

## Some Differences between Seigneurial Demesnes in Medieval Oxfordshire

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### SUMMARY

*Seigneurial demesnes in Oxfordshire responded in different ways to the commercial conditions which developed between the late 12th and early 14th centuries, according to their size and structure and proximity to larger markets. The problem of size and structure was determined historically and was an important contributory reason why some demesnes, for example those of houses of Austin canons, failed to benefit by marketing produce. The largest seigneurial demesnes – those of the bishop of Winchester and the earl of Cornwall – produced a natural surplus product which was directed to the market, but no concerted effort was made to use labour more intensively. By contrast, a most interesting relationship to the market was forged by Merton College for its demesne of Holywell, which depended entirely on wage or contractual labour, but which was also fortuitously placed next to the largest urban market in the county. Within the general context of conservative agrarian practices in Oxfordshire, different demesnes thus responded differently to new opportunities.*

Many questions concerning medieval agrarian production and productivity have been recently illuminated, although there is still scope for further regional and local studies.<sup>1</sup> The influence of external variables has received particular attention, with especial emphasis on the influence of the market. Internal variables which have been discussed include the configuration of selions and furlongs, not only as between seigneurial and peasant holdings, but also contrasts between demesnes. Where demesne lands were consolidated, economies of scale might enhance productivity through more intensive practices. Dispersed selions, however, might have been a barrier to more efficient husbandry. Better productivity and production for the market seem, in some regions, to have been parallel developments stimulated by the growth of markets and the commercialization of the economy, perhaps in response to increases in population, in urban growth and the inflation of prices. Nevertheless, production for sale may not have been an exclusive determinant of agrarian practices on some demesnes, especially those of the religious, one of whose concerns may still have been the supply of the conventual household. At an earlier time, the primary function of the estates of religious houses had been to provide for the conventual *mensa*

<sup>1</sup> B.M.S. Campbell, 'Arable Productivity in Medieval England: some Evidence from Norfolk', *Jnl. Econ. Hist.* xliii (1983), 379–404; idem, 'Agricultural Progress in Medieval England', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xxxvi (1983), 26–46; M. Mate, 'Medieval Agrarian Practices: the Determining Factors', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* xxxiii (1985), 22–31; R.C. Stacey, 'Agricultural Investment and the Management of the Royal Demesne Manors, 1236–1240', *Jnl. Econ. Hist.* xlvi (1986), 979–93; R.H. Britnell, 'Agricultural Technology and the Margin of Cultivation in the Fourteenth Century', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xxx (1977), 53–66; idem, 'Minor Landlords in England and Medieval Agrarian Capitalism', *Past and Present*, lxxxix (1980), repr. in T.H. Aston (ed.), *Landlords, Peasants and Politics in Medieval England* (1987), 227–46.

through food-farms. Something of this primary expectation may have persisted, especially in the case of those medium-sized and smaller houses of the new religious orders of the 12th century, whose estates were, necessarily because of their late advent, piecemeal and fragmentary. In these cases, the primary interest may still have been to meet the needs of the house, with surplus for sale being serendipitous. This paradigm ensued almost entirely from the size and structure of the estates of these religious houses, placing limitations on what could be achieved in response to market conditions. These internal variables, in relation to such an external variable as the market, merit more attention.

Differences in the structure and size of demesnes were very real in Oxfordshire and affected the performance of land and labour. These differences in size and structure, combined with the need primarily to supply the house, led ineluctably to different relationships to the market, with some estates developing a closer involvement whilst others remained primarily geared towards consumption rather than production and distribution for sale. In a cyclical way, the low level of production for sale exacerbated the problems of small demesnes, which, because of their lack of other resources, could not improve their future productivity through investment. Such small demesnes may thus have experienced a cycle of poverty. By contrast, large seignorial demesnes, with a naturally occurring surplus product, had the opportunity to benefit from a cycle of affluence, having vast reserves of labour services and cash accruing to finance a greater input of the costs of production. Receipts from the sale of produce might have been invested in order to sustain further improvements in productivity for the market. How far large estates actually followed this pattern depended on seignorial attitudes towards productivity and increasing the natural surplus product. Evidence from Oxfordshire suggests that producers reacted in different ways to these opportunities.

An interesting contrast to both the small and the great demesnes is the small to medium-sized one which, through a deliberate policy of investment and because of a fortunate position in relation to markets, was able to forge a strong involvement in commercial production. These contrasts are explored here for Oxfordshire through the examples of some houses of Austin canons, at least one of which had very slender resources; the large demesnes of great Benedictine houses; and Merton College's manor at Holywell, not especially large, but fortuitously placed adjacent to an urban market and able to call on the financial reserves of the college which had wider estates.

Size and structure may have been principally determined at an earlier time, since estates such as those of the bishop of Winchester and Westminster abbey, founded in the late Anglo-Saxon period, had large consolidated demesnes in Oxfordshire with extensive labour services, which were, moreover, outliers of vast estates of an absentee lord. Similarly the demesnes of the earl of Cornwall in the county comprised only a part of an immense estate dispersed throughout England. The nature of these demesnes allowed a naturally recurrent surplus product. Seignorial attitudes and policies in the 13th century were thus affected by the natural endowments and character of the estates, determined at a much earlier time.

Variation in the nature and performance of different demesnes is well illustrated by seignorial organization in Oxfordshire.<sup>2</sup> The main difference was between seignorial strategies on some small demesnes (often, but not exclusively, formed around appropriated glebes in the case of estates of houses of Austin canons), on large demesnes such as those of the bishopric of Winchester, and on demesnes such as that of Holywell held by Merton

<sup>2</sup> See also C.C. Dyer, 'Farming Techniques in the West Midlands', in H.E. Hallam (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. III, 1042-1350 (1988), 369-83.

## Oxfordshire demesnes and related markets c1350



TABLE I: SIZE OF DEMESNES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT

*I Acreages shown in manorial accounts*

Demesne	Lord	Acreage	Date
Watlington	Earl of Cornwall	258	1297
Witney	Bp of Winchester	619-835 <sup>a</sup>	1208-32
Witney		364-534.5 <sup>b</sup>	1235-96
Witney		511-758 <sup>a</sup>	1302-12
Witney		164.5-327 <sup>b</sup>	1320-95
Forest Hill	Oseney Abbey	167	1303
Watlington	Oseney Abbey	74	1339
Launton	Westminster Abbey	140-181.5	1341-65
Waterperry	Oseney Abbey	85.5-112	1328-35
Adderbury	Bp of Winchester	417-458 <sup>a</sup>	1208-31
Adderbury		215-292.5 <sup>b</sup>	1232-96
Adderbury		303.5-349 <sup>a</sup>	1302-12
Adderbury		166.5-268 <sup>b</sup>	1320-82

*II Total demesne available*

Ambrosden	Earl of Cornwall	360	1300
Islip	Abbot of Westminster	485	1300-30
Cuxham	Merton College	300	1300

<sup>a</sup> acres *ut iacent* (customary)<sup>b</sup> acres measured *per perticam*, but by a perch of 15' not the statute perch of 16½'.

These different 'measures' explain the apparent changes in the size of the Winchester demesnes; the real acreage was fairly stable until the mid 14th century.

College and located just outside the walls of medieval Oxford. The estates of the houses of the new religious orders of 12th-century England were frequently small and disparate, since their late entry into the land market – despite benefactions in some cases from the baronial laity – limited the size and structure of their lands. Although geographically compact, the estates comprised manors and properties of varying size. Oseney abbey (founded 1129) was one of the more fortunate houses of Austin canons, being one of the wealthiest after Cirencester and Leicester abbeys, but its estates, as well as including larger (for example, Mixbury and Hook Norton) and moderate demesnes (such as Cowley), consisted in many villis of holdings equivalent only to those of other free tenants, and included a large number of glebe-demesnes based on appropriated rectories. Another house of Austin canons, Bicester priory, was much less fortunate; although it held Kirtlington (6 virgates) as well as Wretchwick (10 virgates), Stratton Audley (4½ virgates) and Nether Arncott (4 virgates), the overall size of its estate was small, including such minute 'demesnes' as Caversfield. By contrast, the two demesnes of the bishop of Winchester in the county – Witney and Adderbury – were substantially larger and had vast reserves of customary labour (Table I). Holywell was similar in structure to demesnes of the Austin canons, since it comprised the appropriated rectory of Holy Cross, had minimal resources of customary labour, and was moderate in size.<sup>3</sup> At Holywell, however, investment in the costs of production forged a higher level of productivity and relationship with the market, which became self-sustaining. In this respect, Holywell had singular advantages, located in the eastern suburbs of Oxford,

<sup>3</sup> Some of the evidence for this description is taken from *Rotuli Hundredorum* (Record Commission, 2 vols, 1812-18), ii, 689-877.

close to the largest urban market in the county. Other small and moderate demesnes did not enjoy the same privileged position, since they were not close to large urban markets, although within reasonable distance of local ones. Caversfield, for example, was very close to Bicester, a market centre which survived the extinction of some markets during the later middle ages, and which had some genuinely urban characteristics. Cuxham, by contrast, another manor of Merton College, was some distance from significant market centres (its nearest market being the less important Watlington), but seignorial policy determined that substantial quantities of grain were sent to Henley.<sup>4</sup> Distance to market was thus one of several variables affecting grain production and distribution, but as important was how well placed lords were to respond to those conditions.

The genesis of demesne agriculture in Oxfordshire followed closely the pattern of resumption of demesnes throughout southern England. The Inquest into the Templars' estates in 1185 suggests that parts of the demesnes at Cowley, Merton and Sibford were in lords' hands rather than leased out. The *servitia opera* at Cowley were, by implication, being exacted: at Merton, one of two hides of demesne was being leased to the tenantry, but the other was apparently in hand; although two hides of demesne at Sibford were leased to the tenantry, part may have been in hand. Some demesnes of the Crown may have been in hand in 1193–4, as at Bensington. The demesne of Newington was being directly exploited by Christ Church, Canterbury, by 1207, taken into royal hands during the Interdict so that by 1211 its value had declined through royal depredations. The bishop of Winchester's demesnes were both in direct production by 1208–9, as also were the estates of Eynsham Abbey by 1210–11. When the Crown assumed custody of the manor of Begbroke in 1210–11, 56 cows were sold for 56s. and grain to the value of £11 9s. 0d. and £3 17s. 8d. In 1225, Whitchurch (formerly Berkshire) was also in demesne production, the Crown making substantial sales of grain as also from Burford and Shipton shortly afterwards. By the early 13th century, most major demesnes had thus been resumed in hand for direct exploitation rather than being leased to *fīrmanī*. Nevertheless, little is known about the policy of the new religious houses of the 12th century. The Templars had acquired Cowley in 1139 and Merton in 1152x53 and they may have farmed part of these demesnes themselves through the 12th century. The Austin canons must have received their lands in the county in the mid and late 12th century in a particular condition which determined their policy. On their glebe-demesnes, however, they may have conducted demesne agriculture from the time of acquisition.<sup>5</sup>

By the late 13th century, most large seignorial estates in the county disposed of their surplus product in the market. Sales of grain from the demesnes of the earl of Cornwall at Watlington in 1296–7 and Ambrosden in 1278–9 brought receipts of about £31 in both cases. Sales from the royal demesne at Hanborough produced from £13 to £17 between 1281 and 1284. At Heyford, in 1291–2, over £40 was received from such sales. After the abbot of Westminster no longer used Islip as a residence, sales from this manor attained very high levels: between 1285

<sup>4</sup> P.D.A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village: Cuxham 1240–1400* (1965); idem, *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire, circa 1200–1359* (HMC, JP 23, 1976). For markets in the county, see D. Postles, 'Markets for Rural Produce in Oxfordshire, 1086–1350', *Midland History*, xii (1987), 14–26, to which should be added Hook Norton which received a charter in the 15th century.

<sup>5</sup> B.A. Lees, *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century* (British Academy Rec. of Social and Econ. Hist. 1935), 41, 44–5, 55–6; M.M. Postan, 'The Chronology of Labour Services', in *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Economy* (1973), 98; A.R. Bridbury, 'The Farming Out of Manors', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xxxi (1978), 512–13; A.L. Poole, 'Livestock Prices in the Twelfth Century', *English Hist. Rev.* lv (1940), cited in *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta* (1958), 52; P.M. Barnes and W.R. Powell (eds.), *Interdict Documents* (Pipe Roll Soc. lxxii), 57–8, 85; *Pipe Roll 12 John* (P.R.S., n.s. xxvi), 1; *Pipe Roll 13 John* (P.R.S., n.s. xxviii), 106, 110–11; F.A. Cazel (ed.), *Foreign Accounts, Henry III, 1219–34* (P.R.S., n.s. xlv), 8 and 79; H. Hall (ed.), *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester, 1208–1209* (1903), 16–20, 57–60. See also P.D.A. Harvey, 'The English Inflation of 1180–1220', *Past and Present*, lxi (1973), 4–9; idem, 'The Pipe Rolls and the Adoption of Demesne Farming in England', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xxvii (1974), 345–59.

and 1396 sales of grain there accounted for £13 to £62 per annum (exceeding £30 in 18 years). Sales from the manor of Launton, held by Westminster abbey, varied more modestly between 11s. and £23 between 1267 and 1373, exceeding £15 in 10 years, but this demesne, at 140–182 acres, was only half the size of Islip. The levels of sales of grain from the bishop of Winchester's manors varied between 1208 and 1405, from over £5 to £65 at both Adderbury and Witney (based on 50 sample years, in 13 of which sales exceeded £40). Similarly, high receipts were received from sales of grain from the two manors of Merton College at Holywell and Cuxham, although the level of sales is complicated by 'sales' to the college itself (*in Aula venditi* or 'sold' to a *magister* of the College), as specifically in 1299–1301 at Holywell, but this grain may have been re-sold in the borough.<sup>6</sup> Receipts from sales at Holywell often exceeded £30: in 1304–5 and 1347–8 they exceeded £48, in 1310–11 £49, and in 1350–1 were almost £48; although they sometimes dropped lower, for example, totalling only £12 15s. 10d. in 1301–2. A general picture thus emerges of some large demesnes, often outliers of great estates (as in the case of the earldom of Cornwall, bishopric of Winchester, and Westminster abbey) disgorging their surplus product onto the local market.<sup>7</sup> (See Tables II–III).

TABLE II: GRAIN USE ON SOME MANORS OF THE EARL OF CORNWALL (TO NEAREST BUSHEL)

Manor/date/grain	Net issue		Sown		Sold	
	qr	bu	qr	bu	qr	bu
<i>AMBROSDEN 1277–8</i>						
wheat	100	2	20	0	80	2
barley	34	0	12	2	21	6
oats	81	2	42	0	38	7
beans	4	0	4	0		
<i>ARDLINGTON 1278–9</i>						
wheat	96	6	24	0	73	2
rye	46	4	6	1	22	0
barley	101	5	24	4	71	6
oats	100	2	26	4	73	6
<i>WATTLINGTON 1296–7</i>						
wheat	100	2	18	1	88	3
mixtil	40	3	8	4		
barley	40	2	8	5	31	6
dredge	25	5	6	4	19	1
oats	70	2	27	7	2	1

<sup>6</sup> See also T.H. Aston, 'The External Administration and Resources of Merton College to c. 1348', in J.I. Catto (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 1, *The Early Oxford Schools* (1984), 311–68.

<sup>7</sup> The evidence of this and subsequent sections is derived from: L.M. Midgley (ed.), *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall, 1296–1297*, i (Camden 3rd ser. lxvi), 85; P.R.O., SC6/955/2, 22–24; P.R.O., SC6/957/11–16, 28–29; P.R.O., SC6/959/1; B.F. Harvey, 'The History of the Manor of Islip', unpub. B.Litt. thesis, Oxford (Bodl. MS. B.Litt. d 53); Westminster Abbey Muniments 15286–15375 (Launton); Miss Harvey kindly allowed me to consult her notes on the Islip and Launton accounts and I am grateful to her too for allowing me to cite her thesis; P. Hyde, 'The Winchester Manors at Witney and Adderbury, Oxfordshire, in the Later Middle Ages', unpub. B.Litt. thesis, Oxford (Bodl. MS. B.Litt. d 473); Hampshire Record Office, Eccles 2/159271–159312 (I have consulted all the original accounts for these two manors of the bishopric of Winchester, but I am grateful to Ms. Hyde for allowing me to cite her thesis); P.D.A. Harvey, op. cit. note 4; Merton College, Oxford, MM 4466–4507 (I am grateful to John Burgass of Merton College for many kindnesses and to the Warden and Fellows for allowing me to cite their MSS.). See D. Postles, 'Some Grain Issues from Oseney Abbey', *Oxoniensia*, xlv (1979), 30–7, to which is added here further evidence from Bodl. MSS. d.d. Christ Church, Oseney Rolls 96 (Kidlington), 100–116 (Little Tew) and 119 (Waterperry). For Holywell, see also D. Postles, 'The Perception of Profit before the Leasing of Demesnes', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* xxxiv (1986), 12–28.

TABLE III: WITNEY AND ADDERBURY: SALES OF GRAIN 'IN GROSSO'

*1219-20 Witney:*

Wheat: Idem reddit compotum de lxxvij quarteriis ij bussellis frumenti emptis quia totum frumentum manerii venditum fuit in grosso.

Barley: Idem reddit compotum de lxxv quarteriis dimidio de exitu ordeï quia residuum uenditum fuit in grosso.

Oats: Idem reddit compotum de Cxlvj quarteriis j bussello de exitu auene quia residuum uenditum fuit in grosso.

*1231-2 Adderbury:*

Mancorn: quia residuum fuit venditum in grosso.

*1256-7 Adderbury:*

£28 de una meya frumenti et de j meya siliginis venditis in grosso; totum residuum frumenti venditum in grosso.

*1267-8 Witney:*

70 qtrs. wheat sold in grosso £9 6s. 8d.

20 qtrs. barley " " £2 3s. 4d.

25 qtrs. dredge " " £1 17s. 6d.

70 qtrs. oats " " £4 13s. 4d.

*1267-8 Adderbury:*

24 qtrs. wheat sold in grosso £3 12s. 0d.

76 qtrs. rye " " £7 12s. 0d.

77 qtrs. dredge " " £7 1s. 2d.

16 qtrs. oats " " £1 1s. 4d.

2 qtrs. peas " " 3s. 0d.

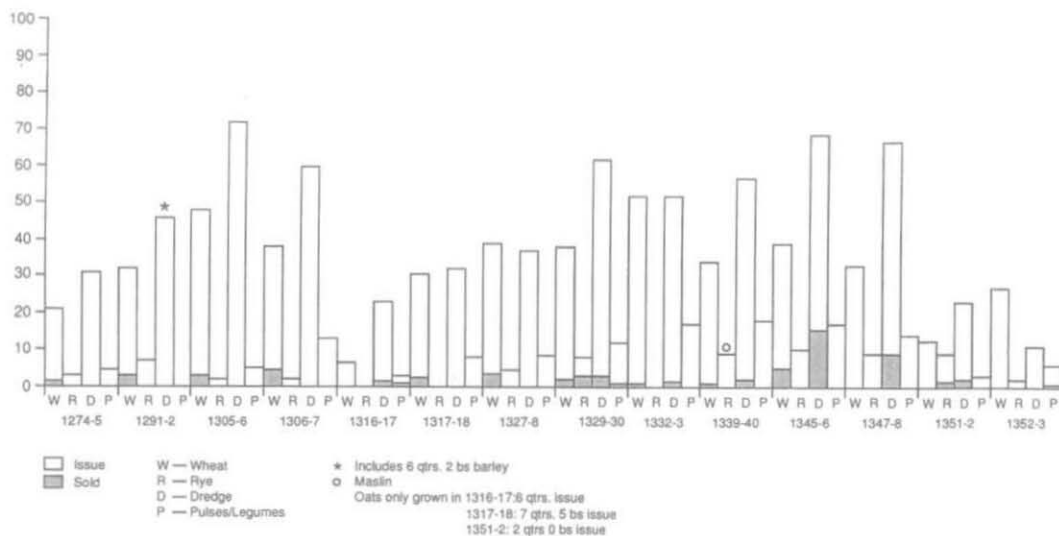
On the bishop of Winchester's manors, these extensive sales encompassed even oats, which were not often a surplus product from estates. Holywell, for example, produced hardly any oats and was a constant purchaser of its needs in the market. On the Oseney abbey estates, oats were replaced by dredge and legumes as livestock feed. Oats were correspondingly sown at the higher rates of 5 and 6 bushels per acre at Adderbury and Witney from c. 1278-82, whereas on other Oxfordshire demesnes they were sown at only 4 bushels per acre. The surplus product of the Winchester manors is further reflected in the large sales of grain *in grosso* in some productive years (Table III), often sold before precise measurement of the quantity. Equally, in some years, substantial amounts lay unthreshed in the Winchester granges.

By contrast, the proportion of grain sold from many small demesnes was insignificant and production barely met consumption: £2 5s. 0d. to £4 15s. 4d. at Forest Hill; 13s. 4d. to £8 16s. 6d. at Waterperry, but in most years less than £3; 9s. 8d. to £3 8s. 0d. at Little Tew, but mostly less than £1. Moreover, in many years a considerable part of sales was necessary to acquit wages or expenses. For example, grain was sold to pay the archdeacon's procuration; to buy oxen; for small outgoing; or, as at Little Tew, to buy a new cart.<sup>8</sup> Sales from Kidlington reached £8 12s. 5d. in 1324-5, but the receipts were almost entirely needed to defray the vicar's stipend, undertake repairs and the costs of harvest. In some accounts, the sales may indeed have been fictitious, in the sense that wages may actually have been paid in kind and entered as a technical sale. This device was used especially for

<sup>8</sup> References as note 7. For example: *in campo per estimacionem pro stipendiis famulorum; unde v quarteria vi busselli pec noui grani assignati in campo pro stipendiis famulorum* (both Ch. Ch., Oseney Roll 119); *Idem respondet de xvj.s. de ij. quarteriis frumenti venditis in parte sallarii sui; Et de xij.s. vij.d. de uno quarterio ij. bussellis frumenti eidem in parte stipendii sui . . . ; Et de ij. quarteriis dimidio fabarum venditis pro columbario et pro aliis negociis faciendis; Et de xxxv.s. receptis de vij. quarteriis Brasei de molendino venditis pro gurgile faciendo; Et de xv.s. de ij. quarteriis dimidio duri bladi venditis pro Autumpno* (all Oseney Roll 96).



## Grain issues and sale at Little Tew (Oseney Abbey)



the payment of the wages of the *famuli* when cash was short, when the sale was qualified as made in the fields for the wages of the *famuli* by estimation in sheaves, as at Waterperry in 1342-3.<sup>9</sup> In 1325-6, the total receipt from the sale of grain at Little Tew was only 15s. 7d. and was used entirely for paying the wages of the smith.<sup>10</sup> Receipts from sales of grain from many of the small properties of Bicester priory were similarly negligible: 16s. 9d. to £2 1s. 1d. at Caversfield and Clifton.<sup>11</sup> Most of the produce was thus consumed in seed, manorial expenses or provisioning the conventual household.

The vast differences in the proportions of grain sold from demesnes of various type are illustrated by the figures which compare Little Tew, Adderbury and Holywell. At Little Tew, representative of the smaller demesnes of Oseney Abbey, only a very small proportion of the issue was sold, by contrast with the much greater level at Adderbury, as well as from the other Winchester manor, Witney. The proportion of grain sold from Caversfield (as on many manors of Bicester priory) was minute and sales occurred only infrequently (Table IV). The proportion of barley sold from Holywell after 1300, however, was comparable with sales from Adderbury.

On the smaller demesnes, the low level of sales was determined by and in return determined the use of labour as a cost of production, since cash was severely limited and there were few or no labour services. Inadequate amounts of wage labour were contracted because of the deficit of cash with the result that costs had to be defrayed in kind — in grain. Reaping at Forest Hill and Waterperry was undertaken for the seventeenth and twentieth sheaf in the late 13th and early 14th century.<sup>12</sup> Weeding on the demesnes of Oseney abbey

<sup>9</sup> Ch. Ch., Oseney Roll 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ch. Ch., Oseney Rolls 100-16.

<sup>11</sup> P.R.O., SC6/957/11-16 (see also Table IV).

<sup>12</sup> Ch. Ch., Oseney Rolls 20, 47, 51, 53, 57-59, 117, 119. For example, *In met' diuersorum bladum nichil in denariis hic quia omnia blada met' ad xx<sup>am</sup> garbam.*



TABLE IV: GRAIN USE ON SOME PROPERTIES OF BICESTER PRIORY (TO THE NEAREST BUSHEL)

Manor/date/grain	Net issue		Sown		Sold		To Bicester	
	<i>qr</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>qr</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>qr</i>	<i>bu</i>	<i>qr</i>	<i>bu</i>
<i>KIRTLINGTON</i>								
<i>1291-2:</i>								
wheat	37	7	11	4	3	4		
barley	10	1	2	1				
dredge	48	4	18	5		4		
peas	1	4						
<i>STRATTON AUDLEY</i>								
<i>1292-3:</i>								
wheat	56	4	16	1		4	26	4
rye	14	7	1	1				
beans/peas	34	6	5	4	1	4		
dredge/barley	144	1	15	0	11	6	92	4
oats	18	0	18	4	1	0		
<i>1321-2 [mainly illegible]:</i>								
dredge	93	3*	13	5			56	0
oats	13	0*	7	7				
<i>CAVERSFIELD</i>								
<i>1276-7:</i>								
wheat	20	2	10	4	2	0	19	7
barley	29	0	8	1	1	4	9	0
dredge	51	3	21	3			15	2
<i>1278-9:</i>								
wheat	28	3	10	3			17	5
barley	31	7	5	5			25	0
dredge	53	3	22	0			31	1
<i>1286-7:</i>								
wheat	46	0	19	2	4	0	13	0
barley	18	4	8	0	2	2		
dredge	83	6	37	2	8	0	34	0
beans/vetch	4	2		6				
oats	15	4	12	6				
<i>1309-10:</i>								
wheat	28	5	9	7			12	5
barley	20	1	8	3			7	0
dredge	51	5	20	1			31	0
<i>1315-16:</i>								
wheat	27	1†						
curall	9	5†						
dredge	72	1†						
<i>CLIFTON</i>								
<i>1293-4:</i>								
wheat	36	6	20	1	1	2	21	0
rye	12	2	3	0				
beans/peas	22	2	5	6	5	6	3	6
dredge	67	2	17	2	3	1	46	0
oats	20	3	19	3			4	3
<i>1323-4:</i>								
wheat	748	0	15	1			43	4
rye	6	6	2	0				
peas	29	0	8	5				
dredge	99	2	21	4			76	3
oats	14	1	6	7			3	0

\* gross issue

† figures taken from winnowing

Net issue is demesne issue excluding intermanorial receipts

TABLE V: PAYMENTS IN KIND FOR THRESHING: OSENEY ABBEY

Property/Date	Grain	Amount threshed <i>ad tascham</i>		Amount to threshers		Rate <sup>a</sup>
		<i>qr.</i>	<i>bu.</i>	<i>qr.</i>	<i>bu.</i>	
Hampton Gay <sup>b</sup> 1274-5	wheat <sup>c</sup>	91	4	3	2	1/28
	rye <sup>d</sup>	141	7	5	0½	1/28
	white peas	20	6	14	4	possibly compensation for other grain
	beans & peas	38	5	28	1	
Kidlington <sup>e</sup> 1324-5	wheat	86	3½	2	5¼ <sup>f</sup>	1/32
	mixtil	8	4		28 <sup>g</sup>	1/34
	beans & peas	68	3	1	6 <sup>h</sup>	1/39
	barley & dredge	159	7½	4	7½ <sup>i</sup>	1/30
Little Tew <sup>j</sup> 1347-8	wheat	32	6½	1	1 <sup>k</sup>	1/29
	rye	8	0		3	1/21
	dredge	65	7	2	2	1/29
	peas	13	4		3	1/36

<sup>a</sup> Calculated by author.

<sup>b</sup> Bodl. MS. d.d. Ch. Ch. Oseney Roll 9.

<sup>c</sup> *Et trituratoribus pro trituratione iij<sup>xx</sup> quar dim ut supra iij<sup>xx</sup> quar ij bus cap<sup>o</sup> j bus pro trituratione iij<sup>xx</sup> quar dim.*

<sup>d</sup> *Et trituratoribus pro trituratione Cxlj<sup>xx</sup> quar vij bus v quar dim bus cap<sup>o</sup> ut supra.*

<sup>e</sup> Bodl. MS. d.d. Ch. Ch. Oseney Roll 96.

<sup>f</sup> *Item liberati trituratoribus pro iij<sup>xx</sup> quar iij bus dim tritrandis ij quar v bus dim. videlicet pro singulis iij<sup>xx</sup> quar j bus.*

<sup>g</sup> *Item liberati trituratoribus pro vij<sup>xx</sup> quar dim tritrandis ij bus.*

<sup>h</sup> *Item liberati trituratoribus pro lxxij<sup>xx</sup> quar iij bus tritrandis j quar vij bus.*

<sup>i</sup> *Item liberati trituratoribus pro CLix<sup>xx</sup> quar iij bus dim et pec tritrandis iij<sup>xx</sup> quar vij bus dim et pec.*

<sup>j</sup> Bodl. MS. d.d. Ch. Ch. Oseney Roll 113.

<sup>k</sup> *Et dati pro trituratione...*

and Bicester priory was performed by wage labour, but at inadequate levels, so that at Caversfield only 4*d.* to 11*d.* was expended each year and at Little Tew only 4*d.* to 14*d.* At the latter, from 1350-2, weeding consisted of only 22 to 27 dayworks, whilst at Hampton Gay in 1274-5 no weeding was performed other than implicitly by the small number of *famuli*.<sup>13</sup> On the Oseney manors threshing too was remunerated in kind for a proportion of the grain threshed.<sup>14</sup> Inadequate levels of labour resulted from the deficit of cash, which also led to grain being consumed in payments in kind; the overall result was that labour input was low and probably inadequate given even the smallness of the demesnes.

On most of the larger demenses, by contrast, there were large resources of customary labour services. At both Watlington (earl of Cornwall) and Cuxham (Merton College) customary services accounted for the principal work, supplemented by some wage labour. In the same way, the abbot of Westminster relied heavily on customary services before the Black Death: 'Casual labour, whether at piece or day rates, was rarely hired and was employed only for reaping, for driving cattle, and for threshing'.<sup>15</sup> The episcopal manors were oversubscribed with services, many, especially harvesting, services being sold annually, although the major tasks were still performed by customary labour. Both manors were

<sup>13</sup> For example, Ch. Ch., Oseney Roll 93: *Sarclacio. Memorandum quod in sarclacione bladurum nichil computat hoc anno.*

<sup>14</sup> *bladum... tritratum ad tascham pro blado* as well as *pro denariis* (see Table V).

<sup>15</sup> B.F. Harvey, op. cit. note 7.

exceptionally endowed with labour services, reflected in an injunction of 1223–4 that at Adderbury all reaping be performed by boonworks, which the subsequent accounts confirmed.<sup>16</sup> Later, however, weeding was performed by wage labour and threshing undertaken *ad tascham* as well as by customary services.

The provision of labour on these different demesnes thus varied considerably. Whereas on large demesnes the *famuli* provided no more than a small core of labour whilst substantial amounts of customary labour performed most of the tasks, especially boonworks and the less specialized tasks,<sup>17</sup> the work of the *famuli* was much more important on the smaller demesnes even though their numbers on these small demesnes were inordinately low. Unfortunately the accounts of both large and small demesnes do not reveal precisely how the *famuli* were used other than for their specialized tasks. It is thus impossible to consider exactly how much weeding, for example, may have been undertaken by them. Moreover, the accounts for the small demesnes remained rather rudimentary, without the finer detail which was introduced into the Winchester accounts. This brevity makes it impossible to assess the relative contributions of *famuli* and wage labour to the unspecialized tasks of husbandry. The position at Holywell was completely different, for, although this manor also lacked the reserves of customary labour, large amounts of wage labour were purchased with cash for more intensive husbandry.

On the smaller demesnes, the level of investment was thus extremely low, exemplified by the failure to undertake any maintenance or improvement of buildings at Caversfield in 1278–9.<sup>18</sup> On the larger demesnes, the opportunity existed to increase the intensiveness of agrarian practices through the purchase of more wage labour to complement customary services, but it was spurned by a seignorial attitude content to accept and not enhance a continuously recurring surplus product.

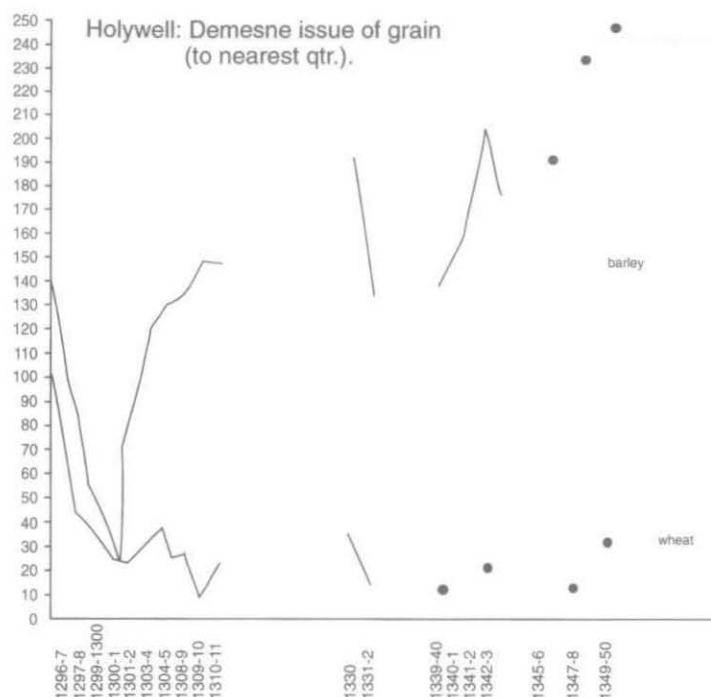
The management of the demesne at Holywell contrasted with all these others. In the late 13th century, more intensive husbandry was introduced, increasing the surplus available for sale. When the accounts begin c. 1296, the management of the demesne seems to have been in some difficulty. Merton College began to invest heavily in labour about that time, but production was still sluggish until c. 1300. Thereafter production increased dramatically allowing large sales of grain, which, in turn, allowed more investment. The large quantity of wage labour employed seems to have been casual labour from within the borough of Oxford, epitomised by the costs of reaping: in 1299–1300, 62 reapers were hired *infra iij dies*, 356 *infra xj dies* and 184 *infra vij dies*; in 1300–1, 309 *infra xx dies*, 250 *infra vij dies* and 61 each for half a day; in 1301–2 660 *infra vij septimanas* and 102 *infra iij dimidias dies*; in 1337–8 170 for one day, 120 for one day, 151 for one day, 151 for half a day, 74 for one day, 21 for one day and 19 for one day.

Such numbers are representative of the quantities of wage labour contracted for reaping at Holywell in most years of the early 14th century. Despite increasing rates of pay, the college continued to invest heavily in wage labour, having no other resources. In the late 13th century, reapers were paid at 2d. to 2½d. per day, which increased to 2½d. to 3d. by the late 1330s. In c. 1338, remuneration was altered to piece-rates, at variously 6d., 7d., or 8d. per acre, according to the type of grain. From 1340–2, all grain was reaped at 6d. per acre,

<sup>16</sup> *Decetero non fuerint precaria in autumpno ad custum domini set totum metatur per consuetudines operariorum* (Hants. R.O., Eccles 2/159278).

<sup>17</sup> M. Mate, 'Labour and Labour Services on the Estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the Fourteenth Century', *Southern Hist.* vii (1985), 55–68; see also M.M. Postan, 'The Famulus', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* Supplement ii [n.d.]

<sup>18</sup> P.R.O., SC6/957/12: *Custus domorum nichil hoc anno*.



but the rate increased to 8*d.* in 1345-6. In 1349-50, however, there was a reversal to costing wage labour by the day-rate at 5*d.* per day. By 1349-50, the total cost of harvesting had increased to over £11 by comparison with £5 to £10 at the opening of the century and £7 to £9 in the 1330s and 1340s.

Weeding is a potential indicator of intensive labour.<sup>19</sup> At Holywell, all weeding was performed by wage labour, the annual commitment ranging from 2*s.* 9*d.* to 16*s.* 5¼*d.* The greatest level of input was in 1295-6 when the demesne was being restored to high productivity. In that year, 186 women-days were employed in weeding the demesne, at a cost of three-farthings each per day. In subsequent years the level varied: in 1310-11, 99 man-days were invested at a cost of over 7*s.* and 86 man-days in *c.* 1335 for 7*s.* 2*d.* Throughout the early 14th century, the cost of weeding rarely fell below 4*s.*, but the cost per man-day increased to 1*d.* after 1310. By 1349-51, the total cost of weeding had increased to between 14*s.* 2*d.* and 16*s.* 5*d.* but the day-rate commensurately to 2*d.* to 2¼*d.*

Similarly all threshing at Holywell involved wage labour at the rate of 2*d.* per quarter of winter grain (wheat and rye) and 1½*d.* per qtr. of barley in the 1330s and 1340s, which rose to 4*d.* for wheat, 3½*d.* for rye, and at least 2*d.* for barley in 1349-50. Winnowing, also performed by wage labour, rose from 1*d.* for 4 qtrs. to 1*d.* for 3 qtrs.

Large expenditure was also incurred for mowing at Holywell. In the formative year, 1296-7, mowing cost £2 8*s.* 1*d.* Large numbers of labourers subsequently received casual employment in the valuable meadows of the Cherwell: in 1300-1, 97 men were contracted

<sup>19</sup> W.H. Long, 'The Low Yields of Corn in Medieval England', *Econ. Hist. Rev.* 2nd ser. xxxii (1979), 459-69; D. Postles, 'Cleaning the medieval arable', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* xxxvii (1989), 130-43.

*infra ix dies*, 32 *infra iiii dies*, and 11 men for one day, mowing and stacking hay. In the following year 71 men mowed *infra ix dies* and 62 *infra xj dies*. Similar numbers were employed throughout the early 14th century at 1d. per day, replaced by a piece-rate of 3d. per acre from 1339–40. From 1345–8, summer meadow (*pratum estiuale*) was assessed at the higher rate of 3½d. as against the lower rate for rewarin. As labour became scarcer in 1349–50, so there was a return to day-rates, but now at the very much higher level of 8d. per day for both rewarin and summer meadow, which increased yet again in 1350–1 to 1s.

These details reveal the college's willingness to commit cash to wage labour to perform the tasks of production at Holywell, although, since it had no customary labour, some level of expenditure in wages would have been inevitable. More indicative of the college's investment was its assiduous commitment to improvement. Capital investment was periodic but heavy when necessary. In 1296, the seminal year, a new grange was completed at a cost of more than £20, followed by the construction of another grange in 1309–10 for more than £6. Although the demesne had no flock of sheep, manure was applied intensively, constantly at a high level after 1297. In the early 14th century this manuring involved the purchase of muck – possibly nightsoil and rubbish from the borough of Oxford – and the cost of carting and storage, as well as labour for spreading.<sup>20</sup> Marl was also frequently sought for improvement.

The college was able to sustain these high costs from income derived from directing grain to the urban market, but also facilitated, initially, by the wider resources available to it from its other manors. In 1296, the demesne issues comprised high quantities of both wheat and barley. From 1300, however, production was concentrated on barley. After a hiccup in 1296–1300, the sale of barley comprised continuously 65% to 90% of the total issue, designed presumably for the urban market in Oxford, a pattern replicated in the brokerage books of Southampton, in which malt comprised about 80% of the grain imported into the town by cart.<sup>21</sup> By concentrating on the production of a cash crop for the adjacent urban market, the college was able to develop a virtuous cycle.

This cycle of affluence was, nevertheless, achieved without intensive sowing. Sowing rates in 1336–7, when the size of the demesne sown was first recorded, were similar to those on the college's other manor at Cuxham and were rather conventional; they were no more intensive than those on the Winchester demesnes. At Holywell, wheat was sown at 2 to 2.5 bushels per acre and barley at 3.5 to 4 bushels, comparable, for example, with the rates at Islip in the 1350s where wheat was sown at 3 bushels and barley, dredge and oats at 4 bushels. Admittedly, rates on some manors in Oxfordshire in the late 13th century had been much lower: at Checkendon in 1272–81 and especially at Watlington in 1296–7, where wheat was sown at only 1.85 bushels, maslin at 1.7, barley at 2.2, dredge at 2.7 and oats at 2.5. By most yardsticks, however, the rates at Holywell were conventional. Nor were seed-yield ratios from Holywell any higher on average than issues from other Oxfordshire demesnes, although Oseney abbey seems to have become accustomed to threefold yields on its small demesnes, perhaps expecting no more than this target (*responsio*) from its manorial officials (Table VI). The important difference thus seems to have been the relationship of Holywell to the market and some investment in labour resources, but not any great movement into radically improved husbandry.

By contrast, small demesnes, such as some of those of Oseney abbey and Bicester priory, became locked in a cycle of deprivation, unable to increase labour inputs and thus unable to

<sup>20</sup> The actual entries for manuring are cited in Postles, *op. cit.* note 19. For the implication of carting out of the borough: *Et de vij.s. v.d. receptis de diuersis hominibus ville Oxon' pro carectis domini eis locatis ad finum carandum extra villam*. The rate for daywork for spreading muck was 2½d. in 1339–40, 3d. in 1349–50 and 3¼d. in 1350–1.

<sup>21</sup> O. Coleman, *Southampton Brokerage Book 1443–1444* (2 vols, Southampton Rec. Soc. iv and vi), *passim*.

increase production for the market. The largest demesnes were, conversely, possibly ensnared in complacency because of a naturally recurring surplus product. The productivity of Oxfordshire demesnes was thus influenced by a complex interaction of variables, particularly the size and structure of the demesnes, but also the proximity to markets. The small demesnes, partly because they were close to lesser markets, but mainly because of their lack of cash, were never in a position to invest heavily in production. Holywell was fortuitously placed adjacent to a large urban market and had the wider resources of Merton College to enable the critical input of resources in 1296 which generated a sustained productivity. Agriculture in Oxfordshire remained, nevertheless, in a conventional framework. The improvements introduced in some regions of eastern England in response to a demand-led economy were not emulated in Oxfordshire, not even on the largest demesnes nor on those medium-sized demesnes like Holywell where movement was made towards satisfying the demands of an urban market.

TABLE VI. SEED-YIELD RATIOS

*A: Calculated by auditors*

Date	Manor	wheat	rye	barley	dredge	legumes	oats
1265-6	Adderbury	4+	6+		6.5+		5+
1265-6	Witney	2.5-		3-	3-		2+
1282-3	Hanborough	2+		6-	3	3	
1283-4	Hanborough	2.5+					
1309-10	Combe	2		2+	2+	2+	2-
1336-7	Waterperry	3		5	2	8	3
1337-8	Waterperry	4		3		5	3
1339-40	Waterperry	1		3	1	4	1
1339-40	Little Tew	2-	4+		2+	2.5-	
1340-1	Little Tew	5				3	1
1342-3	Waterperry	5-		3+		3+	
1344-5	Waterperry	4			5	5	5
1345-6	Little Tew	3+	3+		3+	3+	
1347-8	Little Tew	3-	3-		3+	4-	
1352-3	Little Tew	3-	3		1	3-	
1356-7	Hampton Gay*	1+			4-	2	2

\*cum decima

*B: Seed-yield ratios for Holywell: calculated by the writer*

Year	wheat	rye	barley	beans	oats	vetch
1301-2	2.44		3.7	1.7	1.99	4
1310-11	3.02	4.08	4.03			1.25
1337-8		8.75	3.91			
1340-1			4.41			
1341-2			6.05			
1350-1	4.91	7.04	1.82			

[For Adderbury, Witney and Cuxham, see C.C. Dyer, 'Farming Techniques: The West Midlands', in H.E. Hallam (ed.), *Agrarian History of England and Wales* (1988), 382.]