

A FELDON MANOR IN 1327

Sutton-under-Brailes lies on the River Stour, some five miles upstream from Shipston. From the reign of Edward the Confessor to the Reformation, the entire village was in the hands of Westminster Abbey,¹ and, at least in the 13th and 14th centuries, assigned to the maintenance of the Abbot and his household. Although now in the County of Warwick, until 1844, it lay in a detached portion of the Gloucestershire Hundred of Westminster.

The long series of reeve's account rolls - the earliest is for 1281 - which is deposited in the Gloucestershire Records Office probably contains the material for a detailed study of the village's economic development in the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries. However this paper is intended merely to illustrate a few aspects of the manor's life at one date.

The date chosen is 1327 as an extent was drawn up in the May of that year.² On the basis of its assertion that it agrees with an extent of 1282 except for the change of rents and tenants, there appears to have been no tenant asserting nor subdivision of tenements between the two dates, but if anything some consolidation. Although an expanding structure of subtenants may be hidden from view,³ it may be that Sutton, in common with many of the Feldon vills recorded in the Warwickshire Hundred Rolls of 1279, had reached a maximum population by the second half of the 13th century, from which there was decline through emigration.⁴ The suggestion gains support from the fact that two cottage tenements remained vacant throughout 1325-6. (As the reeve's accounts for 1326-8 are missing, that for 1325-6 has been used to supplement the extent.)

The 41 tenants of the extent comprise six free tenants, 10 customary tenants and virgaters, and 26 cottagers, with one person figuring in two groups; all but one held messuages in addition to arable: Richard le Holder had only a cottage. No tenement was of outstanding size; the largest was Roger Basset's two virgates, but nine other tenants held at least a virgate each. The majority - 24 - held 14 or 16 acres or half a virgate (which we may surmise were roughly equivalent). Five of the remaining tenants held four acres each, and the rest even less. The Subsidy Roll for 1327⁵ indicates who were the most prosperous tenants; evidently the majority escaped assessment as their moveable property was valued at less than ten shillings, but twelve did not. Among them were all but one of the free tenants (Thomas Barnard held only one acre in Sutton), assessed at an average of 3s. $\frac{2}{4}$ d., but the largest contributions came from the four virgaters who were assessed - at 8s. 7d., 7s. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ d., 4s. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., and 3s. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., on average 6s. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.; three cotmen were liable for 2s., 1s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d., and 1s. 6d. Thus the possession of goods which brought liability for the subsidy does not correlate closely either with legal status or with size of tenement.

The total of the tenements is $13\frac{1}{2}$ virgates and 321 acres, which, assuming an 'average west midland virgate' of 28 acres, is equivalent to some 700 acres. The size of the demesne, however, goes unrecorded and may most readily be estimated by taking the sown acreages when the grange accounts first give the density of sowing forty years later: 68 acres in 1378-9 and 43 acres in 1379-80. Two-crop rotation is suggested by the extent's note that a couple of tenements are 'in both fields' (which in turn implies that a 'two-field system' with one field lying fallow each year was not in operation at this date), and by 1378 rent was being paid over and above the 'customary rent' for 22 acres of demesne. On these figures the demesne arable may have been 133 acres in 1327; its leasing did not begin after that date as the extent shows 48 acres of the tenanted land to have been in demesne in 1282. Maybe this small and diminishing demesne is an indication of falling yields and of declining profits from direct exploitation, for the Abbot's primary interest was in a cash income, itinerant though he was.

Money rent was the main component of the tenants' obligations to their lord, for no week-work was owed and had presumably been commuted for the rent. Unfree tenants paid 6s. for a virgate and 3s. to 3s. 3d. for half a virgate or 14 acres; the cotmen in addition owed 16d. tallage each. The free tenants' rents varied considerably - from Roger Basset's 6s. for a messuage and two virgates to Master Laurance le Walker's 18s. 7d. for a messuage and one virgate; perhaps the latter was a way of exacting or recovering part of the value of tithes paid to the Rector. Laurance (and another free tenant holding a virgate) also owed the same occasional labour services as customary tenants, as presumably their virgates were part of the 'terra nativa'. Those services were a day's harrowing in winter and in Lent if the tenant possessed a horse or plough-beast, a day's weeding and twelve man-days' work at harvest. Cotmen owed the same harrowing and weeding services, but mowed and made hay for as long as there was work in Mitford meadow, and harvested for only four days. Most of the harvest works were without food, but otherwise food, or a cash equivalent, was given for boon works performed. In 1325-6, the 370 works were performed in full, except for, 12 sold, 12 from which the reeve was discharged and eight due from vacant tenements. Nevertheless, the lord's right to pre-empt labour beyond the boons was exercised at Harvest-time, when 14 men reaped for $2\frac{1}{2}$ days at 2d. a day and 28 men carried sheaves for half a day. All threshing was done at piece-rates.

Finally, there was a small permanent labour force to do the ploughing and routine work of the demesne. In 1325-6, a ploughman and two carters received in total 16s. 6d. and 12 quarters of rye, pulse and maslin, while a shepherd was paid at the same rate for about 32 weeks of the year. The house-maid - who no doubt acted as milk-maid - received only 1 qu. $\frac{1}{4}$ bus. of corn. The reeve's remuneration came in a discharge of the rent and harvest works, which he owed as the holder of a virgate.

The demesne economy was emphatically arable. The number of cattle in 1325-6 was limited to eight oxen - the usual size of a single demesne plough-team in the Midlands; a cow received as heriot was sold for 9s. along with a surplus oxen for 15s. 6d. The three horses must have been used for carting; the other livestock were solely farmyard animals - 29 geese, one cock, three hens and ten chickens. Sheep and pigs there were none, though the reeve paid the wages of a shepherd to guard 140 sheep which had been brought from elsewhere to the lord's fold. One wonders whether the folding was deliberately effected to alleviate the inevitable deficiency in manuring. The sole indication of the tenants' livestock is the number of harrowing works, by which reckoning 37 tenants had 28 horses and plough beasts between them. Pasture was evidently in short supply: the considerable sum of 4ls. 9½d. (some sixth of the total agrarian expenditure in that year) was spent on grass for winter fodder. However, the arable specialisation of Sutton must not be viewed in isolation, as the three Westminster manors of Sutton, Todenham and Bourton-on-the-Hill were exploited in close conjunction under one serjeant: this is shown, for instance, by the employment of the mowing and hay-making works of Sutton tenants at Todenham.

Corn yields were noted in the margin of the grange accounts by the auditor in the formula not uncommon at this date:⁶ thus, 'siligo minus tertio j qr. ij bus. di.' means that the threshed rye was 1 qu. 2½ bus. less than three times the amount sown. Yields were good at four-fold for drage, three-and-a-half-fold for wheat, and three-fold for oats, pulse and rye.

A membrane attached to the account roll for 1324-5 reveals the meagre equipage at the disposal of the reeve in cultivating the demesne. The document is an indenture listing the stock which Robert Godwy handed over to his successor on relinquishing the office of reeve in December 1324;⁷ it is probably comprehensive as it includes items such as 'a tattered linen sheet'. Although only one fully-equipped plough could be used (as there was only one team of oxen) and there was a further plough with a coulter, hand tools were limited to two forks, a spade, two shovels and one small shovel. If one cart was iron-fitted, another was dilapidated and used only for clay and the third was a small dung-cart. The rest of the equipment comprised of various chests, barrels, vats, troughs, sacks, five cheese moulds, four picks, a hammer for breaking stone, a mortar and pestle, and like small items, as well as 49 planks from the ceiling of the old solar.

Taking the sub-totals given in the reeve's account, it may be summarised as below. No reason other than faulty arithmetic presents itself to account for the imbalance.

Charge	£	s.	d.	Discharge	£	s.	d.
Rent, tallage & Peter's Pence	14.	6.	5½	Quittances & defects of rent	13.		4
Farm of the garden		5.	0	Upkeep of ploughs	6.		10
Lease of pasture, sale of eggs and stubble		18.	7	" " carts	7.		9¾
Sale of corn	2.	11.	4¼	" " mill			10
Sale of livestock	1.	4.	6	" " house	10.	7.	8
Fines, etc. of courts & views	5.	6.	1	Mowing & hay-making		7.	½
Arrears paid by ex-reeves of Sutton & Todenham	5.	11.	10	Harvest expenses		13.	10
Sale of works			9½	Serjeant's wage	1.	6.	0
Miscellaneous sales	13.		½	Wages of 'famuli'	1.	0.	6
				Threshing expenses		9.	11¼
				Corn purchased			7
				Mare purchased		14.	0
				Misc. repairs, purchases, expenses of visitors	3.	9.	2¾
					19.	10.	6
				Arrears brought forward		1.	10
				Cash surplus handed over	4.	17.	1
					24.	9.	5
				Arrears carried forward	6.	4.	8½
					30.	14.	1½
	30.	19.	5½				

The deliveries of cash would obviously have been much greater if the expenditure on the manor house had not been so high. But this expenditure is the especial interest of the account, as extensive repairs and rebuilding were put in hand in 1325-6. The moated manor house site is still visible today, though there is no indication that the manor was surrounded by a moat in 1326. An outline reconstruction of the building may be attempted. The work carried out seems to fall into three parts: internal fittings in the 'nova domum ad capud stabuli', structural repairs and alterations to the hall, and construction of a new kitchen, pantry and fishery, with chambers over the pantry. In the 'new house' were a cellar with an external entrance (as there was a slated porch) and a locked door (as wine was to be stored); a solar and two privies ('camerae privatae', 'wardrobae': the context of the latter term does not suggest it means wardrobes), which were presumably over the cellar; and a 'mangeria', which, since its screens were plastered, can scarcely have been a manger and must have been either a dining room connected with the solar or the high table end of the hall. The gutters of the hall needed repair and quantities of tin and lead were purchased; the lock to the door was also repaired, but above all, new windows were inserted, made from stone brought in seven carts from 'Middelton' during two days and a night; for this work Richard the Mason was paid £1. 6s. 8d. A chapel is mentioned (a step was made before the altar) with the implication that it was attached

to the hall. For the new service rooms and the chambers above, 200 cartloads of freestone and 8000 slates were quarried locally (the manor partially lies on Middle Lias Marlstone), at a total cost of 12s. 2d. The internal walls between the chambers were of timber, as was the louver in the kitchen. One may surmise that the house's lay-out was on the 'typical' H-plan, with the private and service wings separated by the ground floor hall.⁸ Other buildings which are mentioned are the stables, barn, fulling mill and water mill.

Materials comprised a small part of the total expenditure: the purchase of stone and slate was unnecessary, and the 1325 laths required for the new chambers cost only 9s., while 7000 lathnails cost 5s. 3d. (though board-nails and spikenails were more expensive) and the 5000 pegs for the slates, 5d. The major expense was thus labour. The craftsmen were itinerant and usually ate at the common table; often a woman was paid 2d. a day to wait upon them. The erection of the walls of the service rooms and chambers required about 130 man days at 1½d. a day, with up to five men working at a time. The roof took one slater eleven weeks at 8d. plus one bushel of wheat a week (or 6d. less when he ate at the lord's expense). Other craftsmen - carpenters, plasterers, a leadworker, sawyers - were remunerated at similar rates. Robert, with the payment of £1. 6s. 8d. for the hall windows, was probably in a class by himself.

The manor house was of course not permanently occupied, and if the reconstructed, but fragmentary, itinerary of Abbot Walter de Wenlock in the 1280's and 1290's is any guide,⁹ an occupancy of a month in a year by the abbot and his household would have been average, with intermittent and brief visits from officials during the rest of the year. Hence the contrast between the building account and the inventory of demesne equipment, between 'conspicuous consumption' and 'undercapi talisation' is all the more striking, but nevertheless characteristic of the 14th century.¹⁰

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References

For general background see R. H. Hilton, A Medieval Society (1967)

1. That at least is the assertion of The Victoria County History of Warwickshire, vol. V p.157, but a licence was granted in 1366 to one Richard Rook of Westminster to alienate into mortmain to the abbot and convent of Westminster, two messuages and 192 acres at Sutton (Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward III, vol. 13, p.328).
2. The documents used are: Glos. R.O., D 1099, M 49 (extent of 1327),
M31/41 (account roll for
1324-5),
M31/42 (account roll for
1325-6).

3. The works account for 1325-6 records seven harvest works received from 'subcottars'.
4. vide J. B. Harley: 'Population Trends and Agricultural Developments from the Warwickshire Hundred Rolls of 1279', Economic History Review, second series, xi, 1958-9.
5. Sir Thomas Phillipps, ed., Gloucestershire Subsidy Roll, I Edward III A.D. 1327 (Typis medio-montanis, n.d.).
6. vide, e.g. J.S. Drew: Manorial Accounts of St. Swithun's Priory, Winchester, (English Historical Review, lxii, 1947).
7. Robert Godwy was reeve again in 1325-6 and his successor of 1324, John le Brok was paying over substantial arrears: maybe John was not a success as reeve and was soon replaced.
8. On house plans, see M. Wood: The English Medieval House (1965).
9. B. F. Harvey, ed. Documents illustrating the rule of Walter de Wenlock, Abbot of Westminster, 1283-1307, (Camden Society, 1965), pp. 34-42.
10. For a study of the scale of agrarian capital investment in the middle ages, see R. H. Hilton: Rent and Capital Formation in Feudal Society, (Second International Conference of Economic History, 1962).