to falling market demand. Second, peasants reduced their output rather less drastically than did the demesne managers, as if they were less sensitive to market forces than their lords. Third, peasants living in the woodlands of north and west Worcestershire reduced their arable more than those in the champion south and east, which made the regional differences more pronounced. This reflected the increased later medieval market demand for meat and animal products.

In some degree lords' and peasants' crops had much in common, and they made similar decisions. They shared the same physical and commercial environment: they experienced the constraints of soils, climate, and transport to markets. They preferred drage (mixed barley and oats) rather than barley on its own, and very little vetch, peas or beans were planted as a single crop, as they all favoured pulse, a mixture of beans and peas. Rye was grown on its own, or sometimes in combination with wheat as maslin, and these crops were confined to the light gravelly and sandy soils near the rivers Avon and Severn and at Wolverley.

Table 4.1. Ratios between winter-sown and spring-sown crops (from the *estimationes bladorum*).²⁵

Years	South-east Manors		North-west Manors	
	Demesne	Tithe	Demesne	Tithe
1400–13	25:75	27:73	43:57	45:55
1416–62	27:73	29:71	49:51	54:46

The ratios (winter-sown : spring-sown) were calculated from the figures given in the appendix. Wheat, rye, and maslin were winter-sown crops; drage, oats, and pulse were spring-sown.

The balance between winter-sown and spring-sown crops demonstrates some important differences. In an orthodox three-course rotation the choice was dictated by the sequence of crops and fallow, with the acreages of spring and winter crops being approximately equal, but in a two-field system or two-course rotation that predominated in the west midland region the cultivators had more freedom of choice. The figures in Table 4.1 underline the importance of regional difference. Cultivators of all types in the south-eastern manors had a strong preference for spring-sown crops, mainly drage and pulse. Those in the north and west were committed to winter-sown crops, wheat, rye, and mas-

²⁵ Sources for *estimationes bladorum* (years in round brackets): Worcester Cathedral Library [WCL] C 502 (1400); C 503 (1401); C 513 (1403); C 504 (1407); C 505 (1408); C 506 (1412); C 508 (1413); C 509 (1416); C 510 (1417); C 512 (1423); C 514 (1428); C 515 (1429); C 511 (1444); C 516 (1448); C 517 (1451); C 518 (1453); C 520 (1462).

lin. Throughout the first half of the fifteenth century there were only minor changes in cropping in the south and east, but in the north and west winter-sown crops increased considerably in importance. Demesne and peasants seem to have behaved in similar ways in this matter, except that the peasants in the south and east grew a slightly higher proportion of winter-sown crops, but the increase in the proportion of wheat, rye, and maslin in the second quarter of the fifteenth century was pronounced among the tithe payers of the north-west. Examples of individual manors provide more striking differences, for example the demesne ratio at Newnham between winter and spring crops was 40:60 in 1403, but the tithe figures were 65:35, suggesting that the peasants were taking the initiative.

The Appendix gives examples of the varied crop choices made by demesnes and peasants. Peasants sometimes grew crops not found on the manorial demesne. At Hardwick the lord grew no wheat, only rye as the demesne's winter corn. The peasants planted wheat consistently as well as rye: although the quantity of rye was greater, wheat usually accounted for between 10 and 20 per cent of the tithes. At Moor the peasants grew maslin (in the region of 10 per cent of the tithe total in some years) as well as wheat, while the lord concentrated on wheat. The tenants at Newnham in the earlier years of the series of *estimationes* grew a significant amount of maslin, between 2 per cent and 17 per cent, which rarely appeared among the demesne crops. Oats are found among the tithes of Wolverley, although the demesne grew very little or none at all. There are few examples of demesnes planting crops absent from the tithes, though the very small amounts of oats found at Cleeve were not matched among the tithe totals. At Hallow lord and peasants grew wheat and rye in very different proportions, with the demesne favouring rye. After 1412 the demesne stopped growing wheat for some years, though it later came back in a small way.

Scrutiny of individual crops shows a striking pattern in the higher proportion of wheat in the tithe figures in nine of the places, including some significantly greater quantities, up to double the percentage found among the demesne crops, in some years. We can conclude that the peasants had a marked preference for growing wheat. We know that they expected their bread to be made from wheat, especially in the generations after 1350, and at market it fetched a price well ahead of other grains.²⁶ Drage on the other hand was definitely the choice of the demesne managers, except at Moor and Newnham, where oats were preferred. The proportion of drage was markedly higher on

²⁶ Stone, 'Consumption of Field Crops', pp. 22–25.

eight demesnes than among the tithes. Nonetheless drage must be counted as a major crop for peasants, particularly in the south-east of the estate where drage accounted for 40 or 50 per cent of the tithes. High levels of barley and drage production are found in many English regions at this time, which reflect increased ale consumption in the household, as well as sales of surpluses to satisfy a general demand for drink.²⁷ Pulse was a comparatively scarce crop to the west and north of the estate, both for demesnes and peasant holdings. However in the western manors tithes could contain between 2 and 10 per cent of the total, so the crop was not negligible. In the south and east most of the estimations assign pulse in the region of 20 to 30 per cent of the total of both the lord's and peasants' crops. For peasants leguminous crops were not just a source of nitrogen in the soil, and a fodder crop, but also contributed to the pottage which still had a place in their diet.²⁸

The differences that have been noted suggest that peasants thought independently about their choices of crops. The lord's demesne was usually managed by a local peasant acting as reeve. He might have been planting his own holding one week, and then walked or rode to the manorial buildings and gave the ploughmen and other farm servants instructions to follow a different strategy. He would have been influenced in his decisions for the demesne by estate policies as well as his own judgement.²⁹

Evidence of experiment and innovation might involve both demesne and peasant holdings, for example the amount of pulse suddenly increased at Hallow, both among the demesne crops and the tithes in 1416. More important was the wholesale shift to winter-sown crops in the western and northern manors already indicated. Peasants made changes without corresponding movements by the demesne: at Moor and Newnham at some time between 1417 and 1428 peasants switched from small-scale maslin crops to rye. Peasants as individuals were responsible for the management of their own holding, but they needed to act in concert with their neighbours. Changes such as the rise in the proportion of winter-sown crops must have required collective agreements. One would like to know more about the source of the new ideas, and we are tempted to identify the reeves, recruited from the upper rank of peasants, as having influence over both the management of the demesne and the villagers'

²⁷ Campbell, 'Matching Supply to Demand', pp. 835–36.

²⁸ Dodds, 'Demesne and Tithe', p. 135; Hilton, *Economic Development*, pp. 65–66; Sapoznik, 'Productivity of Peasant Agriculture', pp. 536–40.

²⁹ Stone, *Decision-Making*, pp. 56–61, 77–79, 144–45, and 168–75.

land. A striking feature of change and innovation in crops is that most of the evidence relates to the western and northern manors and parishes, where field systems included both areas of open field under common regulation and enclosures under more individual control.

The methods of peasant farming exhibit some similarities with those on the demesnes. The estimates tell us that some stacks of harvested tithes in all parts of the estate were being reserved for use as seed on the demesne, which suggests that estate officials did not regard peasant crops as of low quality. On eight occasions the estimates both for demesnes and tithes explain that a crop was below normal: 'because mown' (Latin *falcare*). This means that the corn was cut with scythes rather than the traditional sickles, and suggests that lord and peasants alike opted for this labour-saving method of harvesting, while running the risk that the sweep of the heavy blade of the scythe would shake loose grains from ripe ears.³⁰

Tithes were aggregates, putting together in the same stacks and ricks a tenth of the crops from both a cottager's single acre and much larger holdings. Tithes might include crops from sub-manors, or land held by townspeople or clergy who did not belong in the peasantry. Nonetheless people who can be called peasants accounted for the great majority of the producers. The estimations sometimes reported separately on the small heaps of crops that had been harvested from individual holdings which had been taken into the lord's hands because of flight, forfeiture, felony, or a failure of heirs. Table 4.2 lists some of these to illustrate the variety of individual practices that lie behind the cumulative general totals of the tithes. For example, two holdings at Hallow in 1412, Wytheleys and Hathewys, had planted wheat and oats only, and none of the rye and drage which usually accounted for more than a quarter of the tithes from that manor. A holding at Grimley grew wheat, rye, and oats, but lacked drage. Perhaps in these Severn valley manors drage was grown by a few specialists. At Harvington, Netherton, and Teddington the individual holdings produced pulse crops on a much smaller scale than their neighbours, as if only a section of village society dedicated much land to the crop, represented by Bryhts holding at Sedgeberrow in 1417, on which 46 per cent of the output consisted of pulse.³¹

³⁰ Myrdal, 'Agricultural Transformation of Sweden', p. 164.

³¹ I have omitted from Table 4.2 holdings from which the lord harvested entirely winter-sown or spring-sown crops, or a single crop, such as Brouns (Newnham, 1401) which produced 6 quarters wheat and maslin; Aleyns with 10 quarters pulse in 1412 and 7 quarters wheat in 1413 (at Crowle); and Legges with 1 quarter 4 bushels drage and 1 quarter 4 bushels pulse (at Netherton, 1416). Heyles holding at Teddington in 1417 produced 22 quarters drage and 10

Table 4.2. Percentages of crops from individual holdings (mainly from the *estimationes bladorum*).³²

Manor/Holding(s)	Year	W	R	M	Dr	O	P	Total	ac/qrs
Cleeve Prior									
Richard Charlet	1456	48	0	0	30	0	22	100	25 ac
Richard Charlet	1458	13	0	0	54	0	33	100	24 ac
Hallow									
Wytheleys	1412	40	0	0	0	60	0	100	5 qrs
Hathewys	1412	50	0	0	0	50	0	100	6 qrs
Harvington									
Palkyns	1405	0	0	39	44	0	17	100	5 qrs 6 b
Grimley									
Gorwys	1412	33	17	0	0	50	0	100	12 qrs
Netherton									
Knyte	1408	17	0	0	66	0	17	100	9 qrs
Sedgeberrow									
Otewys	1416	31	0	0	46	0	23	100	8 qrs 5 b
Bryht	1417	15	0	0	38	0	46	99	13 qrs
Teddington									
Campyon	1408	36	0	0	46	0	18	100	5 qrs 5 b

The far left column indicates total recorded resources of the holding, whether in acres or quarters recorded in the *estimationes*. All manors were in Worcestershire. Richard Charlet was tenant of the vicarage of Cleeve Prior. Holding names, such as 'Wytheleys', derive from surnames of previous tenants. Total percentages other than 100 are due to the effects of rounding.

Abbreviations: qrs = quarters (1 quarter = 8 bushels); b = bushels; ac = acres; for crops, W = wheat; R = rye; M = maslin (a mixture of wheat and rye); Dr = drage (a mixture of barley and oats); O = oats; P = pulse (usually a mixture of peas and beans)

A goal of peasant producers included the provision of food and drink for their households, and fodder for their animals. The tithe estimates can be analysed in terms of their consumption as bread, drink, and pottage, though pot-

quarters pulse. Such imbalances could have resulted from the planting of the vacant land by the lord's officials, but some tenants may have ignored the convention of growing both winter- and spring-sown crops, and bought the bread corn or brewing corn which they lacked.

³² Sources: for Cleeve Prior WCL, E 64 (manorial court roll). For those from the *estimationes bladorum*, see Table 4.4. For further examples not in this table, see note 31.

tage corns such as oats and peas were also used to feed animals. Combined evidence from maintenance agreements for retired peasants and food allowances for wage workers enables the rather impressionistic assumption that bread accounted for 30 per cent of household requirements, ale for 50 per cent, and a notional 20 per cent covers the amount needed for pottage, and animal fodder (mostly the latter).³³ If these figures are compared with the tithe data from the south-east of the estate (Table 4.3) there is quite a close match, though there appears to have been an oversupply of pulse. In the north-west the parishes returning a higher than necessary percentage of bread corn were able to cover their drink corn requirements only if they malted a substantial quantity of oats for brewing, although this still left plenty of oats and some pulse for pottage and fodder. Peasant consumption was apparently tailored to the environmental circumstances, so around Moor and Newnham in particular they drank inferior ale brewed from oats because that crop did best in the local soils.

Table 4.3. Speculative comparison of peasant consumption as suggested by maintenance agreements and food allowances for wage workers with that from tithe records (in percentages; selected median years) from the *estimationes bladorum*.³⁴

	Bread Corn (1)	Drink Corn (2)	Pottage/fodder Corn (3)	Total
a) Maintenance Agreements, etc.	30	50	20	100
b) <i>Estimationes bladorum</i>				
South-eastern Manors				
Cleeve Prior (1407)	29	43	29	101
Croptorne (1423)	31	47	22	100
Harvington (1407)	33	42	25	100
Netherton (1448)	29	45	26	100
Overbury (1412)	24	47	29	100
Sedgeberrow (1416)	27	36	36	99
Teddington (1462)	28	57	15	100

³³ The idea of analysing crops under these headings derives from Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 238–48.

³⁴ Sources: For maintenance agreements, etc., see, for example, Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 151–60, Hilton, *English Peasantry*, pp. 41–42; for the *estimationes bladorum*, see Table 4.4.

	Bread Corn (1)	Drink Corn (2)	Pottage/fodder Corn (3)	Total
North-western Manors				
Grimley (1400)	51	19	30*	100
Hallow (1400)	51	9	40*	100
Hardwick (1429)	46	28	26*	100
Moor (1412)	48	0	53*	101
Newnham (1400)	54	0	46*	100
Wolverley (1400)	40	50	9	99

(1) wheat, rye, maslin; (2) drage; (3) oats, pulse. Total percentages other than 100 are due to rounding.
* mainly oats, some of which may have been used for brewing as well as for pottage and animal food.

The south-eastern parishes fed sheep on pulse in the winter, while the livestock of the north-west would have had limited access to legumes, but instead may have been given oats. The peasants of the south-east fertilized the open-field arable and made money from wool sales by practising sheep-corn husbandry, while horses, cows, and bullocks did well in the wood-pasture and enclosed grasslands of the Teme and Severn valleys and in north Worcestershire; pigs were kept in the woods.³⁵

An element of self sufficiency is indicated by the crops on Richard Charlet's holding (see Table 4.2), the Cleeve vicarage glebe he held on lease, but at 25 sown acres it can stand as representative of larger holdings like the seven tenants at Cleeve in 1420 with more than 45 acres. In 1456 Charlet's 12 acres of wheat would have yielded about 14 quarters, net of tithe and seed for the next year, enough to feed a family of five for a year and leave about 7 quarters to sell. He could have brewed from the expected net crop of 6 quarters of drage (from 7.5 acres) between a gallon and a gallon and a half of ale per day, a modest but adequate allowance for two adults. From 5.5 acres of pulse, after deductions, between four and five quarters would have been available for consumption and the market. Two quarters would have supplied a family with pottage, and fodder for sixty sheep, leaving two or three quarters for sale. Clearly, his well bal-

³⁵ The extent of sheep-keeping at Teddington is revealed by a campaign against trespass in 1427, when 15 peasant flocks were listed, including three of 80, two of 160, and two of 200 (WCL, E 52). At Eymore (adjoining Wolverley) in 1435 trespass was committed by 21 bullocks, 7 cows, 4 calves, and 47 pigs (WCL, E 54).

anced mix of crops was only partly intended for the needs of the household, and he was producing a surplus of about nine or ten quarters of wheat and pulse for sale, which would have gained him about £2.

Closer examination of peasant crops reveals much more buying and selling than has been suggested so far. To begin with Charlet, he had not sown the crops that he grew in 1456, as he took over the land after the vicar had done some planting. In 1458, when he could choose his crops, he aimed to produce much more drage and pulse than his household and sheep could consume and was expecting to sell the surplus. Of the holdings from which crops were harvested by the lord in Table 4.2 four were not growing enough to feed a family, and three of the other five were obtaining such a lop-sided combination of crops that they did not grow enough wheat or rye to feed a family with bread. So the majority of this small sample would have had to obtain grain, presumably by purchase, to meet their basic needs. Some holdings not included in Table 4.2 were not even cultivating a combination of winter- and spring-sown crops (see note 32, above), so they were certainly not aiming at self-sufficiency. If it was a common practice to buy foodstuffs, then we should not assume that the peasants of west Worcestershire were drinking ale brewed from oats, but instead were buying barley and drage from other farming regions. Similarly they may have bought some of the abundant pulses from the Avon valley, and paid for them by selling their many spare cartloads of oats. If even the primary producers of each region were accustomed to buy and sell grain in this way, we can appreciate why urban markets were handling large quantities of corn. The maintenance agreements for retired Worcestershire peasants also suggest that people did not always expect to consume local produce — some of them include an allowance of barley, which as we have seen was scarce except as part of the drage mixture.³⁶

Another way of using the tithes as a guide to marketing is to calculate the likely corn consumption of the village of Cleeve Prior in 1420 when 23 tenant families contained about a hundred inhabitants. If each household consumed on the same scale as Richard Charlet's, and at least 14 quarters of pulse went to the sheep, the human and animal population required 350 quarters.³⁷ This left a disposable surplus of about 80 quarters from the 700 quarters implied by the

³⁶ *Court Rolls of Elmley Castle*, ed. by Field, pp. 77, 83.

³⁷ For feeding sheep, see Stone, 'Productivity and Management of Sheep', pp. 9–10; Page, 'Technology of Medieval Sheep Farming', p. 148. These give annual figures of *c.* 2 quarters for 100 weaning lambs; and 2–4 quarters for 1000 adult sheep. If the total village flock at Cleeve was 2000 sheep and 300 lambs, they could have been given as much as 14 quarters of pulse.

tithe total of 70 quarters. Some of the grain would have been absorbed by the internal market within the village, with purchases by smallholders who could not grow enough bread or drink corn to satisfy dietary needs; by brewers; and by those with large sheep flocks who required extra supplies of pulse. Grain would have been sold from Cleeve (and the nearby manors of Crophorne, Harvington, and Netherton) to the markets of Evesham and Pershore, and even as far as Worcester and Tewkesbury.³⁸

Production for the market is more clearly present in the woodland parishes of the west and north, and the specialization in winter-sown crops which is such a striking feature of the figures presented in the Appendix must have meant that the better-off peasant households heaped up many more quarters of wheat, rye, and maslin than they required for domestic consumption. Much of this grain would have been sold in Worcester for its growing number of cloth workers, and some was carried up and down the river by boats working from its quays. In addition, the practice of feeding animals from arable produce could be seen as a form of indirect marketing of crops, as the wool, meat, cheese, and livestock could all be sold.

Records of tithes on animal products have not been found in the Worcester Priory archive for the fifteenth century, but they do appear in documents of the early sixteenth. At Cleeve Prior, Crowle, and Wolverley lambs and wool account for between 20 and 41 per cent of the tithe revenue that was valued in 1535. Lesser tithes at Lindridge (the parish containing Moor) were defined as including pigs, geese, milk, wax, and honey. This fragmentary evidence signals the importance of pastoralism in the peasant economy in all parts of the region.³⁹

Conclusions

The tithe statistics in the Worcester Priory *estimationes bladorum* give us an insight into peasant economy and mentality. The peasants faced, like the demesne officials, the problem of managing agriculture at a time of limited demand for cereals and legumes. In the lord's barns unsold crops hung over from one year to the next. The quantity of grain that was surplus to the requirements of a village seems very large in the context of the likely demand from

³⁸ WCL, E 25 contains a record of grain sales by the reeve of Netherton at Evesham, Pershore, Tewkesbury, and Worcester in 1374. For Tewkesbury as a distribution centre, see Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 89.

³⁹ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, III, ed. by Caley and Hunter, pp. 224, 264, 265, 275, and 277.

nearby townspeople, artisans, and wage earners. The peasants, conscious of the marketing problem, reduced arable production by about a fifth of gross output in the first half of the fifteenth century, presumably converting the uncultivated arable to pasture. In the contrasting environments of woodland and champion, the managers reacted in different ways to changing circumstances. Both demesnes and peasants opted for a majority of spring-sown crops (about three-quarters of the products) in the champion area, while in the woodlands winter-sown crops accounted for 43–45 per cent of the total at the beginning of the fifteenth century and 49–54 per cent thirty years later.

Compared with the lords, peasants clearly had their own needs and priorities. They had a preference for wheat, which they valued for their own consumption and also brought good returns in the market. In the woodlands they switched to growing wheat and rye more enthusiastically than did the demesnes. In choosing their spring-sown crops, the better-off peasants aimed both to supply their own households with ale and pottage and to make gains from sales. Peasants bought corn, not just those with smaller holdings who could not produce enough for themselves but those of middling and greater prosperity who grew an unbalanced range of crops, confident that they could fill the gaps with purchases of bread corn, drink corn, and pulses for animals. Peasant consumption and production contributed to the flow of inter-regional trade.

The quality of peasant agriculture should not be underestimated, in that the demesne managers planted peasant grain and legumes as seed on their demesnes. Demesnes and peasant holdings alike were beset by labour problems, so both made more use of the scythe in the harvest, and no doubt adopted other ways of reducing the amount of work on the land. Peasants innovated in the mix of crops along with the demesne, and they may have led the way on occasion. In the woodlands, with their enclosures and weaker regulation, technical changes and specialization were perhaps more easily accomplished. The contrasts between woodland and champion in terms of the choice of crops and the balance between arable and pasture increased in the period.

The elephant (or rather the cow, sheep, and pig) in the room in all of this analysis is the lack of much more than anecdotal information about pastoral farming. Cultivation in this period could be viewed in some locations as an adjunct to livestock husbandry, where good profits were to be made.

APPENDIX

Annual mean output of crops from demesne and tithes as recorded in the *estimationes bladorum* for the estate of Worcester Cathedral Priory, 1400–62

Table 4.4a. South-eastern manors, 1400–13

Cleeve Prior (8 years for D & T)	W	R	M	Dr	O	P	Total
Demesne (qrs)	64	0	0	149	2	74	289
Demesne (%)	22	0	0	51	1	26	100
Tithe (qrs)	20	0	0	33	0	17	70
Tithe (%)	29	0	0	47	0	24	100
Crothorne (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	27	49	0	166	7	48	297
Demesne (%)	9	17	0	56	2	16	100
Tithe (qrs)	33	24	0	89	0	25	171
Tithe (%)	19	14	0	52	0	15	100
Harvington (7 yrs D, 6 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	5	0	18	64	0	13	100
Demesne (%)	5	0	18	64	0	13	100
Tithe (qrs)	0	0	3	6	0	3	12
Tithe (%)	0	0	25	50	0	25	100
Netherton (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	63	0	0	106	0	42	211
Demesne (%)	30	0	0	50	0	20	100
Tithe (qrs)	12	0	0	20	0	16	48
Tithe (%)	25	0	0	42	0	33	100
Overbury (7 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	53	0	0	137	2	75	267
Demesne (%)	20	0	0	51	1	28	100
Tithe (qrs)	36	0	0	94	0	41	171
Tithe (%)	21	0	0	55	0	24	100
Sedgeberrow (7 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	61	0	0	114	0	58	233
Demesne (%)	26	0	0	49	0	25	100
Tithe (qrs)	7	0	0	11	0	9	27
Tithe (%)	26	0	0	41	0	33	100
Teddington (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	61	0	0	125	0	86	272
Demesne (%)	22	0	0	46	0	32	100
Tithe (qrs)	21	0	0	26	0	28	75
Tithe (%)	28	0	0	35	0	37	100

Table 4.4b. North-western manors, 1400–13

Dodderhill (3 yrs D & T)	W	R	M	Dr	O	P	Total
Demesne (qrs)	19	0	0	24	11	6	60
Demesne (%)	32	0	0	40	18	10	100
Tithe (qrs)	13	0	0	8	8	8	37
Tithe (%)	35	0	0	22	22	22	101
Grimley (7 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	16	34	0	30	31	0	111
Demesne (%)	14	31	0	27	28	0	100
Tithe (qrs)	15	15	0	13	16	1	60
Tithe (%)	25	25	0	22	27	2	101
Hallow (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	7	34	0	22	37	2	102
Demesne (%)	7	33	0	22	36	2	100
Tithe (qrs)	18	9	0	8	16	5	56
Tithe (%)	32	16	0	14	29	9	100
Hardwick (6 yrs D, 5 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	0	19	0	28	3	1	51
Demesne (%)	0	37	0	55	6	2	100
Tithe (qrs)	13	20	0	27	15	3	78
Tithe (%)	17	26	0	34	19	4	100
Moor (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	109	0	0	0	81	4	194
Demesne (%)	56	0	0	0	42	2	100
Tithe (qrs)	17	0	5	0	19	1	42
Tithe (%)	41	0	12	0	45	2	100
Newnham (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	118	0	1	0	104	5	228
Demesne (%)	52	0	0	0	46	2	100
Tithe (qrs)	32	0	6	1	26	2	67
Tithe (%)	48	0	9	0	40	3	100
Wolverley (7 yrs D, 8 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	0	19	0	26	1	3	49
Demesne (%)	0	39	0	53	2	6	100
Tithe (qrs)	1	34	0	49	9	3	96
Tithe (%)	1	36	0	51	9	3	100

Table 4.4c. South-eastern manors, 1416–62

Cleeve Prior (8 yrs D, 7 yrs T)	W	R	M	Dr	O	P	Total
Demesne (qrs)	64	0	0	122	3	51	240
Demesne (%)	27	0	0	51	1	21	100
Tithe (qrs)	16	0	0	22	0	17	55
Tithe (%)	29	0	0	40	0	31	100
Croptborne (8 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	28	35	0	129	5	43	240
Demesne (%)	12	15	0	54	2	18	100
Tithe (qrs)	28	10	0	51	0	23	112
Tithe (%)	25	9	0	46	0	21	101
Harvington (0 yrs D, 5 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs) – no data	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Demesne (%) – no data	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tithe (qrs)	2	2	2	8	0	4	18
Tithe (%)	11	11	11	45	0	22	100
Netherton (5 yrs D, 6 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	45	0	0	74	1	46	166
Demesne (%)	27	0	0	45	0	28	100
Tithe (qrs)	10	0	0	15	0	10	35
Tithe (%)	29	0	0	43	0	29	101
Overbury (6 yrs D, 5 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	46	0	0	111	0	52	209
Demesne (%)	22	0	0	53	0	25	100
Tithe (qrs)	27	1	0	58	0	31	117
Tithe (%)	23	1	0	50	0	26	100
Sedgeberrow (5 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	61	0	0	94	0	58	213
Demesne (%)	29	0	0	44	0	27	100
Tithe (qrs)	7	0	0	12	0	8	27
Tithe (%)	26	0	0	44	0	30	100
Teddington (7 yrs D, 9 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	40	0	0	63	0	47	150
Demesne (%)	27	0	0	42	0	31	100
Tithe (qrs)	33	0	0	48	0	37	118
Tithe (%)	28	0	0	41	0	31	100

Table 4.4d. North-western manors, 1416–62

Grimley (4 yrs D, 6 yrs T)	W	R	M	Dr	O	P	Total
Demesne (qrs)	5	21	0	16	25	2	69
Demesne (%)	7	31	0	23	36	3	100
Tithe (qrs)	10	14	0	8	9	3	44
Tithe (%)	23	32	0	18	20	7	100
Hallow (5 yrs D, 6 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	2	28	0	14	27	5	76
Demesne (%)	3	37	0	18	35	7	100
Tithe (qrs)	14	9	0	6	11	4	44
Tithe (%)	32	20	0	14	25	9	100
Hardwick (8 yrs D, 9 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	0	20	0	20	1	0	41
Demesne (%)	0	49	0	49	2	0	100
Tithe (qrs)	11	24	0	22	14	4	75
Tithe (%)	15	32	0	29	19	5	100
Moor (4 yrs D & T)							
Demesne (qrs)	72	0	0	1	51	1	125
Demesne (%)	57	0	0	1	41	1	100
Tithe (qrs)	12	2	1	1	8	3	27
Tithe (%)	44	7	4	4	30	11	100
Newnham (5 yrs D, 4 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	82	0	0	4	50	2	138
Demesne (%)	60	0	0	3	36	1	100
Tithe (qrs)	20	1	1	2	9	2	35
Tithe (%)	57	3	3	6	26	6	101
Wolverley (3 yrs D, 6 yrs T)							
Demesne (qrs)	0	17	0	17	1	0	35
Demesne (%)	0	49	0	49	3	0	101
Tithe (qrs)	0	35	0	30	5	1	71
Tithe (%)	0	49	0	42	7	2	100

All manors were in Worcestershire. The numbers in brackets after the manor name indicate how many *estimationes* in the relevant time range comprised the averaged yearly data for the demesne (D) and for the tithe (T).

Abbreviations: yrs = years; qrs = quarters (1 quarter = 8 bushels). Types of crops: W = wheat; R = rye; M = maslin (a mixture of wheat and rye); Dr = drage (a mixture of barley and oats); O = oats; P = pulse (normally a mixture of peas and beans). Vetch (a legume) appeared occasionally and is included in the pulse figures. Total percentages other than 100 are the effect of rounding off the constituent grain/legume percentages to whole numbers.

Sources: Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, for *estimationes bladorum*: C 500 (1289); C 502 (1400); C 503 (1401); C 513 (1403); C 504 (1407); C 505 (1408); C 506 (1412); C 508 (1413); C 509 (1416); C 510 (1417); C 512 (1423); C 514 (1428); C 515 (1429); C 511 (1444); C 516 (1448); C 517 (1451); C 518 (1453); C 520 (1462)

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Part II
Lords and Villeins

LORDSHIP AND VILLEINAGE BEFORE THE BLACK DEATH: FROM KARL MARX TO THE MARXISTS AND BACK AGAIN

John Hatcher*

For well over a hundred and fifty years assiduous attention from medievalists and a wide range of scholars from other periods and disciplines failed to produce a lasting consensus on key characteristics of the relations between lords and villeins. Far from chronicling a steady progression towards a common understanding, the historiography of the subject since the mid-nineteenth century has exhibited a succession of sharp oscillations in opinion and interpretation as changing intellectual fashions and revisionist campaigns propelled the rise and fall of a range of divergent and conflicting hypotheses. Moreover, despite generations of study and the richness of the documentation available to protagonists, the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a surge in the heat of a debate that has only recently cooled. This makes the study of the historiography of villeinage and lordship worthwhile, although at times it reveals as much about the predilections of historians and the practice of history as it does about the nature of these classic medieval institutions.

Before commencing a reconstruction of the chronological sequence of the major writings on the subject it is salutary to note that issues that sparked enduring contention among generations of historians were being disputed over seven

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centuries ago when villeinage was in its prime. In the early fourteenth century a reader studying a copy of *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae* seems to have become so perturbed with confident pronouncements by the authors¹ that the denial of protection to the unfree by the royal courts meant that they held their lands entirely at the will of their lords and therefore were liable to be denied their inheritances and evicted, that he recorded his fundamental disagreement by writing in the margin:

Item usque ad tertium gradum inclusive illi de parentela et sanguine villanorum, sive mares fuerint sive feminae, succedent iure hereditario in terras et tenementa villanorum. Et si per iniquum dominum seu ballivum eiciantur, iniuriatur eis in hoc, quia legam suam habent ut liberi homines suam.²

Also, as far as the third degree inclusive, those of villein kinship and blood, whether they will have been males or females, succeed in land and tenements according to the inheritance law of villeins. And if they are evicted by an unjust lord or bailiff, they are wronged in this, because they have their law as freemen have theirs.

This intriguing contemporary dispute neatly crystallizes a debate about the extent to which lords exercised the powers granted to them by the royal courts that has persisted ever since. The sharply conflicting positions adopted by the lawyers who compiled *De Legibus* and the commentator exemplify how much the differing perspectives of the two parties determined their judgments. The common law was what mattered most to jurists, lawyers, and legal theorists, and since villeins had no access to the royal courts it ineluctably followed that they had no defence in law against their lords. However, what mattered most to our commentator, and to the unfree themselves, was not what would happen in the king's courts if a villein should attempt to plead a case there, but how villeins were treated on a daily basis in manors across England.

The authors of medieval legal texts and practitioners in royal courts, faced with the formidable task of laying down the principles of a new system of law based on a set of simple criteria and categories, had no wish to compromise the clarity of their message by acknowledging the respect for custom and the diversity of conditions of unfree tenure that proliferated all around them. What was material to them was that lords could lawfully increase rents, services, and

¹ Although Henry Bracton is no longer believed to be the sole author of *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, for convenience his name will be used in the text.

² This comment is written in a copy of Bracton in the Cambridge, MA, Harvard Law School Library (HLS, MS 1, fol. 8^v). It is cited but not discussed in Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, p. 416, n. 2.

finer; extract arbitrary tallages; seize goods and evict at will — not whether they commonly chose to do so. Thus, at a time when the conditions of villein tenure were steeped in custom and increasingly being spelt out in writing by lords and their agents, Bracton instructs that ‘all men are either free or serfs’, Britton deems that ‘whosoever is a bondsman is as absolutely a bondsman as any other’, and the *Mirror of Justices* proclaims that serfs ‘hold only from day to day at the will of their lords and for no certain services’.³

It is only rarely that everyday practice intrudes into the legal texts, and it is only in passing, and somewhat reluctantly for a work whose title embraces customs as well as laws, that Bracton mentions that ‘the power of custom and long use is not slight’ and that ‘the English have many things by custom which they do not have by law’.⁴ A great deal of confusion was bequeathed to later generations of historians by this understandable partiality and with it a legacy of controversy that has persisted to the present day.

* * *

There was little hard evidence available to Karl Marx when he addressed the relations between lords and their unfree tenants in the feudal period, but this did not stop him drawing firm conclusions. In the 1870s when Marx was writing the third volume of *Das Kapital*, which contains his most extended commentary on these matters, the weight of historical opinion followed the letter of the common law by assuming that lords exercised the powers it bestowed on them to impose oppressive and capricious exactions of rent and property on their unfree tenants.⁵ But Marx was convinced that a society based on the ruthless and arbitrary expropriation of the product of the peasant class was unsustainable and that the relations between medieval lords and serfs were instead firmly entrenched in custom and tradition.⁶ Although Marx’s analysis covers issues at the heart of lordship and villeinage it has been strangely neglected in subsequent debates and so is worthy of extended quotation:

Since the direct producer is not the owner, but only a possessor, and since all his surplus-labour de jure actually belongs to the landlord, some historians have expressed

³ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, pp. 412–14; *The Mirror of Justices*, ed. by Whittaker, p. 75.

⁴ Bracton, *De Legibus*, ed. by Woodbine, trans. and rev. by Thorne, II, p. 22; *Select Cases in Manorial Courts*, ed. by Poos and Bonfield, p. xxix.

⁵ The third volume of *Das Kapital* was first published eleven years after Marx’s death in 1894.

⁶ Marx, *Capital*, III, ch. xlvii, ‘Genesis of Capitalist Ground-Rent’, esp. pp. 793–96.

astonishment that it should be at all possible for those subject to enforced labour, or serfs, to acquire any independent property, or relatively speaking, wealth under such circumstances. However, it is evident that tradition must play a dominant role. [...] It is furthermore clear that here as always it is in the interests of the ruling section of society to sanction the existing order as law and to legally establish its limits through usage and tradition. Apart from all else, this, by the way, comes about of itself as soon as the constant reproduction of the basis of the existing order and its fundamental relations assumes a regulated and orderly form in the course of time. [...] If this has continued on for some time, it entrenches itself as custom and tradition and is finally sanctioned as an explicit law.⁷

Although Marx acknowledged that the extraction of rent in the last resort rested on force he did not put coercion and caprice at the heart of lordship. On the contrary, in direct contrast to the majority of historians of his own day as well as many of his later followers, he argued that custom exercised a powerful restraint over the amount of rent the unfree paid, rendering it 'a constant magnitude, legally regulated by prescription or written law'.⁸ Marx also saw relative advantages for the unfree in the system of labour rent, making three points in support of this contention: first, the serf enjoys fixed obligations of, say, two days per week; second, these labour dues are reasonable for they constitute 'a much smaller portion of the direct producer's total labour than under developed modes of production, particularly the capitalist mode of production'; and third, the serf has free time to work for his own advantage and this 'will spur him on to a greater exertion of his labour-power' to serve the market, satisfy new wants, acquire wealth, and so on, thereby opening up 'the possibility [...] for definite economic development taking place'.⁹ Engels, who devoted more detailed attention to the feudal period, expanded on the relatively favourable conditions enjoyed by the unfree and in particular the tendency 'for fixed peasant burdens to become lighter as time went on' and for their freedoms to increase. As a consequence, he argued, lords were unable to increase their incomes by raising the burdens on existing serfs, and when they sought to derive additional revenue by encouraging the expansion of cultivation and the creation of new tenancies they did so by 'friendly agreement with the colonists, whether villeins or free men'.¹⁰

⁷ Marx, *Capital*, III, p. 793.

⁸ Marx, *Capital*, III, p. 794.

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, III, pp. 793–94.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm quoting Engels in Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', p. 55.

Although Marx and Engels characterized class struggle in history as the 'the great driving force of historical progress' and the historical process as a series of class struggles, they made little attempt to apply such a dynamic to the Middle Ages.¹¹ It was not until much later that claims began to be made that conflict between lords and tenants was a dominant and abiding feature of the Middle Ages and a main driver of the crisis of feudalism and the transition to capitalism.¹²

What Marx and Engels had determined largely by insight and intuition was soon to receive empirical support from English historians. Thorold Rogers in 1884 used his general knowledge of manorial records gained from gargantuan efforts compiling price and wage data and the particular example of Cuxham manor to conclude that the arrangements between lords and their unfree peasants were 'very far removed from the ideal state of villeinage which is described in our law books, and has been incautiously accepted by those who have written on the social state of England'.¹³ Four years later W. J. Ashley was even more forthright, announcing in his pioneering economic history of England that 'it will be well to restrict our view to the evidence furnished by customals and rentals and to pay no regard to the definitions of the lawyers' and complaining of 'The collision between legal maxims and the plain matter of fact [...] [that] has created so many difficulties'.¹⁴

Paul Vinogradoff's *Villeinage in England*, published in Russian in 1887 and English in 1892, marked a massive advance in the understanding of the institution and the evidential base for investigating it.¹⁵ One of many strengths of Vinogradoff's study is its combination of a lawyer's appreciation of the common law with knowledge of estate documents that 'were intended to describe the matter-of-fact conditions of actual life'.¹⁶ In order to make 'comparison between the views of lawyers and the actual facts of manorial administration', Vinogradoff divided his analysis of the condition of the peasantry into two parts, putting on one side records of trials in the king's court and the doctrines of lawyers based on them, and on the other records compiled by estate officials.

¹¹ Rigby, 'Historical Materialism', p. 488.

¹² See below.

¹³ Rogers, *Six Centuries*, p. 44. Rogers named Henry Hallam (1777–1859) as one of the mistaken historians.

¹⁴ Ashley, *English Economic History*, I, pp. 19–20, 38.

¹⁵ Hilton termed this book 'The pioneer work on the subject, by no means superseded': *Decline of Serfdom*, p. 63.

¹⁶ *Villeinage in England*, pp. 138–39.

Then, when he had satisfied himself of the robustness of the manorial evidence he had collected and addressed the methodological problems involved in making generalizations from a bewildering mass of local detail, he resoundingly concluded that ‘the fundamental positions of legal doctrine we find opposed in daily life to the all-controlling rule of custom’; that ‘the rule of common law dwindles down in daily life to a definition of power which may be exercised in exceptional cases’; and that ‘[e]verywhere customs arise which defend the villeins from capricious extortions on the part of the lord and steward.’¹⁷

Vinogradoff’s researches in estate archives left him in no doubt that the impact of the common law on the conditions of the unfree peasantry was slight and that the system of customary rules he found on manors ‘effectively provided against general oppression’. Echoing Engels, Vinogradoff also concluded that changes in the system were not the result of ‘one-sided pressure on the part of the landlords, but of a series of agreements between lords and tenants’. Finally, like Marx, Vinogradoff believed that ‘the impositions to which the peasantry had to submit left a considerable margin for their material progress.’¹⁸

F. W. Maitland’s brilliant elucidation of the common law of villeinage was published just three years later in *The History of English Law*, a work to which all interested in this field still turn in search of guidance. However, it failed to offer straightforward advice on many matters of prime concern to economic and social historians. It is not a matter of blame that a book written by professors of law and devoted to the history of law should follow in the footsteps of medieval lawyers by viewing history primarily from the perspective of the common law. However, in this seminal work Maitland also tried to address the realities of villeinage on the ground, and it is these diversions that muddied the clarity of his exposition of the law and helped sow confusion among the historians who followed him.

For example, early in his discussion of unfree tenure Maitland wrote, ‘tenure in villeinage is protected, and if we choose to say it is protected by “positive morality” rather than by “law properly so called”, we are bound to add that it is protected by a morality which keeps a court, which uses legal forms, which is conceived as law, or as something akin to law’. In support of these sentiments he added, ‘A good proof that the lords in general felt themselves bound more or less conclusively by the terms of the customary tenures is to be found in the care that they took that those terms should be recorded.’¹⁹ And yet, just a lit-

¹⁷ *Villeinage in England*, pp. 212–13.

¹⁸ *Villeinage in England*, p. 312.

¹⁹ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, pp. 361–62.

tle further on, when his attention turned to instances of lords increasing the services and rents of their unfree tenants, Maitland maintained, 'We cannot contend therefore that the lord's will was fettered by rigid custom, or that any man conceived it ought to be so fettered'.²⁰ In Maitland's next chapter, entitled 'Unfree Status', ambiguities and contradictions reappear as resounding statements trumpeting the supremacy of the common law are subsequently undermined by others asserting that lords rarely acted in accordance with the rights it bestowed on them. Thus, on the one hand, the reader is told that, 'As against his lord the serf can have no proprietary rights'; that the serf 'was a *servus* and his person belonged to his lord'; that 'he was merely a chattel of his lord to give and "sell at his pleasure"'; and that 'any moveable goods that he has, the lord may take these to himself'.²¹ While, on the other hand, the reader is also told that, 'As a matter of fact we hear little of arbitrary seizures'; 'the lord habitually treats them [the unfree] as owners of chattels, he even permits them to make wills'; and 'We hesitate before we describe the serf as rightless even as against his lord, and, if we infer want of right from want of remedy, we feel that we may be doing violence to the thoughts of a generation which saw little difference between law and custom'.²² It is small wonder that historians consulting Maitland have been able to use him to support directly contrasting positions.²³

* * *

Maitland notwithstanding, at the opening of the twentieth century the tide was flowing strongly in favour of the power of custom as a succession of leading historians well-grounded in the sources rejected a dominant role for the common law in regulating the relations between lords and villeins. On the first page of his 1900 article on the disappearance of English serfdom E. P. Cheyney wrote, 'It is true that not even in 1300, if ever, was actual serfdom, the real position of the *villanus*, *nativus*, or *servus*, that condition of practical slavery which is described in the law book', and two pages later added that 'Serfdom did not involve the personal degradation, nor the economic inferiority that is sometimes ascribed to it; nor, as has been said, did it ever probably have a tangible existence in England in the logical completeness asserted in Glanville,

²⁰ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, p. 379.

²¹ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, pp. 414–16.

²² Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, I, pp. 416–18, 430.

²³ For example, see below for Kosminsky's favourable citation of Maitland's views on villeinage.

Bracton, Britton, and the “Mirror”.”²⁴ Nellie Neilson’s 1910 study of the variety of rents and dues owed by the unfree emphasized their customary rather than capricious character;²⁵ and for R. H. Tawney the small cultivators of the sixteenth century were ‘fettered by the remnants of the legal rightlessness of the Middle Ages, without enjoying the security given by medieval custom.’²⁶ New research revealing an increase in payments in money in preference to renders of food and labour was also used to indicate that the manorial system underwent progressive and largely amicable change in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and a series of statistical studies demonstrated that labour services on the lords’ demesnes, hitherto considered one of the key oppressive elements of villeinage, were of lesser importance than had previously been thought and in decline well before the Black Death of 1348–49.²⁷

However, preparations for a brutal assault on this vision of seigniorial restraint in pre-Black Death England were soon to be commenced in an unlikely place — Soviet Russia. The fashioning of Marxism under Stalin was laying increasing emphasis on the Russian peasantry’s struggle against ‘bondage and exploitation’, which even after 1905 saw, in Stalin’s words, ‘the existence in the rural districts of the most hideous and most unbearable survivals of serfdom, coupled with the domineering of the landlords.’²⁸ The longstanding awareness that ‘[q]uestions entirely surrendered to antiquarian research in the West of Europe are still topics of contemporary interest to us,’²⁹ and the rigorous enforcement of state-directed intellectual orthodoxy, ensured that it was not long before this interpretation was being applied to English serfs of the long thirteenth century by the large number of Russian historians working on English history.³⁰

²⁴ Cheyney, ‘Disappearance of English Serfdom’, pp. 20–21, 23 (although Cheyney added the caveat, that serfdom ‘constituted a very real limitation upon the freedom and the well-being of the masses of the English people.’ (p. 23)).

²⁵ Neilson, ‘Customary Rents’.

²⁶ Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, p. 407.

²⁷ For example, Page, *End of Villeinage* (1900), and Gray, ‘Commutation of Labour Services’ (1915).

²⁸ Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, p. 59.

²⁹ Vinogradoff, *Villeinage in England*, p. v.

³⁰ For an account of the work done on English history by a long line of Russian historians see Kosminsky, ‘Russian Work on English Economic History’, and for Russian historians who specialized in English medieval history see Gatrell, ‘Studies of Medieval English Society’. For the imposition of academic intellectual orthodoxy in the U.S.S.R. see Barber, ‘The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy’.

At the forefront of this revisionist movement was Evgeny Alexeyevich Kosminsky, who became well-known to western medievalists from his extensive publications in English. In his 1935 *Economic History Review* article, based on work published in Russia many years before, Kosminsky forcefully presented the outlines of an argument for the depression and oppression of the English peasantry by claiming that Henry II's legal reforms and the development of the common law had combined in 'delivering the property, and to a considerable extent the personal rights, of the villeins over to the mercy of the lord' and that ever greater numbers were condemned into servitude as the legal net of unfreedom widened.³¹ In the same year Kosminsky's invaluable analysis of the Hundred Rolls was published in Moscow, and it was a revised version of this study that was eventually published in England in 1956.³² Whereas the bulk of this book is devoted to an empirical account, its long concluding chapter launched a fierce attack on past and present Russian historians who failed to see the thirteenth century in terms of increasingly ruthless exploitation and growing social disharmony.³³ Vinogradoff, once held in the highest regard by Russian scholars, was accused by Kosminsky of naively underestimating the impact that the legal denial of rights had upon villeins' lives, and he derided his mentor, Dmitri Petrushevsky, for believing that 'manorial custom gave the villein a protection of his property rights that was in no way inferior to that enjoyed by the free man in the king's courts'. For Kosminsky, 'Manorial custom did not, and could not, become the shield of the peasants', and the introduction by royal courts of *exceptio villenagii* not only paved the way for making the plight of existing serfs progressively more miserable, 'it created pretexts for the reduction to serfdom of sections of the working population which had hitherto still been accounted free'.³⁴ Kosminsky found Maitland's judgments much more to his liking and he praised him for arguing that 'manorial custom gave the villein no firm guarantees, but rather created wide opportunities for arbitrary action' and for dismissing Vinogradoff's notion that religious and ethical obstacles stood in the way of the successful exploitation of the villeins. Kosminsky also cited Coulton favourably for stressing 'the miserable and unprotected position of the medieval peasantry'.³⁵

³¹ Kosminsky, 'Services and Money Rents', p. 46.

³² Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*.

³³ Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, pp. 319–59.

³⁴ Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, pp. 329–30, 332, 336.

³⁵ Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, pp. 332–33.

In the prevailing Soviet intellectual environment Kosminsky did not shrink from glossing Marx. Citing the same passage from *Capital* that has been quoted above,³⁶ Kosminsky came to very different conclusions, arguing that ‘custom [was] built up on the whole in a spirit unfavourable to the exploited “working majority”, and protected first and foremost the interests of the “ruling minority” [...] [and] left very wide margins for the increase of feudal rent’.³⁷ Kosminsky put forward scant evidence in support of his emphatic claims of increasing exploitation, but in support of his vision of continuous conflict in the thirteenth-century countryside he did recount a number of instances of bitter disputes that involved peasants attempting, largely unsuccessfully, to resist the demands of their lords.³⁸

A striking example of the pressure on Soviet historians to conform to political orthodoxy is provided by Petrushevsky, who produced three further editions of his 1897 study of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 (*Vosstanie Uota Tailera*), in which he repeatedly attempted to eliminate all argument and evidence that had subsequently become unacceptable.³⁹ Yet, even so the final edition, published in 1937, contained an anonymous preface criticizing the author for producing a deviant analysis of feudalism.⁴⁰ It was in this manner that Soviet historians drove the story of medieval rural England back in line with the views of the bourgeois mid-nineteenth-century writers that Marx and Engels had so comprehensively rejected.

But, much more than this, the Soviet reinterpretation of the feudal period as a battleground between predatory lords and plundered villeins was instrumental in bringing about a sympathetic transformation of the views of a generation of British historians. For, within a remarkably short time, not only had an influential body of western Marxist historians and social scientists adopted this exegesis, many leading historians outside this circle, or even opposed to it, were persuaded to reject the consensus established by Vinogradoff’s generation.

The revolution of opinion in England was initiated by Maurice Dobb and led by Rodney Hilton, both founder-members of the Communist Party Historians Group with strong links to Soviet historians and knowledge of their work. Hilton was instrumental in getting Kosminsky’s monograph trans-

³⁶ See above.

³⁷ Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, pp. 333–34.

³⁸ Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, pp. 338–54.

³⁹ Gatrell, ‘Studies of Medieval English Society’, pp. 35–37.

⁴⁰ Gatrell, ‘Studies of Medieval English Society’, p. 37.

lated and published in England and he used the final chapter of this book as an intellectual framework for his influential 1949 article on English peasant movements before 1381, in which he proclaimed that no longer should peasant discontent be seen as a creation of the feudal reaction of the landlord class to the Black Death or the Great Revolt of 1381 seen as a 'bolt from the blue'.⁴¹ For Hilton, discontent and conflict were bound to be endemic in a society in which 'the sustenance of the non-producing class depended on the transfer to themselves of the surplus produced by the peasant', and a few years later he went much further in propounding the case 'that the struggle for rent was the "prime mover" in feudal society' and in dramatizing the absolute irreconcilability of the rural class struggle by claiming that 'the principal feature of the mode of production in feudal society is that the owners of the means of production, the landed proprietors, are constantly striving to appropriate for their own use the whole of the surplus produced by the direct producers', while naturally 'the peasants [...] strive to increase the portion of the surplus kept by them'.⁴²

Three years before the publication of Hilton's seminal 1949 article, Maurice Dobb had produced his influential account of the development of capitalism which contained a discussion of serfdom, feudalism, and the class struggle.⁴³ Although Dobb was an economist rather than a medieval historian, as a specialist in Russian economic development he had many academic and political contacts in the Soviet Union and was well-informed about contemporary currents in Soviet historical writing on English medieval history, which enabled him to cite a large number of books and articles published in Russian and quote extensively from them. Dobb took up with enthusiasm the banner of systemic destructive exploitation inflicted on peasants and the bitter class struggle it provoked: 'The villein we find everywhere despised as an inferior creature: regarded not at all as an end of policy but simply as an instrument — as a means to the enrichment of their lords'. Inevitably, Dobb maintained, the insatiable demands of the landlord class for income 'taxed the producer's strength beyond human endurance or else reduced his subsistence below the level of mere animal existence'. And, just as inevitably, 'For the system that rested on these foundations history was to have its own peculiar reckoning'.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hilton, 'Peasant Movements in England'. This article was reprinted in 1956–57 by the Institute of History of the Academy of the Sciences in the U.S.S.R (see Works Cited).

⁴² Hilton, 'Peasant Movements in England', p. 123; Hilton, 'A Comment', quotes on pp. 112, 115, 116.

⁴³ Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*.

⁴⁴ Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, pp. 42–43.

The publication of Dobbs' book did not immediately attract much attention from the historical establishment, but it did spark a lively debate among Marxists drawn from other disciplines which focussed on disagreements over the nature of feudalism and the prime reasons for its decline.⁴⁵ Paul Sweezy, the major critic, stayed close to Marx and to Pirenne by objecting to Dobbs' diagnosis that the feudal mode of production with its dependence on peasant exploitation generated the preconditions for its own transformation and arguing instead that feudalism's demise was brought about by outside forces, primarily the growth of trade.⁴⁶ Surprisingly little attention in this debate was paid to the crucial issue of whether lords actually did substantially increase their exactions from their peasantry, but this lacuna did little to stop support rapidly assembling behind the interpretations of Dobbs and Hilton and reinforcing the commitment of English Marxists to characterize the whole of the Middle Ages as a period of discontent, conflict, and revolt engendered by a 'struggle for rent' that impoverished the peasantry and inevitably drove the system into crisis.⁴⁷

* * *

In the course of the 1950s and 1960s an alternative explanatory model was being fashioned by the application of economics, in particular the theories of Malthus and Ricardo, to history. In this model the main driver of economic and social change was neither the destructive internal contradictions and conflicts of the feudal system nor the insidious growth of commerce, but the fluctuating balance of population and resources. Evidence of a long era of rising population stretching back beyond the Norman Conquest was used to highlight the inevitable consequences of growing land scarcity, soaring food prices, plummeting living standards, and the increasing incidence of famines which culminated in the devastating subsistence crises of the second decade of the fourteenth century.

M. M. Postan's address to the 1950 International Congress of Historical Sciences elegantly surveyed and analysed this model and encouraged English and continental scholars to adopt it.⁴⁸ The threat posed to the paradigm

⁴⁵ See Hilton's 'Introduction' to *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. by Hilton.

⁴⁶ Sweezy, 'A Critique', pp. 33–56, and 'A Rejoinder', pp. 102–08.

⁴⁷ For example, Hilton, 'Y eut-il une crise général de la féodalité?', pp. 23–30, which puts serfdom at the centre of the crisis and argues that the over-exploitation of the peasantry prevented them from investing in their holdings and introducing technical innovations.

⁴⁸ 'Economic Foundations of Medieval Society', pp. 3–27.

favoured by Soviet Marxism was swiftly recognized and the historians propounding this rival explanation were roundly condemned by Russian medievalists and other 'progressive historians' for simply 'reviving old liberal positivist conceptions' and applying 'reactionary neo-Malthusian theories' in an attempt to refute Marxism.⁴⁹ Yet, over the next decades some of the battle lines between the two camps, which had at first appeared stark and unbridgeable, began to blur as it was increasingly acknowledged by those stressing demographic and economic forces that over-population and over-exploitation might be complementary rather than competing forces driving the masses beyond the edge of subsistence.

Intriguingly, despite the continuing accumulation of hard evidence from estates across the country where there were 'no attempts to [...] violate custom', where 'customary money rents and dues in kind had remained practically constant from the twelfth century', where tallages and the money value of villein heriots were not increased, and where the rent per acre of new leasehold land was 'vastly in excess' of the tiny payments made by the tenants of anciently settled lands,⁵⁰ a number of leading British historians proceeded confidently to proclaim the weakness of custom and the facility with which lords were able to force rents and charges sharply higher. For example, Edward Miller in his 1964 survey of the thirteenth century pointed to 'the increasing toll which lords could levy from the peasantry in the form of rents, tallages, entry fines, payments for pasture rights and so forth'.⁵¹ More explicitly and significantly, Postan in his classic exposition of the characteristics of agrarian economy and society which appeared two years later, highlighted the ease with which 'lords frequently found ways round the barriers of custom and contrived a variety of devices for bringing the actual payment for land nearer to its mounting economic value'. In an attempt to quantify the extensive range of payments extracted from customary tenants in addition to their annual rents, Postan asserted that on the manors of the bishop of Winchester and the abbot of Glastonbury in the vale of Taunton entry fines alone might account for as much as a third of the aggregate value of the crops raised on a holding during a tenancy lasting twenty years, that on many estates 'tallage was frequently a heavy annual tax, almost as heavy

⁴⁹ See, for example, the attack by Kosminsky in 'The Evolution of Feudal Rent', pp. 12–13.

⁵⁰ Titow, 'Land and Population', p. 38; Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, pp. 118 (n. 74) and 224; Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, pp. 116–17; Miller, *Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 110–11.

⁵¹ Miller, 'The English Economy', pp. 25–26, 33.

as the rent itself', and that the liability to perform labour services frequently involved the villein in yet more outlays of money as well as time. All in all, Postan confidently concluded, 'the money dues of a villein tenant would absorb a very large proportion of his gross output. The proportions varied a great deal, but the average was very frequently near or above the 50 per cent mark'.⁵² Small wonder then, he mused, that the persistent encroachments of landlords on the sparse resources of their unfree tenants met with resistance.⁵³

Thus Postan, one of the foremost critics of many aspects of the application of Marxist theory to history, in perhaps his most powerful essay, adopted a position on the economic burdens of villeinage that was remarkably close to that espoused by Marxists in England, Russia, and elsewhere.⁵⁴ But, equally surprisingly, in the very same year he was outflanked by Hilton, who moved in the opposite direction by retreating from his former views that 'landed proprietors [were] constantly striving to appropriate for their own use the whole of the surplus produced by the direct producers'. After calculating the burden of cash payments on peasant holdings in the west Midlands, Hilton now acknowledged that unfree rents 'tended to get fixed at a low non-economic level by the influence of custom' and that even entry fines, which offered lords the opportunity of compensating for stagnant rents, remained 'fairly low' before the early fourteenth century. As a consequence, Hilton concluded, the rental per acre on competitive free leaseholds were normally higher than those paid by villeins for customary holdings.⁵⁵

Hilton and Postan were leaders of opinion, and it was to be expected that such major shifts in their views would prove influential on their followers. However, Christopher Dyer, at that time one of Hilton's graduate students,

⁵² Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society', pp. 552–53, 602–04.

⁵³ Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society', pp. 607–08.

⁵⁴ I can find no evidence to support Zvi Razi's contention that 'in the 1960s M. M. Postan "criticized [historians of medieval England] for overestimating the negative effects of serfdom" and "idealised the relationship between landlords and their tenants"' ('Serfdom and Freedom in Medieval England', pp. 182 and 187). For further confirmation of Postan's belief in the 'rapacious and exploitative' nature of feudal lordship see Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', pp. 5–6.

⁵⁵ Hilton, *A Medieval Society*, pp. 143–48; 'Lord and Peasant in Staffordshire', pp. 230–31. However, even in Hilton's earlier work very brief acknowledgements that '[rent] was usually constant over a long period of time' can be found tucked away among lengthy expositions of the claim that 'landowners [...] had all the means of coercion in society in their own hands' (see, for example, his 1949 article 'Peasant Movements', pp. 123–26).

also researching the west Midlands, took a different line from his supervisor by claiming in 1968 that, ‘The “struggle for rent” in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was usually won by the lords.’⁵⁶ And in the following year Jan Titow, one of Postan’s former graduate students, informed by a deep knowledge of the richly-documented estates of the bishop of Winchester, roundly contradicted the disparagement of the power of custom by both his mentor and Dyer by concluding that, ‘Thirteenth-century villeinage was neither arbitrary nor unpredictable, even though it was deprived of the protection of the royal courts; the lord knew what he was entitled to and the peasants knew what to expect, since such matters were governed by the Custom of the Manor which was binding on landlords and peasants alike.’⁵⁷ As a result, Titow claimed, rents were rendered largely immobile as the value of land continued to rise and, although entry fines soared to very high levels in the vale of Taunton, he agreed with Barbara Harvey’s contemporary judgment that even by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century they remained moderate on most manors elsewhere.⁵⁸

* * *

By the close of the 1960s a formidable body of new research was lending weighty corroboration to the conclusions reached by Vinogradoff and his contemporaries more than half a century before. When Ambrose Raftis wrote in 1957 that on the Ramsey Abbey estates, ‘While theoretically, the lord might have a jurisdiction “at will” over his villeins, in the practical order custom was upheld as law’, his words had been largely ignored,⁵⁹ but now they were finding widespread confirmation from the records of estate after estate and manor after manor, and the Soviet-inspired counter arguments that had proved so persuasive in the late 1940s and 1950s were being progressively undermined. During the 1970s empirical evidence of a prodigious gap between the common law and the common practice of villeinage continued to mount. Examination of the earliest records of the Cornish manors of the earls of Cornwall, dating from the late 1280s, revealed that the rents of the *nativi* had been fixed for a long time and were far lower than those paid by conventional leaseholders.⁶⁰ Barbara

⁵⁶ Dyer, ‘Redistribution of Incomes’, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Titow, *English Rural Society*, pp. 58–59.

⁵⁸ Titow, *English Rural Society*, pp. 73–78, Harvey, ‘Population Trend in England’, pp. 25–27.

⁵⁹ Raftis, *Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, p. 118, n. 74.

⁶⁰ Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, pp. 60–61,

Harvey's study of the Westminster Abbey estates concluded that, 'Remarkably, in view of the inflationary character of the period, the annual dues for villein holdings [...] changed little in the century that separated the making of the custumal of c. 1225 from the Black Death.'⁶¹ Edmund King reported that on the Peterborough Abbey estates entry fines were rarely high for villeins inheriting family landholdings, and a little later judged that throughout the realm the burden of rent borne by villeins was not as great as might first appear.⁶² A series of studies of Ramsey Abbey manors by Raftis and his students offered complementary evidence from a new perspective by rejecting the concentration on relations between lords and peasants that characterized most of the literature and replacing it with an emphasis on relations between peasants and the workings of the village community.⁶³ Based primarily on court rolls these studies claimed that the lord and his officials made only moderate demands on tenants and interfered infrequently in peasant affairs with the result that dealings between the abbey and its villeins were marked more by cooperation and conciliation than conflict. Finally, at the end of the decade, Paul Hyams's commanding study of the common law of villeinage strongly endorsed the importance of manorial custom and the wide gap that existed between the plea rolls and legal treatises and the manorial evidence.⁶⁴

It was into this environment of mounting evidence of the nature of lordship and villeinage that Robert Brenner's old-style Marxist tornado burst onto the pages of *Past and Present* and once again sent the carousel of opinion spinning.⁶⁵ Brenner's 1976 article was an intellectual tour-de-force that covered wide vistas of history, and his insightful attack on the dominance of rigid demographic determinism in explanations of long-term socio-economic change in the medieval period and beyond exposed significant weaknesses. However, because Brenner believed in the primacy of the relations of production over the forces of production he necessarily placed great weight on the conflictive relations of serfdom and villeinage and the class struggle they generated. To this end he resurrected the contentions made thirty years earlier by Kosminsky and Dobb

⁶¹ Harvey, *Westminster Abbey*, p. 219. For improvements in the legal and public status of the unfree see Richardson and Sayles, *Law and Legislation*, pp. 138–49.

⁶² King, *Peterborough Abbey*, pp. 166–67; King, *England 1175–1425*, pp. 57–60.

⁶³ See, for example, Dewindt, *Land and People in Holywell-cum-Needingworth*; Raftis, *Warboys*; Britton, *Community of the Vill*.

⁶⁴ Hyams, *King, Lords and Peasants*.

⁶⁵ Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure'.

that predatory landlords, unrestrained by custom or law, mercilessly plundered their unfree tenants, asserting that 'the lord's most obvious mode of increasing income from his lands was not through capital investment and the introduction of new techniques, but through "squeezing" the [unfree] peasants, by increasing either money-rents or labour-services'. Brenner further argued that 'the lord's surplus extraction (rent) tended to confiscate not merely the peasant's income above subsistence (and potentially even beyond) but at the same time threaten the funds necessary to refurbish the peasant's holding and to prevent long-term decline in its productivity', thereby damaging the productive base of the economy to the point of collapse and driving relations between the two classes into open conflict.⁶⁶

For Brenner seigniorial exploitation was a prime force behind the deterioration and eventual collapse of the productive base of the economy, but beyond citing Postan's speculation that lords grasped around half of the product of their villein tenants he conspicuously failed to substantiate his assertions that pre-Black Death landlords were 'imposing extra-economic or arbitrary payments upon the peasantry — payments beyond custom or beyond what the relative scarcity of factors might dictate'.⁶⁷ Neither in this nor in subsequent publications did he attempt to quantify the rents and charges on villein holdings, to track changes in them over time, or to compare them with the rents of lands that were influenced by market forces. Nor did Brenner confront the long line of historians from Vinogradoff onwards who had demonstrated the long-term stagnation of rents on villein holdings and the strong property rights enjoyed by their occupiers.⁶⁸

Notwithstanding these failings, Brenner's overarching thesis created a stir among historians and social scientists and attracted considerable support. Unfortunately, however, the contributors to the medieval section of the lively debate that swiftly arose tended to focus on the relative merits of competing class struggle and demographic models and neglected to provide much in the way of guidance on the validity of Brenner's belief in the ease and thoroughness with which landlords plundered the resources of their dependent peasants. Hilton, in his introduction to the book of essays on the debate, commented

⁶⁶ Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', pp. 48–52.

⁶⁷ Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 35.

⁶⁸ Bois claimed in his contribution to the debate that for Brenner 'theoretical generalization always precedes direct examination of historical material' ('Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy', p. 110).

only briefly on the powers landlords possessed to extract rent and on the conflicts their expropriations gave rise to, and did not discuss the level of those expropriations despite the fact that his recent publications had shown that they were considerably more moderate than Brenner was claiming.⁶⁹ Postan and Hatcher's riposte to Brenner offered confusing rather than clear guidance on these issues. Early in their contribution the work of Postan was cited to show that he had 'attached to feudal rent much of the blame for the villeins' impoverishment and for their inability to invest in their holdings or even keep their land in good heart', and it was further claimed that 'the payments borne by peasant holdings in the thirteenth century were crushingly heavy'. However, later in the essay Brenner was criticized for greatly exaggerating the elasticity of villein rents, and it was contended that 'villein tenure in the thirteenth century could often provide a measure of protection against the rigours of the market in a period of inflation and land hunger'.⁷⁰ Similar ambiguities were in evidence in Miller and Hatcher's survey of economy and society before the Black Death published in the same year.⁷¹

The 'Brenner Debate' also re-opened divisions between Marxists, and, paradoxically, some Marxist-oriented historians produced more radical alternatives to Brenner's claims of triumphant landlords and unbounded peasant exploitation than those provided by so-called neo-Malthusians. Guy Bois in his 1976 book had argued that lords in Normandy were frustrated in their attempts to increase the rental from their established peasantry and suffered substantial falls in real income when the growth in population and new settlement slowed and then ceased from the late thirteenth century, and in his contribution to the 'Brenner Debate' he broadened this argument to include England.⁷² Bois's lead was followed by Hilton, who wrote in 1978 that 'it was in the nature of feudal landownership to be passive rather than active' and that the 'declining exploitability of the peasantry' played a major role in the 'stagnation of landowner income derived from peasant rent before the demographic crisis' of the fourteenth century.⁷³ On the other hand, in the following year the criticisms that Zvi Razi levelled at Raftis and the 'Toronto School' for rebutting the 'accepted

⁶⁹ Hilton, 'Introduction', in *The Brenner Debate*, ed. by Aston and Philpin, pp. 5–6.

⁷⁰ Postan and Hatcher, 'Population and Class Relations', pp. 65–66, 72, 74–76 (quote on p. 76).

⁷¹ Miller and Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society*, esp. chapter 5.

⁷² Bois, *Crise de Féodalisme*; Bois, 'Against the Neo-Malthusian Orthodoxy'.

⁷³ Hilton, 'A Crisis of Feudalism', pp. 127, 128, and 132.

view' that lords exploited their tenants with oppressive demands had much more in common with Brenner's thesis, as did Razi's claim that the two classes 'coexisted in a constant state of tension and conflict rather than in harmony'.⁷⁴

* * *

Since Robert Brenner's spectacular re-ignition of a debate that had been smouldering for more than a century was not based on substantial new evidence or interpretation, it gave a clear signal that there remained enduring weaknesses in the historiography of lordship and villeinage and in the manner in which it had been assimilated. Critical areas of the subject were still being conducted in theoretical rather than empirical terms: too often lists of the range of obligations of the unfree were compiled without any assessment of their overall weight, and most commentaries on peasant poverty failed to define the part played by seigniorial charges.

The resolution of the plethora of contradictory claims that villein rents and charges were either 'crushingly heavy' and 'forced up beyond market levels' or stagnant and left far behind the rising value of land lay in systematic quantification and categorization. However, despite their importance to historical analysis and explanation there had been a reluctance to measure them and a notable lack of agreement on how their levels should be judged. Although some historians maintained that all rent was unjustified because peasant communities probably pre-dated feudal lordship,⁷⁵ and others believed that deeming rents to be 'high' or 'low' or 'reasonable' or 'exploitative' was unhistorical since such judgments involve moral issues and reveal more about the values and political attitudes of historians than they do about the past,⁷⁶ it cannot be denied that tenants were acutely sensitive to the absolute and relative amounts of rent and other charges to which they were subject. However resentful villeins might have been about paying rents that were higher than those levied on ancient freeholdings, or perhaps even paying any rents at all, it mattered greatly to them how they compared with those payable for non-villein lands to which they might have access. For, apart from the direct impact on family budgets and welfare, if villein rents were in excess of the value of the land they occupied then strict coercion would have been required to extract them and to keep the tenants on their holdings,

⁷⁴ Razi, 'The Toronto School's Reconstitution of Medieval Peasant Society.'

⁷⁵ For example, Hilton, 'Peasant Movements', p. 123; Hilton, 'Introduction', in *The Brenner Debate*, ed. by Aston and Philpott, pp. 5–6.

⁷⁶ For example, Rigby, *English Society*, pp. 56–57.

while if they were lower then villeins would have had little incentive to abandon their holdings and every opportunity to sub-let them at a profit.⁷⁷

Fortunately, England is blessed with rich manorial documentation capable of providing a solid base for estimating the weight of villein payments across large sections of the country. Moreover, although there might appear to be some degree of artificiality in imposing the abstract concept of a market rent on the Middle Ages, it need not be the alien concept that some historians have claimed. For, on most manors there was land outside the villeinage let on competitive terms and the rent it commanded provides a ready means of comparison with the cost of villein land.

A start on these tasks was made in 1981 with the publication of 'English Serfdom and Villeinage', in which the present author argued that the scale of thirteenth-century villeinage and the weight of its economic burdens had been exaggerated.⁷⁸ Across the centuries the balance of disadvantages and advantages of unfreedom shifted dramatically and, whereas rents and charges were undoubtedly oppressive for much of the twelfth century, in the era that followed they stagnated or rose only sluggishly while the demand for land escalated rapidly. The net result was that, in an increasingly overcrowded countryside, while competitive rents soared villeins enjoyed considerable protection from the buffeting of adverse market forces. In support of these contentions evidence was drawn from across England of remarkably inelastic customary rents and relatively low entry fines, of villeins routinely paying much less than leaseholders and recent assarters for lands of similar quality, and of villeins commonly receiving substantial premiums when they sold or sub-let their lands. It was also argued that lords generally respected villein property rights and inheritance customs and systematically treated kin far more favourably than those who had no right of inheritance, who were required to pay much higher entry fines and rents.

Richard Smith soon followed with additional precise examples of villeins transferring their lands to others in which the 'prices' realized were very substantially higher than the customary rents they bore, and Kathleen Biddick provided further evidence of customary rents falling sharply in real terms on Peterborough Abbey manors where they remained unchanged from at least 1231.⁷⁹ But Christopher Dyer was not persuaded and deemed that 'Hatcher's

⁷⁷ For widespread sub-letting by the unfree, and its economic and demographic implications, see Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem'.

⁷⁸ Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage'.

⁷⁹ Smith, 'Thoughts on "Hereditary" and "Proprietary" Rights in Land', pp. 116–19; Biddick, *The Other Economy*, pp. 58–60.

article [...] seek[ing] to show that the unfree, peasants of the thirteenth century were not overburdened with seignorial exactions [...] does not ring true [...] and does not even fit the economic evidence that villeins paid large sums of money to convert their supposedly protected villein tenures into apparently vulnerable leaseholds'. Dyer expressed regret that Hatcher's article had not 'provoked critical comments and replies' and expressed the hope that 'someone will state a contrary view at length, in a *Past and Present* essay of the old-fashioned kind'.⁸⁰ Although Dyer did not write such an article he continued to express his opposition, and in 1989 developed at some length his repudiation of arguments that 'customary rents were actually below the "market rate" [...] [and] customs under which the villeins held their land were not adjustable at the lord's whim, but protected the tenant against the chill wind of market forces', and he cited with approval what he deemed to be 'the accepted view [that] has maintained that rents depended on the lord's power, and that therefore lords were able to demand payment according to their needs and above market levels'.⁸¹

In the same volume Dyer modelled the income and expenditure of villein half-yardlanders on the Gloucestershire manor of Bishop's Cleeve at the close of the thirteenth century who, he noted, paid rents 'at a rather higher rate than most of their contemporaries'.⁸² However, when S. H. Rigby re-worked the data in 1995 he judged that 'the villeins of Bishop's Cleeve seem to have owed far less than 50 per cent of their gross output as rent to their lord, their rents amounting to less than a quarter of their gross output'.⁸³ Further, in his investigation of the weight of burdens faced by villein tenants across thirteenth-century England Rigby stressed the customary constraints on the ability of landlords to obtain the full benefit of the growing demand for land and wryly concluded that, if the market value of land were to be taken as the yardstick, 'Paradoxically, in this perspective, one could say that it was the peasants who "exploited" the landlords' resources, since the latter were prevented from obtaining an economic return on their property'.⁸⁴

Yet, the depiction of feudal lords as successful devourers of their villein tenants' surpluses remained resilient, and when J. A. Raftis pronounced in 1996

⁸⁰ Dyer, review of T. H. Aston (ed.), *Landlords, Peasants and Politics in Medieval England*, p. 208.

⁸¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 136–38.

⁸² Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 110–40, quote on p. 135.

⁸³ Rigby, *English Society*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Rigby, *English Society*, p. 56.

'That early, and one might properly say primitive, notion that the lord simply employed his feudal monopoly power to exploit tenants has been gradually discarded', Richard Britnell countered by stating that 'None of the economic developments of the thirteenth century removed the disabilities of unfree status or made the weight of manorial obligations any lighter', and stressed the exceptional powers lords enjoyed under the civil law, the vulnerability of serfs and villeins to arbitrary actions, and the rise in their monetary and labour obligations over time.⁸⁵ Britnell was supported in this pessimistic vein by Edmund Fryde, whose book published in the same year resonated with 'conservative and oppressive lordships' and 'oppression and injustice'.⁸⁶

However, over the next few years quantitative studies of impressive size and integrity were dramatically to narrow the scope for dispute. The first to appear was Junichi Kanzaka's analysis of the rents and other dues levied on 29,625 holdings in Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Oxfordshire, and Warwickshire recorded in the Hundred Rolls of 1279–80.⁸⁷ By conducting a systematic comparison of the charges on villein holdings with those of comparable freeholdings let on more competitive terms, Kanzaka was able to demonstrate statistically that 'Villeins held lands on highly advantageous tenure'. Far from being burdened by rents above market levels, Kanzaka concluded, the total payments of villeins, including tallage, heriot, merchet, entry fines, and other dues, were 'well below the competitive rent' to be found elsewhere on the huge sample of manors he studied. Two years later Kanzaka's results were endorsed by Sandra Raban's analysis of the Normancross Hundred Rolls.⁸⁸

The empirical capstone for the proof of the relative lightness of villein payments was cemented in place in 2006 by a monumental study of English lay estates undertaken by Bruce Campbell and Ken Bartley, which rested on a massive database extracted from almost 9300 *inquisitiones post mortem* relating to the estates of over 1800 lay lords and almost 5000 separate places in the first half of the fourteenth century.⁸⁹ The authors' rigorous assessment of this cornucopia of robust evidence of lordship, wealth, land, and agriculture

⁸⁵ Raftis, *Peasant Economic Development*, p. 11; Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, pp. 140–41.

⁸⁶ Fryde, *Peasants and Lords*, passim.

⁸⁷ Kanzaka, 'Villein Rents in Thirteenth-Century England'.

⁸⁸ Raban, *A Second Domesday?*, pp. 132–38. See also the complementary evidence in Raban, 'Landlord Return on Villein Rents', pp. 21–34.

⁸⁹ Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death*.

not only yielded massive additional quantitative evidence of comparatively low villein rents it also demonstrated that the significance of villeinage had been commonly overestimated due to an inherent bias in surviving records towards conservative ecclesiastical estates, large estates, and large manors, and that a comparable bias towards the records of eastern and central England had led to a substantial overestimation of the weight of labour services.⁹⁰ As Campbell elegantly and persuasively argued in his 2005 article, the evidence was now overwhelming that the great majority of villeins paid less than a full market rent for their land and that ‘tenants rather than lords largely had the upper hand and they maintained it by asserting an array of institutions, rights and values that collectively constituted custom.’⁹¹

* * *

Confirmation of the final crumbling of residual beliefs that predatory thirteenth-century lordship rode roughshod over custom came in 2007 with the publication of a commemorative volume of essays written by Rodney Hilton’s former colleagues and students.⁹² The most striking contribution on this theme is Christopher Dyer’s essay entitled ‘The Ineffectiveness of Lordship in England, 1200–1400’, in which he recited the arguments and evidence of his longstanding adversaries with approval rather than censure, confirmed ‘the relatively low rents that are found through much of rural medieval England’,⁹³ concurred ‘that many lords could not extract a great deal from their tenants’,⁹⁴ and highlighted the ‘extravagant language in which lords and their officials expressed their claims over their subordinates’ and the ‘element of bluster and bravado in the routine claims by lawyers that lords could dispose of their serfs’ property as they wished.’⁹⁵ Despite uncertainty being a defining feature of villeinage in both medieval law books and Marxist narratives, Dyer concluded, ‘whatever the legal position over peasant property, in practice their possessions were respected by lords, who normally expected to ratify the hereditary succession of holdings,

⁹⁰ Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death*, esp. pp. 251–68. For the generally low levels of profits from lay lordship exercised through manorial courts, see pp. 271–73.

⁹¹ Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, *passim* (quote on p. 69).

⁹² Dyer, Coss, and Wickham, *Rodney Hilton’s Middle Ages*.

⁹³ Dyer, ‘Ineffectiveness of Lordship’, p. 78.

⁹⁴ Dyer, ‘Ineffectiveness of Lordship’, p. 78.

⁹⁵ Dyer, ‘Ineffectiveness of Lordship’, pp. 73 and 75.

and registered the transfer of land by gift or sale, as long as the court was notified, and he acknowledged that tallage, marriage fines, recognition, and other theoretically arbitrary dues 'were not as variable and arbitrary as lords and their lawyers wished to believe', and that entry fines charged to heirs did relatively little to compensate lords for the declining real value of annual rents.⁹⁶

Phillipp Schofield's essay on lordship and peasant economy *c.* 1250–*c.* 1400 stresses the psychological damage and social stigma of villeinage and explores how its 'bonds and impedimenta [...] irrespective of their economic worth, weighed upon tenants and their families', and provides a case study of tenants of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds being 'scorched by the failing flame of seigneurialism' in the later fourteenth century as the abbot strove to prove they were unfree in order to profit from their prosperity. But Schofield also noted that rents comprised a 'fairly small' element in many villein budgets and that 'In the mid- to late thirteenth century, when population was at or near its medieval peak, land's worth increased exponentially but fixed customary rents remained at the levels set in earlier centuries'. In dismissing Kosminsky's assertion that 'the main body of the English peasantry, the villeins occupying virgates and half-virgates, were not rich solid peasants but a middle peasantry crushed by feudal exploitation', Schofield drew attention to evidence from peasant inventories, taxation assessments, and occasional outlays that indicate the potential they possessed for substantial capital accumulation.⁹⁷

Chris Wickham fights a plucky rearguard action in his 'Conclusions' to the volume by asserting his belief in 'the continuing pressure of seigneurial subjection' in England, but Zvi Razi's essay, the last on this subject in the volume, although sub-titled 'A Reply to the Revisionists' and emphasizing the strength of the class struggle, follows Dyer and Schofield in acknowledging that 'Hatcher and Kanzaka are probably right about the low level of rents for customary land'.⁹⁸

* * *

The final emergence of a consensus on the reduced scale and significance of villeinage and a pronounced softening of the character of lordship has implications for our understanding of a host of prime areas of medieval and early modern history. Prominent among them is the need for a reassessment of the role

⁹⁶ Dyer, 'Ineffectiveness of Lordship', pp. 77 and 78.

⁹⁷ Schofield, 'Lordship and the Peasant Economy', pp. 56–57; Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, p. 30.

⁹⁸ Wickham, 'Conclusions', p. 306; Razi, 'Serfdom and Freedom in Medieval England', p. 84.

that has often been allotted to villeinage in such epochal events as the crisis of the fourteenth century, the collapse of the feudal system and the nature of the transition that followed in its aftermath. This reassessment has been in progress for a while, but is gathering pace. In his 2009 article on villeinage in Suffolk and Norfolk, Mark Bailey argued that ‘villeinage cannot have caused any crisis of agrarian productivity before the Black Death’ nor ‘have been the prime mover behind the transformation of the landholding structure and the emergence of agrarian capitalism’ because it was neither significant enough nor strictly enforced.⁹⁹ In an essay in this present volume, Bailey goes further by proposing that the longstanding ineffectiveness of English lords and of the villeinage they were able to impose destined the post-Black Death ‘seigniorial reaction’ to be a damp squib and the decline of villeinage a far more rapid and less savagely-contested process than has hitherto generally been recognized.¹⁰⁰

There were other consequences of the surprisingly benign economic nature of villeinage, as Bruce Campbell demonstrated in 2005 when he approached the subject from a novel perspective by arguing that lords were agents of increasing poverty in the early fourteenth century not because they drained the resources of their unfree tenants but because they were compliant: ‘By yielding to tenant demands for access to land on terms that were so favourable to the tenants, lords created the preconditions for the subdivision and subletting that stoked population growth and thereby engendered the rural congestion that was the source of so much under- and unemployment.’¹⁰¹

Marx and Engels did not give prominence to a class struggle in the Middle Ages, but it has long been enshrined in Marxist accounts of the feudal system. In *Rodney Hilton’s Middle Ages* Chris Wickham declared that ‘nothing in this book gives any indication that class conflict is an outdated explanatory model for the Middle Ages.’¹⁰² In his advocacy of the centrality of the ‘permanent agonistic relationship’ between peasants and their lords, Wickham received support from Dyer, who in his ‘Ineffective Lordship’ chapter in the same volume cautioned that ‘Some readers will be tempted to take the argument [of the incompleteness of seigneurial power] further than I have attempted to do, and play down the antagonism between lords and peasants. I would warn against

⁹⁹ Bailey, ‘Villeinage in England’, p. 430.

¹⁰⁰ Bailey, ‘Was There a “Seigniorial Reaction” in England?’, this volume; see also Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, p. 9.

¹⁰² Wickham, ‘Conclusions’, pp. 315–16.

such a tendency.¹⁰³ However, now that there is general acceptance that long-standing judgments on the balance of power between lords and peasants need to be radically revised, if the class struggle is to survive as a plausible prime mover of economic and social change it will have to assume a form very different to the bitter conflict between rapacious mighty lords and defenceless peasants that was once envisaged.

A full and convincing explanation of why lordship was so weak in the long thirteenth century when the legal and economic environments were so favourable is still awaited, and its construction will require a deeper and wider understanding of the social and cultural mentalities of the age than has so far featured in the narratives of most economic and social historians. The challenge is made all the greater by the fact that lordship had not always been so passive and peasant burdens so moderate. For if rents and charges on villein land did not increase much in the inflationary thirteenth century it follows that they must have been extremely onerous in earlier times and the ability of lords to impose them commensurately greater.¹⁰⁴

The vital role played by peasants and their communities in restraining the behaviour of lords and contesting their ability to exploit has long been recognized, but the motivations behind peasant actions and attitudes need further elucidation.¹⁰⁵ It is not difficult to understand why impoverished villeins struggled to retain as much as they could of their product in an age of rising prices and falling real wages and employment opportunities, when even low rents could threaten the subsistence of those with holdings too small to feed their families. But resentment and resistance was also deeply expressed by better endowed villeins, who sometimes paid out substantial fees to lawyers to contest insubstantial obligations which their lords were trying to impose on them.¹⁰⁶ The defence by the peasantry of what they saw as their rights manifestly often went far beyond monetary consequences, just as the social stigma that attached to unfreedom went beyond any strictly economic calculation of its burdens. The contemporary usage of 'villein' as a common term of abuse proves by itself that unfreedom was viewed as a degrading condition. Although the panoply of demeaning restrictions of unfreedom were not sufficient to encourage more than a sprinkling of villeins to desert their holdings or purchase manumission at

¹⁰³ Dyer, 'Ineffectiveness of Lordship', p. 85.

¹⁰⁴ Discussed in Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage', pp. 26–33.

¹⁰⁵ Peasant resistance has attracted a substantial and disputatious literature; for a discussion and references see Hatcher and Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages*, pp. 79–83, 99–120, 246.

¹⁰⁶ Dyer, 'Attitudes towards Serfdom', pp. 289–90.

a time when land was scarce and expensive and economic opportunities severely limited, there is no denying the depth of their bitterness at the baseness of their legal and social position. As early as 1966 Hilton drew attention to the fear and uncertainty that villeins must have lived under because of the sweeping powers that their lords claimed over them, whether or not they were used, and that 'It must have been this, as much as their actual weight, which caused resentment'.¹⁰⁷

Pressure on landlords to moderate their behaviour also came from the church, and it is time to probe deeper into the influence that religion exerted on lords as well as peasants. Hilton viewed the parish clergy first and foremost as 'very important conveyors of the ideology of the rulers of society to the peasants',¹⁰⁸ but there was much more to the teachings of the church than persuading rustics to obey their superiors because their lowly position in three estates was divinely ordained and rebellion against God's will. In sermons, books, and in the confessional the rich and powerful were repeatedly told that merciful and charitable behaviour held out the prospect of spiritual and social rewards whereas ruthless and oppressive behaviour by them or their bailiffs provoked God to anger and contemporaries to condemnation. As far back as the mid-twelfth century Gratian had argued that 'natural law' was superior in dignity to both custom and legal enactments, which if 'contrary to natural law, they are to be held null and void'.¹⁰⁹ In similar vein the *Memoriale Presbiterorum*, a handbook for priests written around 1344, decreed lords who abrogated custom to be 'robbers and men of bad faith' and warned that 'no temporal lord ought by natural or canon law to exact anything from his tenant beyond what is owed to him by the same, by custom or by contract made between him and his tenant, or by imposition made from of old'.¹¹⁰ Some churchmen went further by cautioning lords that taking what was due by custom could be a sin if it left their tenants in distress, and it was in this spirit that the Gilbertine monk, Robert Mannyng, said of the temporal lord, 'though God have given him the seignery | He gave him no leave to do robbery'.¹¹¹ That the lords of ecclesiastical estates often failed to abide by these precepts only adds to the complexity of the reality.

¹⁰⁷ Hilton, *A Medieval Society*, p. 145.

¹⁰⁸ Hilton, 'Medieval Peasants: Any Lessons?', p. 118.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, pp. 27–30.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Pantin, *English Church*, p. 208. For a discussion of this treatise see Haren, *Sin and Society*.

¹¹¹ Robert Manning of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, cited in Gibbs, 'Restraints on Landlords', pp. 30 and 41. Gibbs's dissertation provides a valuable review of attitudes found in the moral literature of the period.

Nor did the pressure on lords to behave justly and mercifully towards their tenants come only from the church, for 'good lordship' was an ideal disseminated across all social strata and 'bad lordship' could result in a loss of face among peers as well as dependents. Moralists were also swift to draw parallels between the lordship that landlords enjoyed over their peasants and that enjoyed by the king over his vassals, and to remind lords that they too were reliant on the exercise of restraint by their overlords and that just like their peasant tenants they were quick to call on custom when threatened with unreasonable demands.

Medieval history is much more complex than the simple ideologies and models that have often been used to describe and explain it. There was far more to the relations between lords and villeins than the law and economics and far more to legal and economic matters than the letter of the law and the struggle for rent.

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THE MYTH OF THE ‘SEIGNIORIAL REACTION’ IN ENGLAND AFTER THE BLACK DEATH

Mark Bailey*

The ‘Seigniorial Reaction’ as Historical Orthodoxy

Successive outbreaks of the Black Death between 1348 and 1369 resulted in the loss of perhaps one half the population of England.¹ The scale and speed of the catastrophe posed a serious threat to the economic position of landlords, while simultaneously strengthening that of tenants and workers who were suddenly in short supply. Nineteenth-century historians argued that landlords responded immediately to this threat by using their legal and coercive powers over serfs to manipulate the land and labour markets in their favour, an interpretation of post-plague social relations which has stood unchallenged ever since.² Modern historians such as Bolton, Dyer, Hilton, Freedman, Brenner, Harriss, and Hargreaves have argued that the period between the Black Death of 1348–49 and the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 was characterized by a widespread ‘seigniorial’ or ‘feudal’ reaction, through which landlords fiercely and effectively protected their economic interests at the expense of those of their tenants and labourers.³

* The discussion at the Wells Conference in 2013 much improved this paper, and further comments from John Hatcher and Steve Rigby, especially, have greatly shaped its final form.

¹ Summarized in Rigby, *English Society*, p. 81.

² Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices in England*, I, p. 81; Pearson, *English History in the Fourteenth Century*, pp. 229–30.

³ Bolton, ‘World Turned Upside Down’, pp. 45–46; Bolton, *Medieval English Economy*

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Britnell defines this seigniorial reaction as ‘the ways in which landlords obstructed the operation of land and labour markets after the Black Death in order to maintain a distribution of income in their favour’.⁴ Freedman and Bourin regard it as another example of a recurring pattern of behaviour in pre-industrial Europe, whereby landlords periodically attempted to impose new kinds of serfdom upon subjugated peoples. They regard ‘neo-serfdom’ as ‘an innovative and adaptable means of seigniorial exploitation related to political, demographic and economic factors’.⁵

The attempt to impose neo-serfdom upon post-plague England through a severe seigniorial reaction ultimately failed, because it triggered a counter movement of protest, discontent, and resistance from oppressed individuals and communities, culminating in the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381. Hilton, Dyer, Martin, Fryde, and Rigby, among others, have argued that the Revolt was, at least in part, a collective act of rebellion against provocative seigniorial policies during an era when peasant expectations were rising.⁶ The Revolt represented the peak of peasant opposition to reactionary seigniorial policies, and thereafter English landlords softened their approach and abandoned serfdom. If the peasantry had failed to resist the initial oppression, then the position of landlords would have been greatly strengthened and could even have led to the enserfment of previously free peasant communities.⁷

Historians have never seriously questioned, let alone challenged, the concept of an aggressive seigniorial reaction in post-plague England, mainly because it has also acted as the lynchpin of two important themes in the historiography

1150–1500, p. 213; Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages*, p. 285; Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 37 and 41; Freedman, ‘Rural Society’, p. 87; Brenner, ‘Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism’, pp. 270–71; Dyer, ‘Villeins, Bondsmen, Neifs and Serfs’, pp. 428–33; Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 228; Hargreaves, ‘Seigniorial Reaction’, pp. 53–78.

⁴ Britnell, ‘Feudal Reaction’, p. 28.

⁵ Freedman and Bourin, ‘Introduction’.

⁶ Hilton argued that ‘the feudal reaction was not only partially responsible for precipitating the rising (of 1381), but that it faded away as a result of it’, Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free*, pp. 231–32; Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism*, pp. 63–66 and 72; Dyer, ‘Social and Economic Background’, p. 30; Fryde, ‘Peasant Rebellion’, pp. 744, 760–61, 814, and 818; Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death*, p. 240; Bolton, *English Economy*, p. 215; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 39–41; Rigby, *English Society*, pp. 110–17.

⁷ Hyndman, *The Historical Basis of Socialism in England*, p. 21; Brenner, ‘Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development’, p. 35; Razi, ‘Serfdom and Freedom’, pp. 186–87. The case is well summarized in Rigby, *English Society*, pp. 113–32.

of the late-medieval economy and society. The first is the belief that the Black Death had little initial impact and was therefore not a major factor in socio-economic change, and the second is the conviction that the decline of English serfdom is explained by the process of first reaction then resistance. Thus any challenge to the concept of the seigniorial reaction is also an indirect challenge to two other major historical orthodoxies. This essay represents the first attempt to critique the seigniorial reaction and to subject its evidentiary base to careful scrutiny. It argues that much of the evidence presented in support of the reaction is either anecdotal (and therefore unconvincing) or capable of an alternative explanation. Furthermore, historians have readily searched for and cited any 'positive' evidence for the reaction, while routinely overlooking any unequivocal 'negative' evidence where it did not occur. The essay also contends that the characterization of the period *c.* 1350 to 1381 as one of 'seigniorial reaction/peasant resistance' grossly over-simplifies the complexity and fluidity of both lord-peasant relations, and the processes of economic readjustment, in the wake of successive plague epidemics.

Changes in Rents, Land Occupancy, and Tenures

The first category of evidence marshalled to support the concept of the seigniorial reaction is the buoyancy of rents, the high levels of re-occupation of customary land, and the resilience of villein tenure in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. The sizeable and rapid fall in the population in the first plague outbreak of 1348–49, and further losses in subsequent epidemics, caused the supply of tenants to become scarce relative to that of land. A demographic catastrophe of this magnitude should have caused the rents from, and the occupancy of, unfree land to plummet, and villein tenure to shed its burdensome servile incidents in order to attract tenants, but such evidence is apparently hard to find. Instead, historians have pointed to rent rises of various kinds. On some manors labour services were 'increased' and 'intensified' in the aftermath of the Black Death, and the charges for not performing them were raised, while on others the total money income received from customary rents was higher in the 1360s than it had been in the 1340s.⁸ Elsewhere, the commer-

⁸ Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 36–43; Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free*, pp. 156–57; Bolton, *Medieval Economy*, p. 213; Brenner, 'Property and Progress', p. 96; Fryde, 'Peasant Rebellion', pp. 761–62; Razi, 'Serfdom and Freedom', p. 186; Rigby, *English Society*, pp. 113–14; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 121, 157, 171, and 188.

cial value of arable land per acre actually rose between the 1350s and 1370s.⁹ Even where rents sagged after the Black Death, their fall was seldom commensurate with the scale of the demographic collapse. For example, rental income fell just 10 per cent on certain manors of the earls of Clare, and by 22 per cent between the 1340s and the 1360s on the Berkeley estate in Gloucestershire. Such evidence suggests that landlords were thereby 'seizing a larger proportion of the decreasing product [...] than before'.¹⁰ The buoyancy of rental incomes is also attributed to the rapid and almost complete re-occupation of land on villein tenure, once the initial shock of the first epidemic had passed.¹¹ This remarkable achievement after such a huge blow raises suspicions about the tactics adopted to achieve it, such as on the estate of the bishopric of Durham in the 1350s where serfs were coerced in novel ways to occupy abandoned land on the old terms.¹²

Yet all these trends can be explained in a variety of different ways without having to invoke the existence of a seigniorial reaction. One explanation for the ready re-occupation of land is the pent-up demand stored in the pre-Black Death economy, caused by severe overpopulation and widespread underemployment, which was suddenly released with the dramatic demographic cull. The flood of untenanted land onto the market was readily mopped up by surviving smallholders eager to augment their meagre holdings and by the landless seizing the golden opportunity to mount the property ladder.¹³ A second explanation is the buoyancy of grain, wool, and livestock prices between *c.* 1355 and 1375, caused by an unusual combination of monetary inflation, poor weather, and market disruption, whose net effect was to boost the underlying profitability of agriculture.¹⁴

⁹ Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 226–31.

¹⁰ Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility*, pp. 114–16, 144; Wells-Furby, *Berkeley Estate*, Tables 2, 2a and 2b, on pp. 268–70. Her calculation of 'customary rent' includes all cash rents, commuted labour services, and tallage, which averaged £60 9s. 11d. between 1343 and 1348 (three years), and £47 5s. 8d. between 1362 and 1366 (three years).

¹¹ *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, p. 239; Schofield, 'Tenurial Developments', p. 251; Bolton, *English Economy*, pp. 209–10.

¹² Britnell, 'Feudal Reaction', pp. 30–40; Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 42–43; *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, pp. 239, 326–31.

¹³ Bridbury, *English Economy*, pp. 203–05; Braid, 'Economic Behaviour', pp. 354–57.

¹⁴ Bridbury, *English Economy*, pp. 202–03; Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', p. 444; Rigby, *English Society*, p. 114; Campbell, 'Grain Yields', pp. 144–46; Munro, 'Late Medieval Decline', pp. 301–02.

A final explanation for the surprising buoyancy of both rents and land occupancy is the dramatic changes to the tenures of customary land in the 1350s and 1360s, a major development whose significance has been largely overlooked.¹⁵ Immediately following the first plague epidemic the proportion of customary land converted from traditional villein tenure to fixed-term tenures held for money rents (such as leases) rose markedly in places as far apart as north-east England, the East Midlands, East Anglia, and the West Country.¹⁶ These money-based tenures were introduced when landlords could not find tenants willing to hold the land on the old villein tenure, and their expansion contributed importantly to the relatively full re-occupation of land after the Black Death.¹⁷ The conversion of the old villein tenures — whose rent package included payments in kind, servile incidents, labour services, and a sub-economic money rent — to fixed-term tenancies owing just a commercial money rent 'resulted in a substantial increase in the cash rent income' of lords.¹⁸ In other words, the recovery of rental incomes after the Black Death usually reflected changes in the structure and composition of customary rents. For example, the 22 per cent fall in income from customary rents on the Berkeley estate disguises a significant rise in the proportion of the cash component of the rent package, from just 3 per cent of all customary rents in 1343–48 to 46 per cent in 1362–66, without which the decline would have been even greater.¹⁹

Thus it transpires that buoyant customary rents after 1350 are more a reflection of seigniorial concessions, such as the partial *retreat* of villein tenure and its replacement with monetarized tenures, than of seigniorial aggression

¹⁵ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 60–61, 287–93, and 333–34.

¹⁶ For the northeast, see Lomas, *Northeast England*, pp. 191–92; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 163–66, and 238; Larson, 'Peasant Opportunities', pp. 145–56. For the East Midlands, see Neilson, *Economic Conditions*, p. 69; *Pilsgate Manor*, ed. by Briston and Halliday, pp. 377–403. For East Anglia, see Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 223–31; Müller, 'Peasant Land', pp. 163–65; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 170–71, 187–88, and 251–52. And, for the West Country, see Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, p. 68; Wells-Furby, *Berkeley Estate*, pp. 105–07.

¹⁷ Schofield, 'Tenurial Developments', pp. 255–56; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 106, 136–37, 170–71, 187, 244, 247–48, and 251–52.

¹⁸ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, pp. 120–21; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 165–66.

¹⁹ Wells-Furby, *Berkeley Estate*, pp. 268–70. The growing importance of cash rents was complemented by the contraction in income from the commutation of labour services, many of which were swept away with the conversion to fixed-term tenancies: hence sale of works had comprised around 35 per cent of all income in 1343–48 but merely 3 per cent in 1362–66.

through tactics such as the enforced occupation of villein land and the manipulation of rents. Many landlords were promoting openly accommodating and conciliatory relationships with their tenants throughout this period, because the recruitment and retention of tenants after the Black Death was primarily an exercise in compromise, not coercion.²⁰ The pace and the scale of the changes to villein tenure in the 1350s and 1360s attracted new tenants and non-serfs into the customary land market, and sharpened the competition between landlords for tenants, both of which made the future prospect of any enforced re-imposition of villeinage less, not more, likely.²¹

The proliferation of localized studies in the past twenty years has revealed far greater complexity and variety in the customary land market in the 1350s and 1360s than the uncomplicated narrative of a widespread seigniorial reaction would allow. There were manors where villein holdings were not fully or quickly reoccupied, proving that their lords were unable to impose their will or terms upon their serfs. This was even true of a landlord as powerful as the abbot of Bury St Edmunds, who as late as 1359 had still not found tenants for more than half of the main villein holdings on three of his manors.²² Likewise, a large proportion of customary land remained untenanted and uncultivated until the early 1360s on the manors of various lords in Wiltshire and Oxfordshire, causing major falls in rental income.²³ Even on some manors where customary holdings had been largely re-filled after 1348–49, their success owed much to significant and immediate concessions on the rent package, in response to an initial reluctance among survivors to acquire land on the old terms and to their complaints of poverty.²⁴ Other lords initially played a waiting game in the early 1350s, but then realized that customary land would continue to lay vacant unless they ‘lowered their asking price’ through substantial remissions of cash rents and/or labour services.²⁵

The variety and complexity of local responses in the third quarter of the fourteenth century also warn against any claims that labour services were rou-

²⁰ A point made by Hilton, no less, in *Decline of Serfdom*, p. 43. See also Page, *End of Villeinage*, pp. 54–55 and 60–64; Fryde, ‘Peasant Rebellion’, pp. 749–53; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 61–68; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 143, 149, and 153.

²¹ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 332–34.

²² Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 170–71 and 251.

²³ See Page, ‘William Wykeham’, pp. 117–18; Townley, ‘Crawley’, p. 180; Crossley, ‘Corbridge’, p. 211; Townley, ‘Hailey’, p. 241; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 120, 157.

²⁴ *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, pp. 283–84.

²⁵ *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, pp. 238–89.

tinely intensified or reintroduced as part of the seigniorial reaction.²⁶ These refer to those occasions when a landlord charged high fines to commute labour services or, indeed, chose to reverse a pre-Black Death policy of commuting them for cash: it does not mean that a landlord increased the absolute number of labour services owed from an individual holding. In fact, examples of landlords reintroducing labour services or increasing commutation fines are not very common, and they must be weighed against the manifold examples in the early 1350s of landlords granting temporary, and in some cases permanent, remission of labour services in recognition of the chronic shortages of labour experienced by their own tenants.²⁷ Certainly, some landlords then clawed back these initial concessions by the end of the decade, but during the 1360s and 1370s the most widespread and common pattern was to commute or to abandon — not to intensify — labour services.²⁸ In reality, there were 'wide variations in how long and how forcefully servile labour obligations were demanded' in the 1350s and 1360s, and by the 1370s they were in headlong retreat.²⁹

Thus the full reoccupation of customary land after the Black Death was primarily the result of flexible and concessionary seigniorial responses, or to good fortune, and owed hardly anything to coercion. Indeed, on one of the very rare occasions when a landlord did coerce his serfs to hold customary land on the old terms, the tactic proved unsustainable. In the 1350s the bishop of Durham forced serfs to occupy untenanted customary land, an approach so novel and provocative that Bolton cites it as the embodiment of the seigniorial reaction in England.³⁰ Yet this policy was actually abandoned in 1358, after which the bishop supported his tenants by reducing rents and entry fines.³¹ So the one example used to exemplify the seigniorial reaction is actually better deployed to exemplify the *impossibility* of sustaining it. In other words, the reaction in County Durham 'was only an opening position', which was quickly exposed as unsustainable and ultimately 'incapable of arresting change': as Britnell observes,

²⁶ Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 38 and 41.

²⁷ *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, pp. 238–89; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, p. 30.

²⁸ See, for example, Neilson, *Economic Conditions*, pp. 69 and 73–75; Page, *End of Villeinage*, pp. 60–64; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 120; Harvey, *Westminster Abbey*, pp. 256–61; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, p. 62.

²⁹ Poos, *Rural Society*, p. 242.

³⁰ Bolton, 'World Turned Upside Down', pp. 45–46.

³¹ Britnell, 'Feudal Reaction', pp. 43–47; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 82–84, 105–10, 140–41, and 148–50.

if a landlord as powerful as the Palatinate Bishop of Durham could not maintain a seigniorial reaction, then it is very doubtful that any others could.³²

Manorial Court Revenues

The second broad category of evidence used to support the case for a seigniorial reaction is landlords' manipulation of the activity within their own manorial courts in order to maintain or even to squeeze more income from the peasantry. The jurisdiction of the manor court cut across the lives of all local people, because one of its functions was to regulate agricultural resources and other petty civil and criminal activities, although it mainly impacted upon serfs and tenants of customary land who were compelled to attend every session.³³ Thus peasants were vulnerable to changes in seigniorial policy, such as attempts to raise the level of fines and to crack down on certain types of activities.³⁴

It is argued that this aggressive and novel crackdown on peasants in general and servility in particular is illustrated by a rise in the revenues obtained from manorial courts. Logic would dictate that these revenues should have fallen, because the massive fall in the population meant that fewer people were attending the courts, but Dyer demonstrated that revenues were noticeably *higher* after the Black Death on seven manors held by the bishopric of Worcester and on four manors in south-east England.³⁵ Booth and Poos identified a similar trend in parts of Cheshire and Essex.³⁶ Dyer attributes this remarkable phenomenon 'to the vigorous exercise of the lord's authority' and to the lords' determination to 'maximize' profits from their surviving tenants, because it could only have been achieved through 'a considerable growth in the average per capita payments made'.³⁷

It is widely assumed that servile dues increased in frequency and size after the Black Death, because these were most vulnerable to seigniorial manipulation.³⁸

³² Britnell, 'Feudal Reaction', pp. 46–47.

³³ *English Manor*, trans. by Bailey, pp. 167–84.

³⁴ Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, p. 14.

³⁵ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, Table 12 on p. 121; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', p. 29.

³⁶ Poos, *Rural Society*, pp. 245–46, and Booth, *Financial Administration*, pp. 138–39.

³⁷ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, pp. 121 and 147; Dyer, 'New Serfdom', p. 429; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', p. 29.

³⁸ Freedman, *Images*, p. 262; Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 36–39. The main servile

Table 6.1. Mean annual court income from eight manors, 1330–80.³⁹

Manor	Pre-Black Death		Post-Black Death	
	Mean Annual Court Income		Mean Annual Court Income	
Bircham (Norfolk)	14s. 10d.	(1330–48, 14 years)	18s. 3d.	(1352–80, 9 years)
Birdbrook (Essex)	40s. 6d.	(1330–48, 5 years)	54s. 7d.	(1350–79, 15 years)
Claret Hall (Essex)	34s. 5d.	(1330–48, 10 years)	39s. 7d.	(1350–79, 12 years)
Ham (Gloucs)	51s. 1d.	(1330–48, 8 years)	131s. 11d.	(1350–79, 14 years)
Melton (Suffolk)	141s. 5d.	(1330–48, 4 years)	143s. 4d.	(1350–79, 6 years)
Moulsham (Essex)	32s. 9d.	(1340–48, 3 years)	57s. 10d.	(1350–79, 10 years)
Southwold (Suff.)	98s. 6d.	(1337–47, 8 years)	32s. 7d.	(1352–78, 5 years)
Standon (Herts)	99s. 9d.	(1335–48, 10 years)	142s. 4d.	(1354–75, 6 years)

In all of these court roll series, any data from the plague years of 1348–49 and 1361–62 are omitted, because of the exceptional nature, and therefore distorting impact, of those years.

For example, officials of the bishopric of Durham targeted their collection in the 1350s in an attempt to offset losses of revenue from other sources, whilst some landlords in Essex also enforced merchet and chevage more rigorously.⁴⁰ The individual fines charged for chevage rose sharply; heavy fines were imposed on serfs claiming to be free; novel charges were levied upon serf labour; and penalties were placed upon the relatives of flown serfs.⁴¹ The cumulative impact of such policies was to lower the social condition of peasants 'as lords either imposed servitude on those previously considered free or coerced those who

dues were merchet (a marriage fine), tallage (an annual tax), heriot (death duty on the estate of a customary tenant), entry fine (admission charge to unfree land), millsuit (tax on grinding corn), chevage (licence to leave the manor), labour services (liable routinely on the lord's land), and leyrwyte (illegitimacy charge): see Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 37–56.

³⁹ Sources: Holmes, *Higher Nobility*, pp. 150–56 (Bircham, Southwold, Standon); Poos, *Rural Society*, p. 245 (Birdbrook, Claret Hall Ashen, Moulsham); Wells-Furby, *Berkeley Estate*, p. 271 (Ham, not including the income from 1373–74 because of an exceptional sum); Cambridge University Library, EDC 7/16/II/1 to 19 (Melton).

⁴⁰ Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 91 and 97–99; Poos, *Rural Society*, pp. 245–46.

⁴¹ Page, *End of Villeinage*, p. 56; Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility*, pp. 141–44; Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 37–39; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', pp. 24–32; Fryde, 'Peasant Rebellion', pp. 760–76; Hargreaves, 'Seigniorial Reaction', pp. 52–55; Dyer, 'New Serfdom', pp. 428–32; Schofield, 'Lordship', pp. 60–68; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 86–89, 94–97.

had been allowed to escape supervision.⁴² This explains why after the Black Death serfdom seems more prominent in the records.⁴³

The consistency and scale of the increase in manorial court revenues after 1350 is undeniable and striking, although Dyer's sample is small (eleven manors) and historians have not habitually drawn attention to other examples where these revenues fell. Even so, evidence from a random sample of a further eight manors in Norfolk, Suffolk, Gloucestershire, Essex, and Hertfordshire (Table 6.1) supports Dyer's argument: there were large rises in curial income after the Black Death on four manors, marginal rises on three, and a fall on just one.

The total sample size (nineteen manors) is still small, but it illustrates clearly the tendency for manorial court income to rise in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. So the issue at question is whether this constitutes proof of a seigniorial crackdown on villeinage. It is entirely correct to state as a general observation that higher curial income was 'derived from such payments as amercements, entry fines, and marriage fines, which *could be* maintained at a high level through the vigorous exercise of the lord's authority' [my italics].⁴⁴ However, increased curial income on a given manor can only be admitted as proof of the seigniorial reaction when it has been linked directly and empirically to an increase in the frequency of and charges for servile incidents on the same manor. This link has not been established on any of the nineteen manors in the sample.⁴⁵ On the contrary, its *absence* has been demonstrated on one of them (Chevington, Suffolk). Dyer showed that curial income here rose after the Black Death, but subsequent research has revealed that during the 1360s and 1370s the management of serfs was lax and villein tenure largely collapsed.⁴⁶ The total income obtained from the key servile incidents of merchet (including illegal marriages), chevage, transgressions against millsuit, and childwite came to a grand total of just 32s. 6d. from fifty-eight court sessions between 1352 and 1375.⁴⁷

⁴² Freedman, *Images*, p. 262.

⁴³ Dyer, 'New Serfdom', p. 429.

⁴⁴ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 121.

⁴⁵ For example, Poos argued that the size and frequency of merchet at Great Waltham, High Easter and Birdbrook rose in the third quarter of the century, but this statement is not obviously substantiated from the cited figures, *Rural Society*, pp. 245–46.

⁴⁶ Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', p. 29; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 169–80.

⁴⁷ Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds branch, E 3/15.3/1.1a–1.17. After 1365 chevage was recorded in the account rolls, of which two survive between 1365 and 1375.

The belief that the frequency and size of servile dues rose after the Black Death is not supported by a substantial body of hard, quantitative, evidence from a variety of manors. Instead, it is founded largely upon citations of the *types* of provocative and novel behaviour adopted by landlords in this period, without quantifying their *scale*. A study of two contiguous manors in Walshamle-Willows (Suffolk), which does enumerate carefully the changing frequency of key servile dues between the second and third quarters of the fourteenth century, revealed that the frequency of heriot and merchet halved (although the mean fine remained constant), while that of chevage, leyrwyte, millsuit, and tallage collapsed.⁴⁸ In other words, one of the rare studies to quantify precisely fluctuations in the frequency of servile dues reveals no seigniorial reaction on either manor: on the contrary, the demeaning burdens attached to villein tenure were being rapidly diluted in order to retain tenants, reflecting the conciliatory, not confrontational, approach of the two landlords.⁴⁹

Thus it cannot be assumed that higher manorial court income was the consequence of an increase in the frequency and size of servile fines. But if the profits of serfdom did not cause court incomes to rise on manors like Chevington, then what did? One explanation lies in the changing business of the court. McGibbon Smith has shown that the kind of business handled in the manorial court could shift markedly over short periods of time, and that cases involving seigniorial rights in their broadest sense increased dramatically in importance after 1350 in the court of Sutton-in-the-Isle (Cambridgeshire).⁵⁰ Elsewhere, it was common for cases of brewing against the assize, trespasses, and public nuisance to rise.⁵¹ Another area of dramatic growth was the punishment of peasants whose wandering livestock caused minor damage, which courts pursued with a 'new energy'.⁵² This reflected a growing general interest in pastoral farming and a lack of close supervision of animals due to labour shortages: pastoral farmers probably accepted such fines as part of their operating costs. Hence manorial court income could increase for reasons other than the aggressive management of serfdom. It is entirely possible that individual peasants were paying more in fines and amercements through their manor court in this period, and that courts were sharper on matters of manorial indiscipline and of seigniorial rights

⁴⁸ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 105–16.

⁴⁹ A point also made recently by Larson, 'Peasant Opportunities', p. 147.

⁵⁰ McGibbon Smith, 'Court Rolls', pp. 254–63.

⁵¹ Poos, *Rural Society*, pp. 244–45.

⁵² Dyer, 'New Serfdom', p. 428; Wells-Furby, *Berkeley Estate*, p. 132.

in their widest sense. It is less clear to what extent the changing business of the court was the consequence of aggressive seigniorial intervention or simply reflected the shifting priorities and interests of the presentment jury, who also determined its business. Whatever the answer, the whole issue is more complex and nuanced than the seigniorial targeting of the incidents of villeinage.

Another reason for exercising caution about increased court income is that it can sometimes prove illusory, because the size and nature of the sample selected by the historian can skew the results dramatically. For example, the average annual income from the Birdbrook court between 1330 and 1348 (40s. 6d., see Table 6.1 above) is drawn from Poos's calculation of income from five separate years within that period. However, data is actually available from *nine* extant years within the period, and the mean rises dramatically to 78s. 10d. if this additional information is included in the calculation: based on this revised figure, mean court income actually *fell* after the Black Death.⁵³ Another problem is that the evidence for curial income is usually derived from the total annual income *due* from manorial courts, as totalled at the base of each court roll or summarized in the receipts section of the manorial account. Yet the amounts actually *collected* can only be established definitively if the section on arrears and respites of payments at the foot of the manorial account has survived, and if its breakdown is sufficiently detailed to distinguish the non-payment of court dues and fines. This might seem to be stretching a point, but court fines were a likely source of dispute and detention in this period, and the gap between expected and actual income could be sizeable. For example, headline receipts from the manorial court at Lakenheath (Suffolk) averaged around *c.* £10 per annum between the mid-1350s and mid-1380s, but a detailed analysis reveals that in some years in the late 1370s and 1380s only half the due sums were actually collected so that, as a result, the real level of curial income was well below pre-Black Death levels.⁵⁴

Finally, but perhaps most important of all, monetary conditions were dramatically different in the two periods under comparison. The 1330s and early 1340s was an era of deflation and severe fiscal policies in England, which created local shortages of coin and would therefore have tended to depress manorial court revenues. In contrast, the 1350s to the mid-1370s was a period of

⁵³ There are also twenty-five extant years in the period 1350–79, not the fifteen cited by Poos, which produces an annual mean of 55s. 3d., against Poos's 54s. 7d.: see Schofield, 'Land, Family and Inheritance', pp. 27–28. I am grateful to Professor Schofield for his permission to cite from his unpublished thesis.

⁵⁴ Bailey, 'Prior and Convent of Ely', pp. 17–18.

inflation, as the amount of coin in circulation, and especially the quantity per head, rose sharply.⁵⁵ Thus, even where manorial court incomes rose in aggregate terms after the Black Death, the declining value of money means that the increase was much less in real terms.

Restrictions on Labour

The final category of evidence supporting the case for a seigniorial reaction is the introduction of legal restrictions upon the remuneration and mobility of labour, which took two forms: the introduction of new national legislation, the Ordinance (1349) then Statute (1351) of Labourers, and the extension of seigniorial powers under serfdom to obstruct, or profit from, the migration of serfs.

The introduction of ambitious labour legislation in 1349 and 1351 was principally intended to fix wages at pre-Black Death levels, to ensure transparency in the method of hiring, and to compel all able-bodied people without land or regular employment to work for wages.⁵⁶ The intervention of central government in the labour market was novel in many ways, not least in the creation of a new form of judicial commission (of Justices of Labourers, later Justices of the Peace) to enforce the legislation.⁵⁷ The combination of wide-ranging legislation and a purpose-built agency for its enforcement extended the power of landlords in new and threatening ways. In particular, it established new and additional statutory instruments enabling landlords to bind their serfs into working on the manor, and to reclaim those who had left without licence.⁵⁸ Thus the labour laws can be portrayed as seeking 'to perpetuate villeinage and to hinder the movement towards freedom' by shoring up 'the sagging controls of serfdom'.⁵⁹ The initial statute of 1351 was subsequently and frequently reissued and revised in order to clarify, refocus, and refine earlier versions, which is taken as a sign of the government's resolve rather than of the failure of its legislation.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Munro, 'Before and After the Black Death', pp. 335–64.

⁵⁶ Putnam, *Statutes of Labourers*, pp. 1–5 and 219–24; Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', pp. 483–90; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 33–36.

⁵⁷ Hilton, *Bondmen Made Free*, pp. 154–45 and 160–64; Penn and Dyer, 'Wages and Earnings'; Ormrod, 'Politics of Pestilence', pp. 155–59.

⁵⁸ Putnam, *Enforcement of the Statute of Labourers*, pp. 194–205; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 21 and 33–36; Bennett, 'Compulsory Service', pp. 9–10.

⁵⁹ Putnam, *Statutes of Labourers*, p. 3; Bennett, 'Compulsory Service', p. 42.

⁶⁰ Given-Wilson, 'Service', pp. 24–28.

The purpose, novelty, and sheer scale of the labour legislation constitutes the single most compelling argument for the seigniorial reaction. Yet a proper assessment of the legislation's significance depends not upon its intent but upon its effectiveness on the ground. Most research into the surviving records of prosecutions indicates that it was enforced vigorously and effectively until the 1370s.⁶¹ However, the extant legal records represent just the tip of the iceberg of the information required to evaluate properly the effectiveness of its enforcement, 'although how large a tip (or iceberg) is anybody's guess'.⁶² There is a mounting body of evidence pointing to its ineffectiveness. Wage rates moved decisively upwards in the 1360s, well beyond the levels stipulated in the Statute, which indicates that the labour laws quickly failed in their primary objective.⁶³ Many well-paid labourers evaded prosecution, and hardly any landlords used the provisions in the legislation to recover flown serfs: they found it easier to employ the flown serfs of other lords.⁶⁴ There are many examples of passive non-cooperation, competition, and disagreement between landlords over labourers.⁶⁵ One landlord retrieved his flown serf from the employment of another lord, but ended up being sued by the latter for inciting the serf to breach the contract of employment.⁶⁶ A petition to the Commons in 1376 complained about the lack of solidarity among lords and the 'great mischief' of competing against one another for labourers, which was undermining the labour legislation.⁶⁷ Consequently, historians are increasingly sceptical about its effectiveness.⁶⁸

The second way in which landlords are assumed to have restricted the movement of labour was by exercising the full powers available to them under serfdom to impose chevage and novel forms of service. After the Black Death a sharp rise of interest in flown villeins is recorded on many manors and, on some, the frequency and level of chevage fines increased. Manorial court rolls began to include greater detail about the whereabouts of migrants; officials were

⁶¹ Poos, 'Social Context'; *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, p. 241; Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 33–36 and 42; Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, pp. 223–24.

⁶² Bennett, 'Compulsory Service', p. 17.

⁶³ Munro, 'Late Medieval Decline', pp. 301–02.

⁶⁴ Putnam, *Statutes of Labourers*, pp. 3–4; Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath', pp. 11–32.

⁶⁵ Dyer, *Everyday Life*, pp. 214 and 217; see also Bridbury, *English Economy*, pp. 209–10.

⁶⁶ Vinogradoff, *Villeinage*, pp. 53–54.

⁶⁷ Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath', pp. 19–20.

⁶⁸ Bennett, 'Compulsory Service', p. 8.

ordered to seize them 'by body'; relatives were pressured to secure their return; the chattels of flown serfs were sometimes distrained; and, exceptionally, armed seigniorial bands were dispatched to return migrants.⁶⁹ In 1361 John Paly, the serf of a minor Cornish landlord, fled his home manor to live on one belonging to the Duchy of Cornwall, and refused to return or to submit to his lord. The lord therefore petitioned the Duke of Cornwall for help, who duly instructed his officials to return John bodily to his lord.⁷⁰ Some serfs were forced to return to their home manor for the harvest, or forced to swear to work as required on their lord's demesne, which were new and restrictive conditions on migrants.⁷¹

After 1350 manorial court rolls in many places certainly do display greater interest in flown serfs, reflecting a heightened sensitivity to unlicensed absences and a determination to document the problem, but is this proof of a seigniorial reaction against labour mobility? In reality, most references to flown serfs were simply presentments, which recorded their absence, ordered their return, and, sometimes, included additional instructions to manorial officials.⁷² These presentments were usually repeated with bureaucratic zeal year after year, but few translated into any concrete action, such as the return of emigrants or the payment of chevage. As Poos observes, 'it is hard to see any evidence that they were ever very successful.'⁷³ The case of John Paly of Cornwall (above) is the only cited example of its kind, and even then its outcome is unknown. Lords seldom took decisive action to retrieve their flown serfs, even when their whereabouts was well known, and so these migrants were invariably safe in their new location.⁷⁴ Serfs fled the estate of the bishopric of Durham to settle on the sister estate of Durham priory, yet the bishopric officials experienced 'great difficulties in retrieving them.'⁷⁵ Manorial courts had little effective power to enforce the recovery of servile migrants.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Page, *End of Villeinage*, pp. 55–56; Levett, *Studies*, p. 255; Dewindt, *Land and People*, p. 178; Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility*, pp. 141–44; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', pp. 24–32; Dyer, 'New Serfdom', pp. 428–32; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, p. 43.

⁷⁰ *Register of the Black Prince*, Part 2, ed. by Stamp and Dawes, p. 183.

⁷¹ Page, *End of Villeinage*, p. 56; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', p. 24.

⁷² Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 111–12, 116, 123–24, 140, 180, and 226–27.

⁷³ Poos, *Rural Society*, p. 246.

⁷⁴ Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 113.

⁷⁵ Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility*, p. 168; Fryde, 'Peasant Rebellion', p. 767.

Another ostensibly aggressive and novel development was the explicit labelling of hereditary serfs as ‘the lord’s neifs by blood’ (*nativi domini de sanguine*), and their separate identification in fealty lists, which became commonplace after 1350. When considered in the context of a seigniorial reaction, this looks like a new tactic designed to demean servile families and to create a written record to track them thereafter. Yet, from a different perspective, it can be regarded as the by-product of the rapid rise in the numbers of non-serfs holding customary land, a development which required ‘tenants of customary land’ to be identified separately from ‘serfs by blood’, who were personally servile through the paternal line. So although some manorial documents now identified their lord’s serfs with a new zeal, it did not usually translate to a significant rise in the size and frequency of servile fines. The bark of landlords was usually far worse than their bite.

It is worth looking in detail at an individual example in which a landlord appears, at first sight, to have introduced novel and aggressive restrictions on the mobility of his serfs in a manner consistent with the seigniorial reaction. However, when the circumstances are explored in greater detail, and analysed carefully within their local context, a very different explanation emerges. In the late 1350s brothers William and John Heyward (alias Parkin) had flown the manor of Upper Heyford (Oxfordshire), and in 1367 the manor court repeated an order for them to return and to occupy customary holdings. In April 1368 they appeared in front of the court to submit themselves to the lady (Alice Seymour, alias *de Mauro*) as her *nativi* and to explain that they had for some time been established at nearby Rousham (Oxfordshire).⁷⁷ Further discussions must have ensued, because at the next court they were each formally admitted into a customary virgate on hereditary villein tenure.⁷⁸ A list of their children was formally recorded in the court roll for October 1368, probably to create an unequivocal written record of their servility. John died soon afterwards, so in December 1368 his eldest son, who was also named John, succeeded him in the holding. The lady waived the entry fine, and immediately returned the heriot (a horse) to John junior. However, his mother, the widowed Agnes, was required to swear in court that her children were of full age, and to guarantee that none would either leave the manor or marry without licence.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Oxford, New College, MS 3821, courts held in May and September 1367, and April 1368. For the management of serfdom generally after 1350 at Upper Heyford, see Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 156–67.

⁷⁸ New College, MS 3821, court held in June 1368.

⁷⁹ New College, MS 3821, courts held October and December 1368.

At first glance, and presented in isolation, this appears to be an excellent example of the overt imposition of 'neo-serfdom' upon a serf family. The targeting of the family, the public submissions, the requirement to hold customary land on the old terms, and the formal recording of progeny all seem novel and demeaning. However, upon closer inspection a different perspective emerges. First, the tactic failed. John junior soon fled the manor, followed by two of his brothers, never to return.⁸⁰ Subsequent courts threatened financial penalties for the failure to attach and return the Heyward boys, but never imposed them. Second, this was an isolated incident, and therefore highly atypical of social relations on the manor. The pursuit of the Heywards was confined to a four-year period, and only one other serf on the manor was subjected to anything similar. Finally, it occurred when most hereditary villein tenures were being swept away from Upper Heyford and replaced instead with money rents and tenancies for life. In other words, this event occurred at a time when villeinage was in headlong retreat. If anything, it indicates the *failure* of the lords of this manor to control their serfs or tenants effectively.

This sequence of events is highly revealing in two other ways. The first is that it looks as though a deal had been struck initially between manorial officials and the Heywards to secure their return, which implies that both groups had clear motives for entering into such a negotiation. Manorial officials wanted more tenants to hold land on original villein tenure, because over half of the customary virgates at Upper Heyford had been untenanted in the late 1350s, and even in the mid-1360s only a minority were held on villein tenure.⁸¹ The return of the Heywards might therefore have encouraged other serfs to do the same. John senior's motives can be readily surmised. He chose to return to Upper Heyford in the spring of 1368, because he realized that his death was imminent and his return could secure a landed inheritance for his family. There are a number of hints that an agreement had been reached. The June court of 1368, which marked John's formal return and re-admission, noted that he and William had been in possession of a 'warrant from Robert de Lisle [the previous lord of the manor, and Alice's brother] and his heirs', a terse statement whose purpose seems to have been to legitimize their earlier absence. The lady of the manor's 'generosity' in waiving the entry fine and returning the heriot when John junior entered the holding in December 1368 looks choreographed: in

⁸⁰ New College, MS 3821, courts held October 1371 and May 1372.

⁸¹ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 156–59.

return, the Heywards' servility was publicly confirmed, and Agnes's oath bound the family to stay as serfs following the concessions to John junior.

The second revealing aspect of this case is the explanation given for the absence of the Heyward brothers from the manor from the late 1350s. The April court of 1368 states explicitly that they had been with the lord of nearby Rousham, who was none other than Sir William Sharesull, the principal architect of the government's labour legislation, and so the note that their absence had been warranted by Sir Robert de Lisle let them all off the hook.⁸² It served as a post hoc justification to explain why Sharesull had willingly employed the flown serfs of other local lords on his own manor, rather than insisting upon their return. This case illustrates powerfully that landlords competed with each other for both labourers and tenants, and they were usually pragmatic about, rather than preoccupied with, knotty conflicts of interest.

The Myth of the Seigniorial Reaction

The third quarter of the fourteenth century was unquestionably 'a period of agitation, excitement, anger, antagonism and creativity', and some landlords certainly did react to the shortages of labourers and tenants after 1348–49 by restraining their villeins in various ways and to varying degrees.⁸³ But there are serious doubts about whether this amounted to a seigniorial reaction, or an attempt to impose a second serfdom, in England. Much of the evidence for the reaction is capable of an alternative, more convincing, explanation when examined critically and contextually. The case has also relied excessively upon anecdotal evidence of the *types* of behaviour designed to manipulate the land and labour markets in favour of landlords — such as the physical seizure of serfs, and binding them into novel forms of service — rather than a proper and systematic enumeration of their *scale*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the zealous search for examples of the seigniorial reaction has largely blinded historians to the complete absence of such evidence from many manors and estates.⁸⁵ However,

⁸² New College, MS 3821, courts held in April and June 1368.

⁸³ Dyer, 'New Serfdom', p. 429.

⁸⁴ See, for example, the presentation of examples in Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism*, pp. 72–73; Dyer, 'Social and Economic Background', pp. 23–33; and Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 32–34.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, pp. 30–32, 61–68, and 129; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 227–28; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 307–10. The late Richard

these negative examples must be systematically factored into a balanced assessment of the case for the reaction.⁸⁶ When all of these criticisms are weighed, the concept of the seigniorial reaction in post-plague England is exposed as a myth.

Why, then, did a seigniorial reaction fail to materialize, given that most historians have expected the first reaction of English landlords to the Black Death to be 'repression rather than accommodation'?⁸⁷ One reason is the behaviour of grain and wool prices between *c.* 1350 and *c.* 1375, which were persistently higher than they had been in the 1330s and 1340s. These created economic conditions which immediately after the Black Death helped to protect the landlords' position without the need for them to resort as a class to the heavy-handed impositions of a seigniorial reaction. Villein rents and tenures were adjusted through a variety of approaches, involving negotiation, compromise, and cooperation, as well as some threat and resistance.⁸⁸ Landlords only became vulnerable to the deleterious consequences of declining profits, rental arrears, and shortages of tenants when grain prices fell precipitously and persistently, which did not occur until the mid-1370s. So the economic conditions most unfavourable to landlords, and therefore those most likely to trigger a seigniorial reaction, prevailed during the fourth — not the third — quarter of the fourteenth century. Indeed, there is evidence that a few landlords who had hardly 'reacted' at all during the 1350s and 1360s responded to the economic dip of the 1380s and 1390s with aggressive and provocative policies against targeted serfs.⁸⁹

Another explanation for the failure of a reaction to materialize is that English landlords did not cooperate with each other sufficiently, or act with an effective unity, in their handling of tenants and labourers. This lack of solidarity among lords was a major factor in the failure to control serfs and to maintain serfdom, and their competitiveness severely reduced the effectiveness of the national labour legislation.⁹⁰ Lack of seigniorial solidarity was a major

Britnell commented in a public session at the 2013 Wells conference, upon which this volume to Professor Campbell is based, that he had found no evidence of a seigniorial reaction on any of the manors he researched for his contributions to *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, III, ed. by Miller.

⁸⁶ A point made perceptively in Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 41 and 43.

⁸⁷ Hilton, *Decline of Serfdom*, p. 36.

⁸⁸ Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 230–40.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 299–300, 303–04, and 308–10.

⁹⁰ Dyer, 'New Serfdom', pp. 432–23.

factor behind the retreat from villein tenure, because in the 1350s and 1360s the open competition for tenants of customary land resulted in a raft of tenuous concessions on those manors where tenant shortages were most acute: key incidents, such as tallage and merchet, were dropped from some villein tenures, and swathes of customary land were converted to fixed-term tenures for a straight money rent, as landlords sought to retain existing tenants and to lure new ones from the grasp of other lords.⁹¹ There was no ambitious new legislation to restrict competition for tenants. Instead, landlords were exposed to the forces of supply, demand, and competition in local land markets after the dramatic collapse in population.

What of the traditional view that the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 was mainly a response to oppressive servile conditions on the manor? If, in fact, there was no widespread or effective movement to re-impose serfdom after the Black Death, and if concessions to tenants were widespread, then our attention must turn to the multitude of other factors behind the Revolt. These include the growing intrusion of royal justice into the lives of ordinary people, and the widespread concerns about the quality of that justice, including (but not restricted to) the method of implementation of the new labour legislation, the failure of the war against France, political weakness, court intrigue at the centre of government, and the insolvency of the Crown with its associated fiscal experiments of the 1370s.⁹² As Dyer has remarked, 'to interpret the revolt solely in terms of lord-tenant relationships is to take far too narrow a view of the events in 1381 [...] it is not possible to attribute any single aim to a very heterogeneous group of rebels.'⁹³

Historians have long supposed that the seigniorial reaction, reinforced by an economic 'Indian Summer', counteracted the effects of the first two outbreaks of the Black Death so comprehensively that even this exceptional epidemic had little immediate impact upon the English economy and society.⁹⁴ The acceptance of this orthodoxy has hindered a proper evaluation of the profound structural changes that were occurring within the economy during the 1350s and

⁹¹ See note 17 above, and Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 143–69; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 287–93 and 314–15.

⁹² See, for example, the summaries in Dyer, *Everyday Life*, pp. 214–19; Rigby, *English Society*, pp. 117–24; Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, pp. 230–34, 251–53, and 444–49; and Dyer, *Making a Living*, pp. 286–93.

⁹³ Dyer, *Everyday Life*, pp. 214 and 217; see also Bridbury, *English Economy*, pp. 209–10.

⁹⁴ This established view is summarized in Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath', pp. 3–6; *The Black Death*, trans. and ed. by Horrox, pp. 229–36.

1360s, and it has also obscured the fluidity and complexity of social relations, whether between landlords, or between peasants, or between groups of landlords and groups of peasants. Yet as the orthodox view begins to crumble, so the complex, unexplained, and unresolved characteristics of the period between the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt become increasingly visible.⁹⁵ There is contradictory evidence of collapsing customary land values, yet buoyant grain prices.⁹⁶ There is evidence of dramatic economic and social change immediately after the Black Death, and of highly complex dynamics within lord-peasant relationships.⁹⁷ Bruce Campbell has recently presented evidence which reveals how the weather was both extreme and variable during these decades, adding to the sense of crisis and to the belief that a great economic transition was actually taking place around the middle of the fourteenth century across western Europe, rather than over a generation later.⁹⁸ When all these challenges to the established orthodoxy are combined, they present a compelling case for 'reining back the exuberance with which historians have long sought to undermine the significance of the Black Death'.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Stone, *Decision-Making*, p. 120; Braid, 'Economic Behaviour', p. 357; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 230–40; Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 307–16.

⁹⁶ Bailey, *Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 302–03 and 311–16.

⁹⁷ Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath', pp. 3–35; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 225–40.

⁹⁸ Campbell, 'Grain Yields on English Demesnes', pp. 144–46; Campbell, 'The Great Transition'.

⁹⁹ Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath', p. 32.

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JUSTIFYING INEQUALITY: PEASANTS IN MEDIEVAL IDEOLOGY

Stephen H. Rigby*

Ideology and the Social Order

As is well known, in June 1349, in response to the labour shortage which had been created by the Black Death, the English government issued the Ordinance of Labourers which threatened prosecution and imprisonment to those who took advantage of this situation by demanding ‘excessive wages’. However, what is often forgotten is that, in response to this crisis, the government not only mobilized the powers of coercion which were available to it but also sought to secure compliance with its new legislation by ideological means. The king and council thus wrote to all the bishops of England requesting that their parish clergy should ‘beseech and persuade’ the members of their congregations to observe the Ordinance ‘as instant necessity demands.’¹ This assumption that the transmission of ideology would help to maintain the social order was one which was shared by a number of medieval thinkers who were, after all, very familiar with Scipio’s definition of a commonwealth as a people united ‘by a

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¹ *English Economic History*, ed. by Bland, Brown, and Tawney, pp. 164–67; for the Latin text, see Putnam, *Enforcement of the Statute of Labourers*, pp. 8–12. For the positive response of the bishop of Rochester to the king’s request, see *Registrum Hamonis Hethe*, ed. by Johnson, II, pp. 883–86.

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common sense of right and a community of interest' which had been transmitted to them from Cicero's *On the Republic* by Augustine's *City of God*.² Both John of Salisbury in the twelfth century and Robert Rypon in the fifteenth century thus argued that the unity of the commonwealth depends upon a 'union of wills' and an 'agreement of minds'.³

That social cohesion requires an ideological consensus was not only a key theme of medieval social thought but has also been a central claim of much modern sociological theory. Functionalist sociologists, for instance, present the reproduction of the social order as being dependent upon the internalization by the members of society of a shared set of values or common culture, an approach applied to preindustrial societies, including medieval England, by a number of historians.⁴ A range of Marxist theorists have also argued that the dominance of a specific class within society is never secured by repression alone but also requires some form of ideological hegemony or legitimation which allows it to rule by consent.⁵ Such an approach can also be updated by being given a post-structuralist inflection, with the discourses which are held to have constituted pre-industrial society being seen as creating a situation in which individuals 'appeared fixed' in their hierarchical social positions.⁶ Here our interest is in the relationship between ideology — i.e., any systematic attempt to defend the contemporary social order — and social order in the Middle Ages, particularly in medieval England. In particular, how did medieval thinkers explain and justify the social inferiority experienced by the peasantry and did their ideas have any effects on contemporary social practice?

We survey these issues here in relation to three social theorists whose work illustrates the differences and continuities in justifications of the inequality

² Augustine, *Concerning the City of God*, trans. by Bettenson, IV. 32 (p. 176); XIX. 21 (p. 881).

³ For John of Salisbury, see *Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Policratici*, etc., ed. by Webb [hereafter *Policraticus*] V: 7. For a complete English translation of the text, see *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. by Pike; *The Statesman's Book of John of Salisbury*, ed. by Dickinson. For Robert Rypon, see Fletcher, 'The Unity of the State', pp. 103–37.

⁴ Parsons, *Essays in Sociological Theory*, pp. 56, 69–70, 232, and 325–29; Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, pp. 46–55. For historians who have adopted this approach, see Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 84–86.

⁵ Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, pp. 7–24; Rigby, 'Historical Materialism', pp. 491–92.

⁶ Cabrera, *Postsocial History*, p. 56. For a critique of Cabrera, see Rigby, 'History, Discourse and the Postsocial Paradigm'.

experienced by the peasantry across the Middle Ages. Firstly, we look at the role of the peasantry in John of Salisbury's account of society in terms of the notion of the 'body politic', a metaphor which remained central to social theory for the rest of the medieval period and beyond. Secondly, we explore the impact of Aristotelian justifications of social inequality on medieval social theory by discussing the representation of the peasantry in the thought of Giles of Rome, a writer whose work was very well-known in late-medieval England. Thirdly, we examine the social outlook of Christine de Pizan, another thinker whose views circulated in late-medieval England, in order to see whether, as has been claimed, her work represents a late-medieval change in attitudes towards social hierarchy. Finally, we assess whether ideological justifications of the social inferiority of the peasantry of the kind expounded by John, Giles, and Christine had any actual impact on the reality of social relations in medieval England.

John of Salisbury: The Peasants as the Feet of the Body Politic

For many modern readers, the most familiar medieval view of the social order will probably be that of the 'tripartite conception' of society. Here, as Thomas Wimbledon put it in his sermon *Redde rationem villicationis tue* (c. 1387–89), society is divided into three interdependent orders: the priests, who provide knowledge of God's law; the knights, whose task is to maintain the peace; and the labourers whose toil sustains the rest of society and who, as Wimbledon took for granted, should be 'soget and low' and 'in drede of displesynge' to their lords (1 Peter 2. 18).⁷ One of the many weaknesses of this theory as a realistic account of medieval society was the fact that it forced 95 per cent or more of the population into the single social category of 'those who work' and so blurred the significant differences of wealth, power, status, and economic function amongst them. However, medieval thinkers had a range of other ways of describing society which, while retaining the tripartite theory's stress on the need for reciprocity and hierarchy within the social order, recognized the existence of a much greater variety of status-groups, professions, and occupations.⁸

Perhaps the best known of these alternatives to the tripartite conception is the organic analogy in which the social order was likened to the human body, the founding statement of this outlook being contained in the *Policraticus*

⁷ Wimbledon's Sermon 'Redde rationem villicationis tue', ed. by Knight, lines 38–56, 87–94, 99–103, and 114–15.

⁸ Owst, *Literature and Pulpit*, esp. Chapter 9.

(1159) of John of Salisbury, the first of our three selected authors.⁹ Here, John argued that just as the body's health and survival require the contributions of all of its limbs and organs, so each part of society has to fulfil its own particular 'office' in order for harmony, justice, and reason to be achieved. John equated the position of the prince in society with that of the head in the body in his rule over the other members of the commonwealth, presented the clergy as the body's soul, and described the prince's soldiers and officials as its hands. In this analogy, the peasants (*agricolae*) occupy the place of body's feet which 'always cleave to the soil' and which 'raise, sustain, and move forward the weight of the entire body'. Since the feet perform a vital task for the body but are confronted with stones in their path which may lead them to stumble, they deserve particular care and protection from the head. John therefore reminded the prince of the fate which awaited those who consumed the fruits of the land 'without payment' and so caused the husbandmen to lose their livelihood (see Job 29. 12–13; 31. 16–40).¹⁰

However, for John of Salisbury, the human body did not merely happen to provide a useful metaphor with which to *illustrate* his own preferred social arrangements. Rather, he saw this analogy as constituting an instance of the more general principle that human virtue and social order should be *modelled on* the example of nature. This was an idea which the Middle Ages had inherited from Platonic and Stoic philosophy and which could readily be adopted by Christian theologians who found in God's creation a guide to the divine plan for the world.¹¹ So, for John, nature, which is the 'best guide for life', shows us that, just like the human body, the commonwealth will only enjoy a political health when its 'higher members shield the lower' and, in turn, 'the lower respond faithfully and fully to the just demands of their superiors'.¹²

Nevertheless, the appeal to nature in order to justify particular social arrangements involved a number of problems, as is apparent in John's description of society's humbler members as the 'feet' of the commonwealth. As we have seen, when John presented the husbandmen as the feet of society, he claimed to be

⁹ Archambault, 'The Analogy of the "Body" in Renaissance Political Literature'. For a useful introduction to John's thought, with bibliographical guidance, see Nederman, *John of Salisbury*.

¹⁰ *Policraticus*, IV. 1; V. 2, 4, 6, 9–11; VI. 1, 20, 22.

¹¹ For references, see Rigby, *Wisdom and Chivalry*, pp. 239, 244–45 and Rigby, *Chaucer in Context*, pp. 83–84.

¹² *Policraticus*, II. 12; IV. 6; VI. 20.

using the human body as a model for the body politic. Yet, he then went on to argue that while, in certain respects, the commonwealth resembles a human body, with a head, soul, two hands, and so on, it also has so many different productive occupations, including cloth-making, wood-working, metal-working, and many other menial tasks, that it possesses more feet than a centipede, feet which have to be 'shod' by society's magistrates in order that they may be protected from wrongs and afflictions.¹³ As is evident from the bizarre creature which John's analogy generated, rather than showing how the body politic was in line with nature, what John actually did was to come up with a body which was found nowhere in nature by projecting onto it the characteristics which he thought human society should possess. The result was a circular logic which, rather than justifying contemporary social inequalities, largely took them for granted: the peasants should be in a lowly social status because they are the 'feet' of the body politic but, in turn, they are seen as the feet because they are lowly and humble in social reality.

Giles of Rome: The Peasantry and Distributive Justice

The problems involved in arguments made on the basis of natural analogies are apparent in the thought of Giles of Rome, the thirteenth-century Aristotelian philosopher.¹⁴ His *De regimine principum* (c. 1280) was one of the most famous medieval 'mirrors for princes'. It circulated widely in late medieval England in both its original Latin version and its French translation by Henri de Gauchy (c. 1282) and was also translated into Middle English by John Trevisa (c. 1392–1402).¹⁵ At one point in this work, Giles discussed whether Plato's and Socrates's claim that women should be taught to do deeds of arms could find support from the example of birds of prey, amongst whom the females are stronger and braver than the males.¹⁶ In rejecting this line of argument, Giles

¹³ *Policraticus*, VI. 20.

¹⁴ For bibliographical guidance on Giles's work, see Del Punta, Donati, and Luna, 'Egidio Romano'.

¹⁵ For the *De regimine principum*, I have used the 1607 edition printed in Rome, published in facsimile as Giles of Rome, *Egidio Colonna (Aegidius Romanus), De regimine principum libri III*, and the Middle English translation by John Trevisa, published as *The Governance of Kings and Princes* ed. by Fowler, Briggs, and Remley (hereafter *Governance*), which gives the book, part and chapter of the original Latin version. For Henri de Gauchy's version (which does not keep to Giles's original chapter divisions), see Giles of Rome, *Li livres du gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, II. 2 (pp. 39–40).

concluded that while animals can sometimes provide humans with moral or social lessons, we should, nonetheless, not follow them in things which — as in the case of female aggressiveness — they do ‘without reason’.¹⁷ The problem with Giles’s argument was that if we can know, *a priori*, on the basis of ‘reason’, how society should be organized, then why would we need to appeal to nature as a guide for human behaviour in the first place?

Giles’s implicit answer to this question was that while nature can indeed be seen as a model for human virtue and social order, this was not merely because certain aspects of nature — such as the primacy of the head within the body or the aggressiveness of female birds of prey — can conveniently be cited in order to justify the particular social arrangements which we happen to favour.¹⁸ Rather, as a follower of Aristotle, Giles believed that nature (both as a whole and in its individual parts) necessarily possessed a specific form so that there is an inevitable homology between the structure of the cosmos or of the human body on the one hand and the rightful ordering of human society on the other.¹⁹ Two main aspects of this natural order as set out by Giles in his *De regimine principum* (and also in his *De ecclesiastica potestate* (1302)) are important here.²⁰ Firstly, what nature shows us is the superiority of diversity over simple unity. Thus, although unity *was* an ideal for Giles, one based on the nature of God who rules over all things, the unity which he favoured was not a simple uniformity, but rather, as in both Aristotle’s natural philosophy and Augustine’s neo-Platonism, involved the organic interdependence of a multiplicity of different parts, a ‘harmonious union in plurality’.²¹ Secondly, however, Giles acknowledged that such diversity constituted a potential threat to rightful order because of the possibility for conflict which it contained: where there is multiplicity, there is also confusion.²² For Giles, such confusion could only be turned into harmony if each thing was in its own proper place and, in

¹⁷ *Governance*, pp. 192, 298, 306–07, 311, and 327.

¹⁸ *Governance*, pp. 77, 120, 161, 190, 330, 367, 372, and 377.

¹⁹ On Giles’s cosmography, see Rigby, ‘Aristotle for Aristocrats and Poets’, pp. 267–73.

²⁰ *Giles of Rome’s On Ecclesiastical Government*, ed. by Dyson (hereafter *On Ecclesiastical Government*).

²¹ *Governance*, pp. 11, 58–59, 173, 193, 211, 234, 285, 295–301, 327, and 411. For references to Aristotle and Augustine, see Rigby, *Wisdom and Chivalry*, pp. 244–45.

²² *Governance*, pp. 193, 278, 280, and 327; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, p. 279. For the saying that ‘where there is multitude, there is confusion’, see *The Theodosian Code and Novels*, ed. by Pharr, 9. 45. 4. 3.

particular, if it was ranked within a hierarchically-ordered whole. Those things which are less excellent or perfect, and which are possessed of fewer powers, should therefore always serve and be subordinated to those which are higher and more perfect. For instance, water and the earth nourish plants which, in turn, feed animals, while humans enjoy the use of both plants and animals which have been created for their benefit.²³

For Giles, just as diversity and hierarchy were the basis of order within the universe as a whole, so they were necessarily the foundation of a properly ordered human society. As they are social animals, humans can only survive when they co-operate with their fellows through a social division of labour between, for instance, those who hunt, those who fish, those who till the earth, those who keep animals, and those who exercise specialized crafts and trades.²⁴ However, this social diversity is only properly ordered when its elements are ranked hierarchically. Indeed, since Giles equated uniformity with equality, diversity then became synonymous with inequality so that the self-evident need for difference within society became, in itself, a justification of the need for social hierarchy. As Giles concluded, the political community necessarily requires the diversity whereby some men are lords and others are subjects.²⁵ Just as the soul has supremacy over the human body, so no human community is properly ordered unless its chief and sovereign members rule over those who should be subject and obedient. For instance, the husband should be set over the wife, the father over his children, and the lord over the servant. It is thus beneficial for everyone within society when those who are superior are served by those who are inferior as when, to give Giles's own examples, men have lordship over women, the old have lordship over the young, and the nobles have lordship over the peasants (Latin: *rustici*; French: *vileins*; Middle English: 'cherles').²⁶ Thus, while stressing the need for the social justice in which each man receives 'his due', Giles also

²³ *Governance*, pp. 8, 35–36, 38–39, 50–51, 120–21, 146, 161–63, 175, 193, 211, 216, 226, 234, 259–60, 263, 273–74, 278, 280, 291, 327, 336, 367–71, 387, and 391; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, pp. 19, 25–27, 39, 57, 117–29, 165, 217, 221–23, 229–43, 249–51, 261, 279–81, 287, 295, 307, 336, 367, and 391.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, I. 1–2 (pp. 12–14); *Governance*, pp. 8, 13, 58–59, 98, 161–63, 169, 173, 226, 234, 256–57, 262–63, 274, 288–95, 297, 301, 310–11, 363, 371, and 383–84.

²⁵ *Governance*, pp. 299–300; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, pp. 19, 25–27, 51, 57, 191, 217, 233–43, and 279–81.

²⁶ *Governance*, pp. 50–51, 122, 138, 150, 170–76, 190, 211, 255, 259–63, 273–77, 280–83, 297–99, 301–06, 333, 345, 385, and 411; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, pp. 19,

followed Aristotle in arguing that the principle of 'distributive justice', in which the members of society are rewarded according to their social worth and rank, meant that people's rightful due, in terms of their allocation of wealth, status, and power, would not be an equal one. Rather, as Aristotle had said, all political communities would inevitably and necessarily be divided into three parts, the rich, the poor, and those in between.²⁷

Yet, if Giles offered a defence of social and political hierarchy in general, this still left open the issue of why it was men, the old, and the nobles were to enjoy a social superiority whereas women, the young, and — our main interest here — the peasantry were to be subordinate to them. Many medieval thinkers sought a biblical defence of the peasants' subjection, arguing that serfdom in general had originated in Noah's curse (Genesis 9. 22–27) that the descendants of his son, Ham, should, as the early fifteenth-century *Dives and Pauper* put it, be 'thral and bonde' to his other sons and to their descendants.²⁸ Alternatively, serfdom could be accounted for by specific historical events, as in France, Catalonia, and Hungary where hereditary servitude was said to have originated as a punishment for cowardice in time of war.²⁹ Giles, by contrast, sought to explain the social inequality between lord and peasant in more general terms by making an appeal to 'reason' and by invoking the authority of Aristotle.

Giles's first justification of the peasant's social inferiority was that those who perform deeds of arms to defend the community are 'more noble and worthy' and should enjoy a greater 'dignity' than those who plough the soil. Thus, while Giles believed that all citizens (*cives*) had an obligation to defend their country, he nonetheless distinguished those who had the right and the duty to bear arms, and who were noble or gentle, from those lesser members of society who tilled the land or worked with their hands and who did not play a part in 'civil life'. Since those who defended the community were more noble and worthy

25–37, 57, 59, 93, 97, 169, 191, 217, 233–43, 259–61, 279–81, 287, 307, and 391; *Li livres des gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer, p. 242.

²⁷ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by Rackham, V. i. 8, 10; V. ii. 12–13; V. v. 17–18; V. ix. 9; 17–18; Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, III. 9 (p. 73); III. 12 (p. 79); IV. 2 (p. 107); *Governance*, pp. 28, 53–60, 70, 76, 100, 123, 186–87, 193, 207, 252–55, 264–65, 272, 280–82, 295, 301, 312–15, 330, 336, 339–40, 347, 350, 375, 385–88, and 411; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, p. 139; Rigby, *Wisdom and Chivalry*, pp. 40–41.

²⁸ Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, pp. 86–88, 99–100; *Dives and Pauper, Volume I, Part I*, ed. by Barnum, p. 305–06.

²⁹ Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, pp. 110–26. For such arguments in relation to England, see pp. 126–30.

than others, it was only just that they should enjoy a larger share of society's total product.³⁰ The assumption that certain members of the community are inherently superior to others is also evident in Giles's criticism of Socrates's and Plato's contention that the members of a community should hold their wives and children in common. Against this claim, Giles argued that if the children of the noblemen (*nobiles*) who defend the city had the 'same keeping' as those of the children of peasants (Latin: '*agricole*'; French: '*vileins et gaaigneors de terre*'; Middle English: 'plow₃ men') and 'foul persons' (*persone viles*), this would lead to the absurdity that those who were noble would be despised while those who were foul would receive excessive 'worship'. True social harmony arises not from strict equality but rather when, in line with the principle of distributive justice, each man, whether he is 'gentle', 'noble', 'good', 'worthy', and a knight, or is 'foul', 'unworthy', and a ploughman, is rewarded in proportion to his own particular estate as when the non-noble serves the noble and, in return, is paid in relation to his specific service.³¹

Giles's second defence of the need for the inequality of the peasants drew more directly on Aristotle's *Politics*. As Max Weber said, those who enjoy wealth, status, and power within society usually justify their superiority in terms of a particular 'status-legend' which appeals to some 'special and intrinsic quality' of those who are privileged.³² The specific status-legend on which Giles relied was the Aristotelian argument that those who enjoy power within society deserve to do so as they are its wiser and more rational part.³³ Just as God rules all of Creation with his prudence and wisdom, and just as the rationality of humans makes them lords over the other animals, so amongst humans, it is natural that, for their own good, the unwise, simple, and foolish are subject to those who are wise, prudent, and good.³⁴ Giles applied this principle of rule by those of superior intellect over those of lesser wit to a number of different social relationships including those between ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and child, and master and servant.³⁵ In particular, he argued that gentlemen are generally wiser and more intelligent than *rustici*, *vileins*, or 'cherles', as

³⁰ *Governance*, pp. 223, 244, 292, 306–11, 317–18, and 397.

³¹ *Governance*, pp. 260–61, 297–98, 301–04, 306, 309–11, and 397; Giles of Rome, *Li livres du gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer, p. 277.

³² Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions', p. 276.

³³ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, I. 5, 13; VII. 14; *On Ecclesiastical Government*, p. 1.

³⁴ *Governance*, pp. 3, 50–51, 169, 173, 175, 211–12, 263, and 273–75.

³⁵ *Governance*, pp. 129, 170–71, 175–76, 194, 242–43, 274, and 382.

can be seen from the fact that they have the wiles which, even more than physical strength, are needed for victory in battle, especially for mounted combat.³⁶ In all of these cases, subordination and even 'thralldom' are natural and useful, even to those who are in the inferior position.³⁷ Giles's defence of social hierarchy was thus based on Aristotle's claim that, 'from the hour of their births, some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule.'³⁸

Given this outlook, Giles rejected the argument, one which could find support in Justinian's *Institutes*, that 'thralldom' (*servitus*), was invalid as, by the law of nature, all men, from the creation of the world onwards, had been 'born free'.³⁹ Against this logic, Giles countered that what was natural or unnatural could actually be understood in two different senses. Firstly, referring to something as 'unnatural' could mean that it was not a direct gift of nature (as, for example, wild herbs are) but was instead produced by human skill and labour; secondly, what was unnatural could also be defined as that which was against reason. Thus, although clothing is unnatural in the first sense, since all men are born naked, it is entirely natural in the second sense because it is based on reason and serves the common good. Similarly, in this second sense, it is not against the law of nature that some men rule as lords while others serve and are obedient to them as this too is rational and maximizes the common good.⁴⁰

One problem with Giles's justification of the superiority of the nobility over the peasants was that his Aristotelian socio-biology could be seen as conflicting with the Christian belief in the spiritual equality of all humans (Galatians 3. 28; Colossians 3. 11) and with the orthodox Christian claim that true nobility is constituted by one's inner virtue rather than by one's family and birth.⁴¹ After all, Giles himself distinguished between, on the one hand, the 'outer' nobility associated with one's lineage, wealth, and power and, on the other, the superior nobility of those whose inner goodness means that they surpass other men in their virtues.⁴² Yet, in practice, any egalitarian implications that could be drawn from Giles's claims for the primacy of moral worth over noble birth

³⁶ Giles of Rome, *Li livres du gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer, pp. 379–81; *Governance*, pp. 402–03.

³⁷ *Governance*, pp. 98–99, 273–75, 277, 284.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, I. 5 (p. 16).

³⁹ *Institutes of Justinian*, ed. by Moyle, I. ii. 2; I. iii. 2.

⁴⁰ *Governance*, p. 382.

⁴¹ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. by Stewart, Rand, and Tester, III, prose VI: 22–24; III, metre VI: 7–9; Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 321.

⁴² *Governance*, pp. 150, 280–81, and 385.

were almost immediately undercut by his contention that, in fact, those who are of noble blood are, in general, also more virtuous in their behaviour than other people, a tendency which, he claimed, therefore explained the common equation which was made between the two kinds of nobility.⁴³

For Giles, social nobility and moral superiority tend to be connected for three main reasons. Firstly, just as humans are born from other humans and animals from other animals, and just as humans who are physically immature are likely to produce a feeble child, so those who are prudent, virtuous and wise commonly produce similar offspring. Giles here simply assumes that those of superior prudence are the ones who have initially been ennobled before passing this virtue on to their descendants.⁴⁴ Secondly, Giles argued that even when superior wisdom is not inherited, the children of those who are noble will nonetheless tend to act more nobly because of their desire to emulate their ancestors in their moral worth. In particular, the fact that those of noble status are commonly in the public eye means that they are likely to be more ashamed to commit evil deeds than are other men. Thus, because the nobles (*nobiles*) have a greater love of honour and fear of dishonour than those who are peasants (*rurales*), they are likely to make better fighters since they are more ashamed to flee in battle.⁴⁵ Hence 'courtesy' is so-called because it is linked with the courts of the noble and great men of the realm. Such 'courtesy' is not simply a matter of good manners but is also linked with the moral virtues of liberality, magnificence, temperance, chastity, and affability. By contrast, *rustici*, *vileins*, or 'cherles' who lead a solitary life, tend to be, as Trevisa's translation of Giles's text puts it, 'boistous' (i.e. coarse) and 'boynardes' (i.e. fools or scoundrels).⁴⁶

Finally, Giles also offered a physiological explanation of the superior wisdom and virtue of those who are of noble social status. As we have seen, Giles assumes that lords in general are men of superior wisdom but, following Aristotle, he argued that those who enjoy such wisdom are generally lacking in physical strength. It is those with what Trevisa calls 'nesch' and 'tendre' flesh

⁴³ *Governance*, pp. 280–81.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, I. 7 (p. 18); *Governance*, pp. 47–48, 150–51, 189, 195, and 280–81.

⁴⁵ Rigby, 'Worthy but Wise?', pp. 354–61.

⁴⁶ *Governance*, pp. 43, 97–98, 150–52, 211, 280–83, 333, and 402–03; Giles of Rome, *Li livres du gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer, pp. 136–37. On the 'churlish' lack of courtesy, see the *Gest of Robyn Hode* (in *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, ed. by Dobson and Taylor), stanza 227 (p. 95); on churlish dishonesty, see *Wimbleton's Sermon* 'Redde rationem villicationis tue', ed. by Knight, line 274.

who have the sharpest wits whereas a man with great bodily strength generally lacks the wisdom which is required for the self-rule that is the basis of virtue. As we have seen, it profits the servant to be subject to a lord who is 'prudent and wise'. Accordingly, just as humans, with their greater rationality, have the right to 'wage war' against the animals who are their inferiors, and just as those nations whose inhabitants are wise and rational can conquer those barbaric peoples who lack the use of reason, so the citizens (*cives*) of a community have the right to wage war against its *rustici, vileins*, or 'cherles', 'if they will not remain subject to them'.⁴⁷ Giles was therefore able to reconcile his claim that true nobility was derived from one's deeds rather than one's lineage with a belief in the moral and social superiority of those of 'noble blood'.⁴⁸

Christine de Pizan: A New View of the Peasantry?

As we have seen, from John of Salisbury onwards, medieval thinkers often invoked the organic analogy in order to show that society should be composed of a variety of interdependent but hierarchically arranged parts. However, Cary Nederman has argued that the later Middle Ages witnessed a move away from the traditional 'head-orientated conception' of the body politic towards a more 'inclusive, reciprocal, and interdependent conception of the community'. This shift is said to be particularly evident in the work of Christine de Pizan, especially her *Livre du corps de policie* (c. 1404–07), a text which was translated into English later in the fifteenth century. Nederman thus emphasizes how Christine valued the contribution to society made by the common people, defended them against the disdain of their social superiors and insisted on the duty of the king to consider the impact of his policies upon those who are least able to protect themselves.⁴⁹ Given Christine's fame for her defence of women against the misogyny which characterized so much medieval thought,

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Everson, I. 5; I. 8 (p. 21); VII. 14 (p. 188); *Governance*, pp. 3, 50–51, 73, 170–71, 193–94, 244–45, 263, 274, 284, and 399–400; Giles of Rome, *Li livres du gouvernement des rois*, ed. by Molenaer, p. 242.

⁴⁸ *Governance*, pp. 17, 49–51, 73, 101, 110, 119, 124, 153, 177–78, 186–87, 212, 244, 281–82, 384–87, and 395.

⁴⁹ Nederman, 'Body Politics', pp. 59–61, 63–68, 73–78, and 80–87; Nederman, 'Living Body Politic', pp. 19–26, and 32–33; Nederman, 'Expanding Body Politic', pp. 387–90. For Christine's text and its translations, see Christine de Pizan, *Le livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy; *Middle English Translation of Christine de Pizan's Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Bornstein; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan.

it is hardly surprising that a number of scholars have sought to demonstrate the continuing 'relevance' and 'significance' of her work for modern audiences and to interpret her social and political outlook as being in some sense inclusive, democratic, or egalitarian.⁵⁰

It is certainly true that Christine's work stresses the importance of the lower orders of society. She described those who till the earth as being the 'most necessary' of all the estates since they 'feed and nourish' their fellows: without their efforts, 'the world would end in little time'. Indeed, rather than adopting the traditional teaching that labour was a punishment with which mankind had been cursed after its expulsion from Paradise (Genesis 3. 17), Christine claimed that, even before the Fall, God had put Adam in the Garden of Eden 'to work, cultivate and take care of it' (Genesis 2. 15).⁵¹ Just as many of the Old Testament patriarchs, including Noah (Genesis 9. 20), were 'cultivators of the earth and shepherds of beasts' so Christine believed that the ranks of the poor in her own day included 'many good and worthy persons in purity of life'.⁵² Christine also sympathised with the suffering experienced by the common people of France, advising the king to protect those who were being robbed by his own soldiers who, for lack of pay, cruelly despoiled their fellow countrymen.⁵³ Similarly, in her *Livre des trois vertus*, which offers guidance on how the women of each social class should conduct themselves, she advises princesses not to permit their officials 'to take anything from the people against their will or at an unfair price' and to ensure that 'the poor people of the villages and other places' are paid promptly for their produce.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For detailed bibliographical guidance to works on Christine's social theory, see Rigby, 'The Body Politic in the Social and Political Thought of Christine de Pizan'. For references to Christine's defence of women, see Rigby, 'The Wife of Bath, Christine de Pizan and the Medieval Case for Women'.

⁵¹ Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, p. 64.

⁵² Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I (p. 3); I. 1; II (p. 58); III (p. 90); III. 1; III. 8–10; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I (p. 1); I. 1; II (p. 57), III (p. 91); III. 1; III. 8–10; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, III. 37; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, ed. by Solente, lines 4071–4128, 5131–6580.

⁵³ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I. 9, 11; III. 10; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I. 9, 11; III. 10; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, I. 9 (pp. 16–17); I. 11 (p. 20); III. 10 (p. 109); Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. by Willard and Willard, I. XIV (p. 41); III. VII (p. 152).

⁵⁴ Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des trois vertus*, ed. by Willard and Hicks, I. 20, 23; Christine

Nevertheless, despite Christine's sympathy for the poor, when we examine her social outlook in detail, what is most apparent is the continuity of her views with those which had previously been set out in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* and Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, works with which she herself was extremely familiar. Christine based her social theory on the traditional claim that each of the estates — the nobles, clergy, merchants, artisans, peasants, and labourers (French: *simples laboureaux de terre*; Middle English: 'labourers of the erthe'; 'erthe tyllers') — had the responsibility to carry out its 'own part' for the common good, each serving in 'whatever office God has placed them'. Once society was organized in this way, with everything in its own 'proper place', the order of the political community would mirror the divinely-ordained harmony which characterized the universe and which was to be found amongst the ranks of the angels in heaven.⁵⁵ Thus, although her individual works could differ on which particular parts of society should be equated with the shoulders, hands, belly, or thighs of the body politic, they consistently present the prince as the head of the body in his control of its other limbs and the common people as its legs and feet which should be subject to the head.⁵⁶

In line with this outlook, Christine favoured obedience and deference throughout society: barons should not rebel against the king who is their superior; a wife, even one who is a princess, should humbly and uncomplainingly obey her husband; nuns should submit to their abbesses and prioresses; and servants and labourers should faithfully serve their masters, mistresses, and employers.⁵⁷

de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, ed. by Lawson, I. 19, 22. See also Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, II. 6, 9, 22; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. by Solente, I. 62, 83, 133; Christine de Pizan, *La lamentacion sur les maux de la France*, ed. by Kennedy, pp. 184–85; Christine de Pizan, *Lamentation on the Woes of France*, ed. by Willard, p. 308; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. by Willard and Willard, I. IV.

⁵⁵ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I. 1, 10–11; II. 1; III. 1, 8–10; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I. 1, 10–11; II. 1, III. 1, 8–10; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, II. 1; III. 2, 6, 9, 10, 40; *Middle English Translation of Christine de Pizan's Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Bornstein, III. 9–10; Christine de Pizan, *Epistre de la prison de la vie humaine*, ed. by Kennedy, XI.

⁵⁶ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I. 1, 12, 16, 19, 21; II. 1; III. 1, 9; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I. 1, 12, 16, 19, 21; II. 1; III. 1, 9; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, III. 6; Christine de Pizan, *Le chemin de longue étude*, ed. by Tarnowski, lines 5493–5504.

⁵⁷ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, ed. by Lawson, I. 7–8, 8; II. 13; III. 9, 12; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des trois vertus*, ed. by Willard and Hicks, I. 8–9; II. 13; III. 9, 12.

She therefore rejected the claim that the common people should have an active role in government on the basis that rule by the many was 'too large to be good' and would lead to confusion, instability, and injustice.⁵⁸ When the lower orders refused to accept their place in society, as in the French Jacquerie, Christine attacked these troublemakers as the 'worms of the earth' and as an 'abominable, poisonous mass of vermin' who were like a 'plague' on the land.⁵⁹ Thus, while Christine presented the 'simple labourers' who tilled the earth as the 'most necessary' of all the members of the body politic, she did not conclude that those who fed society should be its most highly rewarded group. Rather, it was the nobles and knights, who were 'wise in government and diligent in chivalrous pursuits' and who risked their lives to defend the prince and his subjects, who were particularly owed 'love, honour, and great reward' by the prince.⁶⁰

Accordingly, although Christine adopted the traditional definition of justice as 'a measure which renders to each man his due', she, like John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, also argued that such 'equity' required that this 'due' should not be an equal one.⁶¹ As she says in the *Livre des trois vertus*, although all temporal wealth and social rank come to us from God, He 'has not divided the wealth equally' or given equal honour to each social position. Naturally, this did not mean that that God's distribution of wealth was 'unjust'. Rather, such inequality allowed the rich to demonstrate their virtue by giving char-

⁵⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, III. 2, 9, 12; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, III. 2, 9, 12; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. by Willard and Willard, I. IX; III. VII.

⁵⁹ Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de l'advison Cristine*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, I. 10; Christine de Pizan, *Vision of Christine de Pizan*, ed. McLeod and Willard, I. 10; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de la mutacion de Fortune*, ed. by Solente, lines 4071–4128.

⁶⁰ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I. 28–29; II. 2–21; III. 10; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I. 28–29; II. 2–21; III. 10; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. by Willard and Willard, I. I (p. 12); I. II (p. 14); I. IV (pp. 16–17); I. IX (pp. 29–30); III. I (p. 144); III. III (p. 146); III. XIII (p. 163); Christine de Pizan, *Le livre de l'advison Cristine*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, II. 19; Christine de Pizan, *Vision of Christine de Pizan*, ed. by McLeod and Willard, II. 19; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. Green, Mews, and Pinder II. 1–3; I. 10; II. 17; III. 3, 13–14; Christine de Pizan, *Cent ballades*, ed. by Roy, LXIV; Christine de Pizan, *Epistre de la prison de la vie humaine*, ed. by Kennedy, III, IX.

⁶¹ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. by Forhan, I. 19, 21, 29; Christine de Pizan, *Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Kennedy, I. 19, 21, 29; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, I. 5; Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, ed. by Solente I. 63.

ity to those who were less fortunate while also providing the poor man with the opportunity to be ‘crowned with the diadem of patience’ in return for his ‘long suffering’. Thus, although a wealthy princess or lady should be charitable, she was not obliged to give away everything she owned to the poor if she did not so wish but could lawfully retain her wealth to as to support her rank and to pay her servants.⁶² Christine therefore denied that Christ’s teachings that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor and that ‘a rich man can no more enter paradise than a laden camel can go through the eye of a needle’ (Matthew 5. 3; 19. 24) meant that it was impossible for a rich person to achieve salvation. Instead, she argued that it was the ‘person who has riches without virtues and who does not distribute his riches in alms and in good deeds’ whom Christ had condemned. If someone is virtuous, he or she becomes ‘poor of spirit and will possess the Kingdom of Heaven’ even if they have enjoyed wealth, honour, and power in this world. In line with these views, Christine urged peasant women (*simples femmes de labour es villages*) to remind their husbands that when they were working for someone else, they should labour ‘as well and as faithfully as if they were doing it for themselves’. They should not defraud their masters when they paid their rents, cut down timber from somebody else’s forest without permission or deceive their masters about their rightful pay since if they do such things ‘they will be damned’. Similarly, while noblewomen should be compassionate to the poor, they should also ensure, when managing their estates, that they are not tricked by their tenants and labourers but should supervise their workers so that they do not slacken, while in the winter-time they should take advantage of the fact that labour is less in demand and so ‘is cheap’. Thus, while advising charity to the rich, Christine also enjoined hard work and patience on the part of the poor so that they may achieve joy in the next world where they would ‘lack for nothing’.⁶³

Indeed, at times, Christine, like Giles of Rome, even argued for the nobility’s moral superiority. In the *Livre de paix*, Christine made the orthodox Christian claim that all humans are ‘equal in terms of creation and birth’ and that it is better to be humble but virtuous than to be of noble birth and yet act

⁶² Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, ed. by Lawson, I. 7, 9, 10, 11, 18; II. 9, 11; III. 2, 3; Christine de Pizan, *Livre des trois vertus*, ed. by Willard and Hicks, I. 8, 10, 12, 19; II. 9, 11; III. 2, 3.

⁶³ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, ed. by Lawson, I. 3, 5–6, 9, 11, 16, 18, 22; II. 10; III. 1, 3, 12–13; Christine de Pizan, *Livre des trois vertus*, ed. by Willard and Hicks, I. 4, 6–7, 10, 12, 17, 19, 23; II. 10; III. 1, 3, 12–13; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, III. 26, 45.

basely. Nevertheless, God has willed that there should be those in society who are marked out by their noble lineage and amongst whom, 'by long habit of difference in rank, the practice of a distinct kind of greatness of spirit from that found in others becomes second nature. Or it should do so, for those who fail in this regard dishonour their ancestry. This is shown by the beasts and birds: some are noble and others not'. As a result of this superior 'greatness of spirit', the other social orders should defer to them, being 'humble' beneath the rule of their superiors and working hard in their estate.⁶⁴ Thus, although it is certainly true that Christine believed that there was a 'natural equilibrium' within the body politic and that no part of the social body was entitled to a 'disproportionate' allocation of society's common resources, such views neither 'stretched' nor 'subverted' conventional social and political doctrines nor did they mark a break with the traditional, hierarchical and 'head-orientated conception' of the body politic whose assumptions remained central to much of the political philosophy of the later Middle Ages.⁶⁵

Ideology and Social Reality

Whilst differing in the specific arguments by which they justified the social inferiority of the peasantry, thinkers such as John of Salisbury, Giles of Rome and Christine de Pizan all sought to show that while society was made up of multiple interdependent parts, these parts had necessarily to be ranked hierarchically and to demonstrate that social reciprocity and social inequality actually went hand in hand. Their works present us with a fascinating insight into modes of thought which are often very different from those which we now take for granted. However, these thinkers can also be seen as providing us with classic examples of what Marxist theorists have characterized as society's 'dominant ideology'.⁶⁶ Ideological thought usually works by investing positive but indeterminate abstractions with a socially-loaded content, as when 'justice', 'reason', and 'nature' were invoked by medieval thinkers in order to justify the need for the social inferiority of the peasantry. By these means, what were, in reality, historically-transient social relations were passed off as being eternally valid, as

⁶⁴ *Governance*, pp. 280–82; 333: Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Peace*, ed. by Green, Mews, and Pinder, II. 1; III. 10, 40. See also Christine de Pizan, *The Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*, ed. by Willard and Willard, I. VII (p. 24); Christine de Pizan, *Une epistre a la royne de France*, ed. by Wisman, p. 76; Le Ninan, *Le sage roi et la clergesse*, p. 370.

⁶⁵ Nederman, 'Living Body Politic', pp. 21–22, 24, and 26; Nederman, 'Body Politics', p. 61.

⁶⁶ See references in note 5, above.

being natural or divinely sanctioned, while potential conflicts of class interest were glossed over by presenting social inequalities as being beneficial for all members of society, even those who, like the peasants, were socially inferior.⁶⁷ A final issue we thus have to consider is whether such modes of argument had any real impact on contemporary social relations. Was the internalization of such hierarchical cultural values on the part of the peasants or their acceptance of a 'dominant ideology' central to the maintenance of order within medieval society? Did such discourses constitute a functionalist 'common culture' which encouraged the peasants toward a deferential acceptance of asocial hierarchy within which their social positions appeared fixed?

A first problem with the view that the role of culture/ideology/discourse is central to the maintenance of social stability is that while it is relatively easy for historians and sociologists to study how medieval social thought was transmitted in the form of political treatises, sermons, or works of imaginative literature, it is much more difficult to assess how such ideas were actually received.⁶⁸ Yet, it would seem that, in practice, rather than passively accepting the ideology which sought to reconcile them to the existing social order, medieval peasants and labourers were active social agents who, given the opportunity, were perfectly willing to ignore such ideological teachings and, instead, sought to improve their position, with their actions having a fundamental impact on long-term social and economic change.⁶⁹ For instance, while, as we saw above, the English government sought the assistance of the Church to obtain compliance with its new labour laws in the years after the Black Death, the fact that in 1352 as many as 7556 people were fined in Essex for contravening the labour legislation, the equivalent of a quarter of the labouring population of the county, suggests that this ideological campaign had not been entirely successful.⁷⁰

Secondly, even when social conflict is not overt, this does not necessarily mean that the bulk of the population has accepted or internalized some dominant ideology. Rather, a lack of social protest may simply be the product of a fear of the consequences of social disobedience, of the difficulties of organizing widespread revolt, or of the fact that most people are normally preoccupied

⁶⁷ Rigby, *Marxism and History*, pp. 287–88.

⁶⁸ For imaginative literature as ideology, see Rigby, 'England: Literature and Society'; and Rigby, 'Reading Chaucer', pp. 10–14.

⁶⁹ Rigby, 'English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict'; Rigby, 'Approaches to Pre-Industrial Social Structure', pp. 7–12.

⁷⁰ Given-Wilson, 'The Problem of Labour', p. 86.

with the 'dull economic compulsion' of securing their daily living.⁷¹ Indeed, as James Scott has shown, the deferential public acceptance of hierarchy by social inferiors is, in practice, often also accompanied by a 'hidden transcript' of dissent and resistance as, for instance, when, in the words of Chaucer's Parson, servants 'grucche' and 'murmure prively' against the lawful commands of their lords even when they dare not 'openly withseye' them.⁷² Alternatively, peasants and labourers might, as Christine de Pizan pointed out, express their social resistance by working slowly or by adopting various methods of defrauding their masters.⁷³ As religious manuals such as the late fourteenth-century *Of Shrifte and Penance* taught, to harm one's lord by working slowly was to break God's commandment against theft and so priests were required to enquire of their parishioners in confession whether they had worked 'feebly and remissly', had failed to perform their labour services, or had murmured words of complaint when rebuked for their slackness.⁷⁴

A third criticism of the view that medieval ideology was a force which helped to contain popular unrest is that, in a society with limited literacy and no mass media, much of this ideology was not actually aimed at the general population but was rather addressed to an audience of the socially privileged. For instance, copies of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum* were owned in late medieval England by nobles such as Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, and Thomas, Lord Berkeley.⁷⁵ Similarly, Christine's *Livre du corps de policie* was originally written for the French Dauphin, Louis de Guyenne, and was perhaps translated into English by Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers (d. 1483).⁷⁶ It would seem that, as Weber put it, those who enjoy good fortune within society are 'seldom satisfied' with the mere fact of being fortunate but also desire the reassurance that this good fortune is legitimate, deserved and just.⁷⁷ In other words, ideology, par-

⁷¹ Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner, *Dominant Ideology Thesis*, pp. 57, 72, and 156–60.

⁷² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Chaucer, 'Parson's Tale', X, 505–57. For a contrasting view, see Cohn, *Lust for Liberty*, pp. 25–27, and 147.

⁷³ Carlin, 'Cheating the Boss'. See also note 63, above.

⁷⁴ *Of Shrifte and Penance*, ed. by Bitterling, p. 61; *Social Life in Britain from the Conquest to the Reformation*, ed. by Coulton, pp. 341–42.

⁷⁵ Briggs, *Giles of Rome's De regimine principum*, pp. 2, 6, 60–62, 71, and 94.

⁷⁶ For Woodville, see *Middle English Translation of Christine de Pisan's Livre du corps de policie*, ed. by Bornstein, pp. 31–36.

⁷⁷ Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions', pp. 267–71, 276, 279, 283–84, and 290; Weber, *Economy and Society*, I, pp. 491–99; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 59.

ticularly in pre-industrial societies, has other functions besides that of pacifying the population as a whole.

A final reason why works of medieval social ideology may have had relatively little impact on the reality of medieval social relations is that their contents were often pitched at such a level of abstraction that they provided little concrete guidance as to what should be done in any particular situation. Thus, while thinkers such as John of Salisbury, Giles of Rome, and Christine de Pizan were all in agreement that justice required that each person should receive his 'rightful due', they offered no real indication as to what this meant in actual practice. For instance, in 1377, when the tenants of Coleshill (Berkshire) refused to perform the harvest labour demanded of them by their lord on the grounds that Domesday Book showed them to be exempt from such services, their acceptance of the ideological claim that their landlord was entitled to receive his 'due' would scarcely have helped to resolve this conflict, which was precisely about what which services constituted his rightful due in the first place.⁷⁸ Similarly, even if John of Salisbury, Giles of Rome, and Christine de Pizan were agreed that, in general, peasants should occupy an inferior position within society, their works did little to help their readers decide whether the peasants of their own day should hold their land by freehold, leasehold, copyhold or unfree tenure, or whether the rents for such holdings should be set at, above, or below the level determined by the supply and demand for land. Thus, if we wish to understand the reality of lord-peasant relations in medieval England, as opposed to their ideological representation, it is upon the sources produced by royal government and by estate administrations that our analysis must ultimately depend, sources whose richness and potential the work of Bruce Campbell has done so much to reveal to us.

⁷⁸ Faith, 'The "Great Rumour" of 1377 and Peasant Ideology', pp. 43–44.

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Part III

Peasants, Lords, and Markets

LORDSHIP AND THE EARLY HISTORY OF PEASANT LAND TRANSFER ON THE ESTATES OF THE ABBEY OF BURY ST EDMUNDS

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It is widely accepted by historians of medieval estates that lordship responded to rather than dictated regional distinctiveness. In a variety of ways, as estate studies have shown, individual lords effected both slight and considerable changes in their estates policy in order to respond to the particular dictates of, above all, custom and geography. If we consider the nature of demesne husbandry, the range of seigniorial exactions, approaches to inheritance, the administration of local courts, and land tenure, we can find examples of single lords adapting policies to respond to local circumstance. On the estates of the bishopric of Ely, as Miller noted with his typical prescience, the bishops ‘had to take account of things which were natural or traditional, and had to use them where they could not change them’.¹ He identifies a combination of ‘vestiges of earlier peasant freedom’, different forms of land-type and potential land use, field arrangements, and waste.² ‘This was the sort of material with which the “will of the bishop” had to work.’³ On the Ely estates this meant, for instance,

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¹ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 79.

² Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 79–80.

³ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 80.

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that the bishop's villeins in Norfolk owed fewer services than did those closer to the Isle of Ely, a feature which Miller explains particularly in terms of the relative proportion of free tenants in Norfolk.⁴ On other estates, too, we find lords obliged or willing to adapt to circumstance. The monks of Christ Church Canterbury, for instance, were able to impose different and heavier obligations on their Essex tenantry than they were on their Kentish tenants.⁵ Page, in her discussion of the Crowland abbey estates, also recognizes an important distinction between the Lincolnshire manors, where free tenants predominated in the manorial economy, and the Cambridgeshire manors, where the reverse was the case.⁶ Page's work on Dry Drayton, Cottenham, and Oakington revealed a largely 'traditional' manorial economy of the kind which she contrasted with the manors beyond Cambridgeshire where, especially to the east, a much less structured pattern of landholding was evident.⁷ Dyer's discussion of the seigniorial economy on the estates of the bishop of Worcester also speaks to adjustment of general policy to reflect differences in quality and type of land across the bishop's estates.⁸

Of course, lords might attempt to impose their expectations on all or almost all of their tenantry, and with seemingly little or no regard for pre-existing circumstance. In certain instances, lords did look to alter cases to suit their own policies and, apparently, to impose a general policy upon their tenantry wheresoever they might be, as for instance in the widespread insistence on Westminster Abbey's estates that the standard customary holding be maintained as a pristine unit of account.⁹ This is also evident in the case of inheritance practice where there exist some fairly striking examples of lords interfering with local custom to their best advantage.¹⁰ Lords of larger estates also did manage to effect a general uniformity of practice, their lordship epitomised by the institutions of lordship, such as those associated with the administration of the manorial economy, its officers, its courts, and its records. The apparent expansion of manorial documentation in the middle years of the thirteenth century is symptomatic of this imposed seigniorial policy, although even here a

⁴ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 88.

⁵ Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, p. 115.

⁶ Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey*, p. 83.

⁷ Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey*, p. 90.

⁸ Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society*, pp. 55–83.

⁹ Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates*, pp. 203–13.

¹⁰ As discussed below, p. 209.

closer investigation of record survival even within estates might reveal regional differences.¹¹

Two articles which have appeared in *Past and Present* since the late 1990s have encouraged further reflection upon these themes. The first, by Jane Whittle, examined the nature of the peasant attachment to land in the Middle Ages and early modern period in England.¹² Whittle moves between close research on Norfolk material and more general observations on a 'midlands/eastern England' divide. She suggests that historians of the medieval and early modern peasant have, for a long time, displayed a fixation with the family-land bond, an emotional attachment to land which restricted ease of alienation and cemented tenurial structures, save when they were disrupted by crisis events. By contrast she also notes a rogue historiographical development, namely the focus on English individualism, prompted by the writing of Alan McFarlane, which she challenges as conceptually limited, notably in its dismissal of the notion of a peasant economy in medieval England.¹³ She argues, instead, that transfer of land in the Middle Ages and into the early modern period was likely to be occasioned far less by either familial choice (a limiting effect) or by individual economic choice (a liberating effect). Instead, for Whittle, and in some contrast to those estate studies noted above, it was the relative strength of institutions, and above all lordship, which restricted or occasioned the opportunities for alienation of land in this period: that is, the distinction she draws is between estates and manors where lords permitted the buying and selling of land amongst their tenants and those manors where they did not. She notes in particular an important distinction between Midlands estates and East Anglian 'estates', in that we can detect alienation in East Anglian/eastern England from a relatively early date, but not in the Midlands, a distinction she argues may be considered in terms of relative strengths of discrete lordships.¹⁴ In fact she suggests that pockets of strong lordship persisted in eastern England/East Anglia, and on those manors we find a 'Midlands'-type system of restriction.¹⁵ For Whittle, it is in fact lordship, rather than the main object of her scrutiny, the family-land bond,

¹¹ As, for instance, Briggs, 'Manor Court Procedures'; also Schofield, 'English Law and Welsh Marcher'. On the expansion of documentation see Razi and Smith, 'Origins of the English Manorial Court Rolls', pp. 38–42.

¹² Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond'.

¹³ See, for instance, Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond', p. 59.

¹⁴ Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond', pp. 49–55.

¹⁵ Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond', p. 50.

that is accorded the greater role in determining the nature/existence of a market in land on those manors and estates where, to follow Whittle, 'manorial control' restricted freedom of peasant action.¹⁶

The second article, which was also published in *Past and Present* a few years later, is by Bruce Campbell. Campbell offers a new assessment of the underlying causes of the agrarian crisis of the early fourteenth century.¹⁷ Continuing an historiographical theme associated for some time with his own work on lordly economies and with John Hatcher's discussions of serfdom,¹⁸ Campbell argues an involved case, the main thrust of which is that crisis for the relatively disadvantaged in early fourteenth-century England was not occasioned by seigniorial exaction and the demands of a confident and economically robust lordship. Instead, it was the relative opportunity presented to poorer rural dwellers, for which villeinage and the encumbrances of lordship have been far overstated relative to the importance of freehold, which paved the way for fragile markets and vulnerabilities of a kind that could not withstand the crises of this period. In fact, in areas where opportunity and relative flexibility existed, that opportunity generated an under-capitalized and under-employed small-holding tenantry, who were essentially victims of their own freedom to engage with growing markets. Campbell's thesis places demographic change at the heart of this malaise, arguing that alongside inadequate control of tenure and limited commercial and labour opportunities, 'over-vigorous growth of population' was a constituent element of the problem.¹⁹ An important implication of his thesis is that some regions, and here he cites East Anglia in general and Norfolk in particular, were ripe for this endogenously exacerbated crisis. By inference, other regions, where adequate institutional constraint persisted, may have been less vulnerable. Neither Campbell nor Whittle venture far into root causes. Campbell proposes that the century after the Conquest may have seen lords abdicate responsibility for their control of land and its redistribution, arguing that this loss of control, allied to the strong commercial and demographic shifts of the thirteenth century, freed up opportunity and helped occasion a burgeoning land market.²⁰ For Whittle, lords in eastern England/East Anglia were weak in contrast to midlands-type lords but no particular explanation for

¹⁶ Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond', p. 58.

¹⁷ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem'.

¹⁸ Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage'.

¹⁹ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', p. 63.

²⁰ Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', pp. 65–66.

this is offered.²¹ In what follows, we reflect further upon these issues and suggest, in one instance at least, that lords appear to have been responsive to the circumstances in which they operated, rather than either wholly overwhelmed by those circumstances or able to alter the same to their own satisfaction.

* * *

In order to explore this further we will consider the peasant land market in thirteenth-century East Anglia and, in particular, on the estates of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, and most importantly its antecedents. Our main purpose here is to consider the relationship between what may be identified as abbey 'policy' with regard to the land transfers of its tenants and the prevailing nature of the local economy, including contemporary and pre-existing attitudes to the transfer of land. The present discussion builds upon an earlier paper by the author in which an attempt was made both to describe the range of documents available for the study of the land market on the estates of the Bury St Edmunds from the eleventh century through to the thirteenth century and to explore evidence for developments in land transfer *per se* during this same period.²² In what follows, the themes explored in the original paper will be extended with a view to describing the ways in a particular and prescribed market in free land which included very small plots, and was strongly in evidence from the eleventh century, flourished and came to influence the formation and culture of peasant land transfer. This market included, by at least the thirteenth century, unfree land.

Historians have tended to perceive lordship as but one element in a panoply of influences which have been admitted into discussion of the peasant land market in medieval England. Work on the land market in eastern England in the last three decades has tended in the direction proposed by Hyams over forty years ago, namely that we should consider a peasant land market, in so far as one can be identified, as responding to the buying and selling of land for money or money's worth, a view that stood in some contrast to the prevailing notion that much transfer of land within the peasantry was driven by the dictates of family and of familial life-cycles.²³ Studies of the East Anglian land market by Smith, Campbell, Clarke, and Schofield have since shown that a peasant land market in customary land, responsive to a range of stimuli including changes in

²¹ Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond', pp. 51–55.

²² Schofield, 'Market in Free Land'.

²³ Hyams, 'Origins of a Peasant Land Market'.

grain price, credit availability, taxation, shifting climatic conditions, and so on, existed by the middle years of the thirteenth century.²⁴

That such a market in customary land could exist in eastern England by this time needs consideration of the relative significance or insignificance of the sorts of restraints which prevailed in other parts of the country until, in some cases, the fifteenth century. To what extent did lordship in eastern England either encourage a growth in a peasant market in land or run helpless before a market beyond its control? A comparison of Benedictine houses illustrates the distinctions. On Westminster Abbey estates, a Benedictine house whose manors were principally concentrated in the south-east and southern midlands, though with some manors in Essex, the control of lordship over customary tenure was so intense that a market in unfree holdings was, in so far as can be judged, virtually non-existent before the fifteenth century.²⁵ By contrast, on the estates of Bury St Edmunds, another ancient Benedictine foundation and the main subject of this discussion, whose estates were fairly tightly focused on the environs of the town of Bury St Edmunds, tenants enjoyed what was essentially an alienable right in their land from the mid-thirteenth century.²⁶

There is no doubt that the Benedictine estate at Bury St Edmunds was no less lax or conservative a landlord than were Benedictines elsewhere. This was revealed in a number of ways: their aggressive exactions, frequent and arbitrary tallage, insistence upon villein status and its maintenance, as well as in the responses of their tenantry who, at Bury as elsewhere, reacted to the privations of lordship through claims for ancient demesne status and through open revolt in 1327 and in 1381.²⁷ Given this innate conservatism, we might reasonably expect the monks at Bury to have been equally controlling of peasant land transfers as were the Westminster Abbey monks. But they were not. In fact, by the close of the thirteenth century, when we first gain closer insight into the

²⁴ For discussion of the thirteenth- and early-fourteenth century land market, see, for instance, Campbell, 'Population Pressure, Inheritance and the Land Market'; Clarke, 'Peasant Society and Land Transactions', chapter 4; Schofield, 'Dearth, Debt and the Local Land Market'; Smith, 'Families and their Land'; Smith, 'Transactional Analysis', pp. 227–40. For much earlier ventures into the same territory, see Hudson, 'The Prior of Norwich's Manor of Hindolveston'.

²⁵ Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates*, pp. 299–311.

²⁶ See, for instance, Smith, 'Families and their Land'.

²⁷ See, for instance, Hilton, 'Peasant Movements in Medieval England'; Dyer, 'Memories of Freedom'; Razi, 'Struggles between the Abbots of Halesowen and their Tenants'; Schofield, 'Lordship and the Peasant Economy'.

unfree peasant land market on the estates of Bury St Edmunds through the surviving court rolls, an active peasant market in land existed. Manorial studies of two of the Bury manors, Redgrave and Hinderclay, have revealed a vibrant market in small plots from the earliest courts.²⁸ Smith's study of Redgrave shows that not only was there an energetic market in unfree land but that it worked to the real advantage of the lord. In years of particularly active *inter-vivos* transfer, the income generated for the lord in the form of entry fines from sales of land exceeded assize rents (the yearly rents collected on tenant land as a whole) whilst in other years entry fines paid on transfer yielded a still significant element of the manorial revenue. In reviewing this material, Smith is surely correct to remark that 'clearly, it was in the financial interests of the Abbot that fragmentation of holdings and an active market in customary tenures should exist.'²⁹

Part of the reason why the monks at Bury, as other landlords in East Anglia, tolerated such a market and, in fact, actively encouraged one, lies in their own fashioning of policy vis-à-vis circumstance, notably the growth of a money economy in the high Middle Ages. It is a feature of some of the greater of the East Anglian landlords, notably the abbey and bishopric of Ely, that their dependence on money increased relative to rents in kind during this period.³⁰ The lack of significant dependence on labour services may therefore have also served to reduce anxieties over an active land market which led to fragmentation and accumulation.³¹ Further, whilst surrenders of villein land *sibi et heredibus suis* were in themselves challenges to the authority of lordship, since such surrenders were potentially examples of implied manumissions, there were other reasons why lords might tolerate such a market, not least the concern that if they did not licence such transfers through their own manor courts, then they could lose effective control over the tenure and any revenue from transfer. It would have been as important to offer a forum for transfer that avoided the use by tenants of common law instruments and charters.

It may also be the case, as Campbell has suggested, that landlords, by the time we best see them engaged in policy toward a peasant land market in the late thirteenth century, were operating within a system that was already well-established and which they could not easily alter or chose to employ to their full

²⁸ See, for instance, Smith, 'Families and their Land', pp. 150, 154–55; Schofield, 'Dearth, Debt and the Local Land Market', pp. 5–9.

²⁹ Smith, 'Some Thoughts on "Hereditary" and "Proprietary" Rights', pp. 116–17.

³⁰ Miller, *Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*.

³¹ On this point, see, for instance, Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates*, pp. 299–319.

advantage. It is possible that by the time the monks of Bury, in the late twelfth century, did what other landlords had also done and attempted to recover their demesnes with their associated tenant holdings from lessees, an infrastructure had already been established that made any reconfiguration difficult.³² In what follows we will explore two potential preconditions (inheritance and the development of freehold tenure) that may have served to produce a tenurial environment inimical to a restrictive seigniorial control of the peasant land market.

* * *

If we begin with customary practices of inheritance and their consequence for landholding and land transfer, we should first note that the lordship of Bury St Edmunds was situated within an area of known Danish settlement, quite possibly from the late eighth century. There is some suggestion that the process of colonization and the concomitant division of holding occurred earlier, before the Danish invasions.³³ As we shall see below, patterns of settlement appear to have had implications for tenure but they also may have had important consequences for customary patterns of inheritance practice. G. C. Homans suggested it was the Frisian influence in East Anglia that explains its regional distinctiveness and, in particular, the persistence of partibility.³⁴ Faith has challenged the validity of this argument on a number of grounds but has acknowledged what she terms ‘a connection between strong lordship and weak kinship, and vice versa. We find’, she writes, ‘many examples of partibility in the weakly manorialized areas of the Danelaw. In Bracton [the mid-thirteenth century jurist] socage [free tenure of a particular kind] and partibility are closely associated.’³⁵

The effect of partibility may, of course, have been to divide holdings and challenge the services which tenants owed their lords.³⁶ Lords, including the

³² Campbell makes similar observations, but of a more general kind, in reflecting upon the deterioration of tenure and the lords hold over the same in the period after the Norman Conquest; Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, pp. 65–66. On the recovery of leased demesnes and the anxiety of lords, including the abbot of Bury St Edmunds, that a period of leasing had allowed a general slip in standards, see Harvey, ‘English Inflation’, pp. 7–9.

³³ See, for example, *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, pp. xliii–xlvii.

³⁴ Homans, ‘Rural Sociology’; Homans, ‘Frisians in East Anglia’; discussed by Faith, ‘Peasant Inheritance Customs’.

³⁵ Faith, ‘Peasant Inheritance Customs’, p. 85.

³⁶ This is certainly the view of Davis: *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. xxxliii, who notes the extensive division of socage holdings on the estates of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds and

abbots of Bury St Edmunds, were not unconcerned about such possibilities, as injunctions against partibility in late twelfth-century charters of Abbot Samson indicate.³⁷ Whilst elsewhere lords were able to resist the force of partibility, as evidenced for the estates of Westminster Abbey and the bishopric of Worcester,³⁸ partibility does not appear to have been constrained in East Anglia where lords may even at times have embraced it. At Gressenhall in Norfolk, in the late thirteenth century, an enquiry into inheritance practices recorded that a change in form of inheritance had occurred in the lifetime of the previous lord, William de Stuteville, where ‘with consent of the lord and the whole court, [the then steward] ruled that always in future the tenement should be partible between brothers because he wished to have more tenants’.³⁹

Partibility did not necessarily promote wholesale division and, thereby, an active land market. As Smith has noted, the land market could in effect mitigate the erosional effect of partibility, as new holdings were accumulated and as heirs sold out their portion to a single sibling. More importantly, as Smith has also shown, the likelihood that fathers would leave property to other than a single heir, especially in the demographic conditions pertaining in thirteenth-century England, is actually remote. Smith calculated heirship patterns for Redgrave and Rickingham in 1260–1320 which suggest that between 30 and 35 percent of parents left no male heir and between 25 and 30 per cent left only one male heir. Although 12 per cent of parents left three male heirs in the period 1260–94, this number declined to just over 4 per cent in the period 1295–1320. Overall, in both Suffolk manors ‘multiple [male] heirship’ took place in between only 20 and 25 per cent of cases. Further, Smith, compar-

remarks that ‘the reason for the small size of the tenures was that inheritance was partible [...]’. On this point, see also most recently, Day, ‘Sokemen and Freeman’, pp. 214–16.

³⁷ *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. xxxiii, and n. 3; see also, *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, charter 39, p. 97: ‘Omnibus ad quos presens scriptum pervenerit, Samson dei gratia abbas sancti Aedmundi et totus conventus loci, salutem. Noverit universitas vestra nos concessisse et presenti carta confirmasse Rogero filio Martini de Rucham omnes terras quas pater eius tenuit de nobis in predicta villa que vocantur Peniherlant et Maltlant [...] tenendas ei et uni de filiis suis post decessum suum [quem] ipse inhereditarie voluerit, ita tamen quod ipse et heres eius post eum teneant predictas terras cum perinenciis integre sine aliqua divisione facienda inter fratres vel sorores vel aliquos alios, de nobis et de successoribus nostris libere et quiete et hereditarie per servitium xi sol. et xd [...]’.

³⁸ Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates*, pp. 210–11; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society*, pp. 106–07.

³⁹ Williamson, ‘Norfolk: Thirteenth Century’, pp. 57–58; Smith, ‘Some Thoughts on “Hereditary” and “Proprietary” Rights’, p. 122; Postan, ‘Charters of the Villeins’, p. xxxix.

ing this data with inheritance cases from an Essex manor where the practice of inheritance was impartible, has suggested that, surprisingly, in neither case did population exhibit real growth and that, in other words, the demographic consequences of the varied inheritance practices appears to have been negligible.⁴⁰

If there was no significant demographic distinction exhibited in such contrasting communities, then the effects on the land market are likely also to have been muted. If the majority of peasant holdings in high medieval Suffolk were not necessarily divided according to patterns of inheritance,⁴¹ we may well need to look elsewhere for explanations of real difference in the land market. The early prevalence of small freeholds may, in this respect, be of far greater importance.

* * *

Eastern England included, from the early Middle Ages, a very high proportion of free tenants with a pattern of settlement which, in so far as Little Domesday reflects a true distinction with the record of Domesday Book, was markedly different from the proportion of free tenants found in the south, the central midlands, and the west of England.⁴² In terms of settlement, there was no clear coincidence of manor and vill and, in fact, less evidence of manors in the pre-Conquest eleventh century.⁴³ This pattern of settlement seems to be closely related to what appears to have been a significantly greater amount of free land in parts of eastern England, a distinction that has been explained in terms of a combination of colonization, landscape, and pastoralism.⁴⁴ Within the broad

⁴⁰ Smith, 'Families and their Property', pp. 38–54 and 66–67.

⁴¹ For similar observations, see Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death*, p. 93, where he argues that differing inheritance customs were of little consequence for population density relative to 'other factors'. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 552–53, also discusses the illusion of the role of partible inheritance in undermining family wealth and power, noting that 'partition only lessens the family stock of land and movables if there is regularly more than one inheriting child' (p. 552). In fact, to follow Wickham, a division encouraged by partibility often supported the expectations of peasantries 'entirely sanguine about their stock of land constantly changing across time, as inheritance, marriage, and indeed in many places the "land market", intervened' (p. 553). In early fourteenth-century Greece, holdings of the dependent peasantry did undergo fragmentation, partly as a result of partible inheritance, but this was not the sole cause. Other factors almost certainly included abandonment of landholdings and the alienation of land through a market in land; Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire*, pp. 203–08.

⁴² Harvey, 'Domesday England', pp. 69–70; Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 180–83.

⁴³ Dodwell, 'Free Peasantry', pp. 145–46.

⁴⁴ Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 122; Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 188–89.

region of eastern England, there was also considerable tenurial variety, with, again it has been suggested, certain kinds of tenure originating at a varying distances from the core of seigniorial estates.⁴⁵ If we divide these free tenants into their constituent elements of *liberi homines* and sokemen, as distinguished in Little Domesday, we find that the majority of them were *liberi homines*. In Norfolk, there were 5505 sokemen, as against at least 5177 *liberi homines* or 'freemen'; in Suffolk the difference is especially striking, with 769 sokemen dwarfed by the 7666 *liberi homines*. In total, 96 per cent of all *liberi homines* recorded at the time of Domesday are located in Norfolk and Suffolk, with the greatest proportion, relative to any other tenure, in Suffolk.⁴⁶

Even with such a heavy concentration of free tenants in Suffolk, the distribution of *liberi homines* in the county was far from consistent. While the number of free tenants — that is both *liberi homines* (freemen) and *socmanni*, hereafter sokemen — declined in the late eleventh century, in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest, it is still clear that as a proportion of the total tenantry in eastern England they were of great significance. Dodwell's examination of the free peasantry in Norfolk and Suffolk in Domesday Book showed that in some parts of each county the free peasantry could comprise over 70 per cent of the total peasant population but that such a concentration was not general.⁴⁷ In those parts of Suffolk that fell within the jurisdiction of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, there was certainly no uniformity of proportion from sub-region to sub-region, that is from hundred to hundred. Within the jurisdiction of the Abbey the two northern hundreds of Blackbourne (a double-hundred) and Thedwestry were composed of 67.3 and 61.6 per cent free tenants respectively, whilst the south-eastern half-hundred of Cosford (30.6 per cent) and the western hundreds of Thingoe (29.9 per cent) and Risbridge (24.3 per cent) contained far fewer. To the south, fewer than 20 per cent of the tenantry were 'free' in the double-hundred of Babergh (16.3 per cent), and the same was true of Lackford hundred in the far north-west (12.9 per cent).⁴⁸ The early development of tenure in eastern England has been discussed in recent

⁴⁵ Harvey, 'Domesday England', pp. 70–72; Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 186–89.

⁴⁶ Darby, *Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, pp. 111 and 169; also, for the tabulation of all counties, Harvey, 'Domesday England', p. 71; Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, p. 180.

⁴⁷ Dodwell, 'Free Peasantry', p. 148; for the same point, see also Darby, *Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, pp. 169–70.

⁴⁸ Based upon Dodwell, 'Free Peasantry', p. 149 (Map 1), and using the same broad percentage ranges. Dodwell's figures for the hundreds are given in an Appendix to the article (p. 156) and are also reproduced here in the text.

work on pre-Conquest rural England. There remains a good deal of uncertainty as to the early origins of the distinct tenurial patterns identifiable by the time of Domesday Book; however, it has been suggested that free tenure, both of the *liberi homines* and sokemen, originated as free lands existing beyond the 'inland' of lords' estates in the Early Middle Ages.⁴⁹ This variability in the proportion of free tenants across the landscape of eastern England is a phenomenon in itself worthy of further investigation both in terms of tenurial patterns and the development of local land markets. While we cannot attempt here a close examination of the relative potential impact of 'inland' and 'outland' tenurial systems upon the later development of tenure and, as a consequence, the economic conditions operating in individual manors of estates by the later middle ages, future study in this area might well reveal some interesting continuities.⁵⁰ For now, we must content ourselves with a preliminary exploration of the proposition that rights of alienation, enjoyed by certain free tenants and especially, as we will now consider, the *liberi homines*, in the Early Middle Ages, had consequences for the extension of the concept of alienability of holdings in later centuries.

These free tenures, frequently associated with 'warland' and owing geld to the king rather than rents more consistent with manorial obligations (labour services and the like) were never as constrained as were the inland tenures, which historians tend to associate with lesser forms of socage and unfree tenures.⁵¹ One of the most important defining features of at least some — but not all — of these free tenures was the right of the freeholder to alienate his land, 'to take it with him where he will'. *Liberi homines* in the eleventh century enjoyed, to varying degrees, well-established rights of grant and sale over their land which other free tenants (namely, the sokemen), as well as the *villani* and lesser tenants, typically did not possess.⁵² Dawn Hadley has reflected that the right to give and to sell was amongst the most important rights of free men, 'although the fact that Domesday Book notes which of them could do so sug-

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 206–07.

⁵⁰ R. H. Tawney pondered a similar 'fanciful' notion over a century ago: 'It may well be that the main outlines of the social system which the Domesday commissioners found already in the east of England crop out again after the lapse of between four and five hundred years', Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, pp. 26–27 (quote at p. 27).

⁵¹ Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 202–09.

⁵² Harvey, 'Domesday England', p. 72; for example, *Domesday Book*, Suffolk, II, 356b (Risby where none of the tenants, including sokemen, could grant or sell without the abbot's consent).

gests that there were many others who could not.⁵³ This is certainly the case on the estates of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds where *liberi homines*, generally speaking, enjoyed rights of alienation, sometimes subject to the permission of the Abbey, whereas sokemen almost always did not. We find this right of alienation associated with *liberi homines* recorded time and again in Little Domesday and very often within the lordship of Bury St Edmunds. Thus, for instance, on the manor of Stanton in Blackbourne Hundred, the sokemen could not 'ever grant or sell their land without the Abbot's permission' but the *liberi homines* could; the same is also the case, for instance, on the Thingoe Hundred manors of Whepstead, Rede, and Fornham All Saints.⁵⁴ In some instances, it is clear that the right was not enjoyed by all *liberi homines*, with some free tenants on the same manor enjoying rights of alienation whilst others did not. This was, for example, the case on the manors of Saxham and Brockley in Thingoe Hundred, and at Little Fakenham, in Blackbourne Hundred.⁵⁵ In some few other instances, it seems that rights of alienation enjoyed at the Conquest had been lost by the time of Domesday Book, as, interestingly, looks to have happened to sokemen at Beccles.⁵⁶

It is clear, therefore, that free tenants did engage in an active market in free land from at least the late eleventh century and certainly earlier than this.⁵⁷ While we lack direct indications of *inter-vivos* exchange in small plots of land per se from this period, there is certainly evidence for division and agglomeration of holdings from the eleventh century. Firstly, if we simply match the numbers of *liberi homines* mentioned in Little Domesday against the numbers

⁵³ Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, p. 180.

⁵⁴ 'Statunam t.r.e. tenuit sanctus Edmundus pro manerio unam carucatam terrae [...]. Lx sochemanni de ii carucatis terrae [...]. Hi sunt sancti et fuerunt commendatio et saca et soca et omnia consuetudo nec unquam potuerunt dare vel vendere terram suam sine licencia abbatis [...]. In eadem vii liberos homines de i carucate et xxx acrae terrae [...]. Hi potuerunt dare et vendere terram suam sed commendatio et soca remanent sancto [...].' Domesday Book, Suffolk, II, 364b; also for the Thingoe examples: Domesday Book, Suffolk, II, 356b, 357a, 358a. Vinogradoff also notes this distinction on the Bury St Edmunds estates. He quotes an example (Hepworth) from Domesday and suggests that while 'the cultivation was evidently going on in the same way on the holdings of the free and of the villeins' the difference was to be found in that 'the freemen could give and sell their land', Vinogradoff, *English Society*, p. 422, also p. 413.

⁵⁵ Domesday Book, Suffolk, II, 357b, 358a, 367b.

⁵⁶ Domesday Book, Suffolk, II, 370a. I am grateful to Professor John Langdon for directing me to this reference and the last reference in the previous note.

⁵⁷ On this point, see also most recently, Day, 'Sokemen and Freemen', pp. 216–17.

of tenemental units they allegedly held (by *carucates*: units of 120 acres),⁵⁸ we do not discover much in the way of uniformity. So, for instance, the number of *liberi homines* per carucate in Thingoe Hundred varied from 1.33 (Fornham) to 7 (Hawstead; Rede).⁵⁹ A simple survey of number of free tenants per carucate suggests then that, by the time of Domesday, free holdings were divided and reconstructed into varying sizes and that this process of fragmentation and, conceivably, of agglomeration, almost certainly continued towards the close of the eleventh century.⁶⁰ A comparison of Little Domesday and the near contemporaneous 'Feudal Book' of Abbot Baldwin of Bury St Edmunds (abbot, 1065–98) reveals no difference between the total amount of land held in carucates by *liberi homines* but does suggest a lack of uniformity from vill to vill in numbers of *liberi homines* as seen against the total amount of land they seemingly held.

Table 8.1. Number of *liberi homines* per carucate and holding size. Six vills of Thedwestry Hundred in the late eleventh century.⁶¹

Vill	<i>Domesday Book</i> (a)	<i>Feudal Book</i> (b)	<i>Feudal Book</i> (c)	<i>Feudal Book</i> (d)	<i>Feudal Book</i> (e)
	Number of <i>liberi homines</i> per carucate (number of tenants/ number of carucates)		Range of holding size (acres)	Mean holding size (acres)	Median holding size (acres)
Beyton	14 (70/5)	12.2 (61/5)	1–81	9.87	5
Pakenham	15.5 (31/2)	>18 (>36/2)	1–41	<5.92	4.5
Rougham	18 (90/5)	>22 (>110/5)	1–61	<6.93	4
Hesset	12 (60/5)	>11.8 (>59/5)	1–65	<10.58	6
Thurston	8 (8/1)	>15 (>15/1)	2.25–30	<9.23	4
Woolpit	40 (40/1)	>56 (>56/1)	0.5–11	<2.51	2

> indicates that the number given is a minimum and that the text of the Feudal Book refers to some units as held by a named individual as well as an unidentified body of associates or kin. The calculated average acres also, of necessity, reflect the same in reverse (<).

⁵⁸ It is generally held that the carucate in Suffolk was one hundred and twenty acres; Darby, *Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, p. 164; *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. xxxii.

⁵⁹ Domesday Book, Suffolk, II, 356b–358b.

⁶⁰ Schofield, 'Market in Free Land'. See also the comments of Lennard, *Rural England*, p. 360.

⁶¹ Source: *Domesday Book*, Suffolk, II, 361b–363b; *Feudal Book*, ed. by Douglas, pp. 25–33, and for tabulation of the same data, *Feudal Book*, ed. by Douglas, p. lx.

This lack of uniformity (in terms of number of *liberi homines* relative to standard units of landholding) is especially well illustrated by some few surviving listings of *liberi homines* recorded in the Feudal Book, which are contemporary with the rest of the Feudal Book or date from a decade or two later. The listings were compiled either in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and survive for the double hundred of Blackbourne, Thedwestry, and the half-hundred of Cosford.⁶² The listings indicate some adjustment in the distribution and extent of holdings in the few years between the compilation of Little Domesday and the Feudal Book, and this can be charted with particular confidence for six manors in Thedwestry hundred (Table 8.1: columns (a) and (b)).

The listings offer unique detail regarding holding sizes among these free tenants, and, as we might expect from our analysis so far, this new information also displays considerable variability (Table 8.1: columns (c), (d) and (e)). For instance, the range of individual holding sizes at Woolpit in the eleventh century was fairly slight and few individuals held more than four or five acres; elsewhere, as at Beyton or Hessel, the range was far greater. While, then, the degree of fragmentation of landholding at Woolpit, in comparison to units of landholding observable elsewhere in the hundred of Thedwestry, appears to have been relatively great, we are still left with similar impressions of fragmentation and accumulation on most of the manors for which such a level of scrutiny is possible. On certain other Thedwestry manors, not listed in Table 8.1, where the range of information is relatively fragmentary, we are also left with a similar impression: at nearby Stanningfield and Bradfeld, some individuals held units of twenty and thirty acres whilst some of their neighbours held as little as a single acre.⁶³ Such disparities are potentially important in that they may reflect discrete and intensely local economic conditions.⁶⁴

It is, for now, important to note that, while Douglas identifies this fragmentation and inconsistent redistribution of landholding as occurring on land held by free tenants — that is, *liberi homines* and sokemen — it seems more correct to identify these divisions as occurring most obviously on land held by *liberi homines*, that is those free tenants typically identified in Domesday as retaining the right to buy and to sell land and whose numbers, as we have seen, were far greater in Suffolk than those of the sokemen.⁶⁵

⁶² On the dating of the lists, see Lennard, *Rural England*, p. 359, n. 1.

⁶³ *Feudal Documents*, ed. by Douglas, p. 34.

⁶⁴ On this point, see also Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, p. 183; also Day, 'Sokemen and Freemen', pp. 153–54.

⁶⁵ *Feudal Documents*, ed. by Douglas, pp. lvii–lxi.

Table 8.2. Numbers of sokemen per carucate. Thingoe Hundred in the late eleventh and late twelfth centuries.⁶⁶

Vill	<i>Domesday Book/Feudal Book</i> (late 11th century)	<i>Kalendar</i> (late 12th century)
Risby	4.62	13.33
Horringer	15	28
Whepstead	4	4
Nowtown	20	>28
Chevington	4	
Saxham		
Lackford	15	
Hengrave	16	>16
Fornham	12	32
Ickworth		
Saxham		
Flempton	10	>8
Hawstead		
Brockley		
Manston	6	
Rede	2	
Westley	>9.4	

> indicates that the *Kalendar* reference is to an identified body of tenants as well as unidentified 'others'. For further detail in relation to each manor, see Schofield, 'Market in Free Land', pp. 276, 279–80. The vill of Saxham (of which there are two), Ickworth, Hawstead, and Brockley, all within Thingoe Hundred, provide no data on sokemen for either period.

Given that Domesday Book tells us that *liberi homines* both could and did buy and sell land in the eleventh century, and the evidence of fragmentation and accumulation hints strongly in the same direction, can we identify the same tendency to exchange land *inter-vivos* amongst other peasant landholders? In the first instance, can we observe the other free tenants, sokemen (who in the late eleventh century rarely enjoyed the right to buy and sell land), buying

⁶⁶ Source: *Domesday Book*, Suffolk, II, 356b–358b; *Feudal Book*, ed. by Douglas, pp. 3–4; *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, pp. 25–31.

and selling land in later periods? The late twelfth-century *Kalendar* of Abbot Samson, a detailed survey of the abbey's estates which contains much information on sokeman (but says less about *liberi homines*), gives the impression that significant division and accumulation of socage holdings (that is, holdings held by sokemen by socage tenure) was already underway by the close of the twelfth century (Table 8.2).

In Thingoe Hundred, which against the trend of the county as a whole had large proportions of sokemen, in villis such as Risby and Horringer the number of sokemen increased two- and three-fold whilst the overall extent of socage land appears to have fallen in acreage (with some possibly incorporated into villein holdings) as, typically, did the average size of socage holding. At Nowtown, in the same hundred, half a carucate or 60 acres was held by ten socagers in the late eleventh century but by the late twelfth the recorded socage land had been reduced to 30 acres and was held by at least seven tenants; at Fornham, where three sokemen held 30 acres in the later eleventh century, 15 acres of socage land were held by four sokemen at the end of the twelfth. Similar patterns emerge for other villis within the hundred: at Horringer the extent of socage land had halved (from 120 to 60 acres) but the number of sokemen had stayed about the same (14 in the late twelfth century as against 15 a century earlier) while at Risby, 180 acres (1.5 carucates) of socage land held by seven sokemen in the eleventh century had given way to only 36 acres held by four sokemen by the late twelfth century.⁶⁷ As well as illustrating some significant division and disintegration of tenurial patterns, these developments also suggest a weakening of the identity of distinct types of free landholding.⁶⁸

A comparison of the twelfth-century material with later documents also reveals a continued pattern of redistribution of holdings. The Hundred Roll entries surviving from the Bury lordship provide some indication of a developing peasant market in free land and of a probable widening of the rights of alienation. At Stanton, for example, a 1286 *quo warranto* return for Blackbourne Hundred describes the land of forty-five *sokemanni gersumarii* (sokemen who owe entry fines of a kind typically paid by unfree tenants).⁶⁹ The tenants owed

⁶⁷ *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, pp. 25–31, and Schofield, 'Market in Free Land', pp. 279–80.

⁶⁸ *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. 29.

⁶⁹ *Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, p. 46. See also Schofield, 'Seigniorial Exactions', pp. 396 and 409. The term *gersuma* was typically, by the thirteenth century, associated with unfree tenure rather than free tenure, and was a term applied both to entry fines and marriage fines; see, for instance, Nielsen, 'Customary Rent', p. 86. On the Bury estates, as on certain other

labour services and fines if they wished to marry off their daughters but ‘they could however sell their land without the Abbot’s licence [...]’.⁷⁰ This may be an extension of the right to sell land to sokemen, a right that largely they did not enjoy in the eleventh century, as Domesday Book makes clear;⁷¹ the term *sokemanni gersumarii* may also suggest, according to Davis, that these sokemen were somehow less free than certain other types of sokemen (sokemen *de alto socagio*), who owed rents and dues of a less onerous or restrictive kind.⁷² However, what is most important is that, by the thirteenth century, it is clear in the record that even those sokemen who were nearest in status to villeins could sell their land. Sokemen such as these held land by terms that were in certain respects quite similar — in name and form — to obligations owed by the unfree; this can easily explain why distinctions important in the early Middle Ages and at the time of the Conquest were increasingly muted by the high Middle Ages.⁷³

Since a common law distinction of alienability of land in terms of free and unfree did not emerge in England, it is generally argued, until the end of the twelfth century, we might wonder if the land transfers in which the smaller free tenants were engaged by the late eleventh century, and almost certainly earlier,⁷⁴ were already a feature of landholding amongst the pre- and post-

estates, *gersuma*, originally a hundredal rather than a manorial obligation, might also attach to sokemen, as it does here, cf. *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, pp. xxxvi–vii.

⁷⁰ *Suffolk Hundred*, ed. by Powell, p. 46.

⁷¹ See above, pp. 212–13.

⁷² *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. xxxvii. There is also some suggestion that sokemen of the ‘inland’ owed obligations closer to villeins than did sokemen of the ‘outland’, as for instance, Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, p. 186, and citations there.

⁷³ On the degree of considerable variety hidden within general tenurial terms and the significant potential for tenants of differing tenurial status to cross back and forth over the boundary between free and unfree tenure in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 188–89. Hudson, ‘Traces of Primitive Agricultural Organisation’ makes similar points for the Norfolk manor of Martham, explaining the later thirteenth-century ‘intermixture of socage and villeinage tenants’ (p. 39), in terms of long-standing tenurial patterns. On the original difference between the obligations owed by and rights enjoyed by the free tenants of socage land — land perceived as owned by its tenants and typically held in support of the hide and the hundred rather than the manor — as opposed to the greater obligations and lesser rights of unfree tenants of the *dominium* — land owned by its lord and the obligations of which were manorial rather than hundredal, see *Kalendar*, ed. by Davis, p. xxxiv.

⁷⁴ On this point, see Campbell, ‘Sale of Land’, pp. 238–39. I am very grateful to Dr Charles Inley for drawing my attention to this essay. See also Hadley, *Northern Danelaw*, pp. 180–81.

Conquest *bordarii* and *villani*. There is of course no clear indication of this in Domesday Book where, although no evident uniformity of holding size can easily be deduced, there is insufficient evidence to extract the sorts of differences identifiable for the *liberi homines*, in particular, and certainly nothing that is consistent with the indications of accumulation and fragmentation to be found in some of the listings of the 'Feudal Book' of Abbot Baldwin. Instead, it is from the mid-thirteenth century, with the appearance of detailed manorial records and in particular manorial court rolls, that we can see a peasant land market in unfree land, albeit one constrained by customary forms of exchange and notably by transfers conducted in the form of surrender of land to the lord by the outgoing tenant and the lord's admittance of the incoming tenant.

As the common law of villeinage developed, lords revealed their concerns over implied manumission by attempting to restrict alienation of unfree holdings and any presumption of alienable or freely hereditary right.⁷⁵ There is good evidence from the Bury St Edmunds estates to suggest that the abbey, by the mid-thirteenth century, may have had to act to secure its claims to customary land, some of which, as we have just discussed in the case of Stanton, may have become all but indistinguishable from free land. At Great Barton, for instance, while there was not a great deal of *inter-vivos* exchange by surrender and admittance in the earliest surviving courts, there was a large number of entries recording transfers which had taken place without the formal assent of the lord. Thus we find instances of alienation followed by a request that the incoming party provide evidence of his or her entry and its form, as well as instances of unfree land transferred by charter.⁷⁶ Similarly at Hinderclay, another Bury manor, in the very first of its surviving manorial courts, that for 24

For the view that a market accelerated after Henry II's reforms, see Palmer, 'Economic and Cultural Impact', pp. 382–89; also Bean, *Decline of English Feudalism*, pp. 44–47.

⁷⁵ Hyams, *Kings, Lords and Peasants*, pp. 38–48. The *Curia Regis* Rolls offer instructive examples of the uncertain terrain in which lords operated, as for instance in Essex in 1225/26, where a transfer of land between two peasants was delayed whilst it was established whether or not they were unfree peasants [*villani*] and therefore not entitled to deal in free land by charter: *Curia Regis Rolls*, XII: 1225–1226, no. 1734, 'Essex — dies datus est Thome de Wardeford petenti et Johanni de Hill tenenti de placito terre, unde habent licenciam concordandi, a die Pasche in iii septimanas, ut interim loquatur cum abbate de Wautham de confirmacione habenda. Et faciat scripta sua, quia cirographum non potest fieri eo quod incertum est utrum sint villanum vel non', p. 354.

⁷⁶ See, for instance, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk Record Office, E 18/151/1, court of 14 September 1277 (inquest into form of entry), 16 March 1279 (inquest into form of entry), 13 September 1279 (retention of bond land alienated by charter).

December 1257, an order was made 'to seise in the lord's hands all lands of the villeins demised to freemen within the fief either at term or at lease'.⁷⁷ Where such uncertainty existed and where the past practice of certain elements of the community may have been adopted by others, it is not difficult to conceive how villagers adopted entitlements that were not, *stricte dictu*, their own. A seigniorial response to this could reasonably have been to facilitate further alienation on their own terms rather than to attempt to restrict alienation entirely.⁷⁸

The large numbers of *liberi homines* on the estates of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds, with their rights to buy and sell land dating back to at least the eleventh century, may therefore have helped establish a strong and persistent culture of land transfer which seeped into the economic life of other groups of villagers, conceivably starting with sokemen and including, ultimately, the unfree.⁷⁹ Such a possibility, predicated on centuries-long changes in tenurial structures and the extension of rights beyond particular groups of tenants, argues against a more immediate explanation of regional difference, such as the arbitrary imposition of a lordly policy against a market in land, and instead encourages the view that the explanation for regional difference lies less with lords' policies and more with lords' responses to prevailing conditions.

⁷⁷ Chicago, University of Chicago Library, Bacon, MS 14, m. 1: Hinderclay, Court of 24 December 1257, 'Preceptum est seisandum in manum domini omnes terras villanorum dimissas liberis hominibus in feodo vel ad terminum seu ad locacionem.'

⁷⁸ For similar observations regarding seigniorial response, but in a different context, see Langdon, 'Lordship and Peasant Consumerism', pp. 41–42.

⁷⁹ We can also note examples of this uncertainty in the inquisitions into tenure sometimes prompted by transfer of land: see for instance Hinderclay (Suffolk), University of Chicago Regenstein Library, Bacon 120, m. 14 (face), court of 17 June 1320, 'finis vid. Walterus le Noble dat domino pro inquisitione habenda utrum Barebonestofy sit terra operaria nec ne.' It is the sub-regional difference in proportion of *liberi homines* that might well reward further research, not least in seeking to associate any such mapping of proportions of free tenants with the extent of land market behaviour observable in manorial courts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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MAKING OR BUYING? MAINTAINING FARM EQUIPMENT AND BUILDINGS, 1250–1350

Richard Britnell[†]

Bruce Campbell's 'Measuring the commercialization of seigniorial agriculture', published in 1995, uses the evidence of manorial accounts to examine the extent to which agricultural products, both arable and pastoral, were traded commodities. He shows how different commodities varied in this respect, and also how estates differed in the extent to which they had surpluses to trade.¹ The present study will examine another set of data from manorial accounts, one that has considerable bearing on the commercial development of the medieval countryside, but which has been little explored, despite a large volume of available information.

Every manorial account records expenditure on the acquisition and upkeep of farming equipment and buildings, often classified in separate paragraphs on ploughs, carts, buildings and 'necessary expenses'. The construction and maintenance of farm equipment and buildings was assigned to smiths and carpenters, who appear in manorial accounts as having received cash payments at day

[†] The editors were extremely saddened when Professor Richard (a.k.a. R. H.) Britnell succumbed after a prolonged illness while this volume was in preparation. Richard was known to all of us involved in medieval history as an uncommonly kind and supportive individual, as well as being a wonderful scholar. It is fortunate that, thanks to the efforts of Richard's son, John, we were able to obtain a near-finished draft of his chapter and to include it, with some minor (mostly stylistic) adjustments, in this volume. It is a fitting example of the carefully-crafted work Richard produced throughout his career.

¹ Campbell, 'Measuring the Commercialisation of Seigneurial Agriculture, c. 1300', pp. 132–93.

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rates or piece rates. On some thirteenth-century estates the need for commercial transactions was reduced by retaining smiths on service holdings: a smith would maintain the ironwork of the plough and ploughteam in return for some land.² Holdings of this sort, however, had never been available on all manorial demesnes, and by the later thirteenth century the availability of smiths for hire by contractual choice, rather than tenurial bond, was tipping normal practice strongly towards more commercial relationships.³ Even when still classed as a *famulus*, the smith's position was ambiguous because in effect he was self-employed. Besides recording the employment of artisans and construction workers, manorial expenditure always includes purchased items that had been manufactured for sale. In other words, these sections of a manorial account relate directly to the employment of those rural artisans, whether in villages or market towns, whose existence is abundantly evident in other contexts.⁴

Sources available in print are sufficiently numerous to enable us to look across manors on diverse estates to discover common patterns: the accounts of Beaulieu Abbey in 1269–70, the Earldom of Cornwall in 1296–97, the Bishopric of Winchester in 1301–02, the manors of Durham Priory between 1277 and 1310, and the accounts of Bolton Priory between 1286 and 1325 are the principal sources of this type.⁵ These may be supplemented with a few published accounts for manors of, for example, Crowland Abbey, the Abbey of Bec, Merton College, Henry de Lacy, and Roger Bigod.⁶ There are also series

² Postan, *The Famulus*, pp. 17–18. For examples of such service holdings, see *The Red Book of Worcester*, ed. by Hollings, I, p. 99 (Bredon); II, pp. 131 (Fladbury with Thockmorton) and 200 (Hartlebury); III, pp. 261 (Stratford), 268 (Hampton Lucy), 287 (Tredington), 309 (Blockley), and 320–01 (Paxford); IV, pp. 343 (Bishops Cleeve), 363 (Withington), and 477 (Old Stratford).

³ Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, pp. 92–93, 125–26; Postan, *The Famulus*, pp. 21–22.

⁴ For example, Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 153–54; Campbell, 'The Land', esp. pp. 221–22; Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 131–34.

⁵ *The Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey; *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley; *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page; *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell; *Bolton Priory Comptus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith.

⁶ Page, *The Estates of Crowland Abbey*, Appendix II; *Select Documents of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, ed. by Chibnall, pp. 146–85; *Surrey Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Briggs; *Two 'Compti' of the Lancashire and Cheshire Manors of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln*, ed. by Lyons; Davenport, *The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor, 1086–1565*, Appendix; *Medieval Framlingham: Select Documents 1270–1524*, ed. by Ridgway.

of accounts in print for individual manors, which can be used to document the frequency of purchases through time. The chief sources of this sort are the accounts of Sevenhampton (Wilts), Cuxham (Oxon), and Wellingborough (Northants).⁷ The fact that the data relate mostly to ecclesiastical estates is less of an inconvenience than in other aspects of demesne management, since there is no *a priori* reason why the procurement of equipment should differ on lay and religious estates. Even so, evidence concerning what was possible will be more secure than any conclusions about what was normal, particularly because there were local variations in detail.

Self-sufficiency in the provision of equipment was of limited relevance by the thirteenth century. Peasant farmers may have been able to produce their own wooden equipment provided that they had access to sources of workable timber, but their self-sufficiency would be limited by lack of appropriate tools and skills, or by the need to purchase ironware and other items to complete what they were making. Self-sufficiency in demesne agriculture would imply that all raw materials were supplied from an estate's own resources and that manufactured items could be made by servile or customary labour. But no estate, however large, was so isolated from the market. A degree of self-sufficiency is approximated on the manors of Durham Priory around 1300 when the estate had both timber reserves and a forge at Muggleswick on the edge of the west Durham moors. Iron and timber were sent to other manors of the estate, together with some manufactured equipment. In 1304–05, for example, the manor of Belasis near Billingham on Teesside received three new carts made from the bishop's timber thirty-two miles away at Muggleswick. At the nearby manor of Bewley the account was charged with 2s. 'for cutting timber for twenty-four ploughs'.⁸ Since large reserves of timber, and the possession of an estate forge, were restricted to larger estates, smaller estates had usually to buy ready-cut timber and ready-forged iron. Self-sufficiency in this respect was of limited relevance even on large estates. Durham Priory bought ready-forged iron as well as making its own.

It is easy to demonstrate that even the largest estates bought manufactured items when it suited them. By 1300 almost any items of agricultural equipment might be bought as a complete final product. This was possible in even relatively little urbanized parts of the country. In 1305–06, for example, a

⁷ *Accounts and Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam of Stratton*, ed. by Farr; *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire*, ed. by Harvey.

⁸ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 212.

cart was purchased in Darlington at a cost of 4s. for the priory's demesne at Billingham.⁹ It might be supposed that the availability of such ready-made items was restricted to second-hand items, but there is good evidence to the contrary. The Earldom of Cornwall estates paid 2s. 6d. for a 'new cart' at Rockcliff in 1296–97 for carrying marl.¹⁰ Durham Priory bought a 'new cart' for Bewley manor in 1303–04.¹¹ Bolton Priory bought a 'new cart' from William of Calverley for 2s. 2d. in 1320–01.¹² In saying that carts were new in these instances the accountant presumably meant that they were newly made, but the relatively low costs may imply that only the wooden structure, the cart body, was in question, to be fitted up by a wheelwright or smith. Beaulieu Abbey bought three carts in 1269–70 for Faringdon Church, Shilton, and Wick, at prices of 11s., 4s. 9d., and 4s. 6d. respectively, the price differences being probably explained by the fact that the first had its wheels ready bound with iron whereas the other two had yet to be bound.¹³ When the Winchester bishopric estate bought two new carts ready fitted up in 1301–02, it paid 11s. for one at Adderbury and 14s. for one at Bishops Waltham.¹⁴

If carts could be purchased as ready-made items, it is not surprising that a wide range of other items was also available. For a preliminary example of what was possible on a relatively remote manor, Durham Priory's manor of Bewley in 1305–06 may serve as an example. This manor had the largest by far of the priory's arable acreages, with about 700 acres under crops. It was situated north of the Tees estuary, near Billingham, about seventeen miles south-east of the larger urban markets of Durham and about fifteen miles north-east of Darlington, but within six miles of Stockton and Hartlepool. No large items of equipment were bought, but there were smaller items of equipment in this ready-made category: ten dung forks, some sieves, a trivet and three sacks, to a combined cost of about 5s. A larger expenditure went on hardware to make or mend equipment: twenty-five iron plough feet (*pedales*), thirteen clouts (iron plates) to protect the mouldboards of the demesne ploughs, sixty more clouts for cart axles and twenty-four clouts for wains together with the nails needed to attach them, 200 nails for cartwheels, twelve clouts to strengthen cartwheels,

⁹ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 84.

¹⁰ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, II, p. 197.

¹¹ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 213.

¹² *Bolton Priory Compotus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, p. 482.

¹³ *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, pp. 56, 59, 77.

¹⁴ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 148 and 254.

six iron spade heads, three tethers 'with swivels', three ropes for a cart, at a total cost of 14s. 6d. The relatively minor repairs to the manorial buildings also led to purchases of ready-made goods, notably different sorts of nails. The manor acquired 6500 brad-nails, 120 spikings and 120 fly-wings, In addition a key was bought for the larder and 1300 laths were bought for the sheepfolds. None of these were particularly complex items, but there was evidently some advantage in buying them rather than having them specially made.

When items are described in manorial accounts as 'bought' they can normally be assumed to be acquired ready-made. If an accountant records that an item has been bought he usually uses the past participle of the verb *emere*; he writes *in una rota empta* ('for a wheel bought') or *in clavis emptis* ('for nails bought'). On the other hand, if an item has been made to order, the accountant will write *in una rota facienda* ('for making a wheel') or *in una rota facta* ('for a wheel made'), implying payment for the maker's labour. Sometimes the clerk adds that objects so made were constructed from the lord's timber or iron, or from re-used materials. So if a clerk records that something has been bought he indicates that it was not made by an artisan employed specially for that purpose. Since accountants had the ready phrase *ex convencione* if they wanted to recorded a contractual payment, it seems likely that in most cases purchases of materials, tools, and parts were not commissioned; the expression *ex convencione* is most commonly used to refer to contractual relations with smiths employed to maintain demesne ploughs. The implications of this are wide-reaching, since it means that in any part of England from which we have manorial accounts a demesne manager could expect to acquire certain items of ready-made equipment and hardware.¹⁵ This is surely implied by the manor of Cuxham's purchase of two new ploughshares and a pair of cartwheels at Crowmarsh Giffard fair in 1289–90. In 1293–94 the reeve of Cuxham bought cart-clouts and clout-nails in Abingdon.¹⁶ In 1289 Durham Priory bought a pair of wheels in Newcastle for its Tyneside manor of Wardley.¹⁷ The plough costs of Cuxham five years later record an expenditure of 1½d. for the reeve's expenses 'when he bought at Reading', but the account does not specify which items he acquired there. In 1277–78, two ploughshares, two pairs of plough-wheels, over one thousand nails, and other iron pieces were bought for Farley (Surrey) in the market town of Croydon, and shortly afterwards the manor bought a further two plough-

¹⁵ An observation made in Platts, *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire*, pp. 121–22.

¹⁶ *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 184–85 and 233.

¹⁷ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 29.

shares in Croydon and two in Walkingstead.¹⁸ This suggests a regular acquisition of metalware from Croydon, though whether or not through the market or fair there is not recorded. There was no market or fair at Walkingstead, so far as we know, though neither do we know where that sale was negotiated. In 1301–02 the Winchester manor of Culham in Berkshire bought cart-clouts and nails as far away as the borough of Farnham in Surrey, apparently in the course of picking up some timber there.¹⁹

Any set of manorial accounts will demonstrate that, in the acquisition of larger and more complex items such as carts, wains, and ploughs, the balance of advantage usually lay in having them made rather than buying them. On the Winchester estate in 1301–02, besides the two new carts bought, carts were made, or cart bodies were made and presumably fitted, at East Knoyle, Merdon, Highclere, Bentley, Fareham, East Meon, and Wolvesey, implying that across the estate the ratio of new carts made to new carts bought was seven to two. The making of such items by employed carpenters was well-nigh universal. On the Lacy estates the manager at Ightenhill in 1294–96 spent 1s. 10d. on the wagons ‘with one new wagon made’, at Standen in the same year 2s. 8d. was spent on making two new wagons, and at Accrington in 1304–05 the account records 6s. 8d. paid for making two new wagons and mending others: there is no example of a cart bought ready-made.²⁰ Apart from the dung cart at Rockcliff, all the new carts and waggons on the Earldom of Cornwall estate in 1296–97 were made by hired artisans. The purchase of ready-made ploughs was also an exceptional event. At Havant in 1301–02 the manager recorded an expenditure of 8d. for a new plough bought, but the price implies that this could only have been the wooden frame without any ironwork or purchased components, so the absolute difference between a new and an old plough is not determined.²¹ The 7½d. paid for a plough at St Keverne in remote Cornwall in 1269–70 implies the same.²² On the estates of the Earldom of Cornwall in 1296–97 two new ploughs were made from the estate’s own timber at Sundon (Beds), one at Berkhamsted (Herts), one at Isleworth (Mdx) and an unstated num-

¹⁸ *Surrey Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Briggs, pp. 12 and 18.

¹⁹ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, p. 183.

²⁰ *Two ‘Compti’ of the Lancashire and Cheshire Manors of Henry de Lacy*, ed. by Lyons, pp. 17, 41, and 89.

²¹ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, p. 239.

²² *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, p. 103.

ber at Watlington (Oxon).²³ On the Crowland Abbey manors of Cottenham, Oakington, Dry Drayton, and Wellingborough in 1322–23 no ploughs were bought, but two were newly made for Cottenham, two for Oakington, and at least two for Wellingborough.²⁴ On Durham Priory manors the making of numerous new ploughs is a regular item of expenditure: two at Houghall in 1299–1300, nine at Pittington, ten at Wardley, three at Rainton, and fourteen at Ketton. Bolton Priory had wagons as well as ploughs made on its properties at Kildwick and elsewhere.²⁵

One of the principal reasons for preferring to make more complex items rather than buying them was the availability of old materials to be recycled in mending, making, and remaking. At Otterwood in 1269–70 the friar warden of Beaulieu Priory had to buy new iron because the old iron was stolen, the assumption being that new iron would be acquired only when there was too little available to reuse.²⁶ For this reason we should be prepared for a great deal of ambiguity. On the Winchester estates in 1301–02, as we have seen, new carts or new cart bodies were explicitly bought or made for nine manors, but on all fifty-four manors there was expenditure on buying parts and mending or remaking carts. There was no absolute distinction between the nine new carts and the dozens of old ones patched up, but rather a range of different degrees of make, mend, and remake. It is impossible to tell to what extent the plough parts bought at Bewley in 1305–06 were used for making completely new ploughs as opposed to remaking or repairing old ones. Even where accounts seems to give more specific guidance, it is as well to be cautious in interpreting them. On all four manors of the estates of the Earldom of Cornwall in 1296–97 where new ploughs were made it is noted that other old ploughs had been repaired. In each case the distinction between old and new was restricted to the mending or remaking of the wooden frame and bore no reference to the metal fittings.²⁷ The making of complex items such as a cart or a wagon was likely to involve the reuse of at least some material, even when they were described as new.

²³ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 7, 18, 43, and 86.

²⁴ Page, *Estates of Crowland Abbey*, pp. 239 and 247; *Wellingborough Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Page, p. 124. The ploughs at Oakington were made *cum meremio ad easdem empto*.

²⁵ *Bolton Priory Comptus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, pp. 80, 92, 118, 147, 251, 270, 313–14, 338–39, 362, and 482.

²⁶ *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, p. 158.

²⁷ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 7, 18, 43, and 86.

As this implies, local smiths and carpenters were of vital importance in maintaining equipment.²⁸ Smiths are most prominent in manorial accounts for the shoeing of horses, chiefly because this was a predictable overhead charge that could be made subject to contract. A manorial officer, knowing how many horses he had to maintain, was able to agree a sum to be paid to the smith for a year's work *ex convencione*. Almost any work requiring the making or fitting of metal parts, however, was likely to require the skills and apparatus of a smith. Sometimes this is explicit, as at Downton in 1301–02, where a smith was remunerated for forging 'ploughshares, coulter and other ironwork pertaining to the plough'; or at Merdon in the same year, where a smith fitted cartwheels; or at Wargrave in the same year, where a smith mended an old cart with iron purchased for the purpose.²⁹ More commonly expenditures for making or mending are recorded without explicit reference to the artisan concerned. Given the importance of repairing and remaking equipment with metal parts locally, and the need for specific skills and equipment, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of smiths in the upkeep of equipment.

There are significant differences between the relationship of carpenters to demesne economies and that of smith. In the past they had rarely been retained by service holdings, and in the present they did not receive annual contracts such as those frequently given to smiths for the upkeep of ploughs and the shoeing of plough-horses.³⁰ Their importance, however, for the making and repair of plough-frames, cart-frames, and other wooden equipment, and for the upkeep of wooden bridges, gates, and manorial buildings, is to be seen in almost any account, even if it has to be inferred from the nature of the work. The making and maintenance of watermills and windmills required particularly exacting carpentry.³¹ Indeed, most aspects of millwork illustrate well the importance of both hired workmen and of purchased materials for everyday operations on the manor,³² even if the labour services of tenants

²⁸ Their importance for maintaining equipment on manorial demesnes is usually taken for granted, but see Bennett, *Life on the English Manor*, pp. 66–67; Platts, *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire*, pp. 121–23; Stern, *A Hertfordshire Demesne of Westminster Abbey*, pp. 68–69.

²⁹ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 64, 80, and 176.

³⁰ Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century*, p. 287.

³¹ Langdon, *Mills in the Medieval Economy*, pp. 68, 132–33, and 248–56.

³² Besides the wealth of information in Langdon, *Mills in the Medieval Economy*, see also Farmer, 'Millstones for Medieval Manors'; Holt, *The Mills of Medieval England*, pp. 122–31 and 176–77.

might be used for some routine operations such as maintaining the mill pond and mill race.³³

The propensity to reuse and remake means that the principal importance of trade with artisans lay not in the purchase of finished items of equipment but in the purchase of component parts. This is sufficiently obvious in the case of building materials, since buildings had to be constructed in situ. Apart from manufactured building materials, such as slates and tiles for roofs, and nails by the thousand, manors bought hinges, locks, bolts, and keys for doors. The making and maintenance of farm equipment normally depended upon the purchase of some manufactured parts, like the plough-feet, clouts, and nails bought at Bewley. At Forncett in 1272–73 the smith remade two ploughs forging some of the parts from steel bought for the purpose, but the manor bought three ploughshares, two pairs of wheels, and two different sizes of nails.³⁴ Amongst the items available for purchase plough parts were prominent, but just what parts were sold locally depended partly on the variable character of ploughs. One of the commonest purchases on all the Durham Priory manors, as at Bewley in 1305–06, was of mouldboard clouts — metal plates to protect a plough's wooden mouldboard, which turned over the furrow slice and was consequently subject to heavy wear — but this item does not figure in the Winchester bishopric accounts of the same period.

Amongst the most universally traded iron plough parts were ploughshares. Since ploughshares suffered badly in the course of a year from abrasion, their maintenance invariably depended on either new iron or newly purchased shares. They could be made by local smiths, and where they do not occur as purchased items it must be assumed that their manufacture was included in the general preparation of plough-irons that is a frequent item in accounts. The balance of advantage was often in buying them ready-made. At Framlingham in 1324–25, for example, the reeve had two ploughshares remade out of the iron of six old ones, but he bought ten new ones.³⁵ On the Winchester estate in 1301–02 purchased ploughshares occur as an item of expense on thirty-six out of fifty-two manors recording plough costs, even on manors where a smith was contracted for the year to forge the ironwork for the ploughs, as at East Meon and East Meon Church.³⁶ On the Beaulieu Abbey estates the purchase of ploughshares

³³ For example, 'Introduction', in *The Black Book of Hexham*, ed. by Britnell, Ety, and King, pp. 10–11.

³⁴ Davenport, *Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor*, Appendix, p. xxxiii.

³⁵ *Medieval Framlingham*, ed. by Ridgard, p. 58.

³⁶ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 18 (Kingston St Mary

was perhaps subsumed under the accountants' normal entry for 'plough-irons bought' or 'bought and mended', but eight were bought for Wick.³⁷ Purchases of ploughshares in 1296–97, on the Earldom of Cornwall's smaller number of demesne manors, are recorded at Iver (Bucks), Mere (Wilts), Watlington (Oxon), and Rockcliff (Yorks).³⁸ Merton College's manor of Cuxham was a regular buyer of ploughshares.³⁹ Adam of Stratton's manor of Sevenhampton bought four ploughshares in c. 1269–70, two in 1272–73 and one in 1273–34, though from then on the balance of advantage seems to have lain in having them made. It is impossible to know the practice at Wellingborough, where plough costs were lumped together as a single item. On northern manors the purchase of ploughshares is well attested in the purchases of Bolton Priory.⁴⁰

Iron plough-feet (*pedales* or *ferri pedales*) were another item normally purchased rather than made, if required. These were bars attached to the front of the plough-beam on ploughs without wheels to regulate the depth of ploughing.⁴¹ They were bought for twenty-five manors on the Winchester bishopric estate.⁴² The Beaulieu accounts do not help, as they combine expenditures

and Nailsbourne), 27 (Trull and Bishops Hull), 32 (Holway), 35 (Poundisford), 55 (Upton), 58 (Bishops Fonthill), 79 (Merdon), 87 (Crawley), 94 (Overton), 102 (North Waltham), 106 (Highclere), 120 (Ecchinswell), 125 (Woodhay), 129 (Ashmansworth), 148 (Adderbury), 155 (Ivinghoe), 163 (West Wycombe), 170 (Morton), 175 (Wargrave), 182 (Culham), 189 (Billingbear), 195 (Brightwell), 202 (Harwell), 211 (Farnham), 220 (Bentley), 226 (Fareham), 244 (Bitterne), 253 (Bishops Waltham), 262 (Droxford), 270 (Twyford), 286 (East Meon), 293 (East Meon Church), 298 (Hambleton), 313 (Cheriton), 331 (Wield), and 364 (Cams).

³⁷ *Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, pp. 56, 59, 69, 77, 90, 103, 110, 115, 121, 132, 136, 140, 146, 152, and 158.

³⁸ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 28 (Iver), 60 (Mere), and 86 (Watlington); II, p. 197 (Rockcliff).

³⁹ *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 164, 172, 184, 217, 233, 268, 285, 317, 354, 415, and 450.

⁴⁰ *Bolton Priory Comptus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, pp. 272, 291, 338–39, 341, 362, and 445.

⁴¹ This is the definition in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, which nevertheless errs in restricting plough-feet to unwheeled ploughs, since they are clearly associated with wheeled ploughs on the Winchester bishopric estate.

⁴² *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 48 (East Knoyle), 55 (Upton), 58 (Bishops Fonthill), 73 (Bishopstone), 79 (Merdon), 87 (Crawley), 94 (Overton), 102 (North Waltham), 125 (Woodhay), 02 (Harwell), 226 (Fareham), 244 (Bitterne), 253 (Bishops Waltham), 262 (Droxford), 270 (Twyford), 286 (East Meon), 293 (East Meon Church), 298 (Hambleton), 306 (Bishops Sutton), 313 (Cheriton), 319 (Beauworth), 323

on ploughs all together, though they record *pedales* bought for Wick.⁴³ The Earldom of Cornwall accounts record purchases of *ferri pedales* at Sundon, Cippenham, Isleworth, Mere, and Watlington.⁴⁴ This understates the true figure for the earldom manors, since in some places the evidence is unspecific, and it is probable that across the estate plough-feet were more commonly bought than made. They were purchased on eight manors of the bishopric of Durham for which there are plough costs from the plague year 1348–49.⁴⁵ They were an annual item of expenditure at both Sevenhampton and Cuxham all through the period of the surviving accounts.⁴⁶

Another range of metal parts was needed for carts and waggons, notably clouts, which were metal plates needed to protect the axle and wheel bearings from wear. Clouts were bought in large numbers, though the eighty-four cart- and wain-clouts purchased at Bewley in 1305–06 was an exceptionally large number for a single manor. On the Winchester estate in 1301–02 cart-clouts together with the nails to fix them were acquired by purchase on so many manors that even where this is not explicit it may be assumed; on none of the manors are cart-clouts said to have been made.⁴⁷ They were also invariably bought on the demesne manors of the Earldom of Cornwall.⁴⁸ In 1322–23

(Alresford), 338 (Esher), 357 (Wolvesey), and 364 (Cams).

⁴³ *Bolton Priory Comptus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, p. 77.

⁴⁴ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 7–8, 35, 43, 60, and 86.

⁴⁵ *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, ed. by Greenwell, pp. 217, 225, 230, 238, 243, 246, 254, and 257.

⁴⁶ *Accounts and Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam of Stratton*, ed. by Farr, pp. 32, 52, 62, 73, 83, 93, 102, 111, 120, 129, 137, 145, 154, 163, 172, and 180; *Manorial Records of Cuxham*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 164, 172, 184, 200, 217, 233, 251, 268, 317, 337, 354, 374, 394, 415, 432, 450, 482, 497, 525, 532, and 560. For the distribution of 'foor' and other types of ploughs, see Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation*, pp. 127–41.

⁴⁷ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 18 (Kingston St Mary and Nailsbourne), 24 (Staplegrove), 32 (Holway), 36 (Poundisford), 49 (East Knoyle), 58 (Bishops Fonthill), 65 (Downton), 73 (Bishopstone), 80 (Merdon), 87 (Crawley), 94 (Overton), 102 (North Waltham), 107 (Highclere), 115 (Burghclere), 120 (Ecchinswell), 125 (Woodhay), 129 (Ashmansworth), 137 (Witney), 148 (Adderbury), 183 (Culham), 189 (Billingbear), 196 (Brightwell), 212 (Farnham), 220 (Bentley), 226 (Fareham), 244 (Bitterne), 254 (Bishops Waltham), 262 (Droxford), 271 (Twyford), 279 (Bishopstoke), 286 (East Meon), 299 (Hambledon), 306 (Bishops Sutton), 313 (Cheriton), 319 (Beauworth), 324 (Alresford), 331 (Wield), 338 (Esher), 358 (Wolvesey), and 364 (Cams).

⁴⁸ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 8, 18, 28, 35, 43, 50, 61, 86, 197, and 209.

the Crowland Cambridgeshire manors of Cottenham and Oakington, but not apparently Dry Drayton, both bought cart-clouts; they bought twenty-four each, and at Cottenham we are told the twenty-four required 360 nails, which is fifteen each. The purchase of clouts is less apparent on the Beaulieu Abbey manors, whose accounts are less itemized, but it occurs often enough to establish that the purchasing was not unusual if not normal.⁴⁹ The evidence from the Winchester and Earldom of Cornwall estates suggest that clouts needed to be purchased annually, implying a regular and substantial level of trade in such items for local smiths. This is borne out by the Cuxham accounts, which record the purchase of cart-clouts and nails every year.⁵⁰

All these items needed nails to fit them. Nails could be made to order by a local smith,⁵¹ but in large numbers they were commonly bought in, as at Bewley in 1305–06. ‘Nailer’ is recorded as an occupational surname from the 1230s onwards,⁵² though nails were produced by general smiths as well. At Witney in 1300–01 the smith was paid for using the lord’s iron to make both large nails for fixing an iron rim to some new cartwheels and small nails for fixing clamps.⁵³ There were numerous different sorts of nails for different purposes, however, that probably need more specialist making, some of them specific to equipment and some to construction work. The Durham accounts of 1277–1310 mention board-nails, brad-nails, clout-nails, fly-wings, scot-nails, spikings, stobbs, strake-nails, as well as just plain nails. It may be significant that though the smith at Witney was able to make nails for some purposes, the manor purchased the clout-nails it required along with the clouts. At Farley in Surrey in 1277–78, one hundred spikings were bought in Walkingstead and two consignments of 500 nails were bought in Croydon, demonstrating that this was genuinely a trade between different communities.⁵⁴

Even in the case of spades, shovels, hay-forks, and dung-forks, though they might be sold as completed tools, often what they sold was the metal head, to be fitted by the purchaser to a wooden handle. This is another example when

⁴⁹ *Account-Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, pp. 69, 90, 103, and 115.

⁵⁰ *Manorial Records of Cuxham*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 165, 173, 184, 200, 217, 233, 251, 268, 285, 318, 337, 355, 375, 395, 415, 433, 450, 482, 497, 511, 532, 547, 560, 575, and 593.

⁵¹ For example, *Ministers’ Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, p. 8; *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, p. 137.

⁵² Fransson, *Middle English Surnames of Occupation, 1100–1350*, p. 149; Reaney and Wilson, *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames*, pp. 319–20.

⁵³ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, p. 137.

⁵⁴ *Surrey Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Briggs, p. 12.

older materials were likely to be reused, since metal heads wore more rapidly than the handles. At Pittington in Durham in 1285–86, for instance, the manager accounted for 2d. paid ‘for the irons for two dung-forks and for their binding’.⁵⁵ The acquisition of heads separately from handles probably explains some ambiguities in the accounts. At Sevenhampton (Wilts), for example, shovels and spades were unambiguously ‘bought’ in some years — one shovel and one spade in 1276–77, four shovels and two spades in 1379–80. But in the intermediate years the accountant records a payment for fitting the heads (*pro tribulis ferrandis*) — four shovels in 1277–78, three shovels, three spades and a fork in 1281–82. Although there can be no certainty, it seems likely that these entries amount to the same thing. On the other hand, it seems that managers could buy completed items if they wished. At Maldon (Surrey) in 1300–01 the accountant recorded first for ‘one iron for a shovel’ (*in j ferro ad tribulam*) and then ‘for two shovels and a spade’ (*in ij tribulis et j vanga*), suggesting a difference between the iron component and a complete item.⁵⁶ On Durham manors in the early fourteenth century the priory was able to buy both heads and handles. At Pittington in 1277–78, for example, the manager paid 8d. ‘for four shovels bought with their irons’ and 1s. 4d. ‘for eight wooden parts of dung-forks bought with their ironwork’.⁵⁷

Besides smiths, another occupational group that seems to have been committed to manufacturing ready-made parts was the wheelwrights. It was not uncommon for an estate to have its cart and wagon wheels made on the estate. Bolton Priory often had wheels made.⁵⁸ On the Earldom of Cornwall estate, wheels were made of the earl’s timber at Watlington.⁵⁹ Even in such cases, however, the making of wheels might depend on buying components. On Durham Priory’s manor of Ferryhill in 1305–06 two pairs of cartwheels were made from the priory’s timber but the axles and spokes were purchased.⁶⁰ Similarly, at the Abbey of Bec’s manor of Combe in 1307–08 a wheel was made using the lord’s timber, but the spokes were bought.⁶¹ In fact, cartwheels were very often, and perhaps normally, bought in as ready-made items, and the same is true of

⁵⁵ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 18.

⁵⁶ *Surrey Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Farr, p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 10.

⁵⁸ *Bolton Priory Comptus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, pp. 129, 166, 270, and 291.

⁵⁹ *Ministers’ Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, p. 87.

⁶⁰ *Durham Priory Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, p. 293.

⁶¹ *Select Documents of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, ed. by Chibnall, p. 161.

plough-wheels in parts of the country where ploughs were wheeled. They were frequently purchased 'naked' (*nuda*) in order to be subsequently rimmed with iron by a smith. At Poundisford (Somerset) in 1300–01 the manager bought in a pair of wheels for 4s. 11d. but then paid the smith 8s. 6¼d. for binding the wheels with iron and fitting them to a wagon. A smith at Merdon received 9s. 11d. for a similar operation.⁶² On the Earldom of Cornwall estate in 1296–97 the four wheels made at Watlington were quite exceptional, and the normalcy of buying rather than making on the manors of the Earldom is easily established. At Berkhamsted the earl's officials bought five pairs of plough-wheels, four more pairs of wheels for dung carts lacking iron rims (*rote nude [...] ad fima*), another pair of wheels to be fitted with a rim, and a further three pairs of wheels for the harvest wains.⁶³ On the bishopric of Winchester estate, which was rich in timber resources, cartwheels were specially made in 1301–02 on twelve manors, mostly from the bishop's timber,⁶⁴ but they were bought for twenty-three manors.⁶⁵ Where ploughs on the Winchester estate had wheels they were almost invariably bought; in 1301–02 they were bought for thirty-two manors, even though not all manors had wheeled ploughs.⁶⁶ Plough-wheels were said to have been made, from the bishop's timber, only at Overton.⁶⁷

⁶² *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 36, 80.

⁶³ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, pp. 8 (Sundon), 18 (Berkhamsted), 28 (Iver), 35 (Cippenham), 43 (Isleworth), 50 (Newport), and 61 (Mere).

⁶⁴ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 94 (Overton), 120 (Ecchinswell), 129 (Ashmansworth), 155 (Ivinghoe), 163 (West Wycombe), 170 (Morton), 286 (East Meon), 293 (East Meon Church), 299 (Hambledon), 306 (Bishops Sutton), 313 (Cheriton), and 324 (Alresford).

⁶⁵ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 36 (Poundisford), 42 (Rimpton), 49 (East Knoyle), 64 (Downton), 80 (Merdon), 87 (Crawley), 94 (Overton), 102 (North Waltham), 125 (Woodhay), 137 (Witney), 176 (Wargrave), 183 (Culham), 189 (Billingbear), 202 (Harwell), 211 (Farnham), 220 (Bentley), 239 (Havant), 262 (Droxford), 271 (Twyford), 279 (Bishopstoke), 331 (Wield), 338 (Esher), and 358 (Wolvesey).

⁶⁶ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 48 (East Knoyle), 55 (Upton), 58 (Bishops Fonthill), 64 (Downton), 73 (Bishopstone), 79 (Merdon), and 87 (Crawley).

⁶⁷ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 95 (Overton), 102 (North Waltham), 107 (Highclere), 115 (Burghclere), 120 (Ecchinswell), 125 (Woodhay), 129 (Ashmansworth), 176 (Wargrave), 182 (Culham), 186 (Waltham St Lawrence), 189 (Billingbear), 195 (Brightwell), 202 (Harwell), 211 (Farnham), 220 (Bentley), 226 (Fareham), 244 (Bitterne), 253 (Bishops Waltham), 262 (Droxford), 270 (Twyford), 279 (Bishopstoke), 286 (East Meon), 293 (East Meon Church), 298 (Hambledon), 306 (Bishops Sutton), 313

Crowland Abbey bought cartwheels for Cottenham, Oakington, and Dry Drayton, while in 1322–23 there is no mention of such wheels made for these manors.⁶⁸ The purchase of wheels, on average about two pairs a year, was a regular charge on the account at Adam of Stratton's manor of Sevenhampton between 1269 and 1287. Only once, in 1273–74, do the accounts record an existing wheel being repaired, and that repair involved replacing the iron rim rather than remaking the wheel.⁶⁹ At Cuxham, wheels were bought for ploughs or carts or both almost annually from the 1270s through to the mid-fourteenth century.⁷⁰ At Wellingborough, too, though the costs of maintaining the carts were often lumped together in a single entry without details, the purchase of wheels was evidently a frequent event: two pairs were bought in 1280–81, two in 1281–82, two pairs in 1282–83, one pair in 1288–89, and so on.⁷¹ Bolton Priory bought three pairs of wheels at Broughton in 1299–1300 and a pair at Halton in 1308–09.⁷²

Wooden axles were perhaps less frequently purchased than wheels but are nevertheless a frequent item of expenditure in manorial accounts. The Beaulieu Abbey accounts regularly record axles bought, often in the formulaic statement that they were bought and fitted to carts, and there is no doubt about the normalcy of buying rather than making axles on that estate.⁷³ On the bishopric of Winchester manors it was usual to record a sum for fitting carts with axles without stating where the axles had come from, but on a dozen manors they are said to have been bought.⁷⁴ On the Earldom of Cornwall estates the purchase

(Cheriton), 319 (Beauworth), 323 (Alresford), 331 (Wield), 338 (Esher), 357 (Wolvesey), and 364 (Cams).

⁶⁸ Page, *Estates of Crowland Abbey*, pp. 239, 247, and 255.

⁶⁹ *Accounts and Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam of Stratton*, ed. by Farr, p. 52.

⁷⁰ *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 164–65, 172–3, 184–85, 217, 233, 251, 268, 285, 302, 317–18, 337, 354–55, 374–75, 394, 415, and 432–33.

⁷¹ *Wellingborough Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Page, pp. 22, 28, 36, 49. For the dating of the rolls, see Aston, 'Note on the Dating of the Rolls', pp. xxxix–xlii.

⁷² *Bolton Priory Compotus*, ed. by Kershaw and Smith, pp. 104 and 251.

⁷³ *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, pp. 59, 65, 69, 77, 90, 103, 121, 140, 153, 166, and 262.

⁷⁴ For example, *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 49 (East Knoyle), 58 (Bishops Fonthill), 80 (Merdon), 87 (Crawley), 107 (Highclere), 226 (Fareham), 239 (Havant), 244 (Bitterne), 254 (Bishops Waltham), 262 (Droxford), 358 (Wolvesey), and 364 (Cams).

of a dozen axles is recorded at Berkhamsted.⁷⁵ They were not apparently bought as frequently as cart-clouts at Cuxham, but the purchases of an axle is recorded in 1290–91 and in most of the published accounts from 1327–78 to 1349–50, and again in 1356–57, it is recorded either that axles were bought or that timbers were bought for axles, which probably amount to the same thing.⁷⁶

Other less complex wooden items commonly bought included yokes for oxen. On the Winchester manors in 1301–02 the balance of advantage lay with having them made, presumably because the estate had ample reserves of timber. New yokes were made from existing wood for the Taunton manors and for Burghclere, Ivinghoe, Twyford, Bishops Sutton, Beauworth, and Wield, though they were bought for Rimpton, East Knoyle, Upton, Bishopstone, Ecchinswell, Harwell, and Fareham.⁷⁷ Yokes were normally purchased as required for the manors of Beaulieu Abbey in 1269–70, and there are no references in the accounts of that year to the making of yokes.⁷⁸ There is little evidence from the Earldom of Cornwall manors, but in the only case where yokes are mentioned, and where the text is undamaged, six new yokes were bought for Mere for 4½d., that is ¾d. each.⁷⁹ At Sevenhampton purchased yokes were a regular item of annual expenditure: sixteen in 1372–73, twelve in 1273–74, thirteen in 1274–75, eighteen in 1275–76, and so on.⁸⁰ They were also regularly purchased at Cuxham up to 1296–97, though there then followed a long period when they are not mentioned in the account and must have been made specially, perhaps because the estate had access to a carpenter whose charges were sufficiently low. Managers of Cuxham started buying yokes regularly again in the years immediately after the Black Death.⁸¹

A further category of equipment in normal and regular use and almost always needing to be bought, was basketwork, comprising articles for a wide

⁷⁵ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, p. 18.

⁷⁶ *Manorial Records of Cuxham*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 200, 355, 375, 415, 433, 450, 482, and 560.

⁷⁷ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 18, 24, 27, 35, 42, 48, 55, 58, 73, 115, 120, 155, 202, 226, 270, 306, 319, and 331.

⁷⁸ *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, pp. 69, 77, 90, 103, 136, 140, and 152.

⁷⁹ *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall*, ed. by Midgley, I, p. 60, where the manuscript is damaged at the critical point (p. 8).

⁸⁰ *Accounts and Surveys of the Wiltshire Lands of Adam of Stratton*, ed. by Farr, pp. 41, 52, 62, and 73.

⁸¹ *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire*, ed. by Harvey, pp. 184, 200, 233, 251, 268, 482, 497, 532, and 547.

range of different purposes, usually unspecified in the accounts. Such items were necessarily bought complete since there were no parts to replace. Baskets were used for carrying or measuring grain,⁸² and for distributing seed on the land.⁸³ They were used for transporting cheese,⁸⁴ and for the fish and other food distributed to harvest workers.⁸⁵ They were also likely to be used for carrying smaller items, such as dairy produce, to market. Other baskets might be used in the fields for spreading dung.⁸⁶ These various uses imply that a range of articles of different sizes and shapes was on sale at markets and fairs. Sacks were an alternative to baskets for some uses, such as the carriage of grain, and they too are abundantly attested in manorial accounts as items frequently purchased.

It in this range of small, mostly inexpensive component parts that we can see and define a reliable market for manufactured items of iron, wood, and basketwork within the rural community as a normal feature of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century economy. We need not be more than moderately sanguine about the profits to be made because although many items were bought their average price was low, and even with a high turnover the living to be made was probably modest. Entry into these trades was likely to be relatively easy, since a lot could be done with only modest capital equipment. And although personal names like Ironmonger, Locksmith, Cartwright, Wainwright, Wheelwright, Wheeler, and Ploughwright are well recorded from the thirteenth century, we should probably not be very confident about the number of people in any given area who could be secure in specializations of this sort.⁸⁷ A lot would depend upon how heavily iron tools and fittings were available outside seigniorial agriculture, since it cannot be assumed that peasant farmers had as ready access to them as demesne managers.⁸⁸ In assessing the possibilities of specialization,

⁸² *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 36, 71, 76, 80, 115, 120, 139, 156, 227, 240, 255, and 263.

⁸³ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 48–49, 71, 82, 120, 286, and 321.

⁸⁴ *Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1301–2*, ed. by Page, pp. 71 and 76.

⁸⁵ The association between basketwork and fish is strong in the Durham accounts, partly because the priory had its own herring-curing plant: *Durham Manorial Accounts*, ed. by Britnell, pp. 31–32 and 45–46. See also *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, p. 191.

⁸⁶ *Account Book of Beaulieu Abbey*, ed. by Hockey, p. 338.

⁸⁷ Fransson, *Middle English Surnames of Occupation*, pp. 145–46 and 161–63; Britnell, 'Specialization of Work in England, 1100–1300'.

⁸⁸ Astill, 'An Archaeological Approach to the Development of Agricultural Technologies', esp. pp. 208–11.

it would be interesting, too, to know to what extent the makers of cart parts, plough parts, and other bits of equipment for sale were the same smiths and carpenters who were active in maintaining farm equipment on contract or for piece rates. Nevertheless, manorial records allow us to be confident of the normalcy of these trades and to illuminate their composition as labour forces.

A number of distinct propositions can be set out in concluding this discussion. (1) Complete independence of the market for the supply of farm equipment was unknown in England by the thirteenth century, though many landlords had reserves of timber and some had their own sources of iron. (2) In every part of the country from which manorial accounts survive it was possible to buy almost any item of farm equipment ready-made, from wagons down to spades and shovels. (3) It is also true that almost any item of farm equipment could be made by hiring smiths or carpenters, or both, to make them. This means that the cost advantage of buying rather than making any item was frequently finely balanced, and managers may have been swayed in their choice by whether they had surplus materials or trusted artisans rather than by any fine cost calculation. (4) A principal reason for making or re-making equipment rather than buying new was the facility in medieval technology for re-using old materials, so that even a 'new' cart was likely to contain cannibalized parts of older ones. (5) The importance of repairing and remaking equipment meant that the main importance of trade for farm equipment was in the supply of components rather than complete items, though this was not true of basket work. (6) The evidence of accounts in print indicates that some such components were more commonly bought than made: for example wheels, plough-feet, spades, and shovel heads. (7) The importance of purchased items in manorial accounts suggests that artisans made them in anticipation of sales and that they were available from stock to be sold from workshops or at markets and fairs. (8) The importance of reassembling farm equipment from partly old and partly new equipment suggests that the technical expertise of smiths and carpenters was more important for the medieval economy than their presence in manorial accounts would reveal at first sight. (9) Finally, the evidence of manorial accounts, in this as in other respects, testifies to many limitations to the development of trade up to 1350. The extent to which farm managers all over England were able to draw on ready-made products of local artisans is impressive, and yet their expenditure on such items was often seemingly less than the imputed value of unpurchased materials and hired labour used to make and repair such equipment.

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PEASANTS, LORDS, AND COMMERCE: MARKET REGULATION AT BALSHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, IN THE EARLY FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Chris Briggs*

Introduction

The formal market, typically established by a landlord by means of a royal charter, is among the most characteristic institutions of English economic expansion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A very large share of the growing trade of this period is thought to have been conducted in such formal market-places, the term ‘formal’ in this context indicating that the market was held on a fixed location on a specific day each week, that stalls and other infrastructure were provided, and that trade in the market was regulated by the market holder.¹ It is true, however, that much trade continued to take place in informal settings.² Some markets also were held ‘by prescription’, basing their right to exist

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¹ On the formal/informal distinction, see for example, Casson and Lee, ‘Origin and Development’.

² Dyer, ‘Hidden Trade of the Middle Ages’; Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, pp. 97–101.

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on ancient usage, rather than on a charter from the king. Yet from about 1200, there was pressure to formalize existing trading assemblies, and those who wanted to set up new markets were required to purchase a charter, reflecting the fact that the right to hold a market was a royal franchise.³ A large number of these charters related to marketplaces established on manors in the countryside. The resulting multitude of rural, formal trading centres set up by landlords was a distinctive feature of medieval English commercialization.

Despite the importance of rural markets, many aspects of their operation remain obscure. A good deal is known about the chronology of market foundation, or at least of the granting of market charters. There exist a large number of local studies of medieval markets, many of them focused on individual counties.⁴ While these studies provide an excellent overview of the spatial and chronological development of the rural marketing network, detailed case studies of particular market villages are in much shorter supply.⁵ Consequently, as Mark Bailey has observed, information about the qualitative aspects of this network remains scarce.⁶ One important area of uncertainty is the regulation of formal rural markets and their trade by means of rules and structures. This aspect is the focus here. To what extent did rural markets witness the imposition of detailed rules about the prices and quality of goods, the use of weights and measures, or other aspects of market behaviour? What structures existed in small rural markets for the regulation of trade, and what effects did they have on market activity? Such questions concerning the institutional framework of marketing have been explored in detail for towns, where the evidence is richer, most notably and most recently by James Davis.⁷ Less has been published on the more thinly documented village markets.

³ Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, p. 84.

⁴ In writing this chapter, the following works have been consulted in search of comparative material: Tupling, 'Origin of Markets and Fairs'; Unwin, 'Rural Marketing'; Postles, 'Markets for Rural Produce'; Palliser and Pinnock, 'Markets of Medieval Staffordshire'; O'Donnell, 'Market Centres in Herefordshire'; McLain, 'Factors in Market Establishment'; Platts, *Land and People*, pp. 135–44; Coates, 'Origin and Distribution'; Mate, 'Rise and Fall'; Britnell, 'Making of Witham'; Britnell, 'Essex Markets'; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 41–77; Reed, 'Markets and Fairs'; Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets'; Barker, 'Warwickshire Markets'; Fleet, 'Markets in Medieval Lincolnshire'; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*.

⁵ An important case study of a single market village is Smith, 'Periodic Market', though the regulation of trade is not its main focus.

⁶ Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare', pp. 235–37.

⁷ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*.

*The Nature and Effects of Regulation in Medieval Rural Markets:
General Views*

Although previous historians interested in charting the distribution, characteristics, and fortunes of medieval markets have placed their primary emphasis on economic and geographical influences, they have also not ignored the attitudes, motives, and objectives of the lords who obtained market charters and thereby secured the right to regulate trade. On the basis of this literature it is possible to propose three broad views or models of the nature and effects of regulation in rural marketplaces in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The models do not correspond neatly to the views of any particular historian or group of historians. In fact, most commentators recognize that the regulation of markets was undertaken with a variety of aims and outcomes.⁸ However artificial the exercise, though, it does seem worthwhile outlining these three models as a framework for the discussion which follows.

The first model may be termed the 'landlords as enablers' view, which sees landlords as performing a positive role in the development of rural trade.⁹ The formal marketplaces set up by landlords provided institutions of trade that allowed the problems of impersonal exchange to be overcome and boosted the overall size of the market. These institutions comprised not only the regulation of buying and selling, but also the physical facilities and provision for personal security required by traders in the marketplace, as well as the advantages for sharing information and finding trading partners entailed by the concentration of exchange in a single location on a specific day. In this model, lords were particularly important. They were the only agents with the wherewithal to provide these institutions of trade in the countryside, since only they could afford the initial investment needed to set up the formal marketplace. In this view, lords gained from the possession of markets via the receipt of revenue from rents, tolls, and from fines for broken trading rules. The crucial feature, however, is that the reduction in transaction costs associated with seigniorial provision of formal markets benefitted everyone, not just the lord. The revenues of lords as

⁸ See, for example, Britnell, 'Local Trade, Remote Trade', pp. 190–91 and 198–99; Mate, 'Rise and Fall', p. 60.

⁹ For work tending to support this view see, for example, Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets*, e.g. p. 68; Goddard, 'Small Boroughs', esp. pp. 17–19 and 23; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 142–44. For similar arguments concerning a Catalan small-town market and its hinterland, see Milton, *Market Power*, pp. 25 and 31.

franchise-holders increased as a result of formal market development, but the overall growth in trade was even greater.

The second, or ‘rent-seeking’, model offers a more negative assessment of landlords’ role in rural trade. This view would place its greatest emphasis on Bruce Campbell’s point that landlords’ ‘aim in facilitating and promoting transport, trade and commerce was to tax it by levying a variety of tolls — pontage, tonage, tollage, and stallage.’¹⁰ Landlords following this pattern of rent-seeking behaviour might (in theory) invest relatively little in market infrastructure, and focus instead on exacting increasing rates of fine for trading offences, or on seeking to compel local people to use their markets. In this model, market holders desire a return on their initial investment in the market charter, but are less concerned to make the expenditures on infrastructure necessary to boost total trade by attracting outside buyers and sellers. They seek instead to tax the existing exchanges of local residents more heavily. The ‘rent-seeking’ model is therefore distinct from the ‘landlords as enablers’ model. Support for the former is implied in several county-level studies of English markets.¹¹ The opportunities for significant seigniorial taxation of trade in England’s dense network of rural markets have also been emphasized in recent work on medieval commodity markets that compares England with Holland and Flanders.¹²

Finally, there is the ‘consumer protection’ model. In this approach, market regulations exist not to boost the volume of competitive trade nor to allow a lord to extract rents, but rather to protect the interests of local consumers. It is not easy to draw a clear distinction between this model and the ‘landlords as enablers’ model, since in both models the aim and effects of much of the regulation are concerned with boosting the confidence of buyers and sellers and limiting fraud and opportunism. But a ‘consumer protection’ model would be distinguished by, for example, its emphasis on the close regulation of the supply and prices of staple foodstuffs.¹³

¹⁰ Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve*, p. 299.

¹¹ For example, McLain, ‘Factors in Market Establishment’, esp. pp. 84, 88, and 98, who comments that many later thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Kentish markets were founded as a result of the ‘wishful thinking of optimistic lords who sought to profit from patterns that had already become well established’; for similar views see Reed, ‘Markets and Fairs’, pp. 568, 571, and 576.

¹² Dijkman, *Shaping Medieval Markets*, esp. pp. 16, 20, 22–23, 26, 96–107, and 343–46.

¹³ For these features of market regulation, see Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, pp. 90–97; Britnell, ‘Introduction’, pp. xiv–xv.

To investigate rural market regulation in action using this trio of models, attention is focused on the single market village of Balsham, Cambridgeshire, before the Black Death. The Balsham manorial court rolls, which survive from 1310, contain amongst the ‘ordinary’ court business numerous entries concerning exchange and its regulation in the village.¹⁴ Much if not all of this trade must have taken place in Balsham’s chartered weekly market. Some of the relevant entries explicitly mention this market and therefore provide direct insight into trade there. Those entries feature the words *mercatum* or *forum*. Yet these terms do not appear in the court records before 1318, and only feature sporadically thereafter. There is a second group of entries which concern rules governing trade and traders, but do not explicitly state that the offences in question took place in the formal market on market day. However, these do all refer to matters which the market holder was entitled or indeed required to regulate by virtue of his market franchise, such as the measures used in grain sales. It therefore seems likely that this second group of offences all relate to trade in the chartered market, even though this is not explicitly stated. It is worth stressing just how unusual these two categories of entries are. Few if any series of manorial court rolls relating to places with chartered markets feature such a large quantity of information about those markets, so this Balsham evidence is exceptional and valuable.¹⁵ A third and final relevant category of Balsham court roll business comprises the many presentments of brewers and bakers who broke the assizes of bread and ale. Again, none of these say specifically that the sales in question were made on market day in the market place, and it seems very unlikely that bread and ale would have been sold only once a week. Many lords, including those who did not possess markets, exercised the right to enforce the assizes of bread and ale through the view of frankpledge, and lists of offenders against the assizes are a common feature of many manorial court roll series. The right to enforce the assizes was distinct from the wider set of regulatory powers implied by a market charter. Therefore, the Balsham evidence relat-

¹⁴ London, London Metropolitan Archives (hereafter LMA), ACC/1876/MR/02/001–011 (Balsham manorial court rolls 1310–49). There are no manorial account rolls for Balsham, nor does a 1279–80 Hundred Rolls return survive, though nominal returns to the lay subsidies of 1315 and 1327 are extant.

¹⁵ See also James Davis’s chapter, this volume. The rarity of such evidence in manorial records of course explains the shortage of case studies of village markets. Graham, ‘“A Woman’s Work...”’, studies trade in a village with a chartered market (Alrewas, Staffordshire), but it is not clear how much if any of the retailing investigated can be shown conclusively to have occurred in the market.

ing to the enforcement of the assizes of bread and ale cannot be equated with commercial activity in the chartered market and its regulation. Nonetheless, as context this study takes into account the information provided by enforcement of the assizes, as well as that more obviously connected with the wider rules of the chartered market. In order to investigate the aims and effects of the formal regulation of rural exchange, it is necessary to consider all these categories of court roll entry together.

Balsham and Its Market

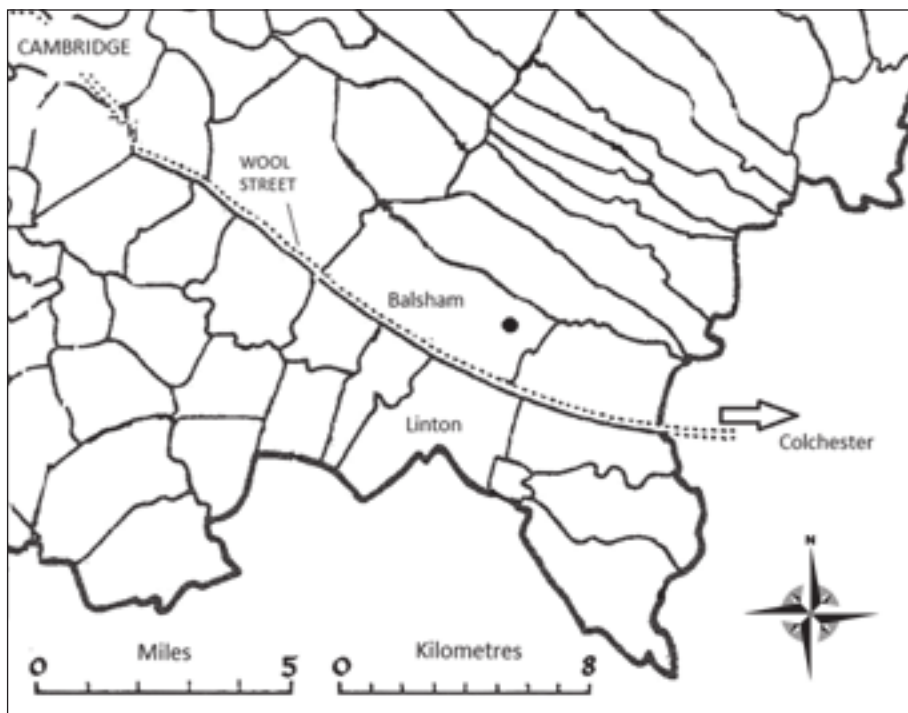
Balsham, situated about fifteen kilometres south-east of Cambridge (Map 10.1), is a nucleated village and the only centre of settlement in the parish. The parish lies on the junction of the chalkland which runs from Royston to Newmarket, and the boulder clays of the county's south-eastern corner. Arable cultivation took place in a system of irregular fields, but lord and peasants were also extensively involved in sheep farming. The court rolls provide numerous references to the folding of tenants' sheep, and to the overburdening of the common pasture, which lay on the chalk heathland in the west of the parish. The clays in the east of the parish also offered economic opportunities, since the court rolls refer several times to the illegal digging of clay (*argillum*) on the common, though the purpose of this activity is not specified.¹⁶

Balsham's principal medieval manor was held by the bishop of Ely. In 1245, King Henry III granted Bishop Hugh de Northwold a charter entitling him to hold a Monday market at his manor of Balsham, plus a three-day annual fair (about which no further information has been found).¹⁷ The site of the marketplace is uncertain. Its likely location was either the large central open area containing the former manor house and parish church, or the rectangular space immediately to the west (Map 10.2).¹⁸ A marketplace in either location would have been in a central position in the village and close to the episcopal manor house, and therefore easy for the landlord or his officials to monitor. Just over two kilometres from this point runs Balsham's south-west boundary, which follows Wool Street, the modern name for the ancient road from Cambridge

¹⁶ For Balsham's landscape and economy see Spufford, 'General View'; Keeling, 'Balsham', pp. 127–31.

¹⁷ Kew, The National Archives (hereafter TNA) C53/37, m. 2; *Calendar of Charter Rolls 1*, p. 287.

¹⁸ Taylor, 'Landscape History, Observation, and Explanation', p. 131; Susan Oosthuizen, personal communication. I am grateful to Dr Oosthuizen for discussing this point with me.



Map 10.1. The parishes of south-east Cambridgeshire, showing locations of Balsham and 'Wool Street'.

to Colchester via Haverhill. This name should not be taken to denote a route frequented by merchants, since it is derived from a medieval form (which also appears at least once in the Balsham court rolls of this period) meaning 'wolves' street'.¹⁹ But it was perhaps the close access to Wool Street and to the trade moving along it which encouraged the initial market foundation.²⁰ There were also potential customers for the new foundation in thirteenth-century Balsham, such as the eighteen manorial cottagers who are unlikely to have produced all their requirements on their own holdings.²¹

¹⁹ Clapham, 'Thirteenth-Century Market Town', p. 194; Reaney, *Place-Names*, pp. 30–32; Rackham, *History of the Countryside*, pp. 255–57; LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (12 December 1315).

²⁰ See Britnell, 'Essex Markets', for the positive effect of a roadside site on a market's fortunes.

²¹ London, British Library (hereafter BL) Cotton MS, Claudius XI, fols 121–126' (Ely



Map 10.2. Balsham, based on nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps and the 1617 estate map.²² Map reproduced by kind permission of the Cambridgeshire Antiquarian Society.

Although the site was promising, there is little evidence that the thirteenth-century market was successful, or that there was significant development of a non-agricultural population or of permanent marketplace structures such as stalls or shops. The Balsham section of the 1250 survey of the bishop's estate does indicate some development in this direction. It includes a group of eleven entries at the end of the Balsham survey, not present in the equivalent section of the 1222 survey, headed 'recent grants in Balsham.'²³ Most of these concern small properties held by eleven different tenants not mentioned elsewhere in the 1250 Balsham survey. Four of these have suggestive occupational surnames:

estate survey, 1250). The other Balsham manorial tenants in 1250 were 6 free tenants, 12 *censuarii*, 34 customary virgaters (20-acre holdings), and 13 customary half-virgaters, plus the small group of tenants of predominantly small holdings described below.

²² Source: Taylor, 'Landscape History, Observation, and Explanation', p. 130.

²³ BL, Cotton MS, Claudius XI, fols 121–126^v; BL, Cotton MS, Tiberius B II, fols 126–129^v (Balsham in Ely estate survey, 1222).

Thomas Sutor, John Faber, Alan Cocus, and Roger Mercator, 'who holds a certain land which was a lane (*venella*) for 2d.'. But later keepers' accounts created for the Ely manors when they were in royal hands during episcopal vacancies (1285–86, 1297–1300, 1315–17) do not provide much evidence for trading activity at Balsham. No income from the Balsham market or fair appears there, although such income is recorded for a few of the other Ely manors in these accounts.²⁴ The earliest Balsham court rolls provide little evidence for an active market in the period between 1310 and 1318 when (as discussed below) a new market was established. Finally, taxable wealth, a potential sign of a successful marketing centre, was not especially high in Balsham. In 1315, out of seven taxation units (*vills*) in Radfield Hundred, Balsham paid the third highest tax charge overall, but its average tax charge per taxpayer was the second lowest in the hundred at 15.9d., the average for the hundred being 21.9d.²⁵

Overall, then, by the early 1300s the market at Balsham seems to have been struggling. This non-growth is evident despite, or perhaps because of, the existence of another more successful market village (or small town) just five kilometres away, at Linton. Linton's Tuesday market was chartered in 1246,²⁶ less than a year after Balsham's.

Balsham's New Market Charter, 1318

In 1318, the king granted the bishop of Ely a second charter for a market at Balsham. This grant entitled Bishop John de Hotham (consecrated October 1316) and his successors to hold a Wednesday market at the manor.²⁷ It is necessary to consider this second grant in detail, as it provides essential background for interpreting the court roll information about the market. It also sheds light on seigniorial motives for founding formal rural marketplaces.

Why did Hotham obtain a new market charter in 1318? One possibility is that the holder of another local Monday market established before 1245 had complained that the Balsham foundation was causing damage to existing rights. This seems unlikely. There were no Monday markets within a fifteen kilometre radius of Balsham founded by charter before 1245, or otherwise known to be

²⁴ TNA, SC 6/1132/9–10, 13. There is no Balsham account in SC 6/1132/11.

²⁵ TNA, E 179/81/7 mm. 16–18 (Cambridgeshire, Twentieth of 1315).

²⁶ Clapham, 'Thirteenth-Century Market Town'.

²⁷ TNA, C 53/105, m. 16; *Calendar of Charter Rolls III*, p. 393 (14 November 1318).

functioning before that date.²⁸ In addition, no trace of a complaint has been found, in the printed sources at least. It has been assumed that the Wednesday market granted for Balsham in 1318 replaced the existing Monday market.²⁹ However, there is no evidence for this, and the purpose of the 1318 grant was not to allow a change of market day, as was sometimes the case.³⁰ It is possible that two Balsham markets were held weekly from 1318. Alternatively, the Monday market simply lapsed. There is no evidence either way.

The argument that in seeking a new Balsham charter in 1318 bishop John was not responding to a complaint from another franchise holder is supported by evidence that between February 1318 and November 1319 he obtained charters for a further six markets and five fairs in seven separate locations.³¹ Five of these were Ely manors, but charters were also granted for a market at Bondby (Lincolnshire) and a market and fair at Solihull (Warwickshire), properties previously acquired by Hotham in a personal capacity. Most of the market charters were the first grants of markets in the places concerned. There were two exceptions: Somersham (Huntingdonshire), for which Bishop Eustace of Ely had been granted a charter for a Thursday market in 1199, and for which John de Hotham obtained a second Thursday market charter in 1319; and Solihull, for which William de Oddingesles had been granted a charter for a Wednesday market in 1242, and for which de Hotham obtained a second Wednesday market charter in 1319. The 1318 Balsham charter thus clearly belongs to the implementation of a more general policy of this bishop concerning his rights in markets and fairs.³² What was it?

This question connects to the wider debate about why so many new formal markets founded after about 1250 turned out to be failures, and why so many charters continued to be sought for markets in this period in spite of the diminishing chances of success. James Masschaele calculated that of fifty-five

²⁸ This statement ignores Cambridge, where presumably a daily market was held. A possible exception to it is Bottisham, eleven kilometres away, where a prescriptive Monday market was first recorded 1298–99. Information about markets and fairs other than Balsham's is drawn from Letters and others, *Gazetteer*.

²⁹ Lysons and Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, II, pt. 1, p. 84; Keeling, 'Balsham', p. 132.

³⁰ As at, for example, Colston Bassett (Nottinghamshire, 1284), or Oxborough (Norfolk, 1326); Letters and others, *Gazetteer*.

³¹ Letters and others, *Gazetteer*; *Calendar of Charter Rolls III*, pp. 391, 393, 397, 415, and 417.

³² This bishop's activity with regard to royal grants of markets and fairs was largely restricted to the years 1318–19. The only other such grant in his episcopate (1316–37) was in 1327 when he was granted a fair at Wisbech: Letters and others, *Gazetteer*; *Calendar of Charter Rolls IV*, p. 11.

markets founded in the four counties of Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire between 1250 and the early 1330s, twenty-six had failed by the latter date.³³ Yet market charters continued to be sought in large numbers after 1250. The most up-to-date figures based on charter evidence suggest that 336 markets were founded in England between 1300 and 1349, which is not far below the 384 founded between 1200 and 1249, though there are of course doubts about the relative quality of recording in the two periods.³⁴ It is possible to see John de Hotham's 1318–19 market charters, including the 1318 'refoundation' at Balsham, as consistent with the 'rent-seeking' model of market establishment and administration. In 1318–19, the bishop cannot have expected to be able to attract much new external trade to the locations in which he wished to found (or re-found) markets. He presumably knew that the existing Balsham market had struggled. The existing market at Somersham, refounded in 1319, is also known to have failed by 1286.³⁵ One could argue, therefore, that in obtaining a clutch of charters in 1318–19, the bishop was asserting his right to tax such trade as was going on anyway among the local manorial population. Such a view might be further encouraged by the consideration that John de Hotham was a royal servant close to King Edward II.³⁶ No evidence has been found to show that Hotham paid for his 1318 Balsham charter.³⁷ If Hotham regarded his new markets as a possible source of easy revenue, his ability to use them in this way would have been strengthened if he had obtained them free of charge as an act of royal patronage. Similar arguments have been made concerning a clutch of Kentish markets granted at around the same time to another of Edward II's courtiers, Bartholomew de Badlesmere.³⁸

³³ Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets*, p. 186. Masschaele's method of identifying market failure in this period employs Quo Warranto pleas and the records of the royal clerk of the market, in both of which the coverage of Cambridgeshire is poor relative to the other three counties. For explanation and implications, see p. 263, n. 47.

³⁴ Britnell, 'Proliferation of Markets Revisited', p. 51.

³⁵ Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets*, pp. 169–70.

³⁶ Thompson, 'Fourteenth Century', p. 75, describes Hotham at his election as 'a careerist royal clerk thus far firmly attached to Edward II's court'.

³⁷ No such payment has been found on the Cambridgeshire sections of the 1317–18 and 1318–19 pipe rolls: TNA, E 372/163, m. 18; E 372/164, m. 25. For market grants as royal patronage, see Masschaele, 'Multiplicity of Medieval Markets Reconsidered', esp. p. 268; Jamroziak, 'Networks of Markets'; Britnell, 'Proliferation of Markets Revisited', pp. 51–52.

³⁸ Reed, 'Markets and Fairs'; Mate, 'Rise and Fall', p. 65; McLain, 'Factors in Market Establishment', pp. 96–98.

There are problems, though, with interpreting the refoundation of Balsham market as an instance of seigniorial rent-seeking. For one thing, it is well known that the Ely tenants enjoyed the privilege of trading free of toll throughout the kingdom. If this privilege was enjoyed by Ely tenants in their own lord's market, then this suggests that the bishop's capacity to profit from residents' trade at Balsham would have been restricted. More important is a striking and exceptional piece of evidence which shows that local residents were keen to have the new market. A court roll entry dated March 1318, about nine months before the new charter was granted, states that 'the whole vill of Balsham gives the lord 40 shillings as a gift for the expenses of his steward incurred at the court of lord king in acquiring a certain market for the vill of Balsham'.³⁹ This suggests that the move to re-establish the market was not imposed on the local population, but may have been something they initiated. Involvement of the lord was clearly essential to obtaining the charter that gave the market formal status, but the drive to secure it came at least partly from the tenants. Furthermore, one cannot ignore the fact that John de Hotham's market grants were obtained shortly after the Great Famine of 1315–17. The social dislocation caused at Balsham by the Famine is clear in the record of its July 1317 leet court.⁴⁰ In early 1318 at Balsham there was perhaps a general wish to establish a formal market, and the powers to undertake close supervision of trade this brought with it, without delay. This is shown by the fact that the regulation of trade entailed by the formal market franchise started at Balsham in mid-1318, even before the new charter was officially granted later in that year. The record of the July 1318 leet court contains a host of unusual presentments, including reports of false balances, illegal bushel measures, and illegal ale measures. The latter were to be kept 'until the coming of the king's marshall', presumably a supervisory visit necessitated by the launching of the new market.⁴¹ An alternative interpretation of bishop John's drive to set up new formal markets in 1318–19 would therefore conform more closely to the 'consumer protection' model, that is, that these markets were intended to improve access to scarce basic foodstuffs and in this way to help meet local demand.⁴²

³⁹ *Tota villata de Balsaham dat domino ex curialitate pro expens' sui seneschalli factis ad curiam domini Regis pro quod' foro perquirend' ad villam predictam de Balsaham .xl.s.* The marginal entry reads: *donum xl.s.* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (12 March 1318).

⁴⁰ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (5 July 1317).

⁴¹ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (17 July 1318).

⁴² For this interpretation of the continued popularity of market foundation after c. 1275, see Britnell, 'Proliferation of Markets in England', pp. 220–21.

Administering the Market: Juries and Officials

The extant court rolls provide an incomplete picture of trade and its regulation at Balsham. It is not clear that all the specification, reporting, and punishment of offences that took place found its way into the surviving records. The evidence is clearly fullest for the period of the establishment of the new market, roughly 1318–22 (Table 10.1). Thereafter, our information consists largely of the ordinary presentments of infringements of the assizes of bread and ale, which, as already noted, do not necessarily relate to transactions in the weekly market. Some legal business concerning the market may have been recorded in a second set of records, now lost. A court roll entry of 1322 states that two men were appointed by the steward as the ‘wardens of market attachments’. These men were to ‘determine all pleas and attachments in the marketplace on each market day’. Rolls for these pleas were delivered to the two men by the steward, and they were to respond at each court concerning the profits arising.⁴³ These lost rolls apparently related to a market court. Special market courts are known for towns, but seem to have been very rare in villages.⁴⁴ The use of a dual system comprising market court and ordinary manor court suggests that regulation of the market at Balsham was relatively intense. It is possible that there were pleas of debt and other commercial disputes which were recorded in the wardens’ market court rolls and not in our surviving series of court rolls. There are interpersonal debt pleas in the extant court rolls, but these make no reference to the market.⁴⁵

Although our information is incomplete, something can be said about the personnel responsible for regulating trade at Balsham, and their work. Most of the work of presenting market offences (other than breaches of the assizes of bread and ale) was done by the chief pledges who formed the jury at the annual views of frankpledge, or leet courts. The aletasters — two or three in number — were responsible for presenting those breaching the assizes of bread and ale. The jurors and aletasters, as one would expect, were all manorial tenants. Aletasters are common in manorial court records from across the country. However, as the next section shows, a distinctive feature of the Balsham evidence is the close monitoring of the aletasters to ensure they performed their duties properly.

⁴³ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (29 January 1322).

⁴⁴ Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, pp. 142–44.

⁴⁵ Briggs, *Credit and Village Society*.

Table 10.1. Balsham: data on surviving manor court records, individuals amerced for brewing and baking, and other aspects of trade and marketing, 1310–49.⁴⁶

No. court sessions with surviving records			No. individuals presented for breaking assizes of bread and ale ('ordinary' presentments)		Other court roll presentments/ entries on trade &/or market?			
Year	'Court'	View of frank-pledge	Brewers	Bakers	Detailed assize infringements	False etc., ale measures	False etc., grain measures	Other
1310	3	0	6	0	–	–	–	–
1311	5	1	14	2	–	–	Y	–
1312	4	1	12	0	–	Y	–	–
1313	2	1	13	0	–	–	–	–
1314	1	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1315	2	1	18	0	–	Y	Y	–
1316	3	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1317	5	1	16	4	–	–	–	–
1318	7	1	18	5	Y	Y	Y	Y
1319	4	1	24	4	Y	Y	Y	Y
1320	3	1	11	2	Y	Y	Y	Y
1321	3	1	15	2	–	Y	–	Y
1322	6	1	17	3	–	Y	Y	Y
1323	6	1	10	3	–	Y	–	Y
1324	5	1	11	3	–	–	Y	Y
1325	7	1	7	4	Y	Y	–	–
1326	6	1	11	5	–	–	Y	–
1327	2	0	6	0	–	–	–	–
1328	2	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1329	5	1	14	1	Y	–	–	–
1330	2	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1331	2	1	8	2	–	Y	Y	–
1332	0	0	0	0	–	–	–	–

⁴⁶ Source: LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001–011 (Balsham manorial court rolls).

No. court sessions with surviving records			No. individuals presented for breaking assizes of bread and ale ('ordinary' presentations)		Other court roll presentations/ entries on trade &/or market?			
Year	'Court'	View of frankpledge	Brewers	Bakers	Detailed assize infringements	False etc., ale measures	False etc., grain measures	Other
1333	2	1	7	2	Y	Y	–	–
1334	7	1	10	1	–	–	–	–
1335	3	1	14	2	–	Y	–	–
1336	0	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1337	3	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1338	6	1	10	2	–	–	–	Y
1339	4	1	11	1	–	–	–	–
1340	2	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1341	2	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1342	4	1	13	2	–	–	–	–
1343	0	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1344	1	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1345	1	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
1346	3	1	11	1	–	–	–	–
1347	6	1	11	2	–	–	–	Y
1348	5	1	6	2	–	–	–	–
1349	1	0	13	2	–	–	–	–

'Ordinary' presentations, usually made by aletasters, list persons who 'brewed/baked and sold against the assize', or equivalent. 'Detailed assize infringements' are presentations where explanation is given for ameracements imposed following specific breaches of the assizes of bread or ale. The 'other' column contains all other references to *mercatum* or *forum*, most of which concern the market's officers.

In addition to the aletasters and presentment juries, there were other officials with specific duties in relation to the market. None of these is familiar from other case studies of manorial records. The appointment of the two 'wardens of market attachments' has already been mentioned. Before that, in 1321, two other men were elected as 'wardens and receivers of tolls, stallage and of all profits of the market'. It was ordered that these men should deliver by tally to the manorial reeve all profits and receipts proceeding from these

sources.⁴⁷ In 1338 there is a stray reference to an election by the whole homage of a 'bailiff of the lord's market of Balsham', though the duties of this official are not clear.⁴⁸ The most intriguing 'special officials', however, are the six men first elected in October 1321 as 'wardens of the metes and bounds of the vill in amending the lord's market'. Their primary duty was to certify to the steward and court concerning any of the lord's bond tenants who, in detriment to the lord's market, visited, or frequented external markets to sell grain or beasts.⁴⁹ A concern to compel use of the Balsham market was already evident before this, when in 1319 two tenants were presented for 'removing themselves from the lord's market with their merchandise'.⁵⁰ References to the wardens of the metes and bounds are found in the records of a further fourteen court sessions (1322–24). In four of these, the wardens presented offenders, namely three (twice), five, and fourteen persons.⁵¹ In the remaining ten, the wardens were simply given a day until the next court to report any offenders. Does this pre-occupation with enforcing a monopoly over the trade of local tenants provide evidence in support of the 'rent-seeking' view of seigniorial market regulation?

The entries concerning the wardens of the metes and bounds convey a strong sense of seigniorial prerogative. It is hard to demonstrate conclusively, however, that these entries show the bishop seeking to compel his tenants to trade at Balsham so that he could tax them. Again, the context of dearth and agrarian crisis is important. The wardens of the metes and bounds were elected in October 1321, in the aftermath of a severe harvest failure and an episode of bovine pestilence.⁵² Just as plausible an explanation for their appointment is a

⁴⁷ *Thomas Priour & Robertus Seburgh' electi sunt custodes & receptor' tolnet', stallag', & omnium proficuorum mercati predicti, & quod preposito manerii omnes profectus & recept' / inde proven' per tall' inter eos confect' fideliter liberarent. Et ad hoc fecerunt sacrum etc.* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (17 October 1321).

⁴⁸ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/007 (16 September 1338).

⁴⁹ *Inquir' / Stephanus Schimming, Nigellus Howell, Henricus Dryver, Willelmus Spilman, Willelmus Pygot, & Hugo Ryvel electi sunt custodes metarum & bundarum ville in emendacione mercati domini videlicet quod ne aliquis de bondagio domini eat nec exercet forinc' mercat' ad vendend' blad' nec best' in deteriamiento dicti mercati, quin ad prox' cur' post factum elapsum, Senescallo cum curia, de omnibus sic agentibus si quos contigerit, certificarent. Et ad hoc fecerunt sacrum etc.* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (17 October 1321).

⁵⁰ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (12 October 1319).

⁵¹ In 1324, an apparently separate inquest also amerced John le Wright for selling his grain in external markets: LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (28 February 1324).

⁵² On 1321, see Campbell, 'Nature as a Historical Protagonist', pp. 287–88; on cattle plague, see Slavin, 'Great Bovine Pestilence'.

concern that supplies of food should be kept within the vill for local residents to buy. In conditions of severe shortage of both food and livestock, it is possible that Balsham tenants who did have a surplus were choosing to market their goods elsewhere in an attempt to obtain higher prices. Whatever the case, the appointment of the wardens of the metes and bounds need not be seen as an instance of lordly rent-seeking.

It is worth emphasizing that virtually all the various officials who ran the market on behalf of the landlord were customary tenants of Balsham manor. The jurors, chief pledges, aletasters, 'bailiff of the market', 'wardens and receivers of tolls, stallage and of all profits of the market', and 'wardens of the metes and bounds' are all easily identifiable from the court rolls as members of leading customary tenant families. In other words, as so often, while a lord might seek to promote particular rules and policies at village level, it was local people who interpreted and enforced those rules and policies. The only possible exceptions to this generalization in the case of Balsham market are the 'wardens of market attachments' appointed in 1322: John Rose and Roger le Dene. These men do not seem to have belonged to the customary tenantry. John Rose was certainly a free tenant, and he also served as the manorial bailiff, apparently in a role which involved supervision of the reeve, hayward, and other lesser officials. Although it is not clear that these men were outsiders, they were not so obviously embedded within the village community as all the other market officials. They may therefore have worked more unambiguously in the lord's interests in administering the pleas of the market.

Market Rules and Regulations

Evidence about the rules and regulations in force in this market comes mainly from court roll entries reporting their infringement. These are discussed in three groups below.

Assizes of Bread and Ale

The medieval assizes of bread and ale represent a complex body of national and local legislation.⁵³ However, the essential objective was clear in each case. By providing for the adjustment of the weight of a farthing loaf according to the price of wheat, the assize of bread ensured that a loaf was always available to the

⁵³ Davis, 'Baking for the Common Good'; Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*; Bennett, *Ale*, pp. 99–101.

consumer at a low price. The assize of ale altered the price of a measure of ale in accordance with the grain price. The assizes, and especially the assize of ale, also governed the quality and measurement of the product, as well as its price.

Most historians have argued that the administration of the assizes of bread and ale by market-holders amounted to little more than a system of licensing. In this view, all those who brewed or baked for sale were fined annually, regardless of whether or not they had actually broken the assizes.⁵⁴ This interpretation of assize administration fits well with a 'rent-seeking' model of rural market regulation.⁵⁵ Yet it has been pointed out that market authorities, especially in towns, did also sometimes single out for heavy punishment notable offenders who had clearly infringed the assizes. These instances, it is argued, were designed to send a moral message about the effects of trading offences on the community and consumers.⁵⁶

How were the assizes of bread and ale administered at Balsham? The 'licensing' approach, in which all brewers and bakers appear to have been fined, is certainly evident. The Balsham rolls feature many of the familiar lists of names of people who according to the aletasters had 'brewed/baked and sold against the assize', or similar. Brewers' names in these lists are sometimes accompanied by dots or other notations which indicate the number of brewings or sales associated with that individual. In one 1315 list of brewers who had brewed and sold against the assize, the name of Katherine Roger is erased because 'she did not brew', the implication being that all the others did brew, and were *ipso facto* liable for amercement.⁵⁷

This is not, however, the whole story. Unusual, more detailed entries concerning brewing and baking offences sometimes appear that expand on the basis for amercements, and suggest that the assizes were not a legal fiction (Table 10.1). These represent a genuine effort to enforce the assizes, even if this was done alongside a system of fining all brewers and bakers. Significantly, almost all of the more detailed entries resulted from the investigations of juries which checked the work of the aletasters, and noted derelictions of duty on their part. For instance, in 1318 a jury noted that two aletasters had failed to seize ale which brewers sold for $\frac{3}{4}$ d. per gallon when, according to the assize proclaimed by the same aletasters, it should have been sold for $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per gal-

⁵⁴ Bennett, *Ale*, pp. 160–63; Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 298–300.

⁵⁵ Dijkman, *Shaping Medieval Markets*, pp. 100–01.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 300 and 317–23.

⁵⁷ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (7 April 1315).

lon.⁵⁸ Bakers were also subjected to punishment when their bread was found to be of incorrect weight. For example, an inquest jury in 1320 reported that when the ‘common price’ of a quarter of wheat on the day of the court leet was 4s., Thomas Chapman had baked and sold farthing wastel loaves which were under weight by 30d.⁵⁹ Even more notable is evidence that the community at large was concerned about the conduct of the bread and ale trade, and encouraged ad hoc juries to investigate specific breaches, apparently bypassing the ale-tasters. This evidence consists of four entries which show these juries to have investigated contraventions of the assizes ‘at the complaint of many tenants.’⁶⁰ The amercement of ale-tasters for failing to perform their duties is a common feature of many court roll series, and seems often to denote a routine seigniorial levy, rather than a genuine concern with or reflection of the failings of these officials.⁶¹ At Balsham, however, there is unusually full evidence of a mistrust of the ale-tasters’ work, which is indicative of a deeper concern that the trade in essential foodstuffs should be conducted honestly and investigated thoroughly. The argument that enforcement of the assizes was taken unusually seriously at Balsham is also supported by the numerous jury presentments of the selling of ale with illegal, broken, or unsealed measures (Table 10.1), and by occasional references to corporal punishments.⁶² Taken together, such evidence provides support for the ‘consumer protection’ model of market regulation.

Grain Measures

The use of standard weights and measures in a market for commodities helps eliminate fraud and uncertainty, and encourages exchange. The Balsham court rolls reveal an unusual degree of preoccupation with the idea that traders in the marketplace should use the correct measures when buying and selling grain. Presentments of the use of bushel measures which are either too small or too large are common. For instance, in 1320 seventeen persons, of whom four are described as ‘merchants’, were amerced a total of 3s. 6d. because they had ‘bushels, some of which are too small and not sealed, and some of which are too

⁵⁸ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (12 March 1318).

⁵⁹ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (25 July 1320).

⁶⁰ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (29 January 1322, 18 January 1326, 12 February 1327); LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/002 (17 March 1323).

⁶¹ Bennett, *Ale*, pp. 101 and 161. Routine amercement of ale-tasters for ‘failing to perform their office’ is also evident at Balsham.

⁶² LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (25 July 1320 (pillory), 22 July 1325 (tumbrel)).

large, and broken'.⁶³ Presumably buyers of grain would be tempted to try to use excessively large bushels in a transaction, while sellers would seek to do the reverse. There are also entries which show bakers (two men in total) amerced for using false balances.⁶⁴

Does the regulation of measures at Balsham suggest a determination to encourage trade and protect consumers? Or should it be associated with a rent-seeking attitude to market administration? The latter interpretation is appropriate if, for example, one can observe market authorities simply imposing fines for the use of false personal measures, but doing little actively to eradicate such measures or to provide alternatives in the form of standard measures accessible to all traders.

At Balsham there are indications of a wish to facilitate and enforce the use of measures which conformed to a national standard. In July 1318, at the outset of the market's refoundation, twenty persons had their excessively large bushel measures seized. These were to be kept in custody 'until the steward shall burn them, or direct otherwise'.⁶⁵ In 1319, nineteen people had their bushels seized, but it was noted that there was no standard bushel in the manor with which to assay the seized bushels. The seized bushels were therefore ordered to be retained until a standard was available.⁶⁶ A later entry in 1322 shows that a standard was available by that date, since it was noted that six persons had been amerced because an assay of their bushels showed a lack of conformity with the 'standard of the lord king'.⁶⁷ There is not enough evidence to prove that measures conforming to a national standard were available on each market day for use by all market traders. There is also possible evidence of resistance to the use of standard measures in a 1326 presentment which says that 'twelve buyers of grain here in the market refuse to receive the standard measure in buying grain, but prefer the old measure', though the entry is still evidence of widespread preference for a single common measure, presumably provided by the market officials, over diverse personal measures.⁶⁸ The drive to offer standard measures as an alternative to irregular personal measures is clear.

⁶³ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (25 July 1320).

⁶⁴ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (17 July 1318), LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/002 (25 July 1323).

⁶⁵ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (17 July 1318).

⁶⁶ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (12 October 1319).

⁶⁷ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (26 July 1322). For a further reference to the 'standard bushel of the lord king', see LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/004 (20 July 1331).

⁶⁸ LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (8 November 1326).

Other Rules

A handful of other isolated and unusual yet revealing presentments give further indication of the aims of market regulation. The first is the only entry bearing directly on the price of grain in the market, but it suggests a role for market authorities in setting prices. This July 1320 entry reports that Thomas Chapman and Thomas Flye, both well known as bakers, 'bought grain in the market at a price higher than the common market [price], thereby causing dearth of grain and of the lord's market'.⁶⁹ The men were amerced a total of 6d. In 1324, Walter son of Nicholas Golyer was amerced 12d. when it was found by inquest that he and others 'damaged the lord's market by beating and attacking foreign merchants, so that these shall not dare to come with their merchandise to the lord's market'.⁷⁰ A similar concern for peace and security in the marketplace underlies a 1322 presentment which reports that Robert Bisshop and Katherine Wolward 'disturb the lord's market by abuse and quarreling'.⁷¹ These presentments support the view that the aim of Balsham's market regulation was to increase market security, attract external traders, and ensure a steady supply of goods at reasonable prices.

Conclusion

The bishop of Ely, as lord of Balsham, was first granted the right to hold a weekly chartered market at his manor in 1245, in the era when the number of such new foundations was at its peak. The evidence suggests, however, that this market did not attract much trade, and had largely fallen into disuse by the early 1300s. In 1318, Balsham's formal market was refounded, apparently as part of a wider policy to establish (or re-establish) weekly markets on a number of Bishop Hotham's manors during 1318–19. Court roll evidence from the

⁶⁹ *Item presentant quod Thomas Chapman & Thomas Flye emerunt bladum in mercato de altiori precio quam communem mercatum ad caristianum bladum & mercatum domini [...]* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (25 July 1320).

⁷⁰ *Compertum est per inquisitionem quod Walterus filius Nicholai Golyer deterioravit mercatum domini verberando & inpugnand' cum aliis forinceis mercatoribus ne auderent venire cum mercandiis suis ad mercatum domini. Ideo ipse in misericordia.* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (19 May 1324).

⁷¹ *Item presentant quod Robertus Bisshop /iii.d. \ et Katerina Wolward /iii.d.\ perturbaverunt mercatum domini per contumeliam & litigium suum ideo in misericordia.* LMA, ACC/1876/MR/02/001 (21 May 1322).

years following the refoundation shows that trade in basic foodstuffs took place at Balsham, that much of that trade must have occurred in the new weekly market, and that traders were closely regulated via a quite complex body of rules and officials. Which of the three models or approaches outlined at the outset provides the best interpretation of the evidence surrounding the re-emergence of the market in 1318, and the regulation of trade thereafter?

The 'landlords as enablers' model seems the least relevant. Even if many thirteenth-century markets were founded with the aim of facilitating and further encouraging new trade in an era of economic expansion, such an aspiration must have seemed unrealistic by the second decade of the fourteenth century. The thirteenth-century market at Balsham does not appear to have become an especially active centre for trade within its locality. Therefore, few in 1318 can have thought it realistic to expect that a new charter could have provided a long-term boost to the volume of trade conducted in the village.

The 'rent-seeking' model is potentially more important as a framework for understanding developments at Balsham. After all, many of the court roll presentments of trading offences and references to market officials explicitly highlight the lord's interest in the market and the revenues it generated. Furthermore, previous historians have tended to interpret many later thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century grants of market rights like Balsham's as acts of royal patronage through which favoured subjects secured easy revenues at little cost to themselves.

Yet such an interpretation of the Balsham case cannot be wholly accepted. Other evidence suggests that the 'consumer protection' model is the most relevant, and supports Richard Britnell's argument that small markets were founded between 1270 and 1349 'perhaps more to accommodate the poor than for profit'.⁷² It appears to have been pressure from the local populace which led to the acquisition of the 1318 charter, suggesting that more intensive regulation of trade was perceived to be in the interests of the community at large. A plausible account of developments, and the one that is preferred here, suggests that the 1318 market charter was sought as a possible solution to dislocations in the food supply experienced in 1315–17, and again in the subsequent years of further dearth (1321–22) and livestock disease. The advantage of the new market charter was that it gave the lord and his local officials the powers to enforce honest dealing and reasonable prices, to ensure that local peasants sold their surpluses within the village, and to make the marketplace safe for visiting

⁷² Britnell, 'Proliferation of Markets in England', p. 221.

traders. One may speculate that a new charter was thought essential because the rights derived from the 1245 charter had lapsed following the effective discontinuation of the earlier market in the later thirteenth century.

A final consideration relates to the wider implications of this evidence. It is difficult to know how representative Balsham is of other villages, in terms of the administration of its market. As noted, the Balsham court roll evidence about the village market seems to be quite exceptional for this period in terms of its quantity, and the insights it provides. It is of course possible that manorial officials elsewhere administered their markets with the same objectives and with the same intensity as Balsham's, but that the results of their work went unrecorded, or were recorded in documents now lost. Equally, the fact that the surviving court rolls of most manors are comparatively silent about activity in the market might suggest that the intensive regulation at Balsham was atypical. Where one can make comparisons between Balsham and other villages is in relation to the administration of the assizes of bread and ale. Here it has been suggested that Balsham was unusual, since the assizes were often enforced as a set of trading standards, rather than simply as a *de facto* licensing system, as seems to have been the case in many places. It is hoped that future research in manorial records will throw up more comparative evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, of village markets and their regulation.

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A REASSESSMENT OF VILLAGE MARKETS IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

James Davis

The proliferation of formal village markets is a mainstay within the range of evidence offered by historians for the commercialization of thirteenth-century England. Such markets appear to embody the emergent commercial orientation of both peasants and landlords, as well as the associated need for more formal mechanisms to cope with greater demand and a higher volume of transactions. Indeed, Richard Britnell and Rodney Hilton both surmised that village markets were instrumental in maintaining thirteenth-century population growth, with increasing numbers of smallholders, landless, and craftsmen who became dependent upon these institutions for their sustenance.¹ Peasant demand and supply are thus seen as underpinning the growth in periodic markets, and this has become part of a chronology that tracks the rise and fall of the village market either side of the Black Death, following demographic trends.

However, it is surprising how often the existence and vigorous operation of this network of village markets is assumed rather than proved, based purely on the total number of market charters granted to manorial lords in late medieval England.² This article seeks to reassess whether village markets were such vital links in the commercialization of the countryside and how far we can glimpse

¹ Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 126; Britnell, 'Proliferation'; Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare', pp. 233–34.

² For example, Bolton, *Medieval English Economy*, pp. 119–20; Bailey, 'Historiographical', p. 298; Slavin, *Bread and Ale*, pp. 1–2.

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the role that they might have played for peasants. Were they important facilitators for peasant trade and even population growth, particularly in comparison to the thousands of villages that had no market charter? David Farmer reasoned that ‘one cannot know in how many villages in 1300 or 1400 there was a weekly market to quicken the pulse’ and for this reason he did not include maps of markets and fairs in his otherwise magisterial study of marketing for the *Agrarian History of England and Wales*.³ There is good reason for such caution since the evidence for these lowly markets is sketchy and any conclusions are often circumstantial. There are few records of market income, such as might be received in tolls, stallage or court perquisites, nor of how village markets were run or organized. Historians have also questioned the extent to which the royal charter evidence matches the map of viable markets in late medieval England, most notably Britnell himself, James Masschaele, and Maryanne Kowaleski.⁴ Indeed, many historians include the caveat that some chartered markets were never established and others soon floundered, yet seem to regard this as a minor obstacle to our understanding of commercialization and peasant marketing.⁵ Britnell stated: ‘There is no reason [...] to question that the increase in the number of markets grants between 1250 and 1274 corresponds to a real increase in the number of markets, facilitated by the ease with which some investors could acquire licenses, even if a larger proportion of the resulting foundations had little local impact on trading opportunities and ultimately proved ephemeral.’⁶ It is this grey area between apparent market foundations and their actual commercial function that needs further consideration if we are to understand peasant marketing behaviour.

There are surprisingly few case studies of individual village markets. A welcome contribution to our understanding of medieval village markets is offered by Chris Briggs for this volume in his case study on Balsham (Cambridgeshire), which identifies the fluctuating fortunes and low-scale evidence for this institution. Richard Smith’s study of Botesdale is also oft-cited, but the place could be classified as a small town market rather than a rural market.⁷ The settlement

³ Farmer, ‘Marketing’, p. 325.

⁴ Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 167–88; Britnell, ‘Proliferation’; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, Chapter 2 and Appendix 2.

⁵ Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, p. 177; Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, pp. 132–33.

⁶ Britnell, ‘Proliferation of Markets Revisited’, p. 52.

⁷ Smith, ‘A Periodic Market’.

certainly offered more than most 'villages' in terms of occupations, facilities, and oversight, which places it on the ambiguous cusp between a village and small town. There is obviously a blurred demarcation between a village and a small town, as well as movement of settlements between the two categories. Besides possible differences in topography and culture, a rule of thumb is that urban societies had a more significant range of non-agricultural occupations. They had developed to supply crafts and manufactures to their hinterlands, and they were a magnet for certain agricultural surplus. Many settlements became small towns because they were in advantageous geographical and commercial locations. Christopher Dyer has identified some 700 urban settlements in medieval England, including hundreds of small towns, though this figure does include failed small boroughs that were effectively villages.⁸ Even with slippage between categories, this still leaves evidence for over 1000 chartered village markets, just over half of the total number of formal chartered markets, most of which were established in the thirteenth century and never achieved urban characteristics.

James Masschaele sounded the greatest note of caution in his work on peasant markets, where he identified numerous failed or marginal foundations in Huntingdonshire and elsewhere. A royal charter only gave the right to establish or formalize a market, not the compulsion. Even after a market charter was granted by the king, it was a competitive process for these places to be successful and attract enough business.⁹ Not only did other markets actively seek to protect their own commercial rights in the royal courts, but there was little that lords could do to compel traders to enter their particular market. They thus had to invest in market facilities in order to entice outsiders.¹⁰ Masschaele mostly looked at the *Quo Warranto* proceedings of Edward I, when franchisal rights were investigated, and at the fines imposed by the Clerk of the Market within the 'verge' of the royal household. Although caveats can be applied to both sources in terms of market coverage, Masschaele nonetheless identified seven of eighteen Huntingdonshire markets that seem to have failed by 1350 and two other 'shadowy' foundations.

⁸ Dyer, 'Small Towns'; Dyer, 'Small Places'. With thanks to Chris Dyer for allowing me to view the data on which these calculations were made.

⁹ Britnell, 'Proliferation', pp. 220–21; Masschaele, 'Multiplicity'.

¹⁰ Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 64–67; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, p. 55; Goddard, 'Small Boroughs'. The question as to how far a lord could directly compel his serfs to use his market still needs further investigation; see Postles, 'Customary Carrying Services'.

The *Quo Warranto* proceedings also give many direct examples of non-use of a market charter,¹¹ such as at Warden (Bedfordshire), Lemington (Cumberland), Sandiacre (Derbyshire), Whorlton and Hovingham (Yorkshire), Orlestone (Kent), Thoreway (Lincolnshire), and Sibbertoft (Northamptonshire).¹² There are other examples of village markets that were initiated but ultimately failed because ‘no one came to do business there’.¹³ Talke in Staffordshire was established in 1252, but we know that no profits were accruing from this market by 1308.¹⁴ The village market of Chesham (Buckinghamshire) was noted as new in 1264 but of no profit to its lord.¹⁵ Many other chartered village markets simply show no signs of related commercial activity, either documentary or topographical.¹⁶ For instance, in Bedfordshire, the fate of the market foundations at Sundon, Old Warden, Aspley, Silsoe, and Blunham is unknown.¹⁷ Some lords were prepared to give a village market a second try, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Mildenhall and Leiston (both in Suffolk) received market charters in 1220/1412 and 1278/1312/1391 respectively, with their later charters stating that this was an attempt to revive markets that had long been discontinued.¹⁸ Similarly, a second market charter at Great Missenden (Buckinghamshire) in 1367, over a century after the first, is a clear indication that the first attempt had failed, perhaps despite the lord’s efforts.¹⁹ A defunct market was considered a franchise lost by the crown, even though they were not usually struck from the royal records.²⁰ Consequently, there are times when lords tried to assert that markets were still operational even when the *Quo Warranto* investigators disagreed.²¹ However, if the market was returning no income or had no regular flow of buyers or sellers, then this indicated to the commissioners that it was defunct.

¹¹ Britnell, ‘King John’s Early Grants’; Salzman, ‘Legal Status’, p. 205; Sutherland, *Quo Warranto Proceedings*.

¹² Masschaele, ‘Multiplicity’, pp. 261–62.

¹³ For example, Old Warden (Bedfordshire): *Placita de Quo Warranto*, ed. by Illingworth, p. 64 (1330).

¹⁴ Palliser and Pinnock, ‘Markets’, p. 53. See also Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 52–53.

¹⁵ Reed, ‘Markets and Fairs’, p. 571.

¹⁶ Dymond, *Norfolk Landscape*, p. 158. See also Slater, ‘Plan Characteristics’, pp. 34–35.

¹⁷ Bigmore, *Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Landscape*, p. 105.

¹⁸ *Calendar of Charter Rolls* [hereafter *CChR*], III, p. 198, v, pp. 321–22 and 447.

¹⁹ *CChR*, v, p. 208.

²⁰ Masschaele, ‘Multiplicity’, p. 264.

²¹ For example, Sandiacre (Derbyshire). *Placita de Quo Warranto*, ed. by Illingworth, p. 163 (1330).

Many of the village markets were thus failures or insubstantial, being 'either being poorly placed to take advantage of trade, or else their owners never acted upon charters, or were prevented from doing so by litigious nearby market-owners or sheriff himself.'²² From an early stage, even before the Black Death, hundreds of village markets were effectively non-functioning — at a conservative estimate, some 40 per cent of village markets.²³ As Masschaele put it, they 'failed to reach maturity'.²⁴ This led Masschaele to argue that the core market network was in place by the early thirteenth century, dominated by those that had taken advantage of a location on good transport links or at the borders of agricultural pays. Factors such as industrial specialism and investment by lords allowed further market foundations to prosper over the following decades, often in burgeoning small towns or 'industrial villages', but most later market 'foundations' were peripheral to regional commercial activity.

These arguments are well known, but there are other unexplored implications to Masschaele's findings, related to the potential argument that 40 per cent or more of England's medieval market foundations never properly functioned and the extent to which the other village markets may have been in a precarious position. We need to think again in a more nuanced manner about the commercial networks that actually existed in thirteenth-century England, as well as the supposed link between village markets, peasant users, and population growth. Britnell himself suggested that local markets were more about local trade between food producers rather than broader trade networks or even the lord's immediate requirements.²⁵ The question we need to ask is whether villages with a chartered market offered much more to peasant producers and consumers than a village without, or were the former often a veneer for pre-existing informal trade and lacking in much commercial substance?

In order to ascertain the success or otherwise of formal village markets we firstly need to consider their primary purpose. What did a formal market provide that informal settings could not? We can approach this from a number of perspectives. There were the lords who acquired market charters and were ultimately responsible for the management of the commercial setting and may

²² McLain, 'Factors', p. 94; Farmer, 'Marketing', pp. 337–39; Masschaele, 'Market Rights', pp. 85–88.

²³ See: Masschaele, 'Multiplicity', p. 262; Palliser and Pinnock, 'Markets', p. 53; Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 184–86; Fraser, 'Pattern', p. 207; Letters, *Online Gazetteer*.

²⁴ Masschaele, 'Multiplicity'.

²⁵ Britnell, 'Urban Demand', p. 4.

have also used it for their own sales and purchases. There was a broader set of potential users, from the peasant producers and consumers to pedlars and merchants. Lastly, the grantors of the market franchise had their own motivations. Before the start of the thirteenth century, most village marketing took place without the need for seigneurial regulation or royal approval. It was only as the crown established its right to authorize such activity, particularly from the reign of King John, that market charters were needed, indicating the day and place of a market and the right to collect tolls and resolve trading disputes.²⁶ It could be argued that a number of lords acquired a charter simply because the king expected that any hints of regular trade meetings needed his permission, as emphasized by the *Quo Warranto* proceedings.²⁷ This does not in itself suggest a changing role for new village markets in response to population growth as much as a jurisdictional illusion. In 1292 the Countess of Aumale claimed that she did not have a market at Crossthwaite (Cumberland), but that on feast days the men of the neighbourhood informally gathered at the church and sold meat, fish, and other goods. She did not take toll, stallage or any profit.²⁸ Nevertheless, the market was formally abolished in 1306 after complaints from Cockermouth. The countess argued that because she exerted no jurisdiction and collected no revenue then it was not a formal market, but it appears that the royal officials thought otherwise. The lowest common denominator for a chartered market was that a regular day and location had been defined for the congregation of sellers and buyers, and royal officials made it clear that only the king could sanction such gatherings.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that many lords did actively seek a market charter and were prepared to pay for it or valued it as a form of royal patronage. Mavis Mate asked the question: 'Did lords who fostered small rural markets do so primarily as a service to their tenants, to enable them to pay their rents, or did they hope to profit from them?'²⁹ The two motivations are not necessarily incompatible. In the former perspective, lords established markets partly to aid their tenants in selling and buying agricultural surpluses, but also to ensure that

²⁶ Britnell, 'English Markets'; Britnell, *Commercialisation*, pp. 10–19 and 81–85; Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, p. 118.

²⁷ After the mid-thirteenth century we also see many market charters given as royal patronage; Jamroziak, 'Networks'; Masschaele, 'Multiplicity'; Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets', p. 313; O'Donnell, 'Market Centres', p. 190; Mate, 'Rise', p. 65.

²⁸ Fraser, 'Pattern', p. 44; Salzman, 'Legal Status', p. 207.

²⁹ Mate, 'Rise', p. 60. See also Britnell, 'Proliferation', p. 221.

they thus obtained the necessary cash to pay their seigneurial dues and taxes. Tenants were thus economically compelled to use markets rather than through commercial choice. In addition, lords could garner revenue from market tolls, stall rents, and enforcement of regulation, securing a proportion of the country's growing trade revenue. One trend in the historiography is thus to view the relationship between village markets and the peasantry as one of compulsion and rent-extraction. Peasants had to sell their surpluses in the market in order to meet the cash demands of the lords as more and more services were commuted and rents demanded in money.³⁰ Others had to enter the market to buy foodstuffs and to enable their basic hand-to-mouth subsistence. We know that there was a substantial growth in smallholders and landless over the thirteenth century, which would seem to suggest a dependence on wage labour and the commercialized infrastructure. In this somewhat pessimistic assessment, commodity markets are seen as sustaining this substantial underclass.³¹

A dense, expanding coverage of available markets is also regarded as a contributory factor for underpinning demographic growth. Masschaele suggests that marginal rural markets 'managed to eke out an existence by meeting local needs for basic supplies, as population growth increased the numbers of people without land.'³² Village markets facilitated this process because they offered a growing population a greater number of outlets that were in reach of the majority. The evidence for a dramatic growth in markets and fairs across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has been covered by numerous historians. Richard Britnell's seminal article on the proliferation of markets highlighted that some 1400 market settlements and 500 boroughs had obtained the right to hold a market by 1349.³³ This has led to the repeated adage that 'most people [...] had reasonably convenient access to a market and not infrequently to more than one'.³⁴ Historians have made observations that in most counties few people were more than 7–8 miles from the nearest market, and the density of markets in a county is seen as an indicator of the level of commercialization.³⁵ This all represents an important cog in the picture of a commercializing society, alongside urbanization, monetarization, and the development of credit mechanisms.³⁶

³⁰ Campbell, 'Measuring', pp. 133–34.

³¹ Britnell, 'Proliferation', p. 221; Britnell, 'Commercialisation'.

³² Masschaele, *Peasants*, p. 188.

³³ Britnell, 'Proliferation'. See also Britnell, 'Proliferation of Markets Revisited'.

³⁴ Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, p. 160; Farmer, 'Marketing', p. 330.

³⁵ Campbell, *English Seigneurial Agriculture*, pp. 149 and 425.

³⁶ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, p. 42.

However, were village markets intended to channelled much more than neighbourly trade? Unfortunately, we have little toll evidence that might indicate the level of incoming trade or traders into village markets. Some evidence can be found in small towns like Whitchurch (Buckinghamshire), which had tolls worth 18s. a year when it was last mentioned in 1330.³⁷ Great Marlow, another small town in Buckinghamshire garnered 10s. in tolls in 1307, while those of Brill in 1252 were worth 36s.³⁸ For Great Marlow, we can estimate the maximum volume of transactions represented by 10s. or 120d. If the tolls were the minimum of ¼d then we are looking at some 480 tollable consignments or about ten per market day. It is difficult to know what might be the equivalent in village markets. This lack of data is compounded by the fact that many traders from larger boroughs were exempt from toll throughout the kingdom, and that a retail transaction that led to consumption was exempt from such dues; but it is likely that outsider traders had to pay a toll on their entire load of marketable produce when entering a market. All we can really say is that it is noticeable how many manors that supposedly held a market franchise did not record toll or stallage income in their account rolls. Was this because such income was negligible or non-existent, or because the market franchise was unused? Perhaps there were separate accounts for market revenue, but no such documents have survived for any village market.

Stallage, a main source of market franchise income, could be used to indicate the level of commercial activity and here we do have some rural market evidence to consider. In 1346–47, the village market of Goring (Sussex), established in 1300, provided just 15d. in stallage annually but nothing in tolls, while in Westwell (Kent), the prior of Christ Church Canterbury received just 3s. from stallage for eighteen stalls. Westwell thus had some trade in its market, but the rental income was very low. Compare this to the small town of Sevenoaks (Kent) where the archbishop of Canterbury was receiving 20s. 4d. in rent per annum, while in larger towns, the profits could be a few pounds, such as at Wye (Kent), Great Marlow (Bucks), Leighton Buzzard (Bedfordshire), Witham (Essex), and Newport Pagnell (Bucks).³⁹ Although we cannot construct a statistical comparison, the qualitative evidence suggests that the trade in village markets, when it can be even vaguely identified, was small-scale.

³⁷ Reed, *Buckinghamshire Landscape*, p. 108.

³⁸ Reed, 'Markets and Fairs', p. 571.

³⁹ Mate, 'Rise', p. 67; Reed, 'Markets and Fairs', p. 571; *Victoria County History Beds*, III, pp. 401, 405; Britnell, 'Making of Witham'; Bailey, 'Trade and Towns', p. 199.

The other main source of market income was from court business, particularly the regulation of traders and debt litigation. Yet, rural manorial courts and account rolls rarely record any information about market activity beyond the assizes of bread and ale and some minor debt litigation, neither of which was particular to a village market or the activities of a weekly market.⁴⁰ As Briggs has shown peasants could pursue debt claims in a manor court even when there was no need for a formal market.⁴¹ However, equally, even brief additional mentions of market officials, sales credit, forestalling or grain measures might suggest that a market is operational. As Britnell once noted, a chartered market should indicate that 'trade has become or might become large enough to benefit from more formal organization'.⁴² Ultimately, formal market institutions were expected to provide a secure environment, enforcement of trade laws, settlement of contractual disputes, and a regular setting for trade, thus lowering transaction costs for all those involved. Otherwise, we are merely left with an open marketplace that might provide a communal witness to transactions but lacks any effective enforcement mechanisms to prevent fraud or default. Although evidence for peasant marketing is admittedly scanty, the absence of even passing mentions for tolls, stallage, and specific marketplace regulation cannot be so readily dismissed as a mere consequence of the paucity of the sources. It rather suggests that many village markets were simply not operating in a way that justified their formalization.

The evidence that a substantial number of village markets were non-functioning makes us question the actual density of the thirteenth-century market network and thus the extent of convenient access. In addition, the failure of many village markets to attract much business leads us to ask whether there were other ways in which smallholders and landless could buy foodstuffs for their sustenance. Was a *formal* small market always necessary for this provision? The likelihood that informal marketing took place on a significant scale has been highlighted by several historians, though with the caveat that it is in the nature of such trade not to leave documentation.⁴³ However, there are glimpses of 'informal' transactions, bypassing the official market day or marketplace, both within and beyond villages with market charters. For example, in Broughton (Oxfordshire), the court rolls indicate much brewing of ale, as

⁴⁰ Briggs, *Credit*; Bennett, *Ale*.

⁴¹ Briggs, in this volume.

⁴² Britnell, 'Proliferation', p. 211.

⁴³ Dyer, 'Hidden Trade'; Bailey, 'Historiographical'.

well as evidence of a butcher and some leather working, but this village was never granted a market charter.⁴⁴ Most villages, with or without a formal market, had a smith, miller, and carpenter.⁴⁵ Britnell highlighted a case in northern England: 'An agreement made in 1303 between the bishop and commonalty of Durham records that the bishop's officers had been taking tolls illegally on purchases made in country villages.'⁴⁶ This implies that smallholders and the landless could survive to a certain extent in non-market villages without travelling further afield. Village market days may have helped in providing a set place for transactions of foodstuffs, but they were not essential and there were other means to acquire sustenance. The everyday presence of brewers and bakers outside the strictures of the periodic market day was probably important for such provisioning. Ale and bread could be sold any day of the week and production happened on a small scale in most non-market villages. Consequently, the assizes are a poor indicator of formal periodic market activity, even though such transactions would have been undoubtedly bolstered by a thriving market. David Farmer also noted that much of the trading on the manors of Longbridge Deverill and Monkton Deverill, both without any market charters, was undertaken informally between lords and tenants.⁴⁷ Many labourers were paid with food as well as cash, which contributed to their consumption requirements. There were thus outlets for peasant sales and purchases outside the formal market.

It is therefore unclear how much a village market setting benefitted labourers and smallholders, especially since many charters seemed merely to recognize existing informal neighbourly exchange. Mark Bailey once asked, 'could peasants expect to dispose of produce in their local market whenever necessary and at a reasonable price?'⁴⁸ If the volume of trade was very low, then a haphazard chronology of transactions would inhibit supply and demand mechanisms and, in turn, lead to uncertain fluctuations in prices. Added to this, there is little evidence that the majority of rural markets encouraged the entry of agricultural produce. Recent research has indicated that better-off peasants, those with sub-

⁴⁴ Britton, *Community*, pp. 87–92. See also Coleman, *Downham-in-the-Isle*, pp. 8–9; Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance*, pp. 187–90; Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village*, pp. 140–45.

⁴⁵ Harvey, 'Non-Agrarian Activities', pp. 107–08.

⁴⁶ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, p. 97.

⁴⁷ Farmer, 'Two Wiltshire Manors'; Farmer, 'Marketing', p. 361.

⁴⁸ Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare', pp. 235–36.

stantial surpluses to sell, were travelling to urban markets on a regular basis to seek the best prices, rather than disposing of their goods in the local rural market.⁴⁹ Kathleen Biddick has noted how wealthier peasants looked up the market hierarchy to dispose of their surpluses, seeking better prices and sales.⁵⁰ 'Wealthier peasants who accumulated commercial assets (sheep and malting grains) put themselves in marketing chains different from peasants who presumably circulated their surplus in local markets.'⁵¹ Before 1350, perhaps some two-thirds of the country's marketable commodities came from the peasantry and a good deal of this surplus went to markets beyond the immediate vicinity. Christopher Dyer has argued that peasants were 'drawn into the trade of the large towns', to purchase such items as clothing, utensils, salt, iron, and fish, as well as to supply grain, hides, and livestock.⁵² Debt litigation in larger boroughs similarly shows interaction with those from small towns and villagers.⁵³

We should therefore not assume that peasants necessarily patronized the nearest 'market' to sell their produce.⁵⁴ Local village markets might well have been very inconsistent and volatile in the opportunities and prices offered.⁵⁵ Conversely, Jessica Dijkman has argued that the tolls in urban markets were a significant burden on peasants travelling to the market to sell surpluses, since 1–2d for taxes and tolls could amount to 4–8s. a year.⁵⁶ However, it is highly unlikely that peasants made more than a handful of trips to urban markets in a year and thus such transactions costs were not a major deterrent. Also, for commodities that could not be found nearby, peasants had to travel to urban markets and were well able to do so. In particular, the movement of peasants was facilitated by their ownership of horses, particularly for hauling, as early

⁴⁹ Bailey, 'Historiographical', p. 304.

⁵⁰ Biddick, 'Medieval English Peasants'; Biddick, 'Missing Links'. However, it should be noted that, for her analysis of peasants and market involvement, Biddick used chartered evidence for the location of the nearest, second nearest, and third nearest markets, without any suggestion that a significant number of these may not have been functional or that they differed in their facilities and operations.

⁵¹ Biddick, 'Missing Links', p. 297.

⁵² Dyer, 'Did Peasants Need Markets and Towns?', p. 25.

⁵³ Galloway, 'Town and Country', p. 112; Rigby, *Medieval Grimsby*, pp. 62–63; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 279–324.

⁵⁴ Galloway, 'Urban Hinterlands', p. 119; Masschaele, *Peasants*, p. 188.

⁵⁵ Bailey, 'Peasant Welfare', p. 237.

⁵⁶ Dijkman, *Shaping Medieval Markets*, p. 103. The burden of transaction costs in England's rural markets is perhaps overstated in Dijkman's comparisons with Holland.

as the mid-thirteenth century. These animals made peasants more mobile and ready to partake in the commercial developments of the time.⁵⁷

Some historians have argued that the network of village markets encouraged an influx of outside traders to buy up peasant produce at more competitive prices. However, there are also uncertainties in this model of peasant marketing. In assessing the network of medieval markets in a more holistic manner, historians have drawn upon the work of historical geographers and theories such as central-place theory to infer a (flexible) hierarchy of markets, through regional centres, secondary centres, market towns, and local village markets. The theory stresses stratification in their function, but also the interlocking nature of these medieval markets.⁵⁸ These places serve their hinterlands of varying size and provide settings where peasants can dispose of their surpluses in exchange for certain goods. By such means, historians have produced a mass of often county-based studies looking at the spatial and temporal distribution of periodic markets and whether they were focused more towards the demands of traders or consumers.⁵⁹ For instance, in studying the markets of medieval Nottinghamshire, Unwin drew on work for contemporary Africa and Asia where most markets are situated in small rural settlements.⁶⁰ Since trade is only at a low and infrequent level, markets are periodic. A few large markets develop for high-value, highly elastic goods and a nested hierarchy of markets emerges below. Such marketing systems can be classified into those oriented towards traders and those towards consumer demands. In the trader model, markets are distant in space and time and enable traders to complete a market circuit, attending a different market each day of the week and finishing at the major market at the end. In other words, local markets provide regularly established cycles for itinerant traders.⁶¹ In the consumer model, geographical distance decreases with an increase in temporal separation.

A cycle of market days thus forms part of the geographers' theoretical framework of central-place theory and periodic market structure. In Nottingham-

⁵⁷ Langdon, 'Horse Hauling'.

⁵⁸ Smith, 'Economics of Marketing Systems'; Bond, 'Central Place'.

⁵⁹ For example, Coates, 'Origin'; Palliser and Pinnock, 'Markets'; O'Donnell, 'Market Centres'; Reed, 'Markets and Fairs'; Britnell, 'Essex Markets'; Unwin, 'Rural Marketing'; Postles, 'Markets'; Goodfellow, 'Medieval Markets'; Barker, 'Warwickshire Markets'; McLain, 'Factors'.

⁶⁰ Unwin, 'Rural Marketing', pp. 232–33; Smith, 'A Periodic Market', p. 461; Bromley, 'Markets'; Hay and Smith, 'Consumer Welfare'; Smith, 'Periodic Market Places'.

⁶¹ Hay and Smith, 'Consumer Welfare', p. 34.

shire, Unwin identified regional market groups centred on Nottingham, Southwell, East Retford, and Newark, with a wide range of days in each circuit. He assumed it was logical for itinerant traders to live in the primary Saturday market and that markets on other days served as distribution outlets and collection points for local produce. In other words, there were middlemen buying up peasant and demesne produce of wool and grain to sell at the major Saturday markets.⁶² Postles has suggested that Oxford conforms to this theoretical model, with a market on Wednesday and Saturday, following markets in the surrounding region. According to this model, small markets played an integral role in commodity collection and distribution, as well as supplying services and manufactures.⁶³ It is important to note that these temporal market patterns in medieval England were not planned from the outset, but were rather formed by competition, the careful choosing of market days by new founders, and the political enforcement of rules regarding harmful neighbouring markets. Bromley has termed this the conflictive approach to market day selection.⁶⁴ Conclusions have thus been drawn about the density of markets, the coverage of the commercial infrastructure for peasants, and the reasons behind the rapid proliferation of markets and fairs in the thirteenth century. Dyer replicated Unwin in suggesting that a pattern of market days allowed grain dealers to visit a succession of small town and village markets, buying up small quantities, and then selling at the larger town.⁶⁵ Masschaele argued, based on the work of economic anthropologists and geographers, that every market in a commercial system is both a bulker and breaker of common goods in circulation. In other words, rural markets bulk agricultural commodities produced in their vicinity and break modest consignments of consumer goods acquired elsewhere.⁶⁶ He wanted to emphasize the relationship between town and country, between boroughs and village markets, arguing that there was an integrated and regional market system, geared chiefly towards meeting the requirements of the largest fifty or so English towns before the Black Death.

Although there were certainly extensive commercial linkages between town and country and a degree of interdependence, it is unlikely that it was

⁶² Unwin, 'Rural Marketing', pp. 241–42.

⁶³ Postles, 'Markets', pp. 14–15. See also Smith, 'A Periodic Market', p. 460.

⁶⁴ Bromley, 'Markets'.

⁶⁵ Dyer, *Making a Living*, pp. 191–92; Dyer, *Bromsgrove*, pp. 2–3. See also Masschaele, 'Multiplicity', pp. 259–60.

⁶⁶ Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 4–7, 68, 72, 144–46, 173–79, and 227.

to the level suggested by geographical models. Indeed, it is too far-fetched to see the big towns as dependent upon the grain in village and small town markets. Richard Britnell, in particular, doubted that the majority of boroughs, of similar size to Colchester, needed complex middlemen networks to meet their food needs.⁶⁷ Britnell argued that the provisioning needs of Colchester were adequately maintained by the resources of a hinterland radiating out to about eight miles. Most regional towns could be fed by their immediate hinterland, and often these hinterlands were free of other markets. Only London, and perhaps to lesser extent Bristol, show any substantial evidence of large-scale, regular movement of grain by cornmongers via surrounding markets.⁶⁸ Even then, many purchases perhaps took place away from the marketplace, at farmgates and manor houses. Landlords are known to have long sold their produce direct from their demesnes to woolmongers or cornmongers, avoiding formal marketing institutions,⁶⁹ or else they tended to look beyond local markets and travelled to larger urban markets or fairs where they hoped to achieve better prices and find quality goods to buy in return.⁷⁰ There are scattered references of private sales to cornmongers in manorial accounts. For instance, David Farmer noted letters from Glastonbury Abbey authorizing the reeve to hand over grain to someone who had agreed a bargain and brought his carts to collect his purchases.⁷¹ Similarly, Britnell records the case of the serjeant of Langenhoe (Essex) taking samples to Colchester market to bargain, arrange sales, and then leaving it to the trader to come to the farmgate to collect their purchases.⁷² Tithes were another important way of indirectly bulking grain.⁷³ Robert le Walke of Ruthin leased tithes of the local rectory, paying the rector £24 for them and then selling them on.⁷⁴ Manorial accounts are not always specific about the destination for their saleable produce, but some seemingly went straight to market. The customary tenants of Cuxham had to carry grain to Henley, Wallingford, and

⁶⁷ Britnell, 'Urban Demand'.

⁶⁸ Campbell and others, *A Medieval Capital*, pp. 2–3; Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 89; Farmer, 'Marketing', p. 335.

⁶⁹ Britnell, 'La commercializzazione', pp. 646–48; Kowaleski, 'Grain Trade', pp. 27–48.

⁷⁰ Dyer, 'Consumer and the Market'.

⁷¹ Farmer, 'Two Wiltshire Manors', pp. 7–8.

⁷² Britnell, 'Production', pp. 382–83; Farmer, 'Marketing', p. 366.

⁷³ Farmer, 'Marketing' p. 375.

⁷⁴ Swanson, *Medieval British Towns*, p. 34.

Ibstone.⁷⁵ Westminster Abbey sent grain from the manor of Launton direct to the markets of Oxford, Aylesbury, and Thame.⁷⁶ Manorial officials would seek the best market and price for their grain dependent on transport, quantity of grain and local knowledge; this might include the local market but they had other choices too.

Masschaele has been criticized for taking the adaptation of central-place theory too far and overestimating the demand of the provincial centres.⁷⁷ Marketing activity remained highly localized. Village markets were not intended as supply links in an integrated marketing chain, joined together through regular visits by cornmongers and other bulk purchasers. Such market circuits, if they existed, should be seen more as circuits to meet the demand for specialized products or manufactures, and for their distribution by pedlars and chapmen.⁷⁸ Indeed, in their analysis of market circuits, most economic geographers are more interested in examining mobile marketers selling products through a cycle rather than middlemen buying up produce for bulking.⁷⁹ Even the medieval jurist, Henry Bracton, when writing about the notion of a hierarchy of markets on different days, mainly referred to vendors not buyers.⁸⁰

The assumption by some historians that market circuits were regularly used for grain bulking by middlemen is actually very doubtful for several other practical and institutional reasons. Firstly, the existence of market circuits has itself been questioned. Palliser and Pinnock, in studying Staffordshire markets, could find no such pattern of market cycles. Indeed, after 1272 there were several markets allocated the same day as their neighbour.⁸¹ Reed, in his study of Buckinghamshire markets, identified a market cycle in the south of the county, but stated that the whole pattern is highly nebulous elsewhere even taking into account markets outside the county.⁸² Additionally, as we have seen, if a proportion of the market foundations of the later-thirteenth century were so precarious, how can we assume that market circuits actually operated?

⁷⁵ Postles, 'Customary Carrying Services'; *Manorial Records of Cuxham*, ed. by Harvey, p. 107.

⁷⁶ Postles, 'Markets', p. 19; Farmer, 'Marketing', p. 361.

⁷⁷ Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 109–28; Bailey, 'Historiographical', pp. 304–05.

⁷⁸ Davis, "Men as march with fote packes", pp. 142–43.

⁷⁹ Bromley, 'Markets', p. 128; Smith, 'Periodic Market Places', pp. 472–80; Webber and Symanski, 'Periodic Markets', pp. 213–14.

⁸⁰ *Bracton*, trans. by Thorne, III, pp. 198–99.

⁸¹ Palliser and Pinnock, 'Markets', p. 60.

⁸² Reed, 'Markets', p. 572.

In terms of the practicalities, the grain trade was a capital-intensive business for merchants who needed to be assured of a steady supply of grain to make these trips worthwhile and to keep their search costs low. Transport costs alone would have been problematic, especially since most village markets were not on riverine or coastal routes, nor even on main roadways. Commonly, overland costs totalled an average of 1–2d. per ton-mile compared to 0.7d per ton-mile by river and 0.2d. by sea. Masschaele estimated that for every mile of transport over land the price of grain would increase by 0.4 per cent.⁸³ This is not cheap transport and hence the attempts to use water whenever possible. Transporting grain through a circuit of village and small markets in a speculative search was thus an additional cost that most middlemen would have been unwise to take unless the supply was guaranteed. The seasonal nature of grain production meant that it would enter local markets in a volatile manner, dependent on yields and manorial policies. The most notable surge in supply came after the harvest when prices were lowest, but thereafter supply fluctuated throughout the year and so did the price. Large estates took advantage of their ability to store grain and hold out for the best price in larger markets. For instance, on the Essex manors of Westminster Abbey it was common for no grain to be sold before the spring.⁸⁴ Yet peasants, for whom grain sales were a major source of income, would have had to sell early. Faced with such basic fluctuations in supply, as well as the likelihood that even village markets may well have directed the sale of grain to consumers first, before middlemen,⁸⁵ cornmongers could not be sure of constant supplies at village markets. The flow of market information to prevent a wasted journey was limited and increased the uncertainty factor for merchants entering such small-scale markets, which is why they preferred to visit larger producers. Given the limitations of the supply, transport, and regulatory systems, it is more likely that such movement of agricultural produce from village markets took place only at times of high prices, scarcity, and possibly purveyance. Even then, small towns would have been the first places to visit rather than villages. Some rural middlemen may have engaged in corn wholesaling and servicing, probably in combination with other commodities like wool and fish, but their purchases and sales of grain may have been speculative and opportunistic, not regular and organized.⁸⁶ Ultimately, the unpredict-

⁸³ Masschaele, 'Transport Costs'.

⁸⁴ Britnell, 'Minor Landlords'.

⁸⁵ Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 176–84; Mate, 'Rise', p. 77.

⁸⁶ Kowaleski, 'Grain Trade', p. 39.

ability of local agricultural yields meant that they did not usually make good profits in the grain trade by travelling around village markets.

Another caveat in this survey is that the role of the village fair still needs much more consideration. There is a possibility that they were more important in local exchange than the village market. Annual fairs were held when the surplus produce of an area was ready for market in bulk, or to cater for luxury imports or specialist goods. Generally, fairs offered economies of scale, wider contacts, and a broader range of goods than weekly markets. Many grew out of festivities on saint days, so the gatherings were not entirely economic in purpose and this may have also helped with their longevity. However, fairs tended to operate for the benefit of traders, for wholesale sales in livestock, hides, fish, wool, and cloth (though seemingly not grain).⁸⁷ Those fairs which survived tended to concentrate on livestock and agricultural needs, or local specialisms.⁸⁸ For example, Halesworth fair (Suffolk) was renowned for its trade in bullocks, while Woolpit (Suffolk) developed a reputation for its horses.⁸⁹ Fairs thus allowed commodities to be shifted from one agricultural region to another, which perhaps partly determined their seasonality. Many fairs in pastoral regions were held in the autumn when cattle were sold and fattened before slaughter.⁹⁰ The proliferation of fairs, alongside small towns, may have played a more important role for the peasants than the fragile village markets.

Overall, as Mark Bailey suggested, 'small village markets mostly involved small transactions between local households' involving grain, some animals, ale, bread, meat, candles, fish, fruit, and cheese.⁹¹ Perhaps the village periodic market additionally provided a few items from rural industry and attracted the occasional pedlar or chapman. However, a village market was mostly for minor internal exchanges, which would have involved derisory returns for the lord. There is little evidence that village markets brought together many buyers and sellers from beyond the boundaries of the community, while many better-off peasants probably sought out urban markets with higher prices and specialized manufactured items.

⁸⁷ Lee, 'Role of Fairs'; Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 58–59; Kowaleski, 'Seasonality', pp. 120–22.

⁸⁸ Britnell, *Commercialisation*, pp. 155–61; Farmer, 'Marketing', pp. 343–44.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, p. 119.

⁹⁰ Kowaleski, *Local Markets*, pp. 45–46.

⁹¹ Bailey, 'Historiographical', p. 304. See also Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, pp. 141–42.

It is also worth questioning the relationship between population change and village markets. The demographic plunge after the Black Death meant that total demand for grain and basic foodstuffs fell significantly, and this has been unsurprisingly linked to market decline and failures. Britnell estimated that some two-thirds of village markets disappeared throughout England between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁹² Hilton pointed out that half of the village markets in the West Midlands and 60 per cent in Lincolnshire had disappeared by the sixteenth century.⁹³ The questionable evidence for the rise of village market network in the thirteenth century should, however, lead us to downplay its supposed post-plague fall. One might speculate that if most village market charters were no more than a façade for the continuation of more *ad hoc*, informal transactions, then it is possible that such functions remained after the Black Death, if in slightly different form. For instance, the alehouse and the emergent village 'shop' now served the purposes of the fifteenth-century villages adequately, without the need for a weekly market day.⁹⁴

The intention of this article has not been to undermine the extent of commercialization in the thirteenth century, for which the evidence is strong and there is a great deal of consensus. However, the role of village markets within this commercial framework does need to be addressed more cautiously before rash statements are made about the pervasiveness of market networks or the ability of the market to support population growth. Localized markets with a veneer of formalization are all very well, but they do not by themselves constitute a thriving level of commercialization. The actual paths and structures of peasant marketing need to look beyond the chartered village markets, the documentation for which have created an illusion of extensive, interdependent commercial networks for many scholars. Neither can we assume that village markets provided much extra for the welfare of tenants. Undoubtedly, the surviving village markets had some advantages in terms of a regular time and setting for trade and communal oversight, but did they offer much more than this? There was a spectrum of institutions, with some on the verge of greater levels of sales, oversight, and facilities, but any village markets that wanted to prosper needed seigneurial investment in order to step up the marketing hier-

⁹² Britnell, *Commercialisation*, p. 160. As a comparison, historians tend to use Alan Everitt's figures for functional markets in the sixteenth century; Everitt, 'Marketing', pp. 467–77.

⁹³ Hilton, 'Medieval Market Towns', p. 10.

⁹⁴ Biddick, 'Missing Links', p. 297; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 349.

archy and so become a significant cog in the marketing network.⁹⁵ Some did so successfully, some only temporarily. Otherwise, it could be suggested that most village markets remained marginal at best, probably used for the same sort of neighbourly low-level exchanges that had been undertaken informally before a charter was granted. For most lords the income from a charter was precariously close to or below the costs. It was a competitive environment, and most village markets were fragile and potential casualties soon after their chartered inception and well before the Black Death struck England's population.

⁹⁵ Goddard, 'Small Boroughs'.

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Part IV

Peasants, Poverty, and the Environment

WOMEN AND POVERTY: GIRLS ON THEIR OWN IN ENGLAND BEFORE 1348

Judith M. Bennett*

In 1992, when Bruce Campbell hosted the Fourth Anglo-American Seminar on the Medieval Economy and Society, he invited Harold Fox to speak about the landless *garciones* of Glastonbury Abbey. The result was, as Campbell commented later, ‘as polished and ingenious a piece of historical detection as one could ever wish to hear’.¹ Fox showed that a Glastonbury fine known as *chevagiūm garcionūm* was levied on landless sons who struggled to survive on the socio-economic margins of their villages. These landless men — called *garciones* not just when young but throughout their lives — were exploited by abbey, neighbours, and even their own parents. The Glastonbury records provide particularly rich evidence of these poor, unfortunate sons (some 30,000 entries before 1348), but *chevagiūm garcionūm* or its equivalent was, Fox argued, levied on other estates too, especially in the Southwest and East Anglia.²

Fox’s extraordinary research allowed us to glimpse the elusive landless poor, but he left a critical issue unresolved.³ The Glastonbury *chevagiūm garcionūm*

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¹ Campbell, ‘Conference Report’, p. 462.

² Fox, ‘Exploitation of the Landless’.

³ Fox also assumed that most *garciones* were servants in husbandry, thereby underestimating

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was a strikingly gendered fine, levied on thousands of men and not a single female. Medieval clerks regularly noted more males than females, but it is actually a rare list — usually of soldiers, clerics, officers, or men in tithings — that contains no female names at all. Fox knew that Glastonbury was distinct in this regard, and he noted that women were included elsewhere. In Eldersfield (Worcs) in 1317–18, fourteen women and twenty-one men were required, like the landless *garciones* of Glastonbury, to provide three boon-reaps at harvest; and at Hele (Devon) a listing of *capitagium garcionum* named seven women and nineteen men (apparently, *garciones* could be female, as well as aged beyond youth).⁴ But women were bit players even in the non-Glastonbury documentation that Fox had to hand. Where were they? If English peasants were producing thousands of landless sons in the decades before 1348, where were the thousands of landless daughters — indeed, given male preference in inheritance, where were the *many* thousands of landless daughters?

Olwen Hufton's magisterial study of the poor in eighteenth-century France, published in 1974, played a critical role in alerting historians to the particular poverty of women, especially unwed mothers and widows, as well as the 'economy of makeshifts' by which they (and all the poor) survived.⁵ Also in the 1970s, social scientists began analysing the causes and effects of poverty's heavy hand on contemporary women. But it is only in the last decade that female poverty has grabbed the headlines, particularly through charities that aim to eliminate female poverty — and especially the poverty of daughters — as a crucial first step for third-world development. 'Girl Effect', a term first coined by the Nike Foundation, operates on the proposition that if resources are directed at poor girls, they will (quoting a UN taskforce) 'marry later, delay childbearing, have healthier children, and earn better incomes that will benefit themselves, their families, communities and nations'.⁶

The particular poverty of girls, then, is well recognized in history, theory, public discourse, and current reality, but it is still mostly unknown in medieval

how they might have otherwise supported themselves (by, for example, wage-labor or subtenancies).

⁴ Fox, 'Exploitation', pp. 530–32, although without the numbers. For Eldersfield, see Worcester, WRO, 705: 134 BA 1531/69, roll 1. For Hele, see Taunton, SRO, DDCN 3/14, m. 5 (undated, but before 1350).

⁵ Hufton, *The Poor in Eighteenth-Century France*.

⁶ *The Guardian*, 10 Feb 2012, quoting a UN Task Force report (2010). Accessed online 25 April 2014 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/feb/10/will-girl-effect-combat-poverty?INTCMP=SRCH> claimed in 2010.>

studies. Medievalists have dwelt at length on teachings about poverty and charitable relief of poverty, but we have said much less about the poor themselves, in part because the poor are so poorly documented. Insofar as the history of medieval poverty is peopled, it has been a mostly male affair — the poor man clothed by St Martin; the voluntary poverty of St Francis and his followers; the ploughmen who so epitomized poverty for late medieval English authors; and, indeed, Fox's landless *garciones*. In the celebrated studies of Michel Mollat and Bronislaw Geremek, women appear almost not at all.⁷ Female poverty is certainly recognized, but it sits to one side of a foundational assumption that the quintessential poor person in the Middle Ages was a man — a man perhaps with wife and children, but a man nevertheless.⁸ As recently as 2012, for example, two leading historians of late medieval England analysed many sorts of impoverishment and poor relief — life-cycle, structural, episodic; rural and urban; external and local — but focused almost exclusively on men.⁹

* * *

Yet what we can glimpse of rural girls in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (the period for which Glastonbury's *garciones* are so richly documented) suggests that many were brutally poor. Their poverty was both absolute and relative: absolute in that finding food, shelter, and clothing was a constant challenge, and relative in that their brothers, even if poor themselves, were nevertheless better able to secure these necessities. Girls, like all females, had only limited access to land and employment, the two mainstays of peasant economy. This did not ipso facto produce female poverty, for many were sheltered by family structures — daughters who lived at home with parents; wives who partook of their husband's assets; widows who claimed part or all of marital estates. Deficiencies of land and work, however, mattered more than we have yet realized to those women who could not or would not be supported by family. Some were poor widows, a perennial favourite of medieval charity; oth-

⁷ Mollat, *Poor in the Middle Ages*; Geremek, *Margins of Society*.

⁸ Skinner, 'Gender and Poverty', and Skinner, 'Gender and the Sign Languages of Poverty'. Farmer, *Surviving Poverty*; Chabot, 'Poverty and the Widow'; Goldberg, 'The Public and The Private'; Hanawalt, 'Reading the Lives of the Illiterate'; McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*; Maddern, 'Survival Strategies'.

⁹ Dyer, 'Poverty and its Relief'; Schofield, 'Approaching Poverty'. See also Dyer, 'The Experience of Being Poor'. Early modernists are much more attentive to female poverty. See, for examples, Willen, 'Women in the Public Sphere' and Wales, 'Living at Their Own Hands'.

ers were never-married women (later called ‘singlewomen’) who, mostly young but also sometimes mature, had neither parents nor husbands to help them.

Finding employment, both self-employment and waged, was especially difficult for women on their own. Men worked in many rural by-trades — as smiths, bakers, thatchers, carpenters, and the like. For women, only brewing offered the possibility of commercial income, and it was a trade of *married* women. When young singlewomen brewed for profit, they usually just dipped their toes into the market and backed out — most sold ale once or twice, and no more.¹⁰ Spinning-for-profit did not self-employ many women, single or married, before 1348, because most English wool was then exported without any prior processing into thread or cloth. By 1500, England dominated the European market in woollen cloths, and spinning-for-profit provided critical (albeit poorly remunerated) support for singlewomen or ‘spinsters’. But this was not a common option for young women before the plague, when English cloth-manufacture was, as yet, undeveloped.

Wage-work was a similarly limited resource for daughters. Women were so rarely employed as wage-workers before the plague that John Langdon has argued, based on building accounts for Old Woodstock, that ‘the presence of *any* woman on the site indicates that the employment situation for men was likely very full’. Langdon found that women’s wage work was episodic, infrequent, and poorly paid (for unskilled work, 1d. for women and 1.5d. for men).¹¹ Sandy Bardsley found much the same on the Westminster manor of Ebury in the 1330s: rare employment for women and a wage gap of 73 per cent.¹² Women were just as uncommon and poorly paid among the *famuli* or manorial work-force.¹³ We might argue about John Hatcher’s suggestion that lower female wages reflect lower female productivity.¹⁴ But we cannot reasonably dispute the following: (i) gender differentiation was fundamental to the rural wage-labour market; (ii) men predominated among both skilled and unskilled wage-earners; and (iii) if women could find work, they earned relatively little. For girls, paid work was usually an occasional and meagre windfall; for young men, it was a much readier and relatively well-paid option.

¹⁰ Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters*, esp. pp. 14–36.

¹¹ Langdon, ‘Minimum Wages and Unemployment Rates’, p. 38, emphasis in original.

¹² Bardsley, ‘Women’s Work Reconsidered’.

¹³ Among *famuli* the only position reliably filled by a woman was that of dairymaid.

¹⁴ Hatcher (with reply by Bardsley), ‘Debate: Women’s Work Reconsidered’.

Table 12.1. Women as manorial tenants in rentals and surveys before 1348.¹⁵

Case	Manor(s)	Year(s)	Proportion of women among tenants	Comments
1	Woolstone (Berks)	1221	11%	6 of 53 tenants
2	Ely estates (Cambs, Ely, Norfolk, Suffolk, Hunts, Herts, Essex)	1222	11%	420 of 3760 tenants
3	13 manors in Berks, Glos, Hants, Somerset, and Wilts	c. 1235–1300	12%	Ranges from 6–22%, but most between 9% and 15%
4	40 manors in Berks, Dorset, Glos, Herts, Leics, Middx, Notts, Oxon, Rutland, Somerset, Warks, Wilts, Worcs, Yorks	1258–1348	15%	265 of 1790 tenants
5	Letcombe Regis (Berks)	1274	8%	6 of 71 tenants
6	Brightwalton (Berks)	1284	12%	6 of 49 tenants
7	Redgrave (Suffolk)	1289	14%	56 of 401 tenants
8	Coltishall (Norfolk)	1314	16%	22 of 141 tenants (incomplete listing)
9	Brigstock (Northants)	1319	18%	11 of 60 tenants (incomplete listing)
10	8 manors in Kent, Sussex, Staffs, Middx, Herts	1322–46	11%	53 of 461 tenants
11	Great Waltham and High Easter (Essex)	1328	23%	96 of 404 tenants fully identified
12	Thornbury (Glos)	c. 1348	14%	14 of 100 tenants

Young women also struggled to get tenure of land, even a tiny bit of land. Married men predominated among peasant landholders, and most women acquired, through marriage, only a second-hand sort of tenancy. A wife helped to cultivate a tenancy, but she usually had no legal say in its use, lease, or sale (as far as the manor was concerned, she was not a tenant). A widow could usu-

¹⁵ Sources: Cases 1, 5, 6: Faith, 'Berkshire' (Table VII, p. 161); Case 2: Postles, 'Migration and Mobility', p. 291; Case 3: Titow, *English Rural Society*, p. 87; Case 4: Russell, *British Medieval Population*, Table 4.1, pp. 62–63; Case 7: Smith, 'Families and their Land', p. 145; Case 8: Campbell, 'Population Pressure', Table 2.1; Case 8: Bennett, *Women in the Countryside*, p. 33; Case 10: Bardsley, 'Peasant Women and Inheritance'; Case 11: Poos and Smith, 'Shades Still on the Window', p. 336; Case 12: Franklin, 'Peasant Widows' "Liberation"', p. 188.

ally claim some portion of her husband's landholding, but only for her use (not sale) and lifetime. Few women held land in their own right, either the use-right of widows or the full right associated with those who inherited, purchased, or otherwise acquired a tenancy. Jane Whittle reported in 1998 that female tenants usually constituted 12–18 per cent of landholders before 1348; the expanded data shown in Table 12.1 on the previous page confirm her range.¹⁶ These data inadequately cover England's northern and western borders where, as James Willard observed long ago, nominal tax lists before 1334 report strikingly low numbers of female householders (and thus, presumably, female tenants).¹⁷ To better account for these borderlands, we can roughly estimate that 10–15 per cent of tenancies were held by women.

Even this reduced number is too optimistic. Tenancies varied widely in size, and most female tenants held only small cottages or crofts. A few widows did acquire large tenancies, and so, too, did a few heiresses (if single, they quickly married). But, as illustrated in Figures 12.1 (for Ogbourne St George) and 12.2 (for Hindolveston), these well-tenanted women were exceptions.

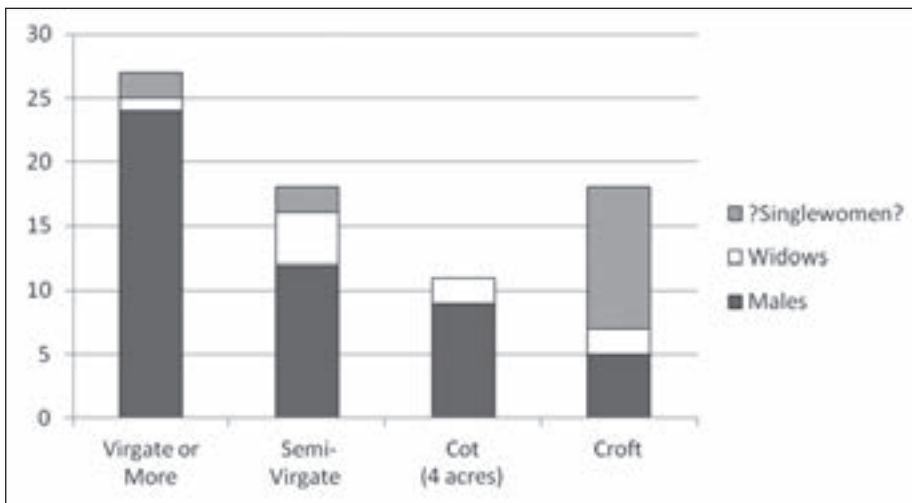


Figure 12.1. Number of tenants at Ogbourne St George (Wilts) by size of landholding, c. 1230.¹⁸

¹⁶ Whittle, 'Inheritance, Marriage'.

¹⁷ Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes*, pp. 168–69.

¹⁸ Source: *Select Documents of the Abbey of Bec*, ed. by Chibnall, pp. 29–36.

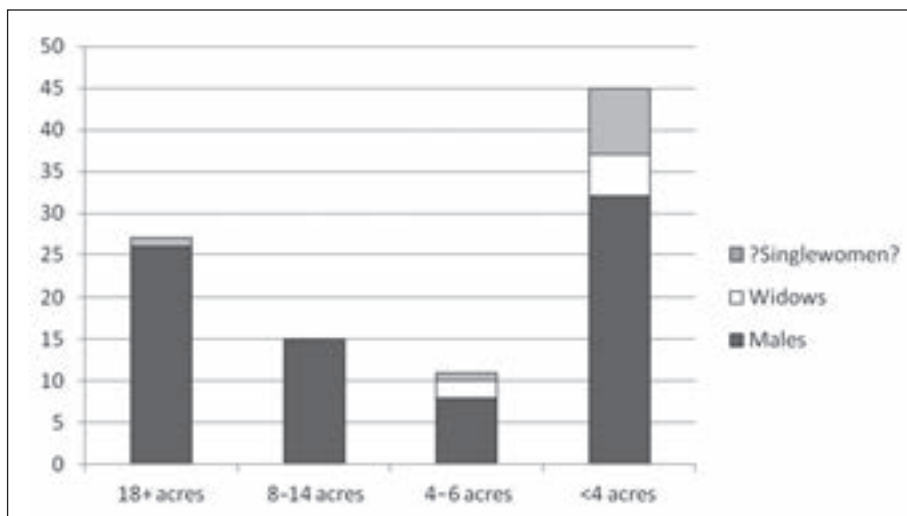


Figure 12.2. Number of tenants at Hindolveston (Norfolk) by size of landholding, 1274.¹⁹

These graphs illustrate what is found, with tedious regularity, in manorial surveys before 1348: most female tenants were smallholders, especially if they were not-yet-married (that is, were identified either as daughters or without any familial descriptor). In Hindolveston, these women predominate among those holding tiny *picrels*, what Campbell has described elsewhere as ‘pathetically small parcels of land’.²⁰

The fraught relation between women and land was set in youth, in the skewed devolution of land to daughters and sons. As can be clearly seen on the Winchester estate between 1269 and 1349 (our largest database on peasant land transactions), whenever a young person might acquire a tenancy, sons succeeded more often than daughters.²¹ First, preference for sons in medieval inheritance is a commonplace, but it was applied with remarkable rigour in the English countryside. (On the continent, rural daughters often had stronger claims, as did daughters in most English towns.²²) Agrarian, pastoral, wood-

¹⁹ Source: Hudson, ‘The Prior of Norwich’s Manor of Hindolveston’.

²⁰ Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, p. 68.

²¹ Mullan and Britnell, *Land and Family*; Page, ‘The Peasant Land Market’; Page, ‘The Peasant Land Market in Southern England’; and the summary report by Britnell, ‘The Peasant Land Market in Southern England, 1260–1350’. I thank Mark Page for answering my requests for further data.

²² Whittle, ‘Rural Economics’, p. 49.

land; unfree or free tenure; manorialized or not; upland or lowland; north, south, east, west: not a single English community allowed a girl to inherit even a smidgen of land if she had a living brother able to claim the property. This resulted in a striking gender imbalance among heirs on the Winchester estates: sons inherited on 4684 occasions and daughters only 1026 times — that is, four or five sons getting land for every daughter who did so.²³ Second, parental gifts of land were also imbalanced, albeit less so — perhaps because gifts to daughters were often part of marriage endowments and settlements. The Winchester data — again, based on thousands of recorded transactions — show three sons receiving such gifts for every two daughters. The gift gap was actually wider than this ratio suggests, because grants to sons were ‘regularly substantial, often including a full holding’ whereas grants to daughters were ‘characteristically small, usually just a few acres or a cottage.’²⁴ Third, sons were also more successful at buying property, perhaps because they were preferred landholders, or their parents were silent partners, or they were simply better able than their sisters to earn good wages, or even, as Chris Briggs has shown, they were more credit-worthy.²⁵ Women accounted for only 751 of 4080 of land buyers on the Winchester estates between 1320 and 1349 (18 per cent).²⁶

Because children acquired land more often by inheritance than by gift or purchase, these three opportunities were not equally available. When weighed according to frequency, the results are striking and consistent: overall, three sons acquired land for every one daughter. Did landless daughters somehow compensate by acquiring land in ways hidden by manorial court rolls, especially by temporary and informal sub-leases? This is unlikely. At Ivinghoe (Bucks), where an exceptional number of sub-leases were recorded in the 1280s and 1290s, women on their own accounted for only five of forty-four sub-tenants.²⁷ Were daughters better able than sons to grab lapsed tenancies? Again, this is

²³ Mullan and Britnell, *Land and Family*, Table 7.1 on p. 104.

²⁴ Mullan and Britnell, *Land and Family*, p. 113.

²⁵ Briggs, ‘Empowered or Marginalized?’

²⁶ Mullan and Britnell, *Land and Family*, p. 122. Because familial relationships (especially for sons) were infrequently specified in land sales, only women and men (not daughters and sons) can be compared. Of the 751 female land-buyers on the bishop of Winchester’s estates, 338 were explicitly identified as daughters. In Brigstock before 1348, where family reconstitutions enable better identifications, the son/daughter ratio for land sales roughly matches Winchester’s male/female data: eighty sons and fourteen daughters (15 per cent) purchased land. Bennett, *Women in the Countryside*, Table 4.2 (p. 79).

²⁷ Page, ‘Town and Countryside’. A few other women held leases jointly with their husbands.

unlikely. Of the 117 re-granted tenancies on the Winchester estate only three went to women (all daughters).

Lack of employment and dearth of land did not ipso facto impoverish young women. Girls had different 'career' trajectories from boys: most children lived with parents until they, if sons, got land or, if daughters, married men with land. Our fullest demographic reconstitution of a pre-1348 village — Halesowen (Worcs) — suggests that parents managed, in such ways, to settle about twice as many sons as daughters.²⁸ But this might be an overly grim gender gap. In the exceptional listing of serfs' children on the Spalding Priory manor of Weston (Lincs) in 1268–69, parents much more equitably either kept children living at home or settled them with land or occupations (sons) or marriage (daughters).²⁹

Table 12.2. Adult sons and daughters in Weston, 1268–69.³⁰

No.	Situation	Sons	Daughters
1	Living with parents	36	47
2	Tenant [or married]	25 [?]	2 [43]
3	Ecclesiastical career	11	0
4	Employed by priory	3	0
5	Living on own in Weston	0	5
6	Living away from Weston	17	17
7	Total	92	114

In addition to the figures given here, 10 sons and 11 daughters were noted as young, and the living arrangements of a handful of others were not specified.

Weston parents did roughly as well by their grown daughters as their sons, especially when the non-tenurial careers of sons (categories 3 and 4) are included. Daughters at Weston seldom got land, but they could reasonably hope to live at home until they married and gained access, through their husbands, to the benefits of tenancy and male wages.

But parents died early, or fell into poverty, or did not get on with their children, and of course, some children wanted to strike out on their own. As a result, some grown daughters — and grown sons too — left home without being set-

²⁸ Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death*, Table 11, p. 59 (283 sons and 136 daughters).

²⁹ These Spalding lists have been much debated and mis-used. Jones, 'Death by Document' provides a good (albeit tendentious) introduction.

³⁰ Source: London, BL, Add. MS 35296, fols 221^v–223^v.

tled with land, career, or marriage.³¹ How many is a guessing game. Proportions of home-leavers surely varied by gender, time, and place, but numbers are elusive until the age of censuses.³² That said, one in five daughters is a workable baseline estimate, supported by two separate indices, both tilted toward the daughters of better-off peasants. At Weston, 19 per cent of daughters (and 18 per cent of sons) made their own way, and at nearby Moulton, for which a similar but less reliable Spalding Priory list survives, 13 per cent of daughters (and 9 per cent of sons) did the same.³³ The Weston figure for daughters nudges up against the bottom of a second measure of female autonomy, namely of those brides (most never-married daughters) who independently paid their own merchets or marriage fines (Table 12.3).³⁴

Table 12.3. Young women and their marriage licenses.³⁵

Location	Paid by bride	Paid by bridegroom	Paid by bride's kin or others	All licenses
Spalding estates (Lincs), c. 1250–1349	215 (33%)	176	260	651
Winchester estates, 1263–1349 (data include the remarriages of widows)	998 (18%)	0	4490	5488
Sutton in the Isle (Cambs), 1308–1319 and 1335–45	26 (20%)	75	22	127
Winslow (Bucks), 1330–49 (data include the remarriages of widows)	51 (43%)	47	21	119

At least one-fifth of brides — and often considerably more than that — paid marriage fines directly. Both these indices draw heavily on the experiences of prosperous families: many of Spalding's serfs held substantial acreage, and mer-

³¹ These were 'victims of nuclear hardship', as described by Laslett in 'Family, Kinship, and Collectivity'. I thank Richard Smith for drawing my attention to this essay.

³² Wall, 'Real Property, Marriage and Children' and Wall, 'Leaving Home'.

³³ London, BL, Add. MS 35296, fol. 221^v–223^v (Weston) and fol. 209–211^v (Moulton).

³⁴ Merchet data are tricky, not least because (a) only a minority of marriages were subject to the fine (usually, marriages of the better off); (b) some data include remarriages; (c) practices varied widely; and (d) these brides-to-be, if living independently, were a successful subset of home-leavers (successful because they had found husbands). These figures are suggestive only: two datasets overlap with Weston and Moulton, and the Winchester and Winslow data are contaminated by widows' merchets.

³⁵ Sources: Jones, 'The Spalding Priory Merchet Evidence', Table 1; Britnell, 'The Peasant Land Market in Southern England'; Müller, 'The Function and Evasion of Marriage Fines'; McGibbon Smith, 'The Participation of Women'.

chets were more often levied on better-off tenants than on the poor. If one of every five well-off daughters lived by their own hand before marriage, their experiences provide a sort of minimum. Children of subtenants or landless labourers or free smallholders were even more likely to set out on their own.

For these young women making their own way, husbands — and therefore, economic security via marriage — were hard to find. We have no reliable data on adult sex ratios *c.* 1300, but many men removed themselves from the marriage market.³⁶ Some pursued careers in the church (*c.* 1300, about 50,000 Englishmen were religiously celibate); others joined the armies of the Edwardian kings (Edward I took tens of thousands of foot soldiers and servants on each of his many campaigns); still others re-settled in Ireland, Wales, or Scotland.³⁷ And many other men were landless themselves (for example, Glastonbury's *garciones*) and therefore unable or unlikely to marry. For Weston's young women in 1268–69, these big numbers had human dimension: eleven men in their generation had joined the church and another seventeen had left the village to live on their own. Left in their wake were local women who never found husbands or found them only after long delays. At Weston and Moulton, we know from marriage fines that some of the daughters living on their own in 1268–69 later married, but not until seven, eight, eleven, and fifteen years later.³⁸ This was a lot of time to shift for oneself, especially for young women with no land and little earning power.

Margery McIntosh has reported that after 1350 'women seldom moved about the country in search of alms'.³⁹ This was clearly not the case for women on their own before 1350. Poor women were then very much on the move, not only in search of alms, but also in search of work and shelter and, indeed, settlement. Young unmarried women were, in fact, at special risk of being forced to migrate: in rural Halesowen in the 1290s, fourteen women and only four men were declared unwelcome; and in Horsham (Norfolk), nine women and only six men were driven away.⁴⁰ The most vulnerable were unwed women who engaged in sexual relations or, worse yet, gave birth. They were liable to puni-

³⁶ For an argument in favor of an abundance of males, see Bardsley, 'Missing Women'.

³⁷ Lepine, 'England: Church and Clergy', p. 369; Prestwich, 'Edward I's Armies'; Campbell, 'England: Land and People', pp. 7–8.

³⁸ Jones, 'Some Spalding Priory Vagabonds', pp. 102–03.

³⁹ McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ Halesowen figures from *Court Rolls of the Manor of Hales*, ed. by Amphlett; *Court Rolls of the Manor of Hales*, ed. by Wilson. For Horsham, see Clark, 'Social Welfare and Mutual Aid', p. 398.

tively large fines (*leyrwite* or *childwyte*) and, in some cases, loss of land, expulsion, or both. The extraordinary data for the Winchester estates shows that women judged guilty of fornication accounted for the largest single category of tenants whose lands were taken from them — fully one-fourth of all seized tenancies.⁴¹

We can just barely glimpse these vulnerable women as they moved about the countryside: they are particularly prominent in manorial rolls among unwelcomed gleaners at harvest, among unnamed ‘strangers’ illegally ‘received’ by locals, and among hedge-burners (that is, those who pilfered fuel from hedges). At Chalgrave (Beds), nine women and only three men were recorded as unwelcome strangers between 1293 and 1306; one unnamed *mulier extranea* managed to stay — only briefly — by sheltering in four different households, one after the other. At Sevenhampton (Wilts), women also predominated among strangers illegally received (six of seven). And at Horsham (Norfolk), about two-thirds of the almost 150 strangers cited in the court rolls between 1265 and 1293 were women.⁴² In some places, these rootless women were especially liable to pay *advocatio*, an annual fine for lordly protection that seems to have been prompted by their otherwise stark autonomy — they were watched over by no husbands, no fathers, no tithing-groups. Thus, at Singleton (Lancs) it was the stated custom of the manor, as recorded in 1346, that ‘every woman, sole and not married’ would give to the lord as *advocatio* 3d. per year.⁴³ Many of these footloose women moved, of course, to and through towns. Rodney Hilton found that between 1293 and 1349 women accounted for three-fourths of those who illegally tried to settle in urban Halesowen.⁴⁴ Paul Bischoff found much the same in Lincoln in the 1290s — dozens and dozens of unmarried women, mostly coming from within twenty miles of Lincoln, mostly supporting themselves as hucksters, and mostly moving on from Lincoln within a year or two.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Bennett, ‘Writing Fornication’, p. 152 (n. 77). Mullan and Britnell, *Land and Family*, pp. 84–86 (female fornication prompted seven of twenty-eight forfeitures).

⁴² *Court Rolls of Chalgrave Manor*, ed. by Dale, p. 26; *Court Rolls of Manors of Adam de Stratton*, ed. by Pugh; for Horsham, numbers were drawn from Norwich, NRO, 19495 42 B 7–19504 42 B 7. I thank Elaine Clark for sharing her unpublished calendar of the Horsham courts. My figures differ from those reported by her in ‘Social Welfare’, p. 398, but we both found that about two-thirds of strangers were women.

⁴³ *Lancashire Inquests*, ed. by Farrer, p. 128.

⁴⁴ Hilton, ‘Small Town Society’, pp. 64–65. Some have doubted Hilton’s figures, but they are reliably based on fines for receiving illegal immigrants.

⁴⁵ J. P. Bischoff, ‘Women in the Lincoln Marketplace at the End of the Thirteenth Century’

Some female migrants were able to settle in new villages or towns, and if they married local men their status was secure. But as long as in-migrating women remained on their own, their right to remain was iffy. Cristina de Illey first moved to Halesowen in 1298, but even in 1311 the court pondered the legitimacy of her presence in the borough. Maddy Strawberry paid a special fee for more than twenty years to remain in Horsham, even though her son had by then gained a more secure foothold in the village. In 1296 Emma de Langton began paying a hen for each year that she remained (*dum manet*) in Kibworth Harcourt, and she was still doing the same twenty-four years later.⁴⁶ Some wandering singlewomen, unable or unwilling to settle, died on the road, a fate that seems to have befallen more women than men. The coroner's rolls for late thirteenth-century Bedfordshire, which are unique not only in their early date but also in their attention to even the most humble of deaths, record fewer women than men in all categories, except when reporting the deaths of beggars and other poor. In that category alone, women predominate. Emma Hatch who begged door-to-door in Beeston on New Year's Day 1274, until she was 'seized by the cold' and died. Beatrice Bone, a 'poor woman' begging food who died 'weak and infirm'. A nameless 'poor woman, a stranger' found dead in a ditch and presumed to have died of the cold. A migrant labourer known only as Alice, who had stopped in Riseley for the harvest and was found murdered one September morning, her brains battered in with a pickaxe.⁴⁷

* * *

These women on their own — those who never left their home villages; those who wandered here and there; and those who eventually settled in new places — have been concealed among categories of people that we have hitherto assumed were mostly men: specifically, people called 'selfodes' and others called 'anilepimen'. Selfode is a northern term, found in only about a dozen references, all but one from manors in Cumbria, Northumbria, and Durham (the exception is a true outlier — from Cirencester in 1209). The etymology is opaque, but 'selfode' described people who possessed nothing except their own

and 'From Village to Town: Gender Variation in Migration Patterns of the East Midlands', both unpublished papers. I thank Paul Bischoff for sharing these papers with me.

⁴⁶ Hilton, 'Small Town Society', pp. 65–66; Oxford, Merton College, MM 6206–6223.

⁴⁷ *Bedfordshire Coroners' Rolls*, ed. by Hunnisett, cases 165, 202, 30, and 71. Twelve cases mention poverty or begging, of which nine involve women (three of these nine have children): cases 9, 30, 147, 165, 170, 187, 191, 202, 203, 208, 245, and 246.

labour power. Like *garciones* on the Glastonbury estate, these northern selfodes were obliged either to help harvest the manorial domain or pay a few pennies instead. Unlike *garciones*, selfodes are never listed by name in any surviving document, but they were clearly the poorest of the poor in the north — as one medieval clerk casually put it, they were *pauperes qui vocantur selfodes*.⁴⁸ As described by historians, selfodes were ‘a numerous class’ (J. E. A. Jolliffe); a ‘fairly common group’ (Angus Winchester); a ‘floating population’ of labourers (Nellie Neilson); ‘servant-like people’ (Fox); landless children of local tenants who ‘were called by a special name, as if they were recognized as a separate class in the community’ (George Homans); and people of ‘the lowest grade’ (William Greenwell).⁴⁹

The individuals who fell into this poor, humble, landless, and numerous category are unknown to us today, but in one instance, and only one, we can know their gender — and they were all women. In a late thirteenth-century survey for Hedgley (Northumb), a clerk reported in 1290 that each selfode there owed either three days harvest work or 3d. per year, with an exemption for the selfodes on the land of John de Somerville. This is standard stuff, except that the clerk tellingly described ‘each selfode’ with a female modifier — as *qualibet selfode*. All other references to selfodes use gender-neutral terms, and that would have happened here, too, if the clerk had thought that the category of selfodes in Hedgley included even one man. Because the clerk wrote *qualibet* instead *quolibet*, his entry tells us that *all* the selfodes in Hedgley in 1290 were women and suggests, by extension, that elsewhere women predominated among the numerous, landless, and poor northerners known as selfodes.⁵⁰

The same point — that we have been inattentive to the women hidden behind words that seem masculine but are, in fact, gender-inclusive — applies to ‘anilepimen’, a category of persons richly documented in the records of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manors in Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and (just barely) Suffolk. Anilepimen were usually unmarried (the term itself derives

⁴⁸ Jolliffe, ‘Northumbrian Institutions’, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Jolliffe, ‘Northumbrian Institutions’, p. 8; Winchester, *Landscape and Society in Medieval Cumbria*, p. 67; Neilson, *Customary Rents*, p. 173; Fox, ‘Exploitation of the Landless’, p. 524; Homans, *English Villagers*, p. 209; *Bishop Hatfield’s Survey*, ed. by Greenwell, p. 283. I thank Angus Winchester and Peter Larson for sharing their thoughts on selfodes.

⁵⁰ Durham, DCRO, Greenwell Deeds D/Gr 66. The reading of *qualibet* in the OED is implausible in the context of the full entry: ‘Item. De qualibet selfode iij dietas vel iijd. exceptis selfod’ propriis Johannis de Somerville in terra sua comorantibus et si extra terram suam moram faciant faciunt servitudines.’

from Old English *onlepi* for 'single' or 'just one' or 'only'); landless; and only loosely tied to manor or village. They were, as one thirteenth-century clerk put it, among the lowest people 'innumerable, sometimes waxing in number and sometimes waning'.⁵¹ These anilepimen were, in short, much like *garciones* and *selfodes* — unmarried, poor, landless, what Edward Miller once called the 'proletarian' element in the medieval manor.⁵² They were also often female.

We know this, in part, because a 1251 survey of the Ely episcopal estates explicitly noted the presence of 'anilepiwomen' as well as anilepimen. An earlier Ely survey in 1221 had used only the male-generic term 'anilepimen', but a generation later, Ely's clerks sometimes reported on both 'anilepimen and anilepiwomen'.⁵³ This shift was not random: it is found only in entries about their autumn work (not in notations about their sheep or carts or chevage); and 'anilepiwomen' were particularly noted in the impoverished manors of the Cambridgeshire blackland. The term 'anilepiwomen' also emerged in a time of increasing attention to this category of people: only six manors with reported 'anilepimen' in 1221, but twenty-one in 1251 (six of these had 'anilepiwomen' too). The addition of 'anilepiwomen' in the 1251 survey might reflect linguistic change; it might be a clerical quirk; it might result from the bishop of Ely's greater interest in landless people; and it might, of course, stem from an actual growth between 1221 and 1251 in landlessness and perhaps especially female landlessness. We cannot know, but we can know that the appearance of the female-specific term 'anilepiwomen' speaks to the prominence of women in this category of persons by the mid-thirteenth century. Like the development of the term 'brewsters' in English, the term 'anilepiwomen' arose because the category was so rich with females that the use of a male generic ('brewers' or 'anilepimen') became inadequate.⁵⁴

The appearance of this new word 'anilepiwomen' was, then, a telling development in the thirteenth century, but it never undid the generic power of 'anilepimen'. (Nor did 'brewster' in relation to 'brewer'.) For some clerks (and presumably for some speakers of English too) 'anilepimen' remained up to the task of describing both sexes, even when women predominated. On the estate of Holkham (Norfolk) in 1312 and again in 1327, all the named 'anilepimen' were women.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Homans transcribes some of the main references, *English Villagers*, p. 432.

⁵² Miller, *Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, p. 93n.

⁵³ London, BL, Cotton Tiberius B.ii (1221) and Cotton Claudius C.xi (1251).

⁵⁴ Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk*, ed. by Hassall and Beauroy, pp. 88 and 304.

In Salle (Norfolk), women predominated in the first listings of ‘anilepimen’ in the late 1320s and remained a substantive presence until 1348.⁵⁶ In East Beckham (Norfolk), regular listings of ‘anilepimen’ between 1288 and 1307 identify about twice as many women as men.⁵⁷ In Horsham just before 1290, the so-called ‘anilepimen’ included nineteen women, four men, and two children.⁵⁸ These are the only name listings before 1348 that I have yet been able to locate, and in all other instances, we cannot do more than be alert to the gender-openness of the term. The late thirteenth-century accounts for Forncectt (Norfolk) tell us that about one hundred ‘anilepimen’ paid a penny a year to the manor, but because the documents provide no lists of names, we cannot know how many of those ‘anilepimen’ were, in fact, ‘anilepiwomen’.⁵⁹

Thanks to Horsham’s extensive court rolls, we can know, in this one instance, a great deal about the landless, poor, unmarried people known there as ‘anilepimen’ — who were, as I shall now describe them, predominantly anilepiwomen. They moved in and out of Horsham, sometimes involuntarily, but most made Horsham their home over many years. Some had been born there, and others wandered in and settled. Maddy Strawberry, for example, arrived in Horsham in 1267 when she lodged with a woman named Matilda Avenaunt; later that year, she agreed to become the prior’s dependent (*hominem* — another male generic) and to pay him 1d. annually; twenty years later, she was still paying her

⁵⁶ Norwich, NRO, 2605/1-2605/5. In Salle, anilepimen were naifs who held no seignorial land; their annual fine was often called *capitagium*; and after 1339, their fine was sometimes mingled with fines to live off the manor. In October 1327, four women of seven anilepimen; in July 1328, six of eleven; in August 1329, nine of fifteen; thereafter, men usually predominated, but women remained in substantial numbers until after 1348 (in that year, four women of fifteen). After 1348, the fine became more closely associated with naifs living away from the manor.

⁵⁷ Norwich, NRO, WKC 2/49 (the first few membranes belong to the reign of Edward II), thirty-three women (many identified as daughters) and eighteen men (some sons) in courts for the reign of Edward I. I thank Chris Briggs for bringing these records to my attention and facilitating my work with them. Because I encountered them late in preparing this essay, I have not yet exhausted their possibilities.

⁵⁸ Norwich, NRO, 19500, 42B7. Most individuals appear in both lists, compiled in 1286 and 1287. I have excluded here two men, one woman, and one child: they are listed only in 1286; their entries are cancelled; and in all but one instance (the child) no fine is levied.

⁵⁹ Kew, TNA SC 6/935/2-13 (1270–1293). Fox, ‘Exploitation of the Landless’, p. 526, n. 36, reports they were ‘emigrants’, but this does not apply to pre-1348 uses of the term; *manentes extra manerium* indicates non-tenants, not non-residents. See Davenport, *Economic Development*, pp. 45–46.

annual penny, and she had a grown son established in the village. No anilepi-woman was married or widowed (two were ordered to marry and did not), but several had children noted in the records. About half shared their hard lives with siblings. Agnes Neth and her sister Avice, for example, lived together in lodgings, left the village together under orders of expulsion, and eventually returned together. Men were included in most of these sibling groups, and, in fact, all the anilepimen in Holkham probably had sisters who shared their condition — Hubert Quin and his sister; Richard Siviere and his sister; William Bishop junior and his sister; and somewhat less certainly (the fraternal relationship is unspecified), Geoffrey Brungine and the sisters Beatrice, Maddy, and Avice Brungine. No man lived on his own, almost as if Horsham could accommodate anilepimen only if they were attached, as brothers, to anilepiwomen.⁶⁰

Like the third-world poor recently studied by Ester Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee, anilepiwomen (and men) lived differently from their more settled neighbours.⁶¹ They possessed no land — or only the tiniest bits of land — to cultivate; they could not rely on wage income; they seldom had the resources to support themselves by brewing; they seem to have not even had sheep or cattle (some had chickens). They lived mostly beyond of the structures of landholding, husbandry, and custom that so shaped the lives of their neighbours, and as a result, they were more responsible for their fate (one might say more individualistic) as well as more vulnerable. They faced more uncertainties, more decisions, more worries, and their lives were more makeshift than managed. They were entrepreneurial by need — that is, they *had* to create work for themselves, and they *had* to spread risk by juggling many tasks. They did not always succeed: one anilepiwoman named Sibyl Stevens was so poor that the Horsham court, after trying to compel her attendance by attaching a mere buckle, decided to leave her alone because of her ‘extreme poverty’. Success depended on what the ‘better’ folk of Horsham considered to be reprehensible misbehaviours — stealing wood or hay; pilfering grain at harvest; receiving and re-selling stolen goods; refusing to contribute to parish fund-raising; dodging repayment of debts. Horsham’s anilepiwomen had, in addition, one option their brothers mostly lacked: they could profit from casual prostitution. Some lodged in houses notorious for attracting suspect men at night, and a remarkable number paid fines for pregnancy outside of marriage (eleven of fifteen such fines), some repeatedly (Avice Brungine paid for four such offences). These activities

⁶⁰ Norwich, NRO, 19495, 42B7–19505, 42B7.

⁶¹ Duflo and Banerjee, *Poor Economics*.

might seem anti-social, but they were primarily economic. When not patching together an economy of makeshifts in these ways, Horsham's anilepiwomen (and men) were no more given to quarrels or insults than anyone else.

* * *

Girls on their own were not victims and only victims. No householder in late thirteenth-century Horsham would have thought of the village's anilepiwomen as merely hapless and pathetic; these women were harvest-workers, lodgers, and sub-leasers, mothers and prostitutes, parishioners and thieves. Some girls on their own actually flourished. I have written extensively about one of them, Cecilia Penifader. Given land by her parents and buying still more, farming in close cooperation with her brothers, surrounded by family, she prospered as a never-married singlewoman in Brigstock (Northants) through these very decades.⁶²

But Cecilia Penifader was luckier than most, and the 'teeming landless workforce' of poor sons on the Glastonbury estates was more than matched by poor daughters who had also been left to manage for themselves.⁶³ These daughters on their own are not, to be sure, as well documented as Glastonbury's *garciones*, but their shadowy presence is an artefact of our records, not a reflection of reality. Most earned too little and were too poor to matter in collections of *chevagiūm garcionum* and similar fines.⁶⁴ Thus, the root cause of their absence from most of the archival record of landless poverty is the very profundity of their plight. These unattached girls and women were the truly poor of medieval England — not the friars who begged and preached; not the ploughmen of late medieval poetry; not the smallholders struggling on a few acres of land; not even Fox's *garciones*. Medieval poverty had a face that was, much more often than we have yet realized, female and single.

For manorial clerks and accountants, these women were usually beneath notice, occasionally disciplined but rarely taxed or enumerated. For preachers, these women evoked little sympathy and only occasional calls to charity. For almsgivers, these women were more cause for alarm than generosity.⁶⁵

⁶² Bennett, *Medieval Life*.

⁶³ Fox, 'Exploitation of the Landless', p. 568.

⁶⁴ An ordinance from Dartmoor (Devon) in 1342–43 accommodated to gender-based earning differentials, charging each landless man 2d. and each landless women only a penny. Fox, 'Exploitation of the Landless', pp. 526 and 523. By a similar logic, small, blind, and old *garciones* were given special dispensations on the Glastonbury estate. Fox, 'Exploitation of the Landless', pp. 530–31.

⁶⁵ The foundation charters of some medieval hospitals explicitly excluded aid to unwed

But William Langland saw them and understood their plight. He knew that coldest, poorest places in his world were the pathetic hovels of women:

Ac that most neden aren oure neyhebores and we nyme gode hede,
 As prisoners in puttes and pore folk in cotes,
 Charged with childrene and chief lordes rente.
 That they with spynnyng may spare spenen hit in hous-huyre,
 Bothe in mylke and in mele, to make with papelotes
 To aglotye with here gurles that greden aftur fode.
 And hemsulue also soffre muche hungur
 And wo in wynter tyme and wakyng on nyhtes—
 To rise to the reule to rokke þe cradel,
 Bothe to cardre and to kembe, to cloute and to wasche,
 To rybbe and to rele, rusches to pylie,
 That reuthe is to rede or in ryme shewe
 The wo of this wommen that wonyeth in cotes⁶⁶

The most needy are our neighbours, if we take good heed, not just prisoners in pits but also poor folks in cots, burdened with children and manorial rent. What they save by spinning, they spend on house-rent or on milk and meal for porridge to fill up their children who cry after food. And they themselves suffer much hunger, and woe in winter time, and waking at night to rise as needed to rock the cradle; to card and to comb wool; to patch and to wash; to rub flax and to reel yarn; to pile rushes. Oh, pitiful it is to read or in rhyme show the woe of these women that dwell in cots.

Some of these woeful women were born and raised in poverty. Others, however, began their lives relatively well, as the daughters of tenants, nurtured and raised around a common familial hearth. But as they approached adulthood, they had less fortune — and often less parental support too — than their siblings, particularly their brothers. If we remember these women and Langland's powerful evocation of their plight, we will, of course, better understand medi-

mothers, and it was only after 1348 that bequests for the marriages of unwed women became common.

⁶⁶ C-Text, Passus 9, 70–83, reproduced here as in *Piers Plowman*, ed. by Pearsall, pp. 173–74. Langland revised this passage at the end of the fourteenth century, but he grew to adulthood before 1348, and, in any case, little suggests that the circumstances of rural women had much improved by 1400. See my 'Compulsory Service in Late Medieval England'. Literary critics recognize this as the first passage in English to evoke 'the felt and inner bitterness of poverty': Shepherd, 'Poverty in Piers Plowman', p. 172. Its focus on rural women has largely been unrecognized or mis-handled. See, for example, Pearsall, 'Piers Plowman and the Problem of Labour', p. 128.

eval poverty and poor relief. We will also have occasion to rethink some of the big questions that drive our studies of medieval economy and society. Consider urbanization. It is appealing to imagine that the best and brightest country girls were attracted to medieval cities, but the raw poverty and compelled mobility of selfodes and anilepiwomen suggests that in-migration to towns might have been more push than pull, more driven by desperation than drawn by ambition. Consider also, the European Marriage Pattern. Since the poverty of daughters delayed or precluded their marriage, might the English origins of the EMP lie in the poverty of the thirteenth century, rather than the prosperity of the fifteenth century?⁶⁷ Consider even the Great Divergence. Economic historians today agree that the English had in place by 1300 most of the essential economic features that would eventually propel it to forefront of commercial and industrial nations.⁶⁸ Was England's further development stalled not only by climate and famine and plague, but also by what we might call 'girl *defect*' — that is, underinvestment in its young women?

⁶⁷ See the optimistic interpretations of de Moor and Van Zanden, 'Girlpower'.

⁶⁸ See especially Dyer, *An Age of Transition?*, and Broadberry and others, 'British Economic Growth'.

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A SNAPSHOT IN TIME: THE WEATHER AS SEEN IN THE RECORD OF THE *NONAE* (1339–41)

Marilyn Livingstone

Introduction

The last twenty years, and in particular the last decade, have seen an explosion of interest in our environmental past. In the mid-1990s Professors Bruce Campbell and Mike Baillie of The Queen's University of Belfast put together a cutting-edge funding application that sought to bring together historical and biological/dendrochronological/climate data in a way that has now become a standard approach to looking at the environmental past.¹ I had the great good fortune to be a PhD student at Belfast when Professors Campbell and Baillie were beginning to work together, and to be working on a source that contained a considerable amount of environmental data for the key period of the early

* I would like to thank Francis Ludlow for reviewing a draft of this paper. All mistakes are of course my responsibility alone.

¹ The innovative application to the National Environment Research Council was an early example of historians and paleo-ecologists working together. Sadly, the application was unsuccessful, but the ideas developed there went on to influence a number of publications including Campbell, 'Physical Shocks, Biological Hazards, and Human Impacts'; Campbell, 'Nature as Historical Protagonist: Environment and Society in Pre-Industrial England'; Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem'; Campbell, 'Hazards, Humans, and History: Human-Environment Interaction during the Last Millennium'; Baillie, *New light on the Black Death*; Baillie, 'Tree-Rings Indicate Global Environmental Downturns that Could Have Been Caused by Comet Debris'; Hogg and others, 'High-Precision Radiocarbon Measurements of Contemporaneous Tree-ring Dated Wood from the British Isles and New Zealand'.

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fourteenth century.² This essay follows their pioneering methods by examining what these data — which were embedded in tax returns — can tell us about English weather in the three years surrounding the tax.

Interest in the weather in England is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, this interest is often seen as one of the defining characteristics of the English. Among historians who have studied the medieval climate are J. Z. Titow (in the 1960s) who examined the effect of weather on the Winchester manors, and Peter Brandon (in the 1970s) who did likewise for a group of Sussex manors.³ European academics in the 1970s also began to analyse medieval climate events more systematically, rather than the anecdotal way in which such records had previously been used. More attention was also paid to contemporary descriptions of the weather, such as that by William Merle of Oxford and Lincolnshire, who kept a daily diary of weather for the years 1337–44 which described the conditions he observed as well as their effects on agriculture.⁴ Outside of the purely historical field, climate change scientists have studied the medieval climate anomaly in the context of the modern global warming debate.⁵

* * *

As scholars of medieval climate are already aware, peasants were on the front line when the weather turned nasty. There is plenty of evidence of this vulnerability in the records of the lay subsidy levied in 1340–1 (hereafter called the *Nonae*). The surviving records of this crisis-time taxation provide numerous illustrations of the effects of adverse weather on peasant agriculture. Environmental degradation (flooding, severe coastal storms, drought), along with poverty (tenants forced to give up holdings, or unable to afford seed to plant) and animal disease (primarily of sheep) all feature as excuses for low payment of the *Nonae* in 1341. Most common are references to land which had fallen out of use and lay unsown or uncultivated.

Some of the *Nonae* documents thus offer a snapshot of an England at a time when the basic element of the economy, agriculture, was already strug-

² This paper is based on Livingstone, 'The *Nonae*'.

³ Titow, 'The Evidence of Weather in the Account Rolls of the Bishop of Winchester'; Brandon, 'Late-Medieval Weather in Sussex and Its Agricultural Significance'.

⁴ Merle, *Consideraciones temperiei pro 7 annis*, ed. by Symons.

⁵ See, for example, numerous articles over the past two decades in the journals *Climate Change* and *Climate Dynamics*. Early examples such as Ogilvie, 'The Past Climate and Sea-ice Record from Iceland', concentrate on identifying warmer and colder periods during the past 1000 or so years.

gling against adversity. This snapshot reflects a crucial time when the peasant population was tentatively beginning to recover from the famine and animal disease of the late 1310s and 1320s. Historians know, as the peasants then did not, that their struggle was shortly to be made worse by the visitation of catastrophic human disease, the so-called Black Death. Hindsight makes analysis of the 'in-between' period particularly difficult for historians. We need to try to understand the mind-set of people whose current circumstances were already bad enough, and not treat the difficulties enumerated in the *Nonae* as the less serious pre-cursor of an imminent disaster.

The Source

The *Nonae* is more commonly called the *Nonarum Inquisitiones* by historians who are familiar with it through the 1807 Record Commission volume, which printed only those documents available at the time. The *Nonae* documents are the record of a lay subsidy of one-ninth of the value of all corn, wool, and lambs, assessed at a parish level. Perhaps the most well-known use of this printed material by economic historians is the work of Alan Baker, who documented the decline in use of arable land in the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Sussex.⁶ Less known is the amount of un-printed material which was not included in the Record Commission volume.⁷ Some of the unpublished documents were examined by local historians and published by local record societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ More recently, historians such as Jim Masschaele have used it to examine commercial activity and concluded that the *Nonae* records are generally reliable in their valuations of mercantile wealth, despite some significant gaps.⁹

⁶ Baker analysed and mapped the reasons for low assessment for those places which appear in the printed volume, *Nonarum Inquisitiones in curia scaccarii*, ed. by Vanderzee (hereafter *Inq. Non.*); Baker, 'Evidence in the *Nonarum Inquisitiones* of Contracting Arable Lands in England during the Early Fourteenth Century'; Baker, 'Some Evidence of a Reduction in the Acreage of Cultivated Land in Sussex during the Early Fourteenth Century'; Baker, 'Contracting Arable Lands in 1341'.

⁷ Virtually all of the unpublished material is in the E 179 class of documents at The National Archives (hereafter TNA) at Kew.

⁸ *Lay Subsidy Roll of 1332–3 and Nonarum Inquisitiones of 1340 for the County of Worcester*, ed. by Amphlett, pp. viii–xxii and 29–56; *A Formula Book of English Historical Documents, Part II*, ed. by Hall, pp. 58–62; Venables, 'The Results of an Examination of the "Nonae Rolls", as They Relate to Cambridgeshire'; Wickham, 'Nonarum Inquisitiones for Suffolk'.

⁹ Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets*, p. 92. It is possible that the gaps are

Although many historians have assumed that the printed material represents the whole of the source,¹⁰ the unpublished material adds considerably to the value of the *Nonae*. First, an examination of all surviving records reveals that what appeared to be inconsistencies of assessment were the result of the 1807 editors printing different layers of administrative documents without acknowledgement or explanation. This discovery has shed considerable light on the value and usability of the existing printed material. Second, understanding the different levels of documentary detail enables a more accurate assessment of the whole of the surviving source and the extraction of the most usable data for analysis. Third, and most importantly, the unpublished material represents a significant amount of additional documentation which provides data for a number of new counties as well as more detailed data for counties where only basic information has been printed.

The unpublished material is greater in both quantity and quality than that printed in the 1807 volume. For all but four counties (Bedfordshire, Cornwall, Middlesex, and Worcestershire) the amount of unpublished material equals or exceeds that in the 1807 edition. Overall the printed volume represents perhaps 40 per cent of the available records. There is no surviving data for several counties, and Cumberland, Devon, Kent, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Northumberland, Somerset, and Surrey (Map 13.1) were not included at all.¹¹ However, the unpublished records for Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire (which consist primarily of original returns) contain a large amount of very detailed information about the glebe, small tithes, and condition of the parishes in those counties. Overall, the *Nonae* provides us with information from over 7200 parishes in all counties of England apart from the palatinates of Cheshire and Durham.

For the purposes of this paper, only a portion of these parishes will be examined, although they cover a large swathe of the country. The data are drawn from what is a peculiar feature of the *Nonae* records. As the valuation for the 1340 lay tax was based on an ecclesiastical tax of 1291, jurors (those who witnessed the assessment) felt it within their remit to provide reasons to explain

a result of administrative differences, as valuation of the fifteenth for urban areas and rural merchants was a minor part of the assessment, and may not have attracted as much attention from the assessors or their supervisors.

¹⁰ Britnell, 'Finchingfield Park under the Plough, 1341–42'; Forrest, 'The Distribution of Medieval Taxation in Southern England: New Evidence from Surrey, Middlesex and Dorset'.

¹¹ There are no *Nonae* documents for Devon in TNA, E 179 class of documents. Data for Devon are drawn from the enrolled account for the *Nonae*, TNA, E 359/12A, m. 3d.

Map 13.1.
Jurisdictions with documents
recording excuses in the *Nonae*.



why assessments were lower than those of fifty years earlier. These reasons comprise a wide variety of information, most commonly about the extent and value of the rectorial land in the parish (which was exempt from a lay subsidy), but also about the value of the tithes. Most interesting for the purposes of this paper are the ‘excuses’ or reasons offered by the assessors for lower than anticipated payments.

These excuses are highly individual in nature, but they contain much that can be compared across parish, county, and other jurisdictional boundaries. This information can illuminate circumstances in a particular parish, and can also be used systematically to provide a cumulative picture of problems experienced by parishes across wide areas of England. There are recurrent themes that run through the excuses as they are presented in the documents. Among endogenous factors there are references to taxation, purveyance, general poverty, and warfare. Most of the exogenous forces referenced concern adverse weather conditions such as storms (and concomitant flooding) or drought. It is from this latter group that the material for the remainder of this paper is drawn.

* * *

Of all the wealth of data contained in the *Nonae* records, the excuses have attracted the most attention from historians and have been most widely used. Alan Baker sought to quantify the evidence (from the published volume) about uncultivated and waste land, evidence which the *Nonae* excuses provide in abundance for certain jurisdictions.¹² Mark Bailey has quantified the acres lost to flooding in Suffolk and used some entries anecdotally as part of his examination of natural disaster in eastern England.¹³ Studies that draw upon this material have also been carried out for Cambridgeshire, Dorset, and Sussex.¹⁴ John Maddicott used the excuses in the printed volume in his study of the effects of royal policy on the English peasantry in the fourteenth century.¹⁵ The present study uses all the available evidence from the *Nonae* excuses, and thereby provides a more complete picture of the effects of environmental problems on the mid-fourteenth-century peasantry.

The Nonae and its Excuses

The documents of the *Nonae*, or taxation of ninths, consist of four layers of records: original returns, intermediate rolls, final assessors accounts, and receivers accounts. Each contains very different levels of detail. The most detailed are

¹² See footnote 6 above.

¹³ Bailey, 'Per impetum maris'.

¹⁴ Venables, 'The Results of an Examination of the "Nonae Rolls", as They Relate to Cambridgeshire'; Reynolds, 'Late Medieval Dorset'; Yates, 'Medieval Assessments in North-west Sussex'; Yates, 'The *Nonae* Rolls and Soil Fertility'.

¹⁵ Maddicott, *The English Peasantry and the Demands of the Crown, 1294–1341*.

the original returns, which survive for 24 per cent of *Nonae* parishes. Slightly less detailed are the enrolled intermediate accounts which retain some important excuses; the assessors accounts which are drawn from the intermediate accounts are usually very terse, and the receivers' accounts even more so. Excuses can be found for nearly one-quarter of all 7200 *Nonae* parishes, and the occurrence of excuses is fairly evenly divided among these four record types, although there is a slightly higher proportion in the intermediate accounts. The original returns contain 34 per cent of all excuses (representing 32 per cent of all original returns). Thirty-nine per cent of entries with excuses occur in intermediate rolls, although these account for only 20 per cent of all these rolls. The fact that excuses were retained in successive record levels may indicate that they were considered important justification for the reduction in the assessed value between the 1291 *Taxatio* and the 1340–41 *Nonae*, excuses that help to explain why three-quarters of the *Nonae* assessments were below the anticipated revenue for 1291.¹⁶

In addition to the excuses that illuminate environmental issues, there are others that point to the effects of war, either on the Scottish frontier or on the south coast. Purveyance, one of the features of a wartime economy, is also mentioned in a few counties.¹⁷ It may well be that broader references to excessive taxation are also referring to effects of purveyance, but this is impossible to discern from the *Nonae* records. Complaints about taxation are also present in a number of counties, especially in the West Midlands and in the counties to the north and north-east of London.

The bulk of the excuses are of more immediate interest for our purposes. There are, of course, levels of usefulness. The only surviving document for Worcestershire, for example, offers the same excuse for nearly all of the county's parishes: that land is uncultivated and that the assessment is lower due to much poverty and oppression.¹⁸ Fortunately, in many other parts of the country the excuses are more varied and individual.

¹⁶ *Taxatio ecclesiastica Anglie et Wallie auctoritate P. Nicholai IV circa A.D. 1291*, ed. by Astle and Ayscough.

¹⁷ Cambridgeshire: TNA, E 179/161/15, Burrough Green (m. 58), Harston (m. 51), Kingston (m. 45), Longstowe (m. 87), Stapleford (m. 81), Thriplow (m. 49); Herefordshire: TNA, E 179/117/8 m. 4 (Bridstow); Oxford with suburbs: TNA, E 179/161/15, m. 8.

¹⁸ For example, the published material for Worcestershire was drawn from a sixteenth-century copy which survives in a bound book now in the Bodleian Library (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dugdale 6502).

The Weather, the Weather

The increasingly disturbed weather patterns of the late 1330s were noted by William Merle, rector of Driby in Lincolnshire between 1331 and *c.* 1347, who carefully recorded the weather from late 1337 to early 1344 in Lincolnshire and in Oxford (where he was studying for much of this time). In 1337 Merle recorded a few sentences per month but used few exact dates. By 1339 his entries are more detailed and are mostly organized on a week by week basis; by 1340 each month's entry is much more detailed and by March of that year his account of the weather takes the form of nearly a day-by-day diary.

Merle's observations can be used to see what was happening in part of central England.¹⁹ His diary records heavy snow fall and hard frosts for much of December 1339 and January 1340, with snow giving way to rain later in the month. February was characterized by rain and wind, March brought severe frosts and some snow and hail with warmer temperatures in the last days of the month. April brought mostly dry and warm weather; May too saw little rain until the 28th which brought a long and severe thunderstorm. June witnessed heat and little rain which Merle said 'did not hinder the workers in the hay fields'. He also notes that any rain that fell from February to May 'did not penetrate much'. July alternated between great heat (with strong winds) and only one day of heavy rain; August likewise brought heat and strong winds with a little rain that did not penetrate the fields. September, however, experienced rain and wind on the majority of days, a trend that continued through October and November; Merle recorded frost as early as 5 September. December 1340 was much warmer than in 1339, and there was only light snow on a couple of days in January 1341, but there was much rain, including a thunderstorm in the third week of the month.²⁰

William Merle's weather observations fit in quite well with some of the excuses recorded by the *Nonae* assessors, which can be mapped to show the location of places affected by different types of weather (Map 13.2) and where flooding was recorded (Map 13.3).²¹ By far the largest number of exogenous

¹⁹ This is especially so for conditions such as drought or frost; hail and thunderstorms can, of course, be more localized.

²⁰ Merle, *Consideraciones temperiei pro 7 annis*, ed. by Symons, *passim*.

²¹ These also fit well with other contemporary sources, including chronicles and manorial accounts. For other writers on the effects of weather in particular English locales, see also Brandon, 'Agriculture and the Effects of Floods and Weather at Barnhorne, Sussex, during the Late Middle Ages'; Hallam, 'The Climate of Eastern England 1250–1350'.

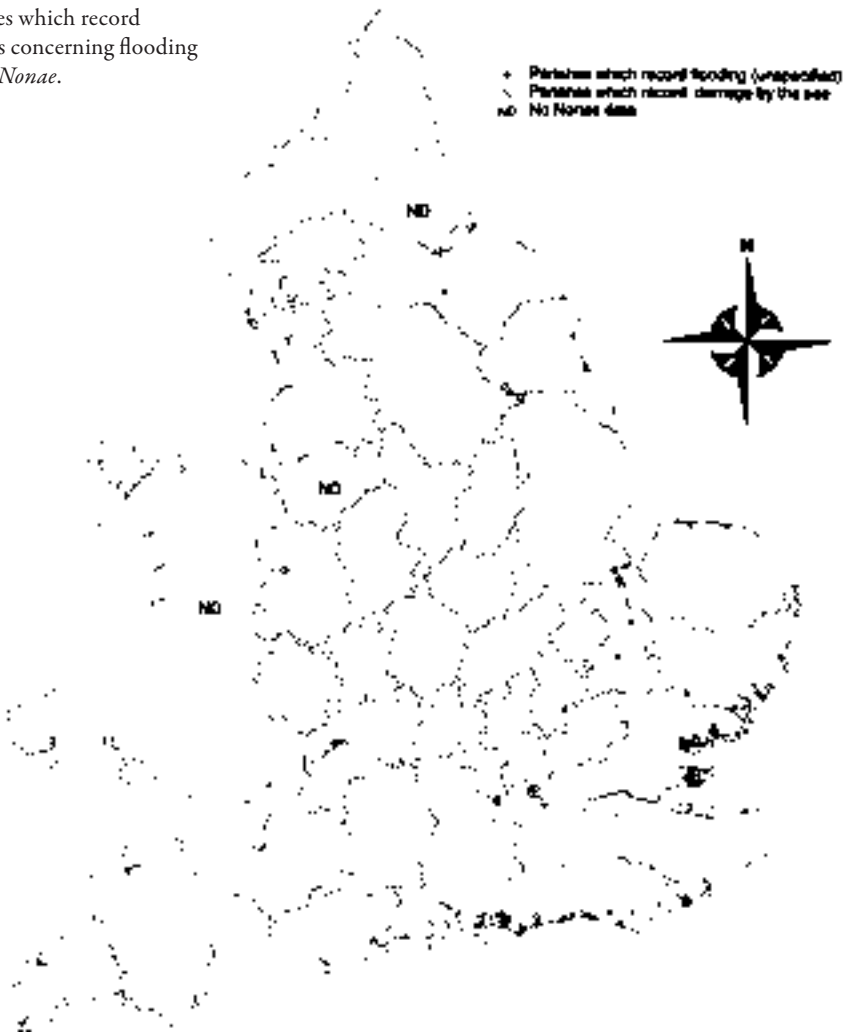
Map 13.2.
Parishes which record
problems with weather
conditions in the *Nonae*.



excuses recorded concern the general effects of poor weather. In addition to these specific complaints about environmental conditions, there are also a large number of places where low assessments are blamed on the condition of the land (Map 13.4).

There are thirty-one parishes that recorded adverse effects of storms and ‘tempests’, the most notable of these are the twenty-one parishes in Shropshire (Map 13.2). These may be ‘blanket’ excuses, but they were recorded for more than just a single hundred or deanery, and were retained in both the intermediate rolls and formal accounts, so it is difficult to discern any administrative pat-

Map 13.3.
Parishes which record
excuses concerning flooding
in the *Nonae*.



tern to their inclusion. The assessment for these parishes may have been carried out by the same group of officials, but given their spread across administrative boundaries, it is unlikely that this explains the repetition of detailed excuses. Phrases used to describe the tempests were similar but not identical in all parishes; the tempests were described as 'great', 'unusual', 'horrible', and 'excessive'. It is likely that these excuses are a reflection of some disruptive occurrence in

parts of Shropshire.²² The Shropshire tempests bring to mind Merle's descriptions of major thunderstorms in 1340.

Sea tempests were blamed for destroying much of the town of Lyme Regis in Dorset, and for flooding the land and marshes at Great Clacton in Essex and much of the village of Holkham in Norfolk.²³ In Sussex, the ninth of corn was reduced by 20s by land destroyed at Aldrington, while at Portslade and Rottingdean in Sussex, 60 and 50 acres respectively were damaged; at Goring in the same county an 'air tempest' was said to have destroyed and adulterated the growth of the corn.²⁴ At Tottington in Norfolk a winter storm was said to have destroyed 300 sheep, while a summer one accounted for 600 acres of land not being sown.²⁵ More generally, at Stainton St Quinton in Wiltshire poor quality corn was blamed on a tempest and at Kirby Wharfe in West Yorkshire the record simply states 'tempest'.²⁶

Other excuses highlighted the difficulties caused by the previous cold and rough winter (Map 13.2), and in three-quarters of those places hard winters were given as the reason for the presence of sheep murrain.²⁷ Winters were described as rough, hard, cold, frigid, and, in Tingrith in Bedfordshire, 'distempered'. Half of such places suffering from winter damage were in Bedfordshire. All of these recorded sheep murrains; in Mapplesden and Stotfold, murrain was said to have occurred before lambing, while in Battlesden, Chalgrave, Eversholt, and Houghton Regis it occurred before shearing.²⁸ The excuses for these places complain of the poor quality or low numbers of lambs. In Wiltshire murrain was present in Alton Priors and Ramsbury and at Sherston two hard winters

²² TNA, E 179/166/8 and E 179/166/9. It may be that other contemporary Shropshire records might confirm such conditions. A short survey of secondary literature for the county has not turned up anything, but more local studies would be helpful.

²³ Lyme Regis: TNA, E 179/103/13, m. 3; Great Clacton: TNA, E 179/107/30, m. 10; Holkham: TNA, E 179/149/18, m. 20.

²⁴ TNA, E 179/189/17, mm. 58, 57, 67, 38.

²⁵ TNA, E 179/149/18, m. 18.

²⁶ Stainton St Quinton: TNA, E 179/196/18, m. 171; Kirby Wharfe: TNA, E 179/206/46, m. 6.

²⁷ Although not specifically linked to a particular weather condition, mildew is recorded as affecting crops in ten parishes, four in Buckinghamshire (Bierton, Farnham Royal, West Wycombe, and Huchehe) and six in Hertfordshire (Flamstead, Great Gaddesden, Kensworth, Rebound, St Peters in St Albans, and Wheathampstead).

²⁸ TNA, E 179/71/17, m. 6 (Tingrith); m. 4 (Mapplesden and Stotfield); m. 1 (others).

account for all sheep mortality.²⁹ Brightwalton and East Tilsley in Berkshire recorded murrain during a cold winter, but did not quantify the damage, as the assessors did in Tottington.³⁰ More general complaints about cold/hard winters were recorded at Edlesborough and Ivinghoe in Buckinghamshire.³¹ In ten places poor winters were blamed for the poor quality of crops; mildew is mentioned in nine parishes.

The recording of cold/hard winters by the *Nonae* fits well with evidence about the effects of volcanic activity which have been the subject of recent study by climate historians. Greenland ice cores provide evidence of volcanic activity in the late 1330s. Suggested dates for eruptions are between 1338 and 1340, and there is evidence that two such eruptions took place in the 1330s.³² One of the results of volcanic eruptions is depressed temperatures, which can be confirmed by examining the growth of trees in the years after an eruption. When more than one eruption occurs close together the effect on trees is even greater. Furthermore, poor tree growth is related to cold weather conditions. A study which looked at the link between volcanic eruptions and cold events recorded in the Irish Annals found a consistent relationship between volcanic activity and unusually cold weather, especially in winter.³³

By contrast, dry summers are blamed for poor crops in forty-five places, twenty-eight of them in Buckinghamshire. As with the references to tempests in Shropshire, the Buckinghamshire parishes described as suffering from dry summers are in different deaneries and hundreds and the wording of these excuses is sufficiently different to see them as individual and not 'blanket' examples. Most of the rest of the complaints about dry and hot summers are in the nearby counties of Bedfordshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire, and Middlesex (Map 13.2). At Potton in Bedfordshire, it was reported that for two months in winter there had been freezing weather, but that it was also a dry year which, it was claimed, resulted in sandy soil. At Abingdon in Berkshire the hot summer was said to have affected the land and its hay. At Lolworth in Cambridgeshire two parcels of land were sown with peas, the majority of which were destroyed

²⁹ TNA, E 179/196/1, m. 48 (Alton Priors); m. 30 (Ramsbury); m. 17 (Sherston).

³⁰ TNA, E 179/173/20, m. 52 (Brightwalton); E 179/173/17 (East Tilsley).

³¹ TNA, E 179/77/8, m. 1.

³² Sigl and others, 'A New Bipolar Ice Core Record of Volcanism from WAIS Divide and NEEM and Implications for Climate Forcing of the Last 2000 Years', pp. 1158 and 1166.

³³ Ludlow and others, 'Medieval Irish Chronicles Reveal Persistent Volcanic Forcing of Severe Winter Cold Events'.

by the dry summer; at Burwell St Mary's some of the corn was sown in Lent when it was dry, and there was a dry summer. Two parishes in Hertfordshire, Kensworth, and St Stephen also record dry summers. At Kensworth the peas and vetch were deficient due to a dry summer, while in the parish of St Stephen and St Julian near St Albans two hundred and forty-four assessors recorded complaints about both a dry summer and mildew attacking crops (presumably at different times of the year).³⁴

At East Blatchingdon in Sussex drought and heat were blamed for damaging the grain crops with a loss to the tax (or ninth) assessment of £1 6s. 8d., while at Sutton near Seaford both a hard winter and a dry summer were cited as reasons for poorer than normal outputs.³⁵ Whiteparish in Wiltshire and Hatfield in the West Riding of Yorkshire also reported dry summers; 'Woketon' in Northamptonshire was more vague with its mention of 'dry times'.³⁶

All the excuses described above can be confirmed by William Merle's weather diary and other sources. For example, an entry in the *Continuatio Chronicarum* states that there was a long period of freezing weather from late November 1338 to mid-February 1339.³⁷ Looking farther afield, the *Annála Connacht* for 1339 also records 'The cattle and winter grass of Ireland suffered much from frost and snow, which lasted from the end of the first fortnight in Winter into the Spring'.³⁸

The Effects of Bad Weather: Flooding from the Sea and Inundation Inland

The *Nonae* records include a substantial amount of information about flooding and the effects of encroachment on the land and coast. Map 13.3 shows the distribution of places affected by flooding. As with the cold weather, contemporary chronicles record that the autumn of 1338 was a period of unusual rainfall.³⁹ References can be found in government records to sea-flooding in

³⁴ Potton: TNA, E 179/71/17, m. 3; Abingdon: TNA, E 179/73/20, m. 79; Cambridgeshire: TNA E 179/81/17, m. 9 (Lolworth); m. 71 (Burwell St Mary); Hertfordshire: TNA, E 179/120/21.

³⁵ TNA, E 179/189/17, m. 6; E 179/189/17, m. 52.

³⁶ Whiteparish: TNA, E 179/196/18b, m. 48; Hatfield: TNA, E 179/206/46a, m. 1; 'Woketon': TNA E 179/155/13, m. 18.

³⁷ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 88–89.

³⁸ *Annála Connacht*, ed. by Freeman, p. 283.

³⁹ Murimuth, *Continuatio Chronicarum*, ed. by Thompson, pp. 88–89.

eastern England and flooding on inland fens in 1339.⁴⁰ The melting of the snow mentioned by Merle in the winter of 1339–40 might well have triggered flooding and there was further heavy rain in February 1340.⁴¹

The *Nonae* records provide evidence of flooding in a variety of different areas of the country, although instances of inland flooding are much less common than floods in coastal regions (Map 13.3). The symbols shown on Map 13.3 differentiate between those places where flooding was specifically blamed on the sea, and those where the nature of the flooding is unspecified. Flooding on the Severn accounts for problems in two parishes in Gloucestershire (Fretherne and Moreton Valence) and two in Shropshire (Shawardine and Montford).⁴² At both Fretherne and Moreton Valence the greater part of the parish was flooded; these are the only two parishes in Gloucestershire where flooding was mentioned. Inundation by the Severn was blamed for the destruction of most of the corn at both Montford and Shawardine.⁴³ Flooding on the Thames was blamed for the ruination of winter grain at Taplow and Burham in Buckinghamshire, while at Dorney in the same county flooding was said to be frequent.⁴⁴ Similarly the Ouse in the East Riding of Yorkshire was mentioned as responsible for the flooding of land at Howden, Skelton, and Saltmarsh just to the north of the Humber. At Howden forty acres were ‘taken away’ by the waters of the Ouse; at Skelton one hundred and forty acres were devastated by the river with a loss of 70s. to the assessment; seventy acres at Saltmarsh were under the waters of the Ouse with a loss of 46s. 4d.⁴⁵ Further north, the record for Kirby Wiske states that flooding on the River Swale was responsible for the destruction of two carucates of land in that parish with a loss to the *Nonae* assessment of £2.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Bailey, ‘*Per impetum maris*’, p. 190.

⁴¹ Merle, *Consideraciones temperiei pro 7 annis*, ed. by Symons, *passim*.

⁴² TNA, E 179/113/12, m. 7; E 179/116/9, mm. 2 and 1.

⁴³ There are no original returns for Gloucestershire, but there is a roll of enrolled inquisitions which add some additional information to the printed version in TNA, E 179/113/12. It is impossible to know whether the lost originals would have recorded more flooding episodes. Shropshire’s records are also not original returns and it may be that other places were affected.

⁴⁴ TNA, E 179/77/8, m. 3; E 179/77/10, m. 5; E 179/77/8 is an enrolled account and was used for the printed volume, however, the detail about flooding in Dorney was not retained in this enrollment, but it does appear in the original return which has survived as part of a small group of these in TNA, E 179/77/10.

⁴⁵ TNA, E 179/202, mm. 29, 37, 61.

⁴⁶ TNA, E 179/211/14, m. 7d.

Table 13.1. Flooding in Essex in the *Nonae* records. (Source: TNA, E 179/107/30.)

Modern Name	Excuse Type	Excuse Unit	£	s	d	Hundred
Barling	Land submerged	40 acres	0	7	0	Rochford
Canewdon	Land submerged	1600 acres	8	1	4	Rochford
Eastwood	Land submerged	300 acres	3	0	0	Rochford
Great Stambridge	Land submerged	700 acres	4	1	4	Rochford
Great Wakering	Land submerged	200 acres	0	1	0	Rochford
Little Stambridge	Land submerged	20 acres	0	6	8	Rochford
North Shoebury	Land submerged	140 acres	2	0	0	Rochford
Paglesham	Land submerged	720 acres	3	3	4	Rochford
Prittlewell	Land submerged	80 acres	2	0	0	Rochford
Rochford	Land submerged	300 acres	3	0	0	Rochford
Shopland	Land submerged	500 acres	2	1	4	Rochford
Southchurch	Land submerged	40 acres	0	1	4	Rochford
Sutton	Land submerged	600 acres	3	1	0	Rochford
Bradfield	Land flooded by salt water		1	0	0	Tendring
Dovercourt	Land/pasture flooded		1	1	8	Tendring
Great Clacton	Land/marsh flooded by sea storm		6	0	0	Tendring
Great Holland	Land in will flooded by salt water	Most land	4	0	0	Tendring
Great Oakley	Land flooded by sea		2	0	0	Tendring
St Osyth	Pasture flooded by salt water	300 acres	-1	-1	-1	Tendring
Great Totham	Meadow and pasture flooded/submerged/ not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Great Totham	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Heybridge	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Heybridge	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Langford	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Langford	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Little Totham	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Little Totham	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tollesbury	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tollesbury	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt d'Arcy	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt d'Arcy	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt Knights	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt Knights	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt Major	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Tolleshunt Major	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Wickham Bishops	Pasture flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
Wickham Bishops	Meadow flooded/submerged/not sown/irreparable	For 5 years	-1	-1	-1	Thurstable
East Mersea	Pasture in vill/demersed by salt water		-1	-1	-1	Winstree
East Mersea	Land in vill/demersed by salt water		-1	-1	-1	Winstree
Fingringhoe	Land/pasture flooded		1	6	8	Winstree
Langenhoe	Land flooded by sea water		-1	-1	-1	Winstree
West Mersea	Land flooded by sea		-1	-1	-1	Winstree
West Mersea	Pasture flooded by sea		-1	-1	-1	Winstree

Evidence for flooding in Essex is centred on two areas near both the east coast and large rivers, the Blackwater, the Crouch, and the Thames (Table 13.1). The recording methods in Essex sometimes vary between hundreds. The most detailed surviving Essex record is the intermediate roll, and it is clear that some summarization has occurred during the enrolment process.⁴⁷ All the parishes for Thurstable Hundred have the same excuses which state that the greatest part of the arable, pasture, meadow, and marsh have been flooded, submerged, and devastated since the Feast of St Clement (23 November) in 1335.⁴⁸ In this hundred there was no specific mention of storms from the sea, or any attempt to estimate the lost value of the affected land, and an examination of the difference between the 1291 *Taxatio* and the *Nonae* assessments for the relevant parishes is only of limited value, since only four had *Taxatio* assessments.⁴⁹

In the Essex hundreds of Rochford, Tendring, and Winstree along the Thames, the Crouch, and the coast itself are more individual in character. All the entries for affected places in Rochford Hundred, for example, include the number of acres of unspecified (but probably arable) land damaged as well as the lost value; according to this record 5240 acres of land were submerged by the sea with a loss to the ninth assessment of £40 10s.⁵⁰ At Great Clacton in Tendring Hundred, both land and marsh were affected by sea storms with a loss to the ninth assessment of £2 6s.⁵¹ In Tendring Hundred only one parish records the acreage of land lost; at St Osyth 300 acres of pasture of unstated value was flooded, but at Great Holland the record states that most of the land in the parish was submerged with a loss to the assessment of £4.⁵² The entries for Winstree Hundred do not include any acreages and only one value, but do suggest that the intermediate roll was drawn from individual returns, as each parish's entry expresses the nature of the flooding in slightly different words and identifies different land types which were affected.⁵³

⁴⁷ Parts of the most detailed Essex record (more than two of the 15 membranes) are unfortunately very faded and unreadable even with the aid of a UV lamp; TNA, E 179/107/30, mm. 3–5.

⁴⁸ TNA, E 179/107/30, m. 12.

⁴⁹ In three of these four, the *Nonae* value is considerably less than that of the earlier valuation; in the other parishes, the *Nonae* values are less than £5, i.e., much less than the average value for the taxation goods.

⁵⁰ TNA, E 179/107/30, mm. 11d, 12. The total value of the lost crops was therefore £343 3s. 4d.

⁵¹ TNA, E 179/107/30, m. 10.

⁵² TNA, E 179/107/30, m. 10.

⁵³ TNA, E 179/107/30, m. 13.

As the Essex material confirms, the *Nonae* contains plentiful evidence for the effects of inclement weather on the physical environment of sea coasts (Map 13.3). The effects of erosion and encroachment from the North Sea in the early fourteenth century have been examined in detail by Mark Bailey in an article which sets such encroachments in the wider context of climate change during the period.⁵⁴ In this study Bailey used evidence from the printed *Nonae* for the county of Suffolk, but other *Nonae* material (both printed and unprinted) offers the opportunity to widen the discussion to include other eastern counties such as Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, and Yorkshire East Riding, as well as places on the south coast.

The Cambridgeshire records contain references to flooding from the sea at Wisbech, along with non-specific flooding in the nearby parishes of Elm and Leverington. At Tydd St Giles excessive digging of turbarry and flooding from fresh water were blamed for the wasted nature of at least four hundred acres of land.⁵⁵ The flooding of two hundred acres further inland at Impington is not explained.⁵⁶ The very few references to sea storms and flooding in the Norfolk records are most likely a reflection of the poor state of the surviving documents rather than the state of the Norfolk coast. The main surviving record for the county is a badly damaged intermediate roll but (as with the Essex roll) the clerk retained details of environmental conditions in his enrolled versions of the original returns. At Wiggenhall St Mary, for example, the entry states that two hundred acres of land had been flooded by the sea and Walpole was said to have been destroyed by the sea.⁵⁷ At Heacham, merchants' boats were said to have been damaged with a consequent loss of their goods, and forty acres of land were also affected by storms.⁵⁸ The enrolled entry for Tilney contains a description of the costs of maintaining the sea defences in this parish and the poverty that resulted from these costs.⁵⁹ If the Norfolk records were more readable, many additional instances of flooding would doubtless be revealed. The effects of inclement weather on the east coast of England are further confirmed by the references to damage in Yorkshire East Riding, as, for example, at

⁵⁴ Bailey, 'Per impetum maris', pp. 184–208.

⁵⁵ TNA, E 179/81/17, m. 103; *Inq. Non.*, p. 203.

⁵⁶ TNA, E 179/81/17, m. 121; *Inq. Non.*, p. 204. The jury also stated that the parish had been subject to 'excessive taxation'.

⁵⁷ TNA, E 179/149/18, mm. 13, 20.

⁵⁸ TNA, E 179/149/18, m. 8.

⁵⁹ TNA, E 179/149/18, m. 13.

Aldbrough where most fields were said to have been devastated by the sea, with a loss to the ninth assessment of 13s. 4d.⁶⁰

Equally compelling is evidence in some original returns from south coast parishes. Twenty-five Sussex, five Hampshire, and three Kent parishes record details of land affected by sea tides and storms. The surviving original returns for Hampshire and Sussex are some of the most detailed, although overall Hampshire returns have fewer excuses than those for Sussex. All Hampshire places which record flooding from the sea are on the mainland. The acreages affected are provided for three Hampshire parishes and the amounts of land flooded are small: only fifty acres in Alverstoke and sixty each in Warblington and Wymering.⁶¹ In Sussex too, the amount of flooded land in most parishes was less than in Essex and Suffolk, although there are notable exceptions such as Pagham where 2700 acres of land were said to have been devastated by the sea with a loss to the assessment of £40 10s.⁶² Apart from this, the Sussex returns specify damage to 1549 acres but in several parishes the amount of land is not measured but merely described as 'much land'. At Icklesham and Salehurst, for example, whole marshes are described as flooded.⁶³ The flooding of marshland is implicit in the records for Breznett and Brookland in Kent which are both on Romney Marsh and where two hundred acres in each parish were affected by flooding at a loss to each assessment of £2.⁶⁴ At Lancing in Sussex, both the mill and seventy 'salthouses' were destroyed by the sea, in addition to an unspecified amount of land.⁶⁵

The evidence outlined here suggests that a number of areas in England experienced greater than average rainfall and unusually stormy weather in the period before the *Nonae* assessments were made. It is difficult to tell precisely when this flooding and adverse weather occurred, although the Essex intermediate roll entries suggest that this area had been suffering from flooding for as much as six years.⁶⁶ Bailey has identified 1337–79 as years of serious inundations and linked this to similar conditions in the Netherlands, and a contemporary

⁶⁰ TNA, E 179/202/41, m. 92.

⁶¹ TNA, E 179/173/12, mm. 141 (*Inq. Non.*, p. 127), 46, 103.

⁶² TNA, E 179/189/17, m. 59 (*Inq. Non.*, p. 360). The value was said to have been customarily enjoyed by the rector.

⁶³ TNA, E 179/189/17, mm. 21 and 42. At Icklesham, Ryngemarsh is said to have been flooded, while at Salehurst (with Udimore), Gatebergh marsh is described as submerged by the sea.

⁶⁴ TNA E 179/123/18, mm. 2, 64.

⁶⁵ TNA E 179/189/17, m. 36.

⁶⁶ See Table 13.1, above.

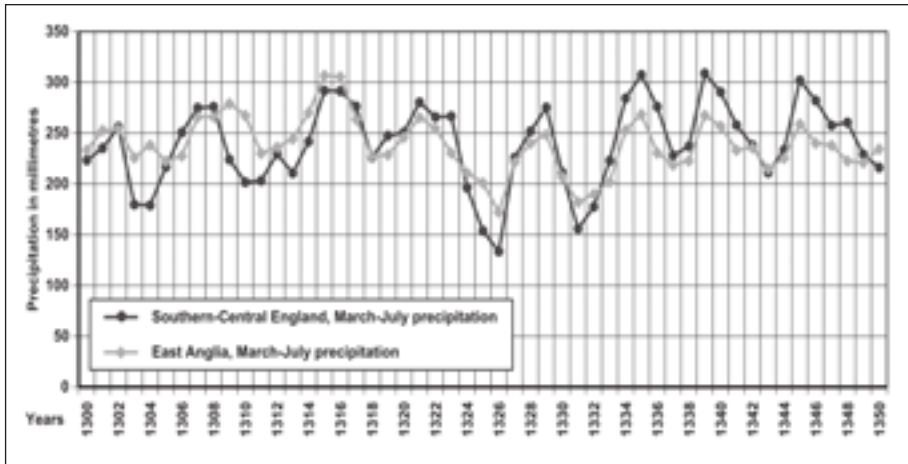


Figure 13.1. Precipitation in southern-central England and East Anglia, 1300–50.
Graph by Francis Ludlow, Yale University.⁶⁷

chronicle records unusually high rainfall in 1338, while James Galloway has found evidence of further flooding in the Thames Estuary.⁶⁸ The Merle weather diary confirms that the year immediately prior to the assessment of the subsidy was marked by a cold, snowy winter, and a dry, hot summer. The picture which emerges from the *Nonae* records and from other contemporary sources is one of extreme weather conditions that must have had a considerable impact on the ability of the peasantry to grow and harvest crops and rear animals.

Further confirmation of excessive precipitation can be garnered from the work of dendrochronologists and climate scientists for the first half of the fourteenth century (Fig. 13.1), which shows the pattern for annual precipitation in the spring/early summer for the areas of East Anglia and southern-central England (roughly an area from the Welsh border to Kent).⁶⁹ These data are derived from the evidence of tree growth, which indicates that 1339 and 1340 were particularly wet, especially for the southern central England region. In

⁶⁷ Sources: Cooper and others, 'A Tree-Ring Reconstruction of East Anglian (UK) Hydro-climate Variability over the Last Millennium'; Wilson and others, 'A Millennial Long March-July Precipitation Reconstruction for Southern-Central England'.

⁶⁸ Bailey, '*Per impetum maris*', Table 6. 1 and pp. 193–96; see also Galloway, 'Storms, Economics and Environmental Change in an English Coastal Wetland'; Galloway, 'Storm Flooding, Coastal Defence and Land Use around the Thames Estuary and Tidal River'.

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Francis Ludlow for alerting me to the articles from which this figure is drawn and for the creation of the figure itself.

fact the trees suggest these two years were the wettest of the entire fifty-one years covered by the graph — wetter even than 1315 and 1316, which are associated with the Great European Famine. The *Nonae* excuses for low payment thus reflect the physical pressures that the environmental situation was placing on the population. Modern scientific analysis and the medieval evidence dovetail nicely to provide a clearer picture.

Overall Loss of Acreage

So we have seen what the weather could do to impair the ability of the peasant to produce crops from their land. It is perhaps useful to conclude with a look at the amount of land which was affected across the whole (or nearly whole) country. In his articles, Alan Baker was concerned to show the extent of land which was lying unused, which greatly increased when all of the relevant *Nonae* records are taken into account. The amount of land in each jurisdiction recorded as damaged or out of cultivation is substantial (over 131,000 acres) and represents nearly 1.3 per cent of a potential total arable acreage of 10.5 million acres in 1300 (Table 13.2).⁷⁰

Table 13.2. Number of acres of all land types recorded as lost or damaged in the *Nonae* excuses.

Jurisdiction	Arable & Unspecified Acres	Meadow	Pasture
Bedfordshire	4741		
Berkshire	1200		
Buckinghamshire	14,539		
Cambridgeshire	8114	100	
Cheshire			
Cornwall			
Cumberland			
Derbyshire			
Devon			
Dorset	780		
Durham			
Essex	1020		

⁷⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 409.

Jurisdiction	Arable & Unspecified Acres	Meadow	Pasture
Gloucestershire	1040		
Hampshire	742 (including 20 acres of woodland)		
Herefordshire	1020		
Hertfordshire	6306		
Huntingdonshire	240		
Kent	245		50
Lancashire			
Leicestershire	1005		
Lincolnshire	2585		
Middlesex	629	220	
Norfolk	940		
Northamptonshire	230		
Northumberland			
Nottinghamshire	60		
Oxfordshire	2520		
Rutland	760		
Shropshire	8184		
Somerset	840		
Staffordshire	1900		
Surrey			
Suffolk	2678		
Sussex	10,048		60
Warwickshire			
Westmorland			
Wiltshire	720		
Worcestershire			
Yorkshire ER	9817		
Yorkshire NR	45,890		
Yorkshire WR	2540		
Total	131,123	320	110

Table 13.2 includes only information for places where actual acreages are provided, and does not include many more places where unspecified amounts of land were recorded as unsown, uncultivated, or otherwise not in use for arable purposes. It is impossible to make a precise calculation of the total amount of arable land which had fallen out of use, but it is likely that the recorded acreage represents as little as half of that actually affected. Such a conclusion is based on the relatively rare survival of acreages for jurisdictions with poor quality documents survival such as Kent, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk which were likely to have suffered the similar effects from weather as Suffolk and Essex. Excuses in Lancashire and Worcestershire that record problems but not the acreages affected could also mask substantial amounts of land which had fallen out of use.

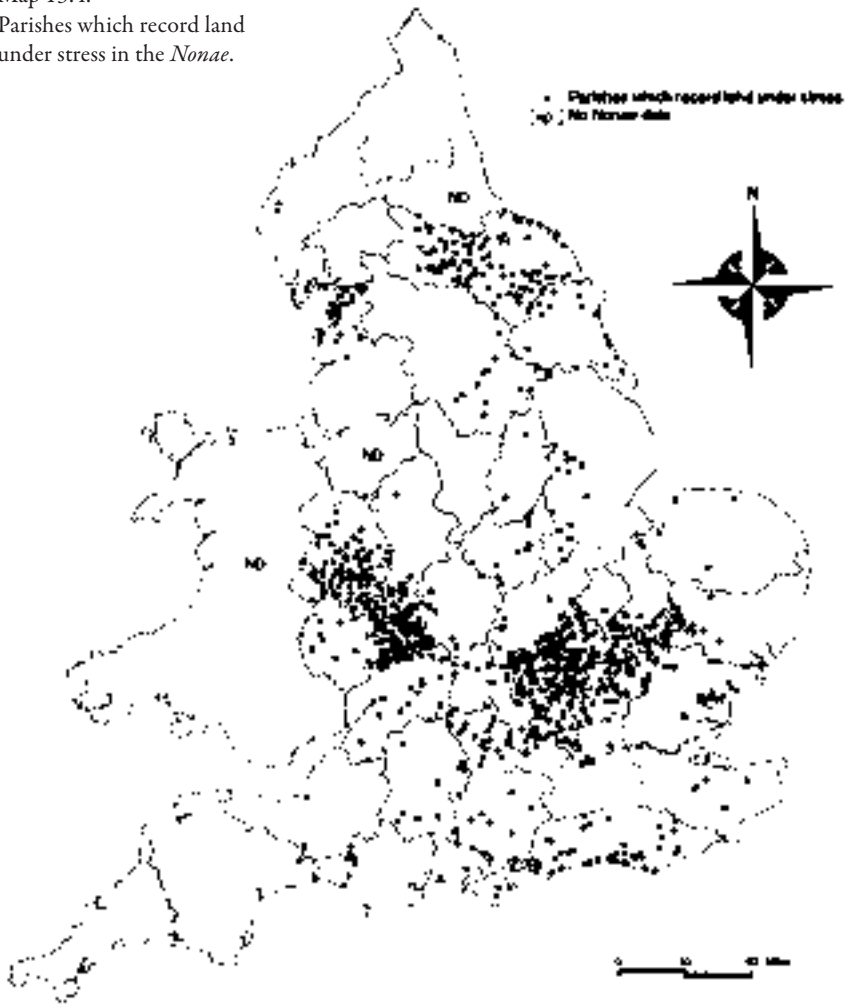
Data from the *Nonae* show the distribution of land which was under some sort of stress (Map 13.4). The inclusion of such details is largely dependent on the survival of good quality records, and the picture presented is unlikely to be complete. For certain areas with less complete records, such as Kent, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, and possibly Gloucestershire and Somerset, there are hints of what may have been more widespread problems, but only hints. Baker attempted to use the *Nonae* material to establish a link between lack of cultivation and soil type, but probably for lack of solid evidence was unable to establish any real correlation.⁷¹ What is clear from any analysis of the excuses is that they do reflect real problems in the arable sector of the economy. Although juries may have had a predisposition to under-value the taxed commodities and to find reasons for low assessments, the individual nature of many of the excuses makes it unlikely that the problems recorded were wholesale invention. Only two jurisdictions, Cumberland and Worcestershire, record significant numbers of 'blanket' excuses (where the same phrases were used for the majority of parishes), and such excuses are present in only 3 per cent of all *Nonae* parishes. Elsewhere, excuses more specific to the parish are provided. One example comes from Harby in Leicestershire, where the ownership of the parish's nineteen bovates of fallow land is identified.⁷² Another comes from Waddington in Lincolnshire where the names of parishioners are not provided, but the number of free messuages which have been abandoned is given (twenty).⁷³

⁷¹ Baker, 'Evidence in the *Nonarum Inquisitiones*', pp. 529–30.

⁷² TNA, E 179/133/10, m. 59.

⁷³ TNA, E 179/135/31, m. 6.

Map 13.4.
Parishes which record land
under stress in the *Nonae*.



The *Nonae* records make it clear that problems affecting the productivity of land were widespread and not confined only to one or two areas of England. Similarly, the records suggest that the effects of poor weather, taxation, and warfare were felt in a variety of regions. Analysis of the juries and the process of record creation has revealed that many of the *Nonae* records were the product of a careful administrative process, albeit one which was under extreme pressure to produce results as quickly as possible. It is also the case that there was a vested interest in the juries to produce reasons for low valuations, but this

does not necessarily mean that such reasons were invalid. The variety and the ubiquity of the excuses make it impossible to dismiss them as manufactured explanations for low tax assessment, and even if they overstate some problems they must be taken seriously as an indication of the state of the English agricultural economy. Supporting evidence about the climate and environment from independent sources, both contemporary and modern, reinforce the conclusion that the *Nonae* excuses are telling us something real and substantive about the state of the agricultural economy in the late 1330s.

The excuses included as part of the *Nonae* records are valuable for two reasons. Firstly, as suggested above, they provide a national level picture of the stresses that the English rural economy was under at this period. The complaints about the weather and its effects are not confined to the *Nonae* records, but these records do provide evidence over a wide geographic spread. The scale of land which was said to have been affected is considerable, and could be as high as 5 per cent of the arable land of England. The effect on animals has been touched upon only lightly in this paper, but the number of places which recorded problems with livestock is also considerable.

The *Nonae* records also point to specific parts of England which were under particular stress, and can be used as a springboard to investigate more closely the circumstances in those places. Where such a study has been undertaken, for example Mark Bailey's analysis of the conditions on the east coast of England or James Galloway's study of the Thames Estuary, the *Nonae* evidence fits well with that from other sources. More case studies could reveal a similar match. Further localized studies in conjunction with dendrochronology and climate science are also likely to refine national level analysis. This paper has provided a snapshot of the weather and some of its effects in the period 1339–41. Those interested in the larger picture of the medieval environment will hopefully take heart from the detail about this short period as it fits in so well with the macro-level evidence for the disturbed late medieval climate.

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PEASANTS AND THE SEA IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Maryanne Kowaleski

During the fourteenth century, custumals of the manor of Stokenham on Start Bay in south Devon recorded a curious labour service.¹ Besides the usual customary works of ploughing and reaping, a number of the villeins were required — every other day from February to early April — to form three teams of nine men each and to station themselves by three rocks along the sea shore to watch for schools of fish (especially mullet), ready with their own boats and tackle to put out to sea when a school was spotted. The lord expected one-third of their catch, and could also exercise an option to buy, at a discount, part of any other villein tenant's catch landed on his foreshore.

These labour services point to how experienced and accustomed to fishing the Stokenham peasants must have been, but they do not fit easily into the traditional picture of peasants farming their fields or tending their flocks. By focusing largely on peasant activities in inland regions, we have overlooked the influence of the sea on the many hundreds of peasant communities that dotted the extensive coastline of England. We miss exploring the impact of the marine environment, an ecotype that British scholars rarely study in terms of the rela-

¹ They survive as: Kew, The National Archives [henceforth TNA], C 134/16/9 (1309 *inquisition post mortem*), printed in Finberg, 'The Customs of Stokenham'; TNA, SC 11/765 (a damaged rental of c. 1346–47, for which see Fox, 'Cellar Settlement Along the South Devon Coastline'); and a sixteenth-century copy in Huntingdon Library, San Marino, HAM box 64, Rental of '1577', of the late fourteenth century, printed in Roberts, 'Manorial Stokenham in the 14th Century'. See also Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 123, 140 (n. 40).

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tionship between peasant economy and society. This paper investigates how proximity to the sea may have affected the work, obligations, and life of coastal peasants. It argues that peasant exploitation of the sea (especially through fishing) and the strategies that coastal peasants developed to cope with the dangers of the sea engendered a distinct maritime sub-culture, an issue that scholars have long debated for other regions and other periods.²

The impact of maritime resources on the economy of peasant communities by the sea is evident mainly through manorial records because lords' ownership of the foreshore generated considerable documentation about their maritime prerogatives, including a whole range of fines and licenses paid by tenants to beach boats, dry nets, sell fish, build boathouses, place capstans, manufacture salt, salvage wreck, transport sand, maintain sea weirs, gather reeds, and use herbage on the dunes.³ The regular payment of these fines and licenses speak to the different ways that both lords and peasants profited from exploiting the foreshore. Some of these maritime enterprises reflect regional specialties, such as the substantial income that east-coast peasants could make from the production of salt in Lincolnshire, or the regular use of sea sand that peasants spread on their fields to improve the soil and reduce weeds in southwestern England.⁴ Other peasant profits from using the resources of the foreshore probably never represented more than an occasional supplement to farming income, such as the collection and sale of the reeds, rushes, and water fowl that proliferated in marshes and on beaches.⁵ Fishing was the most ubiquitous and potentially most

² Those who see a distinct maritime culture include: Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 43–46; Dyson, *Business in Great Waters*; Mollat, *Europe and the Sea*, pp. 148–69, 192–200; and anthropologists who are mainly defending the usefulness of a 'maritime anthropology', as in Smith, 'Comments on the Heuristic Utility of Maritime Anthropology'. Those who criticize this idea include Bernard, 'Is There Anthropology for Everyone?'

³ See, for example, *Havener's Accounts of the Earldom and Duchy of Cornwall*, ed. by Kowaleski; *Court Rolls of the Manor of Ingoldmells*, ed. by Massingberd, pp. 42, 77, 82, 90, 124, 133, 145, 150, 154, 156, and 280; Durham Dean and Chapter Archives, Priory of Lytham (Lancashire), Status accounts for 1333, 1338, 1375–76, 1378–79, 1418–19, 1421–22, 1430–31, 1437–38, 1441–42, and 1463–64; London, Lambeth Palace Archives, ED 139, 777, and 1193A (Essex and Kent manors). See also notes 4, 7, and 8, below.

⁴ See, for example: Darby, *The Medieval Fenland*, pp. 37–42; Hallam, 'Salt-Making in the Lincolnshire Fenland during the Middle Ages'; Keen, 'Medieval Salt-Working in Dorset', pp. 25–28. For peasant sanders and bargemen to carry the sand, see Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall: Farming Practices and Techniques', pp. 311–12; Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 66–71.

⁵ Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 72–73; *Court Rolls of the Manor of Ingoldmells*, ed. by Massingberd, pp. 27, 178–79, and 209–10; Darby, *Medieval Fenland*, pp. 32–37.

profitable of all the by-occupations associated with living by the sea. Its early appearance and the surplus that peasant fishers collected beyond subsistence fishing are reflected in the frequent appearance of fish rents in the accounts of coastal manors.⁶ Eel rents from tenants of coastal fenland vills, herring rents from East Anglian manors, and cod and herring from Durham cathedral priory estates point to specific regional resources exploited by peasant fishers.⁷ Customary labour services also reveal the economic activities of peasants living by the sea, including the fishing services of the Stokenham *nativi*, the fish curing services required of tenants at Temple Ewell in Kent, the carrying services by boat to fetch wine or salt for many manorial lords, or the ownership of certain types of nets required by the bishop of Chichester from masters of fishing craft, presumably to ensure an adequate catch for the lord.⁸

While the resources of the sea may have influenced the types of by-occupations practiced by coastal peasants, they did not alter the fundamental strategies peasants pursued. Both coastal and inland peasants practiced by-occupations to supplement their farming income; it is just that inland peasants more often wove cloth, carted produce, or tanned leather than they fished or manufactured salt. It is much the same story when we turn our attention to the lord/peasant relationship. Although the types of labour services and customary rents on coastal manors reflected their ties to the sea, the basic principles behind the levying of these services and rents were the same regardless of whether the manor was inland or on the shore. In the place of the grain-carting services required of many inland peasants, for example, lords of shoreline manors often substituted sea carriage, while the work required to clean the manorial mill pond was replaced by labour to maintain sea walls or dredge the lord's estuarine channel. Similarly, seigniorial claims to foreshore and fisheries were like inland lords' claims over woods, rivers, and other resources on their estates. Just as villeins on coastal manors paid their lords for licenses to fish, so too inland villeins paid for the right to graze their pigs in the lord's wood. The in-kind grain or poultry rents collected by inland lords were on coastal manors reflected in herring rents or claims to a portion of the fish caught by villeins.⁹

⁶ Neilson, *Customary Rents*, pp. 33–35; Kowaleski, 'The Early Documentary Evidence for the Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries.'

⁷ For example: *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals*, ed. by Lomas and Piper, pp. 138–49.

⁸ *Records of the Templars in England*, ed. by Lees, p. 22; Neilson, *Customary Rents*, pp. 62–64; *Thirteen Customals of the Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester*, ed. by Peckham, p. 84.

⁹ For such claims in southwestern England, see Oliver, *Monasticon dioecesis exoniensis*,

Although some villagers may have practiced maritime occupations full-time (much as inland villages might have smiths or millers), most peasants who generated income by exploiting maritime resources were also farmers.¹⁰ Peasant fishers were usually smallholders looking to supplement their farming income.¹¹ They could represent a significant percentage of the village population. Nine of the twenty-eight cottagers in Beetham in Cumbria in 1254 owned fishing nets, while the poll taxes indicate that almost all of the households in Formby (Lancashire) were headed by a fisher, as were almost half of the households in Benacre (Suffolk); the estuarine village of Tollesbury in Essex included fourteen druggers, two fishers, and one seafarer among its sixty-one households.¹² Villagers who owned their own boats were wealthier, but often less invested in agriculture, presumably because they earned the bulk of their income from maritime ventures that left them with less time for agricultural work. In 1336, a royal inquisition into shipping capacity identified nine fishing boats in Holkham and twelve in Wells-next-the-Sea in Norfolk; two of the boats were twenty tons but the rest were twelve tons.¹³ Five of the six Holkham master/owners were wealthy enough to pay the lay subsidy in 1332, and several were villeins.¹⁴ The wealth that these Holkham peasant ship-owners and masters possessed is hardly surprising given the cost of building even one twenty-ton boat, which in the 1460s required an outlay of £40, not counting the costs of upkeep.¹⁵

pp. 254–55; Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre, 902M/M2/2, mm. 1–2d; Truro, Royal Institution of Henderson's Calendar of Transcripts, vol. XIX, p. 369; and n. 1, above.

¹⁰ Kowaleski, 'Working at Sea', p. 916; Pawley, 'Lincolnshire Coastal Villages and the Sea', pp. 58–59; and Bailey, 'Coastal Fishing off South East Suffolk', pp. 102–14. This was also true of peasants elsewhere; Cabantous, 'Des paysans pour la mer. La société des pêcheurs (vers 1600–vers 1850)', pp. 183–239.

¹¹ Fox, 'The People of Woodbury in the Fifteenth Century', pp. 6–7; Ayton and Lambert, 'The Mariner in Fourteenth-Century England', pp. 166–67.

¹² Winchester, *Landscape and Society in Medieval Cumbria*, p. 66; *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, ed. by Fenwick, I, pp. 162, 247; II, pp. 461, 509–10. The Benacre return is not complete.

¹³ TNA, C 47/2/25, printed in *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk*, ed. by Hassall and Beauroy, pp. 451–52. Another indication of the wealth of these peasant/shipmasters is that they all owned their own boats; in comparison, less than 20% of ships involved in overseas trade, pilgrim transport and naval service were owned in part or in full by their shipmasters; see Kowaleski, 'The Shipmaster as Entrepreneur', pp. 168–69.

¹⁴ *Lordship and Landscape in Norfolk*, ed. by Hassall and Beauroy, pp. 449–50, 462, 474, 492, 500, 508, and 516.

¹⁵ Scammell, 'Shipowning in England, c. 1450–1550', p. 112.

At the other end of the spectrum were the crew members, who probably worked most often for a share of the catch. They outnumbered the master/owners since most fishing boats needed a crew of at least four for inshore fishing because of the labour required to haul in the nets; twenty-ton fishing craft at the Yarmouth fishery included crews of at least six men.¹⁶ At Woodbury (Devon), where even an occasional share of a catch drew the attention of the tithe collectors, it is clear that there were two different types of men who served on fishing boats. One included young men who took up fishing for brief periods before they inherited land and settled down to farm; they were often defined as 'son' or 'servant'. The other group included what were probably older men since many can be identified as householders and tenants; they appeared in the accounts year after year, took in more income, and were often associated with other long-serving crew members like themselves. Some of them likely started as young men but continued to fish, perhaps because as smallholders they appreciated the supplement to their income. The younger men tended to fish for only one to three years, earned substantially less and were often landless young men or sons of other householders.¹⁷ This tradition of youthful service at sea would have provided port towns with a potential pool of experienced labour on which to draw when demand for seafarers became especially intense, as it often was during the Hundred Years War.

Occasional service on trading vessels was another important source of sea-related employment for peasants. Many can be identified in the local port customs accounts of Exeter, which recorded mariners who claimed portage (a custom exemption on the small cargoes they were allowed to freight for free in lieu of wages).¹⁸ Peasant tenants who became shipmasters, however, such as John Shipman, William Crosse, and John Pache in the Essex manor of Brightlingsea, had more significant capital investments since they shipped wine from overseas, conducted coastal trade to London, and regularly transported troops to France and Scotland for the Crown. It is difficult to see how they were able to

¹⁶ Crew size on fishing boats at the Yarmouth fisheries in the early fourteenth century ranged from six to a bit over twenty; see Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries', p. 182, n. 21.

¹⁷ Fox, *Fishing Village*, pp. 111–15; Kowaleski, 'Demography of Maritime Communities', p. 94. See also Fox, 'Exploitation of the Landless', for the conditions under which large numbers of servants in husbandry could be available, although he does not consider sea-going employment.

¹⁸ *Local Customs Accounts of the Port of Exeter*, ed. by Kowaleski, listed in the index under 'mariners, portage claims'.

fulfil their customary labour services in the lord's fields given their maritime activity. Indeed, one of them — John Pache, who was the only one to appear in the 1332 lay subsidy — did have his labour services commuted.¹⁹

The naval service of these three shipmasters was no surprise since their sailing experience, and that of their fellow mariner-tenants, meant that they were often recruited or impressed into naval crews.²⁰ Such service became more common in the fourteenth century as the Crown's need for men to transport troops and supplies increased. Indeed, the massive numbers of mariners required for naval service during the Hundred Years War could only have been supplied if the port towns ordered to provide ships were able to draw on nearby rural dwellers to help crew the ships. At the 1346 siege of Calais, for example, Dartmouth's fleet reportedly included 757 men at a time when Dartmouth's total population was scarcely 1000.²¹ Dartmouth was able to supply these numbers because its fleet included peasants from coastal manors with experience at sea.²² This reliance on peasant mariners is also evident in a 1372 royal survey of Essex mariners, which named 417 mariners available for service in Essex.²³ After the port town of Harwich, the next biggest provider of mariners was the village of Fobbing at the mouth of the Thames, which listed fifty mariners at a time when its tax-paying population was only 225. Over 180 mariners resided in another eighteen Essex villages, although Colchester, the largest town in the region, only recorded thirty-five sailors. No large ships for naval service or the Gascon wine route were ever registered at Fobbing and Stanford or these other villages; instead, they were the homes of mariners who crewed the vessels that were owned and operated out of mercantile capitals like Colchester and London. In many ways rural settlements like Fobbing and Stanford, or the manors of the Exe and Dart estuaries, were the real 'nurseries of

¹⁹ Ayton and Lambert, 'Mariner in Fourteenth-Century England', pp. 166–67.

²⁰ For Devon villagers serving in naval crews, see Devon Heritage Centre, ED/M/214; TNA, C 47/6/4 (below, n. 21).

²¹ Figures are from the 'Roll of Calais', which survives in several 16th-century copies; London, British Library, Harleian MS 78, fol. 16; 246, fols 15^v–16^v; 3968, fol. 132; British Library, Cotton MS Titus E.iii, fols 262–63. For a printed version, see Nicolas, *A History of the Royal Navy*, II, pp. 507–10. There were five hundred and six adults in Dartmouth in 1377; see Kowaleski, 'The 1377 Dartmouth Poll Tax', pp. 286–95.

²² A 1386 list of crew on a Dartmouth ship that was deposed for an inquisition into piracy named villagers from Stoke Fleming (5), Brixham and Dittisham (1 each), and the Dart estuary (2); see TNA, C 47/6/4.

²³ TNA, C 47/2/46/6-10, 13.

seamen' in medieval England. They acted somewhat as 'bedroom communities' for port towns, even though the urban ports provided most of the capital and employment opportunities for maritime ventures.²⁴

The peasants who crewed on these trading and naval vessels (which were mercantile ships pressed into temporary service for the Crown) were usually farmers too, but the time they had to spend away from their home villages and at sea distinguish them from inland peasants, who may have migrated to another village or nearby town, but whose life was much more stationary than that of maritime peasants who regularly went to sea. Despite the fundamental similarities in the lord/peasant relationship among inland and coastal peasants, labour services and customary rents focused on exploitation of the sea reflect a very different type of economy that helped to generate a distinct peasant sub-culture. The remainder of this chapter will explore aspects of peasant life near the sea involving institutions and norms that separated coastal peasants from inland dwellers. Many of the examples are drawn from Devon and Cornwall, which represent particularly fertile ground for this exercise because of the intensification of the maritime economy there during the later Middle Ages.²⁵ This intensification increasingly lured peasants away from the land, thereby offering us an unusual opportunity to view the transition, in stages, that many southwestern peasants followed from a predominantly farming life to one that took fuller advantage of the resources of the sea. This transition, moreover, points to the polarization between not only inland and coastal communities, but also to some degree between coastal villages themselves in the later middle ages as the maritime economy strengthened in certain regions, but not others (such as Lincolnshire).

One example of a source of sea-related income that has no firm parallel in the world of inland peasants is the windfall that arose from shipwrecks and stranded whales and porpoises. The latter were 'royal fish' reserved for the Crown or the local lord, although the number of fines for illegally carrying off blubber, bone, oil, and meat from such finds suggests that peasants often managed to take advantage of these windfalls.²⁶ First finders were rewarded with cash and/or were entitled to share its value with the lord who held right

²⁴ As suggested for early modern Devon; see *Early-Stuart Mariners and Shipping*, ed. by Gray, pp. xv–xvii.

²⁵ Kowaleski, 'Introduction', *Havener's Accounts*, pp. 60–64; Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*; Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South-Western Fisheries'; Kowaleski, 'Port Towns'.

²⁶ Kowaleski, 'Introduction', *Havener's Accounts*, pp. 26–27.

of wreck there, as long as it could be shown that no one survived the wreck. Coastal dwellers, lords among them, paid little attention to the niceties of the law, however, confiscating whatever they could find and then feigning ignorance when surviving merchants stepped forward to claim the goods they had lost.²⁷ Wreck salvagers were almost always men and frequently young men given how often they are named as 'son of' or 'servant of', suggesting that the risk involved in detection might have discouraged women and older householders from this maritime venture, or that young men were more often out at sea and on the beaches where wreck washed up.²⁸ Fines for pillaging wrecks regularly named whole gangs of local men, often related by ties of blood or service, suggesting that word spread fast when a wreck came ashore. Salvaging wreck as part of a community made the task go more quickly, might have furthered the protective culture that limited reporting of the total haul, and reflected the potential profits to be made.

One of the most noteworthy differences between inland and maritime peasants is the latter's greater mobility and absences from home. Their crew service on trading vessels or their work on fishing boats regularly had them sailing down the coast or even to more distant shores. Peasants who served on coastal trading vessels made short hops from, for example, Southampton, Dartmouth, and Plymouth to Exeter, which entailed two to five days away from home. Villagers who crewed on wine ships to Gascony could be away for several weeks and even months. The most common sea-going enterprise for peasants, however, was fishing, which could involve significant travel, especially when participating in the North Sea seasonal fisheries. The Scarborough fishery in the 1320s attracted fishers and fish merchants from Northumberland down the east coast as far south as Kent.²⁹ Hundreds of village fishers also participated in the Yarmouth herring seasons of 1342 and 1343, arriving from eleven coastal

²⁷ For complaints about concealment of wreck in Devon and Cornwall, see TNA, SC 6/817/6, m. 3; London, Duchy of Cornwall Record Office, Duchy of Cornwall Accounts 59, m. 16d. For a local court dealing mainly with peasants' recovery of wreck, see Schofield, 'Wreck Rolls of Leiston Abbey', pp. 361–71.

²⁸ Wreckers are named, for example, in TNA, JUST1/112, 118; TNA, E 159/69, Michaelmas recorda, m. 2; *Havener's Accounts*, ed. by Kowaleski; Schofield, 'Wreck Rolls of Leiston Abbey'; passim; and *Court Rolls of the Manor of Ingoldmells*, ed. by Massingberd, pp. 5–6, 17–18, 24, 55, 78, 102, 104, 123–24, 133, 220, 245, 281, 364, and 370.

²⁹ Based on a local quayage account for 1321/2: TNA, E 122/134/3; see Littler, 'Fish in English Economy and Society down to the Reformation', pp. 88–89 and 271–74; Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries', pp. 182–84.

villages in Norfolk, at least thirteen villages in Suffolk, nine in Lincolnshire, and others in Yorkshire, Essex, Kent, Sussex, Hampshire, and Devon.³⁰ Some villages like Cromer (Norfolk) sent nine to ten ships a year in the early 1340s, but most villages sent an average of about two ships a year to this fishery, from late August to November. Inshore fishing required travel over lesser distances, but still often involved spending nights at sea, when fishing was best. And inshore fishers could also travel some distance from their home base, even setting up temporary camps with flimsy cabins for shelter and storing tackle during fishing seasons that lasted from one to three months.³¹ The expansion of southwestern fishing in the fifteenth century accelerated this development and prompted more and more fishers to sail further east for long stays off the coast of Kent to fish.³² By the 1490s, men from the Dart estuary village of Dittisham were fishing off Winchelsea and Rye and by the early sixteenth century fishers from south Devon villages were active in the Sussex and East Anglian fisheries.³³ The arduous months of heavy labour required for this type of fishing, along with long absences in all-male seasonal settlements, must have fostered a common cultural identity among those who spent months living and working together far from home.

Peasants involved in deep-sea fishing voyages were away for even longer periods, and often in foreign waters; every summer in the late fifteenth century, for example, whole fleets of Cornish and Devon ships left port in late May and early June to catch hake and other fish off the coast of Ireland, only returning two or three months later.³⁴ While there, they would have met the Welsh, Scottish, French, and Spanish fishers who also frequented these waters, just as the fishermen on both sides of the English Channel had regular contact.³⁵

³⁰ Littler, 'Fish in English Economy', pp. 275–79; Saul, 'Great Yarmouth in the Fourteenth Century', pp. 330–35 (for 1337 and 1342–43); Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries', pp. 184–88.

³¹ Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 12 and 129–38; Gardiner, 'A Seasonal Fishermen's Settlement'; Gardiner, 'Medieval Fishing and Settlement'.

³² *Records of Lydd*, ed. by Finn, pp. 205, 209, 212, 243, 244, 279, 300, and 323.

³³ Dulley, 'The Early History of the Rye Fishing Industry', p. 45.

³⁴ Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries', pp. 221–24; Kowaleski, 'Expansion of the South-Western Fisheries', pp. 431–33 and 442–44.

³⁵ Went, 'Foreign Fishing Fleets along the Irish Coast', pp. 17–25. For the interaction of English and French fishermen of the English Channel, see Hocquet, 'Les pêcheries médiévales', pp. 120–22; Mollat, 'La pêche à Dieppe au xv^e siècle', pp. 30–33, 38–39. See also Kowaleski, '“Alien” Encounters'.

Froissart makes a point of citing the friendly interaction of the Channel fishermen in noting the information English fishermen brought to the governor of Dover Castle.

Whether France or England are at war or not, fishermen at sea would never hurt each other, but are friends among themselves and helpful when necessary. They buy and sell their fish between them at sea, when some have a better catch than others. If they fought each other there would be no sea-fish landed and no one would dare to go fishing without an armed escort.³⁶

This passage reflects not only the mobility and foreign contacts regularly made by fishermen, but also their sense of common purpose and a solidarity that cut across national boundaries. Froissart may have been a little optimistic here, considering what we know of the thefts, injuries, piracy, and ransom-arrangements fishermen had to deal with during wartime,³⁷ but maritime anthropologists have often commented on the solidarity among fishermen, a reflection of the craft they shared, as well as the common dangers they faced.³⁸ Indeed, fishers in the age before steam had to deal with extreme uncertainties and physical dangers in their work. Weather conditions were unpredictable and fluctuated widely; a storm at sea could either blow the ship off course into a strange and possibly enemy port, or cast it up on rocky shores with loss of life, cargo, and ship. Further uncertainties were posed by the vacillations in the seasonal migration of fish.³⁹ As their deep-sea fishing ventures increased in the fifteenth century, moreover, the uncertainties and risks mounted. Locating schools of fish in foreign waters was always a gamble, while the dangers from pirates or resentful locals added further peril. The on-going Anglo-French and then Anglo-Hanseatic conflicts, with their periods of warfare and sanctioned privateering, punctuated by periods of truce when privateers turned pirate, also did much to increase the insecurity of both English and continental fishermen.⁴⁰

³⁶ Froissart, *Chronicles*, ed. and trans. by Brereton, pp. 307–08.

³⁷ Hocquet, 'Les pêcheries', pp. 120–23; Kowaleski, "'Alien" Encounters', pp. 117–20.

³⁸ Acheson, 'Anthropology of Fishing', pp. 278–79.

³⁹ Kowaleski, 'The Seasonality of Fishing'.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the negative and positive impact of war on coastal communities, see: Kowaleski, 'Warfare, Shipping, and Crown Patronage'; Kowaleski, 'Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries', pp. 195–96.

To counteract these uncertainties, fishermen not only relied on a sense of solidarity and common purpose, but also developed a variety of other strategies to cope with the risks and dangers they faced. An unusually heavy reliance on recruitment of kin was one such strategy. In southwestern England and elsewhere, many peasant fishing crews were organized around a core of kinsmen; in Exe Estuary villages, father/son fishing partnerships were common, while surname and other evidence indicates that elsewhere brothers and other male kin often worked together on both fishing and trading ships.⁴¹ Family ownership of boats was especially prevalent in villages where coastal fishing predominated.⁴² This strategy of depending on kin to recruit the crew and to share the financial burden of boat ownership helped to ensure cooperation and stability, as well as a steady supply of seasonal labour. In the close quarters on board ship, where privacy was at a minimum and tensions could run high, the presence of kin could also lessen psychological stress.

But probably the chief way that fishermen reduced their risks (especially the financial burdens) was through the shares system, which dominated the organization of the fishing industry (particularly coastal fisheries) in medieval England as well as in many other fishing communities, whether in medieval France, or nineteenth-century South America, or Africa.⁴³ The shares system, which dates to ancient times and can be found in virtually all fishing communities before large-scale commercialization set in, lowered the risks borne by individuals, especially boat owners, by distributing proportions of the profit rather than paying fixed wages to crew members, thus ensuring that all involved in the voyage had a common stake in its outcome. Although local variations

⁴¹ Kowaleski, 'Working at Sea', pp. 910–11; Ayton and Lambert, 'Mariner in Fourteenth-Century England', p. 162. Reliance on kin was also common in other fisheries; Butcher, *The Ocean's Gift: Fishing in Lowestoft*, p. 41; Nemeč, 'I Fish with My Brother'.

⁴² In Dawlish, for example, four of the seven boats were co-owned, two by father and son, while two others were singly owned by men of the same surname; Exeter Cathedral Library, D&C 957. See also Littler, 'Fish in the English Economy', pp. 170 and 183; Pawley, 'Lincolnshire Coastal Villages and the Sea', pp. 167–68. For later evidence on this point, see Bryson, 'The Maritime Household in Northern Europe', pp. 283–86.

⁴³ For descriptions of how the system worked and varied from place to place, see: Littler, 'Fish in the English Economy', pp. 168–69 and 174–76; Butcher, *The Ocean's Gift: Fishing in Lowestoft*, pp. 78–83; Tittler, 'The English Fishing Industry in the Sixteenth Century', pp. 43–44; Mollat, 'La pêche à Dieppe'; Hocquet, 'Les pêcheries', pp. 97–99; Firestone, 'The Traditional Start Bay Crab Fishery', pp. 14–23; Firestone, 'The Technology of the Traditional Start Bay Crab Fishery'; Acheson, 'Anthropology', pp. 278–79; and n. 44, below.

certainly existed, the system basically worked like this.⁴⁴ Profits from the sale of fish were usually divided up at the end of a voyage (or at the end of the fishing season) on the basis of shares held by all involved in the enterprise. The largest number of shares went to those who contributed to the capital costs, such as boat owners, and the owners of nets, fishing lines, and hooks. Since it was common to link nets together in seine and drift-net fishing for pilchards and herring, a group of co-owners could together enjoy a portion, which was usually distributed in proportion to the value of the capital investment. The fishermen themselves generally received equal shares of the catch, although the shipmaster normally garnered twice as many shares as a fisherman in recognition of the greater skill and responsibility he bore. In coastal fishing, those who worked from onshore, such as the huer who watched for shoals and signaled his fellows below as to which direction to head, were also counted among this group, as were those who helped to haul the nets ashore when coastal seining was practiced. Last of all came the shares apportioned to the local authorities and to the Church, which varied widely according to local custom but were generally larger and more regularized in eastern England.

Local clergy and manorial lords occasionally invested in peasant fishing ventures,⁴⁵ a capital infusion that paralleled the contributions made by merchants to fishers in port towns, although in more urban settings the egalitarian aspects of the system were muted as merchants not only monopolized the ownership of boats and nets, but also controlled the marketing of the fish.⁴⁶ Within the rural sphere, however, where merchant participation was less prevalent, the shares system worked to limit risks, increase the crew's motivation, and prompt more egalitarian relationships amongst members of fishing crews.⁴⁷ As anthropologists point out, the egalitarian attitudes and solidarity may have arisen from the need for a skilled and committed crew willing to coordinate their activities in the face of the constant dangers they faced at sea. This solidarity may also have reduced social distance among the owners and crew of fishing boats who were really more like 'co-adventurers' than wage earners.

⁴⁴ Kowaleski, 'Working at Sea', pp. 917–21, for this and the following.

⁴⁵ For example: Peter, 'Glasney', p. 69; Fox, 'Fishing in Cockington'.

⁴⁶ Kowaleski, 'The Fish Trade'. See also Butcher, *Ocean's Gift: Fishing in Lowestoft*, pp. 78–83; Bailey, 'Coastal Fishing off South East Suffolk', pp. 105–07.

⁴⁷ See Acheson, 'Anthropology', pp. 278–79 on this and the following point, although there is as yet no medieval European evidence for his claims that the share system tended to exacerbate competition as crew members seek the best captains, and to stifle capital investment because boat owners receive insufficient returns.

The distinguishing characteristics of peasant fishers touched upon here — their mobility, long stays away from home, travel to distant locations, sense of shared purpose and community in the face of unusual danger, their reliance on kin recruitment and the shares system to reduce risks, and the egalitarian relationships typical of life on board ship — all served to differentiate them from inland peasants. Within Devon and Cornwall, moreover, this differentiation deepened in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as both coastal and deep-sea fishing expanded.⁴⁸ This marked expansion in marine fishing affected the region's peasantry in ways that provide further evidence of the evolution of a maritime sub-culture. Both peasants and lords, for example, began to invest more heavily in fish processing as local catches rose during the fifteenth century. By channelling earnings towards buildings and materials for salting, pickling, smoking, and drying fish, peasants were increasingly able to cater to the export trade, which demanded preserved fish that could make the long voyage to the Mediterranean markets. This investment increased job opportunities in particular for peasant women who were heavily involved in these on-shore enterprises.⁴⁹

As fish cellars, drying sheds, salt chambers, and boat houses were built on the shores of many coastal manors, they also began to provide the nucleus of seasonal settlements of fishers and processors who resided there during the fishing season. Harold Fox has shown how many of these seasonal settlements in south Devon were transformed to permanent fishing settlements in the sixteenth century and later as opportunities and profits in fishing mounted.⁵⁰ In Dawlish, for example, at the same time that fish tithes were going up, rent increments from new cottages situated on the estuarine shore at the hamlet of Cockwood began to appear; by the early 1480s rents were being charged on four new cottages there; and by 1510 the number had grown to at least eight new buildings.⁵¹ It should be stressed, however, that while the development of these communities lessened their residents' reliance on farming as they moved closer to the shoreline, it did not remove them from farming altogether. The extant rentals and manorial records clearly show that most of these fishermen continued to farm, albeit on a less intense basis than previously.

⁴⁸ See: Kowaleski, 'Expansion of the South-western Fisheries', for this and the following.

⁴⁹ See especially Scantlebury, 'The Development of the Export Trade in Pilchards'.

⁵⁰ Fox, 'Cellar Settlements'; Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 111–69.

⁵¹ Exeter Cathedral Library, D&C 5030, 5037–5113. See also Fox, 'Cellar Settlements', p. 63; Fox, *Evolution of the Fishing Village*, pp. 23–24, 130, and 146–49.

By increasing their investment in and profits from fishing, and by moving closer to the shoreline where they would reside in communities of like-minded folk, fisher/peasants were accentuating the division between themselves and other peasants who were more centrally focused on farming than exploitation of the sea. The extent to which these fisher/peasants were distinguished by a characteristic lifestyle or mentalité, is, however, harder to get at given the poor survival of appropriate sources. But here the fuller early modern evidence is highly suggestive. Early modern demographers, for example, have shown how the seasonal migrations of fish influenced the departure and return of fishermen, which in turn shaped the seasonality of marriages and conceptions in fishing communities.⁵² Medieval data on maritime populations, while less full, do provide suggestive evidence of demographic patterns unique to maritime societies across time and region. Seamen and fishers in medieval maritime settlements, for instance, like their early modern counterparts, were away from home for long periods and suffered from high mortality due to the dangers of life at sea, conditions that prompted low sex ratios (more women than men) in maritime communities.⁵³ The many women left at home to manage the household and farming activities of their seafaring kin had arguably more agency and authority than women in land-based societies, an agency augmented by the essential work maritime women performed in baiting hooks, mending nets, and curing and selling the catch. Studies of maritime communities in different cultures have shown how these factors bestowed more standing and influence on maritime women than women in land-based societies. Their standing is evident in the inheritance-based strategies of maritime communities, where women often received bequests of nets and fishing hooks (and sometimes bequeathed such items themselves). Such capital assets could make daughters more attractive marriage prospects, a hint as to the endogamous marriage practices that characterized many later fishing communities. Daughters, wives, brothers, and other kin, along with non-related partners, also often held in common such valuable capital assets as boats, nets, fishing cabins, capstans, and windlasses, a practice that points to the collective nature of risk management that the shares system fostered in fishing communities.⁵⁴

⁵² Storm, 'Seasonality of Births and Marriages in a Seafaring Community', pp. 43–47; Cabantous, 'Des paysans pour la mer', pp. 202–07.

⁵³ For this and the following, see: Kowaleski, 'Demography of Maritime Communities', pp. 74–97 and 101–05.

⁵⁴ See also Sweetinburgh, 'Strategies of Inheritance among Kentish Fishing Communities'.

The investment of all family members in the maritime enterprise was deepened by the distinctive shore-side activities undertaken to support maritime households — such as working the salt pans, caulking and maintaining boats and sailing gear, mending nets, gutting and curing fish, collecting the harvest of inshore sea weirs and shellfish beds, and retailing the catch — which in turn extended identification with the norms and practices of the maritime sub-culture to those who stayed ashore.⁵⁵ The solidarity of the wider maritime community was also reinforced through intermarriage, both within fishing families and in integrating non-native mariners into their new settlements through marriages to local women. Some of these seafaring Englishmen also brought back foreign wives.⁵⁶

Together, coastal residents had to face the ever-present dangers of living by the sea, which during wartime involved the threat of enemy raids. Many ‘men of the parish’ in Patcham and Seaford in Sussex were wounded or killed by a French raid in the first half of the fourteenth century, while two London aldermen were so moved by the suffering of poor fishermen and ploughmen on the Sussex coast from French raids that they bequeathed them £100 in relief.⁵⁷ Another danger came from sea storms and the devastation that flooding could bring. From the mid-1270s up until the Black Death, eastern England in particular suffered a catastrophic series of storms that washed away major settlements, breached sea walls, destroyed mills and bridges, and flooded fields.⁵⁸ Rural manors lost thousands of acres of arable and pasture land to such floods, as laid out in some detail in the *Nonarum Inquisitiones* of 1340–41.⁵⁹

To cope with these dangers, coastal communities developed highly organized forms of cooperative institutions in which all landholders were required to build and maintain stretches of sea walls and dikes according to the amount of land they held.⁶⁰ Most of these cooperative institutions were born out of peas-

⁵⁵ Kowaleski, ‘Demography of Maritime Communities’, pp. 88–89 and 101–04. Further discussion is in Kowaleski, ‘Living by the Sea: Women and Children in Maritime Communities’.

⁵⁶ Kowaleski, ‘Demography of Maritime Communities’, pp. 105–08.

⁵⁷ Blaauw, ‘Remarks on the *Nonae* of 1340’, p. 63; Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, p. 178.

⁵⁸ Galloway, ‘Storm Flooding, Coastal Defence’; Bailey, ‘*Per impetum maris*: Natural Disaster and Economic Decline.’ For the fewer reports of flooding in western England, see Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death*, pp. 43–44.

⁵⁹ Burleigh, ‘An Introduction to Deserted Medieval Villages’; Bailey, ‘*Per impetum maris*: Natural Disaster and Economic Decline’.

⁶⁰ Dugdale, *History of Imbanking and Drayning*; Turner, ‘Statutes of the Marshes of

ant efforts to reclaim and colonize land, but manorial lords' interests tended to become more dominant by the thirteenth century, and by the fourteenth century the Crown was increasingly imposing commissions *de wallis et fossatis* (later known as the commissions of sewers) to regulate these essential safeguards.⁶¹ On the large Lincolnshire manor of Ingoldmells, the peasant community elected keepers of the banks of the sea, called graves, who enforced tenurial requirements to maintain the sea banks and fined those who infringed on the lord's foreshore rights.⁶² They were given the power to compel tenants to repair defects in the sea banks 'according to custom,' a reference to the obligation that tenants of particular properties had to keep the sea banks bordering their lands in good repair. They also often supervised and paid for repairs, undergoing audits before they were refunded. Although they had the power to distrain, attach, and fine, the bond tenants in the manorial court made the vast majority of presentments for infractions to the sea walls and ditches, and initiated the graves' actions. Romney Marsh evolved probably the most elaborate system for mutual cooperation, which required all landholders to pay, in proportion to the acreage they held, to maintain the dikes and walls. The system, which was codified in the 1250s, included a court and was enforced by twenty-four jurats elected by the people of the Marsh, and was considered so effective that it was often adopted or cited by marshland officials elsewhere in England. Special taxes, called common scots, were assessed according to acreage held when repairs were needed.⁶³

All inhabitants of maritime communities would have probably shared the same respectful fear of the power of the sea given the high mortality rates and the ever-present danger of shipwreck, storms, flooding, and enemy raids in coastal settlements. Literary scholars and ethnologists have highlighted how specific rituals, suspicions, and folklore evolved within small fishing communi-

Pevensey and Romney'; *The Records of a Commission of Sewers*, ed. by Owen, esp. pp. 13–15 and 51–53.

⁶¹ Campbell and Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death*, p. 11; Galloway, 'Storm Flooding, Coastal Defense.'

⁶² This and the following are based on material in *Court Rolls of the Manor of Ingoldmells*, ed. by Massingberd, pp. xix, 5, 7, 35, 38, 43, 44, 45, 47, 131, 165, 209, and 220.

⁶³ Dugdale, *History of Embanking*, pp. 17–65 and 85–103; Turner, 'Statutes of the Marshes of Pevensey and Romney'; *The Cartulary and Terrier of the Priory of Bilsington, Kent*, ed. by Neilson, pp. 39–56; Owen, 'The Custom of Romney Marsh and the Statute of Sewers of 1427'. For water scots paid in Hoo near Pevensey Marsh by all tenants, including female landholders, see: San Marino, Huntington Library, BA 960.

ties in particular to cope with the uncertainties and dangers of shipboard life and lengthy voyages; the oral tradition of this material has precluded much of it from being datable to the middle ages, but it is certainly possible that the sea shanties and superstitions rife even today amongst fishermen may have had their origins in the later middle ages.⁶⁴ These rituals can be glimpsed in medieval documents in the blessing of the nets before the fishing season began or the breakfast, to which the lord contributed, that Otterton (Devon) tenants shared at the beginning of the winter herring season.⁶⁵ Coastal residents, regardless of how much time they spent at sea, would also have been part of a unique landscape which included boats, fishing gear and storage cabins, capstans, weirs, quays, seamarks, beacons (sometimes inhabited by hermits), sand or cliffs, and lots and lots of sea water.⁶⁶

Although the paucity of documentary material makes it impossible to offer decisive proof of a maritime sub-culture among peasants living by and from the sea, the evidence assembled here strongly suggests that such a sub-culture existed among coastal peasants in medieval England. The distinct norms and institutions associated with fishing and life at sea, such as the shares system, kin recruitment, and solidarity that spread risks and alleviated tensions, or the mobility, interaction with foreign fishers and mariners, and egalitarian relationships characteristic of life aboard ship, all served to differentiate coastal peasants. They often evolved especially early and strong cooperative institutions to protect against the dangers of maritime life, whether on shore — to raise money or ensure maintenance of sea walls to protect the larger community's resources — or at sea, in the adherence to universally recognized laws of the sea, the relatively egalitarian social structure of small fishing and coasting craft, and the shares system designed to spread risk and ensure that all had a stake in the successful outcome of the voyage. It is possible that this sub-culture existed in early medieval subsistence fishing communities (particularly the shares system and the cooperation needed to maintain sea defenses), but it would clearly have been evident by the eleventh century when the commercialization of

⁶⁴ For the anthropological literature, see: Acheson, 'Anthropology', pp. 287–88. For examples of the folklore, see: Sébillot, *Le Folk-Lore des pêcheurs*. For some of the Cornish superstitions, rhymes, and ballads, see: Harris, *Hevva! Cornish Fishing in the Days of Sail*, pp. 60–66 and 77–79.

⁶⁵ Rivard, *Blessing the World*, pp. 218–26. For the Otterton breakfast, see: TNA, SC 6/1102/1.

⁶⁶ See especially the work of Westerdahl, 'Ancient Sea Marks'; Westerdahl, 'The Maritime Cultural Landscape'. See also Fox, 'Two Devon Estuaries in the Middle Ages'.

marine fishing and increased coastal and cross-Channel trade provided substantially more opportunities for work in the maritime economy.⁶⁷ As marine fishing intensified in such regions as East Anglia in the thirteenth century or the Southwest during the later middle ages, it is likely that aspects of the maritime sub-culture discussed here became more prevalent in these regions.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which all members of coastal communities shared in this maritime sub-culture, which was most likely predominant amongst those whose livelihood depended on the sea. Some features of this maritime sub-culture would have been present, however, in all coastal communities whose economy was strongly oriented towards the sea; sheer proximity to the sea would also have made even full-time agriculturalists familiar with its dangers and might. There seems to have been little difference, moreover, in the opportunities the sea offered to unfree as opposed to free peasants, though the former did have more burdens (usually in the form of licences or rents) imposed on them by their lords. Further research can tell us more about how coastal peasants mixed agricultural and maritime activities, and about the extent to which factors such as smallholding or changes in the market that made agriculture less profitable (particularly after the Black Death) or simply the lure of adventure and profit in life at sea (especially in privateering and piracy) pushed or pulled peasants into maritime enterprises. But manorial records and local topography do allow us to identify the new by-occupations, new buildings, new types of settlements, and more pronounced production for the market that arose from the southwestern peasantry's intensified exploitation of fisheries, even if we cannot trace the subtle alterations in mentalité that may have accompanied these economic, occupational, and topographical changes.

⁶⁷ Kowaleski, 'Early Documentary Evidence for the Commercialization of the Sea Fisheries;' Gardiner, 'Shipping and Trade between England and the Continent'.

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DEARTH AND LOCAL POLITICAL RESPONSES: 1280–1325 AND 1580–1596/97 COMPARED

Richard M. Smith

Over twenty-five years ago John Walter and Roger Schofield, when discussing the susceptibility of late Tudor England to famine and noting the particular vulnerability of northern England to associated mortality crisis such as that of 1596–97, commented on possible similarities with the situation that prevailed in the Great Famine of 1315–17.¹ They perceived a particular vulnerability of this same region during the Great Famine as reported in Ian Kershaw's paper of 1973, which was the first serious scholarly overview of that particular dearth-related crisis in England. More than the similarities, however, Walter and Schofield stressed possible differences, notwithstanding the fact that both crises occurred in periods characterized by rising population and surging grain prices. In particular, their reading of Kershaw's work led them to infer that the effects of famine were geographically more widely felt in the Great Famine than the dearth episodes of the 1580s, 1590s, and 1620s, notwithstanding the fact that late Elizabethan and early Stuart England most likely had a greater proportion of the labour force employed as wage labourers, constituting a pre-eminently harvest sensitive element in the population.² As is well known to early modernists, Walter in a separate essay accompanying his jointly authored essay with Schofield assesses an impressive array of 'human agency'

¹ Walter and Schofield, 'Famine', p. 28.

² Kershaw, 'Great Famine'; Walter and Schofield, 'Famine', p. 29; Walter, 'Social Economy'.

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factors ranging from the Crown and parliament to local government policy in explaining how it was that much of England 'slipped the shadow of famine' in the late Tudor and early Stuart decades.³

This essay is a preliminary attempt to further this discussion by means of a comparison of a set of political structures and processes that enabled or thwarted redistributions of resources which may have served to mitigate or exacerbate the impact of dearth in the two periods with a particular attention given to Amartya Sen's classic thesis that famines tend to be principally man-made and that natural factors occupy a subsidiary role in their determination.⁴ The second half of the essay considers certain local political developments in later medieval society that created conditions which might be regarded as building blocks upon which certain developments in Tudor England were based that were eventually directed towards the amelioration of the intensity, if not the total elimination, of severe mortality crises associated with climatically induced harvest failure.

* * *

The available demographic evidence, although admittedly limited for the earlier period, suggests a more clear-cut rise in the number of inheritance-related deaths in the high-price phases 1283–84, 1293–95, 1310–11, and 1315–17 than in burial entries in parish registers in, say, 1587 and 1596–97 or in any of the other years of harvest difficulties in the early seventeenth century.⁵ Manorial locations in south-east England and East Anglia which, when parish burial registers are considered from 1538, were relatively unscathed in the 1580s, 1590s, and early 1600s, but were not immune to notable dearth-related mortality surges in the 1290s and first two decades of the fourteenth century, if tenant death entries and associated heriot payments in manorial records are used as indicators of the adult death rate. Excess mortality based on reported tenant deaths in the Great Famine of 1315–17 and calculated by a comparison with tenant deaths in preceding and following years suggest a far more intensive mortality crisis in the second decade of the fourteenth century. Crisis mortality ratios in manors based on adult male tenant deaths varied between 2 and 2.5 compared with a national ratio of 1.2 based on all burials in a sample

³ Walter and Schofield, 'Famine', p. 36.

⁴ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*.

⁵ Smith, 'Demographic Developments', pp. 52–58; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp. 336–40.

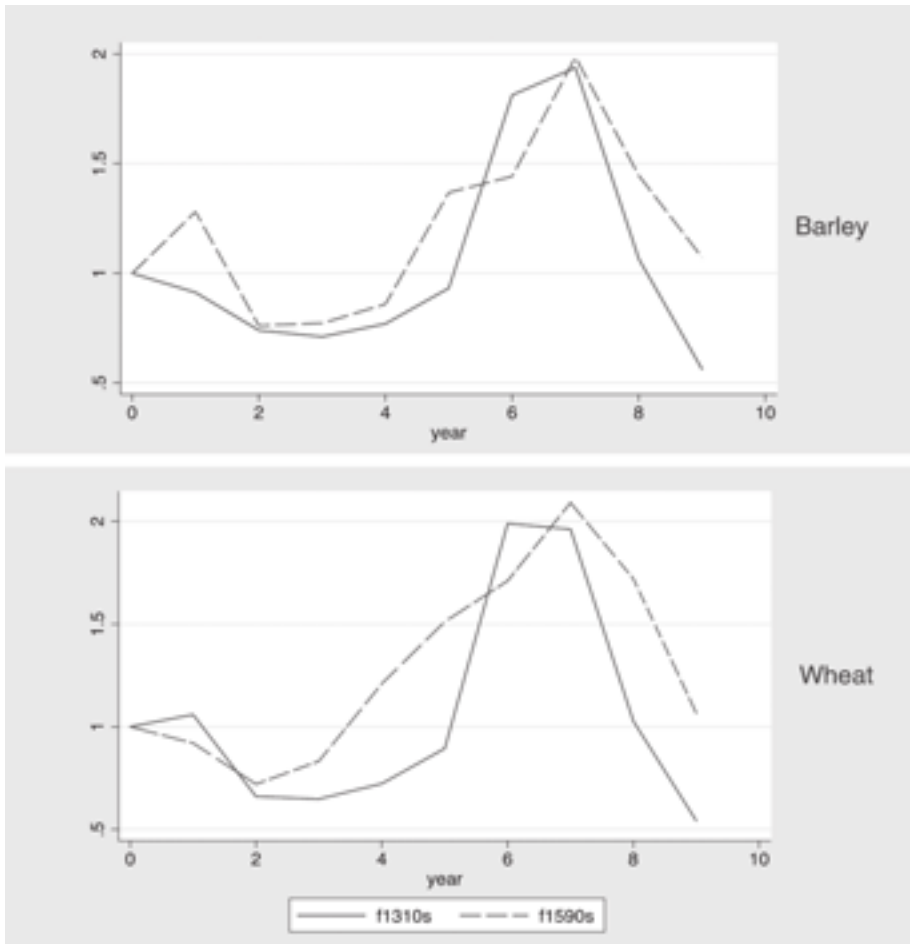


Figure 15.1. Agricultural prices in the 1310s and 1590s [1310/1590=1].⁶

of 404 parishes in 1597–98.⁷ Earlier estimates of an overall 15 per cent population loss between 1315 and 1317 may slightly overpredict short-term population decline since they are based on reported deaths of adult customary ten-

⁶ Source: O’Grada, ‘Hunger and Human Capital’, using Clark database <www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/> [accessed 14 October 2014].

⁷ Smith, ‘Demographic Developments’, p. 54 (Tables 2. 2 and 2. 3); see also Kelly and O’Grada, ‘Living Standards’, pp. 362–63, who show that for seventy-seven manors constituting the estate of the bishop of Winchester tenant deaths slightly more than doubled per year in 1315–17 compared with preceding and following years.

ants or males 12 years and over in tithing, although the manorial sources from which they are derived may be undercounts, largely omitting freeholders (now thought to be the smallholders *par excellence* of pre-Black Death England) and the landless whose circumstances might have made them especially harvest sensitive.⁸ However, the records of death relate almost exclusively to adult males, and it is now generally accepted that in famine conditions infants and children are significantly more robust in their capacity to survive in periods of severe food shortage than adults.⁹ Cormac O'Grada, allowing for the aforementioned factors, proposed a population loss of 10 per cent, thereby deriving an approximate estimate of about 400,000 deaths at a national level in the period 1315–17 from a population totalling *c.* 4.75 million.¹⁰ A more firmly established estimate for a total population of 3.9 million for England in the 1590s, might suggest greater demographic pressure on resources at the earlier date.¹¹ Indeed mortality in the 1590s was only a fraction of that in the 1310s. By comparing Wrigley and Schofield's estimate of the aggregate death rate in 1597 and 1598 with the average of those years 1589–96 and 1599–1601 O'Grada suggests an excess death rate of marginally more than 10 per thousand meaning that 40,000 extra lives were lost to famine (as against other causes), bad enough, but only a tenth of the fatalities that might have been attributed to food deprivation at the height of the Great Famine.¹²

A comparison of grain price movements in the two periods is problematic in the conclusions that might be drawn from it. When comparing the prices of wheat and barley during the 1310s and 1590s using 1310 and 1590 as base years O'Grada has revealed that price increases were of a similar order of magnitude during both periods (See Figure 15.1). However, as Walter made patently clear, price data are a fallible guide to famine intensity when knowledge of the precise proportion of the population dependent on purchased grain or bread for their subsistence is imprecise.¹³ Furthermore O'Grada notes that the higher are per capita incomes, the greater the harvest shortfall associated with any given pro-

⁸ Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death*, pp. 24–26; Poos, 'Rural Population'; Dyer, 'Did the Peasants Really Starve?', p. 61.

⁹ O'Grada, *Famine*, pp. 101–02.

¹⁰ O'Grada, 'Hunger'; Broadberry, Campbell, and van Leeuwen, 'English Medieval Population'.

¹¹ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, p. 531.

¹² O'Grada, 'Hunger'; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, p. 531.

¹³ Walter, 'Social Economy', pp. 86–88.

portionate price increase. Low GDP per capita in the 1310s would thus have entailed a lower proportionate harvest shortfall to create famine conditions. On the other hand, transfers of purchasing power from rich to poor, if welfare practices resulting in genuine redistributions of resources were in place, could have driven up grain prices in the 1590s, through the boost given to the purchasing power of those most affected by grain price rises in securing their basic subsistence needs.¹⁴

* * *

It is of course tempting to link the huge difference between excess mortality in the 1310s and the 1590s to developments in the economy over the intervening two hundred and eighty years.¹⁵ Higher GDP per capita in the 1590s would have offered greater protection against comparable shortfalls in food availability and associated high prices, but what evidence we do possess implies that it would be highly debatable that these improvements could reduce deaths from famine by a factor of ten. Our evidence concerning agricultural outputs in the two periods is far from adequate and estimations dependent on using manorial accounts for the period *c.* 1300 and probate inventories *c.* 1600 make comparisons problematic.¹⁶

Differing degrees in the severity of the climate between the two periods might be one factor to explain why the impact upon harvests in 1315 to 1322 was far more severe than in the 1590s. Bruce Campbell is one of the most influential researchers investigating this line of enquiry. He argues that in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries rural society was battered by adverse climatic conditions of the severest kind.¹⁷ Two principal types of evidence loom

¹⁴ O'Grada, 'Hunger'. While the overall extent of the price increases may have been similar, the speed with which they rose differed in both periods. See below for further discussion of the issue.

¹⁵ Grain storage is just one issue that might be significantly different in the two periods and recent attempts to discuss the scale and availability of storage in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries suggest that what was available made that society more rather than less susceptible to subsistence crises: Claridge and Langdon, 'Storage'.

¹⁶ For such estimates see Broadberry and others, 'British Economic Growth'. For at least one county, Norfolk, where significantly higher live stock to arable ratios by the later sixteenth century had the potential at least of ameliorating vulnerability to grain harvest failure:, see Campbell and Overton, 'New Perspective', esp. pp. 83–88.

¹⁷ The key text is Campbell's Tawney Lecture, Economic History Society, April 2008 and published as 'Nature as Historical Protagonist'; see, also Campbell, 'Four Famines and a Pestilence'. These views were developed in epic fashion in his enthusiastically received *Ellen*

large in the argument. First, dendrochronology provides an annual record of growing conditions for certain species of tree and, second, the analysis of similarly annual records of ice cores from Greenland and Antarctic glacial accumulation, which reveal much about past atmospheric conditions and circulations. This information offers a clear environmental context for the disastrous back-to-back harvest failures of 1315 and 1316. For example, the reconstruction of sea-surface temperatures in the North Atlantic based upon the deuterium content (heavy hydrogen) of Greenland ice layers identifies a period of heightened sea surface temperatures in the North Atlantic beginning in the final decades of the thirteenth century and running into the first part of the fourteenth century. The unusually warm Atlantic in the early fourteenth century generated a source of moisture for prolonged summer rains and winter storms and coincided with an equally sudden retardation in the growth of Old and New World trees as revealed by dendrochronology. This climatic phase is known in certain scientific circles as the Dantean Anomaly and had deleterious, sometimes disastrous, consequences for the grain production of the period.

It would be an exceptionally blinkered view to deny the enormity of the impact of these climatic extremes on the capacity of grain farmers to avoid harvest failure. It cannot be denied that The Great European Famine of 1315–21 was the most severe agrarian crisis to hit northern and central Europe that can be documented to date. To the negative impact on grain harvests, particularly over 1315–17, must be added the impact of the equally severe Bovine Pestilence of 1319–20 that Philip Slavin has so emphatically shown to have resulted in a loss of nearly two-thirds of the bovine animals in the space of one year with enormous consequences for the capital stock of both demesne and peasant farms and human milk consumption.¹⁸

A similar, but seemingly less severe, phase of climatic deterioration is identifiable for the 1580s and 1590s in Europe north of the Alps, although, for the critical years, conditions appear to have been somewhat more severe in 1586–87 than 1596–97. Also the exceptional wetness of the 1590s observed by contemporaries puzzlingly has left no clearly detectable impression on the dendrochronological record. We do know that the Dutch winter of 1595 was very severe and that the cloudy wet weather delayed the Burgundian grape harvest in 1597 and, looking further north into Scandinavia, the Swedish rye and barley harvest of 1597 apparently only yielded 60 per cent of their normal

McArthur lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge in February 2013 and now in the course of publication.

¹⁸ Slavin, 'Great Bovine Pestilence'.

level.¹⁹ As Bruce Campbell observes, this late sixteenth century episode may well show up more clearly in the historical rather than the environmental records but he notes that 'it is the latter which undoubtedly contains the clues as explaining why the weather turned so inclement at this time, thereby reducing much of Europe to a state of famine or near famine.'²⁰ Nature then is allocated the pole position in accounting for the greater vulnerability to dearth in the earlier period than the later phase. In fact human agency and political action whether investigated nationally or locally are seen as of secondary significance, although they are far from ignored and gain greater traction for Campbell in explaining famine alleviation from c. 1550 onwards.²¹

* * *

Notwithstanding the powerful scientific evidence underwriting this new research, it would be unfortunate if all this led towards a stark form of environmental determinism, to the point that it suppressed investigation into political and social responses to dearth. In this regard, historians of the medieval period in particular would do well to remember that these sorts of cataclysmic events were of a piece with later (and earlier) experiences. Early modernists have tackled these problems with increasing sophistication, building upon the work of John Walter and Mike Braddick, and are a considerable resource from which historians of the medieval period might identify at least five themes or issues relevant in the consideration of political responses to dearth.²²

First, a key finding appears to be the realization that the early modern social structure was the product of mobile and constantly contested hierarchies, which has led to a general rejection of binary models of society whether elite/non-elite, deferential/contestational, or lord/tenant. The coming to terms with the presence of a 'middling sort' with all of the analytical difficulties this can create has been a significant challenge to the older historiography, as is the realization that power relations were in continual negotiation.²³ The work of

¹⁹ Chuine and others, 'Grape Ripening', p. 289; Leijonhufvud, *Grain Tithes*, pp. 255–58.

²⁰ Campbell, 'Four Famines and a Pestilence', p. 26.

²¹ Campbell, 'Four Famines and a Pestilence', pp. 28–30.

²² See Walter's collection of essays in Walter, *Crowds and Popular Politics*. Braddick's thinking is set out in Braddick, *State Formation*, esp. part 2.

²³ No work has been more influential than Wrightson, *English Society*. See, too, *The Middling Sort of People*, ed. by Barry and Brooks. For the role of the middling sort as broadening the extent of royal authority, see Hindle, *The State and Social Change*.

J. C. Scott and his notions of public and hidden ‘transcripts’ as opposing discourses between dominators and dominated have been extensively integrated into discussions by Braddick and Walter in ways that are largely absent from the medieval discussion.²⁴

Second, the emergence of an ideology within the early modern social order which allowed, possibly even required, the magistracy to operate under what Walter termed a ‘double obligation’ as a result of their social leadership, or standing as employer or landlord, to acknowledge a personal responsibility to assist poorer members of local communities in return for their appropriate deference and obedience.

Third were manifestations of neighbourliness, reflected in selling grain cheaply outside the market, distributing grain at under-prices, hospitality, charity and altruistic fasting,²⁵ granting of credit, self-interest of the better sort in redistributive acts, willingness of gentry to stay on their estates in times of harvest failure, readiness to act on the part of those of middling status to render relief, and the activities of a church that powerfully endorsed the idea of an obligation to support the needy. All such actions or values were set within a growing sense of membership in communities, which gave individuals a claim to assistance within parochial social structures encouraging the transfer of surpluses to those in need, especially in times of extreme want.²⁶

Fourth, and especially important, were central initiatives particularly relating to controls of the grain supply, whether in the form of the Books of Orders or the various statutes that established more than the bare rudiments of parochial poor relief from the 1540s prior to the legislation of 1598 and 1601. The success of these central policies did depend for their implementation on the political sturdiness of local communities. Here it is very important to keep in mind Mike Braddick’s fundamental point that much of this required not the penetration by the centre of local communities but the fact that the centre was invited in.²⁷

²⁴ Scott, *Moral Economy and Domination*. These ideas are considered thoroughly by British historians in *Negotiating Power*, ed. by Braddick and Walter, esp. Braddick and Walter, ‘Grids of Power’, and Walter, ‘Public Transcripts’.

²⁵ In which the better-off were encouraged to forbear occasional meals and generally to eat less themselves for distribution to the poor in their communities, as in the crisis of the late 1590s: Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms’, esp. pp. 45, 56–58, 69–70, 77–78, and 83–85.

²⁶ Sources upon which this and the two previous paragraphs are based can be found in footnote 20, but also see Hindle, ‘Dearth, Fasting and Alms’.

²⁷ Braddick, *State Formation*, pp. 90–95.

Fifth, Braddick's consideration of Michael Mann's distinction between distributive and collective power in assessing the working of political power, and the responses of individuals and groups to it, has proved of inestimable analytical value.²⁸

* * *

Where are we in thinking about any of these issues in the later thirteenth-century and early fourteenth-century context? First, to state what is perhaps very obvious, there have not been many signs among medievalists of heeding Pat Collinson's plea 'to explore the social depth of politics to find signs of political life where it was not previously thought to have existed'.²⁹ Likewise, there is nothing akin to Keith Wrightson's seminal review of what he termed the 'politics of the parish' with reference to the pre-Black Death manor nor a concern with the politics of that somewhat elusive entity, the late thirteenth or early fourteenth-century vill.³⁰ Political issues are largely framed in terms of the fundamental binary of lord and tenant (especially lord and villein), or unfree and free, or even more crudely lord and peasant. The manor imposes something of an artificial institutional structure over investigations of medieval rural communities, especially in those areas where vill and manor were far from coterminous. As a result, politics when specifically overtly studied is often overly narrowed down to indicators of (mostly unfree) tenant resistance to landlord demands. While these are clearly important issues, as a conceptual approach the predominate use of the binary tends to push from centre stage issues to do with the comingling of manor, vill, and parish and its impact upon the functional reality of local status, wealth, and life style, particularly as viewed through various administrative functions: whether as manorial office-holders like steward, bailiff, or reeve or such roles in the local manorial court as juror, attorney, pledge, or essoin; or in the vill as sub-taxer or constable; or within the parish as parishioner and churchwarden.³¹ Such complexities have all too often

²⁸ Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, pp. 6–7. Braddick, *State Formation*, p. 93, states 'Distributive power is that of one person or group over another, whereas collective power reflects the potential power of an organized group. The routine exercise of administrative power involves both getting people to do things that they would not otherwise do (distributive power) and increasing the collective capacity of groups of people (collective power).'

²⁹ Collinson, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 15.

³⁰ Wrightson, 'Politics of the Parish'.

³¹ By far and away the best considerations of these issues is in Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, esp. chapters 7–9.

been pushed into the background in the study of pre-Black Death rural settlements with its focus on manorial sources as the principal archive. This charge is less applicable to work on the period after 1400 when manorial documentation becomes thinner in content and more parish-generated sources begin to flow.

The relatively small number of studies by medievalists that have considered the social economy of dearth or local political actions, independently of or in response to central government initiatives, have thus reached very pessimistic conclusions about any protection the social economy or political action would have afforded the harvest sensitive.³² In this regard, a very important paper has recently been published by Philip Slavin which is not directly concerned with either the social economy or political responses to dearth conditions, but does provide economic data concerning the performance of English grain markets over the Great Famine and is indubitably Senian in its conclusions. Using plentiful manorial account data, he assesses the extent to which the severity of the crisis had its roots in market failure caused by *human agency* as opposed to purely environmental effects.³³ Slavin is able to exploit 260 account rolls from 196 manorial demesnes for the farming years 1315–16 and 1316–17 which record 1440 grain sales and 508 purchases. His deft analysis demonstrated how, depending upon the type of grain, prices rose from the harvest of 1315 at a very rapid rate of 12–16 per cent per month to reach a peak within eleven months, whereas in 1596–97 the inflation was much slower at 4.2 per cent per month and took longer to peak.³⁴ High coefficients of variation for prices from the various demesne locations in the famine years relative to more ‘normal’ years suggest a decline in market price supervision and unconstrained behaviour on the part of manorial lords and their officials, which was enabled, Slavin suggests, by the absence of governmental supervision.³⁵ In ‘normal’ years Slavin argues that such producers were complying with notions of the ‘just price’ facilitated by the operation of ‘generalised trust’. In the famine years the just price was blatantly abandoned, as forms of ‘particularised trust’ overrode generalized trust in which grain trades undertaken without discrimination in a relatively open mar-

³² William Chester Jordan pays some, rather brief, attention to these matters in *The Great Famine*, chapter 9.

³³ Slavin, ‘Market Failure’. Because demesne accounts were Slavin’s principal source, his focus concerns the grain marketing activities of manorial lords, but the social bias is revealing about the manner in which this elite behaved in periods of grain shortages and resulting high prices.

³⁴ Slavin, ‘Market Failure’, p. 23.

³⁵ Slavin, ‘Market Failure’, p. 29.

ket between buyers and sellers were replaced by transactions based principally upon the affiliations and social allegiances of the parties concerned.³⁶ Under such conditions the information available to parties was highly asymmetric. Hoarding was clearly rife, since Slavin is able to show that manorial lords were able to maximize profit by selling late in the year in spring and summer and to have completed most of their purchases by the end of February, well before prices peaked.³⁷ Slavin is emphatic about the high degree of market failure over the course of the two famine years: 'The Great Famine would not have been *great* without man-made complications.'³⁸

In another recently published paper Buchanan Sharp has assembled a fairly comprehensive description and assessment of government ordinances and presentments over the period *c.* 1314 to 1322 related to the agrarian crisis of the time.³⁹ These included tightening up of the Assize of Bread; prohibitions on export of grain; an ordinance to fix prices early in 1315 (withdrawn less than a year later at height of the dearth); a letter from the king to bishops asking them to condemn grain hoarders; prohibition of the use of wheat in brewing; and issuing of safe conduct letters for individuals to travel abroad in search of grain supplies.⁴⁰ Sharp admits, however, that these government measures comprised a very weak policy of famine relief to start with and were likely ineffectively prosecuted, to the point that they are scarcely evident in local (that is, mostly manorial) records. Indeed, Sharp's work neatly complements Slavin's view about the general ineffectiveness of government efforts. More evident in fact from Sharp's study were the adverse effects of government policies through relatively heavy taxation to pursue the war against the Scot, as well as the purveyance of grain and animals to supply armies on the England-Scotland borders and the deflection of the majority of reported grain imports to Berwick for the same purpose.⁴¹ My hope is that this current paper will serve as a platform

³⁶ Slavin, 'Market Failure', pp. 34–39.

³⁷ Slavin, 'Market Failure', pp. 42–46.

³⁸ Slavin, 'Market Failure', p. 49.

³⁹ Sharp, 'Royal Paternalism'.

⁴⁰ See also the comments of Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, pp. 224–25.

⁴¹ Sharp, 'Royal Paternalism', pp. 641–45. Slavin also notes that war associated with purveyance 'could not have come at a worse time' ('Market Failure', p. 40), although he also estimates, however, that purveyance absorbed no more than two per cent of the total grain supply: nonetheless, at the margins, this seizure of grain undoubtedly exacerbated hardships as grain producers were forced to surrender already seriously depleted stocks to royal officials.

for a fuller consideration of structures of power within early fourteenth century governance, particularly the extent to which the inherent weakness of the crown's repressive force might see it willing to make at least a token response to popular grievances. Mighty tomes on the reign of that highly problematic monarch Edward II instead give literally a few lines to the circumstances of the Great Famine when close to a half a million English inhabitants may have perished in a couple of years following the Battle of Bannockburn.

* * *

As to how neighbour treated neighbour in local situations, two very important studies by Phillipp Schofield, unambiguously influenced by John Walter's 'Social Economy of Dearth' essay, focus principally on the Suffolk manor of Hinderclay. Schofield investigates the 1290s and the second decade of the fourteenth century and concentrates on peasant credit and the pattern of distress land sales on the Suffolk manor of Hinderclay during the 1290s and the 1310s.⁴² His research reveals the wealthier layers of local society in their dealings with the poor or land deficient, not as protectors of the latter, but as opportunists who, against a backcloth of severe harvest shortfall, withdrew credit and accumulated land from desperately poor smallholders. Likewise, Chris Briggs in an extensive analysis of credit in Cambridgeshire and the East Midlands in late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England sees some clear evidence of significant withdrawal of credit, as well as the legal pursuit of pledges (guarantors) of debtors.⁴³ Research on the Suffolk manor of Redgrave, bordering Hinderclay, reveals burgeoning distress land sales by brothers to brothers among sibling groups in the 1290s and again in the Great Famine which would seem an odd familial response.⁴⁴ Adding this indicator of limited benevolence within the family to Schofield's deft consideration of the additional burden of taxation in reducing local money supplies available for credit, then it might be hard to resist the idea that the social economy failed in the worst years between 1290 and 1322.⁴⁵ Furthermore, punitive measures to deal with theft, property damage, and trespass surged in these years. Barbara Hanawalt's pioneering research on gaol delivery rolls documented an avalanche of criminal cases principally to

⁴² Schofield, 'Dearth'; Schofield, 'Social Economy'.

⁴³ Briggs, *Credit*, p. 191; see also Schofield, 'Social Economy', p. 57.

⁴⁴ Smith, 'Transactional Analysis', pp. 226–39.

⁴⁵ Schofield, 'Dearth'.

do with property thefts in the dearth years.⁴⁶ Tolerance of sexual irregularities also seemed to decline as worsening economic conditions closed in, since it can be documented how on a number of East Anglian manors in these years fines paid for daughters of villeins for giving birth outside of wedlock, who were disproportionately from the smallholding sections of that stratum, rose from 6d. per offence in the last third of the thirteenth century to 2s. 8d. over the years of harvest failures in the first quarter of the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ Judith Bennett has shown in striking fashion how severe would have been the implications of such penalties on the individual and household budgets of young women who were amerced in this fashion.⁴⁸

* * *

Of course, what will be amply apparent from what has *not* been said so far in this present discussion is the limited consideration in the above literature of local political action that might have thwarted or indeed been responsible for failure to protect the harvest sensitive. A key issue, it would seem, is the local social structure *c.* 1300 and the evolving positioning, actions, and attitudes of persons or groups intermediate between local communities and higher tiers in the administrative or seigneurial order *c.* 1300. In this regard, there has been a most definite shift in the position of many medievalists now increasingly inclined to downplay the position of landlords as exploitative figures in local economies before the Black Death.⁴⁹ In fact, they are frequently presented as surprisingly passive, as they succumb to the force of custom. As such, they apparently left tenants to their own devices in areas like East Anglia, where a hyper-active land market against a background of demographic growth led to large-scale morcellation of landholdings, much to the advantage of a very

⁴⁶ Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*.

⁴⁷ On the manor of Redgrave, Suffolk, *childwyte* fines were principally in the range 6d.–1s. between 1259 and 1310; thereafter the fine settled on a sum of 2s. 8d., while the neighbouring manor of Rickinghall had a very similar trend. During the Great Famine a women giving birth out of wedlock on both manors of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds would have been amerced four times more heavily than in the late thirteenth century: Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Special Collections, Bacon Manuscripts 1–15; London, British Library, Additional Manuscripts 63378–63430. For observations on the *childwyte* fine in fourteenth-century Suffolk generally, see Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, p. 54.

⁴⁸ Bennett, 'Writing Fornication', p. 151.

⁴⁹ Dyer, 'Ineffectiveness of Lordship', pp. 69–86. See too the excellent overview of many relevant issues in Bailey, *The Decline of Serfdom*, pp. 4–36 and 307–36.

small group of more substantial villeins who fed on the misfortune and increasing insolvency of their poorer neighbours. In Midland and central southern England the full virgaters behaved similarly but benefitted as rack-renting renters to a host of small-scale leaseholders. In both contexts the beneficiaries were those who had heritable tenure of properties held for inflation-protected rents and who gained from high prices for their marketed produce while being able to pay low wages when labour beyond their own family members was needed.⁵⁰ This might well be a crucial set of circumstances which eroded a sense of community and helped to fracture local societies. Consequently, at times of dearth, there would not only be little in terms of local social and administrative structures, but also, even more critically, incentive to effect the necessary transfers of precious surpluses to those in critical need.

In fact, the picture increasingly presented by medievalists is strikingly similar to that which Jonathan Healey has so effectively reconstructed recently for early seventeenth-century Westmorland to account for the vulnerability of a significant section of the rural population to what was locally very wet weather and famine in the area in 1623.⁵¹ Healey, through very careful analysis, shows how the customary tenant population did not grow against a background of overall population expansion in the late sixteenth century. The customary tenants apparently maintained their holdings intact, but through an analysis of 'byfire' fines paid in the manorial court, as ameracements from customary tenants for allowing sub-tenants to take land and housing from them, Healey identifies the growth of a particularly dearth-sensitive section of the local population. These fines were fixed at 12d. a time, and customary tenants who sub-let took advantage of rising prices while their own rents remained fixed. Healey ponders the possibility that there was some degree of collusion between landlords and customary tenants, with byfire fines allowing stewards to cream off some income from what was an increasingly profitable practice of the customary tenants. In that sense, this boost to seigniorial income resembles that which landlords in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century East Anglia received as a result of fines paid in association with the hyper-active land market which frequently accounted for three-quarters of manorial-court income in that area at the time.⁵² Impressive nominative analysis allows Healey to show that very few

⁵⁰ The large literature on this stems from Hatcher, 'English Serfdom', with the most forceful statement being Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem'.

⁵¹ Healey, 'Land, Population and Famine'.

⁵² Campbell, 'The Agrarian Problem', p. 52. See also Smith, 'Some Thoughts', pp. 115–17.

individuals whose names identified them as customary tenants died when death rates surged in that region in 1623 and also led him to suppose that those who could not be linked in this fashion were very likely to have been sub-tenants.

Notwithstanding some similarities between the varying fortunes of customary tenants and their sub-tenants in early seventeenth-century Westmorland (suggestively one of the few famine-prone English counties in the late Tudor and early Stuart period) and what Bruce Campbell, in particular, has seen as at the root of the agrarian problem of the early fourteenth century, we must recognize that this susceptibility of the north-west to famine during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was atypical, particularly when compared to south and east England at the time.⁵³ While it is tempting to focus attention on developments in Tudor England that reduced dearth-sensitivity for large tracts of country away from the north and north-west, there is also much to ponder from recent work on late medieval communities and welfare provisioning in establishing at least the pre-conditions for Tudor policies in dealing with such crises.

* * *

In considering these pre-conditions a prevalent notion in the secondary literature a generation ago might seem incompatible with developments favourable for associative activity: this was the view that late medieval communities were characterized more by the attributes of decline rather than any intensification of communal activity. The evidence for decline came largely from manorial sources which seemingly revealed a growth in the frequency in which land transfers took place between unrelated persons rather than within the family; higher rates of migration and population turnover; more abandoned or decaying houses and farm buildings; and, especially in open-field villages, a growth in trespass offences, principally connected with individuals with large livestock holdings who failed to maintain the collective rules of pasturing.⁵⁴

Social and cultural historians using a more varied array of sources than those of the manor have begun to piece together a rather different image of late medieval community life focused not on the manor but on the parish. Ronald Hutton was a pioneer in this changed emphasis through his work on the rituals of 'Merry England'.⁵⁵ He sees the proliferation of religious and secular festivals which he identifies as emerging in the century before 1500 as a cultural devel-

⁵³ Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp. 670–85.

⁵⁴ A circumspect review of this literature is in Dyer, 'English Medieval Village Community'.

⁵⁵ Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, esp. pp. 62–68.

opment of some significance and links this with contemporaneous expenditure on parish churches, chantries, guilds, and other local institutions. It is, however, Chris Dyer who, using an impressive array of sources and casting off the shackles of dependence on the principal manorial sources, has done more than any other scholar to crystallize an image of community life for which 'decline' is in no sense an appropriate noun to indicate its principal characteristic. In his Neale Lecture of 1991, discussing the nature of life in the late medieval English village community, he drew attention to the fourteenth-century development relating to a community's or vill's obligation to pay lay subsidies.⁵⁶ Dyer believes this shift in both the principles and mechanism of taxation had important repercussions for later English developments. After 1334 tax quotas were assigned to each community and the villagers were expected to assess and to collect the money. For such a function to be fulfilled it was necessary for there to have been procedures for choosing individuals, who were then required to make assessments of their neighbours to cajole them into paying their share.

Furthermore, there was much local experimentation in parish church administration during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. English churchwardens' accounts from this period survive in sufficient numbers to show how these officers gathered parish rates primarily, although not exclusively, for expenditure on the church fabric, books, and vestments. It is tempting to suggest that methods and personnel used in raising state taxes were redeployed to service the financial needs of the parish and its church. These churchwardens' accounts reveal parishes increasingly accumulating stocks of land and other gifts, used principally to maintain the fabric of the parish church, but not infrequently to generate incomes that were directed towards charitable purposes. Beat Kumin has shown that the sums raised annually by pre-Reformation churchwardens were so substantial that they frequently exceeded the amounts secured by communities to meet the lay subsidies of the 1520s.⁵⁷

In addition to parish rates, the churchwardens garnered income from donations and bequests, the profits of church ales, plays, and entertainments organized by fraternities. Chris Dyer was at pains in his Ford lectures to stress a number of apparently redistributive procedures that came to characterize parish life or elements within it. He noted the growth of parish funds generally; the tendency to build church houses where the brewing and sale of 'help ales' and other public events could be held; and the dynamism of fraternities. These last,

⁵⁶ Dyer, 'The English Medieval Village Community', p. 416.

⁵⁷ Kumin, *The Shaping of Community*, pp. 188–95.

found especially in eastern England, were both social and religious institutions, the money from whose members supported processions and feasts, as well as providing funds for funerals and masses for members who could not afford them as individuals.⁵⁸ More than any other scholar Chris Dyer has thought systematically about the character of late medieval welfare. He notes a shift over this period from family to community as the institutional basis of provision, since, in the late medieval demographic regime, those retiring were less likely to have support from children. Analysis of fifteenth-century wills leads him to see a growing tendency for testators to make specific bequests for the local poor, and sometimes this might be earmarked to assist the less well-off to meet their obligations to lay subsidies and the like. Wealthy villagers might leave land to parish churches and fraternities, from which the rental income might be used to benefit the 'poor of the parish', particularly as lay subsidies would not be levied every year, allowing such income to accumulate more rapidly in parish coffers for the relief of local poverty.⁵⁹

Of particular significance was the emergence of a clearer sense of discrimination in judging eligibility for relief in a labour deficient economy for which tolerance for voluntary idleness and begging fell away.⁶⁰ Marjorie McIntosh made a significant contribution to understanding the emerging concern for these matters, as reflected in the increasing number of by-laws advocating punitive measures against unruly behavior found in fifteenth-century village and small town leet courts.⁶¹ She aimed to show that these concerns were not as novel as some early modernists had supposed such steps to have been when they encountered them in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but they suggest to Dyer developments that are entirely consistent with the more positive steps taken to look after the interests of a deserving poor who had become a clear focus of donors' attention and benevolence over the fifteenth century. In fact Dyer sees early Tudor legislation for poor relief at a national level as based considerably upon practices readily found in many later medieval communities.⁶²

⁵⁸ Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, esp. pp. 75–78.

⁵⁹ Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, pp. 238–40; Dyer, 'Poverty'.

⁶⁰ For complaints about such behaviour in the post-Black Death decades, see Hatcher, 'Labour, Leisure and Economic Thought', pp. 76–80.

⁶¹ McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehaviour*.

⁶² Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, p. 240.

While McIntosh in her most recent contribution to this debate might not wish to go so far as Dyer, she has certainly marshalled evidence that clearly forces us no longer to see the 1598 and 1601 acts for the relief of the poor as initiating for the first time an effective means of revenue raising and redistribution for welfare practices organized at the level of the parish.⁶³ Here McIntosh provides a convincing case for seeing the late Elizabethan legislation as only the culmination of moves to establish parochial levies for the poor that had their origins in a series of royal injunctions and the statute of 1552 in the short reign of Edward VI. The background, of course, is the dissolution in the 1540s of these parish endowments, many of which were so central in the story of late medieval charitable provision outlined by Chris Dyer and charted so comprehensively by Marjorie McIntosh in her own extensive examination of the variety and extent of late medieval parochial charity and endowed institutions.⁶⁴ Notwithstanding creative efforts on the part of parishioners to conceal parochial endowments from commissioners charged with dissolving chantries and the like, the elimination of these charitable options did create a substantial shortfall in welfare provision by the early years of Edward VI's reign.

The statute of 1552 empowered churchwardens to record the names of all of those capable of contributing to the relief of the poor and then to nominate two collectors who were to 'gently ask and demand of every man and woman that they of their charity will be contented to give weekly towards the relief of the poor'.⁶⁵ Those who proved uncooperative were to be brought before the bishop, while the collectors were to render quarterly accounts to the parish. McIntosh shows that over a third of the parishes for which there are surviving churchwardens' accounts were actively engaged in fund-raising and the distribution of relief between 1547 and 1553. For McIntosh, this marks a sea change, since churchwardens' accounts that predate Edward's reign are far less likely to leave evidence of any such activities. In a remarkable exercise of data sorting and integration McIntosh argues that procedures put in place by Edward VI remained the bedrock of welfare provision through to 1598 and after. For two hundred and eight parishes for which she has assembled data she finds the collectors were in action. Their role to all intents and purposes mirrored that of the overseers of the poor who replaced them following the legislation of 1598.

⁶³ McIntosh, *Poor Relief*.

⁶⁴ McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, pp. 37–101.

⁶⁵ *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. by Luders and others, IV, pt 1, pp. 131–32 (5 and 6 Edward VI, ch. 2; the quote, here given in modern English, is from p. 131).

In terms of the impact of these legislative efforts, it seems highly significant that over two-thirds of references to Collectors of the Poor before 1598 were to be found in East Anglia and the South-East, where subsistence crises associated with high grain prices in the 1580s and 1590s were strikingly absent, although McIntosh does not note this connection. This geographical concentration is perhaps highly significant given that the two hundred and eight parishes from which McIntosh has collected information form a relatively small percentage of the English total which is roughly ten thousand. In another very recent study McIntosh once again stands apart in her energetic assembling of collectors' accounts surviving after 1552 through to 1598. In this work she shows the communities to which these sources relate moving away from the late medieval practice of providing occasional aid towards more regular support, and of particular note is her finding that average sums awarded per week rose from 4d. in the 1560s and 1570s to 1s.4d. weekly in the 1590s suggesting, as she notes, a clear response to rising prices in the periods of crop failure that so characterized this decade.⁶⁶ Furthermore, while one could be tempted into regarding the late Elizabethan poor law legislation as a response to rising population, especially after 1560, and worsening weather conditions over the 1580s and 1590s, it is a highly problematic argument. Malthusian pressures, as O'Grada notes, have been a recurrent feature of English demographic history, not least when population peaked *c.* 1300 when it might be presumed a similar attempt at public action in support of the poor would have occurred, for which, in fact, the evidence is not forthcoming.⁶⁷ What the progressive development of poor law legislation, along with the instruments and personnel to make it effective, did achieve was to create a political environment in which the better off became legally liable to support the poor in contrast to the voluntarism that had become more apparent in later medieval English village and town life.

* * *

Our data are frustratingly variable and certainly as yet insufficient to gain any confident quantitative measure of the extent of welfare funds in any but local situations, but it is important to gain some sense of possible implications of the new evidence. We have already noted the similarity of the overall magnitude of grain price rise for both the Great Famine and the 1590s and the demographic data show, prices notwithstanding, what would appear to have been a

⁶⁶ McIntosh, 'Poor Relief', pp. 353–54.

⁶⁷ O'Grada, 'Hunger'.

far more muted mortality crisis in the 1590s. It is certainly worth asking how much of the lesser severity of the 1590s dearth compared to the Great Famine, despite both periods revealing sharp upward pressure on grain prices, may have been achieved by rate-aided relief provision, the building up of grain stocks by individual (especially urban) communities, and governmental interventions in the grain market, as well as government campaigns for general hospitality that enabled the poor at least in some regions, particularly in the most densely settled parts of the country south and east of a line from the Humber to the Exe, to obtain material support through these difficult periods. While the redistributions of wealth secured should not be exaggerated, it is a well-known consequence of welfare provision that it might sustain and increase prices if it stops demand from collapsing entirely. It may also mean that those with grain to sell will not rush to offload all of the marketable corn, bringing it to the market over longer periods in the knowledge that demand will not collapse entirely. The slower rise of grain prices in the 1590s when compared with Great Famine may reflect these influences.⁶⁸

It is a relatively straightforward task to assemble evidence of late medieval bequests for the poor and the accumulation of such resources, as well as of instances of collectors implementing the terms of the 1552 Act, but it is far harder to identify those local political processes that underpinned and drove such seemingly benevolent actions. To arrive at satisfactory answers would require us to construct a far more complete sense of local social structures and their political undercurrents than has been achieved to date. One theme that looms large, although categorizable as a consequence of changing terms and conditions impacting on the social distribution of land, concerns the engrossing of holdings, in part as a result of villagers expropriating one another. Such a process noted by Dyer has been effectively documented by Jane Whittle in her study of the late medieval Norfolk land market.⁶⁹ This resulted in a shift to a landholding structure with a growing number of very substantial tenants with farms of 40 to 50 acres or more. Such landholders were the individuals who came to play a key role in their local manorial courts and parochial offices. While smallholders were certainly still evident, their holdings in aggregate accounted for an increasingly smaller proportion of the total farmed area. In

⁶⁸ See Slavin, 'Market Failure', pp. 23–26, for comparisons made between price rises 1315–17 and some other early modern price rises during famine conditions. Slavin does not make a direct comparison with the 1590s, but see the contrasts between 1310s and 1590s shown in Figure 15.1.

⁶⁹ Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, p. 76; Whittle, *Development*, esp. pp. 182–224.

the context of significantly diminished seigniorial authority, substantial tenants were a more assertive group in the running of community affairs, whether it involved church rebuilding or provisions for the poor. Furthermore, the state was clearly acceding to such individuals who assumed greater roles in local governance, as reflected in the increasing number of communal by-laws against misbehaviour, gambling, and anti-social actions that they enacted.

Dyer, in dissecting the character of late medieval community social structure documents their elite residents as pillars of the manor court, parishes, and fraternities, who imposed good order that also reflected their interests as employers and property holders. Such individuals had served as tax assessors since 1334, and, when their various roles are taken together, they came increasingly to see themselves as part of a wider political community.⁷⁰ Indeed, they had to pick up the pieces locally within their parishes after the Henrician Reformation. Of particular significance, too, is that they were not to suffer from fragmentation or morcellation of their holdings as population grew, especially after 1560. As a result, they were undoubted beneficiaries of the price inflation that accompanied population growth. They were, however, to contend with a growing body of property-less wage-earners, and the state and the Protestant Church, often working together, were increasingly urging them to police and to ameliorate the conditions of such people in the face of harvest failure or sharp declines in the fortunes of local industries, both of which became common in the last quarter of the sixteenth century.⁷¹ They were also becoming increasingly identifiable as the 'middling sort' about which late Tudor and early Stuart historians have written with so much enthusiasm in the last twenty or thirty years.

Such individuals were both appealed to and used by the state, as they managed their local communities, and they were frequently engaged with the justices of the peace (JPs), who were the state's more formal representatives in their localities. The JPs were frequently drawn from the gentry and minor landlord ranks of the neighbourhood and probably pivotal in the process of linking local communities and the centre after 1400. This connection of JPs and influential local community figures was refashioned and brought more fully into play by the Tudor state. Such an environment would stiffen the backbone of *local* initiative while reinforcing the development of state power and manifesting a set

⁷⁰ Dyer, *Age of Transition?*, pp. 113–14.

⁷¹ For the precocious developments in which clothiers assumed control over a large proletarianized workforce in the context of traditional ideas of civic status reinforced by early reformed Protestantism, see the detailed analysis by McIntosh, *Poor Relief and Community*, esp. pp. 127–47.

of values that early modernists have viewed as unambiguously 'patriarchal'. It imposed mutual obligations upon the poor and their wealthier 'better sorts', but it also gave those who were dearth sensitive a form of local agency through the appeals they made in times of harvest failure.

In no area were those obligations more evident than when JPs implemented dearth orders from the Tudor privy council in times of harvest shortfall. At their base, the orders were designed to impose export bans when grain prices rose above specified levels. After 1587 the privy council issued periodically a set of regulations referred to as the Books of Orders, which among other things endowed JPs with extensive powers of search in order to prevent grain hoarding and to make possible for grain purchasers a flow of grain to the market at affordable prices. Many of these mechanisms were rooted in centuries-old attitudes in dealing with such issues. As Walter and Wrightson put it in a seminal article, in Elizabethan England popular moral attitudes to dearth were 'derived from customary views of the ideal ordering of economic transactions, firmly centred on the market-place, informed by notions of the just price and the conscionable course of dealing and governed by the imperative of maintaining neighbourly harmony and well-being'.⁷² However, what was now distinctive was the way in which customary expectations were more effectively met through actions on the part of those individuals who were responsive to pressures emanating from those above them in the power-holding hierarchy and those below whose demands, if not met, posed a major threat to order and to their authority locally.

The personnel needed for maintaining at least the illusion of local harmony and just prices from community up to national levels in the *c.* 1600 situation were clearly in short supply in the government of the vill or the manor in the early fourteenth century. Perhaps more important was the absence at this earlier time of a political expectation among harvest-sensitive grain purchasers that they might call upon the better sorts to protect them from rising prices and food shortages under threat of political disorder or the grain riot. There were groups possessed of substantial wealth in *c.* 1300 villages and towns that might have mounted some sort of charitable/redistributive response to severe dearth, such as the well-to-do customary tenant class that Raftis felt was so important in shaping the medieval English rural economy and whom Campbell has forcefully characterized in the early fourteenth century as rent-seeking and rack-

⁷² Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth', p. 31; see also Davis, *Medieval Market Morality*, esp. Section 2.

renting as they benefited from sub-economic rents in a period of rising grain prices.⁷³ However, it appears — in the current state of research — that such efforts, whether motivated to do so from within local society or stimulated or cajoled by central authorities, if existing at all, were very minimal. Thus, it is not surprising that there was so much distress during the years 1315–22. In contrast, much was happening in the century and a half before the Reformation to intensify redistributive actions by individuals and groups as well as to incorporate local communities more effectively into the state, to such an extent that the structures thereby created were far more than just isolated building blocks for an effectively functioning system of welfare, the essential elements of which would endure to 1834 notwithstanding the shocks to which these structures were subjected in the 1540s.

* * *

This essay has been largely descriptive in its attempt to identify those features of late medieval and early Tudor local socio-political structures which provided mechanisms and motivations that increased the likelihood that redistributive actions to raise resources for welfare purposes took place. Furthermore, it has also identified those crucial initiatives and responses by government, such as requests to carry out grain searches or to implement the Books of Orders; to intervene in grain markets; and to build up grain stocks. Perhaps most critically, as pointed out by McIntosh, was the gradual local process in raising parish poor rates in response to a half-century of sometimes loosely imposed legislation before the Poor Law Act of 1598 made the collection of rates obligatory through enforcement by the Justices of the Peace. In the space available this essay has not sought to identify underlying causal factors that would explain those developments. To do so in anything but a superficial fashion would constitute a major investigative task. Such a task would need to consider a variety of potential explanations as follows.

First, the proliferation of religious and secular festivals grounded in parochial contexts linked to formidable contemporaneous investment in parish churches, chantries, and guilds have been seen as a product of surplus wealth as, what the anthropologist terms a ‘ceremonial fund’, was boosted by the rising per capita income of the broader population against a background of demographic decline.⁷⁴ As Dyer puts it so directly when considering the material

⁷³ Raftis, *Peasant Economic Development*; Campbell, ‘The Agrarian Problem’, pp. 45–60.

⁷⁴ Wolf, *Peasants*, pp. 97–100; Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 62–63.

world of late medieval peasantry through archaeological evidence, ‘the number of churches rebuilt and adorned in the fifteenth century (which we know from written sources) were often funded by the parochial community suggests that peasants had money to support good causes.’⁷⁵

Second, another argument, less economically deterministic, sees an intensification of parochial piety reflected in the institutions of chantries, guilds, and obits that was directly related to the belief that the suffering of the dead in purgatory could be reduced by prayer. In an epidemiological climate of intensified episodes of mass mortality people are therefore viewed as driven towards the purchase of paradise by investing heavily in religious decoration and ceremony as well as charitable donations to the poor and the sick — a form of ‘spiritual determinism’ as Hutton deems it; as Slack notes, the economic conditions of the later medieval period made such purchases more affordable.⁷⁶

Third, demographic conditions that lasted well into the early sixteenth century created labour shortages that encouraged collective activities, especially in key agricultural tasks which spilled over into other aspects of community culture. This is an integral part of the view that ‘nuclear family hardship’ (the dependence of the nuclear family on its own rather than the resources of a wider kin group), intensified by migration, mortality, and small families, along with frequent disruptions of the hereditary transmission of land, gave the village and extra-familial institutions a significantly increased role in the provision of personal welfare.⁷⁷ The demographic decline which undermined the economic supremacy of landlords also gave village elites greater opportunity to experiment and devise methods of collective support.

Fourth, and related to the actions of central government, Dyer has been especially impressed by a model of collective revenue raising initiated before the Black Death with the 1334 lay subsidy which required compulsory collection through assessment by local worthies, many of whom acted as churchwardens and took the model of the lay subsidy, although compulsory, to the collection of parish rates which was enforced by moral persuasion.⁷⁸ In this explanation we see a catalytic role provided by central government as it co-opted the parish to become its local arm in taking on responsibilities for activities which made it much more than an ecclesiastical unit. In Dyer’s view the post-1536 impact of

⁷⁵ Dyer, ‘Material World’, p. 22.

⁷⁶ Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, pp. 63–65.

⁷⁷ Dyer, ‘Poverty’, p. 75; Smith, ‘Charity’, pp. 26–27.

⁷⁸ Dyer, ‘Poverty’, pp. 75–76.

the Reformation was limited in its impact because the contribution of religious houses and other institutions of the traditional church to welfare provision had been only on a modest scale.⁷⁹ Indeed a new set of post-Reformation religious motivations given vital encouragement by the Tudor crown, particularly in the reign of Edward VI, endowed the parish with an even more significant role in welfare provision.⁸⁰ But it did so now as an increasingly interventionist form of government which created mechanisms directly aimed at monitoring and managing the supply of grain during episodes of shortage. Indeed Slack sees in these actions an intriguing paradox: 'State and collectivities apparently flourishing together, neither diminished by the other'.⁸¹ This paradox, however, had its roots planted deeply in the century or so following the Black Death.

It would, however, as a fifth and final point, be appropriate to note an argument recently made by Bruce Campbell who characteristically gives the environment more than just a passing role in driving practices and policies regarding welfare in what this essay has seen as a formative period — that is, the later Middle Ages. He notes that, notwithstanding the favourable ratio of grassland to arable and generous wages in the fifteenth century, that serious harvest failure was a recurrent concern. The severe harvest failure of 1437–38 brought about the creation of London's first public granary, and Campbell sees the experience of other difficult years associated with 'the low, varying and uncertain yield of grain' in the closing years of the fifteenth century as serving 'to heighten concern about poverty, vagrancy and public order and spur contemporary quests for improved social security and welfare, through the formation of guilds, fraternities, foundation of almshouses and charities and institution of voluntary parish relief schemes'.⁸²

It can only be concluded that these issues and the interpretation of the far from adequate evidence bearing upon them will continue to play a central role in considerations of the relative roles played by human agency and changes in the physical environment in our understanding of the vulnerability of populations to dearth associated with harvest failure over the late medieval and early modern periods.

⁷⁹ Dyer, 'Poverty', p. 78.

⁸⁰ McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, pp. 127–38.

⁸¹ Slack, *Reformation to Improvement*, p. 161.

⁸² Campbell, 'Grain Yields', p. 162.

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Chronological List of Publications

- 2015** (forthcoming and in preparation) *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- 2015** (forthcoming) 'Unit Land Values as a Guide to Agricultural Land Productivity in Medieval England', in *Production and Productivity in European Agriculture (14th–20th Centuries)*, ed. by Gérard Béaur and Jean-Michel Chevet (Turnhout: Brepols)
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