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RECESSION AND RECOVERY:

THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF RURAL SOCIETY IN DURHAM, c.1400-1640

ALEXANDER THOMAS BROWN

Doctoral Thesis

Department of History

Durham University

2012

RECESSION AND RECOVERY: THE ECONOMIC HISTORY OF RURAL SOCIETY IN DURHAM, c.1400-1640

A. T. Brown

Abstract

This thesis explores how rural society adapted to the fifteenth-century recession, and how this affected the ability of their sixteenth-century counterparts to respond to inflation. It does so through three primary sections: the first explores how the Bishops of Durham and the monks of Durham Cathedral Priory responded differently to the fifteenth-century recession and analyses the subsequently divergent development of their estates. By the seventeenth century, all of the Dean and Chapter's lands were consolidated holdings on 21-year leases, whereas a confused mixture of copyhold and leasehold land had developed on the bishops' estate. The second section explores the balance of landed power in the Palatinate of Durham from the late-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century amongst the laity. This further explores whether the 'crisis of the aristocracy' and the 'rise of the gentry' are misnomers more adequately phrased in terms of land usage as the 'rise of agricultural producers' and the 'crisis of rentier landlords'. The final section explores how the tenantry of the above estates survived this period, with the gradual stratification of landed society and the emergence of the yeomanry as a social group. It especially focuses upon how the divergent development of the two ecclesiastical estates impacted upon the opportunities and challenges facing the tenants of Durham. The overall conclusion reached by this thesis is that estate management and institutional constraints were often crucial factors in the transformation of the English countryside: these two neighbouring ecclesiastical estates faced broadly the same problems and yet the composition of their estates diverged significantly across this period. Institutional constraints had a profound effect not only on levels of rent, but also the tenure of holdings and ultimately their relative size; three of the most important factors in the formation of agrarian capitalism.

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List of Abbreviations

Agricultural History Review	*AgHR*
The Agrarian History of England and Wales	*AHEW*
The American Historical Review	*AHR*
Archaeologia Aeliana	*AA*
Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research	*BIHR*
Economic History Review	*EcHR*
Journal of Economic History	*JEcH*
Journal of Medieval History	*JMH*
Midland History	*MH*
Northern History	*NH*
Past and Present	*P&P*
Durham Cathedral Muniments	*DCD/DCM*
Church Commission Deposit of Durham Bishopric	*CCB*

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Alan and Sue Brown, and my sister, Gemma Simpson; without whose constant support and encouragement this thesis would never have reached fruition.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Problems of Periodization

There is a vast divide in the historiography of this period between medieval and early modern specialisms which has centred around 1540. Although this division has been widely recognised for decades, and often disparaged, it has persisted with extraordinary tenacity, not only in the historiography, but also in research projects and undergraduate courses across England. Margaret Yates aptly summarised this division as:

> 'A historical fault line of seismic proportions [which] lies at the end of the fifteenth century. It has been re-enforced by the institutional and academic divisions within the discipline into 'periods' of history as medieval, early modern, and modern, which have led to segregation into specialisms and a fragmentation of research into chronologically discrete agendas.'[1]

The current thesis attempts to bridge this gulf between specialisms, and argues that this division is particularly detrimental for our understanding of such a key transitional period because many of the challenges and opportunities of the sixteenth century had their origin in the fourteenth century, whilst many of the seeds of change planted in the earlier period do not reach fruition until the late-sixteenth century.

Richard Britnell argued in his book concerning the closing of the Middle Ages that:

> 'The period 1471-1529 is often seen as an epilogue to the Middle Ages, or a prologue to the Early Modern period, for reasons that have more to do with the way in which historians specialise than with any intrinsic characteristics of these particular years. Fortunately the point is now sufficiently widely recognised not to need labouring, but there remains a special duty on a book that aims to introduce the period not to treat it in terms of the problems of another age.'[2]

[1] Margaret Yates, *Town and Countryside in Western Berkshire, c.1327-c.1600: Social and Economic Change* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 1.
[2] Richard Britnell, *The Closing of the Middle Ages?: England, 1471-1529* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 1.

Perhaps the point is widely acknowledged, but it has yet to produce a sufficient shift in study for it to be too readily ignored. This conceptual division is more problematic than simply creating an inability to trace developments across the two centuries, but has directly affected our interpretations of this period. For example, Nigel Saul wrote of how:

> 'it is all too easy for the historian to lose that sense of perspective so necessary if he is not to attach unwarranted significance to developments that he perceives within his own period. Think how often it is, for example, that the medievalist discovers within his own specialised field the origins of our modern state which the historians of the sixteenth century once claimed to be the creation of the Tudor monarchs.'[3]

The buzz-words of 'inter-disciplinary approaches' have become a familiar sight in most new research projects, and yet, despite our willingness to break down some traditional boundaries by engaging with the work of neighbouring disciplines, there is still a remarkable reluctance to demolish the artificial walls we have erected through the process of periodization. Occasionally we peer over them, sometimes we even take down a few bricks and surreptitiously rebuild them somewhere else, but these walls have proven surprisingly enduring despite criticism, for not only have they provided an analytical tool, these walls offer a welcome safety and comfort for historians, with a wide range of interest groups, conferences and journals to defend them. This desire to compartmentalise history, and thus gain insight through specialisation, has proven useful in many ways, but it has also distorted interpretations especially when this division has become as pervasive as the medieval and early modern divide, primarily because many of the key theoretical frameworks were created with only one side of the wall in mind. Thus disagreements abound surrounding the timing, extent, and mechanisms of change, much akin to two neighbours bickering over a boundary dispute.

There are also a myriad of practical problems with crossing this divide which have been imposed upon historians by the sources themselves with a complete discontinuity in the

[3] Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: The Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), p. 262.

sources used by economic and social historians across this period. Firstly, the language in which records were written changed almost wholesale from Latin to English, making the division that much more prominent and visual. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a complete change in the actual sources available between the two periods: parish registers and probate inventories forming the predominant sources of the early-modern period, whilst the records of feudal estates offer a fertile ground for the medievalist. This change, naturally enough, has impacted upon the effectiveness with which the historians of each period can engage with certain debates. Early-modernists, for example, have focused upon detailed demographic studies, upon the living standards of the poor, and upon household economics. There have been numerous admirable studies of these topics by medievalists, but the lack of adequate sources has plagued such attempts. One only needs to compare the gargantuan work on demography by Wrigley and Schofield using parish registers with John Hatcher's attempts to estimate life expectancies of monks in the fifteenth century or with Bruce Campbell's estimates of total population based upon the amount of land under cultivation: the former obviously benefiting enormously from sources much more appropriate for such investigations.[4] Although medievalists traditionally bemoan the lack of sources, there are in fact some areas in which their knowledge far exceeds that of early modernists as, for example, in the abundance of data on yields in the early-fourteenth century compared to the lack thereof in the latter period where Mark Overton resorted to using probate inventories as an indirect source for calculating yields in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5]

This period is made even harder to discuss by the lack of sources concerning agricultural progress from the late-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century, a lack which has

[4] E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: A Reconstruction* (London, 1981); John Hatcher, Alan Piper, David Stone, 'Monastic Mortality: Durham Priory, 1395-1529', *EcHR*, 59 (2006), pp. 667-87; Bruce Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture, 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000).
[5] Mark Overton, 'Estimating Crop Yields from Probate Inventories: An Example from East Anglia, 1585-1735', *JEcH*, 39 (1979), pp. 363-78.

been widely commented upon. In his summary of agricultural sources in 1955, Rodney Hilton wrote that:

> 'the agrarian history of England between the rising of 1381 and the Dissolution of the Monasteries is much more obscure than it ought to be. The fact seems to be that historians have been nurtured in the manorial documentation of the great estates, and when these sources fail, as a result of the almost universal leasing of manors to farmers, they have found nothing to replace them. Consequently, bibliographies of English history of the fifteenth century contain little more than a sprinkling of inadequate and out-of-date material on agrarian conditions.' [6]

He concluded that here lies '*one of the most formidable gaps in our knowledge of English rural life*'.[7] Although there has been much work on this period in the intervening decades Bruce Campbell still remarked in the 1990s on this relative paucity of investigation:

> 'the most marked dichotomy in the historiography of this six hundred year period is between interpretations of the medieval and early modern periods. Between them lie the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; *a murky, ill-documented and under-researched period*.'[8]

It is a problem which has been compounded by contemporary events themselves, for there are many convincing reasons why these two centuries are often studied in separation rather than comparatively. Contemporary socio-economic trends separate the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as surely as do our own conceptions of the past, with rural society in the late-sixteenth century facing decidedly different problems to their counterparts of the mid-fifteenth century. The fifteenth century is typically characterised as a period of economic stagnation or recession, with low prices, low rents, and high wages, providing agricultural producers and landowners with a whole host of difficult decisions.[9] Did tenants retreat from the market into subsistence farming because of low prices and high wages despite generally having enlarged their holdings? How did landlords manage to retain tenants when land was now so abundantly available? The most recent estimate has placed the population of England

[6] R. H. Hilton, 'The Content and Sources of English Agrarian History Before 1500', *AgHR*, 3 (1955), p. 6.
[7] Ibid., p. 6.
[8] Bruce Campbell, 'A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming, c. 1250-c.1850', *P&P*, 141 (1993), pp. 47-8.
[9] M. M. Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', *EcHR*, 9 (1939), pp. 160-7.

at around 4.81 million on the eve of the Black Death to just 2.5 million by 1377, with a low of 1.9 million around 1450; a population which had only recovered to 2.14 million by 1490.[10] By comparison, the population had grown to 3.02 million by 1560, and went on to reach 4.11 million by 1600, matching its early-fourteenth-century levels by 1650, with an estimated population of 5.31 million.[11] This rapid recovery brought with it a whole plethora of different socio-economic problems, not least a high demand for food which increasingly outstripped supply, with a resultant rise in grain prices. Although there was a general rise in inflation, partially exacerbated by Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage, it is generally thought that food prices, especially grain prices, rose more steeply than those for other goods. W. G. Hoskins, for example, found that the average price of wheat increased from between 4-5s in the last two decades of the fifteenth century to consistently over 30s in the 1610s, a sixfold increase in just over a century.[12] Similarly, Harrison recorded an increase in his index of the moving average of all grain prices from around 100 in the second half of the fifteenth century to over 700 by the 1620s.[13] Meanwhile, wages rose but did not keep pace with agricultural prices, producing a decline in real wages over the course of the century, although the extent of this has been questioned.[14] There is still much debate about the course of rents, but certainly there was increasing pressure on landed resources, especially after the general engrossment of holdings across the fifteenth century. As a result of these changes, there were more opportunities for agricultural producers to profit during the sixteenth century, but there were also many hidden dangers.

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[10] Stephen Broadberry, Bruce Campbell, Mark Overton, Alexander Klein, and Bas van Leeuwen, 'British Economic Growth, 1270-1870' (currently unpublished, 2011), p. 54.
[11] Ibid., p. 54.
[12] W. G. Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480-1619', *AgHR*, 12 (1964), p. 31.
[13] C. J. Harrison, 'Grain Price Analysis and Harvest Qualities, 1465-1634', *AgHR*, 19 (1971), pp. 147-51.
[14] E. H. Phelps Brown and S. V. Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables, Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates', *Economica*, 23 (1956), pp. 301-4; John Hatcher, 'Unreal Wages: Long-Run Living Standards and the "Golden Age" of the Fifteenth Century', in Ben Dodds and Christian Liddy (eds.), *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 1-24.

There are, therefore, multiple reasons for viewing these two centuries separately rather than comparatively, but the period needs to be analysed as a whole because changes wrought in these two centuries were vitally important in the development of agrarian capitalism. Jane Whittle has given the most succinct definition of these transformations in her recent book:

> 'Agrarian capitalism is capitalism in the countryside. Its development involves the transition from a rural, peasant society based on subsistence-oriented agriculture to a market-dependent economy in which agriculture is productive enough to support a large non-agricultural population employed in industry and services. Industry cannot develop unless agriculture can provide food for the workforce. For these reasons, we can argue that the origins of agrarian capitalism are the origins of the development of capitalism, and therefore of the economy of the modern world.'[15]

The period from the late-fourteenth century to the early-seventeenth century was important in these processes because it 'stands between the end of serfdom in England and the appearance of widespread landlessness'.[16] Karl Marx placed particular emphasis upon the role of social relations in economic development, with a logical progression from primitive communism, to slavery, feudalism and then capitalism. The key developments between these two latter phases were thus the end of serfdom and the expropriation of the peasants from the land, but it is here that Marxism is famously weak because it struggles to explain why that transition took centuries to fulfil.[17] By comparison, Weber distinguished between modern capitalism and traditional capitalism in which the 'spirit of capitalism' grew so that the ethos of making money was a virtue rather than a necessary evil. Neo-classical thinkers have built upon the work of Adam Smith, seeing the emergence of a money economy, increasing division of labour, and the growth in towns and trade as being fundamental to the emergence of capitalism.[18]

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[15] Jane Whittle, *The Development of Agrarian Capitalism: Land and Labour in Norfolk, 1440-1580* (Oxford, 2000), p. 1.
[16] Ibid., p. 2.
[17] S. R. Epstein, 'Rodney Hilton, Marxism and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism', in C. Dyer, P Cross and C. Wickham (eds.), *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: An Exploration of Historical Themes* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 248-269.
[18] Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, pp. 1-10.

These traditional theoretical frameworks explaining the transition from feudalism to capitalism have proven problematic because historians have emphasised one element as the most important above others. Moreover, because this period has so rarely been studied as a whole the chronology and mechanisms driving these changes have remained elusive. This is not to say that such changes have not been studied before: to list but a few of the most influential writers is to name some of the most distinguished historians of the past century: Tawney, Postan, Hatcher, Brenner, Dyer, Britnell and Hoyle, but this list also reveals many of the weaknesses of the current historiography; the relative divide between specialisms. Tawney, for example, focused much of his writings on the sixteenth century which has become synonymous with his name, whilst Postan did not follow many of the developments of the fifteenth century beyond the traditional end of the middle ages, and when Brenner did so he was roundly criticised for misrepresenting or misunderstanding developments there.[19] There have been several studies which have attempted to redress this imbalance, but it has been insufficient to make the period 1350-1650 one widely studied. Most notable of these are Cicelly Howell's study of Kibworth Harcourt for the period 1280-1700; Majorie McIntosh's two books on the manor of Havering covering the period 1200-1620; Jane Whittle's work on agrarian capitalism in Norfolk from 1440-1580; and Margaret Yates' work on the interactions between town and countryside in Western Berkshire from c.1327-c.1600.[20] There have also been large collaborative works which have tried to cross this period, for example that of Bruce Campbell and Mark Overton on the progress of agriculture in Norfolk, 1250-1850, and Stephen Broadberry's work with Bruce Campbell, Mark Overton, Bas van Leeuven and

[19] Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', pp. 160-7; David Palliser, 'Tawney's Century: Brave New World or Malthusian Trap?', *EcHR*, 35 (1982), pp. 339-53; T. H. Ashton (ed.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985).

[20] Cicely Howell, *Land, Family, and Inheritance in Transition: Kibworth Harcourt, 1280-1700* (Cambridge, 1983); Marjorie McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community: The Royal Manor of Havering, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 1986); Marjorie McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620* (Cambridge, 1991); Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*; Yates, *Town and Countryside*.

Alexander Klein on measuring British economic growth, 1270-1870.[21] Nevertheless, there is still much debate over the exact timing of change, and the nature and mechanisms of those changes, as well as the importance of these two centuries as a 'transitional' one between feudalism and capitalism.

Howell, for example, argued that by the second half of the fifteenth century a 'modern society' had emerged: 'our discussion of the early modern period must therefore begin with a prelude, 1440-1520, in which we must view a modern society through the perhaps distorting medium of medieval archival practice'.[22] Even her chapter division is particularly revealing, with that on 'plague and their consequences, 1348-1450' analysing the restructuring of rural society in the aftermath of the Black Death, and her next chapter 'Kibworth in the early modern period, 1450-1700' showing her preference for a mid-fifteenth century ending to the 'medieval period'.[23] Margaret Yates similarly placed this chronology at a very early stage and disagrees that there was any 'rapid and revolutionary changes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries', arguing that 'by 1400 the process of change that would shape the economy and society of the future was already under way', whilst the 'fifteenth century saw little that was decisive or unprecedented'.[24] She concluded that, although the pace of change would 'escalate in the second half of the sixteenth century' it was insufficient to identify a 'specific moment that constitutes a break with the past and the end of the middle ages', but it is 'undeniable that fundamental change had occurred by 1600' through a 'discontinuous process which continues to this day'.[25] Change after 1400 was, therefore, an organic process; evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Richard Britnell was similarly unable to identify any

[21] Campbell, 'Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming'; Broadberry et al., 'British Economic Growth'.
[22] Howell, *Land, Family, and Inheritance,* p. 58.
[23] Ibid., p. 58.
[24] Yates, *Town and Countryside,* p. 23.
[25] Ibid., p. 23.

unprecedented developments between 1450 and 1550, and he regarded the century as one of 'exceptionally gradual and unremarkable economic change in England'.[26]

Michael Postan, by comparison, took umbrage with the notion that the fifteenth century was one of 'transition' during 'which the so-called medieval development was completed and the great Tudor achievement prepared', famously characterising the century as 'an age of recession, arrested economic development and declining national income'.[27] John Hatcher summarised the pervading historiographical gloom surrounding this period when 'tales of falling land rents, of retreating cultivation, of dilapidated holdings, and often also of chronic insolvency, pervade the rural history of the fifteenth century.'[28] In his essay on the mid-century slump, he went on to identify the depth of the recession, across agriculture, trade and industry from the 1430s to the 1470s.[29] His work has also cast doubt on there being significant population recovery by the end of the fifteenth century, with the life expectancy of monks in various cathedrals across the country plummeting in the last few decades of the century.[30] Likewise, Bruce Campbell characterised the later middle ages as a period of contraction in which a protracted process of rationalisation and restructuring was under way after the relative achievements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[31] The post-Black Death economy underwent a period of retrenchment and retreat after the high degree of commercialisation during the thirteenth century. Dyer has similarly argued that many of these processes began before the Black Death but he went on to argue that rural society underwent an important restructuring in the fifteenth century with a vital stratification of landholding

[26] Richard Britnell, 'The English Economy and the Government, 1450-1550', in John Watts (ed.), *The End of the Middle Ages? England in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Stroud, 1998), p. 116.
[27] Postan, 'Fifteenth Century', p. 160.
[28] John Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 148.
[29] John Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in Richard Britnell and John Hatcher (eds.), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 237-72.
[30] Hatcher et al., 'Monastic Mortality', pp. 667-87.
[31] Bruce Campbell, 'England: Land and People', in Stephen Rigby (ed.), *A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 3-25.

that led to the emergence of the yeomanry as a social group.[32] He particularly emphasised the role played by demesne lessees as an emergent group of farmers who worked on a much larger scale than their peasant neighbours, and who were perhaps the forerunners of the commercial farmers who feature so prominently in the literature of the late-sixteenth century.[33] Interestingly, Dyer has disagreed with Postan that this was not an important period of change, entitling his Ford Lectures on the subject as *An Age of Transition?*, although he had the prudence to retain the question mark.

By contrast, many early modernists have placed the challenges of the sixteenth century at the forefront, with R. H. Tawney, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Lawrence Stone all arguing that the century before the Civil War was particularly tumultuous as they sought the origins of the conflict in the changes rural society was undergoing.[34] They emphasised that there was a revolutionary change in the distribution of landed power during the sixteenth century as each section of rural society sought to come to terms with a century of demographic growth and rapid inflation. Tawney especially argued that the period 1540-1640 was particularly significant for the transformation of rural society as landlords sought to increase their incomes by evicting copyhold tenants, converting their lands to leasehold, and subsequently rack-renting their lands.[35] Stone pointed to a particularly severe period of sales by the aristocracy from 1585 to 1606, 'during which time the net losses were so alarming that one may reasonably talk about a financial crisis of the aristocracy, which was arrested soon after the death of Queen Elizabeth', whilst Tawney similarly concluded that 'to say that many noble families, though not they alone, encountered in the two generations before the Civil

[32] Chris Dyer, *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 194-200.
[33] Chris Dyer, 'Were there any Capitalists in Fifteenth-Century England', in Jennifer Kermode (ed.), *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Gloucester, 1991), pp. 1-24.
[34] Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965); R. H. Tawney, 'The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640', *EcHR*, 11 (1941), pp. 1-38; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry, 1540-1640* (1953).
[35] R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912), pp. 177-260.

War a financial crisis is probably not an over-statement.'[36] These historians saw fundamental changes in the relative distribution of landed resources amongst the aristocracy and gentry in the late-sixteenth century, but there have been similar arguments made for lower down the social scale, with Margaret Spufford finding some evidence of engrossment before 1500, but identified the key period of change as the late-sixteenth century.[37]

Many of these disagreements stem either from identifying different changes in rural society as being more important than others, or from making a priori judgements that changes found in the period under investigation were the most significant transformations, whilst regional variations have confused the picture still further. In his insistence that the proletarian nature of the agricultural workforce was of fundamental importance, Leigh Shaw-Taylor for example, has placed the date for these developments much later than this current study, but he acknowledged that 'given the extent of commercialisation during the medieval period a high degree of commercialisation seems probable even for family farms throughout the early modern period. If being commercially oriented were a sufficient definition of a capitalist farm then we would probably have to push the description of English agriculture as 'capitalist' a good deal further back than will be suggested here'.[38] Likewise, Robert Allen found engrossment across the seventeenth century in the south midlands but identified the eighteenth century as the critical period: however, he did not investigate the same phenomenon across the fifteenth century, a period Outhwaite has called '*the* period of engrossment', and so can provide no real conclusions about its importance with regards to earlier developments.[39]

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[36] Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 72-3; Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 10.
[37] Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London, 1974), pp. 40-120.
[38] Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'The Rise of Agrarian Capitalism and the Decline of Family Farming in England', *EcHR* (2011), pp. 5-6.
[39] Robert Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman: The Agricultural Development of the South Midlands, 1450-1850* (Oxford, 1992); R. B. Outhwaite, 'Progress and Backwardness in English Agriculture, 1500-1650', *EcHR*, 39 (1986), pp. 1-18.

The period 1400-1640 is, therefore, generally seen as crucially important in the development of agrarian capitalism because it saw the de facto end of serfdom, widespread changes in tenure, and the engrossment of tenant holdings, all of which provided opportunities for the accumulation of capital in the countryside. It is argued here that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries should not be studied in isolation, and indeed, cannot be studied thus, for many of the challenges faced by rural society in the late-sixteenth century have their origins in the fifteenth century, whilst the seeds of change planted in the late-fourteenth century do not reach fruition until the mid-sixteenth century. This is primarily because structural changes made during the fifteenth-century recession directly impacted on the ability of their successors to adapt to the inflation of the sixteenth century. The current thesis charts the effects of the fifteenth-century recession on rural society between the River Tyne and the River Tees in north-east England and explores how landed society responded to this period of stagnant population, low prices, low rents and high wages. It then analyses the long-term consequences of these responses by exploring how they impacted upon people's ability to adapt to the inflation of the sixteenth century. This thesis focuses upon 'landed society' as a concept, exploring the structure and relative experiences from the two largest landowners in the region and their tenants to the balance of landownership more broadly amongst the gentry and aristocracy. Unfortunately, for reasons of both space and evidence, labourers and those who possessed little land have been largely excluded, although it must be acknowledged that they formed an important dynamic in rural society which will be partly explored in section three.

Durham was chosen as the research area, not only because of its high concentration of ecclesiastical lands which enables an in-depth study of two neighbouring landlords and their tenants, but also because of the precocious development of the coal industry. It has been argued that the North-East did not follow national trends in this period, partially because of a

delayed recovery from the fifteenth-century recession, but also because of the early boom of the coal industry during the second half of the sixteenth century. For example, A. J. Pollard concluded that the:

> 'fifteenth century after 1440 was a bleak era in the economic history of the north-east. Parts of southern England grew in wealth in the last decades of the century, while the north-east stood still. In this context the plight of the north-east was even more grave; for during the second half of the fifteenth century the gap between prospering and expanding southern districts and a stagnant north-east widened. The north-east was experiencing relative as well as absolute decline.'[40]

Christine Newman similarly found depressed rents for Northallerton in North Yorkshire throughout the period 1470-1540, while Ben Dodds' work on production levels from tithe data found few signs of increased output, with levels stagnating right through until the 1530s.[41] Existing studies, therefore, suggest that Durham was experiencing a prolonged agricultural recession, but in the same period Richard Britnell has highlighted the success of the Bishop's coal mines at Railey, an entirely landlocked group of mines near Bishop Auckland which were dependent on local sales.[42] Was this industrial sector of the rural economy able to promote recovery from the mid-century recession, and how was local demand sufficient to encourage such precocious levels of output from the Railey coal mines? Certainly, from the mid-sixteenth century the take-off of the coal industry on Tyneside has come to dominate the historiography of the North-East, with a rapid expansion in all aspects of this industry, resulting in a tenfold increase in exports from the 1570s.[43] Did the Durham region stagnate behind much of the country in the late-fifteenth century and how did the

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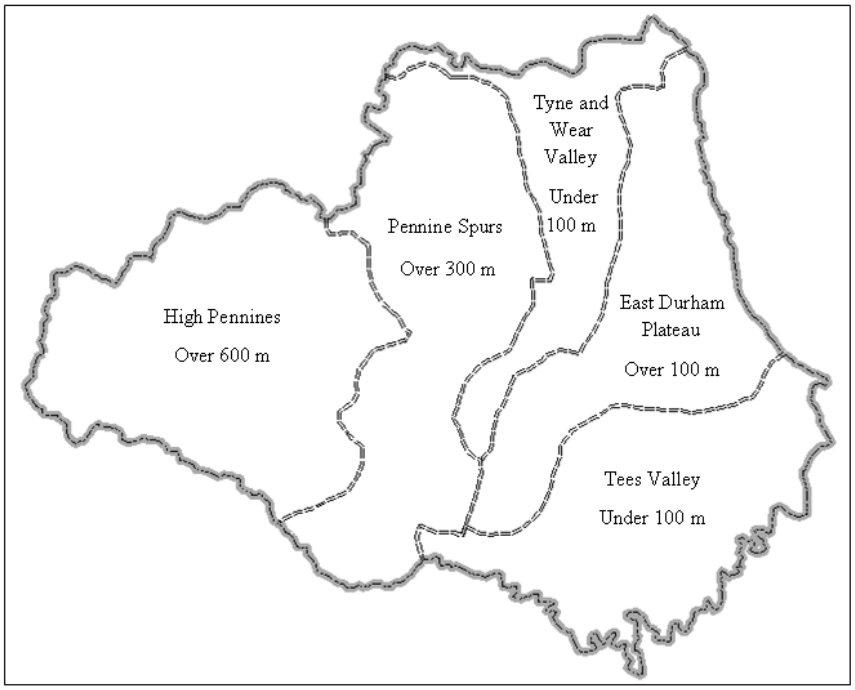
[40] A. J. Pollard, *North-Eastern England During the Wars of the Roses: Lay Society, War, and Politics, 1450-1500* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 78-80.
[41] Christine Newman, *Late Medieval Northallerton: A Small Market Town and its Hinterland, 1470-1540* (Stamford, 1999), pp. 70-80; Ben Dodds, *Peasants and Production in the Medieval North-East: The Evidence from Tithes, 1270-1536* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 101.
[42] Richard Britnell, 'The Bishop of Durham's Interests in Coal, 1350-1540', in M. Bailey and S. H. Rigby (eds.), *England in the Age of the Black Death: Essays in Honour of John Hatcher* (Turnhout, forthcoming)
[43] John Hatcher, *The History of the British Coal Industry, vol. 1, Before 1700: Towards the Age of Coal* (Oxford, 1993), p. 78.

precocious development of the coal industry affect the rural economy in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries?

The Palatinate of Durham was also chosen because of the geographical and geological diversity present in such a relatively small area. Map one, created from Dunsford and Harris's work, clearly shows this diversity, with the two lowland zones focused upon the Tyne and Wear valleys to the north, and on the fertile Tees lowlands to the south.[44]

Map 1: Relief Map of the Palatinate of Durham



Source: H. M. Dunsford and S. J. Harris, 'Colonisation of the Wasteland in County Durham', *EcHR*, 56 (2003), pp. 37.

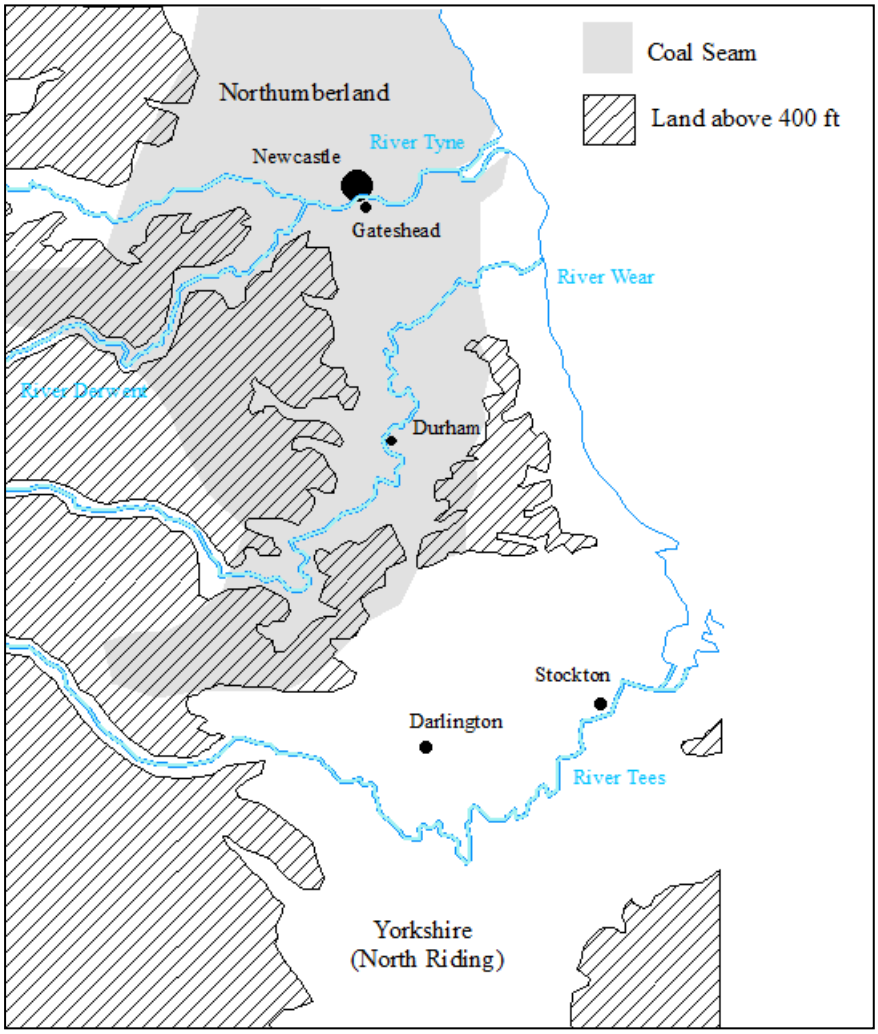
These areas were rich fertile zones, and were characterised by earlier settlement, open-fields and heavily manoralised nucleated villages focused predominantly on arable farming.[45] It was in these zones, and the East Durham Plateau region, that the majority of the ecclesiastical manors were located, as well as many of the wealthiest agricultural manors of the laity. As will be seen in section three, the Cathedral's tenants of Harton to the north and Cowpen

[44] H. M. Dunsford and S. J. Harris, 'Colonisation of the Wasteland in County Durham', *EcHR*, 56 (2003), pp. 37.
[45] Dodds, *Peasants and Production*, pp. 32-5.

Bewley to the south, focused primarily upon arable cultivation, but by the late-sixteenth century they had acquired engrossed holdings capable of also maintaining modest numbers of livestock. Ben Dodds found that yields on these manors were 'comparable with those further south', whilst the cropping systems never approached a monoculture of oats as in some districts in the north-west.[46] By comparison, the west of the Palatinate was characterised by pastoral farming, and it was in the high Pennine region that the bishops had their extensive parks and forests at Wolsingham and Stanhope. The Pennine Spurs were also where later reclamations from the waste took place and which produced numerous manors which were little more than moorland farms, but whose owners had a place in the parish gentry of the fourteenth century. 'On the whole', Christian Liddy concluded, 'estates in the north and west, compared to the south and east of the bishopric, contained only small arable demesnes'.[47] However, as he went on to point out, there were other valuable resources available to these landowners than just good arable land: woodland, pasturage for livestock, and perhaps most importantly, coal.[48] It was this precious mineral resource which penetrated the Pennine spurs and Tyne and Wear lowlands, and which provided the gentry of these regions with an alternative supplement to their incomes. It was these same lands which Newcastle merchants coveted the most and could be seen slowly acquiring from the fifteenth century onwards.

[46] Ibid., pp. 32-5; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 249-302.
[47] Christian Liddy, *The Bishopric of Durham in the Late Middle Ages: Lordship, Community and the Cult of St Cuthbert* (Suffolk, 2008), p. 46.
[48] Ibid., p. 53.

Map 2: Main Coal Seams in the North-East of England



Source: John Hatcher, *The History of the British Coal Industry, vol. 1, Before 1700: Towards the Age of Coal* (Oxford, 1993), p. 71

This thesis explores the transformation of landed society in Durham looking at: firstly, the responses of the two main ecclesiastical landowners in Durham to the fifteenth-century recession and the consequences for their sixteenth-century counterparts; secondly, the balance of landownership amongst various sections of the laity; and finally, the experiences of the peasantry and their gradual differentiation into yeomanry, smallholders and wage labourers. This thesis especially focuses upon combining the study of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because often how individuals, families, and institutions responded to the fifteenth-century recession had long-term consequences which directly impacted upon their

descendants' abilities to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century. Explanations for change in rural society have traditionally focused upon demographic changes, the extent of commercialisation, or class relations, and yet, despite an increasing awareness of the importance of decision-making, estate management and institutional constraints have rarely been invoked as an explanatory factor, nor recognised as important structural impositions upon these processes of change.[49] This is all the more significant given that at Durham it was the divergent development of the estates of the two ecclesiastical landowners which often accounted not only for the tenure by which their tenants held land, and subsequently the rent they paid, but also the potential stratification of landholding on their estates; three of the most crucial factors in the formation of agrarian capitalism. Although demographic changes, commercialisation and class relations created various socio-economic trends which produced change, institutions and estate management played a much greater role in the transformation of rural society than has often been recognised.

Despite the general problems of discontinuity in the sources for economic and social history, the records of Durham's ecclesiastical estates provide a rare opportunity to study these developments on the lands of the two largest landowners between the River Tyne and the Tees. Developments on their estates were far more important than representing the changing fortunes of the church across these two centuries and had vast consequences for all of rural society in the region. The economic importance of Durham Priory's archives hardly needs to be emphasised, containing as they do some of the 'longest non-government accounts ever produced in medieval England'.[50] Because of the profusion of records created, and importantly, retained, by these institutions it is possible to trace the rental incomes of these ecclesiastical estates across both centuries, and thus gain a much greater understanding of the economic fluctuations of the period. It quickly becomes apparent that the fifteenth century

[49] David Stone, *Decision-Making in Medieval Agriculture* (Oxford, 2005).
[50] R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400-1450* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 260.

was not one of continual or unrelenting recession but one of sub-periods, with the hardship of the 1430s, the mid-century depths of the 1450s and 60s, and the renewed problems of the 1480s emerging particularly prominently. There were also periods of recovery, especially in the 1460s and 70s, as well as from the mid-80s onwards. Overall these two centuries were particularly problematic for rentier landlords, for the difficulties of collecting rents during the fifteenth century were matched by the problems of trying to increase rents in the sixteenth century in order to compensate for inflation. Neither was an easy task, but as will become clear the two estates appear to have responded differently to the former, which greatly impacted upon their successors' ability to respond to the latter.

The second aspect of this thesis explores the laity, whose experiences provide a different response to the recession. Given that one of the primary characteristics of the above institutions was their inability to sell or alienate land, this thesis investigates the balance of landownership amongst the laity to explore whether there was an accumulation of manors in either century by certain sections of society. Through the use of Inquisitions Post Mortem, charters, wills, and probate inventories, this study subsequently broadens to analyse how the laity struggled with the fifteenth-century recession and the sixteenth-century inflation; charting those who survived and exploring why others did not. How far did the sixteenth-century inflation and the burgeoning coal industry provide opportunities or challenges for the Durham gentry, and how much of a hindrance was posed to some of their number by their adherence to Catholicism? This engages with the debates surrounding the rise of the gentry and crisis of the aristocracy in the sixteenth century, with Durham forming an important case study after the downfall of the Nevilles for their part in the Rising of the North, and the economic opportunities arising from the coal industry for both members of the gentry and Newcastle merchants. This second section explores how far social status was the important defining feature of these changes or whether this is a misnomer more adequately phrased as a

question of land-usage with a 'rise of agricultural producers' and a 'crisis of rentier landlords'.

The final aspect of this thesis is an investigation of how the above transformations impacted upon the peasantry. This initially involves establishing a firm definition of the term peasant because as Sreenivasan has discussed 'the question has to be settled at a terminological level before it can be dealt with at a historical one'.[51] The third section especially explores how the divergent developments of the two ecclesiastical estates noted in the first section impacted upon their tenants, questioning how far estate management and institutional constraints shaped the opportunities and challenges tenants faced in this period. During the fifteenth century the monks of Durham Priory reorganised their holdings which was to have long-term consequences for their tenants as this led to a gradual transformation from bond tenants with fragmented smallholdings, to a modest yeomanry possessing consolidated holdings of between c.50-150 acres on 21-year leases. These holdings were created during the depth of the mid-fifteenth-century recession when population was low, and despite the demographic growth of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, remained intact, providing their occupants with an opportunity to benefit from increasing agricultural profits by creating a marketable surplus. By comparison, the Bishops of Durham did not implement any kind of uniform redistribution of land on their estate, which resulted in several families accumulating much larger holdings than many of their neighbours, producing a much greater degree of stratification of land than on the Dean and Chapter's estate. This also enabled smallholders to persist in much greater number as these holdings were still financially viable because of their copyhold tenure and stagnant rents. On lay estates many of these larger tenants can be seen purchasing pieces of their lord's manors and slowly swelling the ranks of the parish gentry as these stagnant rents and economic opportunities worked in

[51] G. Sreenivasan, 'The Land-Family Bond at Earls Colne (Essex), 1550-1650', *P&P*, 131 (1991), p. 4.

their favour. Overall this thesis argues that estates played a much greater role in the transformation of the English countryside than is often recognised, creating different challenges and opportunities for both landlords and their tenants. If we were to choose a Durham village at random in the early-seventeenth century there would be significant differences in the tenure, rents and size of holdings between a village on the Dean and Chapter's estate and their counterparts on the bishops' estate. Estates and institutional constraints played a significant structural role in the economic development of rural society in this period and had long-term consequences for the living standards of landowners and their tenants alike.

Section 1

The Divergent Development of the Ecclesiastical Estates of Durham, c.1400-1640

Introduction:

In exploring the financial difficulties of the bishops of Worcester during the fifteenth century Chris Dyer wrote that:

> 'The most convincing argument is that the main economic trends of the early/mid-fifteenth century were against magnates, as rents, which formed the bulk of their revenues, declined. However, it has been maintained that skilful management could stabilise or even increase estate revenues.'[52]

The first of these two sentences has become something of an orthodoxy over the intervening years, which has been bolstered by work such as that of John Hatcher which identified the depth of the mid-fifteenth-century recession across agriculture, trade and industry.[53] By comparison, there has been surprisingly little work on his second point. It is logical that estates which were managed efficiently could weather the recession better than others, but could they actually avoid its effects altogether? Whether the recession was caused primarily by continuing demographic stagnation, lack of silver bullion, a collapse in foreign trade, or bad harvests in the 1430s, there were some estates which had natural advantages against recession: those situated near London, no matter how severe the recession, would always find a market for their goods, whilst others were bolstered by sections of the regional economy,

[52] Chris Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society: The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 153.
[53] Hatcher, 'The Great Slump', pp. 237-72.

such as in Wiltshire where the textile industry bolstered agricultural demand.[54] Was efficient and 'skilful management' sufficient to achieve this success in the north-east or was the precocious development of the coal industry capable of providing the region with sufficient stimulus in order to lessen the effects of the agricultural recession in Durham?

From the state of scholarship outlined in the introduction, this certainly does not seem to be the case, with an emphasis placed upon the delayed recovery of the north-east. Pollard's work has been the most crucial in showing that there was little recovery in the regional economy, especially after the harvest failures of the 1430s which hit the north-east harder than much of the country.[55] He went on to explain that 'the north-east was experiencing relative as well as absolute decline' because other regions of the country 'came out of recession earlier than the north-east, and began to enjoy the fruits of sustained economic resurgence from the 1470s.'[56] It is argued here that there actually were signs of recovery from this date on some estates in the north-east but that this was far from universal, for although the efficiency of a landowner could not enable them to completely avoid such a pervasive recession, it was the acumen and initiative of estate managers which enabled some to recover earlier than their neighbours. Moreover, if the coal trade was not sufficient to provide a stimulus to agricultural demand in the fifteenth century, it was at least capable of providing landlords with a cushion against some of the worst ravages of the agricultural recession.

Chapter three then turns to the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, exploring how the development of these estates had long-term consequences for the future tenurial structure of their lands. Although there have been many studies of the financial problems of the English church during the deprivations of the sixteenth century, ranging from Christopher

[54] J. N. Hare, 'Growth and Recession in the Fifteenth-Century Economy: The Wiltshire Textile Industry and the Countryside', *EcHR*, 52 (1999), pp. 1-26.
[55] A. J. Pollard, 'The North-Eastern Economy and the Agrarian Crisis of 1438-40', *NH*, 25 (1989), pp. 88-105.
[56] Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, pp. 78-80.

Hill's pioneering study in the 1930s, to those led by Felicity Heal and Rosemary O'Day in the 1970s and 80s, these have tended to focus upon the difficulties facing the higher clergy rather than the development of their estates.[57] Indeed, since the 1970s, when there was a flurry of institutional studies across the country, there has been a paucity of work focusing upon estate management and how different institutions responded to the problems caused by inflation in the sixteenth century. As Richard Hoyle remarked in the introduction to his work on the crown lands, there have been 'remarkably few recent studies of estates in the century following the dissolution of the monasteries (as opposed to studies of rural communities)'.[58] This lack in the historiography is all the more surprising given that developments at the estate level were important in shaping the tenure of landholding and so had widespread repercussions for the relative challenges and opportunities facing their tenants. What is perhaps even rarer to find are studies which not only combine the developments of an estate across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but one that also compares these findings with a neighbouring estate.

The following chapters explore how the two largest landowners in the Durham region responded to the fifteenth-century recession and how far the divergent development of their estates affected the ability of their successors to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century. Much ink has been expended investigating the mechanisms of change in this period; whether it was great sweeping changes in demography, an increase in commercialisation and market penetration, or class relations which transformed the countryside in this period. Although the thesis conclusion explores these mechanisms in greater detail, it is argued here that these two ecclesiastical landowners faced broadly similar problems, but responded to

[57] Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church: From Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford, 1956); Felicity Heal, 'The Tudors and Church Lands: Economic Problems of the Bishopric of Ely During the 16th Century', *EcHR*, 26 (1973), pp. 198-217; Felicity Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Positions of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, 1980); Felicity Heal and Rosemary O'Day (eds.), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church, 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981)

[58] Richard Hoyle, 'Introduction: Aspects of the Crown's Estate, c.1558-1640', in Richard Hoyle (ed.), *The Estates of the English Crown, 1558-1640* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 1.

them in different fashion, partially because of the differing needs of their households; both were rational responses, and were to have long-term consequences for their sixteenth-century counterparts. These changes also had significant consequences for their tenants which is partly explored in section two with regard to their gentry lessees, but much more fully in section three, for the divergence in estate management found here had far-reaching and long-lasting consequences, many of which provided their respective tenants with a whole host of different challenges and opportunities for centuries to come.

Chapter 2

Divergent Responses to the Fifteenth-Century Recession

Durham Cathedral Priory

Durham Cathedral Priory was one of the wealthiest landowners in the region, second only to the Bishops of Durham, but their wealth was divided between eight obediencies. At the start of the fifteenth century the bursar's office, which was responsible for the general provisioning of the Durham monks, could expect an income of around £1,400, with the other obedientaries possessing much smaller incomes to carry out their more specialised roles, approximately as follows: the hostillar £170; the almoner and chamberlain £100 each; the sacrist £80; the commoner £90; the feretrar £30; and the terrar £20.[59] The bursar thus accounted for approximately three-quarters of the Priory's revenue, and was significantly larger than any of the other obediencies. He collected rents from villages spread across the counties of Durham, Northumberland and Yorkshire, but the vast majority were between the two rivers, the Tyne and the Tees, with a high concentration on the River Tyne, such as Harton, Monkton, Heworth, Willington, Westoe, Wallsend and South Shields, and a similar concentration in the fertile south-east of the Palatinate, including Billingham, Wolviston, Newton Bewley and Cowpen Bewley. The bursar also collected rents from numerous tenements in the urban boroughs of Newcastle, Sunderland, Hartlepool and Durham, but

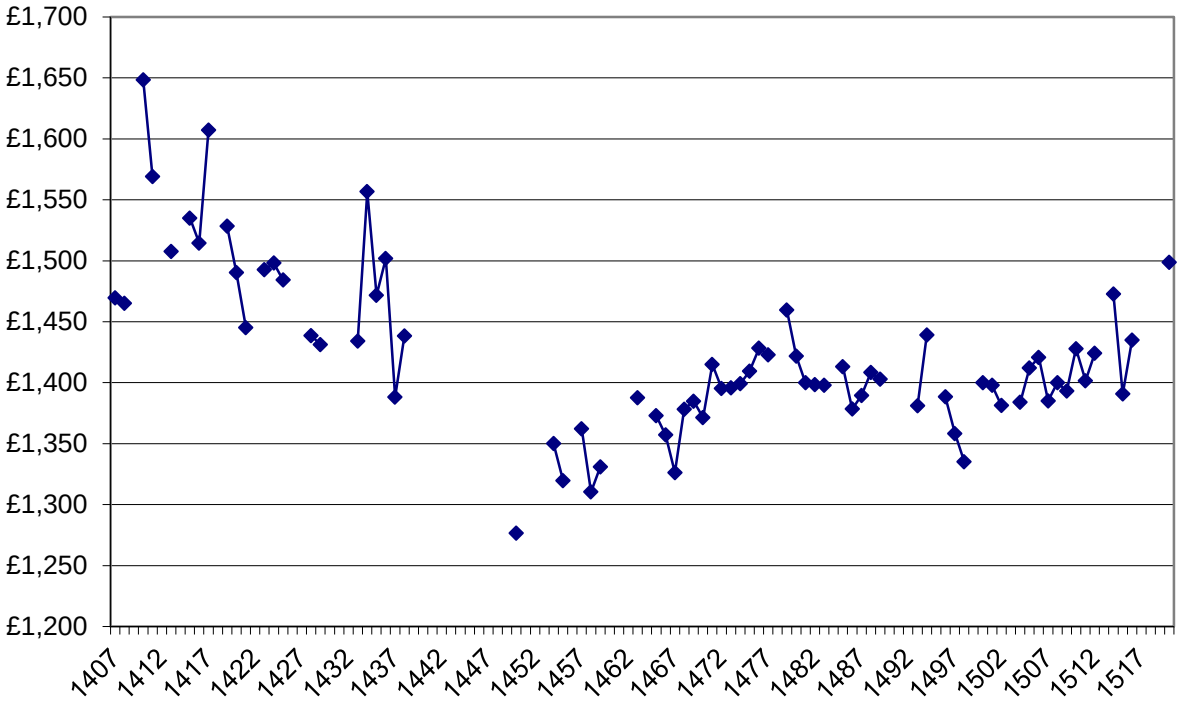
[59] Dobson, *Durham Priory*, pp. 253-4.

these formed a very small proportion of overall receipts, perhaps as little as five per cent, and so the majority of their rental income came from agricultural property.[60]

Although he did not report for all of the Priory's income, it is the bursar's income which will be used here as the yardstick for the Priory's economic prosperity, for if he was struggling to collect rents then the whole monastery felt its effects. The bursar's total potential income in this period was approximately £1,400, of which around £1,000 came from the above landed rents, with a further £300 coming from tithe receipts and the remaining income coming from pensions, jurisdictions and small sales of goods.[61] Tithes were often leased out during this period, sometimes for multiple years, and thus became fossilised with surprisingly little fluctuation in their amounts, except for the returns from some villages like Billingham, which were kept in hand throughout. An approximate breakdown of the composition of this income in 1450 shows that £937 came from landed rents, £272 from tithe collection, and £65 from other receipts, whilst in 1536 this was as follows: £1,067 from rents for landholdings, £290 from tithe receipts, and £98 from other receipts.[62] Unlike on the bishop's estate, which will be explored later in this chapter, there was no major redistribution in the bursar's income in this period. The bursar's overall income fell from c.£1,600 at the start of the fifteenth century, to its lowest figure of £1,276 in 1450, and although recovery did happen in the second half of the fifteenth century, this still only brought the bursar's income to £1,498; falling woefully short of levels a century earlier.[63] Figure 1 shows these levels of rent and the expected income of the bursars.

[60] R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989), pp. 129-99.
[61] A. T. Brown, 'Surviving the Mid-Fifteenth-Century Recession: Durham Cathedral Priory, 1400-1520', *NH*, 47 (2010), pp. 209-231.
[62] D(urham) C(athedral) M(uniments), Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20.
[63] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1449/50 and 1519/20.

Figure 1: Total Potential Revenue of the Bursars of Durham Cathedral Priory, 1400-1520

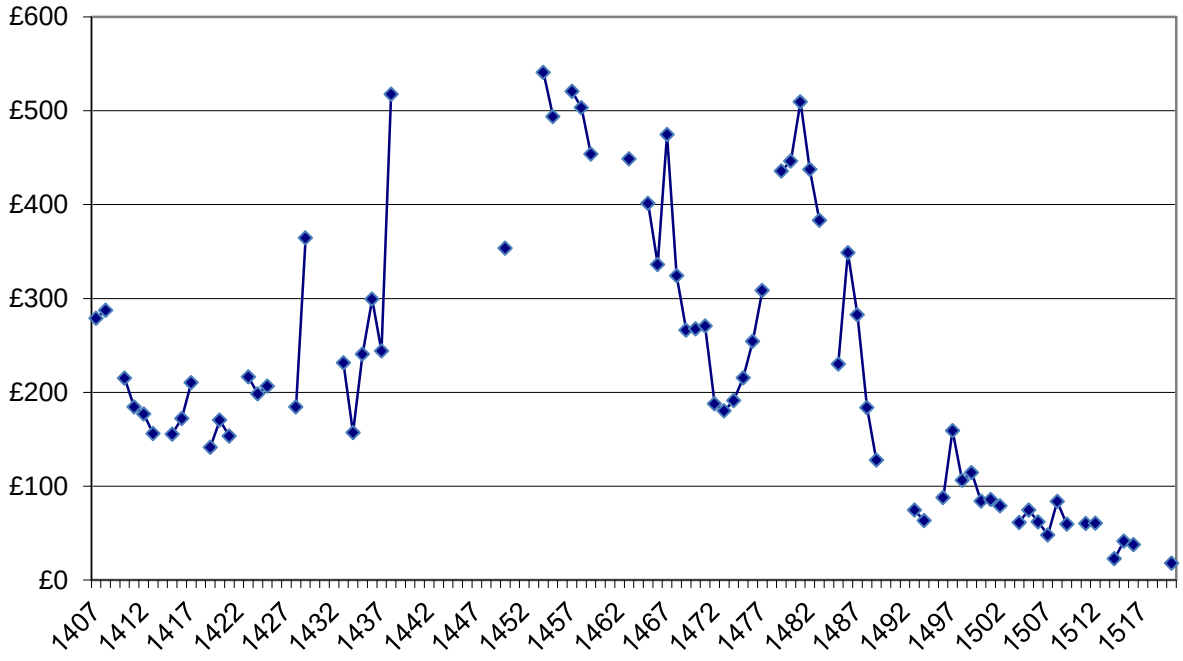


Source: DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20

There was a gradual decline in revenues in the first half of the fifteenth century, with a complete stagnation in the second half. However, this only tells part of the story of the Priory's economic vitality: these figures represent only what the bursar could expect to receive if every single tenant paid their rent on time and in full, a situation unlikely to happen in the fifteenth century. The real net income of the bursars is to be found at the end of the account rolls where the arrears, waste and decay are totalled. Waste was the medieval accounting term for lost income through vacant holdings, whilst decay represented the income lost because of rents which had been temporarily reduced but which the bursar hoped would return their full value in the future. These were both structural and potentially long-lasting problems for a landowner, but a more transient obstacle to fully collecting all rental income was arrears. Whereas waste and decay were potentially permanent reductions in net income and often represented long-term problems, arrears were only temporary and thus

reflected short-term fluctuations in the economy of the region, being especially prone to harvest failures or outbreaks of disease. These combined deductions were not static or continual problems for the bursars of Durham Priory, but reflect the complex chronology of economic trends in the fifteenth century as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Sum of Arrears, Waste and Decay for the Current Accounting Year for the Bursar's of Durham Priory, 1400-1520

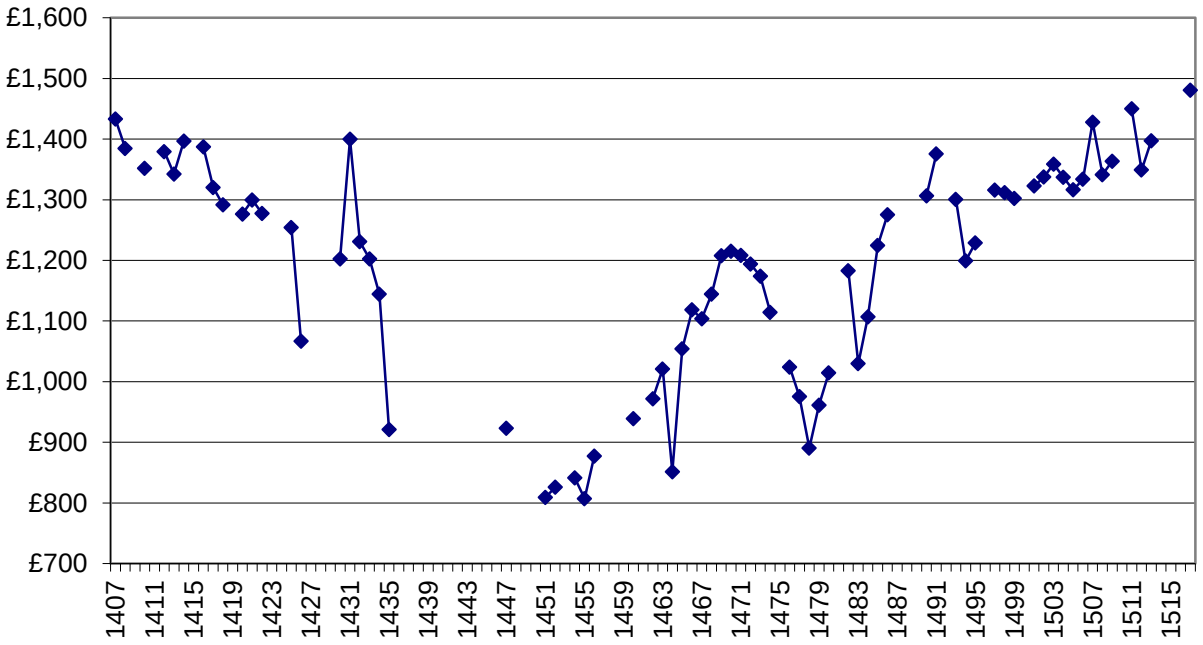


Source: DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20

When these losses from permanent reductions and late payments are taken away from the potential annual income of the bursars of Durham Priory, a radically different image of the fifteenth century is revealed, as shown below. The full depth of the mid-fifteenth-century recession is revealed, as is an initial phase of recovery in the late-1460s and early-1470s, with

a renewed crisis in the 1480s, before eventual recovery to levels even slightly higher than those at the start of the century.[64]

Figure 3: Total Income Less Annual Arrears, Waste, and Decay for the Bursar's of Durham Priory, 1400-1520



Source: DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20

The financial history of Durham Priory confirms Mark Bailey's view that the years 1430 to 1465 witnessed 'one of the most sustained and severe agricultural depressions in documented English history'.[65] In 1432, Prior Wessington appointed Thomas Lawson as bursar 'in the absence of a more suitable candidate', who, when pressed by the prior to provide a proper account of his receipts and expenses, was alleged to have been on the point of committing suicide.[66] When he finally did produce accounts, he reported for lower than usual levels of waste and decay, but significantly higher arrears which rose from £124 in

[64] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20.
[65] Mark Bailey, 'Rural Society', in R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 153.
[66] Dobson, *Durham Priory*, pp. 285-6.

1433/4 to £265 in 1435/6, whilst he was later accused of hiding debts he was incurring to the amount of £1,210 'concealed from the prior and convent'.[67] When the rest of the Priory discovered this secret, Lawson was touring the estate, and rather than return to report for his shortcomings, he fled into hiding. This led to an administrative experiment, whereby the bursar's lands and responsibilities were divided into roughly three equal amounts, the first retained by the bursar, the second given to the cellerar, and the third to the granator. It was intended to lessen the responsibilities upon the bursar, which Lawson had shown could be considerable, but it was also hoped that this would ease the process of rent collection. However, it is far from clear that this radical new division of labour actually improved the collection of arrears: although the bursar's income had reduced to approximately £500, he was still experiencing arrears consistently over £100 up until 1445, when the new administrative arrangement came to an end.[68] The monks were perhaps unduly critical of Lawson for he was bursar at one of the most inopportune times: the beginning of the harvest failures of the 1430s. In 1446, Prior Ebbchester described the state of the monastery as nearing collapse, whilst several of the Priory's manorial farmers were ruined by the agrarian depression.[69]

By the middle of the fifteenth century the bursar's income certainly supports Ebbchester's pessimism, with the total expected receipts reaching their lowest in the Priory's history, a meagre £1,276 in 1449/50.[70] The true depth of the recession, however, is more visible when annual arrears, waste and decay are taken into account. The bursar's arrears in this period reached some of their highest levels at £444 in 1453/54, whilst waste often reached £40 and decay averaged over £50 for the 1450s.[71] Given that the expected income of

[67] Ibid., pp. 285-6.
[68] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1438/9–1444/5.
[69] Dobson, *Durham Priory*, pp. 286-7.
[70] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1449/50.
[71] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1449/50–1458/9.

the bursar was already at its lowest ever, the position of the Priory was indeed precarious, with the bursar unable to collect well over a third of his income in the year it was due. The trough in this period came in 1453/54 when the bursar was only able to collect £810 of his income in the accounting year.[72] Moreover, bad arrears were accumulating rapidly, so that, although cumulative arrears were only £452 in 1449/50, they reached a colossal £1,949 by 1462/63, most of which the bursar would never be able to recoup.[73] Despite innovative attempts to reorganise the administration of their estates there can be little doubt that the Priory suffered the full force of the mid-fifteenth-century recession, the trough of which hit in the 1450s and early-1460s, with high levels of waste and decay, accumulating high levels of permanent arrears, and the lowest rents the bursar was able to charge.

The first signs of recovery from this pervasive recession can be seen in the late-1460s and into the 1470s. Arrears were initially brought under control, so that by 1472/73, they were down to £119, a level still higher than average arrears before Lawson's disastrous occupation of the office of bursar, but much more manageable than arrears two decades before.[74] Decay in the accounts gradually decreased to £45 by 1475/76, a figure nearly half that of 1406/07.[75] However, it is in the waste section of the accounts that the most significant recovery occurs, with levels dropping from their height of the last few decades to a record low of £7 by 1475/76.[76] This was, moreover, a lasting improvement, with future waste levels staying at these low figures and never again rising to their previous heights. The bursar was also able to raise rents slightly so that the total potential income of his office reached £1,414 in 1470/71.[77] All of these factors combined to raise the actual annual income the bursar received in the year it was due from an unprecedented low of £810 in 1453/54 to a new high

[72] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1453/4.
[73] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1449/50–1462/3.
[74] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1472/3.
[75] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1406/7 and 1475/6.
[76] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1475/6.
[77] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1470/1.

of £1,215 by 1472/73, a not insignificant degree of recovery from the real financial straits the Priory found itself in during the mid-fifteenth-century recession.[78] Indeed, this was not a bumper account, but a new standard income the bursar could expect to receive, with the five years surrounding this high point all producing a net income of over £1,150.

Unfortunately for the Priory, these high levels were not maintained in the decade to follow, as high mortality and bad harvests were to wreak havoc once more with the bursar's income. After such promising recovery, the successive shock of renewed plague outbreaks in 1479/80, and the second worst harvests of the fifteenth century in 1480-82, reduced the net income of the bursar to a meagre £890 in 1481.[79] It was not that the overall potential income of the bursar's lands changed during this period, but that annual arrears reached their highest levels, so that by 1480/81 they had reached the enormous sum of £454, which amounted to a third of their income in arrears for a single year.[80] Despite this financial nightmare, the bursar's account rolls show the tenacity of the monks in this period, as waste and decay did not appreciably rise, and so their major concern was with late payment, rather than no payment at all.

After the crisis of the early-1480s, the bursar's income recovered quickly and decisively. By 1487/88, the bursar's total potential income less arrears, waste and decay for that accounting year had reached the previously high levels of the early-1470s, at £1,225, and continued to recover so that by 1493/94 this had reached £1,375, equivalent to the bursar's actual income in the early fifteenth century.[81] By 1520, the last full surviving account of the Priory, this had reached £1,480; the highest amount the bursar actually received in the year it

[78] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1453/4-1472/3.
[79] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1478/9-1481/2; Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, p. 47.
[80] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1480/1.
[81] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1487/8 and 1493/4.

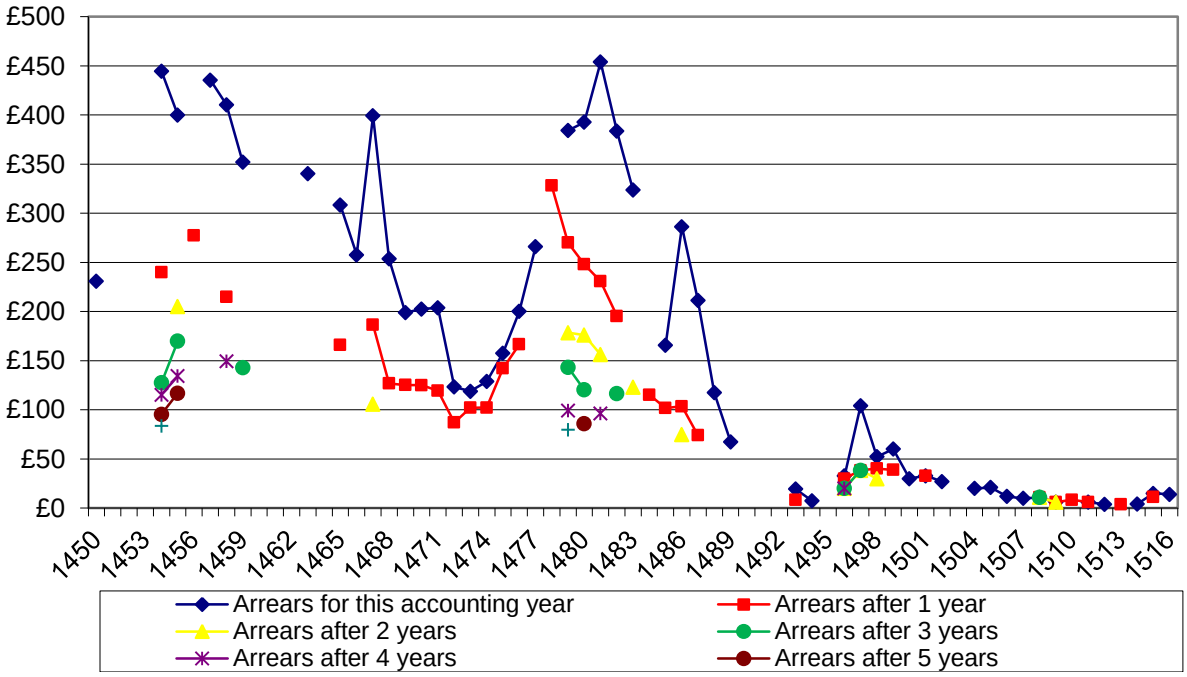
was due for over a century.[82] This recovery was partially because of an increase in the bursar's potential income from £1,378 in 1485/86 to £1,498 by 1520, but was primarily because arrears, waste and decay were reduced to unprecedented low levels. Waste was kept below £10 for much of this period, only increasing in the 1510s to around £20 before it was brought back down to £5 by the time the accounts end.[83] Decay was also decisively handled, albeit at the later date of the 1510s, but here it was finally reduced from its average of around £50 to an insignificant £6 in 1520. The most dramatic fall came in the arrears section of the accounts, going from their high of £454 in 1480/81 to £7 by 1494/5, and, although these rose again to over £100 a few years later, they fell to their lowest ever values of around £5 in the 1510s.[84] This improved collection of rents was significantly better even than the bursar managed in the early fifteenth century, with the sum of all arrears, waste and decay averaging over £150 in the 1410s and 1420s, whereas it never went above £100 in the early sixteenth century.[85]

Arrears were clearly a major problem for a landowner in this period, particularly during the mid-fifteenth-century recession, but just how large a problem? In the 1450s and again in the 1480s, arrears for a single accounting year could reach as high as £450, around one-third of the bursar's total expected income. But how much of this amount could the bursar expect to recoup in years to come? Fortunately, when accounts survive from consecutive years this can be answered with reasonable certainty because the accounts often include arrears from the previous year, which was a reduced amount as these debts were recouped during the current year. Occasionally, this method was used to keep track of arrears for several years, and so we can see how the bursar slowly managed to claw back his income. It is much more likely that this gradual lowering of the amounts in arrears for each year

[82] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1519/20.
[83] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1485/6–1519/20.
[84] Ibid.
[85] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1419/20 and 1485/6–1519/20.

represents tenants paying off their debts rather than the bursar writing them off as uncollectable since much older arrears, often dating back a decade or more, were kept on the accounts even though nothing had been collected for them for several years.

Figure 4: The Collection of Arrears by the Bursars of Durham Priory, 1450-1520



Source: DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1450/1-1519/20

Figure 4 shows that the bursars were quite efficient at reducing arrears, and within five years often succeeded in getting them down to one-fifth of the original figure. Thus for the high arrears of 1479/80 the bursar managed to recoup just under £320 so that the original arrears of nearly £400 were reduced to £86 within five years.[86] This reinforces the tenacity of the monks of Durham Priory in this period: during the 1480s, despite renewed outbreaks of plague, the sweating sickness, and the second worst harvests of the century, waste and decay did not appreciably increase, whilst arrears, although initially crippling, were gradually recouped so that only a fifth of late payments would eventually have to be written off. Indeed,

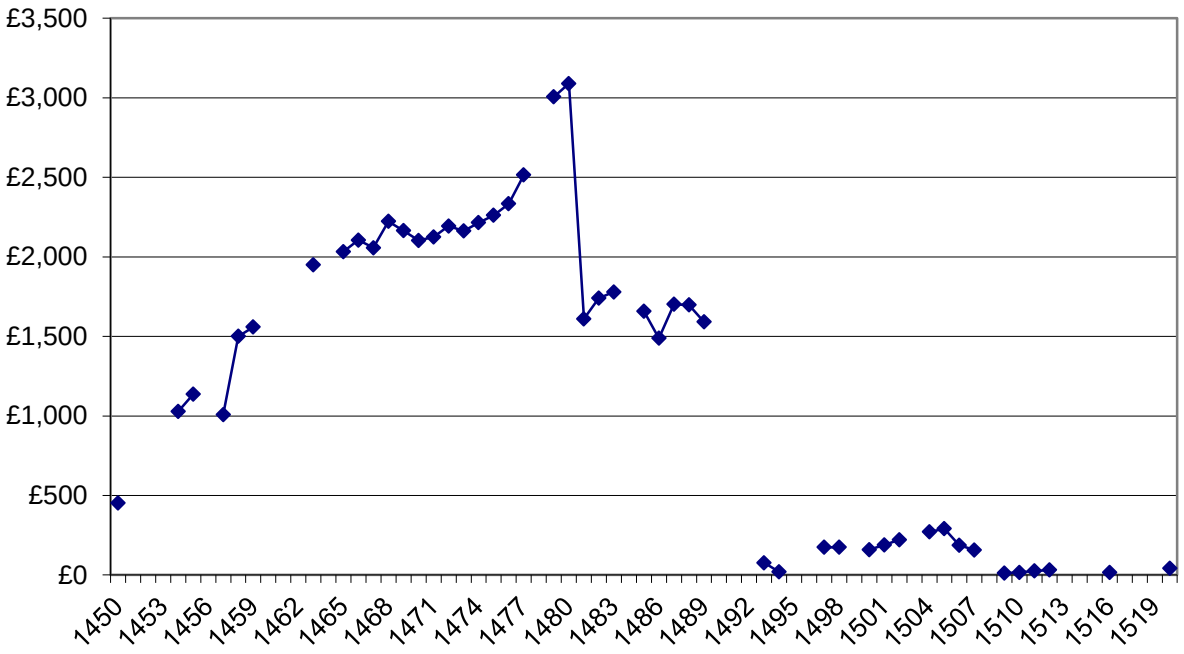
[86] DCM, Bursar's Account, 1479/80.

any hope of collecting outstanding arrears generally ended after five years and these amounts tended to accumulate on the accounts until they were simply cancelled as uncollectable. It thus appears to be the landlord who often suffered much of the financial burden resulting from poor harvests in the fifteenth century, with tenants able to pass on at least part of their difficulties by withholding their rents for several years until harvests improved. Within five years most tenants had repaid these arrears: they were not withholding their rents from an ideological stand against the rapaciousness of a medieval landlord, but simply unable to pay their rents on time because of a succession of poor harvests.

The endless struggle against accumulating permanent arrears was clearly a problem for a landowner in this period, with bad debts constantly increasing. It is impossible to reconstruct the amount of income lost to permanent arrears on an annual basis accurately because temporary arrears were constantly being added to this total. However, once long-term arrears were written off, it is possible to produce an approximation of yearly losses for the period those arrears covered. Thus, between 1450 and 1463 permanent arrears increased by £1,500, an annual increase of around £115.[87] This meant that in a typical year during this same period the bursar was permanently losing over £200 to waste, decay and bad arrears, whilst having to wait for several years before he managed to recoup the further £300 worth of arrears that accumulated on an annual basis. When he only had an income of around £1,300, the bursar could ill afford to lose 15 per cent of his income, whilst being unable to collect a further 20 per cent in the accounting year it was due. Although the bursar could take some comfort from the fact that he eventually managed to regain such a large proportion of arrears owed to him even at the height of the mid-century recession, the very existence of such large sums in arrears, coupled with the high proportion of income permanently lost, reveal the true depths of the recession.

[87] DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1449/50–1462/3.

Figure 5: Cumulative Arrears in the Account Rolls of the Bursars of Durham Priory, 1450-1520



Source: DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1450/1-1519/20

By comparison, between 1465 and 1475, permanent arrears increased at the much slower pace of around £20 per year, clearly supporting the earlier impression that this was a period of recovery from the depths of the mid-century recession.[88] Cumulative arrears then leapt to their record height of £3,089 by 1479/80, primarily due to the rapid increase in temporary arrears as a result of the poor harvests and plague outbreaks of these years.[89] Despite the fact that the bursar was ultimately able to recoup many of the arrears accumulated during these crises, John Swan was clearly concerned by the fact that he had over twice his annual income in cumulative arrears on the accounts, and so resorted to writing off around £1,500 worth of bad arrears. The remaining cumulative arrears then stabilised for several years, after which the bursar cancelled a further £1,500 worth of bad arrears at the end of the

[88] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1464/5–1474/5.
[89] DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1479/80.

1480s.The accounting procedure changed at this point so that cumulative arrears were cancelled when the bursar changed office, which, together with the improvement in rent collection, ensured that bad arrears never reached their previous levels. By the 1510s, permanent arrears were increasing by as little as £5 a year, which, when added to the £11 lost in waste and decay, meant that the bursar was only losing approximately 1 per cent of his annual income, a clear testament to the improvement in rent collection made by successive bursars of Durham Priory.[90]

How were successive bursars of Durham Priory able to reduce arrears, waste and decay by over £500 at the same time as raising rents by £130? The fifteenth century is traditionally described as a golden age for labourers and tenants compared to the endless struggle landowners underwent to collect their income.[91] The Priory's own efficiency must have been a vital component of their success given that a large proportion of this improvement came from a reduction of the amount in annual arrears. In 1436/7 the Durham monks expressed alarm at the decline in their spiritual income, in a 'surprising example of economic self-awareness'.[92] The monks not only analysed their economic position over the past century, but went on to give suggestions as to why their income had declined since the thirteenth century, blaming the loss of Scottish parishes, and explaining how garb tithes had declined as land was put to pasture and frequent outbreaks of pestilence led to many places becoming waste.[93] It is likely that this awareness of their own declining economic position led the monks to search for a more efficient system of rent collection in the face of continued recession later in the century.

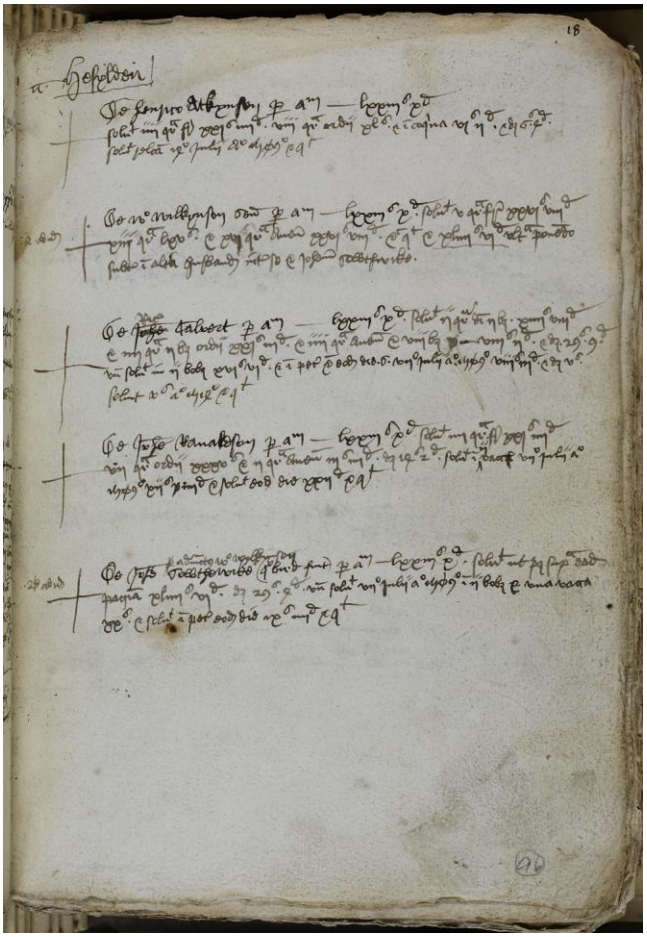
[90] DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1509/10–1519/20.
[91] J. Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages: The History of English Labour* (1906), p. 326.
[92] Ben Dodds, 'Durham Priory Tithes and the Black Death between the Tyne and Tees', *NH*, 39 (2002), pp. 23-4.
[93] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

It was at this time that the bursar's office was divided in a major administrative experiment that sought not only to spread the responsibility of the bursar, but also aimed at improving efficiency and eradicating the arrears which had accumulated under Lawson. Although this was ultimately a failure, it is representative of the resourcefulness of the monks of Durham Priory and it is likely that this adaptability explains the transformation that the bursar's rent-book underwent in this period, changing from a rental which merely listed what rent each tenant owed, to one of the most detailed lists of rent payment imaginable. In the fourteenth century, the procedure was to place a mark by a tenant's name when they had paid, but this developed at some time in the fifteenth century into a detailed account of how tenants met their rental obligations, where and when they did so, and often include extra details such as in whose presence they paid. It is unclear exactly when this new style of rent-book came into use, with the book of 1495/96 being the first surviving example, but it might have been in use from the mid-century onwards.[94] The standard page was pre-filled in with four or five tenants' names and what they owed evenly spaced out. As the tenants met their obligations, new entries were recorded underneath their names, a typical entry looking like this:

> '+ From John Calvert per annum 73s. 10d.
>
> Whereof he paid at the court of Pittington 6s. Item he paid in 8 quarters of wheat 32s. Item in 8 quarters of barley 24s. Item in 4 quarters of oats 5s. Item in 4 chickens 12d. And thus quit.'[95]

[94] *Durham Priory Rentals*, pp. 129-32.
[95] D(urham) C(athedral) M(uniments), Bursar's Books, G-M.

Plate 1: Bursar's Rent Book of 1539/40



Source: DCM Bursar's Book M, f.18.

Such a detailed description would have proven invaluable in improving the efficiency of rent collection; tenants prone to late payment could be targeted by the itinerant rent collectors, whilst those still owing could be identified more easily and pressured into paying. The rent-books are perhaps the clearest evidence of the Priory's adaptability in the face of economic hardship: as rent collection became more difficult, the whole process evolved to reflect the complexity of the fifteenth century. One of the clearest changes from earlier rentals is that the two-payment system in evidence in the fourteenth century appears to have disintegrated, if indeed it was ever that simple in reality.[96] The new style of rent-book allowed for a greater flexibility in recording rent payments, to represent the fact that tenants

[96] *Durham Priory Rentals*, pp. 129-32.

were paying on a more ad hoc basis than earlier rentals would suggest. As in the above example of John Calvert, tenants often paid in five or six transactions throughout the year, instead of the two traditional collection days in earlier rent-books, whilst the monks could be quite tenacious in tracking down tenants who still owed rent, as when John Oxenhird paid 8s of his rents in Monkton 'at the plough in the presence of the Master of Jarrow'.[97]

Further management changes took place in this period which also reveal the adaptability of the Priory so that 'by the middle of the fifteenth century the structure of the estate was completely altered'.[98] The most prominent of these changes was the process of syndication: as the fifteenth century progressed leases were renegotiated so that whole townships were leased to groups of tenants. Gone were the myriad rental obligations due in the fourteenth century, leaving all of the land and tenements of a region, except freeholds, divided into equal shares amongst the remaining tenants. Around 1360, 'with very few exceptions, tenants were granted their holdings for life', but by the mid-fifteenth century this form of tenancy had 'given way completely to the short lease'. [99] Syndication replaced the confused state of landholding, where tenants could owe ad hoc amounts of rent for holdings of unequal size and number that were often spread throughout the region, with a uniformity which must have increased the bursar's efficiency. Whether this was at the behest of their tenants or an initiative of the monks is unclear, but the gradual conversion of all land to leasehold suggests that the monks had a guiding hand in the process. Syndication was on-going throughout the fifteenth century and presumably eased the rent collection process, as the myriad ancient rental obligations were replaced with simple cash values that were equal for all tenants in the region.

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[97] Ibid., p. 139.
[98] Richard Lomas, 'Developments in Land Tenure on the Prior of Durham's Estate in the Later Middle Ages', *NH*, 13 (1977), p. 35.
[99] Ibid., p. 35.

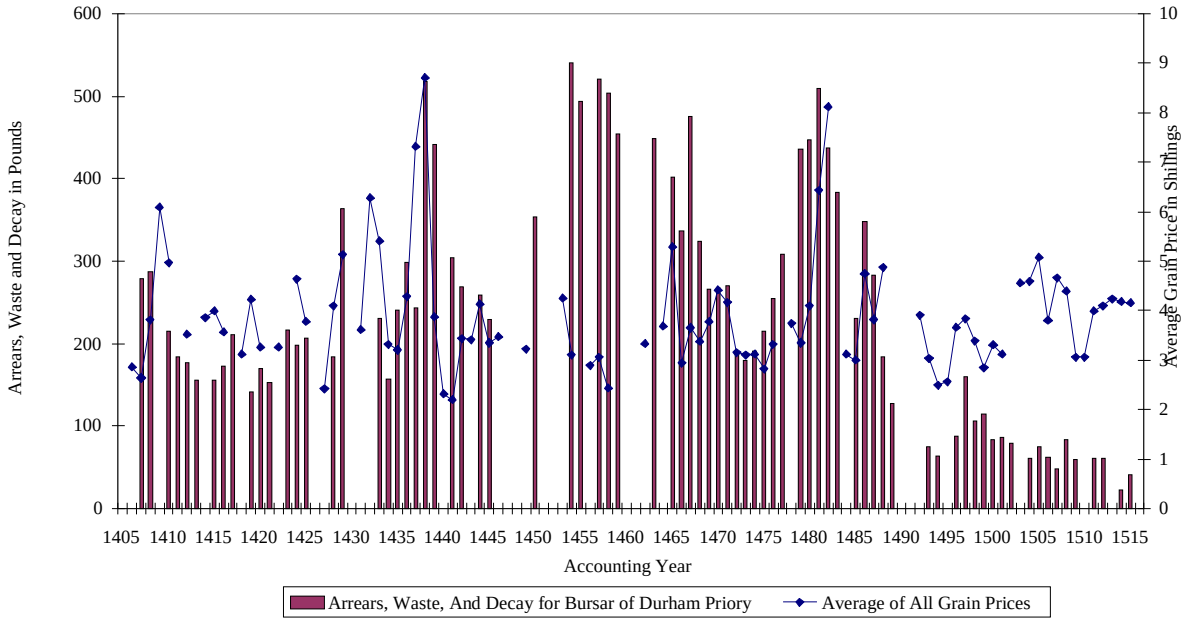
Moreover, this could help to explain how the bursar was able to decisively overcome the problem of waste: all land in the region was put into these syndicates. It is likely that previously vacant land was placed within a syndicate's obligations, and so the bursar could greatly reduce this loss of income by cleverly reorganising his lands. As Richard Lomas showed, the 'number of syndics was the same as the previous number of tenants, and was between two, as at South Pittington, and thirteen, as at Billingham and Ferryhill'. He concluded that the 'creation of syndicates is less easy to explain, especially as they appear to have done no more than neaten ragged arrangments'.[100] As far as can be discerned, landholdings retained their integrity within these syndicates, which were an official recognition of the redistribution of land after the Black Death. For example, at Harton there were twenty-one bondlands before the Black Death which were consolidated by the remaining tenants so that each tenant had either two or three bondlands. When Harton was syndicated the remaining ten tenants each held a tenth of the total township, which amounted to approximately two bondlands each. A more detailed exploration of this process of syndication and its consequences for their tenants is given in section three below in relation to the rise of the church leaseholder, but this was of vital importance in the long-term tenurial development of their estate. One of the assumed consequences of this wholesale transformation of tenure was the destruction of the family-land bond with Peter Larson recently arguing that the 'priory's conversion to leasehold would cost tenants in the long run by eliminating heritable rights', but as chapter eight shows, this was far from the case.[101] Indeed, the conversion to leasehold was probably most significant because it made these syndicated holdings achieved after the Black Death the standard holding on their estate, and

[100] Ibid., p. 38.
[101] Peter Larson, 'Peasant Opportunities in Rural Durham: Land, Vills and Mills, 1400-1500', in B. Dodds and C. Liddy (eds.), *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 148.

thus when population grew in the sixteenth century, it gave these enlarged leaseholders from the fifteenth century a great opportunity for advancement.

A comparison of average grain prices in the region with levels of arrears, waste and decay reveals just how dependent the bursar's rent collection process was on the success of the harvest.[102] The two worst periods of harvest failure, when the average price of all grains roughly doubled, coincided with two of the highest levels of arrears, waste and decay in 1438-40 and 1480-82.

Figure 6: Average of All Grain Prices Compared to the Sum of Arrears, Waste and Decay for the Bursar's of Durham Priory, 1400-1520



Source: DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20; Ben Dodds, Elizabeth Gemmill, and Phillip Schofield, 'Durham Grain Prices, 1278-1515', *AA*, 39 (2010), pp. 307-27

However, there are two distinct periods which do not correlate so well: the mid-fifteenth-century recession, and the recovery noticed from the 1490s onwards. In these periods, arrears,

[102] Ben Dodds, Elizabeth Gemmill, and Phillip Schofield, 'Durham Grain Prices, 1278-1515', *AA*, 39 (2010), pp. 307-27.

waste and decay seem to be acting independently of the quality of harvests, with the bursar struggling to collect rents in the 1450s and 1460s far beyond what should have been the case if the success of the harvest were the only factor, whilst the recovery from the 1490s is better than any improvement in harvest qualities would allow for.

Dodds's work on calculating output levels from tithe receipts in the region has shown that there was no discernible increase in arable production from the 1480s onwards, and so this recovery is particularly hard to explain.[103] Hoskins described the 1490s as a 'bountiful decade', when 'five out of ten harvests were plentiful; only one was deficient. It was indeed a golden decade'.[104] Perhaps a decade without a dearth harvest produced a situation in which the prospects for collecting rents were greatly improved; after all, the dearth in 1480-2 had a knock-on effect on arrears for several years. However, that alone cannot explain the recovery: the 1450s experienced good harvests, but simultaneously formed the low-point of the Priory's income in the fifteenth century. Furthermore, there are no signs of resurgence in urbanisation or trade in the region: quite the reverse is generally believed to have occurred, with Newcastle and York losing out to London.[105] The only section of the regional economy to have noticeably increased was the mining industry, but this was still in its infancy and could not have stimulated enough demand to account for such large improvements in rent collection.[106] Given current research, it seems unlikely, therefore, that this improvement can be explained solely through tenants' abilities to pay their rents. If not in their ability to pay then perhaps the answer lies in their willingness to pay? In a period and region where land was relatively abundant, the Priory may well have experienced difficulties with particularly truculent tenants who sought to take advantage of the monks' weakened economic position. Indeed, as Dyer points out, how else can we explain the many examples of tenants paying

[103] Dodds, *Peasants and Production*, p. 101.
[104] Hoskins, 'Harvest Fluctuations', p. 31.
[105] Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, pp. 78–80.
[106] Dodds, *Peasants and Production*, p. 120.

absolutely none of their rents, which is also in evidence at Durham?[107] Some tenants may well have used rent payment as a bargaining position; getting into arrears for several years, for example, then promising to make amends if the monks paid for some repairs on their land, or reduced their overall rent. For an earlier period, Peter Larson suggested that the 'bursar had little hope of generating and then sustaining economic recovery with a recalcitrant peasantry'.[108] It is possible, therefore, that tenants became more cooperative as the fifteenth century progressed, perhaps because the monks of Durham Priory became more responsive to their tenants' needs. Although this is perennially hard to prove beyond a suggestion, it is unlikely that the Priory could have forced a higher percentage of rent payments, unless the tenants themselves were more compliant.

Durham Priory experienced real recovery from the 1470s onwards, so that by the turn of the century the Priory was in a much stronger economic position than it had been at the end of the fourteenth century. Successive bursars showed a remarkable degree of flexibility in adapting their style of rent collection, and the recording thereof in their records, to represent the complexity and *ad hoc* nature of tenant payments. The process of syndication must have greatly improved the efficiency of rent collection as well; not only did syndicates ease the job expected of rent collectors, but they may also have enabled the bursar to eradicate waste through a clever redistribution of landholdings, and for tenants to improve output through consolidating and enlarging their landholdings. The fifteenth century still defies easy description, but it cannot be characterised as a century of continuous stagnation and decline for landowners. The mid-century recession was indeed a dark period in the economic history of Durham Priory, and the period from c.1430 until the late-1460s should rightly be seen as some of the most challenging in its history. However, by the 1470s recovery was well underway, and, despite further crises in the 1480s, the Priory emerged from the fifteenth

[107] Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 183.
[108] Peter Larson, *Conflict and Compromise in the Late Medieval Countryside, 1349-1400* (2006), p. 143.

century in a strong and stable economic position. Not only were the monks able to increase rents closer to their early-fifteenth-century levels, but they could also rely on actually collecting a larger income than had been possible for generations. Successive bursars were thus able to reduce arrears, waste and decay down from a combined total of £540 in 1453/54 to a meagre £18 by 1519/20 at the same time as increasing overall rents by £130; a truly remarkable feat.[109]

The fifteenth century was not necessarily a period of ceaseless decline, but should be seen as a period of 'new beginnings' for landowners, who experimented and adapted to the difficulties of the economic situation, showing 'a readiness to spend and to innovate', whilst displaying considerable financial acumen.[110] Given the complexity of collecting hundreds of such disparate rents, often in kind rather than cash, Durham Priory showed a remarkable adaptability and ingenuity in improving rent collection to such extents as successive bursars managed. A more cautionary tale could be told, in which the bursar's income was still much lower than it had been in the fourteenth century, but we should not fall into the trap that so many contemporaries did: to compare the bursar's income with pre-Black Death levels, or indeed, even with those of the 1370s, is unrealistic and unfair. Successive bursars had stopped the rot that had set in on their lands, and improved the position of the office so that by the end of the fifteenth century the economic fortunes of the Priory looked healthier than they had for over a hundred years. The Priory faced a dark period in their economic history, but their financial acumen was equal to the challenge, intensifying their rent collection process and ultimately recovering from the recession. One crucial result of the reorganisation of land on their estates, and the subsequent engrossment and syndication of these holdings, was that they became the standard unit of land, which as will be seen later, did not fragment

[109] DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1453/4-1519/20.
[110] J. N. Hare, 'The Monks as Landlords: The Leasing of the Monastic Demesnes in Southern England', in C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill (eds.), *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F. R. H. Du Boulay* (Suffolk, 1985), p. 90.

with the population increase of the sixteenth century. This gradual process of converting land to enlarged leasehold plots was to have long-term consequences for both the Dean and Chapter and their tenants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As we shall see, the road to recovery took a decidedly different course on the neighbouring estate of the Bishops of Durham.

The Bishops of Durham

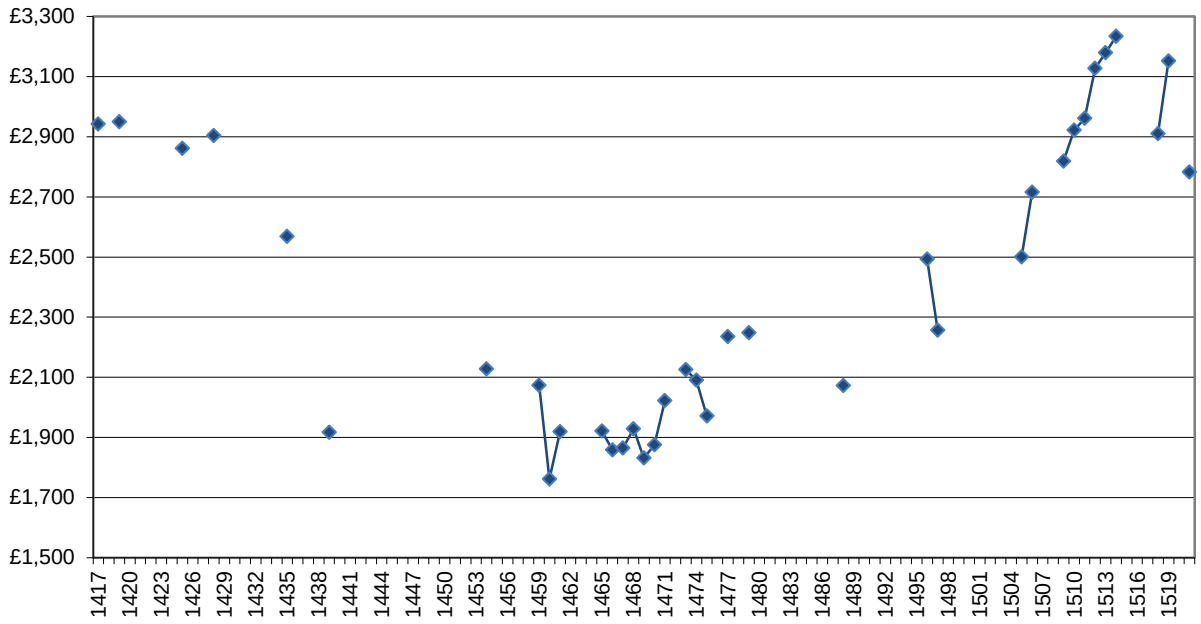
Storey concluded that 'Bishop Langley was one of the five richest landowners in England', with an estimated income of between £3,000 and £4,000 at the start of the fifteenth century: only the duke of York, earl of Warwick and the bishop of Winchester possessed comparable incomes.[111] However, it is the vast concentration of this income which was almost unique in the medieval countryside, with the receiver general of the Durham exchequer accounting for between £2,500 and £3,000 in revenue from between the Tyne and the Tees. This comprised the rental incomes of the four wards of the shire: Darlington, Chester, Easington and Stockton; but also much of the bishops' ancillary income ranging from perquisites of the halmote court to the Durham mint, and importantly, the office of Master Forester who was responsible for the bishopric's parks and coal mines.[112] Some other substantial sources of income did not reach these annual accounts, the most significant being the bishop's Yorkshire estates in Allertonshire and Howdenshire, as well as the liberty of Crayke, which in total would increase the income of the see by a further £500.[113] Unfortunately, the accounts of the receivers of these outlying estates do not survive in

[111] R. L. Storey, *Thomas Langley and the Bishopric of Durham, 1406-1437* (London, 1961), p. 68.
[112] Receiver General's Accounts: CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139.
[113] Allerton Receiver's Accounts: CCB B/84/1- CCB B/90/124; Howden Receiver's Accounts: CCB B/93/1a-CCB B/101/142.

sufficient quantity before the sixteenth century to be included in this analysis, and fall outside the defined research area of this thesis and so do not feature here.

The income of the receiver general underwent a substantial decline from the 1430s to the 1460s, which supports Pollard's conclusion that the agrarian crisis of the 1430s hit the North-East particularly hard and plunged the bishopric into decades of economic hardship as Figure 7 shows.

Figure 7: Total Income of the Receiver Generals of the Bishops of Durham, 1417-1520



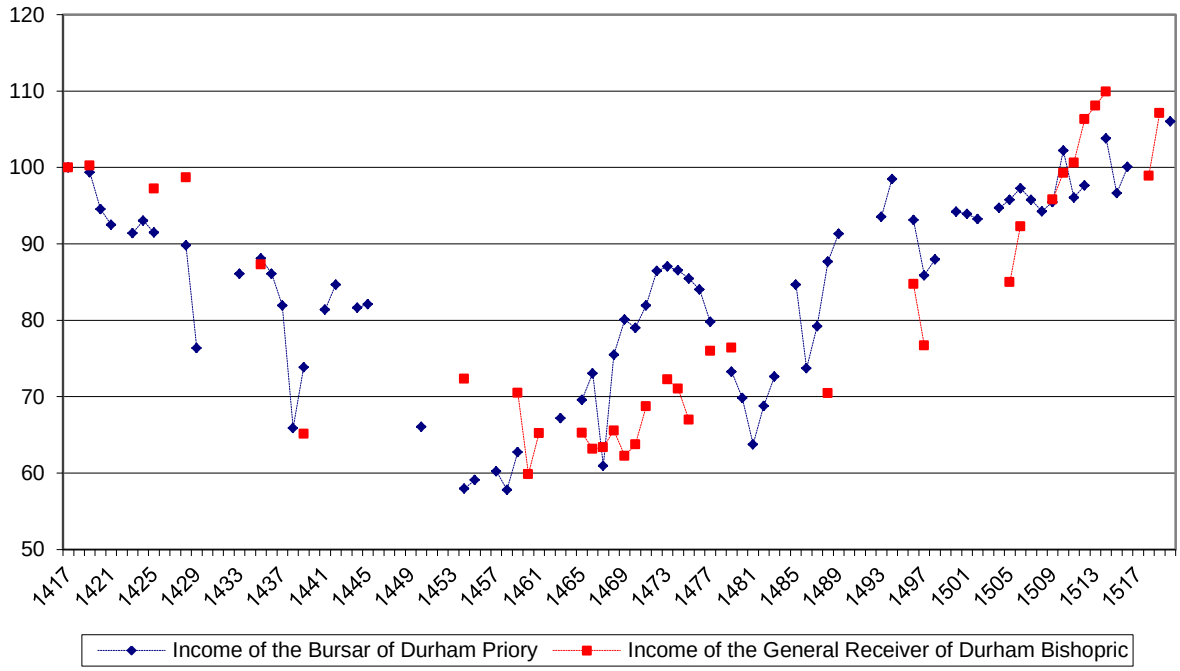
Source: Receiver General Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/1/10

The depth of the mid-fifteenth-century recession was certainly a bleak period for the bishop, with the receiver general's income being reduced by around 40 per cent from £2900 in 1417 to just over £1700 by the 1450s: a decline which closely mirrors that of the bursars of Durham Cathedral Priory outlined above.[114] Indeed, if the overall incomes of these two neighbouring institutions are indexed with 1417 representing 100 (the earliest surviving

[114] CCB B/1/1- CCB B/1/10.

receiver general's account), then Figure 8 is the result. The incomes of both estates were hit hard by the bad harvests of the 1430s, reaching a nadir in the 1450s and 1460s at approximately 60 per cent of their previous levels. However, recovery was clearly underway by the 1470s, and, although this was interrupted by the bad harvests and pestilence of the early 1480s, both of their incomes went on to reach new heights by the 1520s.

Figure 8: Index of the Incomes of the Bursars of Durham Priory and the Receiver Generals of the Bishops of Durham, 1400-1520



Source: DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1400/1-1519/20; Receiver General's Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/1/10

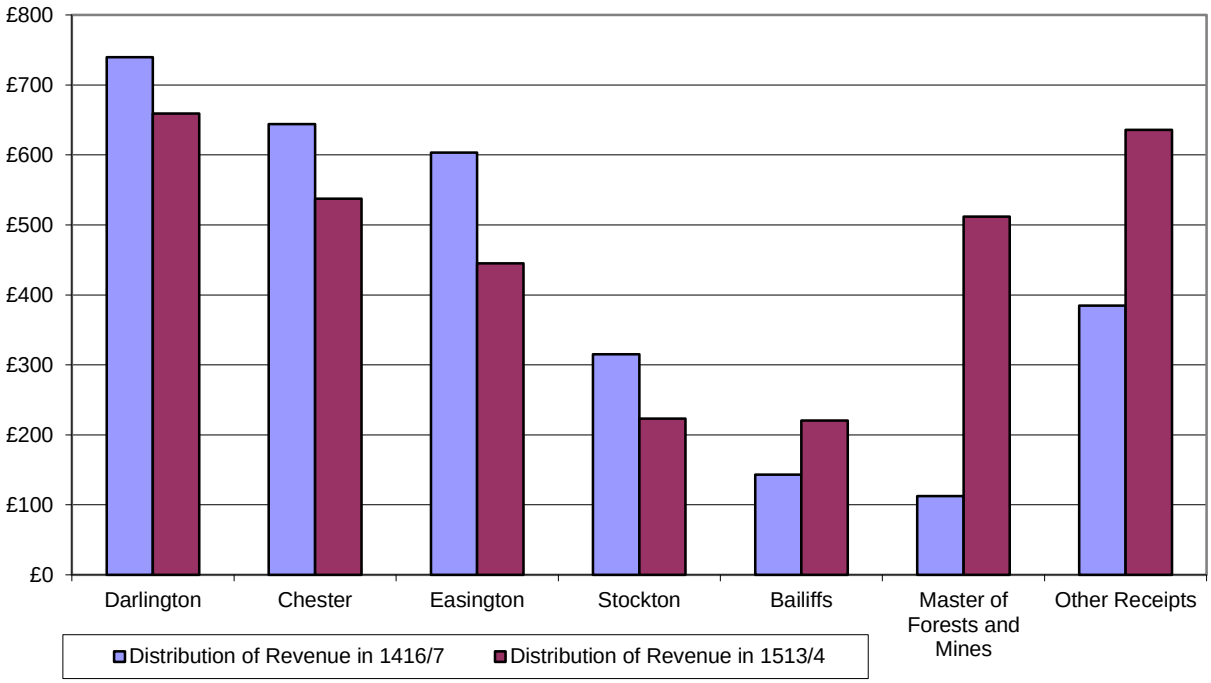
Despite the chronological synchronicity of these recoveries, they were in fact achieved through quite different means. The monks of Durham Cathedral Priory focused upon the collection of arrears and so managed to increase the income they actually collected even though rents on their lands did not increase markedly.[115] By comparison, the Bishops of Durham diversified their sources of income, with a noticeable increase in receipts from the

[115] See above, pp. 39-59.

Master Forester, and more specifically from their coal mines. Unlike the bursars of Durham Priory, the bishop's rental income from agricultural sources had not actually surpassed its early-fifteenth-century level, but was still substantially below it. Although the overall receipts of the receiver general were considerably higher in the early-sixteenth century than those of the early-fifteenth century, the source of that income had undergone a substantial transformation. The bishop had not lost any land in his four Durham wards, but the rental income from these sources had in fact been reduced during the course of the fifteenth century by over £400.[116] Instead, his income was greatly bolstered by an increase in the receipts collected by the Master of Forests and Mines, which coincidentally increased by nearly £400 and by the escheator, who appears in the accounts by the end of the fifteenth century with an income of around £200.[117] Figure 9 shows how the actual composition of the receiver general's income had greatly changed during the fifteenth century. In the face of continued low revenues the monks appear to have increased the efficiency of their rent collection, whereas the bishop sought other sources of revenue to supplement his ailing rent rolls.

[116] CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69.
[117] Ibid.

Figure 9: The Changing Composition of the Income of the Receiver General of the Bishops of Durham in 1416/7 and 1513/4



Source: Receiver General's Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69

A more detailed breakdown is given in Table 1, which clearly shows how the rental income of each ward suffered dramatically across this period. In 1416/7 the four wards accounted for over £2,300, but by 1459/60 this had been reduced to just £1,461, and although recovery is clearly visible, this income was still only £1,800 by the early sixteenth century.[118] Part of the reason for this rapid decline was that some land which had previously been accounted for in the section recording the four wards had been transferred to the bailiff's responsibility. However, even if this is taken into consideration, the rental income was still significantly lower than it had been at the start of the century. In complete contrast, the receipts of the Master of Forests and Mines had more than quadrupled in the intervening

[118] CCB B/1/1.

period; declining from £112 in 1416/7 to £74 in 1459/60, but leading the recovery in the receiver general's accounts to a new high of £511 in 1513/4.[119]

Table 1: Breakdown of the Income of the Receiver Generals of the Bishops of Durham, 1416/7-1529/30

	1416/7	1459/60	1478/9	1513/4	1529/30
Darlington Ward	£739.69	£433.26	£574.13	£659.36	£661.61
Chester Ward	£643.84	£399.64	£442.54	£537.68	£508.38
Easington Ward	£603.16	£412.17	£413.99	£444.99	£402.96
Stockton Ward	£315.15	£217.95	£212.06	£223.16	£227.48
Bailiffs	£142.95	£85.37	£197.58	£220.50	£217.33
Master of Forests and Mines	£112.67	£74.91	£271.45	£511.97	£468.28
Other Receipts	£384.53	£138.46	£135.43	£636.00	£288.63
Total	£2,942.00	£1,761.75	£2,247.19	£3,233.65	£2,774.67

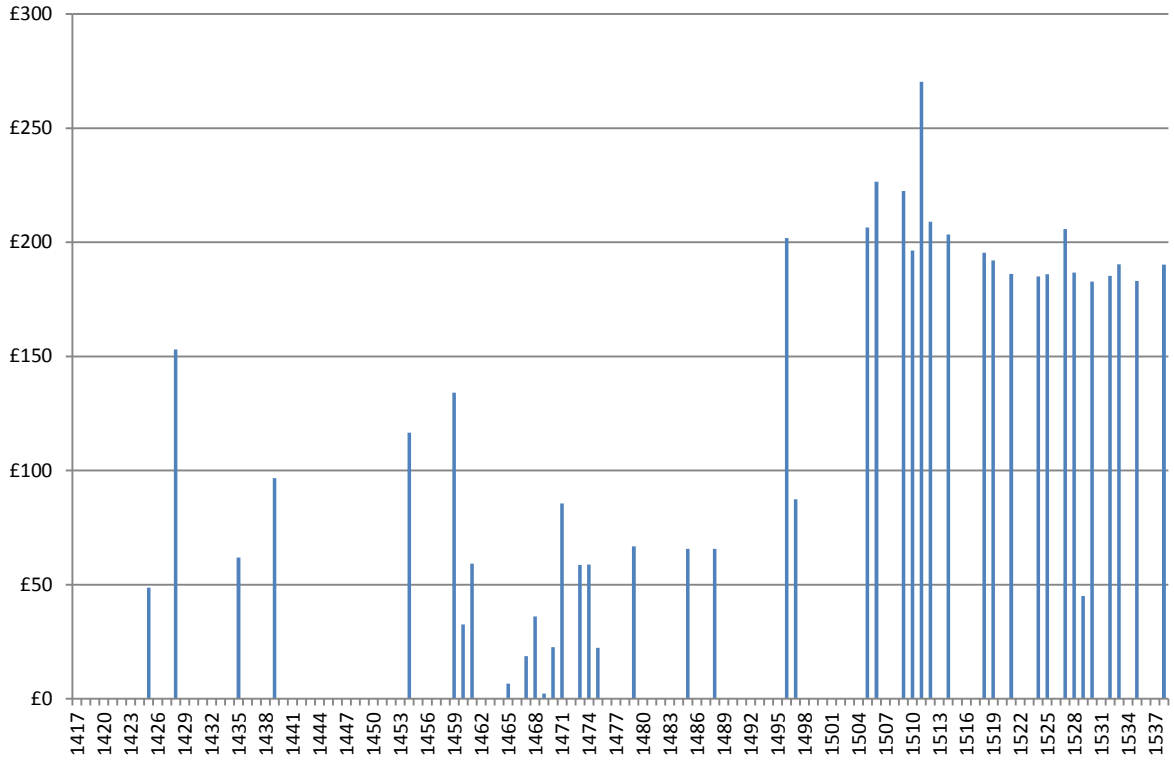
Source: Receiver Generals Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/1/10

One of the reasons for the resurgent success of the Master of Forests and Mines was his coal mines, which will be explored in greater detail below, but this office was also responsible for the other great success in this period: the bishopric's parks and forests. An account for the Master Forester survives for the late-fifteenth century which covers two years, those of 1484-6, and which shows the numerous sources of income he was responsible for, varying from fixed ancient rents to the sale of 662 hens, the pannage of pigs, and the sale of wood, wax, and honey.[120] However, the primary source of income came from tenants with holdings at farm in the High Forest of Weardale owing £82 6s 8d p.a., and the herbage of various parks farmed out such as: Stanhope Park, £66 4s 3d p.a., Wolsingham Park, £26 13s 4d p.a., Bedburn Park, 40s p.a., Evenwood Park, £14 p.a., Birtley Park, 30s p.a., and Auckland Park, £13 6s 8d. His discharge section was particularly extensive, including £6 13s 4d for his own wages, £20 8s 6d for the decay of farmed-out shielings in the High Forest and a further 106s 8d for the decay of Wolsingham Park. The upkeep of the walls and enclosures,

[119] CCB B/1/1- CCB B/1/10.
[120] CCB B/83/4.

hay-making for deer, and allowances to tenants for work on their holdings cost a further £14 12s 7d, as well as £14 which was granted as fees by Richard III to retainers from the rents of Stanhope Park. Despite these expenses, George Lord Lumley still accounted for over £70 profits to the receiver general for the period covered by this account. The financial success of the Master Forester, especially from the 1490s onwards, can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Receipts of the Master Forester Less the Receipts from Coal Mines, 1417-1537



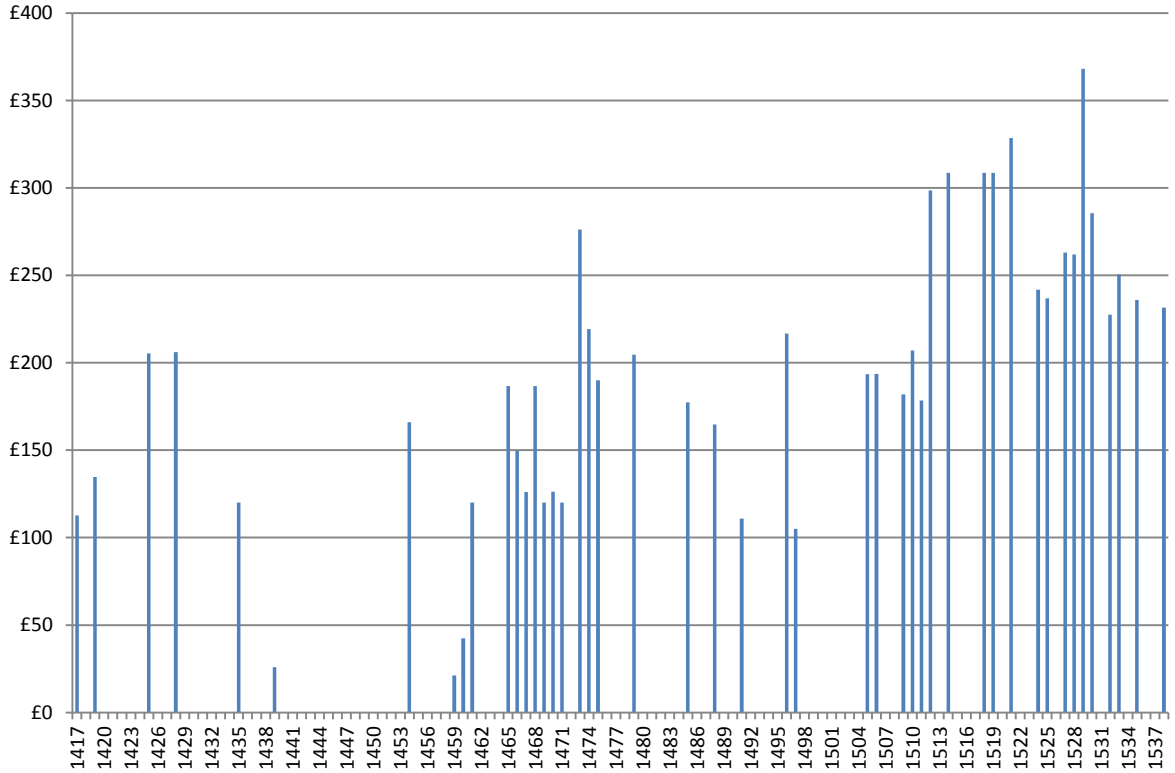
Source: Receiver General's Accounts: CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139

The bishops thus began to turn to other sources of income to bolster their ailing rent roll from their four Durham wards and, naturally enough, their gaze quickly turned to their ample coal reserves, being as they were the most productive and financially rewarding of any coal mines in England in the Middle Ages, producing an income of between £100 to £350 when the total income of the bishops of Durham was approximately between £3,000-

£3,500.[121] Coal mines became increasingly important to the bishop's overall income in this period precisely because they rose during the fifteenth century at a time when his other sources of income were in decline, and came to form as much as 10 per cent of their total revenue. This income, moreover, was the net revenue that the bishops received from their lessees, rather than gross receipts from coal sales, so that there were no additional expenses to be deducted from this income. Thus the bishops faced neither the expenses of winning the coal nor of transporting it, both of which could be exorbitantly expensive. These revenues came from two primary groups of coal mines: the Tyneside mines at Whickham and Gateshead which were to become so important in the late-sixteenth century, and a group of landlocked mines focused on Railey near Bishop Auckland. By the start of the sixteenth century successive bishops of Durham could consistently rely on an income from coal mines of around £250, and which in good years could top £300.[122]

[121] CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139.
[122] CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69.

Figure 11: Total Receipts of the Bishops' Coal Mines of Railey, Whickham and Gateshead, 1417-1537

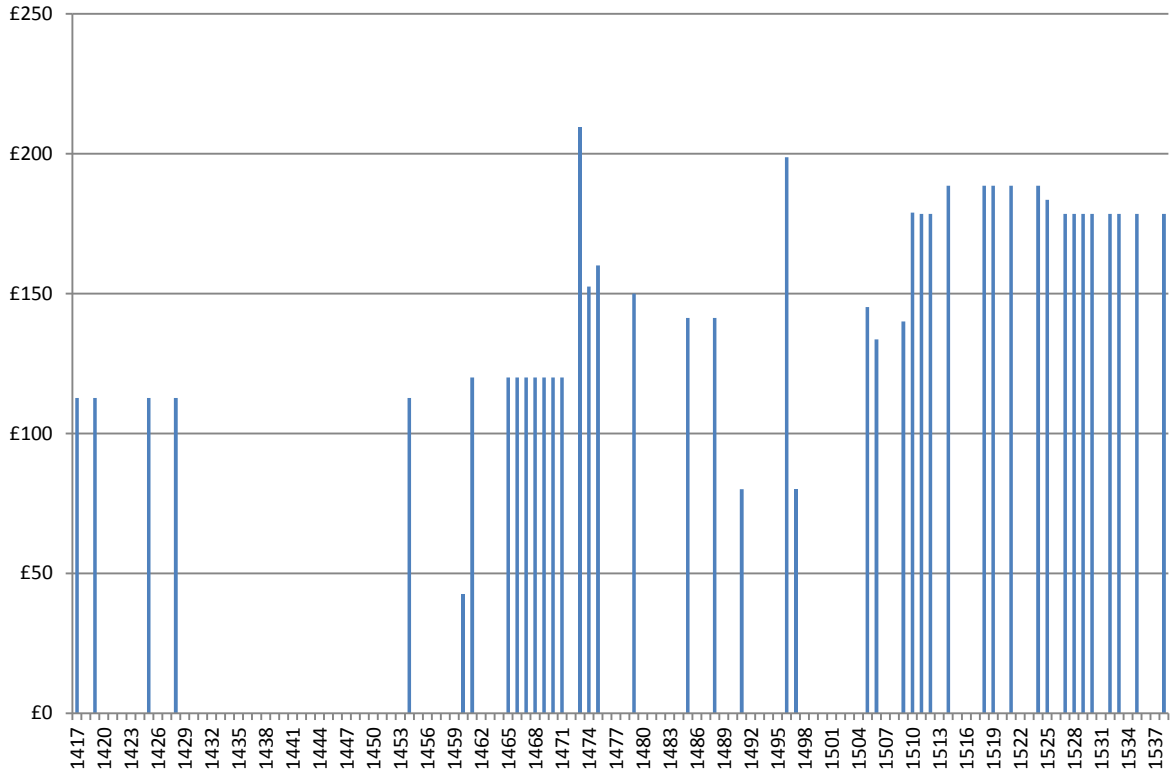


Source: Receiver General's Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69

As Richard Britnell has shown from the receiver general's accounts, the Railey mines were the primary cause for such buoyancy in coal receipts during the fifteenth century as Figure 12 shows.[123]

[123] Britnell, 'Coal Industry', pp. 439-72.

Figure 12: Receipts from the Bishops' Railey Mines, 1417-1537

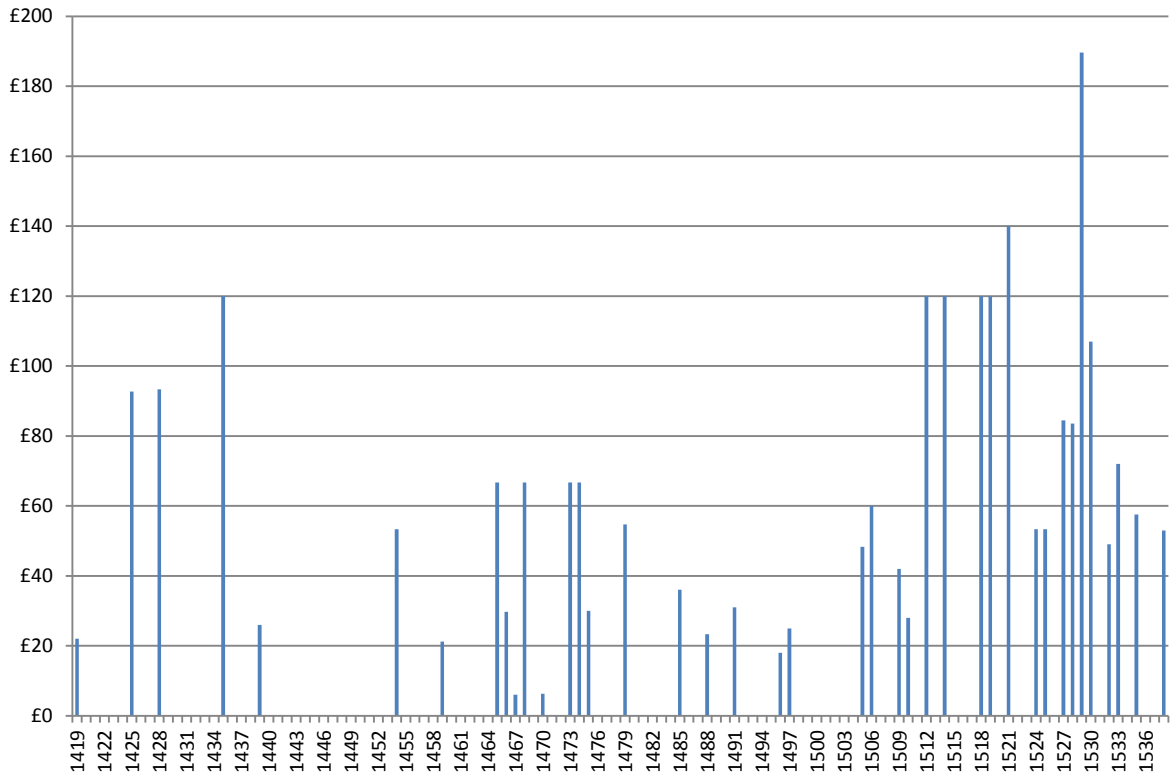


Source: Receiver General's Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69

The regularity of income here shows the financial benefits of leasing out these coal mines. On the few occasions that revenues drop it is because the bishops had the mines in hand as for example in 1460/1; the only time revenues fell below £50. The other primary coal mines of Whickham and Gateshead did not prosper during the fifteenth century because they were so dependent on export sales, and the prospects for trade were indeed bleak during this period. The Tyneside mines appear to have been hit much harder by the mid-century slump than the Railey mine, with several of the pits going completely out of production. However, their recovery was underway by the sixteenth century, and although this improvement in receipts

was delayed, the income from these mines could be double that achieved during the middle of the century, if somewhat sporadic.[124]

Figure 13: Receipts from the Bishops' Whickham and Gateshead Mines, 1417-1537



Source: Receiver General's Accounts, CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69

Unfortunately because the bishops' coal mines were usually leased out, there are few actual accounts which reveal the scale of operations in these mines, although occasionally they were kept in hand for a year during which a brief glance into their operations can be attained.[125] For example, immediately after Sir William Eure's lease of the mines lapsed in 1459, the Railey mines were not leased out but kept in the bishop's hands, and so we have a rare view of the production schedule of these mines. In the account of John Baker, the

[124] CCB B/1/1- CCB B/6/69.
[125] Bishop's Clerks of Mines: CCB B/79/1- CCB B/79/12.

manager of the Railey coal mines from 14 June to 25 December 1460, they won 2,601 chaldrons of coal and sold 2,315 chaldrons for £78 16s 5d.[126] They paid their workforce 5d each per day: three hewers for winning 300 corves of coal per day; three barrowmen for taking the coal from where it was hewn to the foot of the pit shaft; and four drawers for pulling the coal from the foot of the shaft to the bank. They worked 21½ weeks out of the possible 27½ weeks and so were paid a total of £23 2s 6d. Other expenses included purchases of necessary materials: 79s 2d for the purchase of 760 lbs of candles at 1¼d per lb; 9s for the purchase of three ropes of forty-one fathoms; 27s for the purchase of a dozen corves; and a further 6s 10d for the purchase of shovels, a wheelbarrow, a bushel measure, and a windshield for the pit mouth. They faced necessary expenses for repairs: mending the old roof at the pit, the underground wall and ironwork, and le 'Draght' (perhaps a ventilator of some description) cost the manager 13s 10d; whilst they also had to mend two wheelbarrow ways underground which had become obstructed by earth and stone, the water sinking tub, and the high road by the pit. They paid a bonus to the workers of 1d each, and a smith for sharpening the picks, as well as men to load coals into carts and horses to speed up sales, and the scribe's payment. The total expenditure, therefore, came to £30 17s 1d, whilst the manager reported for gross receipts from coal sales of £78 16s 5d. The Railey mine thus produced a net profit of £47 19s 5d with a further 256 unsold chaldrons of coal in just half a year's worth of operations. This was during the very depth of the mid-century recession found on both of the ecclesiastical estates, and yet these coal mines were making a not insubstantial profit. Indeed, because the coal was often sold at the pithead the bishop was able to avoid expensive transportation costs and so made an even larger net profit than would have otherwise been possible.

[126] The following taken from CCB B/79/4.

There are signs, however, that even the successful mine at Railey was suffering from a slump in demand during the mid-fifteenth century, with the two accounts covering 1460 both showing a considerable surplus of coal being produced which remained unsold, perhaps helping to explain why the Eures let the lease of Railey lapse in 1459 after having held it since at least 1416. The table below shows that the approver had a considerable surplus of 1,537 chaldrons already on hand at the start of April, but during the course of the two months that the mine was operating this overall surplus increased to 1,981 chaldrons. The coal mines actually made a loss over this short period, with expenses of £22 18s but receipts of only £17 13s 7d, primarily because of the production of 444 chaldrons of unsold coal.[127]

Table 2: Coal Production and Sales at the Railey Mines, 2 April – 1 June 1460

2 April – 1 June 1460
Received from former approver: 1,537 chaldrons
Coal won during this period: 1,171 chaldrons, 3 quarters, 1 bushel
Coal sold during this period: 727 chaldrons of coal, total: £17 13s 7d
After sales, surplus of: 1,981 chaldrons, and 3 bushels

Source: Clerk of Mines Account, CCB B/79/3

The generation of this surplus was not a unique occurrence, and despite better sales during the half-year period covered by the succeeding account, the overall surplus of coal at the Railey mines increased to some 2,374 chaldrons.[128]

Table 3: Coal Production and Sales at the Railey Mines, 14 June – 25 December 1460

14 June 1460 - 25 December 1460
Received from former approver: 1981 chaldrons, and 3 bushels
Coal won during this period: 2,601 chaldrons 2 quarters 2 bushels
Coal sold during this period: 2,315 chaldrons, 1½ quarters of coal, total: £78 16s 5d
After sales, surplus of: 2,374 chaldrons, 2 quarters and 2 bushels

Source: Clerk of Mines Account, CCB B/79/4

[127] CCB B/79/3.
[128] CCB B/79/4.

It is possible that this is an artificial view of the coal mines because the manager was forced to produce his accounts for the bishop before he had been able to sell all coal produced in the same period. This seems unlikely, however, because much of this coal appears to be unsold for multiple accounts and was forming a clear stockpile at the pit. The growing surplus of coal at the Railey mines from several consecutive accounts in 1460 is hardly definitive proof of problems in the coal industry, but it is certainly indicative of a slump in local demand for coal, especially as by the end of the year they had approximately six month's worth of coal just sitting at the pithead.

Who were the people purchasing this coal in such quantities and how were they able to afford it in the midst of the fifteenth-century recession? The Railey mines were landlocked, with the coal produced being sold directly at the pithead, often in small quantities to individuals bringing their own wheelbarrows to the mines, which makes the sheer scale of these profits truly remarkable. These mines were near Bishop Auckland, to the north of the bishop's manor at Evenwood, but as Britnell has shown through a schedule of sales, much of this coal was going to local tenants.[129] Between Christmas 1460 and 12 January 1461, 23 ¾ chaldrons and 7 bushels of coal were sold to twenty five people scattered throughout the surrounding region of Stockton, Houghton-le-Side, West Auckland, St Helen Auckland, North Auckland, Woodhouse, Evenwood, Eldon, Coundon and Escomb with amounts varying from five loads costing 5d and eight wagonloads worth 6s 8d. As Britnell went on to explore, these lists give no indications of industrial usage, and even though a Thomas Smythson of Escomb purchased a wagonload which could suggest usage in a blacksmiths, a William Gregge who was a chaplain purchased four wagonloads.[130] It is still unclear, however, how these individuals could afford to purchase such quantities of coal, especially if

[129] Britnell, 'Coal Industry', pp. 439-72.
[130] Ibid.

they were for domestic fuel rather than industrial usage, or indeed how this coal was being used at home. As John Hatcher wrote, 'fireplaces designed for the burning of wood were rarely well suited to the burning of coal', with a great shift in domestic architecture to better incorporate the required ventilation for a coal fire, so that 'by the second half of the sixteenth century there is clear evidence that standards of domestic comfort and heating were improving in many modest homes'.[131] What led Durham tenants to incorporate coal into their daily lives in such a precociously early period and during the very depth of the mid-fifteenth-century recession? Not only this but also if the expenses of coal mining often halved gross receipts, as suggested below, this could well mean that the lessee of Railey would have to annually sell between £200-350 worth of coal simply to break even, representing a remarkable level of demand from the local populace although it is likely that at least some of this coal found its way to the bishop's palace at Bishop Auckland and the Eure's own household.

Another glimpse of their activities is possible in the sixteenth century. Between 6 November 1502 and 11 November 1503, workers at the Railey mine won 8,301 chaldrons of coal, and sold all of it for £205 12s.[132] In the same period, the coal mine at Growbourne (which was normally leased with the Railey mine) produced a further 2,991 chaldrons for £76 11s. In the next year, they produced 8,815 chaldrons of coal, all of which was sold for £225 13s 4d, and at Growbourne a further £77 8s.[133] Although these mines were relatively small, they were a precursor of what was to come in the early modern period, and some could be of considerable size. Certainly coal mining was already changing the rural landscape of medieval Durham, with numerous pits being opened to supply the household of the local lord, whilst some of the bishop's coal mines were easily capable of producing over 10,000

[131] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 409.
[132] CCB B/79/10.
[133] CCB/B/79/12.

chaldrons of coal per year. This precocious development, although of intrinsic interest, was insufficient to stimulate demand for agricultural goods in the region because the pits were not employing a large enough workforce to encourage the growth of new markets with the Railey coal mines only employing ten workers, but it was enough to cushion the bishops of Durham against the worst ravages of the fifteenth-century recession.

This recovery in receipts from coal mines was not some serendipitous stroke of good fortune for the bishops of Durham: they consciously protected and encouraged their coal interests, often through quite aggressive means if necessary. Britnell found that in the 1490s the bishop of Durham leased the mines of the Earl of Westmoreland for £22 a year, either to take them out of production or to eliminate price competition, whilst in 1476/7 Richard of Gloucester organised on the bishop's behalf the blocking of a road near Escombe by which the Earl of Westmoreland conveyed coal from one of his pits.[134] Moreover, the bishops kept a close eye on all coal mines being opened in the region. For example, Finchale Priory's mine at Softley produced a consistent income of £6 13s 4d up until the 1410s when the pit went out of production.[135] Galloway attributed this failure of Softley to the large lease of the bishop's mines at Railey to Ralph Eure in the same period; the competition proving too great for the monks.[136] However, the monks of Finchale Priory tried to re-open their coal pit at Softley in the 1480s, which was soon noticed by the bishop of Durham, who agreed in 1487/8 to rent out the mine for 20s in order to take it out of production.[137] This is significant because the mine at Softley had not produced substantial coal receipts since the 1410s, with receipts of less than 10s for the few years prior to the bishop's intervention.[138] Clearly the bishops wanted to ensure that the monks did not begin coal production which could challenge their

[134] Britnell, 'Coal Industry', pp. 439-72.
[135] J. Raine (ed.), *The Priory of Finchale: Charters of Endowment, Inventories, and Account Rolls of the Priory of Finchale Priory*, Surtees Society, 6 (1837), pp. lxxx-clxxxii.
[136] R. L. Galloway, *Annals of Coal Mining and the Coal Trade, vol. 1* (Newton Abbot, 1882), p. 72.
[137] Britnell, 'Coal Industry', pp. 439-72.
[138] *The Priory of Finchale*, pp. ccclxxiv-ccclxxxi.

dominance of the market, but that they sought to close such a relatively small mine reveals the keen watch kept on coal production in the region by the bishops of Durham. Indeed, Britnell believes that this policy was crucial to the success of the Railey mines, given that they were landlocked and thus sales were completely dependent on their monopoly of local demand.[139]

Whether the increase in coal revenues was part of a strategy implemented by a specific bishop or receiver general is unclear, but there was an increasing reliance on coal receipts which began to affect decision-making to the extent that they could be seen aggressively blocking access to other coal mines or even buying out their competitors. It was this improvement in coal revenues, alongside the aforementioned increase from forests and parks, which helped the bishops survive the mid-fifteenth-century recession and greatly bolstered their ailing rent rolls. However, coal was not the sole preserve of the bishops of Durham, with numerous other landlords, lay and ecclesiastical alike, possessing considerable coal reserves. If coal was such a profitable venture why did the enterprising monks of Durham Cathedral not also seek to bolster their profits yet further by exploiting their coal mines?

Coal Mining in the Region

Although the survival of the bishops' records has enabled a better view of coal production on their lands than most, there are other glimpses of the coal industry, especially in the records of the other ecclesiastical landowners in the region. Why did Durham Priory and Finchale Priory not exploit their coal assets in the same way as the bishops of Durham?

[139] Britnell, 'Coal Industry', pp. 439-72.

Was it a matter of scale and location or was there a qualitative difference in the use of their coal mines? Unfortunately, the direct records of Durham Cathedral Priory's coal mining activities only survive for the early-fifteenth century and so it is much harder to evaluate their overall contribution to coal production in this period or the profitability of their operations. However, from these accounts it is clear that Durham Priory had an interest in coal mining at Rainton, Fery, and Aldingrange from at least the mid-fourteenth century onwards. The monks of Durham 'were not endowed with rich collieries', which were primarily located around the city of Durham and thus useful for fulfilling the household consumption needs of the monks but unsuitable for large-scale commercial output.[140] By comparison, the Tyneside coal mines of the bishops of Durham were much better positioned for the Newcastle market and for export of coal from the region, whilst their mines at Railey had the advantage of being close to the bishop's palace at Bishop Auckland and near the home of the Eure family, who became their most prominent lessees. The more extensive seams in favourable locations which the bishops' possessed no doubt proved important in their decision to exploit their coal reserves more commercially than the monks, but the institutional context of these mines was similarly important; after all, the Railey coal mines were landlocked and so it was the acts of numerous bishops which protected their coal interest and so ensured the success of these mines. Why, then, did the monks of Durham Priory not show the same entrepreneurial vigour in exploiting their coal assets that they showed in reorganising their landholdings?

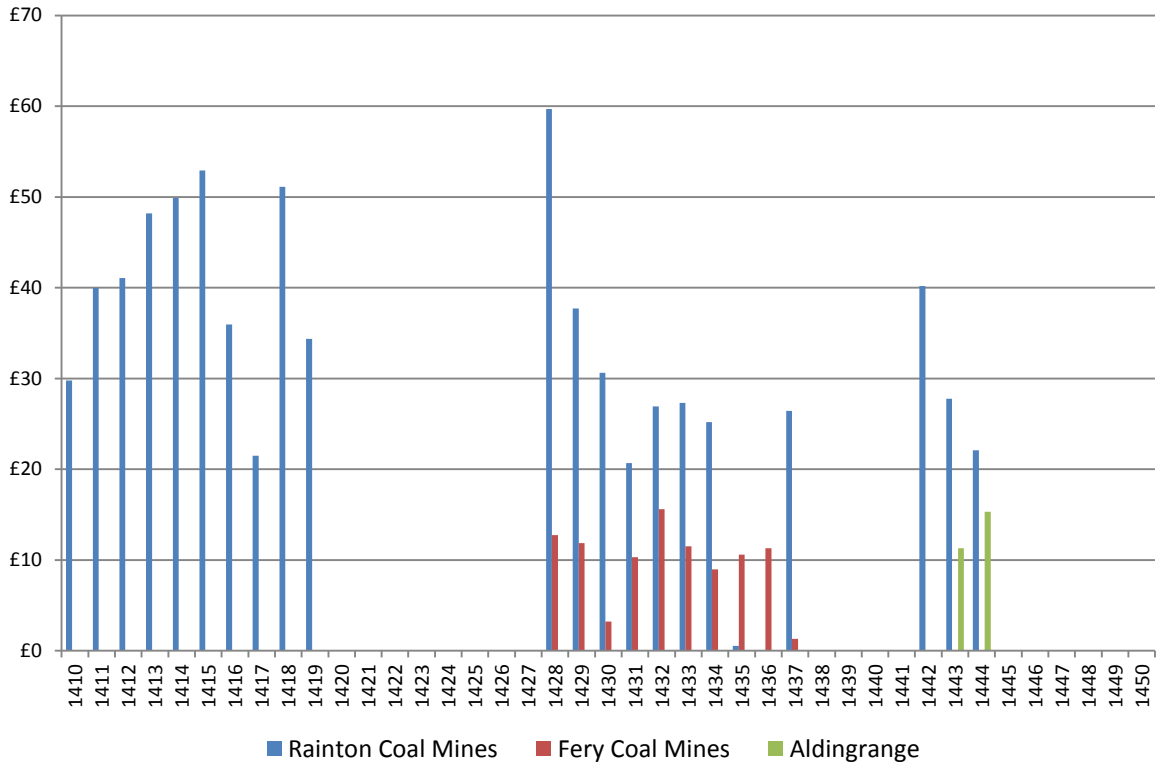
The receipts of the coal mines of Durham Priory never achieved the equivalent levels of those of the bishops of Durham because their mines never appear to have been worked with the same level of large-scale commercial interest. The Priory's coal mines were oriented towards household consumption of the Cathedral itself: for example in 1442/3 their Aldingrange coal mine accounts for receipts of £11 5s 7d, but with a further £10 2s 6d noted

[140] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 75.

for 230 chaldrons of coal ‘pro expensis domus’, valued at 9d per chaldron.[141] There are other glimpses of the Priory’s mines at work even when their income is not mentioned, as in 1536/7 when necessary expenses of the bursar include an entry ‘et sol William Gamilsby, Thomas Spragin, John Dychaund, Cuthbert Martin et Thomas Stubs pro cariagio 389 di dd carbonum a puteo de Brome, ad 6d, summa £41 3s 9d’.[142] The levels of coal production at the Priory’s pits were presumably higher, therefore, than the receipts of sales alone would suggest because some of the coal would be sent for the Cathedral’s consumption rather than sold. However, even if this is taken into account, it is clear that the Priory’s coal ventures never reached the same scale as that of the bishops of Durham. Moreover, the steady receipts from coal mines shown in Figure 14 are deceptive because these revenues were often gross rather than net profits, with the expenses of operating the coal mines often equal to their potential revenues.

[141] DCM Coal Mines, 1442-3.
[142] DCM Bursar’s Account, 1536/7.

Figure 14: Receipts of Durham Cathedral Priory's Coal Mines, 1410-50



Source: DCM Coal Mines, 1409/10-1452/3

The mine accounts of the bishops of Durham and Finchale Priory make it clear that ordinary operating expenditure could represent half the gross receipts of the coal mines, but there were also one-off expenses which could completely eradicate any profits in that year.[143] Drainage and water damage were perennial problems for coal mining in this period, whilst sinking a new pit could represent a significant investment. The necessary expenses section of the bursars' account rolls are littered with expenditure on coal mines as in 1351/2 '*in via aquatica minere de Rainton novo facienda*, £39 8s 2.5d' and in 1368/9 '*in expensis factis pro uno Watergate pro minera de Rainton* £8 17s 4d', and again in 1375/6 '*in expensis factis circa aqueductus carbonum de Rainton*, £37 7s 2d', whilst in 1397/8 they sank a new pit for

[143] See below, pp. 80-2.

coal at Aldingrange which cost £14 5s 6d.[144] These expenses were a constant burden for the monks of Durham Priory who seem to have kept the mines in hand for much of the period, with the bursar in 1536/7 excusing any rental receipts from the coal mines of Rainton and Brome because: '*Nec de minera carbonum nichil, quia in manu domini*'.[145] This unfortunately means, however, that once the coal mine accounts cease in the mid-century there are few indicators of their productivity, although evidence from the early-sixteenth century does not suggest any rapid take-off in production.[146] It seems likely that the monks kept the mines in hand in order to meet the household consumption of the Cathedral itself rather than as a large-scale commercial venture. It is often thought that their coal mines were situated unfavourably compared to the Tyneside mines of the bishops of Durham, but given the success of the bishops' Railey mines the lack of close water transportation was not necessarily a hindrance at this early period. It is more likely that the monks thought the expenses of coal mining could often outweigh its successes and that they only sought to produce enough to satisfy their own demand.

Finchale Priory was another ecclesiastical landowner whose accounts have survived in sufficient number to allow a view of their coal production across the fifteenth century and reveal many of the potential advantages and problems of directly working coal mines in this period. They possessed two primary coal mines in the fourteenth century at Softley and Lumley, opening up further coal mines in Baxterford Wood and Coxhoe in the early-fifteenth century, and finally another pit at Moorhouseclose in the second half of the fifteenth century which was to prove their most financially rewarding endeavour. During the course of the fifteenth century, Finchale Priory's overall income fluctuated between £150-£200, with profits from coal mines anywhere between £5-£35, and representing as much as ten per cent

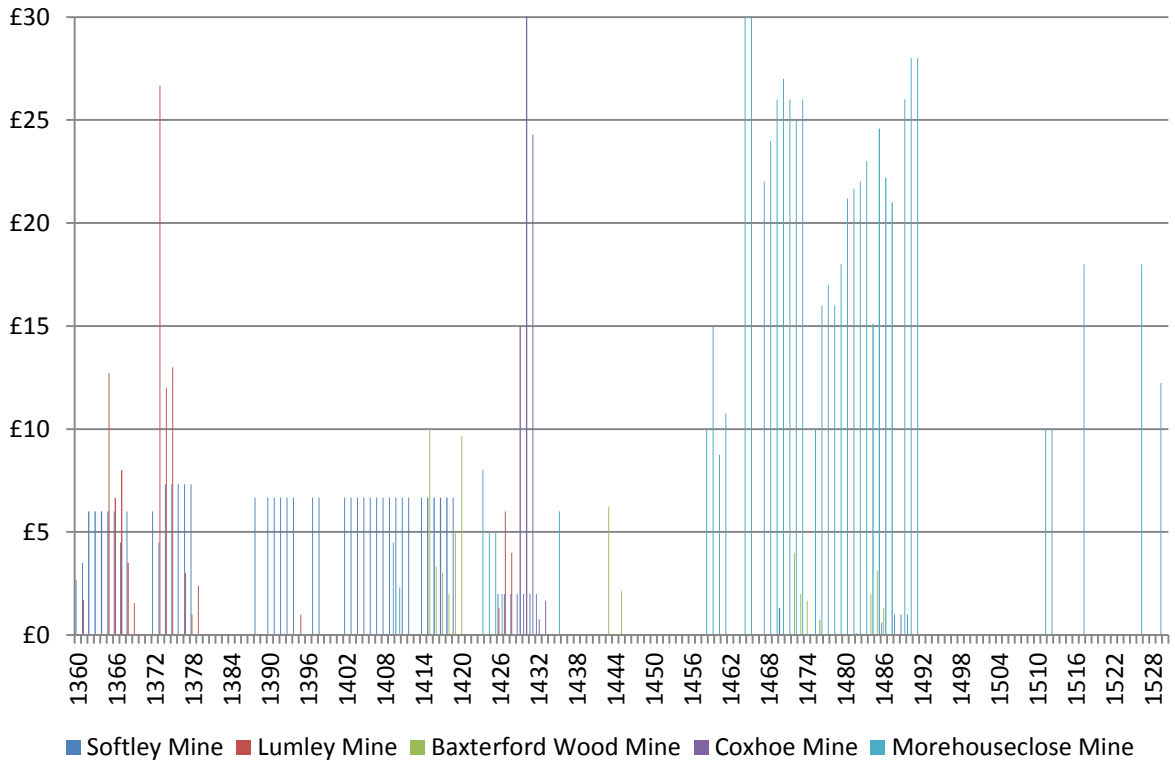
[144] DCM Bursar's Accounts, 1351/2, 1368/9, 1375/6, 1397/8.
[145] DCM Bursar's Account, 1536/7.
[146] Coal mines at Fery and Rainton were leased out at £20 during the sixteenth century: DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670.

of the Priory's income with the opening of the Moorhouseclose pit: coal receipts, thus representing a similar proportion of their income as it did for the bishops of Durham, if on a much smaller scale.[147]

Unlike the bishops of Durham who possessed several core coal mines, however, Finchale Priory opened up numerous new mines, which often produced a short-lived but profitable decade of coal receipts before being abandoned. For example, in the 1360s and 70s the Lumley mines were particularly profitable but from then onwards rarely produced coal receipts worthy of mention.[148] Likewise the pit at Coxhoe was opened up in 1427/8 'in expensis factis circa aquaeductum de Coksow pro carbonibus lucratis, £40'.[149] This represented a large outlay for the Priory as their total income in this year was only £178. However, the coal mine was successful in the short term with the Priory's total revenue increasing to nearly £200, almost solely because of the receipts of the Coxhoe mines over the next three years: £15, £54 and £24 per annum.[150] This was a short-lived venture for soon the mine appears to have been abandoned and is never mentioned again in the accounts. Perhaps the mine encountered further problems and the monks decided it was unwise to reinvest further money into repairing the pit or the seam became much harder to mine because it would otherwise seem peculiar that they would simply stop production at such a profitable mine.

[147] *The Priory of Finchale*, pp. i-ccccxvi.
[148] Ibid., pp. lv-cvi.
[149] Ibid., p. cxcvii.
[150] Ibid., pp. cxcix-ccvi.

Figure 15: Receipts of Finchale Priory's Coal Mines, 1360-1530



Source: J. Raine, (ed.), *Charters of Endowment, Inventories, and Account Rolls of the Priory of Finchale Priory*, Surtees Society, 6 (1837)

The mine at Softley produced a consistent and reliable return of around £6 13s 4d up until the 1420s when the pit ceased making a profit.[151] As has been seen, the bishop soon closed this mine down when the monks showed signs of trying to reopen it in the second half of the fifteenth century, with the monks of Finchale Priory recording '20s, receptis de scaccario domini Episcopi pro stacione putei carbonum minerae de Softley hoc anno' in 1488/9.[152] The pit at Baxterford Wood followed the same pattern as many of the Priory's mines, producing a relatively short-lived profit in the 1410s. Once again the monks had their pit bought out by a larger landowner, this time by Durham Cathedral Priory itself who bought four acres of coal-bearing land in Baxerford Wood for £40 in 1427/8.[153] However, the monks

[151] Ibid., p. i-clxxix.
[152] Ibid., p. ccclxxxi.
[153] Ibid., pp. cxcvi-cxcvii.

of Finchale Priory tried reopening a pit here in 1442/3 when they paid 'in expensis factis pro aquaeductu pro carbonibus acquirendis apud Baxstanford £26 5s 9d'.[154] This was a high outlay for a coal mine which had barely produced any profits earlier in the century, especially as their total income was a mere £177 14s 6d whilst the overall sum of their expenses was well over £350. It was to prove a failure, with the receipts in the next year recording 'nichil ultra costagia,' and the pit never again producing the equivalent income it had before Durham Priory had purchased some of this land in the 1420s.[155]

The most successful pit, however, was opened up in the 1450s at Morehouseclose which greatly bolstered the Priory's ailing rent rolls during the particularly harsh decades of the 1450s and 60s, ensuring that their overall revenues were above £200. However, once again these receipts are deceptive: they represent the gross revenues from the sale of coal at the pits rather than the net income that the monks actually received. During the 1460s, when Morehouseclose pit was at its most productive, their accounts bore a regular annual charge of approximately £10 per annum.[156] Thus the net income of the monks of Finchale Priory from coal mines was not as high as their accounts would make it appear: the cost of winning the coal often reduced their gross receipts to little more than half their value. These expenses, moreover, represent the ordinary expenditure involved in coal-mining and there is no mention of constructing further water-gates, which would almost certainly double expenses. Coal-mining could thus be a very speculative proposition in medieval England, even in the north-east where its precocious development was so remarkable. The regular expenses of the coal industry meant that net profits were often half those of gross receipts, whilst exceptional expenditure on repairing aqueducts could quite literally wash away profits as easily as flood their coal mines.

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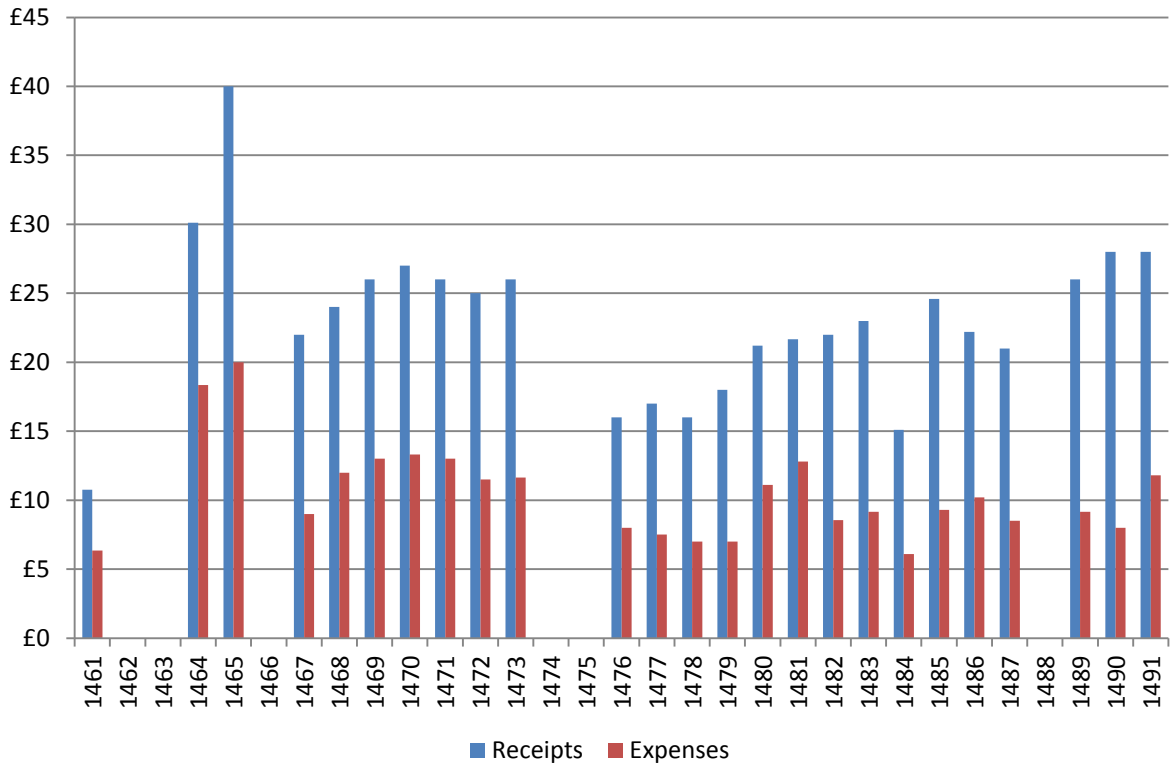
[154] Ibid., p. ccxxxviii.
[155] Ibid., p. ccxl.
[156] Ibid., pp. cclxv-cccxix.

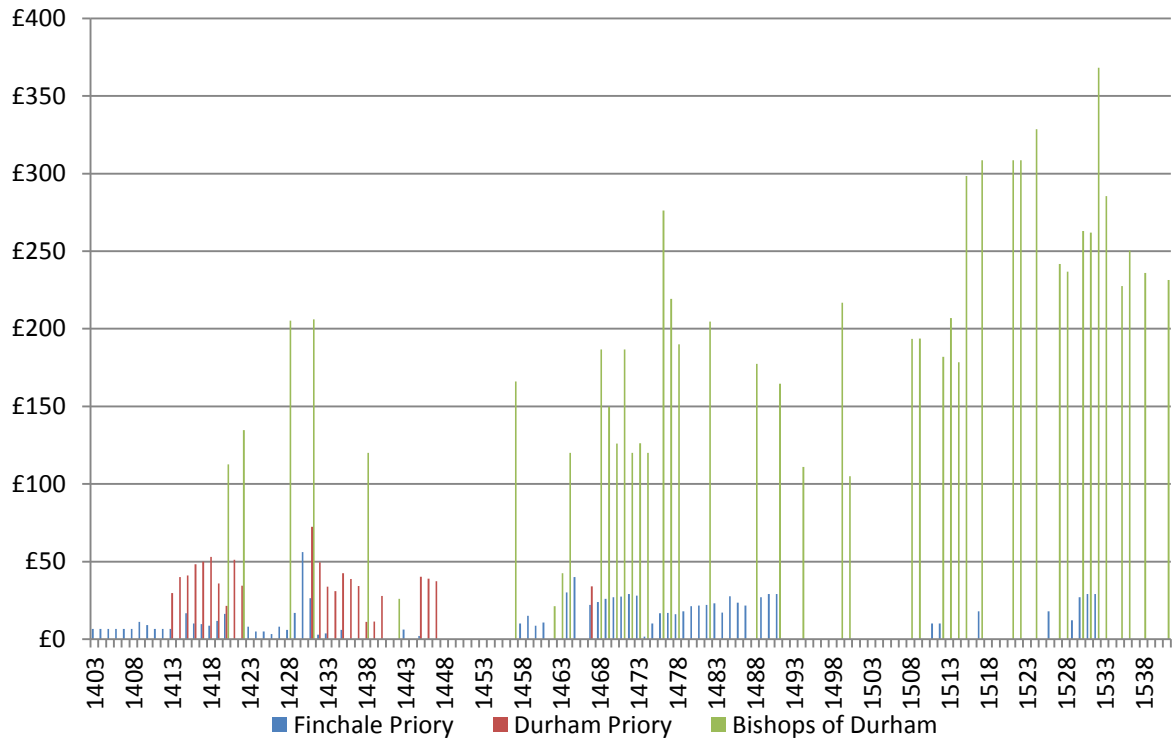
Figure 16: Receipts and Expenses of Finchale Priory's Coal Mine at Moorhouseclose, 1460-90



Source: J. Raine (ed.), *Charters of Endowment, Inventories, and Account Rolls of the Priory of Finchale Priory*, Surtees Society, 6 (1837)

For the monks of Durham and Finchale Priory, coal-mining represented a way to provide for their own household requirements, and although there were various attempts to open new pits, they were either unsuccessful, short-term, or attracted the attention of the bishops who quickly sought to limit it. The monks at Finchale Priory were particularly tenacious in this respect, and sometimes were successful in gaining a net profit, but it was not on the same scale as those achieved by the bishops of Durham. By comparison, coal-mining provided the bishops of Durham with a vital supplement to their ailing rent rolls, enabling them to experience recovery on par with that achieved by the monks of Durham Priory, but without the need to reorganise their holdings and radically alter the tenure on their lands.

Figure 17: Coal Receipts of the Ecclesiastical Landowners in Durham, 1400-1540



Source: Raine, J. (ed.), *Charters of Endowment, Inventories, and Account Rolls of the Priory of Finchale Priory*, Surtees Society, 6 (1837); Receiver General's Accounts: CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139; DCM Coal Mines, 1409/10-1452/3

John Hare's study of the differences between the demesne agriculture of the bishops of Winchester and Winchester Cathedral Priory showed that there were 'subtle variations between the two estates that reflected both individual decisions by estate managers, and the contrasting demands of the two estates for cash or food'.[157] He went on to describe that there were 'major contrasts between the two estates. They possessed very different households, and this could affect agrarian policies.' For example, the 'priory's need to feed a static household may have encouraged a more conservative management, as with the later food leases' whereas the 'itinerant nature of the bishopric…probably encouraged a greater emphasis on

[157] J. N. Hare, 'The Bishop and the Prior: Demesne Agriculture in Medieval Hampshire', *AgHR*, 54 (2006), pp. 211-2.

cash and the market.'[158] The differing needs of these two estates and their consequences were not overly dissimilar to those found at Durham, especially with regards to how these two ecclesiastical landowners approached their mineral resources. The bursars of Durham Priory kept their coal mines in hand for long periods, preferring to supply the consumption needs of a large group of monks rather than commercially exploit them. By comparison, the bishops of Durham, who were often away for periods of time and moved around even within the Palatinate, preferred the flexibility of leasing out their coal mines with the provision for purchasing cheap coal from the lessee when it was required. Although the bishops undoubtedly possessed more extensive coal seams in more favourable locations for commercial exploitation, the different household requirements of the monks and bishops played an important part in their decisions upon how to exploit their coal resources. Thus, it was as much the institutional context in which these mineral resources were found as their location which dictated how they were exploited, in a fashion akin to the way the differing household demands of the monks and bishops of Winchester affected their agrarian policies.

Conclusion

The two largest ecclesiastical landowners in Durham faced substantial economic challenges in the fifteenth century, experiencing similar falls in real income, but also achieving a similar chronology to their recoveries. Although the overall recovery of these two estates was broadly similar chronologically, it was achieved through fundamentally different methods. The monks of Durham Priory intensified their rent collection process, restructuring their estates and so improving the actual income they collected, whereas the bishops diversified, supplementing their ailing rent rolls with increased coal receipts. These different

[158] Ibid., pp. 211-2.

responses were to have lasting implications for both estates when they faced the completely different problems of inflation and population increase in the sixteenth century.[159]

How do the experiences of these two northern landowners compare with similar estates in other areas of the country? Broadly speaking the national trends of the rural economy of England went through three sub-periods in the fifteenth century: a period of relative stagnation up until the bad harvests of the late-1430s; a deep and pervasive period of low rents, vacant holdings and high arrears from the late-1430s to the 1460s; and a period of recovery taking place from the 1470s onwards despite the bad harvests and recurrent outbreaks of disease during the 1480s.[160] There were regional variations on these trends, however, not least where industry played a role in the local economy such as in Wiltshire and Cornwall. These regions of local industry and trade enjoyed a period of continued prosperity in the first third of the fifteenth century, but appear to have suffered from the mid-century recession regardless, primarily because these industries were also hit hard by the recession. John Hare summarised the evidence from Wiltshire manors as showing that the fifteenth century should be divided into three phases:

> 'a period of growth in the first half of the fifteenth century continuing late-fourteenth-century developments; the period of mid-century recession from about 1450 to the 1480s; and, finally, the period of late-fifteenth-century growth. These phases coincided with the changing fortunes of the cloth industry'.[161]

He concluded that the Wiltshire evidence 'reinforces the idea of a great slump in the mid-fifteenth century, but suggests an important qualification…in Wiltshire the growth of the cloth industry generated high prosperity until about 1450'.[162] It was in the first phase of the fifteenth century, therefore, where the textile industry provided a respite to agricultural stagnation, especially in creating demand for land and resurgent profits in pastoral farming.

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[159] See chapter 3 for sixteenth-century consequences. See section 3 for impact upon their tenants.
[160] Hatcher, 'The Great Slump', pp. 237-72.
[161] J. N. Hare, *A Prospering Society: Wiltshire in the Later Middle Ages* (Hatfield, 2011), p. 196.
[162] Ibid., p. 211.

In a similar fashion, John Hatcher found that 'rents in south-east Cornwall soared to new peaks in the first half of the fifteenth century, boosted by a growing demand for agricultural produce from centres of industry and trade…whilst in western Cornwall fluctuations in the output of tin were paralleled by fluctuations in rents.'[163] For example, the total income from the manor of Rillaton rose from £11 16s 4d in 1406 to £21 8s 5d in 1427; an increase of almost 90 per cent. 'Furthermore, textile manufacturing in the south-west entered, in the early fifteenth century, upon a phase of very rapid expansion in which west Devon and the extremities of Cornwall played a significant part'.[164] Thus two of the regions which were most buoyant in the first quarter of the fifteenth century owed their success to their regional industries.

The north-east has traditionally been described as a region of precocious industrial activity but despite the coal industry being 'exceptional in the Middle Ages', it was insufficient to provide the regional economy with the kinds of demand which were achieved either in Wiltshire or Cornwall, or indeed were to be provided by the coal industry in the north-east from the late-sixteenth century.[165] At this early stage in its history, coal production still employed relatively few people, with even the successful coal mine at Railey only employing three hewers, three barrowmen and four drawers, whilst there was no comparable workforce to the throngs of keelmen waiting to export coal from the region in the early-modern period.[166] Moreover, there are signs that the coal industry suffered its own slump in the fifteenth century with slack demand at Railey in the 1460s and a complete collapse in the Tyneside mines for much of the middle of the century.[167] The rural economy of Durham, therefore, followed national trends in the first half of the fifteenth century rather than those

[163] Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, p. 258.
[164] Ibid., p. 151.
[165] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 72.
[166] CCB B/79/4.
[167] CCB B/79/3-4.

established by regional economies bolstered by local industries. Although Pollard has highlighted the 'burgeoning prosperity' of cattle rearing in the Pennine Spurs of Upper Weardale and Stanhope Park during the second and third decades of the century, this 'was highly specialised' and made 'a comparatively small contribution to the gross product of the region'.[168] If anything the north-east region may well have gone into recession slightly earlier because of the impact of the poor harvests of the 1430s, which saw a 'spate of high mortality and failed harvests which culminated at the end of the decade in a major agrarian crisis', and led to high levels of arrears on Durham Priory's lands.[169]

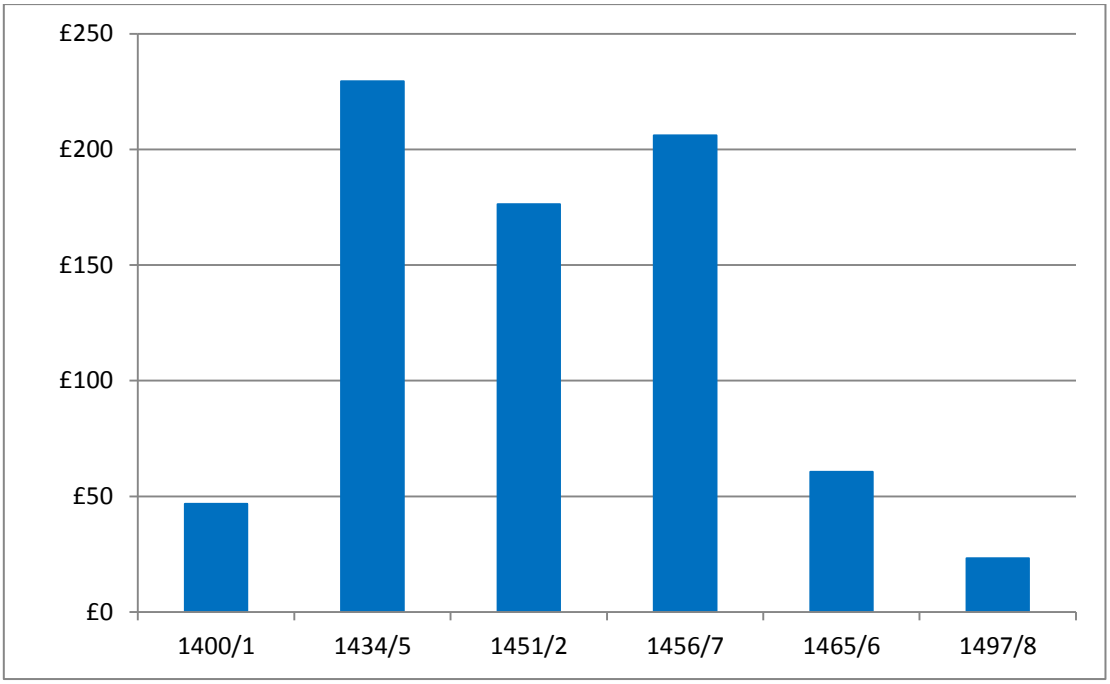
Although the Durham region was not buoyed in the early part of the fifteenth century by local industry, how did the chronology and mechanisms of recovery compare nationally? Dyer's study of many of these problems on the estates of the Bishops of Worcester tells a remarkably similar story of recovery from the mid-century recession, where tales of a 'great decay and falling down of the buildings of tenants for lack of repair' abounded.[170] On their Worcester lands 'increase of rents…were occasionally made in the second half of the fifteenth century', whilst their net income increased from a low of £820 in 1458/9 to a relative high of £1,074 by 1540, broadly in step with the increases made by Durham Priory.[171] It was in their rent collection, however, where the experiences of Durham Priory coincided with much of the nation, with '1486 marking a turning point in the history of arrears on the estate' of the bishops of Worcester through an 'orgy of administrative activity'. Under Bishop Alcock's successors, 'arrears did not build up, and remained at a relatively low level, less even than in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries'.[172] There are many other estates with a similar tale of recovery by the last few decades of the fifteenth century

[168] Pollard, 'Agrarian Crisis of 1438-40', p. 92.
[169] Ibid., p. 93.
[170] Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 165.
[171] Ibid., p. 177.
[172] Ibid., p. 185.

through a concerted effort in improving their own efficiency. Du Boulay's study of the estates of the archbishops of Canterbury revealed an increase in revenues on the majority of the Kentish estates after 1490, with there being a 'moderate burden of arrears up until the 1480s or 1490s, but after this arrears declined and often died away altogether, and the payments of money, always fairly steady, rose gently to a correspondingly high plateau'.[173] Other examples include Margaret Beaufort, who managed to achieve a similar feat in her lordship of Kendal in Westmoreland. In 1453/54, it had yielded *c.* £200 to the Earl of Richmond, but 'the financial yield from Kendal rose steadily under Margaret's administration, reaching an annual figure of around £380, a sum further swollen by efficient collection of long-standing arrears of rent'.[174] T. B. Pugh found a similar improvement in the collection of arrears in the accounts for the lordship of Newport as shown in Figure 18, revealing not only a broadly similar chronology of recovery, but also that the improvement in collecting arrears achieved by the end of the fifteenth century once again outstripped that of their early-fifteenth-century predecessors.[175] It is unlikely that even an efficient landowner could completely avoid the mid-century recession, as this was so pervasive that the vast majority of estates seem to have suffered to some extent. However, the speed and timing of recovery from this trough was likely to have been greatly affected by the efficiency of the landowner in question.

[173] F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'A Rentier Economy in the Later Middle Ages: The Archbishopric of Canterbury', *EcHR*, 16 (1964), pp. 435-6.
[174] E. B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England, c.1380-c.1525* (Stroud, 1996), p. 262.
[175] T. B. Pugh (ed.), *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415-1536: Select Documents* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 182.

Figure 18: Arrears Owed by Local Ministers to the Receiver of Newport, 1400-1540



Source: T. B. Pugh (ed.), *The Marcher Lordships of South Wales, 1415-1536: Select Documents* (Cardiff, 1963), p. 182.

If the chronology of recession and recovery was not overly dissimilar to other areas of the country, how far did the severity of the recession in the north-east reflect national trends? The income the bursars of Durham Cathedral Priory annually collected declined by 43 per cent of its previous level, from c.£1,400 in the first decade of the fifteenth century to £810 by 1453/4, whilst the receiver generals of the Bishops of Durham suffered a remarkably similar decline of some 42 per cent, from around £2,900 in 1417 to just over £1,700 by the 1450s.[176] By comparison, Mark Bailey found that the Suffolk manor of Staverton generated a rental income of some £59 in 1400, but by the 1470s perhaps as little as £40.[177] Hilton noted that the income for Leicester Abbey declined from £268 19s 9d in 1408 to about £229 9s 4d in 1477, whilst Canterbury Cathedral Priory suffered a similar reduction in income from £2,202

[176] DCM, Bursar's Accounts, 1449/50 and 1519/20; CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139.
[177] Mark Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk: an Economic and Social History, 1200-1500* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 208.

in 1419/20 to some £1,907 in 1454, which reached a low point of £1,757 by 1469. [178] This led Chris Dyer to conclude that 'reductions in the region of 20 per cent were normal in southern and midland England', whereas 'revenues fell by a third' in the north-east.[179] This is perhaps an underestimate of the decline, with Bean's study of the Percy's Northumberland estates showing that between 1434/5 and 1449/50 'the demesne lands and tenancies at will dropped from £17 15s 2d to £10 12s 3d', concluding that there was 'a decline of over a half in the value of the demesne lands in the first half of the fifteenth century'.[180]

The chronology of recession and recovery on the estates of these two Durham landowners were not overly dissimilar from national trends despite the current belief that 'the North-East was experiencing relative as well as absolute decline' in the later fifteenth century because other regions of the country 'came out of recession earlier than the North-East, and began to enjoy the fruits of sustained economic resurgence from the 1470s'.[181] An analysis of the arrears of Durham Cathedral Priory has shown that there was a marked improvement in the collection of rents from the 1470s onwards which compares favourably with national trends, whilst there was a similar improvement in the prospects of the coal industry during the last quarter of the fifteenth century. It was in the severity of the recession where the main difference between Durham and the rest of the country lies. Pollard's belief that the north-east suffered differently from the recession of the fifteenth century is fundamentally correct but in need of slight revision: it was not that the north-east recovered more slowly than other parts of the country, but that the recession had a harder bite in the north and thus there was more to recover from. Why this should be so is not immediately apparent. The Durham region was a centre of precocious industry in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with

[178] R. H. Hilton, *The Economic Development of Some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London, 1947), p. 86; Dyer, *Making a Living*, p. 337.
[179] Ibid., p. 337.
[180] J. M. W. Bean, *The Estates of the Percy Family, 1416-1537* (London, 1958), pp. 30-1.
[181] Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, pp. 78-80.

numerous coal mines being worked throughout the region, but this was still in its infancy and employed too few people to provide the kind of stimulus to the local economy which was given by the labour-intensive textile and tin-mining industries in Wiltshire and Cornwall respectively. In his work on the harvest failures of 1438-40, Pollard has suggested that this crisis was 'particularly severe in north-eastern England. The Midlands and southern England, recent studies suggest, felt only a muted effect with no apparent lasting consequences,' and thus this crisis was 'without doubt the major turning point in the economic fortunes of the North-East'.[182] The above investigation has found that arrears, waste and decay reached corresponding highs in these years, but unfortunately the consequences of this crisis are hard to trace given the division of the bursar's office until 1445 when the effects of the mid-century recession were beginning to be felt. It is clear that there was no quick recovery from this crisis though as just a year later Prior Ebbchester described his house as being 'in a state of collapse'.[183] Thus on the eve of the mid-century recession, the rural economy could already be described as in the throes of a deep depression, and so the severity of the mid-century recession is perhaps best explained by this combination of the long-term consequences of the agrarian crisis of the 1430s and the immediate impact of the mid-century recession.

[182] Pollard, 'Agrarian Crisis of 1438-40', p. 94.
[183] Dobson, *Durham Priory*, pp. 286-7.

Chapter 3

Path Dependency and High Inflation in the Sixteenth Century

Introduction

During the fifteenth century rural society adapted to a prolonged period of population decline and subsequently to low prices, low rents and high wages, but the sixteenth century posed entirely different problems. It is not clear whether the population recovered because of lower mortality or increased fertility but many of the problems of the sixteenth century were caused by rapid demographic growth from some 2.14 million at the end of the fifteenth century to 3.02 million by 1560, and which went on to reach 4.11 million by 1600 and finally 5.31 million by 1650.[184] The rise in inflation across the sixteenth century was partially caused by Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage, but also by this rapid increase in population which led to higher prices, especially for grain which increased some sixfold by the early-seventeenth century. The question of how far landowners and tenants were able to capitalise on this situation still remains uncertain with much of the debate surrounding the ability of landlords to increase their rents in the face of inflation and how far their tenants were able to resist such incursions, producing considerable focus upon the strength of customary tenures. An even more important question which has rarely been asked is how far the changes rural society underwent in the fifteenth century affected how these institutions could respond to the new challenges imposed by inflation. The Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral, for example, inherited an estate which had steadily converted its land to leasehold, whereas copyhold tenure had become entrenched on much of the bishops' lands, but did this enable

[184] Broadberry et al., 'British Economic Growth', p. 54.

the Dean and Chapter to respond to this inflationary period better than the bishops? This chapter focuses upon how these two rentier landowners responded to the rapid inflation of the sixteenth century, and how far the divergent development of their estates influenced these responses.

The ability of rentier landlords to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century has proven controversial, with Eric Kerridge seemingly exasperated when he opened his article on the movements of rent some half a century ago with the statement that 'the opinion is not yet dead that rents lagged behind prices in Tudor and early Stuart England, landlords as a class being either impoverished or in difficulties'.[185] He advocated that rents across England may in reality have not only kept pace with prices in the sixteenth century but have actually led them. In a similar trend, both Tawney and Brenner have seen landowners in this period as rapacious exploiters, with Tawney especially emphasising how the rise in inflation caused landlords to increase rents and fines at the expense of customary ones, to promote the growth of larger farm units and consolidate these units through conversion to enclosed pasture.[186] Peter Bowden, despite acknowledging that rents often stagnated behind prices, concluded: 'that the basic premise of landlord embarrassment has been seriously overstated'.[187] He went on to write that 'the inflation of Tudor and early Stuart times is generally believed to have confronted English landowners with serious problems: problems which derived from the inelasticity of tenures', commenting that 'if such theories carry great scholarship behind them, they also seem in the light of present evidence to be built on very uncertain foundations'.[188] He concluded that 'rent was not the landlord's only source of estate revenue', whilst 'in spite of rigidities due to the prevailing system of land tenure, there were probably

[185] Eric Kerridge, 'The Movement of Rent, 1540-1640', *EcHR*, 6 (1953), pp. 16-34.
[186] Tawney, *Agrarian Problem*, pp. 200-13.
[187] Peter Bowden, 'Agricultural Prices, Wages, Farm Profits and Rents', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW, IV, 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 694-5.
[188] Ibid., pp. 694-5.

few estates where rental revenues remained inflexible for any length of time'.[189] Alan Simpson similarly concluded that 'it is difficult to see how the mere landlord had suffered from the inflation', as he 'simply raised the rents, and found tenants – often the same tenants – who were able and willing enough to meet each rise'.[190] This process was far from simple and, as the following chapter explores, these two ecclesiastical landowners faced a whole host of problems when trying to increase their rents, many of them created by the previous development of their estates.

The Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral

On 31st December 1539, the monks of Durham Cathedral Priory surrendered the church to Henry VIII, but within seventeen months the Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary had been refounded in 1541, with the former Prior Hugh Whitehead as the Dean of the new foundation.[191] Rather than housing fifty to a hundred monks divided into obediences, the new Cathedral was comprised of a dean, twelve prebendaries, twelve minor canons, and numerous deputies, including choristers, deacons and the master of the school, but this transformation did not noticeably decrease the Cathedral's expenses as much as might be expected, for each of these posts were paid a not inconsiderable stipend. For example, the dean was allocated £266 13s 4d, clearly emphasising his prominence within the new foundation; the twelve prebendaries shared a further £400 between them; and the minor canons were paid £120 divided between them. The other aspect of their pay, known as corpes-land, and the gradual inroads many of these prebends were able to make into the landed society of the Palatinate are discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

[189] Ibid., pp. 694.
[190] Alan Simpson, *The Wealth of the Gentry, 1540-1660* (Cambridge, 1961) , pp. 201-2.
[191] David Marcombe, The Dean and Chapter of Durham, 1558-1603 (Durham Doctoral Thesis), p. 6.

Much of the Priory's lands were restored to it, perhaps because of the backlash feared after the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536, and such was the continuity that David Marcombe described 'the new Cathedral as but old abbey writ large', which 'was evident in many facets of its foundation as well as its subsequent history'.[192] With regards to the estates of the Cathedral, all the manor and park of Bearpark was included in the new foundation, alongside the manors of 'Witton Gilbert, Elvet otherwise Elvet Hall, Sacriston Heugh, Wardley, Hedworth, Pittington, Hesleden, Holme, Bewley, Wolviston, Bellasis, Billingham, Ketton, Aycliffe, Hett, Muggleswick, Houghall and Shincliffe with all their rights, members and appurtenances'.[193] The full list of all messuages, burgages, and lands which were bestowed upon the new foundation was indeed long, and there were many holdings which suffered little interruption in ownership across this turbulent period. However, some of the Priory's considerable holdings were not restored, whilst many of its subordinate cells lost their lands. For example, the manor of Ketton was not restored to the Cathedral, which throughout the second half of the fifteenth century had owed a rent of £24.[194] As late as the receiver's book of 1541/2 the manor of Ketton was accounted for by the Dean and Chapter as owing a rent of £27 6s 8d. This manor was granted by the king to Sir Arthur Darcy, who alienated it to Sir William Bellasis, of Newborough Abbey, several years later.[195] Similarly, the manor of Haswell, a former possession of Finchale Priory was granted out to the Andersons, the rich Newcastle merchant family, who eventually sold it in 1631 for £4,600, whilst the cell of Wearmouth was granted to Thomas Whitehead, a relative of Hugh Whitehead who had surrendered the Priory of Durham to the Crown in 1539.[196]

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[192] Ibid., p. 6.
[193] A. H. Thompson (ed.), *The Statutes of the Cathedral Church of Durham: With Other Documents Relating to its Foundation and Endowment by King Henry VIII and Queen Mary*, Surtees Society, 143 (1929), p.15.
[194] W. Greenwell (ed.), *Feodarium Prioratus Dunelmensis: A Survey of the Estates of the Prior and Convent of Durham*, Surtees Society, 58 (1872), p. 158.
[195] R. Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham, vol. 3* (1816), p. 330.
[196] R. Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham, vol. 1* (1816), pp. 119-20.

Reconstructing the income of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral for the first hundred years of its foundation is a singularly difficult proposition, partly because of the poor survival of some of the key accounting material, and partly because of the lack of information surrounding entry fines. The surviving receiver's rolls cover the period c. 1550-1606, but of the first nine rolls which cover the period before the 1580s, several are only small and virtually useless fragments whilst even the best surviving roll has at least a third of the accounting year missing. The transumpt books provide a useful summary of the annual accounts and so can cover some of this loss, but their survival is unfortunately very chronologically limited to the period c.1572-1614. Lastly, the receiver's books have survived in both the best condition and chronological coverage, but they are not without their limitations: it is often unclear whether the rent recorded had been paid in full or whether this was simply the expected rent, whilst the sub-totalling is sometimes inaccurate, and there are often no annual totals even attempted. With these limitations in place, it is still possible to piece together much of the information concerning their income, that is, except for entry fines. Prior to 1660 there is scant information concerning this crucial piece of the puzzle, although several theoretical attempts will be made later in this chapter to suggest what could have been achieved from this source given the few indicators of the levels of entry fines which have survived.

The first glimpse of the reconstituted income of the Dean and Chapter is possible from the receiver's book of 1541/2, which is shown in Table 4. However, this is somewhat deceptive, for as noted above, some of the possessions of the Cathedral were yet to be stripped, whilst there is no information about the state of arrears, providing a superficially buoyant picture of their income.[197]

[197] DCM Receiver's Book, 1541/2.

Table 4: Revenue of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral, 1541/2

	£	s	d
Sum of all temporalities	1554	16	5
Sum of all spiritualties	599	0	8
Sum of all temporalities and spiritualties	2153	17	2
Sum of decay	32	13	4
Remaining clear	2121	0	21

Source: DCM Receiver's Books: 1541/2

A much more satisfactory and detailed breakdown of this income can be found in the receiver's rolls, shown in the table below for 1569/70.[198]

Table 5: Revenue of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral, 1569/70

	£	s	d
Sum of Temporalities in Durham	1388	2	6
Sum of Decay and allowances	49	4	5
Sum Clear after decay and all deductions	1338	18	1
Sum of all receipts collected for year	1229	15	5
Sum of arrears	109	2	8
Sum of Temporalities in Northumberland	31	19	7
Sum of Decay and allowances		3	4
Sum Clear after decay and all deductions	31	16	3
Sum of all receipts collected for year	25	0	12
Sum of arrears	6	15	3
Sum of Temporalities Total (decay and allowances deducted)	1370	14	4
Sum of Spiritualties in Durham	294	7	8
Sum of Decay and allowances		55	8
Sum Clear after decay and all deductions	291	12	0
Sum of all receipts collected for year	260	5	4
Arrears	31	6	8
Sum of Spiritualties in Northumberland	187	5	6
Sum of Decay and allowances		76	8
Sum Clear after decay and all deductions	183	8	10
Sum of all receipts collected for year	105	18	8
Arrears	77	10	2
Sum of Spiritualties in Ebor	73	0	0
Sum of all receipts collected for year	68	10	0
Arrears	4	10	0
Sum Total	1918	15	3
Sum total receipts of this account	1689	10	6

[198] DCM Receiver's Roll, 1569/70.

Sum of arrears for the year	229	8	10
Sum Total	1859	19	4

Source: DCM Receiver's Rolls, 1569/70

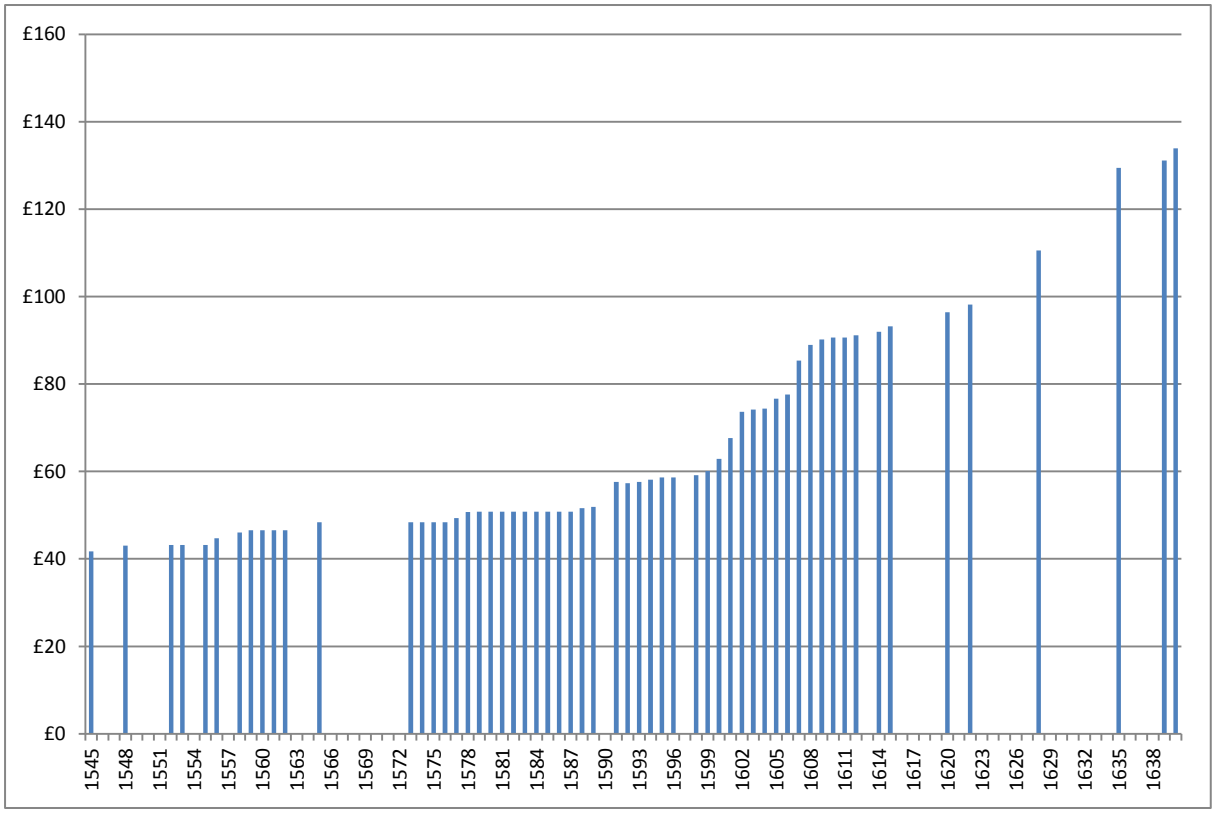
The total income of the Dean and Chapter was, therefore, £1,974, from which £56 was deducted for decay and allowances, so that the receiver was expected to account for £1,918, but only £1,689 was collected, with over £229 outstanding as arrears.[199] The reason for these high levels of arrears, which is somewhat surprising given how well their early-sixteenth-century predecessors had managed to control these problems, will be explored in greater depth below in relation to their on-going dispute with their tenants concerning the lottery system of the 1570s. Such high levels of decay are perhaps more surprising given the rising agricultural prices in this period, however, when the rents and properties in decay are taken into consideration this becomes more readily explainable. Decay by the sixteenth century had become an urban phenomenon on the Dean and Chapter's estates, with Sadlergate in decay of £4 14s 4d out of a rent of £13 18s 2d in 1614. In the same year, the burgh of Elvet was in decay of £5 6s 6d, and the barony of Elvet of £4 9s 10d, whilst Crossgate was in decay of £4 10s 8d, and the mills there were also in decay of £4 6s 8d.[200] Similarly, the fishing rights in the River Tyne, out of a rent of £11 1s 8d, were in decay of £9 8d, and had become virtually worthless as a rent by the late-sixteenth century, presumably as a result of the coal trade which saw a much busier and more polluted River Tyne develop in the late-sixteenth century.[201]

Although there were signs of high arrears and consistent allowances for decay, there were also occasional glimpses of improvements; nowhere more so than at South Shields,

[199] DCM/G/AA/5.
[200] DCM Transumpt of Accounts, 1571/2-1613/4.
[201] DCM Transumpt of Accounts, 1613/4.

where the vast increase in the salt industry there provided the Dean and Chapter with one of the few noticeable increases in annual rent.

Figure 19: Dean and Chapter Receipts From South Shields, 1540-1640



Source: DCM Receiver's Books: 1541/2-1639/40

As can be seen, this improvement in rent was delayed until the very end of the sixteenth century, but rose quite dramatically during the early-seventeenth century, more than tripling the total revenue of South Shields. This improvement was not made from any noticeable increase in rents, with many salt pans leased out at around 10s each throughout this period, but because of the sheer increase in the scale of operations in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries as a result of the take-off of the coal trade.[202] A seventeenth-century rental lists 129 individual salt pans, many being leased out to the usual suspects, the Selbys

[202] DCM Receiver's Books: 1541/2-1639/40: DCD/G/AB.

and Andersons, but they were far from having a monopoly over production here with many other families possessing considerable numbers such as the Harles and Colts.[203]

In order to understand the overall income of the Dean and Chapter in this period, especially the problems they encountered with arrears, we have to better understand the controversy on their estates during the 1570s, which was created by the so-called 'lottery system'. David Reid called this system 'legal chicanery' whereby the Dean and Chapter attempted to increase their revenues through the device of double-leasing, which in his words was 'leasing a holding to a man of substance able to pay a market rent during the lifetime of the customary tenant and by a legal chicanery denying the heir the ancient right to inherit on the grounds of a lease already held'.[204] The core of the debate surrounding the lottery system was whether these tenants held by tenant-right; a customary tenure which guaranteed certain protections to inheritance and stable rents. Did the process of syndication during the fifteenth century, which effectively converted their lands to leasehold tenure, undermine these claims to tenant-right? Naturally, their tenants argued that it did not, as they owed border service as part of their tenure and they considered their holdings to be inheritable, whilst the Dean and Chapter argued that the process of syndication undertaken by their predecessors clearly converted their tenants into leaseholders. It is a contentious point which not only divided contemporary opinions but one which has provoked historical debate, with David Marcombe considering the tenants' claims of a 'vague and ill-defined local custom of 'tenant-right'' as 'largely fictitious', whereas Jean Morrin has argued that the tenants 'genuinely believed in their tenant right and their convictions were reinforced when their duty to perform border

[203] DCD/E/BA - list of tenants, with rents and valuations temp.~Dean Hunt [1620-38].
[204] D. S. Reid, *The Durham Crown Lordships in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and the Aftermath* (Durham, 1990), p. 43.

service was restated in their new leases'.[205] Were these claims to tenant-right incompatible with the previous history of leasing on the Dean and Chapter's estate?

As has been shown in chapter two, Durham Priory's tenants increasingly held by leasehold tenure as the process of syndication involved all of the land of a township, except freehold land, divided amongst the sitting tenants. This point must be emphasised, for the Dean and Chapter had equally as strong a claim that their tenants were leaseholders, a point which has often been disregarded. For example, if one reads the introduction to the *Surtees Society* edition of the 1580 Elizabethan survey, the editor wrote that there is 'no room for doubt' that in the fourteenth century their tenants 'had a recognised tenant-right in their holdings which was ripening into a customary freehold estate', but that soon after the foundation of the Cathedral body of the Dean and Chapter they 'refused to recognise a customary estate in their tenants, who were induced to take leases of their lands under a system of renewable leases'.[206] However, the monks' estates had undergone important changes in the fifteenth century so that Richard Lomas concluded that 'whatever the conditions or arrangements prevailing in 1300, by 1500 leasehold tenure of customary holdings had become widespread if not universal'.[207] The changes which Durham Priory's estates had undergone during the fifteenth-century recession thus provided their successors with a hangover which was not easily cured. The primary cause of dispute after the foundation of the new Cathedral was that their statutes laid down that the same fixed annual rent charged by the monks should be kept, with 21-year leases becoming the norm for all agricultural property, but that these leases must contain no agreement to renew after the term. The exact wording of this last point was: 'we appoint that the lands, meadows, grazings or

[205] Marcombe, Dean and Chapter of Durham, p. 141; Jean Morrin, 'The Tenant Right Dispute on Durham Cathedral Estate 1541-1626', paper given at Tawney Conference, Exeter, 2011.
[206] W. H. D. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1889), pp. xxxv-xxxvi.
[207] Lomas, 'Developments in Land Tenure', p. 43.

pastures be demised on lease to no person or persons for more than the term of twenty-one years, and that no reversion (as they call it) be granted of any manor…which is previously demised on lease for the term of twenty-one years', nor 'that any covenant or pact be made with the lessees to renew the term of the previous lease upon its completion'.[208] The fixed rents seemed to confirm their tenants' belief that they held by tenant-right, and a clause in their leases which required them to equip themselves with horse and armour for fifteen days service a year only served to enhance this impression. It was the question of inheritability which caused considerable dispute for the next few decades because it was vital to their tenants' belief in their tenant-right. Under the administration of the monks in the fifteenth century, despite their holdings being syndicated, tenants were still only charged with a fixed annual rent, and their lands were clearly considered inheritable with numerous families possessing the same holding throughout the fifteenth century.[209]

During the 1570s, as the Dean and Chapter increasingly put pressure on their tenants to give up their claims to tenant-right and take up these leases, they introduced a system of granting reversionary leases which were termed lotteries by their tenants. The dean and prebendaries chose various holdings of tenants who were reluctant to take on new leases, granting a reversion of the lease to a friend or themselves, effectively disinheriting the sitting tenant and evicting them when the reversionary lease was due to come into operation. However, the much more common outcome was that the sitting tenant would pay a large entry fine (as will be seen below, these were usually much larger than a standard entry fine) and thus purchased the reversion of their lease, forcing them to admit to being leaseholders in the process. Naturally, this did not sit well with their tenants, who petitioned the Privy Council numerous times, and colourfully described the lottery system in a petition in 1575, whereby the prebendaries decided that 'all the tenements parcel of their possession being

[208] *Statutes of the Cathedral Church of Durham*, pp. 95-7.
[209] See chapter eight below for more about the inheritability of these holdings.

numbered should be put into several billes, which in the whole did amount to the number of eight tenements for every prebendary and sixteen for the Dean' and that each of them should 'hold in severalty such tenement as by loot should fall unto them by the same lottery' denying 'your said poor orators' their land which they had held by 'the laudable custom of tenant right' for 'time out of mind'.[210] The table below shows a contemporary summary of the lottery system, which reveals that although the tenants were misinformed about the exact number of leases per stall, they were certainly within their rights to complain as the Dean and Chapter were able to raise immense profits within just a few years of its operation. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence concerning the third, sixth and eighth stall, but even with these prebendaries missing, they were able to raise £3,687 13s 8d from the granting of just 111 reversionary leases.[211] When their annual income from the temporalities in Durham came to around c.£1,400, it is easy to see why the Dean and Chapter pursed this policy and why their tenants were so keen to resist it. The fact that all profits accrued in this fashion went directly into the hands of the Protestant prebendaries rather than the Cathedral's coffers only served to increase the contentiousness of the lottery system.

[210] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis* , p. xliii.
[211] Ibid., pp. 249-50.

Table 6: Income Generated by the Lottery System of the 1570s on the Dean and Chapter's Estates

Position	Dean and Canons	Number of Leases	Valuation of the Lotteries
Dean	William Whittingham	29 leases	£886 (and £40 for Jesus Miln)
First Stall	Robert Swift	11 leases	£411 13s 4d
Second Stall	John Pilkington	11 leases	£527
Third Stall			
Fourth Stall	William Bennet	12 leases	£356 6s 8d
Fifth Stall	Ralph Lever	5 leases	£126 13s 4d
Sixth Stall			
Seventh Stall	Leonard Pilkington	9 leases	£418
Eighth Stall			
Ninth Stall	William Stevenson	15 leases	£394
Tenth Stall	John Rudd	5 leases	£130
Eleventh Stall	Adam Halliday	7 leases	£322
Twelfth Stall	George Cliffe	7 leases	£136
Total		**111 leases**	**£3,687 13s 8d**

Source: Longstaffe, W. H. D. and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1886)

Naturally, the tenants resisted, reasserting their claims to tenant-right, and maintaining that the above practice was entirely unreasonable, with many of them utterly refusing to take any lease. The whole dispute, which has been explored in greater detail by both David Marcombe and Jean Morrin, resulted in hundreds of tenants, led by Roland Seamer, protesting.[212] Ultimately the case was referred to the Council of the North who in 1577 for the 'ending of which troubles, and for a quietness hereafter to be had', decided that whereas the tenants claimed tenant-right and the Dean and Chapter 'alleged them to be only their tenants at will, because some of them had taken no leases by a long time', it 'appeareth by an ancient book and register of the leases made by the predecessors of the said Dean and Chapter…that the lands in contention belonging to that house, had many times been letten for years by lease', and that the tenements 'should not be holden by tenant right'.[213] It was in many ways a victory for the Dean and Chapter, as the Council ordered that all tenants

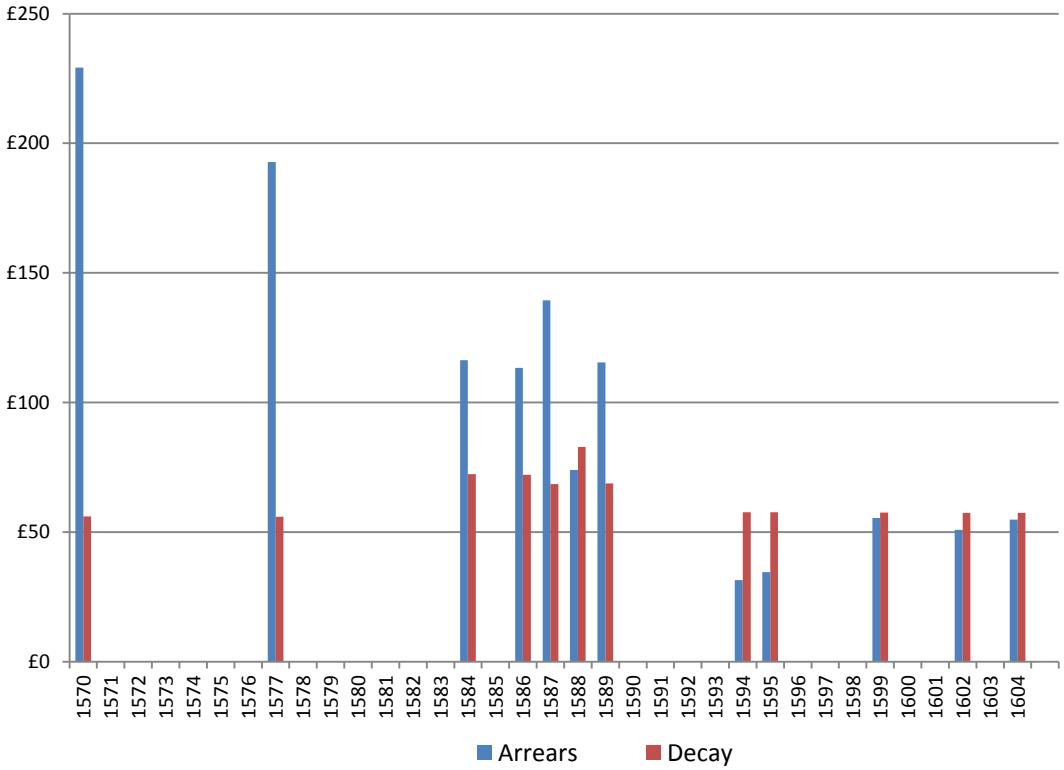
[212] Marcombe, Dean and Chapter of Durham; Jean Morrin, Merrington: Land, Landlord and Tenants, 1541-1840: A Study of the Estate of the Dean and Chapter of Durham (Durham Doctoral Thesis, 1997).
[213] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

'claiming by tenant right, shall relinquish and give over for them, their heirs and assigns forever, all their titles, rights and claims of tenant right in the premises and every part thereof'.[214] However, as we shall see in section three, this did not lead to a wave of mass evictions, but to a more harmonious relationship with their tenants, many of whom went on to inherit the holdings which had been in the family name for over two centuries. Indeed, even those primary agitators around Merrington and Ferryhill seem not to have been disinherited, whilst the Crown pardoned many of the Dean and Chapter's tenants for their role in the Rising of the North.[215]

The effects of this dispute with their tenants can be seen in the receiver's rolls which cover the period 1570-1605, and which record both the annual arrears and decay of rents on their estate.[216] Although it is difficult to know the state of arrears just prior to this dispute with their tenants, given the ability of their early-sixteenth-century predecessors to control arrears, it seems unlikely that they were coming down from a high point. Indeed, it is much more likely that the 1570s brought these disagreements with their tenants to a head, with arrears spiralling upwards as tenants simply refused to take new leases, pay entry fines, or even in some cases pay their rents. However, once the issues of tenant-right and renewable leases were resolved, arrears were once again brought under control as Figure 20 shows.

[214] Ibid., p. xxxviii.
[215] See chapter 8 below.
[216] DCM Receiver's Rolls: 1570/1-1604/5.

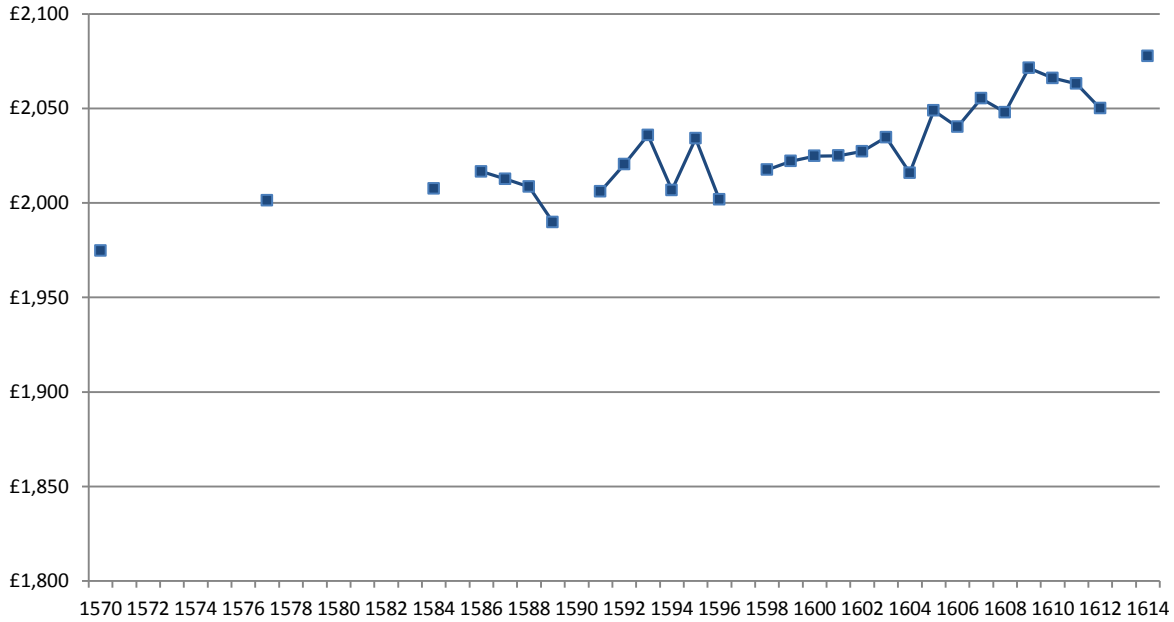
Figure 20: Arrears and Decay on the Dean and Chapter's Estate, 1570-1605



Source: DCM Receiver's Rolls: 1570/1-1604/5

If we take all of the above information into consideration, is it possible to reconstruct the Dean and Chapter's income in this period? Certainly, South Shields was one of the few townships which showed any real sign of improvement in this period, but this was because entry fines were increasingly becoming the dynamic element of a tenant's rental obligation. Thus, for a 21-year lease their tenants would pay a lump sum entry fine to acquire the lease, or renew it, and then pay the annual ancient rent. It was only newly-created rents which could increase the Dean and Chapter's overall income, and so their rents stagnated as Figure 21 shows, with South Shields being primarily responsible for the slight increase found here.

Figure 21: Total Income of the Dean and Chapter, 1570-1614

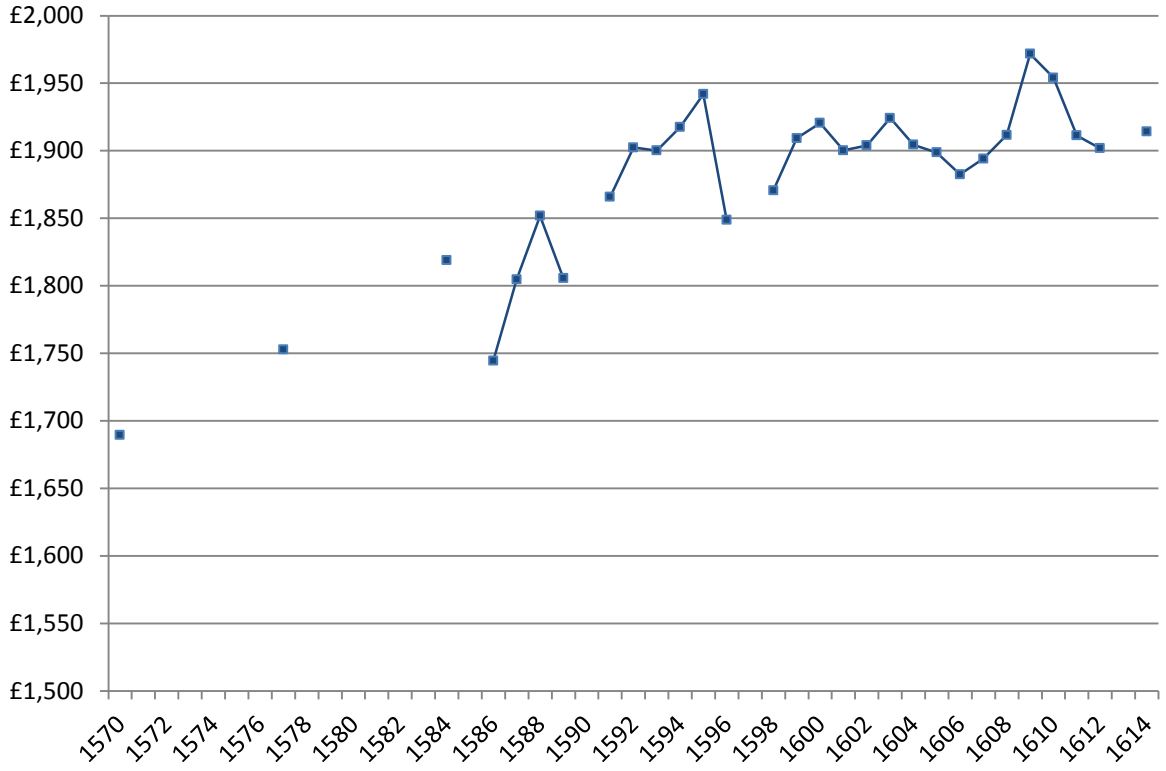


Source: DCM Receiver's Rolls: 1570/1-1604/5

Even this is somewhat deceptive, for there was some variation in the annual income that the Dean and Chapter actually managed to collect, especially from the 1570s onwards as the dispute with their tenants reached its climax. The below graph, therefore, shows this expected income, less decay and annual arrears, which clearly shows how, after the ruling of the Council of the North, the Dean and Chapter benefited from a more conciliatory attitude towards their tenants.[217]

[217] DCM Receiver's Rolls: 1570/1-1604/5.

Figure 22: Annual Income Collected by the Dean and Chapter, 1570-1615



Source: DCM Receiver's Rolls: 1570/1-1604/5

The relative stagnation of the Dean and Chapter's income brings the lack of information concerning entry fines into sharp relief: if the Dean and Chapter's tenants were leaseholders then they were technically open to fully commercial leases. It seems unlikely that the Dean and Chapter's income was anywhere near as stagnant as the above explorations of their rental income would suppose, with entry fines increasingly making up any shortfall in the ancient rent. However, it is difficult to provide any definitive conclusion on this matter because entry fines were never recorded in the lease documents and so information concerning them is extremely limited. The Elizabethan survey of 1580 is one of the few documents which allows for a very speculative glance at the entry fines charged by the Dean

and Chapter, as well as a closer investigation of the lottery system and its profitability.[218] David Marcombe suggested that the Cathedral could have been making up the deficit caused by inflation by charging massive fines to offset small rents, but that 'this is a theory which in no way squares with the facts: apart from the sums made by the prebends in selling leases to tenants who claimed tenant right, the Chapter seem to have asked no more than a fine of three or four years ancient rent as laid down by their own Chapter Act of 1574 and the order of the Council of the North in 1577'.[219] He argued that this was considered 'quite normal by sixteenth-century standards', and that the maintenance of fines at this level was not out of 'conservatism' but self-interest, since many of the prebends held land as part of their incomes at 'ancient rents in just the same way as the bulk of their tenants did', and so any increase in rents 'would have been an attack on their own interests and on the interests of other prebendal families already established on the estates'.[220] Marcombe described this as a 'general stagnation', with prebends such as Pilkington and Lever deciding in favour of the 'status quo', preferring not 'to rock the boat too much'.[221]

Entry fines of between three to four year's annual value were not extortionate on a national level, but as will be seen below, this was considerably higher than could be achieved on the estate of the bishops of Durham who were often charging less than one year's rent for their copyholds even sixty years later.[222] Although it is perennially hard to discover exactly what entry fines were charged on the Dean and Chapter's estates, rather than what their statutes instructed them to impose, the Elizabethan survey of 1580 does allow for the best picture of fines. Unfortunately there are several problems with using this survey. Firstly, many of the entry fines were in fact amounts paid for reversions of leases granted out in the

[218] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 189-250.
[219] Marcombe, Dean and Chapter of Durham, p. 104.
[220] Ibid., p. 105.
[221] Ibid., p. 106.
[222] See below, pp. 120-30.

lottery system, which were almost always considerably more than any standard entry fine appearing in the survey: for example, few lottery reversions were ever valued at less than £20, with most approximately worth £30, whereas almost all standard entry fines were below £20.[223] Secondly, this survey can only provide a snapshot of entry fines, and so it is impossible to estimate annual fluctuations over the sixteenth century. Some knowledge, no matter how provisional, however, is perhaps preferable to none.

Four townships have been used as a template for the estates more broadly: Harton, East Rainton, West Rainton and Dalton le Dale. These townships represent the best compromise between geographical diversity, and sufficient evidence of entry fines, with as little interference from the lottery system as possible in the 1580 survey. If the whole estate had been used instead, the resulting calculations would have little meaning because too many townships were affected by the lottery system, especially around Ferryhill and Merrington, whilst there are many other townships with incomplete data. A summary of these four townships has been provided below and shows that entry fines were charged at approximately 4.5 year's rent.[224]

Table 7: Approximate Annual Entry Fines on Four Manors of the Dean and Chapter, 1580s

	Total Annual Rent	Total Entry Fines	Approximate Annual Fines
Harton	£27 5s 10d	£132 10d	£6 5s 8d
East Rainton	£24 8s 7.5d	£99 12s 1d	£4 14s 10d
West Rainton	£20 4s 6d	£106 14s 8d	£5 1s 7d
Dalton le Dale	£12 9s 2d	£53 9s 2d	£2 10s 11d
Total	**£84 8s 1d**	**£391 16s 6d**	**£18 13s**

Source: Longstaffe, W. H. D. and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1886)

[223] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 189-250.
[224] Ibid., pp. 189-250.

Entry fines thus appear as an important source of income, but it must be remembered that these fines were only collected once every 21 years as each lease fell in. There is little evidence at this stage of the later seven-year renewal policy which the Dean and Chapter encouraged tenants to use in the early-seventeenth century, which saw the entry fine reduced by a third but renewed every seven years. A final column has been added above, therefore, simply and crudely by dividing the total entry fines taken by twenty-one. Entry fines still appear as a considerable source of annual income, although clearly they were not in a position to replace the importance of the annual rent. If 4.5 year's rent is taken as the average entry fine for the whole estate this represented a total income of approximately £6,300 or £300 per annum from entry fines. As must be stressed, this is an incredibly provisional snapshot of the Dean and Chapter's income from fines in the 1580s, but it does suggest that income from fines was not insignificant, while there were still occasional windfalls, such as the £200 fine taken on a lease of coal mines to Henry Anderson.[225] This was perhaps the best compromise between the Dean and Chapter and their tenants, with the Cathedral able to access some of the unearned increment created by inflation, but not oppressing their tenants to the extent that they could not profit also. Despite their foundation statutes prescribing that leases should contain no agreement to renew after the term was finished, their tenants were clearly inheriting these leases, often disposing of them in their wills, with some families inheriting holdings which stretched back to the bond tenants of the Priory over two hundred years earlier. These tenants were able to make a modest profit in the late-sixteenth century, with low medieval rents and entry fines of approximately 3-4 years' rent, and were variously described as yeomen or husbandmen, with many of them possessing goods valued between £100 and £200. These tenants will be explored in much greater depth in section three, which investigates the implications of these estate changes upon their tenantry, but certainly these

[225] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, p. 197.

levels of entry fines cannot be said to have oppressed them overly, even if they did provide the prebends with some cushion against inflation.[226]

By the seventeenth century, however, these fines do not appear to have greatly risen, with Marcombe again describing them as 'a pitifully small sum' and there are signs that the prebendaries agreed with him, especially Marmaduke Blakiston whose idea appears to have 'been to base fines on the principle of the 'seventh penny''.[227] He reinterpreted the Dean and Chapter's policy of taking three year's ancient rent as an entry fine, with the idea of taking three year's *improved value* as a fine, which would in effect become one year's improved value every seven-year renewal. Marcombe described the situation thus: 'for a while the chaos of the 1570s was recreated, with Blakiston on occasion demanding arbitrary fines', whilst 'accusations of favouritism and bribery were rife'.[228] The Chapter decreed in 1626 that in future tenants would pay one year's improved value as a fine every seven years 'which by true account is three year's fine for a lease of 21 years'. The Chapter Act of 1626 marked an 'important turning point in the leasing policy of the Dean and Chapter', for now their entry fines were directly linked to the value of the land rather than the ancient rent and thus took inflation into consideration.[229]

The way in which the monks of Durham Cathedral Priory adapted to the fifteenth-century recession greatly foreshadowed many of the challenges faced by the newly-founded Dean and Chapter in the sixteenth century. The decision taken by the monks to syndicate their lands and thus convert all of their holdings into leaseholds undoubtedly influenced the new statutes which ordered all leases to be 21 years. The history of leasing on their estates provided the prebends with evidence taken before the Council of the North which

[226] See chapter 8.
[227] David Marcombe, 'Church Leaseholders: The Decline and Fall of a Rural Elite', in Rosemary O'Day and Felicity Heal (eds.), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 256-9.
[228] Ibid., pp. 256-9.
[229] Ibid., pp. 256-9.

categorically proved their tenants were in fact leaseholders, but the leniency of the monks in allowing the inheritability of these leases to become established, in keeping fixed rents and low entry fines, and in maintaining their tenants' duty of border service, allowed the tenants to assert their claims to tenant-right, one which they likely believed in. After much wrangling a kind of customary leasehold became established on the Dean and Chapter's estates, allowing the prebends to improve their income and, if it did not enable them to keep pace with inflation entirely, then it at least provided them with a buffer against its worst effects. By the early-seventeenth century, they had re-negotiated these entry fines further and were thus at least able to keep their income in line with inflation through taking fines which, rather than being related to the ancient rent, were now based on the annual value of the land. This may not seem much, and certainly Marcombe was somewhat sceptical about the general effects this had on their overall income, but as we will see it was much more than their neighbour, the bishops of Durham, could accomplish in this same period.

The Bishops of Durham, 1540-1640

In his seminal work on the *Economic Problems of the English Church* Christopher Hill highlighted many of the problems facing the clergy in the sixteenth century, but it was not until the 1970s and 80s that a flurry of historical activity produced coherent outlines of the economic position of the higher clergy.[230] The work of Felicity Heal and Rosemary O'Day in particular explored many of these financial problems, whilst there have been published studies of many sees including the archbishopric of York, and the bishoprics of Ely, Bath and Wells, Coventry and Lichfield, and London.[231] The general conclusion from

[230] Hill, *Economic Problems*, pp. 1-21.
[231] Felicity Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Positions of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, 1980).

these works was that the Crown did not bear the lion share of responsibility for the relative decline in their economic prosperity, but that inflation had eroded the value of these sees. For example, Claire Cross concluded that: 'the myth that the archbishops of York in the sixteenth century endured grievous spoliation at the hands of the crown which eighteenth century historians had perpetuated should be recognised for what it is; a pious deception'.[232] However, Durham has tended to feature little more than a footnote in these broader studies because the experience of the bishopric was completely different to almost every other see and is used as the exception that proved the rule. In her survey of the resources of the Elizabethan bishops, Heal concluded that Durham and Winchester were the 'only outstanding cases of income loss during the Elizabethan era', whilst 'in most sees the erosion of money income, which had been so common in the mid-Tudor period, was halted under Elizabeth, and the bishops enjoyed a long period of comparative stability in the management of their property'.[233] Although she acknowledged that Durham was treated qualitatively differently, there have been few attempts to explore the consequences of Elizabethan intervention in the Durham countryside, and how this intervention shaped the broader agrarian structure of the estates of the bishops of Durham. As the work on these other sees has demonstrated, it was often the inability of bishops to raise their incomes which caused their economic problems, and yet these historians have not explored the long-term causes of these difficulties. In Durham, the intrusive intervention by the Crown served to compound the problems facing the bishops of Durham during the late-sixteenth century which were created by the evolution of customary and copyhold tenures upon their estates. It was the tenurial development of the estate of the bishops of Durham which greatly curtailed their ability to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century.

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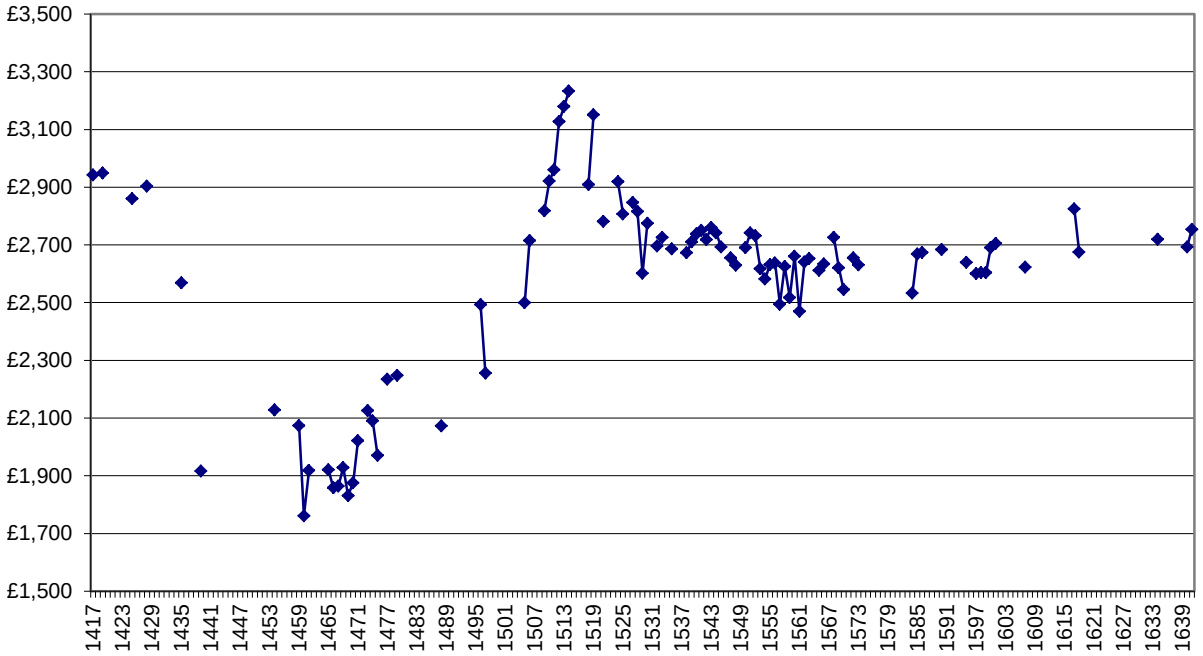
[232] Claire M. Cross, 'The Economic Problems of the See of York: Decline and Recovery in the Sixteenth Century', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *Land, Church and People: Essays Presented to Professor H. P. R. Finberg*, AgHR Supplement (1970), p. 81.
[233] Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes*, pp. 223-7.

Although all bishoprics suffered to some extent from the predatory landed interests at the Elizabethan court, the bishopric of Durham was treated differently to almost every see, and it is this difference which is vital to understanding developments in the Durham countryside in the sixteenth century. From the 1520s right through until the 1640s, the receiver general's income shows a remarkable stability, with an average annual income of around £2700.[234]

Figure 23: Total Receipts of the Receiver Generals of the Bishops of Durham, 1417-1640



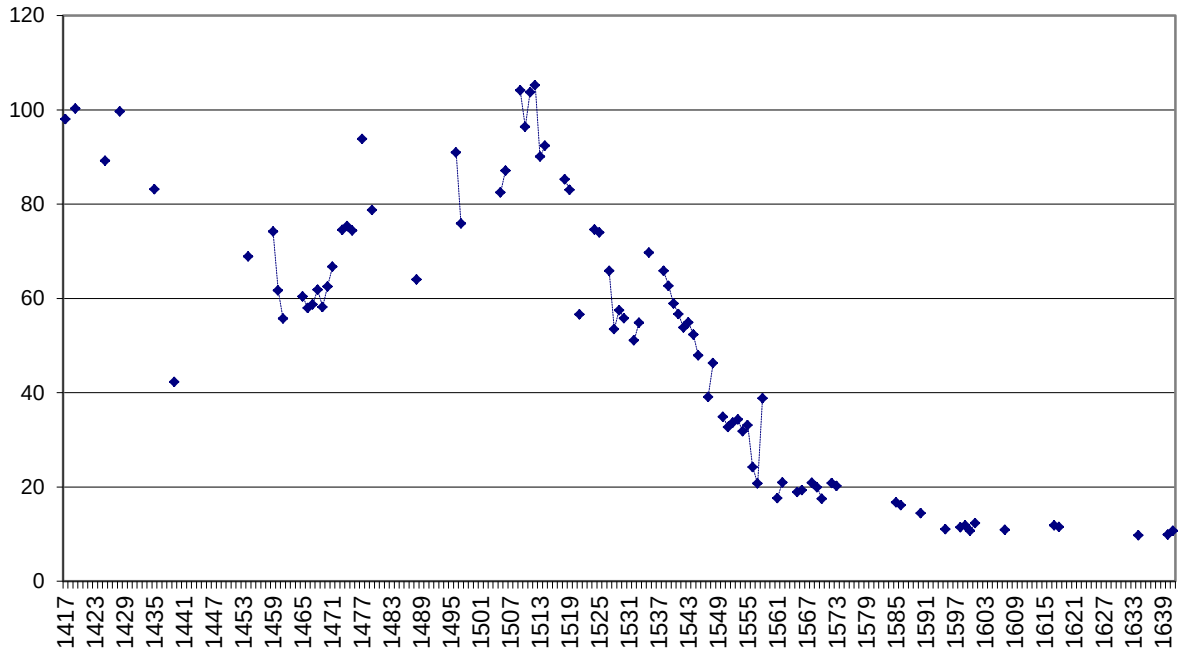
Source: General Receiver's Accounts: CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139

After the volatility of the bishop's income during the mid-fifteenth-century recession this appears at first glance to be a triumph for the receiver general, but given the increasing levels of inflation across the sixteenth century this stagnation was in fact more disastrous for the bishop than even the depths of the fifteenth-century recession. Although there are many

[234] CCB B/5/47- CCB B/12/139.

problems with using the Phelps-Brown and Hopkins index of inflation for the disposable income of a bishop not least because of the different kinds of purchases which would be made compared to a labourer, it does provide a more adequate representation of the real value of the bishop's income as the sixteenth century progressed.[235] It is clear that the remarkable continuity of the bishop's income represented stagnation rather than stability: in a period of remarkable change and rapid inflation, the bishop was treading water.

Figure 24: Income of the Bishops of Durham, Deflated by Phelps-Brown and Hopkins' Index, 1417-1640



Source: General Receiver's Accounts: CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139 and Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries', pp. 301-4.

How and why were successive bishops so helpless in the face of high inflation when other lay landowners were able to increase rents to keep pace with prices whilst the Dean and Chapter were at least able to take modest entry fines? Felicity Heal concluded for Ely that: 'the cause of financial crisis lay in the failure actually to improve income in the face of the

[235] Phelps-Brown and Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries', pp. 301-4.

rise of prices, rather than in any direct action by the crown or aristocracy'.[236] However, in many of the bishoprics and especially at Durham, it was often the Crown's direct intervention which contributed to their inability to improve their income. Under the Act of Exchange of 1559, the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishops of London, Ely, Hereford and Chichester were forced to surrender seventy-three manors with a total rental income of around £3,000, and received impropriated rectories, tithes and tenths of an equivalent value.[237] Heal succinctly described the general effects of these exchanges thus: 'the bishops lost good, finable lands...which could have been exploited very successfully in the economic circumstances of the late sixteenth century, while the Crown surrendered a whole range of small and unprofitable spiritualities, which were difficult and costly to collect and virtually impossible to improve'.[238] In the long term, this was to the bishops' disadvantage because they surrendered manors which could provide an increased revenue to the next generation of bishops in exchange for fixed incomes, but in the short term this meant that the annual income of these bishoprics was relatively little affected by the Crown intervention.

By comparison, the bishopric of Durham was dealt with completely differently, having most of its Yorkshire estates, the ward of Easington, and a variety of scattered properties confiscated. In a letter to Cecil, Bishop Pilkington protested against these seizures, explaining how the loss of so much land would greatly reduce his ability to aid in the defence of the realm. He went on to detail how:

> 'the danger is great; the shire is small. And yet if any of the wardens of the marches send for aid to the bishop on the sudden, he must give them help. The shire is divided into four wards. Of which is detained from me a ward and a half.'[239]

[236] Heal, 'Economic Problems of Ely', p. 199.
[237] Felicity Heal, 'The Bishops and the Act of Exchange of 1559', *HJ*, 17 (1974), p. 239.
[238] Ibid., pp. 242-3.
[239] John Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion, and Other Various Occurrences in the Church* (London, 1701), p. 440.

The lands were later restored to the bishopric, but a rent charge to the Crown of £1,020, the approximate total value of the above lands, was imposed upon the see. There was to be no exchange for the bishop of Durham and this represented nothing less than an overnight slashing of his total income by around a third of its previous medieval levels. Given the stagnation of the bishop's income during this period of rapid inflation, the sudden and decisive loss of £1,020 per annum was a further blow to the financial health of the see.

If this was the full extent of Crown intervention in the bishopric, then the bishops would still have been able to weather the inflationary trends of the period relatively well. However, the Crown went on to lease out many of the bishops' best manors on very low rents for extremely long periods of time. With hindsight, historians have focused upon the Grand Lease of the coal mines of Whickham and Gateshead as being the most detrimental to the bishops of Durham, primarily because of their future potential wealth under the Newcastle Hostmen. However, it was also crucially important because their medieval counterparts appear to have relied so heavily on these other sources of income to supplement their ailing rent roll, enabling them to ride out the worst of the mid-fifteenth-century recession. The Grand Lease made it impossible for the bishop to replicate this success and alleviate his income with profits from the burgeoning coal industry.[240] The Grand Lease was assigned to Thomas Sutton, Master of the Ordinance in the North in 1578 for 79 years, but was renewed several years later for 99 years, however, Sutton could not profit from his lease because the Newcastle hostmen refused to make him a freeman of the city. In the end the mayor, Henry Anderson, and one of the aldermen, William Selby, were provided with funds from the city and their own money to purchase the lease, and it was thus that the 'leaders of Newcastle's coal-owning oligarchy became prodigiously rich, above all those of them who retained

[240] See chapter 2, pp. 60-75.

personal shares in the Grand Lease'.[241] The bishops of Durham saw none of this immense increase in the overall value of the Newcastle coal trade because the rent of these mines was fixed at the low annual rent of £117 15s 8d for 99 years.[242] By comparison, the jurors of the Parliamentary surveys found fifteen coal pits on the manor of Whickham which they valued at £20 per annum 'for every several pitt over and above the rent aforesaid in the Grand Lease', whilst on the manor of Gateshead the jurors valued the mines, tolls and salt meadows as being £2,555 10s above the reserved rent.[243] The bishops also found it difficult to improve the rent from some of the other coal-bearing assets of the bishopric, such as the colliery at Ryton, which, with the neighbouring properties of Tallow and Kyo, was said to be worth over £2,400 a year in 1662, although Bishop Cosin received only £20 13s 4d in rent.[244]

Furthermore, the Crown leased out many of the bishops' manors for extremely long periods: these manors represented some of the most prized assets of the bishopric, both in agricultural land, and as a source of financial wealth and patronage. For example, the previous lessees of these manors included the Lords Scrope and Eure, as well as the Bellassis, Ducketts, Cecils, and Frevilles, whilst the bishops also used these manors to reward their own families with favourable leases.[245] Of course, patronage had been an integral part of the countryside for centuries, but it was particularly important to the bishops of Durham in this period: these were Protestant bishops thrown into the predominantly Catholic North and expected to become the largest landowner in the region overnight. The local gentry may have owed loyalty to the bishop as an institution, but it was the judicious use of this patronage which bound men to the individual bishop. These long leases, therefore, greatly curtailed the

[241] David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *The Making of an Industrial Society: Whickham, 1560-1765* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 18-19.
[242] CCB B/5/47- CCB B/12/139.
[243] D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham, vol. II*, Surtees Society, 185 (1968), pp. 105-41.
[244] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 90.
[245] DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670; CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640.

ability of the bishop either to take entry fines, increase rents, or even to garner support for themselves in the region as Table 8 shows.

Table 8: Leases granted to Queen Elizabeth by the Bishop of Durham

Property	Former Lease	Queen's Lease	Rent	Estimated Value, 1640s
Middridge Manor	Thomas Tunstall, 40 year lease, 1558	80 year lease, 1583	£26 9s 8d	£250
Quarrington Grange	Henry and John Ducket, 21 year lease, 1546	80 year lease, 1584	£22 4s 8d	£138 18s
Rectory of Leake	Lord Scrope, 21 year lease, 1547	50 year lease, 1578	£18	
Crayke Manor	Henry Duckett, 21 year lease, 1549	80 year lease, 1586	£29	
	Thomas Cecil, 21 year lease, 1567			
Coundon Grange	William Drury, 21 year lease, 1572	70 year lease, 1585	£24	£106
Howden Manor, land in Howden	Sir Marmaduke Tunstall, 21 year lease, 1547	90 year lease, 1584	£34	
Weelhall Manor	Francis Tunstall, 21 year lease, 1550	80 year lease, 1586	£5 18s 5d	
Morton Grange	Sir Richard Bellasis, 21 year lease, 1581	70 year lease, 1585	£6	£90
Sowerby Grange		80 year lease, 1584		
Wolsingham Park	Anthony Carleton, 21 year lease, 1558	80 year lease, 1584	£6 13s 4d	£30
	William Lord Eure, licence to hunt and hark, 1561			
Norham Fisheries	Various tenants, 21 year lease, 1554	100 year lease, 1577	£82	
Byers Green	Sir George Freville, 21 year lease, 1576	80 year lease, 1585	£8	£38
Bishop Middleham Park		80 year lease, 1585	£18 1s	£88 15s 8d
Darlington and Blackwell Mills	Edward Atkinson and John Grene, 21 year lease, 1547	40 year lease, 1578	£22	£50
	George Kingesmill, 21 year lease, 1576			
Gateshead and Whickham	Anthony Thomlynson	99 year lease, 1578	£117 13s 6d	£2,555 10s

Source: DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670; CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c. 1530-c. 1640; Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham, v. I and II, Surtees Society 183 and 185 (1971 and 1972)

Crown intervention, therefore, played a significant role in the inability of the bishops to improve their income but perhaps an even greater part was played by the development of their estates which had seen customary and copyhold tenures become rife on many of their manors. The Elizabethan survey of 1588 gives the tenure of all holdings upon the bishops' lands, grouped partly by ward and partly by the office responsible for each rent.[246] Table 9 represents those rents that the collector was responsible for.

Table 9: Tenure of the Rents Collected by the Collectors of the Bishops of Durham in 1588

	Freehold Rents		Copyhold Rents		Leasehold and at Will		Total Rents
	(£)	(%)	(£)	(%)	(£)	(%)	(£)
Easington Ward	£2.22	0.68%	£93.97	28.68%	£231.45	70.64%	**£327.64**
Chester Ward	£3.83	1.72%	£184.82	82.88%	£34.35	15.40%	**£222.99**
Stockton Ward	£2.40	1.27%	£124.08	65.52%	£62.88	33.21%	**£189.36**
Darlington Ward	£12.48	2.78%	£305.36	68.06%	£130.80	29.15%	**£448.63**
Totals	**£20.92**	**1.76%**	**£708.22**	**59.58%**	**£459.48**	**38.66%**	**£1,188.62**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

It is clear that freehold rents accounted for very little of the collectors' responsibilities, whilst the total division between copyhold and leasehold land was approximately 59 per cent and 39 per cent respectively. However, there was a large difference between the two most northern wards, with Easington ward, that closest to Newcastle, possessing a much higher ratio of leasehold land at 70 per cent and only 30 per cent of land here being on copyhold tenure, whereas Chester ward, which accounted for land approaching the Pennine foothills such as Lanchester, possessed the opposite ratio with 15 per cent leasehold and 82 per cent copyhold.[247] Thus at first glance, there appears to be a wide geographical division between tenures with the highest proportion of leasehold tenures, widely recognised to be the most commercial, centred upon Easington ward, close to Newcastle and emerging Sunderland.

[246] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.
[247] Ibid.

However, this is somewhat deceptive for this only represents the proportion of tenures which the collectors were responsible for, with the coroners of the bishops' of Durham theoretically responsible for all tenures which were not answerable to the halmote court, and were therefore not copyhold.[248] Table 10 is the summary of these rents:

Table 10: Rents Collected by the Coroners of the Bishops of Durham in 1588

Ward	Rent
Easington Ward	£59 2s 4d
Chester Ward	£170 0s 10d
Stockton Ward	£22 8s 1d
Darlington Ward	£230 7s 8d
Totals	**£481 18s 11d**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

A much higher percentage of the total rental income of the ward of Chester, therefore, came from the coroners rather than the collectors, and so much of the different proportions of tenures found above represents a different division of responsibilities in each ward rather than a geographical bias in tenures. If these rents are all assumed to be leaseholds, the following pattern emerges:

Table 11: Tenure of the Land in the Four Wards of the Bishopric in 1588

Ward	Copyhold		Leasehold		Total (£)
	Rent (£)	Percentage (%)	Rent (£)	Percentage (%)	
Easington	£93	24%	£290	75%	£383
Chester	£184	47%	£204	53%	£388
Stockton	£124	59%	£84	41%	£208
Darlington	£305	45%	£360	55%	£665
Total	**£706**	**43%**	**£938**	**57%**	**£1,644**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

[248] Durham University Library Special Collections Catalogue: Church Commission Deposit of Durham Bishopric Estate Records: Financial and Audit Records to 1649: Coroner's Accounts.

The apparently high concentration of copyhold land in Chester ward has disappeared, with most wards having an equal distribution of copyhold and leasehold tenure, but the much higher proportion of leasehold land at Easington remains. Why this should be so is not immediately apparent, although it could potentially be because of a commercialising effect of its close proximity to Newcastle.

The rents collected by the bailiffs of the bishops of Durham show a similar concentration of leasehold lands, primarily because they were responsible for the manors of Auckland, Coatham Mundeville, Darlington, Evenwood, Gateshead, and Bishop Middleham, many of which were leased out.

Table 12: Tenure of the Rents Collected by the Bailiffs of the Bishops of Durham in 1588

	Total (£)	**Percentage (%)**
Freehold Rents	£1.27	0.59%
Leasehold Rents	£151.20	70.03%
Copyhold Rents	£32.63	15.11%
Unknown Rents	£30.80	14.26%
Totals	**£215.90**	**100%**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

Moreover, there was the High Forester who was responsible for the bishopric's main forests and parks, which were primarily located in the west of the Palatinate, in the Pennine foothills. There was an approximately equal ratio of customary to leasehold land here also, but again with a wide variation. A majority of the tenants in Weardale Forest and Stanhope Park held by customary tenure, whilst the parks of Wolsingham, Evenwood and Bedburn were entirely leased out.[249]

[249] Linda Drury, 'More Stout than Wise: Tenant Right in Weardale in the Tudor Period' in D. Marcombe (ed.), *The Last Principality: Politics, Religion and Society in the Bishopric of Durham, 1494-1660* (Nottingham, 1987), pp. 71-100.

Table 13: Tenure of the Rents Collected by the High Forester of the Bishops of Durham in 1588

	Customary Rents		Leasehold Rents		Totals
	(£)	(%)	(£)	(%)	(£)
Weardale Forest	£36.55	82.10%	£7.97	17.90%	**£44.52**
Stanhope Park	£46.83	65.04%	£25.17	34.96%	**£72.00**
Wolsingham Park	N/A	N/A	£28.67	100.00%	**£28.67**
Evenwood Park	N/A	N/A	£20.00	100.00%	**£20.00**
Bedburn Park	N/A	N/A	£2.00	100.00%	**£2.00**
Totals	**£83.38**	**49.87%**	**£83.81**	**50.13%**	**£167.19**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

In total, the Elizabethan survey of 1588, shows that the bishops had over £820 worth of rent, or approximately two-fifths of their income, coming from copyhold or customary rents.

Table 14: Total Rental Value of the Different Tenures on the Bishop of Durham's Estates in 1588

	(£)	(%)
Copyhold Rents	£740.85	36.63%
Customary Rents	£83.38	4.12%
Leasehold Rents	£1,176.29	58.15%
(Of which was leased to the Queen)	(£420)	(20.77%)
Freehold Rents	£22.19	1.10%

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

On these copyhold lands, rents were fixed by custom at extremely low medieval values, as were entry fines which, from an analysis of the entire estate in the parliamentary surveys, were charged at an average of 1 year's old rental value.[250] These rents were virtually impossible to improve with copyhold tenure giving much greater protection to tenants than has often been thought.[251] A typical example is that of Newbottle, where approximately half of the land was held by copyhold tenure and the other half by leasehold. Unfortunately, there

[250] *Parliamentary Surveys, vols. 1 and 2*.
[251] R. W. Hoyle, 'Tenure on the Elizabethan Estates', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Estates of the English Crown, 1558-1640* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 163-168.

are few indicators of the level of entry fines on the bishops' leasehold land, but the parliamentary surveys of the 1640s show the copyhold land as being worth the following.[252]

Table 15: Entry Fines on the Bishop's Copyhold Lands at Newbottle in the 1640s

Annual Rent	Entry Fine	Yearly Value
£1 10s 8d	10s	0.33
1s 1d	7d	0.53
£2 6s 8d	13s 4d	0.28
2s 6d	1s	0.4
8s 2d	5s	0.61
2s 6d	1s 8d	0.64
3s	6d	0.15
£3 6s 8d	£1	0.3
8s	2s	0.25

Source: D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham. Vol. II,* Surtees Society, 185 (1972), pp. 158-60

The entry fines paid here at Newbottle did not even amount to a single year's rent. When the inflation of the sixteenth century is taken into consideration these copyhold rents had become nominal payments rather than representing the economic value of the land.

The tenurial development of their estates makes the long leasing of many of the bishop's manors all the more detrimental: roughly a third of all leasehold land was on long leases to the Crown, whilst there were further long leases of other manors to members of the gentry. The below table is just an example of several of the long leases granted out by the bishops of Durham in this period, which were entirely unrelated to the mass leasing of manors under Elizabeth.[253]

[252] *Parliamentary Survey*, 185, pp. 158-60.
[253] CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640.

Table 16: Long Leases of Manors by the Bishops of Durham to Gentry Families

Property	Lease	Rent of Property	Value in the 1640s
Ricknell Grange	Sir William Bellasis, 73 year lease, 1548 Sir Thomas Bellasis, lease for lives, 1621	£30	£160
Tunstall Township	John Middleton, 70 year lease, 1550 King James I, 80 year lease, 1604	£16	£120
Stockton	John Thornell, 60 year lease, 1559	£23 14s 10d	

Source: CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640

Of the leasehold land demised to the Crown, not only was it impossible to renegotiate the rents to keep them equivalent to prices, it was also impossible to take entry fines from new tenants for nearly a hundred years. This resulted in many agricultural tenants in the Durham region paying the same rents on the eve of the Civil War as their predecessors were during the depths of the mid-fifteenth-century recession, and yet receiving six or seven times the income for their agricultural produce. Members of the gentry in particular gained extremely advantageous leases of some of the bishopric's most valuable manors. For example, Ricknell Grange was leased first to Sir William Bellassis for 73 years at £30 p.a., and then to Sir Thomas Bellassis for three lives in 1621, for the same rent, despite the parliamentary surveys giving the improved rental value of the manor at £160 per annum.[254] The consequences of this will be returned to in both sections two and three because of the considerable potential for profits that it offered for their tenants.

These financial problems led the bishops into making further estate changes that were not in the long-term interest of the institution. The most important of these was the wholesale conversion of large numbers of leases from 21 years into leases for three lives in the early-seventeenth century. Peter Clack found that Bishops Howson and Morton especially had converted these leases because they could charge a larger entry fine on a lease for three lives

[254] *Parliamentary Survey*, 183, p. 67.

compared to a 21-year lease.[255] This was problematic because the entry fine was seen as the bishops' own income, rather than belonging to the bishopric, and so has been seen by many as examples of bishops sacrificing future profits for their own needs. After the Civil War, Bishop Cosin was particularly critical of his predecessors, commenting that:

> 'most of the profitable and best leases were let out for 3 lives by my predecessors (and by Bishop Morton more than by any before him)…which shall continue in being. They have one or two lives dead, refuse to renew their leases, unless they might have them for the 4th part of the value. I desire my successors to take special notice hereof, and to wait till all the lives of these tenants leases become void; which will be a great advantage to him if he maketh use of his right to let their leases unto any others whom he shall be pleased to choose.'[256]

This was perhaps unfair of Cosin, for he could rely on a much larger income than his predecessors because many of the long leases taken by the Crown fell in during his episcopate. Sherburn, in Easington ward, is perhaps one of the most explicit examples of this transition from 21-year leases to leases for three lives.

Table 17: Tenure and Rents of Sherburn in the Elizabethan Survey of 1588

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	LENGTH	RENT
LEASEHOLDERS:			
Henry Cote	1 tenement	21 yrs	42s
William Shaldforth	1 tenement	21 yrs	42s
Christopher Dixson	1 tenement	21 yrs	36s 9d
Ellinor Whitfield	1 tenement	21 yrs	42s
John Taylor	1 tenement	21 yrs	36s 9d
Robert Tailor	1 tenement	21 yrs	52s 6d
John Radeson	1 tenement	21 yrs	42s
William Pearson	1 tenement	21 yrs	64s
Gilbert Ferley	1 cottage	21 yrs	5s
John Tailor	1 cottage	21 yrs	5s
John Dobson	1 cottage	21 yrs	6s
…Whitfield	1 cottage		8s

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU.

[255] Peter Clack, 'Bishop Cosin's Survey of his Episcopal Estates', in Margot Johnson (ed.), *John Cosin: Papers Presented to a Conference to Celebrate the 400th Anniversary of his Birth* (Durham, 1997), pp. 228-36.
[256] Ibid., pp. 230-2.

In the 1580s, all leases were for 21 years, however, by the time of time of the parliamentary surveys of the 1640s this picture had radically changed and now all the larger messuages of the village were held by leases for three lives, with only the smaller cottages remaining on 21-years leases.[257]

Table 18: Tenure and Rents of Sherburn in the Parliamentary Survey of the 1640s

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	LENGTH	RENT
Robert Dixon	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 3s 1.5d
William Whitfield	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 9s
William Hall	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 3s 1.5d
John Rowele	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 10s 8d
Henry Cooke	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 10s 8d
John Rawling	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 4s
William Browne	1 messuage	3 lives	£2 10s
Brian Biolston	1 messuage	3 lives	£3 4s 8d
John Whitfield	1 cottage	21 yrs	5s
Michael Pattison	1 cottage	21 yrs	6s
William Hale	1 cottage	21 yrs	6s
William Nicholson	1 cottage	21 yrs	7s

Source: *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham*, Surtees Society,185 (Newcastle, 1971), pp. 182-4

This was problematic for future bishops because leases for three lives were generally considered to be less economically sound for a landowner than 21-year leases because they almost always ran for longer and so restricted the future ability of bishops to take entry fines. This was a fact that their tenants were clearly well aware of as, for example, at Heighington where a Martin Richmond put the lives of his lease as himself and two children who were aged one and three, whilst a John Tewart in the same township put down three children aged four, two, and the final one just three months old.[258] If these children survived into adulthood there was a very real possibility that the bishops would not be able to charge an entry fine on these holdings for decades. Bill Sheils and Felicity Heal have both highlighted Laud's

[257] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU; *Parliamentary Surveys*, 185, pp. 182-4.
[258] *Parliamentary Surveys*, 183, pp. 65-70.

prohibition of the translation of years into lives upon renewal as a way of changing a system by which 'the present bishop puts a great fine into his own purse, to enrich himself…and leave his successors …destitute of that growing means which else would come in to help them.'[259] It is illustrative of the increasing financial straits that the bishops of Durham were finding themselves in by the early-seventeenth century that they were resorting to this expedient to increase their personal revenues.

The conversion of all leases from twenty-one years to three lives by successive bishops of Durham in the early-seventeenth century was a clear example of how estate management directly shaped tenurial development, but why had copyhold tenure become entrenched in some villages and not others? Table 19 below shows the long-term tenurial changes on a random selection of manors on their estate from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries which clearly reveals a large amount of path-dependency from the Boldon book of the 1180s to the Hatfield survey of the 1380s. At Norton, for example, the thirty villeins became twenty-nine bondmen (with one presumably unaccounted for), the leaseholders became malmen, and the cottages continued throughout. However, there was a clear break in the tenurial development of holdings here during the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries as this entire manor was converted to copyhold tenure, with the survey of 1588 showing all messuages as copyholds. The situation at Newbottle was much more comprehensible if we think of the cottages becoming bondland, which in turn developed into copyhold land, whilst the demesne land was leased out at some point from the late-fourteenth century. However, this was not a uniform tenurial progression on the bishops' estate for at Ryhope there was a similar composition of demesne land, villeins and cottages which was transformed wholesale into leasehold land during this same period. There was no discernible geographical pattern to

[259] Felicity Heal, 'Archbishop Laud revisited: Leases and Estate Management at Canterbury and Winchester before the Civil War', in Rosemary O'Day and Felicity Heal (eds.), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church, 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), p. 130.

these variations, but it is clear that there was a real disconnect in the tenurial development on the estates of the bishops of Durham focused upon the two centuries between the Hatfield survey of the 1380s and the Elizabethan survey of the 1580s: again, highlighting the fact that the consequences of the restructuring rural society underwent in the late-fourteenth century did not end with the middle ages but posed long-term consequences for landowners and their tenants. There is, therefore, an increasing need to conceptualise the period from the late-fourteenth to the early-seventeenth century as a transitional whole rather than as a beginning and an end; it's traditional place in historical studies, but one which has clearly hampered our understanding of some of these crucial tenurial developments.[260]

[260] By the fourteenth century there had been additions made to the agricultural land in these bishopric townships in the form of exchequer land. The below table does not include this and shows the continuity of the twelfth-century holdings by the time of Hatfield's Survey.

Table 19: Long Term Changes in Tenure on Various Manors of the Bishops of Durham from the Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries

VILLAGE	1180s BOLDON BOOK			1380s HATFIELD SURVEY			1580s ELIZABETHAN SURVEY		
	TENURE	ACRES	RENT	TENURE	ACRES	RENT	TENURE	DESCRIPTION	RENT
NORTON	Villeins	30 villeins (900 acres)	3 days work per week	Bondland	29 bondlands (870 acres)	£20 10s	Copyhold	50 messuages	£36
	Leasehold	20 tenants, 40 bovates (600 acres)	1/2 mark per 2 bovates	Malmen	40 bovates (600 acres)	£8 2s 2d			
	Cottages	12 cottages	6s	Cottages	12 cottages	Blank			
	Further	1 carucate and various holdings	For services rendered						
BISHOP	Demesne	Lordship farm of 20 bovates	£20	Demesne	150 acres	£14 2s 8d	Copyhold	19 messuages	£39 9s
WEARMOUTH	Villeins	22 villeins (660 acres)	3 days work per week	Bondland	20 bovates (300 acres)	£15	Leasehold	A windmill	55s 4d
	Cottages	6 cottages (72 acres)	2 days work per week	Cottages	10 cottages (90 acres)	£3 15s 6d			
	Further	3 holdings of 12 acres (36 acres)	For services rendered						
CLEADON	Demesne	Lordship farm leased out	50 chalders, 15 marks	Demesne	336 acres	£45 10s	Copyhold	11 messuages	£21 8s
	Villeins	28 villeins (840 acres)	3 days work per week	Bondland	56 bovates (840 acres)	Blank			
	Cottages	12 cottages (144 acres)	2 days work per week	Cottages	12 cottages (144 acres)	£9 12s			
	Further	4 holdings (196 acres)	For services rendered						
WHITBURN	See above	See above	See above	See above	See above	See above	Copyhold	24 messuages	£51 1s
NEWBOTTLE	Demesne	Lordship farm, 4 ploughs	In the lord's hand	Demesne	315 acres	£22 12s	Leasehold	5 messuages	£18 9s
	Cottages	19 cottages (210 acres)	2 days work per week	Bondland	26 bovates (312 acres)	£7 11s	Copyhold	5 messuages	£17 9s
	Further	4 holdings of 12 acres (48 acres)	For services rendered				Copyhold	10 cottages	above
RYHOPE	Demesne	Lordship farm leased out	42 chalders, 6 marks	Demesne	292 acres	£29 15s	Leasehold	19 messuages	£41 7s
	Villeins	27 villeins (810 acres)	3 days work per week	Bondland	18 messuages (540 acres)	£28 6s			
	Cottages	3 cottages (36 acres)	2 days work per week						
	Further	3 holdings(72 acres)	For services rendered						
BURDON	See above	See above	See above	Bondland	20 bovates (300 acres)	£15 14s	Leasehold	7 messuages	£11 9s

Source: W. Greenwell (ed.), *Boldon Boke, A Survey of the Possessions of the See of Durham*, Surtees Society, 25 (1852); W. Greenwell (ed.), *Bishop Hatfield's Survey: A Record of the Possessions of the See of Durham*, Surtees Society, 32 (1857); ASCRefB1CHU, Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes

Although it is hard to identify any exact management decisions which could be described as a 'policy' towards their landed estates, the end result of these changes is beyond doubt. There may have been long-term differences between the estates of Durham cathedral and the bishops of Durham but it was changes wrought in this period, or often the lack thereof, which had the most significant impact upon their successors. In short, it was their differing responses to the fifteenth-century recession which produced many of the differences between their estates in the sixteenth century.

The bishops of Durham, as a large rentier landlord in this period could not wrestle the unearned increment from the divergence between prices and rents away from their tenants: the inflexibility of tenures and long-leases rendered the bishops relatively helpless in the face of inflation. Bishops Matthews, James and Neile faced institutional constraints in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries which their predecessors had allowed to develop, and which hindered their opportunity to improve their stagnant income. High concentrations of copyhold and customary tenure, with fixed medieval rents and low entry fines, accounted for over a third of their rental income, whilst Crown intervention only served to reinforce these problems. The Crown's long leases of many of the bishops' manors, alongside other long leases to the gentry, ensured that they could not use their leasehold land to supplement their stagnant copyhold rents. Similarly, the Grand Lease of the bishops' coal mines meant that the bishops could not repeat the success of their fifteenth-century predecessors who had turned to their coal reserves as a means of bolstering their ailing rent roll. The only estate management change available to the bishops in this period was one which ultimately proved detrimental: the wholesale conversion of vast numbers of leases from 21-years to three lives, which has been roundly condemned by many contemporary critics and modern historians as an attempt to sell the future for immediate profits.[261] It is a sign of the financial straits that the

[261] Heal, 'Archbishop Laud Revisited', p. 130.

bishops found themselves in that they resorted to this method of estate management in order to make ends meet. This rental stagnation had much wider implications than the income of one man: the divergence between rents and prices enabled several generations of rural gentry and larger yeomen farmers to greatly benefit in the sixteenth century, the results of which are explored further in sections two and three.

Conclusion

The two largest landowners between the Tyne and the Tees faced the same problem of how to increase their income in a period of rapidly rising inflation, but did so from two distinctly different positions. The Dean and Chapter inherited an estate which had largely been converted to leasehold tenure, and although this caused a considerable headache for the first few decades after their foundation, they were ultimately able to take modest entry fines and experience a more harmonious relationship with their tenants. By comparison, the Bishops of Durham, who possessed substantial amounts of copyhold land, found that they had little room to manoeuvre, which was further curtailed by Elizabethan intervention through the forced long leasing of many of the bishopric's most valuable manors and coal mines. The relative positions these two landowners found themselves in during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries would be incomprehensible without a knowledge of the evolution of their estates during the fifteenth-century recession: their ability to respond to these high levels of inflation being directly linked to the earlier development of their estates. Section three explores the consequences of these developments for their tenants further because they provided them with a whole host of different challenges and opportunities depending upon which estate their lands belonged to. There has been considerable attention paid to tenure in studies of the sixteenth century from Tawney and Brenner's assertions that

copyholders were often evicted and their lands converted to leasehold tenure, to the more recent views that copyhold tenure was surprisingly strong and provided tenants with recourse to legal defences.[262] This chapter has shown how the tenurial development of these estates depended considerably upon changes made under the economic pressures of the fifteenth-century recession, and which impacted upon the ability of these landowners to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century.

If we return to the literature surveyed in the introduction to this chapter, there has been a historical consensus that rents increased roughly in line with prices across the second half of the sixteenth century. Simpson, for example, asked 'why should landlords suffer when agricultural prices were rising?'[263] One of the explanations for this view, he suggested, was the 'supposed inelasticity of tenures – such as the long lease or the inflexible copyhold – which prevented the landlord from getting his fair share of rising values'. Despite this, he concluded that 'it is difficult to see how the mere landlord had suffered from inflation…he had simply raised the rents, and found tenants – often the same tenants – who were able and willing to meet each rise'. However, the reason Simpson has this optimistic view of the position of landlords is clear from the evidence he uses, showing an increase in revenues across the sixteenth century for the Butte family, which was 'simply the result of increasing the rents whenever their leases fell in'. In other words, his optimism is underpinned by the performance of leasehold land, with the Buttes in his example formally introducing a *novum incrementum* to this tenure between 1559-61, which was raised in 1572-4 and again in 1585-6.[264] Similarly, Bowden argued that 'in spite of rigidities due to the prevailing system of land tenure, there were probably few estates where rental revenues remained inflexible for any length of time', whilst C. G. A. Clay concluded that 'certainly the sixteenth and early

[262] Hoyle, 'Tenure on Elizabethan Estates', pp. 163-168.
[263] Simpson, *Wealth of the Gentry*, p. 179.
[264] Ibid., p. 200.

seventeenth century rise in rents and fines had involved a redistribution of income from the small farmers to their landlords.' [265] Kerridge has also shown the multitude of contemporary commentators who repeatedly ascribed the problems of the sixteenth century to the raising of rents, with the Husbandman of Hales' *Discourse of the Common Weal* in 1549 opining that: 'I think it is long of you gentlemen that this dearth is, by reason you enhance your lands to such height, as men that live thereon must need sell dear again, or else they were not able to make the rent again.'[266] In 1587, William Harrison similarly spoke of fines being double, trebled or raised sevenfold and of 'such landlords as use to value their leases at a secret estimation given of the wealth and credit of the taker…'[267] These examples, once again coming from leasehold land, show the opportunities for rent increases and overall profit which were available for some landlords, but it is far from clear that it was available to all. Over a century ago, for instance, Frances Gardiner Davenport described the process whereby the rents on a Norfolk manor became fixed in the fifteenth century, and how this 'change to tenure at fee farm must ultimately have resulted in great profit to the tenants and loss to the lord' when prices began to rise from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards.[268]

At the heart of these differences in historical opinion lie debates surrounding tenure; a singularly dry but fundamental subject, and one which often determined the living standards and prosperity of landlords and tenants alike throughout this period. At Durham, the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral may well have inherited an estate which was entirely leasehold, but, as the tenant-right dispute showed, the reality of the situation was not so simple. The lottery-system in the 1570s both shows the extraordinary profits which could be eked out of their tenants by a landlord during the sixteenth century, but also the disputes such

[265] Bowden, 'Agricultural Prices', pp. 694-5; C. G. A. Clay, *Economic Expansion and Social Change: England 1500-1700, vol. 1* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 17.
[266] Eric Kerridge, 'The Movement of Rent, 1540-1640', *EcHR*, 6 (1953), p. 16.
[267] Ibid., p. 16.
[268] Frances Gardiner Davenport, *The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor, 1086-1565* (Cambridge, 1906), pp. 77-8.

activities were likely to provoke. The ruling of the Council of the North ultimately restricted the prebends from fully exploiting the leasehold nature of their estates, but they still succeeded in rising entry fines to a commensurate level with increases in land value from the early-seventeenth century. By comparison, the divergent development of the tenurial structure on the estates of the Bishops of Durham meant that they had far fewer prospects for increasing rents, with long-term leases and copyhold land prevalent upon their estate. The restrictive nature of these tenures left the bishops of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century with little room for manoeuvre and it is hard to argue with Peter Horton's conclusion that 'the bishop can undoubtedly be numbered amongst the victims of the sixteenth-century price inflation'.[269] How far was this problem unique to Durham or are the difficulties found here representative of both the English church in general and landlords more broadly in the late-sixteenth century?

Christopher Hill highlighted the fact that the 'Tudor monarchs freely granted, to courtiers and others, long leases of church lands on favourable terms', the effect of which was 'to put most of the profits from lands so leased into the pockets of the lessees.'[270] This redistribution of incomes because of low rents on church lands was acknowledged by contemporaries like Hacket who argued that tenants 'enjoyed six parts out of seven in pure gain', whilst Laud at his trial said 'more than five parts in six' were kept by tenants.[271] It was not just the actions of the Crown or the leading gentry which hindered the ability of the higher clergy to respond to inflation, with tenurial developments on their estates greatly undermining any attempts to increase rents in the sixteenth century. Indeed, there has been a tendency to downplay the role of the Crown by modern historians in favour of seeing inflation as the greatest problem facing the bishoprics of England. Felicity Heal concluded for

[269] P. Horton, 'The Administrative, Social and Economic Structure of the Durham Bishopric Estates, 1500-1640' (Durham Mlitt., 1975), p. 154.
[270] Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 6.
[271] Ibid., p. 36.

Ely that: 'the cause of financial crisis lay in the failure actually to improve income in the face of the rise of prices, rather than in any direct action by the crown or aristocracy'.[272] Gina Alexander noted that 'the rigidities of leasehold and copyhold tenure on their manors made it difficult for the bishops [of London] to improve the long-term profitability of the see', concluding that 'the real income of the bishops of London was drastically reduced not by the direct action of the crown but by inflation'.[273] Likewise, Rosemary O'Day concluded for the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield that 'if Elizabeth did nothing to worsen the see's economic position she did nothing to aid it positively. In an age of inflation successive bishops were forced to seek a way out of a very real financial predicament.'[274] She went on to explain that the bishops chose short-term methods which were 'detrimental to the see's resources in the long term', with 'much episcopal property being leased out in reversion'. Finally, Claire Cross described how the 'myth that the archbishops of York in the sixteenth century endured grievous spoliation at the hands of the crown which eighteenth century historians had perpetuated should be recognised for what it is, a pious deception', and once again pointed to inflation as the chief culprit.[275]

In short, historians of the higher clergy of the sixteenth century have argued that it was the inability of these ecclesiastical landowners to increase rents in the face of inflation which caused them so many problems rather than because of grievous deprivations suffered at the hands of the crown, but as this study has shown, these difficulties have a much longer history than has often been recognised. Certainly, crown intervention restricted the options available to the higher clergy from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, but it was the tenurial development of their estates which proved so problematic for these landowners. The higher

[272] Heal, 'Economic Problems of Ely', p. 199.
[273] Gina Alexander, 'Victim or Spendthrift? The Bishop of London and his Income in the Sixteenth Century', in E. W. Ives (ed.), *Wealth and Power in Tudor England: Essays Presented to S. T. Bindoff* (London, 1978), pp. 144-5.
[274] Rosemary O'Day, 'Cumulative Debt: the Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield and their Economic Problems', *Midland History*, 3 (1975), p. 91.
[275] Cross, 'Economic Problems of York, p. 81.

clergy could not increase rents, partially because of the widespread development of copyhold of inheritance upon their estates, but also because of the numerous beneficial leases granted out by their predecessors. In this respect the crown did the higher clergy no favours by taking extremely long leases of a whole host of manors which hindered their ability to respond to the inflationary pressures of the sixteenth century. Section 2 below goes on to explore how far this was restricted to the higher clergy or was in fact a feature of the early-modern countryside which saw rentier landlords increasingly struggle because of the tenurial development of their estates from the late-fourteenth century onwards.

Section 1

The Role of Estates in Rural Economic Development

Conclusion

Chris Dyer's assertion that the 'main economic trends of the early/mid-fifteenth century were against magnates' can to a large extent be extended to encapsulate the experiences of both the largest landowners in Durham across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[276] As Dyer went on to conclude, the fifteenth century was particularly full of hardship as 'rents, which formed the bulk of their revenues, declined', whilst they faced the difficulties of filling vacant tenancies and ensuring prompt, or indeed, any, payment of rent at a time when land was in relative abundance.[277] Similarly, in the sixteenth century both of these landowners faced the problems associated with trying to increase rents in a period of rapid inflation. However, the abilities of these two institutions to respond to this challenge were quite different, with the Dean and Chapter inheriting an estate predominantly composed of leasehold land, and who were thus able to take modest entry fines even in the face of a truculent tenantry, whilst the bishops struggled to increase rents in the face of restrictive tenures which had developed on their estate and Crown intervention which further hampered their efforts. But why did the experiences of these two institutions differ so much in the late-sixteenth century?

It is in their responses to the demographic decline of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth-century recession where the most profitable answers lie, for the estate management of these two landowners diverged across the fifteenth century. The monks of Durham

[276] Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 183.
[277] Ibid., p. 153.

Cathedral Priory were clearly aware of their financial difficulties, trying innovative ways to reorganise the administration of their estates after the high arrears of the 1430s, whilst they similarly adapted their rent-books to more accurately reflect reality on the ground. More importantly, they restructured their estates, not simply leasing out demesne lands but gradually converting all tenures upon their estate, except some freehold, into syndicated leaseholds whereby all land was divided between tenants who had an equal share in the rent. Although this may have been at the behest of their tenants and was a long process, with some townships not converted until the early-sixteenth century, it seems likely that the combined transformations seen in their administration and upon their estates were responsible for bringing arrears, waste, and decay back down from their mid-fifteenth-century highs. The fifteenth-century recession was too pervasive for a landowner, no matter how efficient, to avoid entirely, but through their administrative acumen the monks of Durham Priory were able to recover from its depths from the 1470s onwards. The long-term consequences of these transformations were in many ways more important than this recovery, however, for they enabled the newly-formed Dean and Chapter to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century better than many other rentier landlords because their tenants held leases, enabling them to increase entry fines. Crown intervention, in the form of the new Cathedral foundation statutes, actually helped the Dean and Chapter in many ways, for it approved the new 21-year leases upon their estates, ensuring that the preferential long-leasing which became so prevalent on the bishops' estate could not occur here. These accumulated changes provided much of the impetus for the Dean and Chapter's dispute with their tenants in the 1570s, and although the lottery system was prohibited by the Council of the North, they were still able to take modest entry fines. In the 1620s, the Dean and Chapter adjusted their entry fines to three years' improved value; perhaps not a true commercial reflection of the land, but a compromise which enabled both parties to benefit from the unearned increment of inflation

and high agricultural prices and which ensured these fines would keep pace with future inflation. Thus, the high inflation of the sixteenth, such a burden for many rentier landlords, including the bishops of Durham, was handled much more successively by the Dean and Chapter of Durham.

By comparison, the bishops of Durham did not implement any kind of uniform reorganisation of their estates, nor convert land wholesale to leasehold tenure in the fifteenth century, preferring instead to bolster their ailing rent roll through the profits of the coal industry, which proved successful. Their coal mines at Railey were continuously leased out during this period at remarkably high rents, which are suggestive of precociously high levels of production in the region, whilst the early-sixteenth century saw further improvement as the bishop's Tyneside coal mines recovered. Such was the success achieved by the Master of Forests and Mines that the receiver general's overall income followed that of the bursars of Durham Priory broadly in step, recovering from the 1470s onwards. This recovery distorts from the fact that their rental income was much lower by the end of the fifteenth century than it had been at the start, a fact which was to haunt their sixteenth-century counterparts. These sixteenth-century bishops found it increasingly difficult to raise their income in line with inflation because copyhold and customary tenures had become entrenched on much of their land. Unlike on the estates of the Dean and Chapter where Crown intervention may have been a blessing in disguise, Crown intervention in the diocese only brought further troubles, burdening the bishopric with a large rent charge, and taking extremely advantageous leases of many of the best manors. It was this intervention, moreover, which stopped the bishops from replicating the success that fifteenth-century incumbents of the office had achieved because the Crown leased out their most valuable asset, the Tyneside coal mines, in the Grand Lease. Parts of section two and three explore how these transformations gradually transferred the profits of the bishopric to either the Newcastle Hostmen or those long-standing members of

the gentry who were able to acquire extremely beneficial leases across the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.

Estate management and institutional constraints played a vital role in establishing a new path dependency upon the ecclesiastical estates of Durham from the late-fourteenth century onwards, which not only affected the ability of their successors to respond to high levels of inflation in the sixteenth century, but as we will see in section three, had a significant impact upon their tenants. The importance of the restructuring rural society underwent in the fifteenth century can be seen in the radical divergence of the tenurial structures of these two neighbouring estates, so that by the early-seventeenth century they were completely different. The 21-year beneficial lease had become the only form of tenure for the vast majority of the Dean and Chapter's tenants by the late-sixteenth century, for which they were expected to pay three years' improved rent as an entry fine. However, tenure upon the bishops' lands was about as diverse as it could be, with varying amounts of freehold, leasehold and copyhold land. Approximately two-fifths of their income came from land held by copyhold tenure, and of the remaining three-fifths held by leasehold, over thirty-five per cent was held on long leases by the Crown, with yet more land on long leases to the gentry. Even the remaining leasehold land was by no means uniform by the mid-seventeenth century, with around half these leases being converted to three lives from 21 years, further complicating the overall tenure on their estate.

The major difference between these ecclesiastical estates of Durham derive from changes made in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the monks of Durham Priory were increasingly leasing out their lands and the bishops were not. As Peter Larson concluded for the late-fourteenth century, 'the major discernible difference between the two estates had to do with the tenure of customary land. On the bishopric, although the steward granted some leases, most holdings were held for life; on the Priory, leases for a short length

of time quickly became standard'.[278] The wholesale change of tenure on the estates of Durham cathedral may have begun at the behest of their tenants in certain villages, but the complete transformation wrought in this period is highly suggestive of top-down direction from the monks. But why did the bishops of Durham, a neighbouring landowner whose primary residence was within the same peninsula complex as Durham Cathedral, not follow suit? The answer remains unclear, but it does not lie in any inherent conservatism on the part of the bishops; given the sometimes aggressive protection of their coal interests, the bishops of Durham were clearly not unconcerned with financial matters in the Palatinate. The answer lies more in their different management styles, with Larson for example, finding much less conflict in townships on the bishops' estate than on the Priory's lands because of their more hands-off approach compared to the monks' interference and reorganisation.[279] It is perhaps likely that the exploitation of their mineral resources and parks was sufficiently successful that successive bishops questioned the need for such wholesale changes in the tenurial structure of their lands. It was the tenurial changes on the Priory's estate which produced conflict between landlord and tenants not only in the late-fourteenth century, but also in the sixteenth century with the tenant-right dispute. The importance of precedence in determining the outcome of these disputes is clear from the Dean and Chapter's presentation of an 'ancient book and register of leases' to the Council of the North, and their tenants appeal to the concept of 'time out of mind'. Thus landlords and tenants across England were sent trawling through manorial records in the sixteenth century in order to defend not only their possession of land, but also its tenure, rent and inheritability.[280]

The mechanisms for some of these changes and the consequences of them for their tenants are explored more fully in section three and the thesis conclusion, but the

[278] Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 235.
[279] Ibid., pp. 225-40.
[280] Andy Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict, The Peak Country, 1520-1770* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 127-50.

overwhelming difference between these often coterminous estates was the development of their tenurial structure from the late-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries.[281] The divergent development of these neighbouring ecclesiastical estates created wholly different tenurial structures upon their manors, which in turn greatly affected the rents and security of tenure of their tenants. It is all the more surprisingly, therefore, that as Hoyle has commented, there have been 'remarkably few recent studies of estates in the century following the dissolution of the monasteries (as opposed to studies of rural communities)'.[282] Management differences at the estate level produced tangible variations in rural society and could often act as an important driving force of change. Although demographic changes, commercialisation and class relations are often cited as the primary causes of change in pre-industrial society, estates were often the vehicle through which these factors manifested change. Similarly, there has been increasing recognition that decision-making was fundamentally important in medieval agriculture and that there were a range of factors affecting this, such as weather patterns and regional farming. It has been shown here that the previous development of estates was just as important in creating a path dependency which sixteenth-century landowners found it difficult to overcome, whilst the structural imposition this created upon their tenants will be explored in greater depth in section three.[283]

[281] See chapters 8-10 below.
[282] R. W. Hoyle, 'Introduction: Aspects of the Crown's Estate, c.1558-1640', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Estates of the English Crown, 1558-1640* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 1.
[283] See chapters 8 and 9.

Section 2

The Balance of Lay Landownership, 1350-1640

The fundamental differences between lay landlords and their ecclesiastical counterparts was not only that the laity could alienate their manors in the face of rising financial struggles whereas the likes of Durham Priory were forced to watch their total arrears outstrip their annual income twice over, but also that they had more than just a life interest in their landed estates. This section, therefore, explores the process of alienation and accumulation of land amongst the laity within the Palatinate to explore this element of rural society, which would otherwise be overlooked in a study predicated purely upon ecclesiastical estates. The methodology used here is developed from that used by Christian Liddy in his recent book on the Durham gentry between 1340 and 1430, in which he analysed changes in the balance of landed power and its subsequent implications for the political community.[284] However, because of the dates chosen for Liddy's study the long-term consequences of many of the trends he identified could not be fully explored, especially when related to the findings of Mervyn James and Diana Newton concerning the early-modern gentry of the Palatinate.[285] By combining the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, it becomes clear that the emergence of the parish gentry which James commented upon in the late sixteenth century was in fact a re-emergence of an important social group which had been hit particularly hard by the fifteenth-century recession.

[284] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 1-75.
[285] Mervyn James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society: A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region, 1500-1640* (Oxford, 1974); Diana Newton, *North-East England, 1569-1625: Governance, Culture and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2006).

The debate surrounding the fortunes of the laity in this period has a long history, with the 'storm over the gentry' having taken place over half a century ago, and many other studies of individual counties arising since.[286] Tawney's argument for the rise of the gentry, in conjunction with Lawrence Stone's thesis of a crisis of the aristocracy combined to create a narrative of economic upheaval in rural society in the century leading up to the English civil war. Although there have been many criticisms of this older historiography, not least its tendency to portray the Civil War as inevitably rising out of these financial difficulties, there have been numerous studies which have shown that there were significant changes in the composition of rural society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Simon Payling and Christine Carpenter found a contraction in the number of smaller gentry members holding manors from the late-fourteenth century, which in turn facilitated the accumulation of larger estates by members of the aristocracy and knightly families.[287] Lawrence Stone has shown that there was an inflation of honours in the early-seventeenth century which saw a 'remarkable increase in the number of upper classes, which trebled at a period when the total population barely doubled. The number of peers rose from 60 to 160; of baronets and knights from 500-1,400; of squires from perhaps 800-3,000; of armigerous gentry from perhaps 5,000-15,000'. [288] It was in this same period that Tawney concluded many noble families faced a financial crisis, whilst advocating a rise in the financial prosperity of gentry families. [289] The work of Cliffe on the Yorkshire gentry and that of James on Durham have both shown that there was a great proliferation of gentry families from the late-sixteenth century onwards

[286] J. H. Hexter,'Storm over the Gentry', *Encounter*, 10 (1958), pp. 22-34.
[287] Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Gentry, 1401-99* (Cambridge, 1992)pp. 83-4; Simon Payling, *Political Society in Lancastrian England: the Greater Gentry of Nottinghamshire* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 8-10.
[288] Lawrence Stone, 'Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700', *P&P*, 33 (1966), pp. 23-4.
[289] Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, pp. 72-3; Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 10.

as yeomen increasingly took advantage of the rise in agricultural profits and the eclipse of the aristocratic families of northern England.[290]

This section primarily relies on counting manors, a technique which has many problems, not least the fact that one manor was not equal to another manor in terms of economic or landed wealth, nor was a manor always the same across time.[291] Some Durham manors were little more than moorland farms with a few dozen acres carved out of the waste, whilst others such as Raby and Brancepeth were the caput of an entire barony. The ownership of a manor, however, was one of the clearest and core principals of gentry status, and without rental accounts of the gentry, this offers one of the few opportunities to trace changes in the composition of the rest of rural society in Durham.[292] As Eric Acheson concluded for Leicestershire, it was the 'tenure of a manor and the exercise of lordship which such tenure involved that distinguished the gentry from the non-gentry.'[293] In the following analysis, the overall number of manors is used to suggest general trends in the pattern of landownership amongst social groups, whereas much more detailed investigations of selected families is undertaken to illustrate their changing living standards and economic activities. This section explores how the balance of landownership within the Palatinate was transformed under the pressures of the mid-fifteenth-century recession, and how this changed under a multitude of challenges in the sixteenth century; rebellion, religious dissidence, and inflation. It does so primarily through a combination of Inquisitions Post Mortem, probate inventories, wills, charters, and registers of ecclesiastical leases. This overview has potential flaws, not least how to account for manors which simply disappear from mention as several of the smaller

[290] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 31; J. T. Cliffe, *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (London, 1969), p. 19.
[291] John P. Cooper, 'The Counting of Manors', *EcHR*, 8 (1956), pp. 377-89; Christopher Thompson, 'The Counting of Manors Reconsidered', *EcHR*, 25 (1972), pp. 124-31; Lawrence Stone, 'Counting Manors Again: A Reply to Mr Thompson', *EcHR*, 25 (1972), pp. 131-6.
[292] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p. 58; Pollard, *North-Eastern England*, pp. 81-3.
[293] Eric Acheson, *A Gentry Community: Leicestershire in the Fifteenth Century, c.1422-c.1485* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 49.

manors were prone to do or other manors which changed name across this period or were sometimes classified as a manor in one period but not another. As such the overall number of manors fluctuates in this analysis: it is not, therefore, a concrete statement of the ownership of every manor, but rather a general survey exploring overall trends in the balance of that ownership.

Another methodological concern with the following two sections is the extensive use of probate inventories as a general indicator of wealth, against which there are a whole host of warnings: 'probate inventories can seriously underestimate a man's total wealth'[294]; 'they are not a reliable guide to the total wealth of any individual, nor can they be used for comparative analysis of relative wealth, unless…the person concerned owned little or no land'[295]; 'there is often a considerable gap between the gross personal estate and the net estate'.[296] These warnings derive primarily from two deficiencies of probate inventories in general: 'they do not record debts owed [by the deceased] or any real estate, so they do not give a complete account of the person's wealth.'[297] However, there is little to be gained from throwing the baby out with the bath water and thus completely dismissing such an invaluable source of information.

The main deficiency of probate inventories for studying the wealth of either an individual or a social group is the lack of information about real estate.[298] This is obviously problematic to the study of wealth, especially since a person's landholding was almost certainly the most valuable item they possessed. It can, however, be overcome in many ways by the use of supplementary sources concerning the deceased. Where a will survives, land

[294] Michael Reed, *Buckinghamshire Probate Inventories, 1661-1714* (Aylesbury, 1988), p. ix.
[295] John S. Moore, 'Probate Inventories: Problems and Prospects', in P. Riden (ed.), *Probate Records and the Local Community* (Gloucester, 1985), p. 12.
[296] W. G. Hoskins, 'The Elizabethan Merchants of Exeter', in S. T. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield and C. H. Williams (eds.), *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale* (London, 1961), pp. 78-9.
[297] Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain, 1660-1760* (London, 1996), p. 2.
[298] Margaret Spufford, 'The Limitations of the Probate Inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds.), *English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 142.

which is granted to members of the family can often be traced, and an indication of the scale of the deceased's landed property can regularly, although not always, be obtained. For the gentry, Inquisitions Post Mortem can form a very informative counterpart to the probate inventory where both survive since they are essentially a record of the person's wealth which is excluded from their inventory: a survey of their landholding, and so can act as a great foil for the inventories of wealthier figures in the countryside. Furthermore, the estate records of the two largest landowners between the Tyne and the Tees, Durham Cathedral and the bishops of Durham, have survived remarkably well and allow for a reconstruction of both their gentry and peasant tenants alike, and thus a further aspect of a person's access to land can be revealed.[299] It may never be truly possible to reconstruct the net total estate of various social groups because of the potentially ad hoc nature of these sources, but it is possible to do so in smaller prosopographical studies of individual families.

The second deficiency of probate inventories brings the ability to do even this into question: the lack of information about the debts the deceased was owing to other people at the time of his death. There is a consensus that probate inventories do not contain this vital piece of information as 'the great majority of surviving inventories were concerned only with a man's personal effects, not with his liabilities'.[300] John Moore put this in a national context, describing how 'unlike the Scottish 'testaments', the English and Welsh inventories only give the gross values of moveable estates… it is impossible to calculate the net values of estates'.[301] When studying the contribution of probate inventories to material culture, Rachel Garrard concluded that 'debts owing by the deceased are seldom listed, for properly they were the property of someone else', whilst Mark Overton wrote that 'money owed by the

[299] CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640; DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670.
[300] B. A. Holderness, 'Credit in a Rural Community, 1660-1800: Some Neglected Aspects of Probate Inventories', *MH*, 3 (1975-6), p. 95.
[301] Moore, 'Probate Inventories', p. 12.

deceased to other people was another item which did not have to be included, for such debts belonged not to the deceased but to the creditors', however, there is a nuanced distinction here: they did not have to be included, but this does not preclude their existence in inventories.[302] This is such a trenchant belief that it has become something of a mantra to be recited in warnings on the use of probate inventories. Naturally the lack of information about a person's debt would greatly distort any study of their overall wealth and financial position; for example, Roger Widdrington, esq., possessed an inventory naming goods worth £1,446, but he also had outstanding debts worth £4,468 in which he was the principal debtor, and a further £2,152 for which Widdrington stood as surety: his goods alone not remotely representing his financial position.[303]

Contrary to the weight of historical belief noted above probate inventories do in actual fact often contain the debts owed by the deceased, although whether these were the full extent of such debts is unclear. There are 3,500 inventories surviving for what is modern County Durham between 1540 and 1650, of which 2,250 provide details of debts owing by the deceased, approximately 65 per cent.[304] The bishop of Durham required the executors and administrators to 'perform or administer the deceased's will or estate, *pay debts according to law* and exhibit a full and perfect inventory of all his goods and chattels'.[305] Whether including the debts owed by the deceased was a legal peculiarity of Durham is unclear, but it does provide the historian with the opportunity to work with the net moveable wealth on a much larger scale than probate accounts would allow. These debts could range from

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[302] Rachel P. Garrard, 'English Probate Inventories and their use in Studying the Significance of the Domestic Interior, 1570-1700', in Ad van der Woude and Anton Schuurman (eds.), *Probate Inventories: A New Source for the Historical Study of Wealth, Material Culture, and Agricultural Development* (Wageningen, 1980), p. 62; Mark Overton, 'English Probate Inventories and the Measurement of Agricultural Change', in Ad van der Woude and Anton Schuurman (eds.), *Probate Inventories: A New Source for the Historical Study of Wealth, Material Culture, and Agricultural Development* (Wageningen, 1980), p. 206.
[303] DPRI/1/1641/W8/1-5.
[304] DPRI/1,2,3; Online database accessible here: http://familyrecords.dur.ac.uk/nei/data/intro.php.
[305] Linda Drury, 'Inventories in the Probate Records of the Diocese of Durham', *AA*, series 5, vol 28 (2000), p. 178.

outstanding tithe payments, rent arrears, personal debts to named individuals, funeral expenses or even administration costs: preserved not in probate accounts but in the inventory itself. Spufford concluded that: 'the sum which appears at the foot of the probate inventory cannot be taken to indicate any individual's real net wealth, even in any approximate manner not only because it does not include, as we all know, real estate, but because it carries no clue to the extent of his indebtedness,' concluding that inventories 'must be taken no longer with pinches of salt, but with whole salt-cellars of disbelief'.[306] Perhaps through the use of supplementary sources such as IPMs, wills and leasehold registers we can reduce our salt intake slightly. Indeed, as Cressy has argued, despite their problems 'inventories give an adequate indication of the distribution of wealth', whilst Zell concluded unreservedly that probate inventories 'were superior to taxation returns as a source for studying the changing distribution of wealth or relative wealth of the different trades in the Elizabethan Weald'.[307] It is hoped, therefore, that the combination of these sources will provide the best indication of the economic position of the various social groups and families of the Palatinate across this period.

The broad balance of landownership has been summarised multiple times, with the two ecclesiastical landowners from section one being the most well-endowed and richest landlords in the region, behind which came the Earl of Westmoreland, whose estates in Durham were estimated to be worth around £1,087 p.a.; followed by Lord Lumley with just over £850 from his lands in Durham and Yorkshire; followed by a group of families led by the Bowes of Streatlam, the Eures of Witton, the Hiltons of Hilton, and the Conyers of Sockburn, who all held between six and a dozen manors, and constituted 'the richest and

[306] Spufford, 'Limitations', p. 174.
[307] Tom Arkell, 'Interpreting Probate Inventories', in T. Arkell, N. Evans, and N. Goose (eds.), *When Death do us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 95-100.

most influential group in the Durham landed class'.[308] For the beginning of the sixteenth century, Mervyn James then placed the Claxtons, Tempests, Salvins, Blakistons and Lambtons on a yet lower level, although the Claxtons were certainly more influential during the fifteenth century when two branches of that family held over a dozen manors between them. He described this group in society as 'less widely connected than the Eures and their kind, these were nevertheless established and respected gentry stocks, solidly entrenched in Durham society', although they were most 'likely to be found in the role of followers' rather than leaders.[309]

James went on to describe the 'smaller parish gentry, a group which, practically non-existent as such at the beginning of the century, was in process of emerging from the ranks of the rich farmers, yeomen, and merchant-shopkeepers.'[310] This is one of the most interesting groups in rural Durham because the parish gentry were not emerging but were in fact *re*-emerging as the economic conditions changed in their favour during the sixteenth century. As prices and rents declined and real wages increased during the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, the parish gentry were perhaps the most vulnerable section of society to this pincer movement: families who carried such martial responsibilities and social pretensions, and yet whose landed estates were often precariously balanced between profit and loss. As will be seen over the next few chapters, the parish gentry struggled during these socio-economic conditions and were gradually forced to sell their lands as the recession continued to bite. By the start of the sixteenth century, however, the majority of the gentry and yeomen farmers found themselves in a favourable position to benefit from rising agricultural prices. There is obviously another side of the same coin: the struggles of the parish gentry provided those with wealth with a perfect opportunity for estate building in the

[308] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 30.
[309] Ibid., p. 31.
[310] Ibid., p. 31.

fifteenth century. The Nevilles and Thorntons purchased between them around a fifth of all lay manors in the Palatinate during the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, whilst many other knightly families can be seen making opportunistic acquisitions on a smaller scale. As the sixteenth century progressed, these families struggled for various reasons: some, such as the Claxtons of Claxton faced a divided inheritance; others such as the Nevilles and the Claxtons of Oldpark faced ruin because of political follies; and others such as the Lumleys and Conyers faced financial difficulties in this period of rapid inflation.

The North-East thus forms an important case study where the debates surrounding the crisis of the aristocracy and rise of the gentry have traditionally come together to form a coherent outline of events in the sixteenth century. As Diana Newton concluded, 'with the counties of Northumberland and Durham no longer dominated by the Nevilles and the Percies, the lesser peers and gentry filled the political (and social) vaccum'.[311] It will be argued here that this goes far beyond the Rising of the North and subsequent forfeitures, but was part of a much broader shift in rural society which saw rentier landlords struggle in the face of inflation, whilst agricultural producers were able to accrue a higher return for their goods than had been possible for generations. It was not simply the overnight disappearance of the Nevilles which brought about this shift in power in the Palatinate, but also the financial struggles of the leading families such as the Lumleys and Conyers, who were forced to alienate large portions of their inheritance, and the bishops of Durham whose hands were tied in the face of inflation. By comparison, the gentry, who were directly farming their own manors on a commercial scale during the sixteenth century, were enjoying the fruits of their labour. Perhaps in this respect, the debates surrounding the 'rise of the gentry' and the 'crisis of the aristocracy' are misnomers more adequately expressed in terms of land-usage, with a

[311] Newton, *North-East England*, p. 45.

general ‘rise of agricultural producers’ and a ‘crisis of rentier landlords’.[312] It is argued here that it was this economic shift, as much as the political suicide of the Nevilles or even the take-off of the coal industry, which brought about the overall redistribution of power within the Palatinate.

[312] Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*; Tawney, ‘Rise of the Gentry’, pp. 1-38; Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: The Great Lay Estates of the Palatinate of Durham

The Formation of Great Estates in the Fifteenth Century

Estate management and institutional constraints played a greater role in the medieval countryside than just affecting the economic opportunities of the church, although because of the excellent survival of their records it is often from their lands that most of our evidence derives. The tenurial development of lay estates and the path dependency which this created was fundamentally important to their prosperity, and it is clear that the challenges and opportunities which they and their tenants faced in this period often originated from the composition of their landed estates. Unfortunately because of the lack of comparable evidence about the lay estates of the Palatinate of Durham we cannot follow these developments as clearly as on the ecclesiastical estates, but as will become clear over the following chapters, whether a landowner was directly engaged in commercial agriculture or had become a rentier landlord was extremely important, especially from the sixteenth century onwards.

The Nevilles, Lumleys, Bowes, Hiltons, Claxtons (of Claxton and of Aldpark), Scropes, Grays, Graystocks, Eures and Conyers were the major manor-holding families inside the County Palatine of Durham.[313] The above families held around 54 out of the 208 manors mentioned in the Inquisitions Post Mortem, hereafter referred to as IPMs, of the second half of the fourteenth century, meaning that approximately twenty-five per cent of all

[313] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 58-75; James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 30.

lay manors rested in the hands of ten families.[314] By the first half of the sixteenth century, however, these estates had been greatly consolidated, so that the same families, less those who no longer appear in the IPMs, possessed some 104 manors of the 201 manors recorded.[315] Thus over the course of the fifteenth century this handful of families had managed to double their holdings, coming to account for over half the lay manors within the Palatinate. The consolidation was even greater than the above suggests if one looks at the three principal lay families within the Palatinate: the Nevilles, Lumleys and Bowes. This triumvirate of landed power possessed around twenty manors in the second half of the fourteenth century but by the first half of the sixteenth century had accumulated no less than eighty-eight manors, coming to account for approximately forty-four per cent of the lay manors recorded in the Durham IPMs.[316] This represented an extraordinary process of consolidation of land across the fifteenth century, not only amongst the knightly group of families, but also in the hands of the resident aristocracy who came to dominate rural society across the century. Was there a specific strategy of estate-building which fuelled these mass acquisitions or was it a matter of simple opportunism at their neighbour's bad fortunes? Was the fifteenth century, as well as being a depressing period of economic gloom and strife, paradoxically also a great period for estate building for those with wealth or enough resources to acquire credit?

The Nevilles were the main purchasers of manors in medieval Durham and increased their estate from a dozen or so manors in the mid-fourteenth century to owning over forty-five by the middle of the fifteenth century.[317] Of the major landholders in Durham they were

[314] Inquisitions Post Mortem: DURH 3. General trends summarised here from the deputy keeper's reports: 'Durham Records: Cursitor's Records: Inquisitions Post Mortem' in *The Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1883), Appendix, pp. 310-542; 'Durham Records: Cursitor's Records: Inquisitions Post Mortem' in *The Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1885), Appendix, pp. 153-282.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.
[317] DURH 3/2, f. 110; DKR 45, pp. 243-4; DURH 3/3, f.61; DKR 44, pp. 532-3.

the earliest to accumulate such a large estate, and it was this bout of purchases which secured their position as the largest lay landowner in the diocese until the mid-sixteenth century. They often purchased manors from absentee landlords, for whom the thought of keeping a distant manor was presumably no longer desirable in the economic context of the fifteenth century.[318] In the middle of the fourteenth the landed position of the Nevilles in Durham was 'basically limited to their patrimonial estates of Raby and Brancepeth'.[319] By 1381 John Lord Neville had acquired a further fourteen manors, many of which were in the particularly fertile arable land in the south-east of the Palatinate. On the death of Ralph Neville, first earl of Westmoreland, these lands had increased from around thirty at the time of Hatfield's survey in 1381 to forty-seven by 1425, but Ralph Neville, Liddy argued, 'seems to have concentrated his attention on properties close to the main patrimonial estates of Raby and Brancepeth'.[320] It was these purchases which founded the position of the family as the largest lay landowner in the Palatinate of Durham and a major focal point of local politics and patronage right up until the forfeiture of this vast estate in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The Bowes owed their initial acquisition of land at Streatlam to the marriage of Adam Bowes and Alice, the heiress of Sir John Trayne, and by the mid-fourteenth century the family possessed six manors in the south-east of the Palatinate. Although this estate was relatively modest, Streatlam was no mere moorland farm and was valued at £40 per annum in 1399.[321] The Bowes accumulated land on a large scale across the fifteenth century so that by the time of an inquisition in 1516, Ralph Bowes was said to hold the manors of Barnes, Berford, Bertfield, Bireside, Cleatlam, Clowcroft, Chilton Magna, Dalden, Eggleston, Elton, Hilton, Hamilden, Hepton, Medomsley, Middleton in Teesdale, Newton, Osmondcroft, Stainton, Streatlam, Pavilion, Plawsworth, Willington and various other moieties and parcels

[318] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 67-9.
[319] Ibid., pp. 67-9.
[320] Christian Liddy has written more about these acquisitions in *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 67-9.
[321] Ibid., p. 42.

of land within the Palatinate.[322] These lands were partly acquired by purchase but also because of Sir William Bowes' marriage to Matilda, the heiress of the of the Dawdon inheritance, who brought with her substantial property valued at £44 per annum, and which greatly increased the landed estate of the Bowes family.[323]

The Thorntons were the largest purchasers of manors from outside the landed elite of the Palatinate in the fifteenth century, and will be returned to again in chapter six in relation to the much broader phenomenon of mercantile purchases in rural society.[324] However, the role they played in purchasing manors must be explored here first, for their purchases went on to raise an ancient Durham family to prominence at the end of the fifteenth century. This rich Newcastle merchant family was perfectly positioned to take advantage of the troubles of many of his rural neighbours which provided a unique opportunity for the widespread accumulation of manors for someone with ready cash. Roger Thornton was a bailiff, alderman and nine times mayor of Newcastle and one of its wealthiest inhabitants in the fifteenth century, and he accumulated manors hand over fist in the first half of the fifteenth century, although the actual purchases were often hidden through trustees.[325] For example, in 1369 John Birtley died seized of High Friarside, comprising of eight messuages and eight score acres, valued at 20s.[326] The Thorntons purchased the manor sometime afterwards and by the death of Roger Thornton the elder the manor was said to contain three messuages, 100 acres of arable, ten of meadow, 100 of woodland, and twenty acres of pasture, along with Lyntz and Colfield which were parcels of the same manor.[327] The manor of Ludworth was held by Walter Ludworth in 1347 and contained four carucates of land, held of the bishop by the fourth part of a knight's fee and of a tenement and sixteen acres held of the Prior of

[322] DURH 3/3, f. 36; DKR 44, pp. 330-1.
[323] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, p. 235.
[324] See chapter six below.
[325] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p. 56.
[326] DURH 3/2, f. 82v. DKR 45, pp. 161-2.
[327] R. Surtees, *The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham, vol. 2* (1816), p. 233.

Durham by 12s.[328] Ludworth was exchanged several times, but was eventually alienated by Thomas Holden to Roger Thornton in 1438, whilst the manor of Sheraton was acquired in an equally complicated series of transactions.[329] The descent of the manor of Follansby was much simpler, having been held by John Farnacres in 1339, and descended to his son Thomas who died in 1359.[330] The manor descended to a William of the same name, who presumably alienated it to Roger Thornton who settled it on the marriage of his son Roger with the daughter of Lord Graystoke.[331]

Fugerhouse was acquired in a different fashion for under Hatfield's survey this estate was included amongst the free tenancies of the manor of Whickham, held by the Earls of Northumberland, containing approximately 100 acres, but whose real value was in a coal pit which the bishop leased to the earl for the rent of £26 13s 4d.[332] In 1405, Roger Thornton was granted the manor in letters patent of Henry IV for his role 'in the defence of Newcastle' against Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland.[333] Another acquisition was made in the early fifteenth century when in 1411, William Swalwell quitclaimed all his father's lands to John Fenwick, chaplain, a trustee for Roger Thornton. Several more manors followed in similar fashion. The manors of Axsheles and Redheugh were held by the heirs of Hugh Redheugh in Hatfield's survey, and the IPM on the death of Hugh Redheugh in 1391 confirms this.[334] His brother, Thomas Redheugh alienated these manors to Roger Thornton, who received a pardon for purchasing without licence in 1411.[335] The manor of Bradley near Medomsley presumably followed in a similar pattern to Axsheles, for in 1390 Hugh Redheugh is described as holding two parts of the manor of Bradley, which soon ended up in Roger

[328] DURH 3/2, f. 30v. DKR 45, p. 228.
[329] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 123-4.
[330] DURH 3/2, f. 31v; DKR, p. 193.
[331] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 123-4.
[332] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, p. 93.
[333] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p. 56.
[334] DURH 3/2 f. 114; DKR, p. 255.
[335] DURH 3/2, f. 167v; DKR, p. 269.

Thornton's hands. The manor of Stokerley Crook was described in Hatfield's survey as belonging to John Kirkby who held the vill of Crokheugh and 100 acres of arable and woodland.[336] The heirs of Kirkby alienated Crook to Roger Thornton, who died seized of the manor containing two messuages,120 acres of arable, five of meadow, eight of pasture, and twelve acres of woodland.[337] The manor of Bradbury and Isle passed from one of the most prominent former mercantile families, the de la Poles, into the rising house of the Thorntons with Little Chilton being similarly sold, which was described on the death of Katherine, widow of William de la Pole, as a messuage, three tofts, and two carucates of land. The manor of Preston le Skerne followed the same path from the de la Poles into the Thornton family, and was described in 1381 as a messuage, three tofts, twenty oxgangs, five acres of meadow, and a watermill.[338]

The Thorntons were thus one of the most prolific purchasers of manors in the Palatinate during the early-fifteenth century, second only to the newly created Earls of Westmoreland, presumably because their immense wealth acquired in Newcastle meant they were one of the few families in the region who could afford such extensive purchases when others were no doubt struggling to make ends meet. Chapter six looks at this influx of mercantile wealth into rural society in further depth, exploring the social position of merchants and their motives for making such inroads into landed society, but Roger Thornton's purchases were to have a profound impact upon the Lumley family. In 1471, Roger Thornton, whose family had accumulated such an impressive array of manors, died without a male heir, leaving his sole daughter and heiress to marry George Lord Lumley. Lord Lumley thus made one of the smartest matches in this period, virtually doubling his family's inheritance with his marriage to this wealthy heiress, who brought with her all of the

[336] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, p. 124.
[337] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, p. 352.
[338] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, pp. 330-1.

manors briefly outlined above. Indeed, such were the stakes involved that a quarrel arose concerning this succession in which Lord Lumley slew Giles Thornton, his wife's bastard brother, in a duel in Windsor Castle ditch.[339] Thus overnight the name of Thornton disappeared from the Durham countryside, and Lord Lumley gained a more than ample dowry.

How far the above purchases were sheer opportunism is unclear, for there appears to have been definite attempts at building consolidated areas of landed power: there were definite concentrations of manors for the Nevilles around the caput of Raby and Brancepeth, similarly for the Bowes around Streatlam, and likewise for the Lumleys around Lumley castle. It is also clear, however, that there were concentrations of land away from these traditional power-bases, such as at Elwick Hall in the south-east of the Palatinate where the Nevilles possessed several very large and rich manors, including Stotfold which Surtees described as comprising of 1,500 acres of arable land, 800 of meadow, 1,000 of pasture, 10 of wood, and 2,000 of furze and briar in the sixteenth century.[340] The Bowes family had a consolidated estate in the south-west of the Palatinate centred on Streatlam, but the marriage of Sir William Bowes with Matilda brought the family important lands in Easington ward around Seaham and Dalton.[341] Similarly, the marriage of Lord Lumley with the sole daughter and heiress of Roger Thornton brought the family a whole host of coal-bearing manors just south of the River Tyne.

The knightly families of the Palatinate of Durham slowly accumulated manors from their less fortunate and smaller neighbours across the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. It was the Nevilles, Lumleys and Bowes who gained the most across this period and went on to rise out of this group in rural society; the two former families rising into the

[339] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2,* pp. 153-164.
[340] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3,* pp. 88.
[341] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1,* p. 235.

titular aristocracy. The Nevilles purchased manors hand over fist in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, whilst the latter two families acquired substantial dowries through marriage; in the case of the Bowes twice, thus acquiring Streatlam and the Dawden inheritance, whilst the Lumleys secured the substantial properties acquired by the Thorntons. These larger landowners were certainly facing the same recession and hardship as others in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they could also benefit from sourcing their household requirements from rents in kind, whilst the financial struggles of other landowners provided opportunities for acquisition. It was the knightly families and the aristocracy of Durham, whose commercial connections often extended outside of the Palatinate and who thus often had better access to credit and capital. The late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries were perhaps paradoxically a period of great hardship for landowners but also a great period for estate-building for those with sufficient resources and resourcefulness to take advantage of the opportunities this provided.

Fragmentation and Forfeiture in the Sixteenth Century

If the fifteenth century was a period of opportunity for building great estates, then in many ways the sixteenth century was anathema to them in Durham. During the sixteenth century there was a fragmentation of the larger estates created by Durham's aristocracy in the fifteenth century, with an increasing number of families holding anything from a portion of a manor to several manors, but very few held more than five manors.[342] The single most obvious event which affected the composition of rural society in Durham was the Rising of the North in 1569, which saw the forfeiture of the Neville estates and the redistribution of

[342] DURH 3; DKR, 44 and 45.

many other minor estates.[343] In many ways, the downfall of the Nevilles was an exogenous event, inspired by a heady mixture of fear, uncertainty and religious convictions against the court of Elizabeth. In 1569, around 6,000 people from Durham and North Yorkshire joined in the Rising of the North under the banners of the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland to secure the restoration of Catholicism. The rebellion was ultimately a failure and led to the forfeiture of the Percy and Neville estates, the latter permanently. In the aftermath, Sir George Bowes ordered the execution of around 600 rebels, whilst the Crown received land worth some £5,300 per annum from attainted rebels, although much of this was entailed to the Earl of Northumberland's brother whose family were eventually restored to the earldom.[344] By comparison, Charles Neville, the sixth and last Earl of Westmoreland, died a penniless pensioner of Spain and his extensive lands in Durham which had formed the largest lay estate with approximately a fifth of all lay manors in the Palatinate, rested in the hands of the Crown. The political spectrum of the Palatinate became a lot narrower, at least in terms of sources of local aristocratic patronage and James argued that this calamity was crucial in transforming Durham from a feudal to a civil society focused upon the Crown's representative in the region; the bishops of Durham. [345]

The Lumleys suffered not necessarily from outright forfeiture but from the long and imprudent sales of the elderly Lord Lumley, who, in trying to fund the extravagant expenditure of his father-in-law, the Earl of Arundel, slowly sold off many of the family's manors. John Lord Lumley married Jane, the daughter of FitzAllan the Earl of Arundel and it was through these connections that Lumley was introduced into the court, being made a Knight of the Bath two days before the coronation of Queen Mary. The Earl of Arundel expressly stated that his son-in-law Lord Lumley had sold and mortgaged 'most part of his

[343] Krista J. Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics, and Protest in Elizabethan England* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 118-43.
[344] Ibid., pp. 118-43.
[345] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 178.

own lands, tenements, hereditaments and patrimony for the discharge and payment of his (the Earl's) debts and causes'.[346] Similarly Lumley bore his share in the displeasure his father-in-law incurred in 1568 by being privy to the Duke of Norfolk's matrimonial intrigue with the Queen of Scots, and was imprisoned in the Tower. He was later released and spent the rest of his life in 'the pomp, pride and circumstance of ancient nobility.'[347]

In order to meet the increasing costs of his life at court, the extravagant expenses of his father-in-law, and the rising costs of his aristocratic lifestyle in this period of rapid inflation, he was forced to sell much of his inheritance: not just the vast estate accumulated by the Thorntons during the fifteenth century but also the ancestral lands of his family. Murton, for example, was alienated to the husbandmen tenants of the manor; Richard Rede, Thomas Yonge, Thomas Shadforth, Anthony Dune, John Gregson, William Unthank, John Shaklock, and John Robinson, in eight portions in 1566 for £341 6s 8d, reserving a free rent of £21 6s 8d, eight hens and 8s.[348] It is of particular significance that it was his husbandmen tenants who were buying out portions of his manor; essentially purchasing freehold rights to their own lands, an idea which will be returned to in section three.[349] The manor of Bainbridge Holme was similarly alienated by John Lord Lumley, with a fishery in the Wear, to Thomas Whitehead, gent., for £276 12s 4d in 1560.[350] This manor had often been granted out, as in 1421 when John Lumley granted it to his servant William Mahew for life, and again in 1539 when it was granted to Nicholas Bainbridge for life.[351] The manor of Ludworth, which had been given the not inconsiderable value of £22 p.a. on the death of George Lord Lumley in 1511, was alienated to Sir Richard Bellassis of Morton, knt., in the same flurry of

[346] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, pp. 153-164.
[347] Ibid., pp. 153-164.
[348] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 8-9.
[349] See chapter nine below.
[350] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, p. 234.
[351] Ibid., p. 234.

sales.[352] The Bellassis family are returned to in chapter five, for they were one of the wealthier and more prominent families of the Durham gentry who increasingly profited from the financial struggles of the Lumleys and the bishops of Durham. The manor of Twizel was likewise alienated to Humphrey Cole, goldsmith, sometime before 1550, who in turn sold the manor on to the Tempests.[353]

The manor of High Friarside was alienated by John Lord Lumley in 1562 to James Rawe, merchant of Newcastle for £243, whilst the manor of Butterby was similarly sold by Lord Lumley to another Newcastle merchant, Christopher Chaytor, who died seized of the manor in 1591. [354] Walridge manor was alienated relatively late in John Lord Lumley's lifetime in 1607, shortly before his death, to George Smith and Thomas Kimraston, the latter as a trustee for Smith, whose descendant, Thomas Smith, appeared amongst the disclaimers at St George's Visitation in 1615.[355] A whole host of other manors, all inherited from the Thorntons, were disposed of during this great period of sales: the manors of Swalwell and Axsheles to Matthew Ogle, gent; the manor of Bradley near Medomsley was alienated during the reign of Elizabeth to the Newtons, as John Newton, gent., died seized of the manor in 1607; the manor of Bradbury and Isle was alienated to the Nevilles in the sixteenth century for they appear in the forfeiture of Charles Earl of Westmoreland in 1569, being granted out to the Bowes, presumably for life, after the defeat of the rebellion; the manor of Folansby was alienated to the Hiltons, for in 1561 Sir Thomas Hilton held the vill and manor there by the fortieth part of a knight's fee; the manor of Bolam was alienated in parcels to a whole host of freeholders, including the Raynes, Trotters, Garths, Wranghams, Crawfords, and Southerns;

[352] DURH 3/3, f. 5; DKR 44, pp. 453-4.
[353] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, p. 199.
[354] Ibid., p. 233.
[355] Ibid., p. 196.

and the manors of Stranton and Seaton Carrowe were alienated by John Lord Lumley to Sir Thomas Gresham, knt., who settled his estates on his wife Anne Gresham in 1577. [356]

There was a definite trend in the overall balance of these transactions which saw the slow and steady alienation of John Lord Lumley's inheritance to those of a lower social status. Murton was sold to his husbandmen tenants; Hamilden sold to a gentleman; Ludworth to a knight; Walridge to a gentleman; Twizel to a goldsmith; High Friarside to a Newcastle merchant; Swalwell and Asxheles to a gentleman; Bradley near Medomsley to a gentleman; Stranton and Seaton Carrowe to a knight; and Bolam to various small freeholders; only Bradbury and Isle went to an Earl. These manors which in the early-sixteenth century had been in the hands of a single aristocratic family, had by the death of John Lord Lumley in 1609 come to rest in the hands of nearly a dozen families. Several of these belonged to the knightly group of the Palatinate who were following the trends laid down by their ancestors in the fifteenth century, but a number of newer groups were emerging as purchasers across the sixteenth century. Gentlemen were now purchasing their way back into the countryside on a scale only matched by their alienations in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century, whilst a wide variety of merchants and even husbandmen were amongst the purchasers. How these various sections of society were able to make these purchases will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters, but it is perhaps most noteworthy that it was his own husbandmen tenants who were purchasing portions of some of these manors as agricultural profits trickled down the social ladder during the sixteenth century.[357] It is also particularly significant that Lord Lumley was selling the Thornton inheritance in the second half of the sixteenth century, which included a whole host of coal-bearing manors on the very eve of the take-off of the coal industry.

[356] Ibid., pp. 153-64.
[357] See chapters 5 and 9 below.

How far Lord Lumley spent the rest of his life in 'the pomp, pride and circumstance of ancient nobility' can be seen from the inventory taken on his death in 1609. The total value of his moveable goods came to £1,404, but there is no mention of agricultural goods, and the vast majority of this valuation came from his famous collection of hangings and paintings.[358] He possessed hangings retelling the stories of Troy, Hector, Scipio and Hannibal, Jason and Medea, and King Pluto, which were valued at £80 each, with yet more hangings of the story of the Amazons worth £60, those retelling the story of Paris and the story of St George worth £40 each, and a 21-piece hanging of the story of King Saul and David worth £120. His collections of paintings and statues were valued at considerably less than these hangings, but are still of interest, with pictures of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and 'my Lord Arundel' amongst his collection. In the Great Chamber he possessed fifteen pictures of 'my Lord Lumley's ancestors with a pillar of his pedigree' worth £8, as well as a picture of Lord Lumley in armour with his two wives and the old castle of Arundel valued at £13. In the hall he possessed seventy-six little pictures worth £12, and fifteen great pictures worth £5, as well a further nineteen pictures in the drawing chamber worth £6 6s 8d, and ninety-one other pictures in the gallery and four others in the wardrobe, valued altogether at £40. He also possessed a considerable number of chairs, carpets and bedding, but this luxurious interior seems to have come at the cost of whole tracts of the family's lands. The Lumleys, in the words of Tawney, had the expenditure 'of one age, its income that of another.'[359]

One of the principal reasons for his extravagant expenditure was that Lord John Lumley had no son and the family was facing extinction in the direct male line: his three children by his first wife, Jane Fitz Alan, had died in infancy, and his second wife, Elizabeth

[358] DPRI/1/1609/L5/2-4.
[359] Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 8.

Darcy of Cliché, was childless.[360] Given the pictures, paintings and statues of his ancestors, it is clear that Lord Lumley was very conscious of this fact and it almost certainly contributed to his overspending. However, the widespread alienation of his ancestral lands would have remained a last resort for a man who was so clearly concerned with his family's pedigree and position, and who made provisions for the future inheritance of his estate. Before his death he chose to settle his lands on Richard Lumley, an ancestor of the Earl of Scarborough, who was a collateral line of the male blood, derived from Anthony, a younger brother of Lord Lumley's grandfather. Richard Lord Lumley inherited the estate, which had been greatly reduced by his predecessor's sales and mortgages, and received a knighthood in 1616, and in 1628 he was created an Irish Peer as the Viscount Lumley of Waterford. An idea of the losses suffered by the Lumley family during this intense period of alienation may be gleaned from the feoffment of Lord Lumley around 1540 and the IPM of John Lord Lumley in 1609. In the feoffment of 1540 he possessed: 'in the Palatinate, the castle and manor of Lumley, the lordships of Hart, Stranton, and Seaton Carrew, the manors of Bradbury, Isle, Butterby, High Friarside, Ludworth, Axwell, Swallwell, Bradley, Bolam, Morton, Hesleden, and Housefield'.[361] In the IPM of 1609, John Lord Lumley died seized of the castle and park of Lumley, the manor of Great Lumley, the manor and rectory of Hart, and the manors of Hartness, Hartlepool, Thurston, Over Thurston and Nether Thurston, and Nelston, recent consolatory purchases from the Cliffords.[362] Thus the entire estate founded by the Thorntons through extensive purchases and much of the ancient inheritance of the Lumleys had been sold piecemeal during the course of the sixteenth century. In this regard, John Lord Lumley represents the archetypal aristocrat of Lawrence Stone's thesis of the 'crisis of the aristocracy': living beyond his means at court he faced the problems of high inflation with a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption. But it was his inability to increase rents which caused

[360] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, pp. 153-64.
[361] Ibid., pp. 153-64.
[362] DKR 44, pp. 455-6.

and compounded many of the difficulties he faced, and it was precisely this situation which enabled his own tenants to purchase portions of his estate as they profited the most from the high agricultural prices of the sixteenth century.

The Bowes family were one of the few large landowners in the Palatinate for whom the sixteenth century was not necessarily one of decline, but even so they faced a divided inheritance by its end. The family's conversion to Protestantism, and Sir George Bowes' decision to defend Barnard Castle against the rebel forces during the Rising of the North was crucial in consolidating their success in the second half of the sixteenth century, as was their increasing involvement in the lead industry. William, Robert and George Bowes gained leases for the term of lives of property in Stockton and in Evenwood Park from the bishops of Durham in 1569, perhaps for their involvement in the defence against the rebels.[363] They also received the office of Moor Men for a term of lives, which put them in charge of all the bishops' lead workings in Stanhope and Wolsingham in 1565; an occupation which they increasingly became synonymous with as the seventeenth century progressed.[364] This allegiance of protestant faith and potentially capitalist exploitation of mineral resources seems at odds with the stance of many of their neighbours and is perhaps one of the main reasons for their survival in this period, but they faced other challenges. There was a divided inheritance which, after the the death of Sir George Bowes, saw his three daughters as coheirs inheriting the family's estates in the east of the county. It was this divided inheritance which furthered the trends of fragmentation already explored in this chapter, with for example, the eldest and youngest sisters carrying a large portion of these lands into the families of Blakiston and Collingwood.[365]

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[363] DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, vol. 3, f. 8, 12v.
[364] Ibid., vol. 2, f. 211v; John Brown, *Lead Production on the North-East Periphery: A Study of the Bowes Family Estate, c.1550-1771* (Durham Doctoral Thesis, 2010) .
[365] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 4*, pp. 101-26.

The Claxtons were another family whose large estates disappeared across this period, with the Claxtons of Claxton dying out in the male line towards the end of the fifteenth century, and the Claxtons of Oldpark suffering for recusancy, and yet another divided inheritance in the second half of the sixteenth century. William Claxton of Claxton possessed the manors of Claxton, Fishburn and Holom in 1380, but it was the marriage to Isabel, the only daughter of William Laton, which brought Sir William Claxton the manors of Horden, Haswell, Pespol, Boisfield and Hawthorn, and so greatly improved the financial and social standing of the family. It was thus that on the death of Sir Robert Claxton in 1483, the family possessed the manors of Bruntoft, Claxton, Fishburn, Haswell, Holom, Horden, Pespol and Boisfield, and Pontoft in the Palatinate, making them one of the most substantial families outside of the Nevilles, Lumleys and Bowes.[366] However, Sir Robert died leaving four daughters as coheiresses, and so this substantial estate was partitioned approximately as follows: Margaret, wife of Sir William Bulmer, knt., acquired the manors of Claxton, Bruntoft, Pontoft, and a third of Fishburn; Joan, wife of John Cartington, co Northumberland, acquired the ancient possessions of Tyndales at Dilston and Whitchester in that county; Elizabeth, wife of Richard Conyers, acquired the manor of Horden and lands in Easington, and a third of Fishburn; Felice, wife of Sir Ralph Widdrington, acquired the manors of Haswell, Pespol and Boisfield, and the remaining third of Fishburn.[367] These lands were to be even further divided in the sixteenth century as purchases and alienations fragmented this estate, with Sir Richard Bellassis acquiring the manor of Haswell, whilst the manor of Pespol and Boisfield was acquired by the wealthy Newcastle merchant Henry Anderson. The manor of Pontoft descended with the Bulmers until 1600 when it was sold to Anthony Meaburne, whilst Bruntoft was sold to John Featherstonhaugh, esq., of Stanhope in 1608.[368] This estate which had been held by a single knightly family of the Palatinate in the middle of the

[366] DKR 44, p. 352.
[367] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, p. 142.
[368] Ibid., p. 89.

fifteenth century had by the early-seventeenth century been fragmented amongst a whole host of families ranging from wealthy gentlemen to Newcastle merchants.

The Conyers were another important landowning family partly because of their estates but also because of their unique role in welcoming the new bishop of Durham into the Palatinate. The Conyers held the manor of Sockburn for over five centuries, having been granted the manor along with other lands both north and south of the Tees during the episcopate of Ranulf Flambard (1099-1128) and were amongst 'a small group of families who formed the baronial elite of the palatinate in the twelfth century known as the barones et fideles Sancti Cuthberti.'[369] The Conyers were amongst the first to greet the bishop, meeting him in the middle of the river Tees and presenting the falchion with which their ancestor supposedly slew the fabled Worm of Sockburn. This ceremony was clearly a memorable event, for on 22 August 1661 Bishop John Cosin, wrote to William Sancroft, relating the welcome he received as he crossed the Tees from the south:

> 'The confluence and alacrity both of the gentry, clergy and other people was very great; and at my entrance through the river Tees there was scarce any water to be seen for the multitude of horse and men that filled it, when the sword that killed the dragon was delivered to me with all the formality of trumpets and gunshots and acclamations that might be made.'[370]

As Christian Liddy has argued, the medieval ancestors of the Conyers must have enjoyed 'semi-mystical status' because of these legends.[371]

From a very early stage, the Conyers possessed the manors of Sockburn, Bishopton, Harperley, and Clowcroft and further lands in county Durham and Yorkshire, with the IPM of

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[369] W. M. Aird, *St Cuthbert and the Normans: The Church of Durham, 1071-1153* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 211-12; Christian Liddy, 'Land, Legend and Gentility in the Palatinate of Durham: The Pollards of Pollard Hall', in Christian Liddy and Richard Britnell (eds.), *North-East England in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 70.
[370] G. Ornsby (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Cosin D.D., Lord Bishop of Durham: Together with Other Pages Illustrative of his Life and Times*, Surtees Society, 55 (1870), p. 21.
[371] Liddy 'Land, Legend and Gentility', p. 71.

Robert Conyers describing the ancestral manor of Sockburn in 1431 as containing: a hall, a chamber, a kitchen, a granary, and a stable; a dovecote, three orchards, three cottages, with their gardens worth 30s p.a.; a watermill worth 100s; the milnhalgh worth 40s; an enclosed wood, of ten acres, worth 3s 4d; 100 acres of arable land and 100 acres of meadow, valued together at £4 13s 4d.[372] The income from Sockburn and the family's other estates provided the Conyers with a total landed revenue in the region of £50-£100, which was sufficient to enable them to weather the harsh economic conditions of the fifteenth century, but the Conyers family appear to have suffered a similar fate to that of the Lumleys in the sixteenth century. Sir George Conyers died in 1567, with £281 worth of moveable goods, a much more modest inventory compared to many of his gentry counterparts, although it is unclear whether this was the whole inventory or just a valuation of goods at Harperley.[373] Regardless, it is the composition of this wealth which is revealing about the difference in living standards between the families, for although he possessed corn, hay and wool worth approximately £20, and livestock worth £133, his household goods only came to £31. Indeed, the sole reason that they even approached this level was the possession of a large quantity of fairly low quality items. He also died with jewellery valued at £72 6s, but which included a gold chain for official ceremonies that alone was valued at £40 and so was worth more than the entire sum of his household goods. Clearly, the social expectations of the age could not be spurned, especially for a family such as the Conyers who played such a prominent role during the ceremonies of the diocese.

The will of Sir George Conyers also provides a particularly revealing insight into the family's estates during the sixteenth century as he provides an annual valuation of his lands: in Girsby, Dinsdale, Hornby and Worsall land worth £19 11s 4d; land in Bishopton worth

[372] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, pp. 243-7; DURH 3/2, f. 262; DKR 45, p. 180.
[373] J. Raine and W. Greenwell (eds.), *Wills and Inventories from the Registry at Durham, Part I*, Surtees Society, 2 (1835), pp. 266-8.

£26 4s 5d; land in Wintringham, co Yorkshire, worth £21 22d; land in Newbiggin and Little Stainton worth £18 19s 6d; land in Harperley worth £4 4s 5d; and the home manor of Sockburn worth £8 17s 10d.[374] It was from these lands that Sir George Conyers empowered Robert Aske of Aughton, John Dawney of Seassey, and John Saier of Worsall, esqs., to 'have the said lands till they receive from them 500 marks to the use of Elinor Conyers, my daughter, for her preferment in marriage, or when she reaches twenty-one; and the same sum to Mary Conyers, my daughter'.[375] Sir George Conyers thus possessed an estate worth around £100 per annum, but this rent had hardly improved since the fifteenth century and was quickly being eroded by high levels of inflation: Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage in the 1540s alone had reduced this to perhaps a half of its real value. As agricultural prices increased sixfold across the sixteenth century and early seventeenth centuries, these stagnant rents became increasingly problematic for the family and there are signs that the Conyers were financially struggling to maintain their position in society, especially when they were burdening their estates with such large marriage portions.

Sir John Conyers, knt., who died in 1609 possessed a considerably larger moveable wealth than his predecessors, with goods and chattels valued at £647 18s.[376] He had over £18 worth of gold, and £15 17s in ready cash, with over £85 worth of plate and jewellery, and also apparel worth £50; an expensive wardrobe for the period. The scale of their agricultural activities appears to have been quite limited for they only possessed eight draught oxen, which was the average for many of the larger tenants on the lands of the two ecclesiastical estates, whereas other members of the gentry possessed considerably more, such as Ralph Lambton who had forty-one draught oxen spread across two manors.[377] Although they

[374] J. Raine and W. Greenwell (eds.), *Wills and Inventories from the Registry at Durham, Part III*, Surtees Society, 112 (1905), pp. 34-5.
[375] Ibid., pp. 34-5.
[376] DPRI/1/1609/C14/1.
[377] DPRI/1/1594/L1/1-4.

possessed twenty-two kyne with ten suckling calves and a further thirteen calves and eleven twinter beasts, this was virtually the extent of their agricultural interests, with only around £13 6s 8d worth of corn on the ground and suggests that the majority of their income was still primarily derived from their rents. Despite the considerable total valuation of his moveable goods, it is unclear whether the family were enjoying any financial success in this period, for Sir John Conyers also died with debts of £520: notably £120 to the aldermen of York, and a further £400 to Anthony Applebie.[378] On Sir John's death in 1609, his son and heir, Sir George Conyers inherited his father's estate aged 35, but by 1613 had alienated the family manor of Bishopton and other lands in Stainton and Newbiggin to his own tenants.[379] In the 1560s these lands had formed over a third of the rental income of the family: this was not the sale of surplus territory, but the alienation of important land which had been held by the Conyers for centuries. It is also revealing that once again it was his own tenants who were purchasing these manors as stagnant rents passed the profits of agriculture down the social scale, much akin to the sales by the Lumleys. This need not necessarily have been the end of the Conyers at Sockburn, but a sad series of early deaths in the family sealed their fates. When Sir George Conyers died in 1625, he left William Conyers as his 13 years-old heir to the ancestral homes of Sockburn and Harperley, who died just ten years later.[380] In 1635 this William Conyers, esq., died leaving his three daughters as co-heiresses: Katherine aged 2, Anne aged 1, and Dorothy who was only 12 days old, with the principal line of the family at Sockburn thus dying out in the male line.[381]

[378] DPRI/1/1609/C14/1.
[379] DKR 44, p. 362.
[380] Ibid., p. 365.
[381] Ibid., p. 367.

Conclusion

These two centuries were of completely contrasting fortunes for the larger lay landowners of the Palatinate of Durham: the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries proved to be a great period for estate building, whilst the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries were quite the reverse and saw the fragmentation of many of these estates. Natural contingency played its part in these processes: the marriages of the Bowes and Lumleys in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for example, saw them acquire significant estates which led to a greater accumulation of land amongst a smaller territorial elite, whereas the Claxtons and ultimately the Conyers died out in the male line leading to a greater fragmentation of their lands in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. However, there was a much greater balance of these trends than mere misfortune could account for, with a whole host of purchases being made in the earlier period which were only matched in scale by the alienations of the latter. In the mid-fourteenth century, the balance of landed power in the Palatinate was, if not uniform, then certainly less stratified than it was to become by the end of the fifteenth century when the three families of the Nevilles, Lumleys and Bowes held over two-fifths of the lay manors of the Palatinate of Durham, and a group of knightly landowners just below them held perhaps another fifth. This concentration of territorial power was not to last in the sixteenth century. Each family appears to have found its own way to disaster: the Nevilles committing political suicide with the Rising of the North in 1569; the Claxtons dying out in the male line; the Lumleys slowly selling their inheritance; and the Conyers sharing a mixture of the fates of these last two families.

In many ways, therefore, the above chapter supports the idea of a ‘crisis of the aristocracy’, but in important ways it does not: it was not so much a crisis facing a particular social group, but one facing a particular type of landowner. After all, the Conyers and Claxtons were never members of the titular aristocracy however important they were as

landowners in the Palatinate. It was in their roles as large landowners, and more specifically as rentier landlords, in which they suffered the same vissitudes as the Lumleys and the bishops of Durham. The lands of the Conyers, for example, were worth between £50-£100 in the fifteenth century but all their rental income, including their manors in Yorkshire, only totalled £100 according to the will of Sir George Conyers in the second half of the sixteenth century, despite agricultural prices having already increased threefold by his death. It was these pincers of high inflation and stagnant rents which gave rise to a crisis, not of a social group per se, but of a type of landowner who struggled to benefit from the unearned increment which their tenants slowly accumulated. It was no coincidence that it was these same tenants who were increasingly able to purchase portions of their lord's manors and acquire freehold rights to their land. In other words, the experiences of both landowners and their tenants were greatly affected by the tenurial structure upon their estates and by its previous history. Rather than thinking of these issues as a crisis of the aristocracy it is much more useful to conceptualise them as a crisis of rentier landlords: the problems of stagnant and unimprovable incomes had their origins in the tenurial development of their estates rather than in their social status and it is here where the answer to the potential problems and profits of rural society in the sixteenth century lies.

How far does Durham represent national trends across these two centuries? Simon Payling found a similar accumulation of land in the hands of the aristocracy of Nottinghamshire across the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries, with Ralph, third Lord Cromwell, and Humphrey, Earl of Stafford, making extensive acquisitions of land 'made chiefly at the expense of non-resident gentry'.[382] This was very reminiscent of John Lord Neville's purchases in Durham during the late-fourteenth century which were 'based upon a willingness to exploit opportunities on the land market as they arose, notably from

[382] Payling, *Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, pp. 8-9.

landholders whose principal interests lay outside the bishopric'.[383] Payling concluded that by the middle of the fifteenth century, 'the quantity of land in baronial hands had significantly increased', but unlike at Durham where this resident aristocracy came to dominate landed society for a further century, the large Nottinghamshire estate Ralph Lord Cromwell 'built up between 1429 and 1441 was gradually dismembered' upon his death in January 1456. 'The dispersal of this estate, which was at its greatest extent for only fifteen years from 1441 to 1456, reminds us that the hegemony of a great magnate family within county politics was often a very short-lived phenomenon.'[384]

The experiences of the Nevilles and Lumleys in the sixteenth century certainly support Lawrence Stone's conclusions in his *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, with one family disappearing from landed society entirely and the other selling off whole tracts of land in the second half of the sixteenth century. Stone used three snapshots of the manorial possessions of the aristocracy in 1558, 1602 and 1641 to create the table below which clearly shows the structural changes in manorial possessions during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Although the total number of manors held by aristocratic families declined only slightly from some 3,390 to 3,080 by 1641, the average number of manors per family was nearly halved from fifty-four to twenty-five because the total number of aristocratic families had doubled in the intervening period.[385]

[383] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p. 67.
[384] Payling, *Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, p. 10.
[385] Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 355.

Table 20: Estimates of the Total Manorial Holdings of the English Aristocracy, 1558-1641

Date	Type of Family	No. of families	Manors held	Average No of Manors	No. of Families > 40 manors	No. of Families < 10 manors
31 Dec 1558	Extant on Dec 1559	63	3,390	54	39	2
31 Dec 1602	Extant on 31 Dec 1602	57	2,220	39	c.19-21	5
31 Dec 1641	Pre-1602 creations still extant, 1641	48	1,640	34	14	9
31 Dec 1641	Post-1602 creations still extant, 1641	73	1,440	20	9	29
	Total families extant in 1641	121	3,080	25	23	38

Source: Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), p. 355.

Of course, there are numerous problems to the technique of counting manors, not least the fact that this was not a standard unit of measurement, but there are other indications of decline across the sixteenth century. Stone estimated that 'in 1559, the total receipts from land were thus about £135,000 and the mean receipts per peer £2,140. Dependent on various assumptions, the mean net income of a peer, as adjusted by the price index, was £2,200 a year in 1559 and £1,630 in 1602, a drop of 26 per cent.' He went on to describe that 'in terms of landownership, though not of course of gross landed income, much less total income from all sources, the top level of the English social pyramid had been substantially reduced between the accession of Elizabeth and the outbreak of the Civil War', with a severe period of sales from 1585 to 1606, 'during which time the net losses were so alarming that one may reasonably talk about a financial crisis of the aristocracy, which was arrested soon after the death of Queen Elizabeth.'[386] Tawney similarly pointed to the fact that a family 'inheriting great estates, often inherited trouble. Its standards of expenditure were those of one age, its income that of another'. [387] It was in the second half of the sixteenth century and especially the last quarter of the century that the aging Lord Lumley was so prolific in selling land,

[386] Ibid., pp. 72-3.
[387] Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 8.

partly to cover the costs of his time at court, but also to cover the expenses of retiring in all 'the pomp, pride and circumstance of ancient nobility', which saw the landed assets in the hands of Durham's resident aristocracy slowly disperse.

As Trevor-Roper was quick to point out, those seeking aristocratic decline were bound to find it, whereas the gentry did not have a monopoly on good husbandry with the likes of the Earl of Worcester, head of one of the oldest noble families described as a 'wonderful great husband and did very much to improve his own estate; the Earl of Newcastle improved his rent-roll to £22,393 per annum; and it was a nobleman not a gentleman, whom Bacon knew "that had the greatest audits of any man in my time, a great grazier, a great corn-master, a great lead-man, and so of iron, and a number of the like points of husbandry"'.[388] A particularly pertinent example of this aristocratic success for the current study, is that of the Percy family, Earls of Northumberland, whose gross income increased fourfold during the life of the ninth Earl from some £4,595 in 1582 to £13,847 in 1636, with revenues from Northumberland increasing from £826 to £4,238 and those from Yorkshire rising from £1,177 to some £5,699 per annum.[389] Batho concluded that one of the main causes of this 'great achievement' was the creation of large leaseholds at high rents out of demesnes; 'in this way the receipts at Alnwick were nearly trebled between 1581 and 1612. More important still were the replacements of customary tenancies by leaseholds for twenty-one years, and as copyhold tenancies fell in, new tenants were being pressed to take out leases at increased rents.'[390] The Percies thus seem to have taken a different approach to their tenants than most of the Durham landowners so far studied, seemingly changing tenures, creating enclosed leaseholds and increasing rents at will. But in many ways they were the exception that proved the rule. Though born at Tynemouth Castle, the ninth Earl of

[388] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 7.
[389] Gordon Batho, 'The Finances of an Elizabethan Nobleman: Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632), *EcHR*, 9 (1957), p. 435.
[390] Ibid., pp. 440-1.

Northumberland was an absentee landlord who never visited the North after the execution of his uncle, the seventh Earl, and so his estate became a source of income to be exploited from his principal residence at Petworth in Sussex: profit was the product of his estates, not patronage or paternalism. The other significant aspect of the Percy estates is that their income from Tynemouth stagnated at a time when their revenues from Northumberland and Yorkshire increased fourfold. Although the answer to this question is beyond the scope of the current study, it likely lies in the previous history of the Tynemouth estate which was former monastic land until the Dissolution. Again, estate management and long-term institutional constraints played a vital role in the ability of landowners to respond to the rapid inflation of the sixteenth century, and it is here where the primary differences between larger landlords and smaller landowners was most pronounced. It was often on the estates of the larger, rentier landlords that customary tenures and copyholds of inheritance became fixed and it was these landowners who often found it most difficult to adjust to the inflation of the sixteenth century. By comparison, the smaller landowners who tended to keep some land under cultivation throughout this period were increasingly in the position to take advantage of the rising agricultural prices in the sixteenth century, often benefiting directly from the stagnant rents on the bishopric estate. It is to these landowners we now turn.

Chapter 5

The Changing Fortunes of the Gentry

Alienations and Financial Crises in the Fifteenth Century

There is another side to the story described in chapter four, as the greater consolidation of manors in the hands of fewer families during the fifteenth century led to a reduction in the number of families holding a single manor in the Palatinate. There was remarkable stability in the overall number of families who held more than one manor but less than five: in the late-fourteenth century there were thirty-three such families who held a combined total of eighty-one manors and by the start of the sixteenth century there were thirty-two families holding a total of seventy-three manors.[391] Although the actual families in this category changed, the overall composition of this section of rural society was relatively stable with some families accumulating manors to join the aforementioned upper gentry and others dropping downwards into the parish gentry. By comparison, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of single-manor families. In the late-fourteenth century there were sixty-four families who held a single manor each, and so accounted for approximately thirty-one per cent of lay manors in medieval Durham. By the start of the sixteenth century there were only twenty-eight such families, accounting for only fourteen per cent of lay manors.[392] Christian Liddy described the rural society of Durham in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries as relatively unique because of the large number of single-manor families who had little economic power but had political status through their involvement in the

[391] Inquisitions Post Mortem: DURH 3; DKR 44 and 45.
[392] Ibid.

community.[393] Why did this seemingly dynamic group in rural society slowly diminish across the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries? The parish gentry, many of whom owned little more than moorland farms but who possessed all the pretensions of the lesser gentry, were gradually forced out of the land market as recession continued to erode their incomes.

Some members of the lesser gentry fell upon hard times, but were still determined to carry out their roles in society, such as Walter Hawk, who settled his manor of Little Eden on the trustees John Trollope, gent., and John White, chaplain, as he proposed to journey to France in the service of the king. This manor of Eden Parva was returned in the IPM of Johanna Hawk in 1371 held by homage, fealty, service and was given an annual value of 10 marks.[394] It then descended through several Walters before another Walter settled the manor on these trustees prior to embarking for France. The trustees were to pay his wife 40s. a year out of the profits of the manor, and any remainder was to 'pay his debts', although the nature of these debts is unclear.[395] If his line should fail the manor would pass to the heirs of John Trollope, and so when his daughter Joan died without issue, the manor duly passed to John Trollope of Thornlawe, son of John Trollope. Was this nothing more than a series of unfortunate events? Perhaps, but clearly Walter Hawk was in debt, although whether as a result of his determination to serve abroad or from the problems of recession is unclear. There are a whole host of similar examples of these single-manor families who sold their lands, often to the more substantial knightly families who could afford to purchase manors during the harsh economic conditions that troubled landowners after the Black Death, or more specifically after the 1370s. Eppleton gave name to its family occupiers from a very early period and the family had resided there for nearly three centuries prior to its alienation by

[393] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 1-75.
[394] DURH 3/2, f. 87; DKR 45, p. 212.
[395] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 36-7.

Robert Epplinden to Sir John Heron, knt., in 1391.[396] Similarly, the manor of Ponthop belonged to the Gourlay family in the mid-fourteenth century with John Gourlay dying seized of the manor in 1361.[397] In Hatfield's Survey, William Gourlay held the manor containing sixty acres of land with a rent of 2s; a messuage and forty-eight acres with an ancient rent of 16s, now only 8s; and a messuage and thirty acres called Shippinstele, with a rent of 2s.[398] The same William died seized of the manor in 1395, but his son and heir Richard Gourlay, alienated the manor to Sir William Claxton, knt., in 1409.[399]

The Gildfords were another gentry family who alienated their manor to members of the knightly community in the Palatinate, in this case to Sir William Tempest, Sir William Lumley, and others in 1428. Thomas Gildford died seized of Collierley in 1349, presumably as a result of the pestilence of that year, with the manor valued at £4-5 p.a.[400] In Hatfield's survey, John Gildford is described as holding the manor of Collierley, containing 200 acres of pasture, arable and woodland by foreign service and suit at the county court and the same John died seized of the manor then described as containing a messuage and 180 acres, and a further thirty acres called Smethystrother, in 1385.[401] The manor continued in the hands of the Gildfords until John Gildford sold the manor and all his land to the aforementioned Sir William Tempest, Sir William Lumley and others in 1428.[402] Another example of a gentry family who took the name of their manor were the Alansheles who held a messuage and 100 acres of arable and meadow ground there by homage, fealty, suit of court three times a year, and 6s 8d rent, and was valued at 60s.[403] William Alansheles died seized of the manor in 1364, and of a messuage and thirty acres in Roughside, whose daughter and heir Alice

[396] DURH 3/2, f. 59; DKR 45, p. 154; Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 217-9.
[397] DURH 3/2, f. 63; DKR 45, p. 201.
[398] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, p. 115.
[399] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, p. 350.
[400] DURH 3/2, f. 37; DKR 45, p. 200.
[401] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, p. 124; DURH 3/2, f. 155; DKR 45, p. 203.
[402] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, p. 359.
[403] Ibid., p. 367.

married Richard Laton.[404] What became of the manor is unclear, for it never reappears in the IPMs under the same name, however, in 1425, Ralph Neville, Earl of Westmoreland was recorded as holding a messuage and 100 acres in Alansheles, which seems likely to be the same lands and was presumably purchased from Laton.[405] The manor of Farnacres follows a similar pattern: held by the Farnacres family until it was sold to Sir Robert Umfraville, knt., who in turn founded the chantry of Farnacres with much of this land.[406] Whether all of these families were under financial pressure because of the economic trends of the period is unclear, but there was a pattern here of the smaller parish gentry alienating their ancestral manors to the established knightly families of the Palatinate. This was not the occasional sale of unimportant land, but was often the last desperate act of ancient landowning-families whose names never reappear in the Durham countryside.

Given the high attrition rate of parish gentry noted above, it seems all the more remarkable that there were gentry families who survived and even prospered on their single manor throughout this period. Many of these will be discussed further in the next part of this chapter with regard to their sixteenth-century descendants who found themselves in a favourable position because their ancestors had managed to hang on to the family manor. This included the Bellassis of Henknoll who were to feature so prominently in the leases of the bishops in the sixteenth century; and, for example, Blakeheveds of Woodcroft, the Egglestons of Bradwood, the Fulthorpes of Fulthorpe, the Haggerstons of Haggerston, the Hagthorpes of Nettlesworth, the Sayers of Preston-on-Tees, and the Wards of Consett; all examples of single-manor families who survived the fifteenth century and went on holding their manor for generations. It was the high attrition rate amongst the Durham gentry, however, which reveals just how troubling the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were for

[404] DURH 3/2, f. 71; DKR 45, p. 154.
[405] DURH 3/2, f. 230; DKR 45, pp. 279-82.
[406] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol.* 2, pp. 243-4.

lesser landowners: many ancient families had their names stricken from the rolls, either through failure of the male line because of increased outbreaks of disease and war, or through forced alienation or sale as the recession continued to bite into their inheritances. There can be little doubt that there was an overall balance to these alienations which saw these single-manor families slowly disappearing and their lands being accumulated, either piecemeal by knightly families or in the wholesale purchases of the Nevilles or Thorntons. The relatively large number of families who held on to their family manor and modest inheritances, speaks to the resilience of many during the fifteenth-century recession whilst there are signs that this situation stabilised in the second half of the century. In the latter part of the fifteenth century, there was a halt in the accumulation of larger estates, and the number of single-manor families stabilised. Between 1350-1400, there were sixty-four single-manor families, which had been reduced to forty-two families by 1400-1450, and then down to twenty-five families by 1450-1500.[407] But in the period 1500-1550, there were still twenty-eight single-manor families, suggesting that their numbers had steadied from the middle of the fifteenth century onwards. Was this perhaps a sign that the smaller members of the gentry, at least those who had survived this long, had adapted to the socio-economic conditions of the fifteenth century? Or perhaps rather than the supply of manors drying up, did this in fact reflect upon the increasing difficulties larger families were finding themselves in as the recession continued to take its toll on them, especially during the 1450s and 60s? Without the estate records of these smaller landholders it remains unclear why some families were able to survive whilst so many of their neighbours were forced to alienate their lands: was it good estate management or merely providence? There are signs of a geographical trend to these alienations with many of the smaller landowners in the western half of the Palatinate particularly struggling, but equally the Milots of Whitehill were based there and, as will be seen below, they went from

[407] DURH 3; DKR 44 and 45.

strength to strength across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries using their coal reserves to great effect.

'The Rise of the Gentry' in the Sixteenth Century

The so-called 'storm over the gentry' was an historiographical debate which raged between Tawney and Trevor-Roper concerning the fortunes of the gentry, and which has become inextricably linked with discourses surrounding the causes of the Civil War; the origins of that conflict being sought in the upheavals of rural society in the century prior to its outbreak. It is argued here that the rise of the gentry was a misnomer more adequately phrased as a rise of the agricultural producer who increasingly profited from the rising prices of the sixteenth century. In other words, land usage was a more important factor in the prosperity of landowners than social status. The sixteenth century was a period of rapid inflation, with landowners facing the problem of how to increase rents when their estates had been focused upon retaining tenants, not exploiting them, for the past century. In Tawney's words: 'such difficulties confronted all conservative landowners, both peers and commoners, in proportion to the magnitude of their commitments and the rigidity of their incomes. The most that can be said is that the former usually carried more sail than the latter, and found it, when the wind changed, more difficult to tack'.[408] When landowners like the bishops of Durham and Durham Priory retreated from direct-demesne farming, with many of the larger lay landowners taking the same decision across the course of the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they left a gap in rural society. As Eric Acheson found in Leicestershire during the fifteenth century, the gentry rarely leased their demesne in its entirety because their households still needed supplies and so they found it easier to directly farm their own lands,

[408] Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 37.

and it was for this reason that they were able to benefit most from the rising prices of the sixteenth century.[409] The only feasible way for many landlords, such as the Lumleys and the bishops of Durham, to improve their income in the sixteenth century was to increase rents: a singularly difficult proposition which led many landlords into disputes with their tenants over the course of the century. By comparison, those agricultural producers of the sixteenth century who could create a large marketable surplus, namely the parish gentry and to a lesser extent the yeomanry, were in a much stronger position. It was often this section of society who stood to gain the most from the rise in agricultural prices, taking beneficial leases of the bishops' best manors, directly farming their own lands, and taking advantage of the increased economic opportunities associated with the burgeoning coal industry. It is to these families that we now turn.

Although the number of single-manor families was roughly halved across the fifteenth century, those who survived these upheavals were able to benefit from the continued possession of their manors in the sixteenth century. The Lambtons are a particularly important example of this continuation of the ancient families in the Palatinate, being another family whose name and identity were bound up with their manor and especially with the tale of the Worm of Lambton, in which an ancestor slew the fabled worm in an allegorical tale warning against the dangers of procrastination and sloth.[410] Lambton was the ancestral home of the family, being returned in the IPM on the death of Robert Lambton in 1350, and remained in the hands of the family throughout this period. They were granted their other manor of Tribley in 1427 from John Arrowsmith, William Hutton and Thomas Brancepeth, clerk, which consisted of sixty acres of arable land worth 30s p.a., twenty-four acres of meadow worth 33s 4d, and 100 acres of pasture worth 6s 8d p.a.[411] They also acquired

[409] Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, p. 57.
[410] A. L. Hind, *The Story of the Lambton Worm* (Durham, 1978), pp. 1-16.
[411] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, pp. 200-1.

several other parcels of land, the most important being their estate in Penshaw, which was acquired piecemeal. In 1370, Robert Lambton died seized of a messuage, a carucate of land and fourteen acres there, but by 1431, William Lambton died seized of a messuage worth 12d p.a., three cottages worth 12d, 100 acres of land worth 2s, eight acres of meadow worth 20s, forty acres of meadow worth 12d, and ten acres of wood.[412] Within another two generations the Lambtons had purchased a further messuage, sixty acres of land, and two acres of wood in Penshaw, and a messuage and forty acres in Bishop Houghton. Thus the Lambtons had two principal manors, Lambton and Tribley, and land at Penshaw but how far were they commercially farming this estate and reaping the profits of rising agricultural prices?

The evidence from their probate inventories suggests that the Lambtons not only retained much of this land in hand but were involved in commercial agricultural on a considerable scale. For example, the inventory taken on the death of Robert Lambton, esq., in 1583 valued his total goods at £744 5s and shows the agricultural activities on his lands immediately prior to his death, which were far beyond the consumption needs of his own family, with a total of over £76 worth of corn and hay, and over £300 worth of livestock.[413] At Lambton, the corn on the ground was valued at £20, a wheat stack at £4 and old hay worth £2. Similarly at Lambton there were ten oxen worth £36 13s 4d, six horses and mares and a one-year old foal worth £10, a black gelding worth £6 13s 4d, and a dun horse worth 53s 4d, eighty-eight ewes and seventy-six lambs worth £21 3s, forty-six *hogges* worth £9, eighteen *dimmonds* and two tuppes worth £6, nine geld cows worth £13, twelve cows and calves worth £22, two hand milk cows worth £3, a bull worth £2, seventeen *stottes* and *whies* worth £20, a further eleven *stottes* worth £28, another three *whies* with calves worth £5, and another six *stirkes* worth 40s, and nine swine worth 33s, with all of the plough and waine gear valued at £4. At Tribley, there were eight acres of rye worth £9 12s, and four thraves of rye worth 10s,

[412] DURH 3/2, f. 84-5; DKR 45, p. 229; DURH 3/2, f. 255; DKR 45, p. 232.
[413] DPRI/1/1583/L1/2.

with eight oxen worth £22 13s 4d, seven *stottes* worth £16, three cows with calves worth £4 10s, and four cows without calves worth £5 10s, a bull worth 33s 4d, and three *stirkes* at 24s, and a further 204 *wethers* and two tuppes valued at £48, sixteen ewes and lambs worth £4, and a black horse at £2, with all the plough and waine gear valued at 33s 4d. Lastly, at Penshaw, there were fifteen double acres of corn worth £20, and forty thraves of wheat worth £3 6s 8d, but no livestock mentioned.This agricultural activity, which was distributed across all their lands, was far beyond their own consumption requirements, and was clearly intended for the market, especially with their substantial sheep flocks. [414]

Robert Lambton also had a considerable wealth of household goods valued at £51 18s, with, for example, linen worth £12, and pewter vessel valued at £5. There were also four featherbeds worth £6 12s, and five beds and five servants' beds, suggesting substantial amounts of hired labour was required throughout the year. Furthermore, he possessed plate and jewellery worth £20, around £110 in ready money and three coats of plate armour worth £3 5s, whilst his funeral expenses were certainly equal to his social status coming to a total of £80. In his will Robert made bequests of £32 a year to his four younger sons Roger, John, William and James, as well as £100 for each of his daughters' marriage portions; Margery who married John Tempest, esq., and Jane, who married Sir William Blakiston of Gibside.[415] His will also made mention of a coal mine at Lambton, which was being leased out to Mr Heath for £20 annually.

The inventory taken on the death of Ralph Lambton, esq., the eldest son and heir of the above Robert, also survives, for he died just over a decade later in 1594 with a total moveable wealth estimated at £996 7s: in a short period of time he had already made

[414] A stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a wether hogge was a yearling-male sheep; a whie was a heifer up to three years old; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a gimmer hogge was a ewe between first and second shearing.
[415] DPRI/1/1583/L1/1.

substantial gains on the goods he inherited.[416] Ralph appears to have purchased further land at Beddick, and with this was able to increase the size of the family's agricultural activities. Thus at Lambton he possessed wheat and peas worth £3 6s, malt in the kiln worth £3 6s, hay similarly valued at £3 6s, and beehives worth 26s 8d, and thirty-three cows, twenty-two calves and two bulls worth £74, twenty-one one-year old *stirkes* worth £18, ten two-years old *stirkes* worth £16, 140 ewes worth £49, twelve tuppes worth £3 12s, with seventy-two *wether hogges* worth £17, sixteen fat ewes worth £4 16s, a mare and a foal worth £8, a bay horse worth £3 6s 8d, two grey nags worth £4, a black mare worth £5, and a grey-stoned horse which was for his own saddle worth £10, and fifteen swine worth £3 10s. At Tribley he possessed three cows and calves worth £6, two yearling calves, seven winter *whies*, three *stottes*, and two bulls worth £19, 131 *wethers* worth £40, twenty ewes worth £6 13s 4d, and hay worth 20s. At Penshaw he possessed thirty-two acres of corn in the ground worth £32, further corn in the stackyard worth £30, hay worth £3 6s 8d, and plow and waine gear worth £5 6s 8d, and twenty draught oxen worth £58, three cows worth £4 10s, eight *stottes* and *whies* worth £10, four calves worth 30s, twenty ewes and a ram worth £6 13s 4d, twenty-two *wethers* worth £8 10s, nine fat ewes worth 50s, eighty *gimmer hogges* worth £10 13s 4d, and four work horses worth £5, with a grizzled mare worth £3. Finally at Beddick he possessed corn on the ground worth £26 13s 4d, corn in the stackyard worth £32, hay worth £2, plough and waine gear worth £3 6s 8d, twenty-one daught oxen worth £66 13s 4d, a cow worth 40s, six *stottes* worth £20, a bull worth 28s, a black colt worth £3 6s 8d, four fillies worth £9, and a mare and foal worth 40s.

The scale of their agricultural activities was clearly expanding because of the extra arable land at Beddick and Ralph possessed a total of £184 worth of corn and hay, and over £500 worth of livestock. He was not just expanding the agricultural pursuits of the family, for

[416] DPRI/1/1594/L1/1-4.

he was very aware of the profitability of the coal industry and, along with the coal mine at Lambton, possessed coals and gear at Penshaw worth £34, his own keel worth £30, and three salt pans at Sunderland worth £100.[417] The value of his household goods was substantial at £80, with, for example, £18 worth of napery, and a selection of claret and white wine worth £7. He also possessed apparel worth £20, and £64 in ready money, although much of his plate and jewellery had been bequeathed as heirlooms before the inventory was taken. The Lambtons were thus an archetype of the successful gentry family in this period, taking advantage of all the economic activities in the region, not just passively reaping the benefits of a sixfold increase in agricultural prices, but also engaging in the burgeoning coal industry and its ancillary operations, whilst quite literally ploughing these profits back into the countryside.

The Bellassis were another long-standing family in the Durham countryside who found themselves similarly able to fill the void created by the problems of the nobility during the sixteenth century. They not only found themselves increasingly in a position to command the leases of some of the bishop's best manors because of loyal service, but were in such an economically advantageous position that they purchased several manors, one of which was from Lord Lumley himself. Peculiarly the Bellassis were no longer of Bellassis having exchanged their ancestral manor with Durham Priory for the manor of Henknoll near Auckland and thus the primary land of the family throughout these two centuries was Henknoll manor, which was valued at £5 in the IPM of John Bellassis in 1409.[418] It was in the sixteenth century, however, that the fortunes of the family significantly improved, especially with the leasing out of some of the bishop's best manors. The manor and grange of Morton was leased to Richard Errington, gent., for forty years by Bishop Fox but the lease soon found its way into the hands of Richard Bellassis who had married the daughter and heir

[417] DPRI/1/1594/L1/1-4.
[418] DURH 3/2, f. 165; DKR 45, p. 166.

of Errington, and in 1525 Cardinal Wolsey confirmed the lease with a fixed rent of £6.[419] It was in these years that Richard Bellassis also leased the Railey coal mines in a consortium, and acted as a bailiff of Stockton and constable of Durham Castle. Morton grange appears to have remained in the hands of the Bellassis family for generations, with a lease for 21 years granted to Sir Richard Bellassis in 1580, and even after the manor was leased to the crown for 70 years in 1585, it was Richard Bellassis who retained the manor.[420] In the 1640s the manor was still in the hands of the Bellassis with a rent of £6, but which was valued at £90 per annum by the parliamentary surveyors.[421] Bishop Cosin was particularly troubled by these preferential leases, especially when William Bellassis tried to persuade him to convert the lease of Morton to three-lives, complaining that:

> 'He maketh great instance (having deserved well for his service done to the King and his country in the late rebellious times) that…his lease for years may be changed into a lease for 3 lives…because it was let for 70 years before. But I am not willing to do it. If his importunity chance hereafter to prevail with me or my successors, let the rent at least be advanced to £10 from £6.'[422]

Similarly, Sir William Bellassis was granted the profitable lease of Ricknall Grange for 73 years in 1548 with an annual rent of £30, which was renewed by Thomas Bellassis in 1611 for a further 21 years at the same ancient rent.[423]

Through these advantageous leases of the assets of the bishopric, the Bellassis family were able to purchase further land in the sixteenth century. It has already been seen how John Lord Lumley was approaching financial disaster, and sold the manor of Ludworth to Sir Richard Bellassis of Morton, knt.[424] This manor was then inherited by Brian Bellassis,esq., who succeeded his uncle, and then by William Bellassis, esq., son and heir of Brian, who had

[419] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 202-4.
[420] CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640.
[421] *Parliamentary Surveys*, p. 157.
[422] Clack, 'Bishop Cosin's Survey', pp. 228-36.
[423] CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640.
[424] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 123-4.

livery in 1614, and became High Sheriff of the County of Durham from 1628 until his death in 1641, and received King Charles on his Scottish progress in 1633 at the head of the gentry.[425] Similarly, Richard Bellassis gained the manor of Great Haswell from the Widdrington family, which he settled in trustees on himself for life, and the remainder, failing his own issue, to his nephews, Brian, Charles and James Bellassis. The manor of Owton also came into the possession of the family. In 1574, the Queen granted the manor of Owton, parcel of the lands of Robert Lambert who was attainted for high treason, to Edmund Gresham and Percival Gunston. In 1584, Gresham conveyed the manor to Richard Brookman, and in 1588 Brookman granted in fee to Richard Bellassis, who settled the manor, as with Haswell, on his nephews.[426]

The incredibly revealing will of Sir Richard Bellassis shows that he had hardly over-extended his wealth in these acquisitions. Indeed, his purchases pale in comparison to the stores of ready cash he possessed at Morton. He made bequests of around £6 to each of the following parishes for the relief of the poor: Jarrow, Houghton, Easington, Pittington, Kirkletham (co. York), Cockwold (co. York), and Blacterne (co. Westmoreland), St Andrew in Auckland, and to the prisoners of Durham gaol, as well as £5 to the School of Kepier.[427] He also made various bequests of goods to his family, the most noticeable cash bequests being: £64 to his sister Jane Hedworth; £30 each to his nieces, Katherine Bainbridge, Elizabeth Fenwick, Margery Constable, and Anne Conyers; £200 to his nieces Isabell and Margaret Hedworth for their marriage portions; £100 to his servant Margaret Lambert; £100 to each of his nephews, Richard Pullen and Richard Hedworth; £10 to each of his servants, Michael Myers, William Thursby, William Rudd, Robert Rutter; £100 to the mending of highways in county Durham; and lastly, £100 to each of his nephews, Brian, Charles and

[425] Ibid., pp. 202-4.
[426] Ibid., pp. 123-4.
[427] DPRI/1/1599/B6/1-2.

James Bellassis. Unlike many testators, he was not anticipating these large bequests coming from the sale of his personal goods or from mortgaging his property but instead expected them to be made from the ready coin he possessed at Morton which is shown in a schedule of gold and silver attached to his will in 1597.[428] At his house in Morton he possessed: £500 which had been walled away in his staircase; a further £300 walled away there; £200 put under the highest step of the staircase; £200 put into a wooden box and walled away in the great chamber; £100 within the bottom of the table chair in his bedchamber; £64 hidden within a shoe in his study; £400 in a presser in the study; whilst at Jarrow he possessed: £100 lent to William Blithman to cover his rents; and a further £100 in his chest at Jarrow. This ready cash accrued partly because Sir Richard never married, nor had children, but even if this is taken into consideration, it was an extraordinary list of ready money to have sequestered away at his home, especially if his previous land purchases are taken into consideration. Through the sound management of his lands and the advantageous leases acquired from the bishops of Durham, Sir Richard Bellassis was thus able to purchase a further three manors, and accumulated literally thousands of pounds worth of ready gold and silver.

There were a whole host of gentry families in the sixteenth century whose experiences were similar to that of the Bellassis and none more so than the Blakistons who, in Surtees' words, 'reached the zenith of its wealth and honours under John Blakiston the Paterfamilias, of 1575, who seems to have been exactly the ancient Esquire of the old ballad'.[429] By 1349, Hugh Blakiston, the lineal ancestor of the Blakistons, had acquired their family home, which in the inquest on the death of Thomas Blakiston, esq., in 1483, was described as containing a hall, pantry and buttery, six chambers, a kitchen, a stable, and other buildings, an orchard, forty-four oxgangs, each of fifteen acres, sixty acres of meadow and 100 acres of pasture,

[428] DPRI/1/1599/B6/3-4.
[429] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, pp. 159-64.

worth annually £20.[430] Sir William Blakiston, knt., died in 1418, also seized of the whole manor and vill of Coxhoe, described as: 'the manor house and the mill, both ruinous, and of no value; ten messuages, worth annually 20s; ten cottages, 10s; 300 acres of arable land 66s 8d; thirty acres of meadow, 20s; 1,000 acres of moor, 23s 4d.'[431] Thus the Blakistons held the manors of Blakiston and Coxhoe throughout this period, which in 1418 were valued at £40 p.a., as well as further land throughout the Palatinate. The inventory of William Blakiston, esq., of Whickham (Gibside) came to a total of £1,116 5s 11d in 1609, with debts of £58 19s 2d, and reveals the considerable wealth of the family. At Gibside, for example, he had ten draught oxen worth £35, twelve *stottes* worth £24, twenty-one cows worth £40, two *whies* worth £3, twelve calves worth £6 10s, 120 ewes worth £27, a grey stoned horse worth £8, a grey gelding worth £12, another grey gelding worth £6, two mares and a nag worth £7, with sixty thraves of oats at £5, forty thraves of rye at £6, and some oat worth £3, and corn at Gibside and Marley Hill worth £7. At Marley Hill he possessed twelve draught oxen worth £42, four cows and calves worth £8, ten *whies* worth £15, with thirty thraves of rye worth £3 15s, and twenty-four thraves of oats worth 36s. Lastly, at Fenhouse, he possessed twenty winter *stottes* and *whies*, with three bull *stirkes* worth £20, a cow and calf worth £2, 220 *wethers* worth £49 10s, 180 ewes worth £36, seventy-seven *gimmers* worth £13 6s 8d, forty old tuppes worth £6, twenty-eight young tuppes worth £3 13s 4d, 120 hogges worth £18, and eighteen *hogge* sheep valued at £3 12s. In total he possessed only corn and hay worth £26 10s, but an impressively large amount of livestock valued at some £393 10s, which included considerable sheep flocks, although the fact that the probate inventory was taken in February probably disguises the full extent of his arable farming if it did not take into consideration seed corn. He also appears to have had a high standard of living with household goods totalling £75, his and his wife's clothes worth £40 each, £469 in ready money, plate and

[430] DURH 3/4, f. 81; DKR 44, p. 324.
[431] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, pp. 159-64.

jewellery worth £76, including two chains worth £36, whilst his total funeral expenses came to £50. In short, he had a large agricultural interest on his death, the profits of which enabled him to accumulate a not inconsiderable reserve of ready cash and valuables, whilst having a relatively high standard of living.[432]

The Milots of White Hill were another gentry family who not only survived, but prospered throughout this period. They had very humble beginnings in the late-fourteenth century, being one of those families who used the opportunities of the post-Black Death period to accumulate a manorial holding. John Milot was originally a free tenant at Pelaw, a village a mile to the north-east of White Hill, who was active in the local land market and acquired the estate of White Hill from its previous owners in the 1380s. It was families like the Milots who Christian Liddy concluded 'remained, in financial terms, gentry landholders of very modest rank.'[433] Indeed, White Hill was little more than a freehold farm, which on the death of William Milot in 1437, comprised of a hall, a chamber, a kitchen, a granary, a stable, and a kilnhouse, with sixty-seven acres of arable land, and three closes containing forty-four acres of arable and six of meadow.[434] This family is most representative of those who were established in the west of the bishopric, whose landed estates were small, but who had other sources of income upon which to rely: one of the most important being coal. Using the natural resources of their lands, these smaller members of the gentry were able to fund further purchases of land. By the end of the fifteenth century the manor of Mayland and the vill of Newton had been acquired by the Milots, as had a moiety of the manor of Bedick Waterville. During the sixteenth century the Bowes family purchased this moiety of the manor from Thomas Millot, esq., and so united the manor in the Bowes family (the other moiety having

[432] A stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a wether hogge was a yearling-male sheep; a whie was a heifer up to three years old; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a gimmer hogge was a ewe between first and second shearing.
[433] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, p. 74.
[434] DURH 3/2, f. 286; DKR 45, p. 241.

descended to the Bowes through inheritance). An interesting document, written by George Bowes in 1595, describes the manor as containing 464 acres of meadow and pasture, of which no part had been arable for the past sixteen years, being rented for two years together at £114 per annum. He then described the ample salmon fishing there, a seam of coal which he estimates will yield £200 p.a. clear benefit when fully exploited and attests that he purchased the land for £1640 and will take no less than £2200 for the sale of the property.[435]

By the start of the seventeenth century, the Milots were relatively prosperous, and could certainly not be dismissed as amongst the poorest of the squirearchy, with the inventory of Robert Milot, esq., of Chester-le-Street worth £379 16s 2d in 1622.[436] The agricultural pursuits of Robert were not overly dissimilar to those of the yeomanry, with, at White Hill: eight oxen worth £24, nine cows worth £18, six mares and nags worth £10, fifty *wethers* and four ewes worth £10 10s, three swine worth 13s 4d, five ganders and geese worth 5s, fourteen cocks and hens worth 5s, a turkey worth 12d, and four ducks worth 2s, as well as plough and waine gear worth £6, £17 worth of hard corn sown in the ground, 50s of oats about the house, and £5 worth of hay. At Mayland he possessed, six oxen worth £12, four *stottes* worth £6, three *whies* worth £4, thirty-eight old sheep worth £8 4s 8d, forty *hogge* sheep for £5 6s 8d, five horses worth £8 6s 8d, and 20s worth of hay.[437] It was his household goods which confirmed his gentry status and high living standards, valued at a total of £90, and which included Damaske diaper and linen worth £18, pewter worth £5, and a clock described as an heirloom, with £10 worth of clothes, and plate and jewellery worth £16. In total he possessed £31 worth of corn and hay, and £107 in livestock, but the family had clearly diversified into the coal industry, for he also owned a keel worth £20, and 'coals wrought at the pit and

[435] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 198-201.
[436] DPRI/1/1622/M6/1-3.
[437] A wether hogge was a yearling-male sheep; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a whie was a heifer up to three years old.

staithes' worth £96 13s 4d.[438] Thus over the course of this period the Milots went from being free tenants in the middle of the fourteenth century, to vital members of the squirearchy by the sixteenth century with the financial base to support such claims, primarily through the exploitation of the subterranean wealth of their lands.

Conclusion

Discussing the fortunes of the gentry is like trying to catch a rainbow: ultimately impossible, but equally irresistible. It is not only because the term 'gentry' is a social construct that so much debate has ensued, but also because they form the middle section of rural society, sharing both characteristics of the aristocracy and yeomanry at either extremity. As Holt sardonically wrote, the 'gentry are always rising; it is their habit'; a habit they share with the middle-class.[439] Indeed, Saul went so far as to argue that 'were we to seek 'the rise of the gentry', we would do well to look to the fourteenth century as much as to the sixteenth'.[440] In many ways he is correct, for it was in the fourteenth century, especially after the increasing stratification of society following the Black Death, that the newer social ranks of esquire and gentleman arose. But if so, it was a relatively short-lived rise, at least for the poorer members of the gentry whose numbers were savagely halved by the middle of the fifteenth century. It was this section of society who were so vulnerable to the joint pincers of low prices and high wages as they tried to maintain a degree of social and military station that their incomes simply could not meet. These parish gentry had all of the social ambitions of their larger neighbours but without the economic base to justify it, thus experiencing a much higher level of expenditure than their yeomen counterparts. Indeed, some of these parish

[438] Ibid.
[439] J. C. Holt, *The Northerners: A Study in the Reign of King John* (Oxford, 1961), p. 60.
[440] Saul, *Knights and Esquires,* p. 262.

gentry may have emulated larger landlords by renting out their lands, which would have proven disastrous in the late-fourteenth century because they would have faced mounting arrears and declining incomes without the assets to ride out any cash-flow problems. Although this is impossible to prove given the lack of evidence, many of these families may well have been facing the same problems as much larger rentier landlords but with very little room to manoeuvre. Family after family, some of whom had held their ancestral manor since the Norman Conquest, were forced to sell their lands to their larger neighbours, the knightly group of the Palatinate of Durham.

By comparison, if the sixteenth century was a period of crisis for many rentier landowners, it was a century of opportunity for the gentry, who, because of their very nature, often possessed characteristics of both the yeomanry and aristocracy. These gentry figures in the sixteenth century were able to capitalise on the rising profits of agriculture in a fashion often more reminiscent of the yeomanry than the aristocracy. It was the likes of the Lambtons, Bellassis, and Blakistons who, having survived the crucible of the fifteenth-century recession were able to take advantage of the problems of their rentier neighbours: Richard Bellassis, notably, exploited both the long leases of the bishops' lands and the financial difficulties of John Lord Lumley and thus accumulated a considerable fortune. This is not to say that all the gentry rose, for many continued as befitting their station, but there was a new opportunity for this group in society which had not been there a generation before. It was an opportunity arising from increasing prices, especially in the north-east of England where the take-off of the coal industry not only stimulated high demand for agricultural goods but also offered investment opportunities for enterprising families in the late-sixteenth century.

How far was the gradual reduction in the number of single-manor families in Durham across the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries representative of national trends and,

importantly, how far was this disappearance caused by financial difficulties following the price crash of the 1370s? These are harder questions to answer than they perhaps should be, primarily because it was 'these people's farming practices about which we know least', but this difficulty has been further exacerbated by the time-frame on which most gentry studies have focused.[441] Liddy's study of the gentry and lesser landowners of Durham is one of the few studies which specifically aims to explore the late-fourteenth century in conjunction with the fifteenth century, whereas Christine Carpenter's study of the Warwickshire gentry focused upon 1401-1499; Susan Wright's study of the Derbyshire gentry was of the fifteenth century but focused primarily on c.1430-1509; Simon Payling's work on the gentry of Nottinghamshire used the 1412 tax returns as its start point; and Eric Acheson's study of the Leicestershire gentry began around 1422.[442] It is also difficult to make direct comparisons because other studies have used social status as their springboard into the wealth of these lesser landowners, whereas the current thesis has used IPMs to explore their landholding first and foremost, and thus the current thesis captures families who were on the cusp of gentility and whose claims to such status were often fleeting.

Susan Wright's description of Derbyshire landed society in the early-fifteenth century, for example, is not unlike that of Durham with:

> 'two peers constituting our upper dividing line. Below this, only eight Derbyshire families are known to have provided one or more knights throughout the period and a further twenty-four families were distrained…Below the knightly group a second tier can be identified of families with at least £20 p.a. from land. In theory JPs also had a minimum income of £20 p.a. making the total membership of this second strata twenty and with the knightly families a grand total of fifty-two.'[443]

Although the absolute numbers in each category are different, the overall social structure is broadly comparable, with a 'much more complex' group of 'parochial gentry' existing below these knightly families, who were 'accorded the distinction of gentility however ephemeral

[441] Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 194.
[442] Ibid.; Susan Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century* (Derby, 1983); Payling, *Gentry of Nottinghamshire*; Acheson, *A Gentry Community*.
[443] Wright, *Derbyshire Gentry*, p. 6.

and open to ambiguity the status was in the fifteenth century'. She concluded that a comprehensive list of landowners with over £5 per annum worth of landed income totals over 200 families, 'forming a broadly-based pyramid' not unlike at Durham, but unfortunately this is as far as any comparisons can be taken because she decided to exclude 'this rather ill-defined group of gentlemen-yeomen in the £5-£20 income range' from any further analysis.[444] Even so, she still touched on the financial difficulties of these smaller landowners in Derbyshire during the fifteenth century when discussing the potential accumulations of the larger gentry, as 'the need to settle debts may occasionally have forced the gentry into realising their landed assets' and so 'sometimes it was possible to acquire single manors in their entirety from small local landowners'.[445]

Christine Carpenter's study of Warwickshire provides much better comparative data which has been compiled in the table below. Broadly speaking her findings show a similar erosion of the property of the lesser gentry found at Durham, with the most notable being an increase in the number of Warwickshire gentlemen holding no manors at all from seventeen in 1410 to forty-six by 1500. Of course, part of the reason for this increase was the growing acceptance of lawyers as gentlemen who often possessed little landholding of their own. However, there was clearly a much larger redistribution of land at work here, with seventeen gentlemen families holding two to four manors in 1410, but only five holding the same by 1500: the redistribution in this instance greatly favouring the Earls of Warwick, akin to their counterparts the Earls of Westmoreland in Durham.[446]

[444] Ibid., p. 6.
[445] Ibid., p. 27.
[446] Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p. 58.

Table 21: Landed Possessions of the Warwickshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century

Landed Wealth		1410			1436			1500		
		Knights	Esquires	Gentlemen	Knights	Esquires	Gentlemen	Knights	Esquires	Gentlemen
No Warwickshire manors	**Number**	0	1	17	1	7	28	0	12	46
	Percentage	0.0%	2.4%	27.4%	5.6%	11.9%	51.0%	0.0%	19.0%	55.4%
1 Warwickshire manor	**Number**	0	17	28	1	23	18	4	19	31
	Percentage	0.0%	40.5%	45.2%	5.6%	39.0%	32.7%	40.0%	30.2%	37.3%
2-4 Warwickshire manors	**Number**	5	19	17	12	26	9	4	26	5
	Percentage	50.0%	45.2%	27.4%	66.7%	44.1%	16.4%	40.0%	41.3%	6.0%
5+ Warwickshire manors	**Number**	5	5	0	4	3	0	2	6	1
	Percentage	50.0%	12.0%	0.0%	22.2%	5.1%	0.0%	20.0%	9.5%	1.2%

Source: Christine Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: A Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 58 and pp. 83-4.

The main difference between Warwickshire and Durham is in the stability of the single-manor families, who show relatively little change across the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, part of the reason for this may be that Carpenter uses 1410 as her start date for these comparisons and so it is unclear how far there had already been a reduction in their number during the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. She was, however, willing to make some provisional judgements on the financial difficulties faced by landowners during the fifteenth century, concluding that 'it is probably safe to assume that the greater lords were in a better position to cope with these difficulties than the gentry' and that 'it is probable that it was the gentry who suffered most, squeezed between the demands of the crown and the resistance of the peasantry'.[447] The difficulty of making any definitive conclusions surrounding the financial position of these parish gentry is shown by the tentative nature of Carpenter's statements, with 'probable' featuring very prominently in any discussion of their wealth in this period.

> 'What we can do is decide how well, on the evidence before us, lesser landowners were likely to have surmounted arguably one of the worst periods for them in the agrarian history of England. The indisputable conclusion is that although most of them must have been under some strain, if they responded effectively, as most apparently did, they had nothing to fear. It is probable that the smaller landowners, nearer the base of the gentle hierarchy, struggling to provide for their families while sustaining a level of consumption superior to that of the richer peasants, lived closer to the margin of their income. Unfortunately, it is these people's farming practices about which we know least.'[448]

This thesis has shed some light on the lives of these lesser landowners, like Walter Hawk who settled his manor of Little Eden on trustees to pay his debts as he tried to maintain his military obligations by journeying to France in the service of the crown, or Robert Epplinden who alienated his manor in 1391 which had descended in the family for three centuries. It was these kinds of smaller landowners, whose claims to gentility were often most tenuous, who struggled the most in the half-century following the decline in prices from the 1370s.

[447] Ibid., p. 155.
[448] Ibid., p. 194.

The other main trend of these fifteenth-century transactions was that the knightly group of county society tended to be one of the main recipients of these manors, but how far were they the beneficiaries of the struggles of their smaller neighbours nationally? In his study of the greater gentry of Nottinghamshire, Simon Payling concluded that there was a 'significant tendency' for failure in the male line and profits available from office-holding to 'bring about a concentration of wealth in the hands of fewer families' and as 'this wealth became increasingly concentrated, county administration and representation became more exclusively the preserve of the greater shire gentry, and it was they, distinguished from the bulk of their gentry neighbours by their wealth, who were the natural recipients of royal and baronial patronage'.[449] Thus for Payling there was a definite accumulation of wealth by the knightly families of Nottinghamshire which was very reminiscent of that found here for Durham, but there were significant differences in the social, political and economic consequences of this stratification of rural society between these two counties during the fifteenth century. This was primarily because 'Lancastrian Nottinghamshire was a county with a low index of both church and baronial wealth', which 'may have served to give the greater gentry as a class a prominence in the county that they did not enjoy in the country at large'. The 'small group of greater gentry families made some important gains' and it was this small group of leading county families who 'had a much more continuous corporate existence' which made them 'as a body, less susceptible to such misfortunes' which broke apart the estate built up by Ralph Lord Cromwell on his death in 1456. It was on the death of this baron and the dismemberment of his lands that the balance of landholding was 'tipped further in favour of the greater gentry'.[450] The knightly families of Durham may well have benefited from the financial struggles of their smaller neighbours but it was not to the same degree as managed by those in Nottinghamshire for the Nevilles and Lumleys still dominated

[449] Payling, *Gentry of Nottinghamshire*, p. vii.
[450] Ibid., p. 10.

local society, whilst the large estates of the bishops of Durham and Durham Priory curtailed the opportunities for further expansion.

It was not until the sixteenth century that such opportunities would come for the Durham gentry, with the political downfall of the Nevilles, and the financial struggles of the Lumleys and bishops of Durham. The options available to landowners in the face of rising prices during the sixteenth century were summarised by Tawney as: revising the terms on which property was held, getting rid of the 'unprofitable copyholders when lives ran out, buy out small freeholders, and throw the land so secured into larger farms to be let on lease'; secondly, he could 'expand his own business activities, run his home-farm, not to supply his household, but as a commercial concern'; thirdly, 'if he had the means, he could invest in bringing new land into cultivation, clearing woodlands, breaking up waste, draining marshes'; and finally, he could 'supplement his agricultural income by other types of enterprise, going into the timber trade, exploiting coal, iron and lead'.[451] The Durham gentry were certainly not behind national trends in exploiting each of these options: the Lambtons, Blakistons and Milots, for example, not only engaged in commercial agriculture, but also with the coal industry and went on to purchase further lands. Another source of profit for the gentry was the acquisition of former monastic land, with Cliffe finding that 'most of the landed property of the Yorkshire monasteries was in the possession of the county gentry' and emphasised the fact that over 'one-quarter of the gentle families of 1642 owned property which had been seized from the monasteries'.[452] Although there were perhaps less opportunities for acquiring former monastic lands in Durham for the gentry than elsewhere, with the Percies acquiring the Tynemouth estate wholesale and numerous Newcastle merchants receiving grants from the Crown within Durham rather than the gentry, there were still many opportunities for profiting from ecclesiastical land in the form of long leases. It was in this way that families like the

[451] Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 14.
[452] Cliffe, *Yorkshire Gentry*, p. 15.

Bellassis were able to profit so handsomely across the sixteenth century. Lawrence Stone argued that the great rebuilding between 1575 and 1625 saw more 'country-house building than any other fifty-year period in our history, which is itself significant proof of a "rise of the gentry"'.[453] Again, the Durham gentry were often at the forefront of this improvement in living standards and comfort with the likes of Lady Bellassis recorded in the Hearth Tax of 1666 as occupying a twelve-room house in the borough of Elvet, and Robert Lambton, gent., living in considerable comfort in a fifteen-room house at Penshaw.[454]

If, in 1600, 'it could be said that the richer gentry had the incomes of an earl and, in 1628, that the House of Commons could buy the House of Lords three times over', then Durham, with the forfeiture and fragmentation of two aristocratic estates, the financial problems of the church, and the opportunities for advancement amongst the gentry, was at the forefront of this redistribution of economic power.[455] The sixteenth century was a period of rapid inflation, with landowners facing the problem of how to increase rents when their estates had been focused upon retaining tenants, not exploiting them, for the past century. In Tawney's words: 'such difficulties confronted all conservative landowners, both peers and commoners, in proportion to the magnitude of their commitments and the rigidity of their incomes. The most that can be said is that the former usually carried more sail than the latter, and found it, when the wind changed, more difficult to tack'.[456] In short, it was the long-term development of their estates which often provided landowners in the sixteenth century with such problems: the gentry, who according to Acheson rarely leased out their demesne in its entirety in the fifteenth century because their households still needed supplies, found it easier to directly farm their own lands and thus benefit from the rapidly increasing agricultural

[453] W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640', *P&P*, 4 (1953), pp. 44-59; Stone, 'Social Mobility', p. 26.
[454] Elizabeth Parkinson (ed.), *County Durham Hearth Tax Assessment Lady Day 1666*, introduced by A. G. Green (London, 2006), p. 58.
[455] Tawney, 'Rise of the Gentry', p. 37.
[456] Ibid., p. 10.

prices of the sixteenth century; the aristocracy, who had leased out their demesnes and allowed customary tenures to develop on their estates, much like the bishops of Durham, struggled to respond and found their revenues stagnating.[457]

[457] Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, p. 57.

Chapter 6

The Influx of 'New' Wealth

Mercantile Inroads into Landed Society

John Hatcher's work on the British coal industry highlighted the immense take-off of the coal industry in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, as 'we are driven unerringly to the 1570s and 1580s as the turning-point. Between the later 1560s and the later 1590s shipments of coal rose fourfold', which was for the 'seasale trade alone. In the ensuing twenty-five years shipments virtually doubled again to reach an average of over 400,000 tons a year in the early 1620.'[458] It was at this time that 'power over the coal industry was passing into the hands of a 'fewe rich men of Newcastle', who had obtained a 'plain monopoly or staple of coal', and, through the Grand Lease, had 'dealt a final blow to the aspirations of the Bishops of Durham to share in the coal trade'.[459] The Newcastle Hostmen, or 'Lords of Coal' as they were christened by the local inhabitants, were a small group of Newcastle merchants, led initially by Henry Anderson and William Selby, who formed an oligarchy at the pinnacle of Newcastle society, in terms of both office-holding and wealth.[460]

Nef argued that one of the most important causes for the expansion of the coal industry was the transference of ownership, or at least long-term management, of coal mines from the church to Newcastle merchants. There were natural advantages for the development of the coal industry in the North-East, not least the close proximity of many outcropping seams to rivers and ultimately the sea which enabled the widespread transportation of coal to

[458] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 78.
[459] J. U. Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry, vol. 2* (London, 1932), p. 120.
[460] Ibid., p. 121.

London. However, Nef argued that the transference of ownership of these coal mines was a virtual pre-requisite to the take-off of the coal industry because of the extremely restrictive leases the bishops of Durham imposed on lessees during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[461] For example, in 1478 Sir William Eure took on the lease of Railey and the surrounding group of mines, with his output being limited to 'thirty-one tons per day at Railey, twenty-seven tons at Tofts, and five tons at Hertkeld'.[462] The artificial nature of these policies can be seen in the schedule of production for these mines when they were kept in hand by the bishops, with only three different levels of production recorded depending upon whether they worked for six, five or four days: 140 chalders, 2 quarters, 4 bushels at a cost of 25s; 117 chalders and 6 bushels at a cost of 20s 10d; and 93 chalders, 3 quarters at a cost of 16s 8d respectively.[463] Such policies were not overly restrictive during the fifteenth century when large-scale export of coal was economically unviable, and may even have helped keep prices buoyant in the region, but under the pressures of the sixteenth century they would have been extremely restrictive. As population increased, pressure upon all resources increased and the demand for fuel quickly outstripped the supply of timber in London: the Newcastle Hostmen provided the solution, and quickly reaped the benefits from their increasing control over coal extraction and export. By comparison, Hatcher has more recently argued that, although landlords may have believed that coal-seams could be exhausted, there is 'little reason to believe that the first priority of landlords was the preservation of their coal reserves rather than the maximisation of their incomes'.[464] The financial return on leases of coal mines remained static and unrelated to production, and so if a lessee ripped out thousands of pounds worth of coal the bishop would see nothing more than the customary rent. Therefore the ceilings on production were introduced to protect the landlord's interest. It is logical that if

[461] Nef, *British Coal Industry, vol. 1*, pp. 133-7.
[462] Ibid., p. 137.
[463] CCB B/79/4 .
[464] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 273.

demand increased then the bishops would increase the rent of the coal mine and thus in turn the maximum amount of coal allowed to be extracted would increase. The changes in ownership of coal mines may not have been as important as Nef argued, but rather the increase in demand for fuel in the sixteenth century produced the take-off of the coal industry.

How far did the increasing mercantile wealth derived from this precocious development of the coal industry affect the balance of lay landownership outlined above? Nef described these merchants as frequently acquiring 'great estates and set[ing] up as country gentlemen, allying themselves by marriage with the local gentry, and eventually retiring from direct participation in the trade of Newcastle'. He then reeled off a whole host of such examples, including:

> 'Thomas Liddell's purchase of Ravensworth and Ralph Cole's purchase of Brancepeth [which] are only two examples of a general movement among the coal merchants to buy up local manors. The Selbys set up at Winlaton, the Tempests at Stella. The Andersons formed connections by marriage with the Collingwoods and the Gascoignes; the Selbys formed connections with the Bellassis, the Curwen, the Delaval, and the Darcy families'.[465]

This view represents a much broader historiographical tradition which has seen these purchases as being a general sign of merchants' desires to integrate into landed society, seeking validation and status through their purchases. Thus far much of the thesis has focused upon those already established in rural society whereas the present chapter explores the influx of other groups into the Durham countryside and how far they upset the traditional balance of landed power in this period.

The position of merchants in English society revolves around the social construct of the 'gentry'and whether land was the sole basis for claims of gentility and status. This is particularly pertinent for any study of landed society in the north-east because the purchases

[465] Nef, *British Coal Industry, vol. 2*, p. 121.

of Roger Thornton in the fifteenth century seen earlier in chapter four were but a precursor for a series of much broader purchases made by numerous merchants throughout the sixteenth century. There is a long tradition in the historiography of late-medieval and early-modern England which has assumed that the aspiration of merchants was to gain enough money to leave their trade and acquire gentility through landed possessions, to retire, and in Nef's words 'set up as country gentlemen'.[466] This belief is riddled with assumptions about English society in this period which often sits ill at ease with much of the surviving evidence. In this historical interpretation it is not only assumed that gentry status could only be acquired through landed possessions, but also that it was the ambition of merchants to assimilate into rural society. For example, in his general survey of medieval England Pollard wrote concerning social mobility that the 'ultimate goal was the acquisition of land, title and lordship and entry into the ranks of the gentry'.[467] Such a view has dominated the thinking of many historians of late-medieval England and has been compounded by the problem of placing merchants into the traditional categories of 'those who worked, those who prayed, and those who fought'.[468] The rise of the law profession has been relatively well documented and it is now commonplace to allow for their place in the gentry, showing that the term 'gentry' was not synonymous with landowning in late-medieval England, with particular emphasis upon service, office-holding and wealth.[469]

Merchants, by comparison, have often been portrayed by historians as ostentatiously aping characteristics of gentry behaviour with their elite mentality and evident wealth seen as pretensions above their social status, rather than as reflections of their high status.[470] Maurice Keen has partially challenged this assumption by showing that mercantile activity in itself

[466] Ibid., p. 121.
[467] A. J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England, 1399-1509* (Harlow, 2000), p. 185.
[468] S. H. Rigby, 'Introduction: Social Structure and Economic Change in Late Medieval England', in R. Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 5.
[469] Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, p. 131.
[470] W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III* (Stroud, 2000), p. 166.

was not contrary to gentility with no comparative laws of *derogeance* as on the Continent, but maintained that mercantile activities were not sufficient to guarantee gentry status.[471] Caroline Barron has emphasised the distinctly mercantile and civic view which London merchants had of themselves, pointing to the fact that merchants were not remotely covetous of the lifestyles of the landed elite, but the most important contribution to this debate was Rosemary Horrox's article on the urban gentry in which she presented the idea of an urban gentry who bore many of the same attributes that historians have noted for the landed gentry, but who lived, worked, and died in towns.[472] As a whole, merchants seem to have had little interest in the chivalric pursuits of the landed gentry; neither reading their literature nor participating in their tournaments and although merchants adopted some traditional forms of authority, it was often to suit their own, specifically civic, ideals. For example, they used armorial bearings in memorial works, but often combined them with their own merchants' marks, not only making a distinctly urban statement, but also revealing pride in their mercantile identity. In their use of pageantry and heraldry merchants created an urban answer to the chivalry of the landed hierarchy, adopting the elements that suited their purposes but choosing to ignore others. Merchant brasses, for example, show a pride in their trade that seems quite at odds with the image of gentrification that has become the received idea amongst historians studying this period. The brass of the London vintner Simon Seman at St Mary's Church, Lincolnshire, is a very good example of this pride that merchants took in their occupations, as he is depicted standing on wine casks surrounded by an inscription and his merchant's mark.[473]

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[471] Keen, *Origins of the English Gentleman*, p. 126.
[472] C. Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London', in Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 225; R. Horrox, 'The Urban Gentry in the Fifteenth Century', in J. Thompson (ed.), *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century* (Gloucester, 1988), p. 22.
[473] Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture', p. 237.

Plate 2: Funeral Brass of London Vintner Simon Seman at Mary's Church, Barton-on-Humber, Lincolnshire, c. 1433

Source: C. Barron,`Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London`, in Peter Cross and Maurice Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and SocialDisplay in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 238

The pride of these merchants is most clearly reflected in William Greville's memorial brass at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire. Perhaps the most important English merchant in the Cotswold wool trade of the later fourteenth century, the inscription on his brass proudly proclaimed him to be 'late citizen of London and the flower of the wool merchants of all of England.'[474] The style is so reminiscent of the language used to proclaim a knight the flower of English chivalry that it is likely this was an intentional comparison between mercantile activities and those of knights. As will be seen below, it was this social status and identity which the likes of the Thorntons, Andersons and Selbys of Newcastle demonstrably possessed, with Jenny Kermode concluding that 'to be a successful merchant and civic

[474] C. D. Liddy, *War, Politics, and Finance in Late Medieval English Towns: Bristol, York, and the Crown, 1350-1400* (London, 2005), pp. 153-4.

dignitary was to be at the apex of society'.[475] This can further be seen in contemporary literature which ranked people by their social status, such as in John Russell's *Boke of Nurture*, where 'worshipful merchants' were to be seated before gentlemen, whilst the mayor of London was seen as being the equivalent rank of a viscount.[476] In *The Order of Going and Sitting*, the author used the same ranking as Russell, again placing merchants above gentlemen, whilst the *Boke of Keruynge* emphasised the prestige of office-holding for merchants by placing ex-mayors as equivalent to knights.[477] The author of this work also stated that worshipful merchants were not only ranked above gentlemen in precedence but that they could also sit at an esquire's table.[478]

Merchants, in their capacity as municipal office-holders, acted as justices of the peace with full powers of enquiry, trial and punishment. These urban merchant elites provided the king with the same qualities as men of local standing that the traditional landed gentry did and it is clear from the perspective of royal government that merchants were in many ways comparable to the landed gentry. This is made explicit in the direct comparisons drawn between the two groups in the legislation of the period where merchants were seen as being the equivalent to the titular nobility in their role as office-holders, whilst in their occupation as merchants they were considered the equals to the landed gentry. The sumptuary legislation of 1363 is a clear example of this, having been brought in to combat the situation whereby 'people of various conditions wear various apparel not appropriate to their estate'.[479] The legislation goes on to say that merchants, citizens and burgesses:

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[475] Jenny Kermode, *Medieval Merchants: York, Beverley and Hull in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 17.
[476] J. Russell, 'The Boke of Nurture', in F. J. Furnival, ed., *Manners and Meals in Olden Time* (London, 1868), pp. 186-7.
[477] Wynkyn de Worde, 'The Boke of Kerunge', in F. J. Furnival, ed., *Manners and Meals in Olden Time* (London, 1868), pp. 284-5.
[478] Ibid., p. 285.
[479] *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, 1274-1504, vol. 5*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 165.

> 'who clearly have goods and chattels to the value of £500, and their wives and children, may take and wear in the same manner as the esquire and gentlemen who have land and rent to the value of £100 a year. And that the merchants, citizens and burgesses who clearly have goods and chattels above the value of £1,000, and their wives and children, may take and wear in the same manner as the esquires and gentlemen who have land and rent to the value of £200 a year.'[480]

From the perspective of royal authority merchants were seen as social and political equals to the landed gentry. Of course, this is not to deny that there were dissenters from this view who saw merchants as social inferiors, but there is at least as much contemporary evidence to the contrary, suggesting that many merchants were not remotely covetous of landed society.

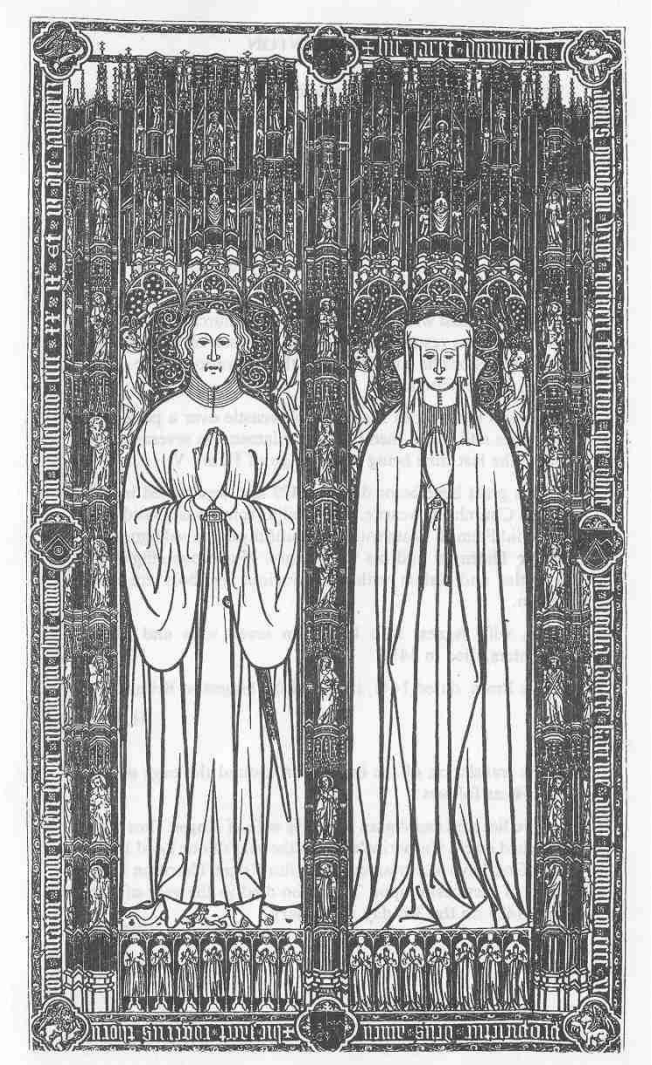
If the above discussion is borne in mind, it is clear that Roger Thornton was a member of this urban gentry, and rather than seeking validation from his purchases, he was in fact investing further in his trade. The sixteenth century antiquarian John Leland referred to Thornton as 'first a marchante and then a landid man', but as Christian Liddy is at pains to emphasise 'there is no evidence at all that Thornton sought to become a landed gentleman.'[481] This might at first seem contrary given that Roger Thornton was the second largest purchaser of manors in the Durham countryside in the fifteenth century, but his will makes it clear that he had other priorities. He was buried next to his wife in the church of St Nicholas, where his brass still remains, whilst he gave bequests for the repair and maintenance of several Newcastle churches: St Nicholas, All Saints, St Johns, St Andrews, and St Thomas, and a donation of 100 marks to the upkeep of Tyne Bridge.[482] Liddy has described Thornton's numerous purchases as a 'commercial investment' because he looked upon land 'not as a source of social status, but as an economic asset, as the foundation of future wealth'.[483] For example, five of his acquisitions were just south of the Tyne, in parishes 'known for their rich coal deposits': Swalwell and Axwell in Whickham, Redheugh in Gateshead, Crookhall in Lanchester, and Friarside in Chester-le-Street. It is clear that these manors did indeed yield

[480] Ibid., p. 167.
[481] Liddy, *Bishopric of Durham*, pp. 56-7.
[482] Ibid., pp. 56-7.
[483] Ibid., pp. 56-7.

coal because the bishop was later paid wayleave to carry coal across his land by the lessees of the Lumley's coal mines at Redheugh in the 1470s.[484] Similarly, Fugarfield and Swalwell were described as possessing coal mines in the IPMs of the Lumleys, the later inheritors of Thornton's purchases. There are, therefore, few signs that Roger Thornton was seeking legitimatisation through his purchases but was rather securing the assets upon which his wealth was predicated, whilst his social identity was always centred on Newcastle and his mercantile background rather than in the Durham countryside. Although he is depicted in his great Flemish brass as wearing a partially concealed sword, the inscription reads 'here lies Roger Thornton, merchant of Newcastle upon Tyne', despite 'the fact that he possessed a coat of arms and that his family intermarried with the greatest families in the county'.[485] He was first and foremost a merchant of Newcastle, and it was as such that he wished to be remembered.

[484] CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139.
[485] P. Coss, 'An age of deference', in Rosemary Horrox and W. Mark Ormrod (eds.), *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 72.

Plate 3: Funeral Brass of Roger Thornton, merchant of Newcastle, 1441



Source: http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/sources/brasses/brass7.shtml

How far did the Newcastle merchants of the sixteenth century follow the pattern laid down by the Thorntons: were they trying to establish landed dynasties or to secure the resources upon which their wealth was largely founded? The Andersons were one of the wealthiest merchant families from Newcastle who made increasing inroads into the Durham countryside across the course of the sixteenth century, and were especially prominent in the leases of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral. The family formed a dynasty of urban office-holding, with Henry Anderson as sheriff of Newcastle in 1520, and mayor of Newcastle in 1531, 1539, 1542, and 1546. His son Bertram Anderson, went on to be sheriff

of Newcastle in 1543, mayor in 1551, 1557 and 1563, and MP for Newcastle in 1554, 1557, and 1563, whilst his grandson Henry Anderson continued in the same vein.[486] It is difficult to overestimate the extraordinary wealth of this family which is partially revealed in the inventory on Henry Anderson's death in 1558, which estimated his moveable goods at £3,133: far beyond the wealth of most of his rural counterparts at such an early date in the sixteenth century.[487] He possessed nearly £1,500 worth of mercantile and industrial goods, such as sixty-eight fothers of lead worth £493, coals wrought at Elswick worth £594, three tons of English iron worth £29, six tons of Amish worth £48, 580 stones of wool worth £100, and 400 sheep skins worth £12. He also possessed £130 in ready money, £176 worth of plate and jewellery, including a nest of bowls weighing eighty-eight ounces worth £22, and had debts owing to him worth £886, of which £346 were desperate debts and £540 were good debts. He also owned various shares in a fleet of ships, including three-quarters of a ship called Michael worth £100, another three-quarters in Anthony worth £100, half of John worth £100, part of Andrew worth £80, three-quarters of Barbara worth £40, and a half of Christopher worth £15.

The family made steady inroads into the Durham countryside but given their immense wealth this was not on a scale that would suggest they were trying to establish themselves as landed gentry. Indeed, Henry's son was just as involved in the Newcastle trade as his father had been, and his grandson would be too. For example, the manor of Haswell had belonged to Finchale Priory since the twelfth century, but the foundation of the new Cathedral only included the grain tithes of Haswell Grange; the manor having been granted by the Crown to Henry Anderson, which descended in the family for several generations.[488] The Andersons similarly gained the manor of Ouston which had belonged to St Edmund's Hospital in

[486] *Wills and Inventories, part 1*, p. 335.
[487] DPRI/1/1558/A1/2-3.
[488] DURH 3/4, f. 84; DKR 44, p. 314.

Gateshead, until Henry VIII seized the manor during the Dissolution and granted it to Sir William Barentine, knt., and Kenelm Throgmorton, and Henry Abelson. These grantees conveyed the manor to Betram Anderson, whose son, Henry Anderson sold half the grange of Ouston to Nicholas Tempest of Stella, esq., in 1584.[489] There were many other manors and portions of land which passed through the hands of these wealthy merchants, who showed no sign of wishing to hold on to them for their status value, nor any attempts to build up a landed estate. For example, the moiety of Consett was purchased from Richard Ruthall in 1572 by Henry Anderson, who then sold it on to Robert Blenkinsop of Newcastle in 1579. Similarly, in 1575, Queen Elizabeth granted the messuage of Swainston and the manor of Newton Hansard, former estates of the Earls of Westmoreland, to Thomas Calverley, esq., and Henry Anderson, although both of these manors passed to the Calverleys, presumably upon purchase of Anderson's interest in them.[490]

Much akin to the interest that the Thorntons took in coal-bearing land, Henry and his son Bertram appear to have had few intentions of settling in the Durham countryside, often treating manors and land as a commodity to be bought and sold rather than inherited towards building a consolidated estate. The family's interest in land was often not for the social status it bestowed, nor even the financial security of land, but for the subterranean wealth which was so vital to their positions as merchants. This becomes widely apparent when their leases of bishopric and Dean and Chapter lands are taken into consideration. Between 1523 and 1533 Henry Anderson, along with Richard Hedworth and several partners, was leasing the bishop's coal mines at Whickham.[491] Similarly, in 1570, Bertram Anderson was granted a 21-year lease of the bishop's coal mines at Crosse Moor in Whickham which stipulated that only

[489] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2,* p. 192.
[490] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3,* p. 54.
[491] CCB B/5/50 - CCB B/6/66.

three pits were to be opened at once, with a rent of £30 p.a.[492] His son, Henry Anderson, was a prodigious lessee of Dean and Chapter lands and mines, and in 1575 held a 21-year lease of coal mines in Jarrow and salt pans in South Shields for a rent of £20, which he renewed in 1595, 1599, 1601, 1606, and 1613; he held a lease of farm property in North Pittington with a rent of £4 14s 6d which was renewed in 1581, 1592, 1606, 1613, and 1618; in 1589 he took out a 21-year lease of further salt pans in South Shield, paying 10s rent for each and renewing the lease in 1606; he had further leases of property on the South side of the Tyne, which were renewed in 1592, 1598, and 1606; and he went on to hold a 21-year lease of the manor and windmill of Pittington for £27 13s 4d rent in 1606, which he renewed in 1613.[493] The focus upon the coal trade and ancillary industries like the salt pans at South Shields is abundantly clear: it was after all Henry Anderson's joint venture with William Selby in the Grand Lease of the bishops' coal mines of Gateshead and Whickham from the 1580s which was fundamental to the wealth and position of both of these families.[494] Henry Anderson was also involved in less successful exploits as he sought profits wherever he felt there were opportunities, such as the leasing of the Dean and Chapter's coal mines and salt pans at Hayning for £20 per annum in the 1570s, but which the Elizabethan survey of 1580 described as 'a lease hereof made about six years since to the men aforesaid, and now do not work coal there and therefore pay no rent, occupying also the salt pans without rent'.[495] Perhaps he deliberately took up the lease to take the mine out of production, but if so it was an expensive proposition, for he is recorded as having paid £200 for the privilege of taking on the lease.

The immense wealth that coal provided these merchants hardly needs to be laboured, but can be illustrated with a passing glance at Bertram Anderson's inventory of 1570, which

[492] DCM Dean and Chapter Register 3, f. 20r.
[493] DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670.
[494] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, pp. 18-20.
[495] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, p. 197.

was valued at £2,766.[496] He possessed over £1,400 in mercantile and industrial goods, including twenty-four score tons of coal lying by the waterside worth £640, a further 126 tons of coal at Crosse Moor pits worth £139, and more coal at the south west pit worth £295. Even though the immense wealth of the family was based in coal and trade, they were not ignorant of the financial rewards of farming in this period, although it is equally clear that they were not abandoning trade in favour of more rural pursuits with a total of corn and hay valued at £117 and livestock worth some £264. His immense wealth, and the high living standards he enjoyed, however, can be more adequately seen in the lists of household goods which totalled over £250, clothes which were worth £43, and plate and jewellery worth over £370, including a nest of bowls of 107 ounces worth £35. Indeed, his plate and jewellery together were worth more than the total inventory of many Durham and Northumberland knights in this period. He also possessed shares in ships worth £266, including two keels, whilst his will includes bequests of 400 marks to each of his children.[497] A particularly revealing bequest to the poor of Hambrough in his will reveals his keen financial acumen: 'eighty coals to be given to the poor people of Hambrough taken from my staithes on the Tyne, and they to pay for the fetching of them from the staithes and for the customs with all other charges'.[498]

The Selbys, the partners of the Andersons in the Grand Lease, were another Newcastle mercantile family who acquired land in the bishopric. The manor of Stotfold was alienated by Charles Earl of Westmoreland to William Selby of Newcastle just prior to his rebellion and the subsequent forfeiture, comprising of 1,500 acres of arable land, 800 of meadow, 1,000 of pasture, 10 of wood, and 2,000 of furze and briar.[499] As David Reid noted, 'it was the likes of George Selby…who could raise the rents of Stotfold from £26 13s 4d to

[496] DPRI/1/1570/A1/2-6.
[497] DPRI/1/1570/A1/1.
[498] Ibid.
[499] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 3*, pp. 88.

£200 at the cost of decaying the township'.[500] Similarly, the manor of Winlaton was sold by Charles Earl of Westmoreland immediately before the forfeiture to Richard Hodgeson, Humphrey Scrivener, William Selby, and Robert Anderson, merchants of Newcastle for £2,000. The purchasers immediately after granted to trustees Ralph and George Lawson for the use of Selby and Hodgeson in equal moieties. A plan of the lordship of Winlaton in 1632, states that Sir William Hodgeson held 1,601 acres of land, whilst Sir William Selby held 2,121 acres, and Robert Anderson, esq., also held a further 519 acres, who presumably retained some interest in the manor after the initial purchase. [501] These were not sales of some trifling moorland farms, but of some of the most fertile and profitable land in the Palatinate. The sheer size of these manors marked them as extremely valuable commodities, but their position was also vital, with Stotfold situated in the fertile south-east of the Palatinate, and Winlaton, with its coal reserves, was just south of the Tyne.

The immense wealth that could be accrued in this period is visible in the probate inventory taken on the death of George Selby, son of the above William, in 1625, which estimated his moveable goods to be worth the sum of £9,765 15s 10d; a figure comparable to that of the titular aristocracy like the Earls of Northumberland.[502] These items are far too numerous to detail in full, but just a brief summary shows the extraordinary wealth of this family. At Whithouse, he possessed nearly £400 worth of household goods, with over £80 worth of goods in the New Great Chamber alone, and included items such as the linen which was appraised at £46 15s. His house in Newcastle was only slightly less opulently furnished with around £340 worth of goods, whilst his apparel came to £100, and he had over £1,200 in ready money. He also possessed a chain of gold worth £120, and plate weighing a total of 1024 oz, estimated to be worth £330. However, his inventory not only shows his immense

[500] Reid, *Durham Crown Lordships*, p. 42.
[501] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, pp. 272-3.
[502] DPRI/1/1625/S4/12-22.

wealth, but also the family's interest in Winlaton which they had purchased from the Nevilles, with coals wrought at the staithes and pits at Winlaton and Elswick valued at £1,508 3s, and seven keels with their riggings worth £280. John Hatcher drew attention to the rare glimpse into the capacity of this Winlation colliery when a dispute between its partners revealed that between Martinmas 1581 and Martinmas 1582 around 25,000 tons were produced during the year.[503] It is little wonder that these Newcastle merchants were willing to part with £2,000 to acquire such a productive coal mine. His largest asset was in fact the debts which were owed to him, which had been divided into those upon bonds and those without formality, the former appraised at £4,267 15s, and the latter at £1,977 12s 2d, leading Nef to call these Newcastle Hostmen a 'nucleus of money-lending'.[504] His expenses were no less extravagant than his goods, with funeral expenses totalling £574 13s 4d, an amount that would have bankrupted many landed esquires in the Durham countryside, whilst he left £2,000 for each of his two daughters for their portions.[505] Once again though, the emphasis upon Newcastle is present in his last will and testament, with bequests to each of the four alms houses of Newcastle, and a further £6 13s 4d to the poor of Winlaton. Although he was now described as 'of Winlaton' in his probate material he clearly envisaged and prepared for his final return to Newcastle: 'I will that my body be buried within the church of St Nicholas at Newcastle Upon Tyne or near where my tomb is already erected there', giving to the church warden one mark per annum out of his rent from a house in Newcastle so that the said tomb 'be well kept and clean in a comely manner'.[506]

The Liddels were yet another merchant family who acquired manors in Durham during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Sir Henry Gascoigne of Sedbury alienated the manors of Ravenshelm and Lamesley, as well as various lands in the Palatinate

[503] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 80.
[504] Nef, *British Coal Industry, vol. 2*, p. 120.
[505] DPRI/1/1625/S4/1-10
[506] Ibid.

to Thomas Liddell, esq., in 1607.[507] The manor of Ravensworth, as would be expected, included a very extended and valuable field of coal, with grants of wayleave occurring in the bishop's accounts, and by 1700 'it was one of the very largest collieries in Britain, with an output of 65,000 tons'.[508] The Liddells, like many other Newcastle merchants, could be seen in transactions involving manors, often acting as intermediaries and quickly reselling them as, for example, in 1619 when Giles Burton of Pespol and Boisfield granted these manors to Thomas Liddell, alderman of Newcastle, who conveyed it to Robert White, gent., who then sold it to Thomas Midford, merchant of Newcastle in 1623. Similarly, Thomas Liddell purchased Darncrook from John and Thomas Heath, esqs., who devised the estate to his youngest son Roger Liddell in 1615; once again, showing no intention to establish a landed dynasty, but using these properties to endow his younger sons. It is in their leases where their true interest often lay, with Thomas Liddell leasing certain coal mines in Whickham in 1601 for 21 years at £10 rent, and a lease for three lives of the bishops' coal mines at Chester-le-Street in 1609 for £20 rent.[509] Thomas Liddell's inventory of 1577 reveals household goods worth £126 10s, including six featherbeds valued at £8, eighteen pairs of linen sheets worth £8, and thirty-six banqueting dishes worth 20s, clearly highlighting the high living standards that these merchants enjoyed from the second half of the sixteenth century, with a further £66 12s worth of plate and jewellery.

These are just a few examples of some of the most prominent merchants who acquired manors in the Durham countryside; some through crown grants of former monastic land or of forfeited estates, whilst others through more direct purchases. Nef and Hatcher have both analysed the take-off of the coal industry in the second half of the sixteenth century, with exports from the Tyne rising from c.35,000 tons in the 1560s to some c.400,000 tons in 1625,

[507] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 2*, pp. pp. 208-11.
[508] CCB B/1/1-CCB B/12/139; Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 92.
[509] DCM Dean and Chapter Register 6, f. 108r; Register 7, f. 138r.

which greatly increased the wealth of those controlling this trade: the Newcastle Hostmen.[510] Through the Grand Lease, and a multitude of other smaller leases of ecclesiastical coal mines, these Newcastle merchants were able to control not only the export but also much of the production of coal in the region. Levine and Wrightson concluded that the Grand Lessees were 'not remotely interested in agricultural estate management' in their ownership of Whickham manor, not challenging the 'security of their tenures', whilst 'rents and fines remained small and stable': it was coal first and foremost which interested these Newcastle merchants.[511] Many of these merchants were able to control virtually every stage in the production and export of coal, with oversight of these ecclesiastical mines, their own keels to transport the coal from the south banks of the Tyne, and their own sea-faring ships to export coal from the region. They also dominated the various ancillary industries which were springing up on the Tyne with, for example, extensive leases of the salt pans which were growing rapidly in South Shields.

These merchants were not simply content with controlling ecclesiastical coal mines, however, and they were constantly on the lookout for coal-bearing land which was within accessible distance of the Tyne, something that was greatly facilitated by the growth of waggonways in the seventeenth century. The purchases of the Thorntons in the early-fifteenth century were but a precursor of the sixteenth-century purchases by mercantile families whose entire wealth was predicated upon coal. The majority of Roger Thornton's purchases demonstrably possessed considerable coal reserves, whilst the manors acquired by Newcastle merchants in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries were to later house collieries, some of the most important being the Selbys' purchase of Winlaton, the Liddells' purchase of Ravensworth, and the Tempests' acquisition of Stella. These merchants had little interest in purchasing their way into the Durham countryside, and thus abandon their mercantile ties

[510] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 78; Nef, *British Coal Industry, vol. 1*, pp. 133-7.
[511] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 96.

with Newcastle and so ‘set up as country gentlemen’. Indeed, why would they? Given their immense wealth, high living standards, and obvious status, there was little to be gained from such a move, and much to be lost. Of course, that is not to deny that the likes of George Selby removed themselves to the countryside, being described as ‘of Winlaton’, but he also maintained a house in Newcastle almost as equally well-furnished, whilst it was to Newcastle that he looked on his deathbed: just as Roger Thornton before him, he envisaged his last journey being a home-coming to Newcastle.

The influx of ‘new wealth’ from mercantile sources in the sixteenth century certainly impacted upon the Durham countryside, but caution is needed when discussing either its novelty or extent. Not only did Roger Thornton make a brief but memorable impression on the Durham countryside in the fifteenth century, it is also clear that few of these merchants had intentions of establishing landed dynasties in the Durham countryside: given their immense wealth, their purchases were often surprisingly restrained. Many of these merchants were quite content to buy and sell numerous manors, often treating them as a commodity rather than as a potential building block for a landed estate. In a period when yeomen, parish gentry, and even the new prebendaries of Durham Cathedral were able to make such headway in purchasing manors, it is highly doubtful that this was ever the main intention of these Newcastle merchants, whose wealth could have afforded to purchase whole tracts of the Durham countryside. That is not to deny that they made an impact on the Durham countryside, but they often did so more in their roles as Newcastle merchants rather than as landed gentlemen.

The Emergence of Ecclesiastical Dynasties

Of all the people who entered the ranks of the gentry in this period, Mervyn James suggested that, 'perhaps the most significant group of new recruits to the middle and lesser gentry at the latter date (1615) were the now married upper clergy'.[512] He went on to list a whole host of prebendaries, deans and indeed, bishops, who established dynasties in the Durham countryside, slowly intermarrying with established members of the gentry. This included Henry Ewbank, prebendary of the twelfth stall, who established his son and heir at Snotterton; Dean Whittingham, whose heir became the squire of Holmside; Marmaduke Blakiston and John Hutton, prebendaries who founded landed families at Newton Hall and Houghton-le-Spring respectively; and the relatives of Bishop Barnes and Bishop James who also acquired estates.[513] Diana Newton argued that the new composition of the Elizabethan chapter:

> 'impacted adversely on the county gentry, for the prebendaries were recruited from a much wider area than the monks they replaced and they were drawn from higher up the social scale. Thus these were outsiders who regarded themselves as the social equals of the resident gentry, presenting a double challenge to them as a discrete and coherent gentry'.[514]

But what wealth were these acquisitions predicated upon? As was explored in chapter three, the Dean was allocated a stipend of £266 13s 4d, a not inconsiderable income by any means, but the prebendaries by comparison shared £400 between twelve of them; a much more modest income.[515] Although they were also paid a dividend derived from the income of entry fines, this could hardly account for their purchases. How were these prebendaries or even bishops in the first half of the seventeenth century able to afford such extensive purchases of land?

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[512] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 72.
[513] Ibid., p. 72.
[514] Newton, *North-East England*, p. 48.
[515] See chapter three above, p. 90.

The answer can be found in the beneficial leases which bishops of Durham granted out to their relatives and in the land which was attached to each prebendal stall of the Cathedral. The bishops were often hindered by long leases granted to the gentry, but they were also often hampered by grants their predecessors had made to members of their extended family. This particularly emphasises the problem facing many bishops, for they only had a life interest in their episcopate, and many now had families for which to provide. One of the most extensive examples of this in the sixteenth century is Cuthbert Tunstall, who was bishop for some of the most turbulent years of the diocese from 1530 to 1559. A list of his leases to other Tunstalls and Thornells from the 1540s is detailed below:

Table 22: Leases Made by Bishop Tunstall to Relatives and Friends

Property	Lease	Rent of Property
Property in Howden	Sir Marmaduke Tunstall, 21 year lease, 1547	£13 6s 8d
Manor of Weelhall	Francis Tunstall, 21 year lease, 1550	£5 18s 5d
Property in Thorpe	Roger Tunstall, 40 year lease, 1551	£5
Property in Weardale	Anthony Tunstall, 30 year lease, 1551	£10
Water Mill in Norton	Anthony Tunstall, 30 year lease, 1554	£16 13s 4d
Property in Norton	Roger Tunstall, 31 year lease, 1554	Blank
Property in Stockton	Rogert Tunstall, 31 year lease, 1554	£5
Manor of Middridge	Thomas Tunstall, 40 year lease, 1558	£26 9s 8d
Manor of Windlestone	Thomas Tunstall, Grant after treason, 1558	Blank
Property in Wolsingham	Ralph Tunstall, 21 year lease, 1559	£1
Property in Wiske	Nicholas Thornell, 21 year lease, 1543	£5 18s 5d
Property in Lumley	John Thornell, 30 year lease, 1548	£1
Water Mills, Bakehouse, etc	Laurence Thornell, 50 year lease, 1550	£11
Property in Darlington	Laurence Thornell, 21 year lease, 1551	£7
Various Properties	John Thornell, 21 year lease, 1556	£1 4s
Property in Stockton	John Thornell, 60 year lease, 1559	£23 14s 10d

Source: CCB Registers of Leases and Patents, 1-5, c.1530-c.1640.

Some of these leases were quite extensive and favourable, such as those to Thomas Tunstall which included the manor of Middridge for forty years and the manor of Windlestone which had been forfeited to the bishop. Although it is unclear how all of these Tunstalls relate to Cuthbert Tunstall, a Francis Tunstall was given £40 in Bishop Tunstall's will and appears to have been his great-nephew, whilst Sir Marmaduke Tunstall was Francis' father. Bishop Tunstall's will also makes provision for the care of 'little Thomas Tunstall sonne to Thomas Tunstall late my servaunte' and who was to receive ten marks, as was 'Roger Tunstall his brother'.[516] Similarly, the Thornell connection is not entirely clear but Nicholas Thornell was one of the prebendaries of the Collegiate Church of Norton, and was clearly favoured by Bishop Tunstall who made him an executor and witness to his will, as well as provisioning £5 for 'John Thornell waytynge on me in my chamber'.[517] It is likely that this is the same John Thornell who received the extremely favourable lease of property in Stockton worth £23 14s 10d in rent, but which would have been greatly devalued by inflation over the 60-year period of the lease. This lease was made in the last year of Bishop Tunstall's life and it undoubtedly represents an attempt to reward loyal service, an attempt which presumably gave his successors a headache.

James Pilkington, the first of these successors, did not flood the lease books of the bishopric in the same way, for after 1556 Mary granted the bishop of Durham the right of presentation to the Cathedral stalls, which had been a right preserved by the crown in the Henrician foundation statutes. David Marcombe emphasised the importance of this new source of patronage as:

> 'These were amongst the most valuable livings in the Bishop's gift and were therefore frequently used as rewards for his relatives, friends, and administrators: this process, still often uncharitably referred to as nepotism, represented no more than the bishop's attempt to build up his own sphere of influence in the diocese

[516] Charles Sturges, *Cuthbert Tunstall: Churchman, Scholar, Administrator* (London, 1938), pp. 378-82.
[517] Ibid., pp. 378-82.

> which was necessary if he was to free himself from over dependence on the local gentry and a consequent involvement in their squabbles.'[518]

He went on to describe how Bishop Pilkington, 'by far the most prolific distributor of prebends, promoted his two brothers and seven known kinsmen and friends, whilst his successors Barnes and Hutton presented a son and a nephew respectively.'[519] Emanuel Barnes, for example, was installed in the fifth stall in 1585 where he remained until 1603 when he moved to the fourth stall until 1614, whilst Robert Hutton held the third stall between 1589 and 1623. Pat Mussett explained the financial importance attached to these stalls because:

> 'The Durham stalls, unlike those in other Cathedrals of the New Foundation, were genuine prebends; each stall (including the deanery) had assigned to it from the Cathedral's estates its own endowment in land or in tithes or both, and any dean or canon of Durham received each year not only the sums of money authorised by the Cathedral statutes and his share of any surplus on the Cathedral's central accounts, but also the income from his own decanal or prebendal estate.'[520]

It was these prebendal estates which were so valuable in this period, and it was out of the profits arising from these lands which many prebendaries and deans were able to branch out into the countryside.

John Pilkington, brother of Bishop Pilkington, was installed in the second stall of the Cathedral from 1561-1602, and was also collated to the archdeaconry of Durham, with the rectory of Easington annexed in 1563, whilst his other brother, Leonard Pilkington, was installed in the seventh stall between 1567 and 1599.[521] It was the land which they leased from the Dean and Chapter as part of their prebendal estate, or corpes land as it was known, which was so valuable to them, as the name Pilkington flooded into the Dean and Chapter's lease-books.

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[518] Marcombe, *Dean and Chapter of Durham*, p. 72.
[519] Ibid., p. 72.
[520] Mussett, *Deans and Canons*, introduction.
[521] Marcombe, *Dean and Chapter of Durham*, p. 72.

Table 23: Leases of Agricultural Land Held by the Pilkingtons on the Dean and Chapter's Estate

Lessee	Length	Property	Rent	Date
Anne Pilkington	21 yrs	East Merrington	£2 9s	1623
	21 yrs	West and Mid Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1628
Barnaby Pilkington	21 yrs	Cowpen Bewley and Burdon	£7 4s 10d	1572
	21 yrs	Property south side of the Tyne	£1 10s	1600
Jacob Pilkington	21 yrs	Monkwearmouth, Hedworth, Mid Merrington	£9 14s 2d	1583
	21 yrs	Monkwearmouth, Simonside Fields and Hedworth	£7 5s 10d	1587
	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1587
	21 yrs	Mid Merrington and West Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1588
	21 yrs	Monkwearmouth and Simonside	£3 19s 1d	1590
	21 yrs	West Merrington	£3 0s 5d	1593
Francis Pilkington	21 yrs	Harton and Simonside Fields	£3 2s 3d	1564
	21 yrs	Coatsay Moor	£7 13s 5d	1567
	21 yrs	Cleatham, Merrington, Nether Heworth, Wolviston	£7 19s 6d	1572
	21 yrs	Cleatham	£1 6s 8d	1575
	21 yrs	Cowpen Bewley	£4 0s 6d	1575
Hugh Pilkington	21 yrs	Parsonage of Norham	£13	1566
Isaac Pilkington	21 yrs	Half of the manor of Elvet	£8 6s 8d	1599
Jane Pilkington	21 yrs	Property in the South Bailey	£1 3s	1604
John Pilkington	21 yrs	Half of the manor of Elvet	£8 6s 8d	1569
	21 yrs	Coatsay Moor	£2 11s 2d	1622
	21 yrs	Coatsay Moor	£2 11s 2d	1630
	40 yrs	House in Kingsgate	6s 8d	1628
Joseph Pilkington	21 yrs	Monkwearmouth, Hedworth, Mid Merrington	£9 14s 2d	1583
	21 yrs	Mid Merrington	£2 8s 4d	1587
	21 yrs	Mid Merrington and West Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1588
	21 yrs	Mid Merrington	£2 8s 8d	1593
	21 yrs	West Merrington, Mid Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1595
	21 yrs	West Merrington and Mid Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1598
	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1606
	21 yrs	West Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1606
	21 yrs	Mills in Merrington	£2 13s 4d	1607
	21 yrs	West Merrington and Mid Merrington	£5 8s 8d	1613
	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1613
Nehemiah Pilkington	21 yrs	Monkwearmouth, Hedworth, Mid Merrington	£9 14s 2d	1583
	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1594
	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1598
	21 yrs	Finchale	£9 19s 8d	1598
Toby Pilkington	21 yrs	Hedworth and Simonside Fields	£2 15s 7d	1627

Source: DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1670: DCD/B/BA

The sheer scale of this leasing is all the more impressive when two factors are taken into consideration. Firstly, the surname Pilkington did not appear in any of the rent books of the sixteenth century relating to the Priory before Bishop Pilkington's brothers became prebendaries. Secondly, the prebendal estate was only supposed to belong to the prebend whilst he was an incumbent of the Cathedral: once he left his stall, all of the land assigned to that stall was supposed to pass to his successor. The only land and tithes they were entitled to as part of their stalls are shown below; the rest of their extensive leasing coming from their ability to give preferential leases to their relatives and friends as leases fell in.

Table 24: Land Associated with the Second and Seventh Stalls of the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral

Second Stall		**Seventh Stall**	
Corpes Land		**Corpes Land**	
Half of Elvet Hall	£8 6s 8d	Finchale	£9 18s 8d
Bye-Corpes Land		**Bye-Corpes Land**	
Cold Hesleden	£5	Harton	£9 10s
Eden	£3 3s 4d	Wardley	£8 10s 6d
Hardwick	£2	Wallsend	£3 13s 4d
Redworth	£4		

Source: Marcombe, *Dean and Chapter of Durham*, p. 136.

As chapter eight shows, many of the smaller leases which the Pilkingtons acquired were sufficient to provide a comfortable existence, but these additional corpes lands could prove extremely profitable.[522] For example, the half of Elvet Hall attached to the second stall with its £8 6s 8d rent was in fact valued at around £150, whilst Finchale for which a rent of £9 19s 8d was paid, was valued at £200.[523] David Marcombe concluded that 'a man like Leonard Pilkington, for example, in possession of the wealthy manor of Finchale and the greater part of his bye corpes, could perhaps expect an income from them somewhere in the region of

[522] See chapter 8 below.
[523] Marcombe, *Dean and Chapter of Durham*, p. 136.

£300 per annum in the 1590s'.[524] This income, when combined with his stipend and dividend, would have been sufficient to make many members of the established gentry envious in the sixteenth century: an income, moreover, which could keep pace with inflation since this was not a stagnant rent and could either be sublet for a more commercial rate or directly farmed.

Conclusion

It was the advantageous leases of church lands which formed the platform from which new prebendaries could purchase their way into the Durham countryside and make permanent acquisitions of property. These leases enabled prebendaries to enter the region and quickly gain a foothold of important agricultural lands, especially of the larger leases which amounted to whole manors. It was the likes of Leonard Pilkington above, with an income as high as perhaps £300 per annum in the 1590s, who were able to accumulate enough capital to purchase up whole manors, at a time when some members of the gentry like Sir George Conyers were facing increasing financial difficulties. The monks who had preceeded these canons had little impact on the ownership of land outside of their monastic community, but with the reformation of the Cathedral, these new prebendaries formed an increasingly important influx of wealth into the Durham countryside.

But just how far did these new prebendaries, together with the Newcastle merchants discussed earlier in this chapter, upset the traditional balance of landed power within the Palatinate? Certainly, they increasingly made their presence felt, with numerous merchants purchasing manors, whilst the prebendaries could be seen slowly founding gentry families, but it is easy to overemphasise their importance. The purchase of manors by these Newcastle merchants was neither novel nor as extensive as it perhaps could have been, suggesting their

[524] Ibid., p. 136.

intention was not to relocate to the countryside en masse, but was often aimed at securing the mineral resources upon which their wealth was predicated. Likewise, the prebendaries of Durham Cathedral were increasingly putting down permanent roots in the countryside, but this was still restricted to a handful of families. There was a general shift in the overall balance of landed power in the Palatinate across the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries which saw the gradual fragmentation of larger estates into the hands of an ever-increasing number of families: these purchases were but one facet in this overall redistribution of land. This influx of new wealth into the Durham countryside certainly never approached flood levels, but represented a gradual trickle of wealth which permeated society, with Newcastle increasingly forming a regional focus point.

Section 2

Conclusion

Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the balance of landed power within the Palatinate changed radically. This was initially in favour of the larger knightly class who were able to benefit from the financial straits which many members of the parish gentry found themselves in after the price crash of the 1370s. It was these members of the parish gentry who were most vulnerable to the pincer effect of high wages alongside low prices, low rents and potentially high arrears: their potential profits were marginal at the best of times, and the socio-economic trends of the early-fifteenth century proved too challenging for many members of this group in rural society. By the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries almost half of the lay manors of the Palatinate had been accumulated within the hands of a few families, representing the highest concentration of land in this period, but from this point there was a gradual fragmentation of these large estates. The inflation of the sixteenth century provided landowners, many of whom had become purely rentier landlords, with a whole host of problems, not least the problem of how to increase their rental income to match their ever-increasing expenditure. By the early-seventeenth century, there were very few families in the Palatinate with over five manors, something which had been relatively common in the fifteenth century, whilst there had been an influx of newcomers into the market, including wealthy merchants from Newcastle, the prebendaries of Durham Cathedral, and the yeomanry of the region who were able to accumulate enough capital to purchase portions of their lord's manors.

Was there a crisis of the aristocracy in the sixteenth century, with a corresponding rise of the gentry? Certainly in Durham this is the overwhelming impression of the period: the Nevilles disappeared from the Durham countryside because of their political misadventures; the landed estates of both the Lumleys and the Conyers were greatly diminished through a long period of continual sales; whilst the Claxtons of Claxton died out in the male line in the late-fifteenth century, as did the Conyers finally in the sixteenth century. Coupled with the seizure of various monasteries at the Dissolution, this led to a major redistribution in the landed assets of the Palatinate, which saw an influx of mercantile wealth from Newcastle, alongside an increase in the number of yeomanry purchasing portions of manors, and the gradual accumulation of manors by the established gentry. This redistribution of landholding was on a large scale, and indeed, Hoskins argued that the century after 1540 saw the greatest transference of landownership in England since the Norman Conquest.[525] There was a definite balance to these transactions and inheritances which saw the replacement of a handful of families controlling over half the lay manors in the Palatinate of Durham to dozens of newcomers holding anywhere from a portion of a manor to several, but very few accumulating land on the scale of the Thorntons of the fifteenth century.

As Trevor-Roper was quick to point out those looking for economic difficulty only among the peerage naturally found it there, but if they had looked among the gentry they would have found it there too: 'the history of Elizabethan and Jacobean gentry is strewn with their casualties, although Tawney's searchlight, seeking to illuminate only prosperity among the gentry and aristocratic decline, has seldom lit upon them'.[526] Was this phenomenon in fact a misnomer? Rather than a crisis of the aristocracy and the rise of the gentry, Trevor-Roper thought the key differentiation between success and failure in this period was often office-holding. He concluded that 'whereas many families indubitably increased the yield of their

[525] William Hoskins, *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1950), p. 155.
[526] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 7.

lands, the great new fortunes were almost invariably made either by offices or in trade. Indeed, I would go further and say that between 1540 and 1640 land alone, without the help of offices or trade, even if it were improved, was hardly capable of causing the significant rise of any but a most exceptional family'.[527] Of course, the key question here is what constitutes a 'significant rise'? The rise of former bond tenants into the prosperous gentry or the rise of parish gentry into the knightly class of a region? Certainly, the profits of land alone could achieve this, although more often than not in the Palatinate they were twinned with the subterranean wealth of coal. As David Reid concluded: 'local power then in [the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] had come to lie in the hands of a gentry whose strength was based on a fusion of mercantile and mining wealth with the land of Durham'.[528] He went further, saying that:

> 'The older gentry, if they were to maintain their political influence it became increasingly necessary for them to pursue wealth through marriage alliances and business connections in Newcastle, by a more commercial exploitation of their lands, or by the fostering of industry or mining where such possibilities existed.'[529]

A more commercial exploitation of their lands was often capable of producing considerable profits, with many gentry families farming their own land on a scale which was often three or four times that of many of their yeoman neighbours. Upon a single manor, William Blakiston, esq., for example, possessed around 500 sheep: certainly not a huge flock, but as Alan Simpson commented, 'sheep-farming was no short-cut to great wealth', but did provide a 'dependable livelihood for people in their various stations'.[530] Furthermore, many members of the gentry, and even the yeomanry, were increasingly turning to the mineral deposits on their lands as a source of wealth: the Lambtons and Milots were involved in the coal industry; the Shadforths were leasing quarries near Sunderland; whilst it was those coal-bearing

[527] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 13.
[528] Reid, *Durham Crown Lordships*, p. 7.
[529] Ibid., p. 8.
[530] DPRI/1/1607/B4/1-2; Simpson, *Wealth of the Gentry*, p. 196.

manors which most tempted the mercantile elite of Newcastle to purchase land in the Palatinate. Of course, this was nothing novel, as many members of the laity were engaged in the coal industry even in the fifteenth century as the grants of wayleave by the bishops of Durham confirm, but it was the sheer scale of operations which increased during the sixteenth century.

Alan Simpson posed the question 'why should landlords suffer when agricultural prices were rising'?[531] He posited many reasons for doubting the 'basic premise of landlord embarrassment' within the historiography of this period. For example, his suggestion that gentry families who were farming their own estates quite literally could not fail to take advantage of the rising agricultural prices of the period certainly rings true for Durham, with many gentry-farmers slowly accumulating wealth, if not in spectacular fashion, at least in a fairly consistent pattern. However, his assertion that mere landlords did not suffer from inflation because they could 'simply' raise rents and find tenants – often the same tenants - who 'were able and willing enough to meet each rise' is much more difficult to defend.[532] There was nothing simple about this process for a rentier landlord in the sixteenth century, and although it was certainly possible, there are numerous estates like those of the bishops' of Durham who were hindered by the restrictive tenures which had developed on their estates.

Perhaps the idea of a crisis of the aristocracy and rise of the gentry is indeed a misnomer: after all, the Conyers and Claxtons suffered in this period, and despite being members of the upper gentry and treated here as large landowners, they were still just that, members of the gentry. Similarly, the downfall of the Nevilles had little to do with this changing configuration of the countryside, and much more to do with political, religious and personal motivations. Is Trevor-Roper's identification of a 'court and country' divide any

[531] Ibid., p. 179.
[532] Ibid., p. 202.

more useful? In ways, it is, for example, with many of the gentry families who were able to benefit from long-leases of the bishops' manors also office-holders, whilst it was the Bowes who benefited from grants of various forfeited lands. It was often through office-holding that one could acquire further land or influence, and thus commercially farm on a larger scale, or indeed, enter into the coal-industry in some form or another. It was through their access to these kinds of patronage that bishops of Durham and the Dean and Chapter were able to favour their own friends and relatives. However, there are problems with this interpretation, not least because the greatest office in the Palatinate, that of the bishops of Durham, was in fact in economic decline in this period, whilst the available sources of revenue were not on par with what could be offered in London.

One of the most conspicuous and consistent trends in the historiography of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries is the agreement that it was a prosperous period for producers in the countryside. Stone commented that 'there was a striking rise in the material comforts of all classes from the yeomen upwards, groups who benefited from rising agricultural prices, increased activity, and increased demand for professional services'.[533] As Trevor-Roper commented, the rise of successful yeomen into the gentry 'seems incontestable', with yeomen farming their lands directly often able to build up properties 'worth three or four squires put together' and were found 'able yearly to dispend betwixt three and five hundred pounds'.[534] This will be explored further in section 3, in relation to the decline of the peasantry and rise of the yeomanry, but this idea has a much wider significance in these transitional debates. Rather than suggesting the rise or fall of an entire social group such as the gentry, one which was open at both ends of the spectrum and incorporated a whole host of different families, it is perhaps more useful to think of the problem in terms of land usage. It was not a matter of the rise of the gentry and crisis of the aristocracy, but a

[533] Stone, 'Social Mobility', p. 26.
[534] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 9.

general rise of agricultural producers and a crisis for rentier landlords. That is not to say that all landlords declined, but all faced problems: some such as the Dean and Chapter of Durham were able to overcome them, others such as the Lumleys, and bishops of Durham were not.

Social status was relatively unimportant on the income side of a family's accounts. As agricultural prices rose, so farmers became more commercially-oriented with their surpluses, and thus members of the gentry and yeomanry were able to prosper. The reason, perhaps, why members of the gentry tended to prosper more in this relationship was simply one of scale: upon Ralph Lambton's death, for example, he possessed corn and hay worth £184, and livestock worth over £500; commercial farming on a scale that few yeomen could accomplish simply because the Lambtons possessed a considerably larger access to land by the sixteenth century. He was representative of an increasing group in the Durham countryside who was engaged in the coal industry, possessing three salt pans in Sunderland, a keal, and coals at Penshaw: not simply commercially-farming, but market-oriented in all potential aspects of profit in the region. In contrast, it was the truly large landowners who had become landlords across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who struggled to raise their rents in the face of restrictive tenures. There were landlords such as the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral or the earls of Northumberland who were able to change the tenure by which their tenants held land and thus acquire an increasing portion of the unearned increment provided by inflation, but the fate of the rentier landlord was more commonly that of the Bishops of Durham: stagnant rents and little room for manouvere.

Social station, however, was very important in terms of expenditure, with families like the Conyers burdening their estates with large children's portions, and the Lumleys maintaining all the pomp of ancient aristocracy. For these two families, the twin pincers of declining real incomes and increasing expenditures provided an insurmountable task, which resulted in sales of land. For others, the combination of higher agricultural prices and brief

forays into the coal industry could provide a more than ample reward, with families such as the Bellassis and Blakistons dying with hundreds of pounds in ready cash by their sides. If we are to think of the problems of this period in terms of the rise of agricultural producers and the crisis of rentier landlords it must be done so cautiously. It was not an inevitable decline for all rentier landlords, but it was perhaps a crisis for all landlords, and this period is littered with legal disputes between tenants and landlords over access to the profits provided by inflation. Likewise, agricultural profits were no shortcut to wealth; that was still the preserve of coal, which quickly became monopolised by Newcastle merchants intent upon not only controlling the ecclesiastical collieries but also acquiring as much coal-bearing land as possible. However, agricultural profits did allow for the slow accumulation of wealth across several generations, which if combined with other ventures, such as exploiting coal mines or salt pans, could ensure the prosperity of an ancient gentry family.

The reason the argument was once formulated as a crisis of the aristocracy was simply because most aristocrats tended to be large rentier landlords with other priorities elsewhere in the realm, whilst it was the local gentry who often maintained direct-demesne farming, or at the very least, found it easier to revert to this kind of land usage in the sixteenth century. Whether this was the rise of a more entrepreneurial and business-minded group within rural society is unclear: were the Lumleys and Conyers ignorant of the profits being made by others around them? Much akin to the bishops of Durham, it is likely that these landowners struggled to increase their rents in a period of high inflation, but it is also likely that their attentions were elsewhere: Lumley, for example, was often outside of the Palatinate in the mid-sixteenth century, whilst the high social expectations placed upon the Conyers may well have encouraged a level of expenditure which was unsustainable. In comparison, families such as the Lambton could clearly be seen exploiting virtually every source of revenue in the region, engaging not only in commercial agriculture, and plowing said profits into further

land, but also in the coal trade and ancilliary industries such as the salt pans in South Shields. Similarly, families such as the Bellassis and the Blakistons were engaging in commercial agriculture, and clearly profiting from their endeavours as members of each family died in the early-seventeenth centuries with substantial sums of ready cash on hand. It was this slow and steady redistribution of wealth down the social scale, especially helped by the long leases of the bishops' manors, which saw a gradual fragmentation of large estates across the sixteenth century. Alongside the influx of new wealth from the canons of the cathedral and Newcastle merchants, as well as the increasing importance of the yeomanry, this represented a wholesale redistribution of the landed resources of the Palatinate of Durham by the seventeenth century so that there were remarkably few large landowners where just a century before there had been dozens.

This section reinforces the two overall themes of the current thesis: the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries need to be understood as a whole, with the gradual accumulations of the aristocracy in the earlier period only matched by the scale of their alienations in the latter; and secondly that estates provided a structural imposition on the transformations of the English countryside which greatly affected the potential opportunities and challenges of both landowners and tenants. It was no coincident that the tenants of the Lumleys and Conyers featured so prominently as purchasers of their lords' manors as profits slowly trickled down the social ladder because of the difficulties facing rentier landlords. Likewise, members of the gentry like Richard Bellassis were able to gain advantageous leases of some of the bishop's best agricultural manors and so profited from stagnant rents and rising agricultural prices. Unfortunately because of the lack of gentry accounts we are often unable to acquire more than a glimpse of some of these processes at work, but the overall conclusions of this thesis are clearly more applicable than just to the two ecclesiastical estates of Durham. Estate management and institutional constraints were one of the key mechanisms through which

changes in rural society were manifested, often accounting not only for the tenurial structure of landholdings, but also for the problems and profits of various sections of society. If we returned to Tawney: 'such difficulties confronted all conservative landowners, both peers and commoners, in proportion to the magnitude of their commitments and the rigidity of their incomes. The most that can be said is that the former usually carried more sail than the latter, and found it, when the wind changed, more difficult to tack'.[535] In short, it was the long-term development of their estates which often provided landowners in the sixteenth century with such problems: the gentry, who maintained some semblance of direct-farming, found it easier to profit from the rapidly increasing agricultural prices; the aristocracy, who had leased out their demesnes and allowed customary tenures to develop on their estates, much like the bishops of Durham, struggled to respond and found their revenues increasingly inadequate.[536]

[535] Ibid., p. 10.
[536] Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, p. 57.

Section 3

The Decline of the Peasantry, c.1400-1640

Introduction

One of the key discourses in the transition from feudalism to capitalism surrounds the peasantry who have been seen by many as a hindrance to the progress of English agriculture: their removal, and the transition from a rural society dominated by feudal lord and medieval peasant to a tripartite society of landowner, capitalist farmer, and wage labourer has been seen as crucial in setting England apart from much of early-modern Europe.[537] One of the most significant changes in rural society in this period was 'the demarcation of the agricultural population into three main strata – freeholders, tenant-farmers, and landless or nearly landless, labourers,' which 'was to form the characteristic pattern of English rural society until the end of the eighteenth century'.[538] The decline of the peasantry is a narrative which has been fraught with disagreements ranging from Alan MacFarlane's controversial view that England has never possessed a true peasantry to W. G. Hoskins' belief that peasant traditions survived into the twentieth-century at Leicestershire.[539] These disputes have often arisen at a terminological level rather than an historical one primarily because of problems defining the peasantry: how important were property rights, market-orientation and cultural inheritance to peasant societies? The first chapter of this section, therefore, explores the

[537] Henry French and R. W. Hoyle, *The Character of English Rural Society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750* (Manchester, 2007), p. 2.
[538] M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century, 1307-1399* (Oxford, 1959), p. 341.
[539] W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: the Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (London, 1957), pp. xx.

definition and concept of a peasantry, their role in economic development, and whether they possessed a unique mentality traditionally characterised as a 'peasant mindset'.

Peasants have traditionally been presented as a hindrance to agricultural progress, with both R. H. Hilton and M. M. Postan emphasising the inability of peasants to re-invest in medieval agriculture, although they apportioned the blame for this squarely on the shoulders of feudal lords, many of whom 'tended to spend up to the hilt on personal display, on extravagant living, on the maintenance of numerous retinue, and on war.'[540] Mark Bailey has criticised these interpretations as 'a tendency to stereotype medieval lords as rapacious extractors of peasant surpluses', but went on to concede that 'landlords did not develop sophisticated notions of profit or returns to capital invested…they certainly expected good returns…but did not look to maximise profits. Their landed estates continued to be regarded more as a mark of status and privilege than as business enterprises.'[541] Hilton calculated that average re-investment levels on the estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory were less than five per cent, which, although enough to ensure the land and infrastructure were maintained in relatively good condition, were hardly entrepreneurial.[542] Even with the broadest definition of re-investment Postan argued that 'we cannot escape the conclusion that lords as a rule invested very small proportions of their incomes.'[543] He went on to calculate that the direct impact of these seigniorial extractions on peasants meant that something like fifty per cent of an unfree peasant's total product was taken by the lord, and that 'this was entirely unproductive profit, for hardly any of it was ploughed back into production; most was squandered in military expenditure and conspicuous consumption'.[544] The widespread

[540] R. H. Hilton, 'Rent and Capital Formation in Feudal Society', in R. H. Hilton (ed.), *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages: The Ford Lectures for 1973* (Oxford, 1975), p. 177.
[541] Mark Bailey, 'Historiographical Essay: The Commercialisation of the English Economy, 1086-1500', *JMH*, 24 (1998), p. 309.
[542] Hilton, 'Rent and Capital Formation', p. 186.
[543] M. M. Postan, 'Investment in Medieval Agriculture', *EcHR*, 27 (1967), p. 578.
[544] Robert Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', in T. H. Aston (ed.), *BD* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 31.

building of mills was one of the few areas where manorial lords did provide structural investment in the medieval economy, but this was often undertaken as an extension of their seigniorial rights rather than an attempt to improve agricultural productivity.

Medieval society is said to have undergone a feudal or Malthusian crisis at the start of the fourteenth century as the soil was slowly exhausted from over-exploitation with diminishing rates of return meaning that an increasing proportion of the population was living at subsistence levels. This was because capital formation amongst the peasantry was restricted by the lack of any available surplus from production above basic subsistence needs and so 'they could not, so to speak, put back what they took out' of the soil.[545] Kosminsky found that up to 57 per cent of unfree holdings and up to 80 per cent of free holdings had less than eight acres of land in four East Midlands counties in 1279-80, whilst in Bedfordshire in 1297, 85 per cent of taxpayers had either one draught animal or none at all.[546] Postan and Hilton both estimated that there were 'next to nil' opportunities to accumulate any surplus for peasants holding a half-virgate or less, which is a particularly significant threshold given that as many as half of all peasants in pre-plague England may have held half a virgate or less.[547] The peasant, alongside his manorial lord, has thus been seen as hindering the formation of agrarian capitalism because the former could not create a large enough surplus to re-invest in agriculture, whilst the latter had little interest in doing so.

This vicious cycle is said to have been broken with the Black Death as peasants had increasing opportunities to accumulate holdings, enabling the creation of larger surpluses and the gradual formation of capital which their medieval ancestors had been deprived of by a combination of feudal extractions and fragmented holdings. However, this was not a straight forward and linear process because there were many difficulties for agricultural producers

[545] Ibid., p. 33.
[546] E. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1956), p. 216; Hilton 'Rent and Capital Formation', p. 197.
[547] Postan, 'Investment', p. 585; Hilton, 'Rent and Capital Formation', pp. 199-200.

during the fifteenth century in the form of low prices and high wages, which reduced the potential profit margins for peasants seeking to intensively farm their engrossed holdings. It was not truly until the sixteenth century that the widespread enlargement of peasant holdings took on a new social and economic significance. The high inflation of the sixteenth century provided these tenants with increasing potential for profits, not least because many of their rents stagnated behind the rise in agricultural prices. This process increasingly gave rise to two new groups in society: the yeomanry, who thus rose out of the peasantry, re-investing in commercial agriculture, and sometimes even purchasing the freehold rights to their lands and entering the gentry; and a group of increasingly landless agricultural labourers who worked on the farms of the aforementioned yeomen. This was not to be the end of the peasantry in the English countryside because they were able to survive on smallholdings on various estates where restrictive tenure, stagnant rents, and common grazing rights ensured their viability, but it did help to create important new social groups within rural society: the yeomanry and agricultural wage-labourers.

Many of these themes are explored in the following chapters on the estates of the two Durham ecclesiastical landlords studied in section one not only because their records allow for the greatest continuity across this transitional period, but also because of the divergent tenurial structures which developed on their estates.[548] How far did this divergent development of the two ecclesiastical estates impact upon their tenants? Were the institutional restrictions imposed by the differences in tenurial structure sufficient to affect the experience of their tenants across these two centuries, creating different opportunities and challenges? In short, this section explores how far estate management and institutional constraints played a role in the formation of agrarian capitalism. Chapter 9 further explores the consequences of the difficulties many rentier landlords faced found in section two,

[548] See section 1 above.

especially on the estates of the Lumleys, whose tenants were able to purchase portions of their manors, thus acquiring freehold rights to their own lands. How far did rural society undergo an important restructuring in the fifteenth century and how far did this create a path-dependency which greatly affected the opportunities of both landlords and tenants alike for centuries to come?

Chapter 7

What's in a Name? Defining the English Peasantry

The term 'peasant' is so value-laden and in such common usage that a full definition of the concept is required before we proceed further. The idea of a peasantry is crucial to the history of agricultural development, and their decline forms one of the key meta-narratives in the debates surrounding the transition from feudalism to capitalism. It is a term, however, which many see as problematic and thus seek to avoid even when they are directly involved in these debates. For example, Sreenivasan refused to engage with the problem because 'to date the essence of that controversy has been the definition of a peasant. It seems to me that the question has to be settled at a terminological level before it can be dealt with at a historical one'.[549] In his recent article concerning the rise of agrarian capitalism and the decline of family farming, Leigh Shaw-Taylor refused to engage directly with the concept of a peasantry, eschewing the description entirely because it is too problematic although he acknowledges that 'the terms are far too deeply embedded in numerous discourses to be excised from public discussion and they are not without value'.[550] This refusal to engage with the concept of a peasantry and to provide clear definitions has often led to many of the differences of opinions between historians, especially about the timing and nature of the transition from feudalism and capitalism, primarily because historians have tended to emphasise different aspects of this transition as the most crucial element. This chapter explores previous definitions of peasants employed, assessing their utility, and then provides a definition which will be used in the rest of this section exploring their evolution into

[549] Sreenivasan, 'Land-Family Bond', p. 4.
[550] Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of Agrarian Capitalism', pp. 4-5.

yeomen, husbandmen, cottagers and wage-labourers. It is hoped that this clear conceptual definition will help to synthesise many of the disputes within the historiography of this period.

One of the most controversial and important definitions of a peasantry was provided by Alan MacFarlane who drew upon anthropological literature describing Polish and Russian peasantries of the late-nineteenth century to establish the characteristics of a peasant society in which there were no institutional property rights but land was vested in the family group. There could, therefore, neither be sale nor inheritance of goods, for no individual 'owned' them, and so English society displayed a remarkable degree of individualism which precluded the existence of a peasantry. [551] His hypothesis was 'that the majority of ordinary people in England from at least the thirteenth century were rampant individualists, highly mobile both geographically and socially, economically 'rational', market-oriented and acquisitive, ego-centred in kinship and social life'.[552] Many of these aspects of English medieval society have since found considerable support but his conclusion that these features precluded the existence of a peasantry has not. Jane Whittle, for example, has commented that MacFarlane's usage of the term peasant was an 'unusually constrictive definition of peasant society and economy, stressing an almost total lack of market relations in peasant societies', whilst Henry French and Richard Hoyle similarly criticised it for there 'seemed to be no good reason why one historically specific form of peasantry should be the standard against which all others should be judged.'[553] MacFarlane's definition was certainly controversial and although there are few who would agree with his refusal to acknowledge the existence of a peasantry in England, many aspects of his hypothesis have

[551] Alan MacFarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism: The Family, Property and Social Transition* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32-3.
[552] Ibid., p. 163.
[553] Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, p. 13; Henry French and Richard Hoyle, 'English Individualism Refuted: And Reasserted: The Land Market of Earls Colne (Essex), 1550-1750', *EcHR*, 56 (2003), p. 596.

survived revisionism surprisingly well, not least the increasing acknowledgement that medieval society was far more commercialised than was once thought.[554] MacFarlane's definition, however, is too simplistic to explore the transition from feudalism to capitalism adequately. In emphasising the individualism of English society from the thirteenth century through until the eighteenth century MacFarlane minimised the significance of the numerous transformations which rural society underwent in the intervening period. His definition, therefore, does not allow for a full exploration of many of the key developments in English rural society, and after all, what is the point of a definition if it does not allow for the maximum understanding of the phenomenon under study?

There have been many other attempts to define peasants, usually informing an article about a specific aspect of peasant society as, for example, Paul Hyams' definition of a peasant as anyone in medieval England who 'lived outside the towns, and either; held no land at all, or; held all his land by customary or socage tenure or; if he held some land by knight service, had all his holdings in one manor or village, and; was not a noble, knight, burgess, monk, or clerk (except parish priest)'.[555] This is perhaps the broadest possible definition of a peasant and focused almost entirely on landholding and social status. It was sufficient for his article searching for the beginnings of a peasant land market in the thirteenth century, but it is wholly inadequate for comparisons across time, especially from the fifteenth century onwards when rural society became increasingly stratified with the emergence of the lesser gentry and the yeomanry. It is, therefore, far too broad a definition which fails to take into account the size of peasant holdings, their market orientation, or the nature of the labour they used for it to be a useful definition in the larger transitional debates.

[554] Ben Dodds and Christian Liddy, 'Richard Britnell: An Appreciation', in Ben Dodds and Christian Liddy (eds.), *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. xi-xv.
[555] Paul Hyams, 'The Origins of a Peasant Land Market in England', *EcHR*, 23 (1970), p. 23.

Jane Whittle has more recently provided a concise and useful definition of peasants as 'smallscale agricultural producers who are in possession of land which is farmed primarily with family labour and with the main aim of providing the family directly with a means of subsistence'.[556] This definition covers many of the key developments, although Whittle has perhaps placed too much emphasis on the divide between market-orientation and subsistence farming as being the crucial defining feature. For example, in her article about the family-land bond, she refused to associate such debates with the presence of peasants because in her 'view that argument rests on whether the rural economy was predominantly subsistence-oriented in this period'.[557] Frank Ellis has shown the dangers of placing too much importance on the relative market-orientation of peasants arguing that 'its significance should not be overstated in the context of the many other factors which enter the definition of peasants. Many farm households worldwide are highly specialised commodity producers of cotton, sugarcane, bananas, coffee, tea, and so on, but they may still qualify as peasants according to the other criteria we have discussed.'[558] Similarly, there are examples of medieval peasants displaying such micro-specialisation, such as selling all their wheat on the market and buying back an inferior and subsequently cheaper grain for consumption; however, there can be little doubt that they were still peasants. Likewise there are examples of moderate-sized commercial farms which consumed a high proportion of their own produce in the sixteenth century: oats were used as a fodder crop for the farm animals; barley was paid in kind to the harvest workers; and much of the animal produce was consumed by the household itself. Indeed, Paul Warde found that 'not all large farms were commercial, and even though a high proportion of the larger producers sold crops, this still amounted to a relatively small

[556] Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, p. 11.
[557] Jane Whittle, 'Individualism and the Family-Land Bond: A Reassessment of Land Transfer Patterns Among the English Peasantry, c.1270-1580', *P&P*, 160 (1998), p. 27.
[558] Frank Ellis, *Peasant Economics: Farm Households and Agrarian Development* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 9.

proportion of even their net harvest' in sixteenth-century Germany.[559] Instead, Ellis placed much more emphasis on the partial engagement of peasants with markets, but with particular emphasis on the imperfection of those markets. His definition is that 'peasants are farm households, with access to their means of livelihood in land, utilising mainly family labour in farm production, always located in a larger economic system, but fundamentally characterised by partial engagement in markets which tend to function with a high degree of imperfection.'[560] This is perhaps the most useful definition of peasant society because it allows for a full exploration of the various facets of the medieval peasantry including their market-orientation and the nature of their workforce.

The idea of a peasantry has, moreover, long provoked questions between economic and cultural factors, as for example, whether their relative market-orientation represented oppressive seigniorial extractions or a unique peasant mentality. Eric Wolf's description that a 'peasant runs a household, not a business concern', succinctly represents these distinctions suggesting not only a quantitative difference between commercial farmers and peasantries but also a qualitative one.[561] French and Hoyle have taken this further to emphasise that cultural change was a key process in the decline of the English peasantry in their work on Earls Colne, and bears quoting in full:

> 'We suggest that it was not only economic factors which forced small farmers out of farming, and drove the consolidation of their holdings, but that *the change from a peasant to a non-peasant mindset was a crucial element in the dissolution of the peasantry as a social group*. Whilst the medieval peasant was a petty entrepreneur, who looked for market opportunities and was no stranger to selling his produce, he operated on a small scale when compared with the eighteenth-century farmer. The former saw any income as advantageous where the latter lived in a world in which every activity had a cost.'[562]

[559] Paul Warde, 'Subsistence and Sales: The Peasant Economy of Wurttemberg in the Early Sixteenth Century', *EcHR*, 59 (2006), p. 313.
[560] Ellis, 'Peasant Economics', p. 12.
[561] Eric Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966), p. 2.
[562] French and Hoyle, *Earls Colne*, p. 38.

They are thus proposing a qualitative difference in the mentalities of more market-oriented commercial farmers and their peasant equivalents. Despite this appearing to be a distinctly different approach there are remarkable similarities to more traditional definitions; not least the fact that peasants 'operated on a *small* scale' compared to eighteenth-century farmers which suggests that the quantitative difference may have actually been as important as any qualitative change in outlook. Indeed, it is likely that the increasing scale of production was what led to any change in mindset rather than peasants suddenly deciding to become more than a 'petty entrepreneur': their increasing market-orientation making them more profit-maximising in order to maintain their living standards and social position in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Furthermore, Hoyle and French have perhaps overly-stereotyped medieval peasants here: they may well have operated on a small scale, but given the margin of subsistence for many peasants it is unclear that they were not painfully aware that 'every activity had a cost'. Although there were often institutional restrictions on their activities, such as what grain to sow in which field, they would have to make crucial decisions about whether to spend their time extensively weeding their own field or to work as hired labour on someone else's lands: decisions which could quite literally mean the difference between life and death. Whether they thought of this in terms of an economic 'cost' is unlikely, but the work of Dyer, Britnell, Dodds and Stone has shown that peasants were market-aware if not always market-oriented, and they clearly made decisions accordingly.[563] The following chapters further explore how far there was a change in mentality between medieval peasants and their early-modern counterparts. How far did their economic outlook change across these centuries or were the socio-economic challenges facing them more responsible for the transformations rural society underwent in this period?

[563] Stone, *Decision-Making*, pp. 3-44; Chris Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain, 850-1520* (London, 2002), pp. 155-86; Richard Britnell, *Britain and Ireland, 1050-1530: Economy and Society* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 158-222; Dodds, *Peasants and Production*, pp. 132-61.

Chapter 8

The Rise of the Church Leaseholder

The Rise of the Church Leaseholder

The north-east of England was characterised not only by a precocious development of industry, but also by a high concentration of ecclesiastical landownership: the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral was one of the most substantial landowners in the Palatinate of Durham, second only to the bishop himself, and so the fortunes of their tenants was of crucial importance to rural society in the region. David Marcombe introduced his article on the decline of these church leaseholders in the nineteenth century thus:

> 'In most English shires the Church was a very substantial landowner, and the tenants who leased its lands came to form an *elite group* in county society characterised by an *economic independence and a degree of social aspiration* not common to the English tenantry at large; the fact that this important social and economic group has been almost wholly neglected by historians is all the more difficult to understand when we remember that in the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century the position of the church leaseholder provoked heated debate in and out of Parliament.'[564]

Church leaseholders have often been overlooked in rural studies which have focused upon the more detailed data which can be extracted from manorial courts, and so many of the debates surrounding the peasantry have focused primarily upon the plight of copyholders in the century after the Dissolution. The debate surrounding the family-land bond which has raged since the 1990s in *Past and Present* between MacFarlane, Sreenivasan, Hoyle, French and Whittle has been based upon the inheritability of copyhold land; the equivalent study for leasehold land having hardly been attempted because of the supposed commercial nature of

[564] Marcombe, 'Church Leaseholders', p. 255.

their tenure. Demesne lessees of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have often been studied because of their role in the retreat from direct-demesne farming by landlords, and yet comparative studies of their successors are still relatively rare.[565] This is all the more surprising given the importance that most historians have placed upon leaseholders as a dynamic group in rural society during the sixteenth century.

The current chapter explores many of these themes on the estates of the monks of Durham Priory and the newly-founded Dean and Chapter, investigating whether the general patterns and trends for copyhold land were similar on these consolidated ecclesiastical leaseholds. Was there a strong family-land bond on the estates of Durham Cathedral across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries despite the numerous obstacles to such long-term inheritance and did this represent the survival of a 'peasant mindset'? Were families who held land continuously for generations able to accumulate capital and form a rural elite as Marcombe advocated for their successors? Was there a retreat from the market during the fifteenth-century recession as the pincer movement of low prices and high wages provided few incentives to create large marketable surpluses? By comparison, were their sixteenth-century successors engaging in commercial agriculture, and how far were they able to benefit from the rapid inflation in agricultural prices over the course of the sixteenth century? In essence, was capital formation now possible in rural society in a manner not achievable before and did this emerge because of a cultural change away from a peasant mentality or as a result of the combination of demographic changes, removal of institutional constraints and increasing market opportunities?

In his study of the structure of Durham Priory's estates, Richard Lomas estimated that before the Black Death, the estates of the Priory contained some '825 holdings, which were

[565] F. R. H. Du Boulay, 'Who were Farming the English Demesnes at the End of the Middle Ages?', *EcHR*, 17 (1965), pp. 443-455.

in the hands of approximately 740 tenants'.[566] He estimated that of these tenements over 100 were freeholds, of originally between 30 and 60 acres, with a further 148 bondlands whose tenants owed no money rent but rendered labour services only and which could range in size between 18 and 48 acres although they were predominantly 30 acres, whilst there were also 61 husbandlands who owed money rent rather than labour services. Below this was a group of smallholders of perhaps half a virgate, with 12 acres being 'by far the most common', whilst most townships also contained a group of cottages with a small amount of land attached to them, some of which survived as cottage-holdings throughout this period, although they often became a place of retirement for elderly family members or widows.[567] During the population growth of the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries many of these holdings fragmented so that the structure of landholding in some townships was radically altered. For example, at West Rainton in the early-thirteenth century there had been some seven bondlands and six husbandlands, all consisting of 32 acres, but after a century of population growth and inheritance they had fragmented into thirty-three holdings ranging from half an acre to 48 acres, with in Lomas's words, 'very few of like size and with almost all including fractions of an acre'.[568]

The monks of Durham Priory reorganised their estates across the fifteenth century so that 'the structure of the estate was completely altered…although new arrangements were not everywhere complete in detail until the sixteenth century'.[569] The most obvious change was that wrought by the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of disease which reduced the number of tenants from 740 to 330 by 1495, with a similarly drastic decline in the number of holdings from 825 to no more than 375. Naturally this led to the engrossment of the surviving holdings, which will be explored in more detail with reference to Harton and Cowpen Bewley

[566] Lomas, 'Developments in Land Tenure', p. 28.
[567] Ibid., p. 32; See chapter 2 above.
[568] Ibid., p. 33.
[569] Ibid., p. 35.

below, but there was another equally significant change which was wrought in this period: the conversion of these holdings to leasehold tenure. Around 1360, 'with very few exceptions, tenants were granted their holdings for life', but by the mid-fifteenth century this form of tenancy had 'given way completely to the short lease'.[570] It was this conversion to leasehold tenure which provided the Dean and Chapter with such headaches in the mid-sixteenth century, but as will be seen below it caused surprisingly little discontinuity in landholding.[571] The conversion to leasehold was probably more significant because it made the engrossed holdings achieved after the Black Death the standard holding on their estates, and thus when population grew in the sixteenth century their holdings did not fragment in the same way they had during the thirteenth century.

The Family-Land Bond on the Dean and Chapter's Estates

Historians such as Alan MacFarlane have advocated that one of the most fundamental characteristics of peasant societies is a strong tradition of inheriting the family's holding: if the family-land bond was weak, for example because of sales outside of the family, then England did not possess a peasantry in MacFarlane's view because land was familial in the peasant societies of Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century.[572] He showed, through the use of land transfers at Earls Colne, that transactions outside of the family were more common than familial inheritance, and concluded that England was not only no longer a peasant society, but had in fact never possessed a peasantry in its truest sense.[573] However, MacFarlane's arguments have been criticised on multiple levels, not only in his use of the specific data at Earls Colne, but also in the importance he placed in the family-land bond to

[570] Ibid., p. 37.
[571] See chapter 3 above.
[572] MacFarlane, *English Individualism*, pp. 32-3.
[573] Ibid., pp. 32-3.

the peasantry. Sreenivasan, in a repeat study of landholding at Earls Colne, found MacFarlane's 'depiction of the weakness of the land-family bond [to be] exaggerated', whilst French and Hoyle have gone so far as to suggest that 'the transformation in the land market which MacFarlane commented upon may be no more than a figment of his statistics'.[574] Sreenivasan in particular argued that MacFarlane's definition of 'family' was too narrow and that relationships outside the strictly nuclear family still held strong bonds, thus including transmission from uncle to nephew or to relatively distant in-laws, as transmissions within the family.[575] Hoyle contended this aspect of Sreenivasan's article and also his understanding of common law, but, although they disagreed with each other over the exact interpretation of the Earls Colne data, both Hoyle and Sreenivasan agree that MacFarlane overstated the degree to which tenements passed outside of family groups.[576] Hoyle especially found that certain periods had a much lower rate of transactions outside of the family, for example in the 1550s and 1570s, when the amount of extra-familial transactions fell to 30 per cent of the familial and extra-familial transactions combined as compared to the mean annual average of around two-thirds.[577] During a period of inflation, population increase and land shortage in the mid-sixteenth century families appear to be retaining holdings longer.

There have been other historians writing both before and after MacFarlane who have similarly seen the family-land bond as a crucial concept for peasant societies, not only because having access to land 'must have been of supreme importance' to peasants, as Rosamond Faith noted, but it has also been argued that it represented a peasant mentality.[578] Faith, for example, went on to argue that peasants 'placed great importance on the concept of "keeping the name on the land"': it was not enough to have access to land, it was also

[574] Sreenivasan, 'Land-Family Bond', p. 6; French and Hoyle, 'English Individualism', p. 603.
[575] Sreenivasan, 'Land-Family Bond', p. 14.
[576] Richard Hoyle, 'The Land-Family Bond in England', *P&P*, 146 (1995), pp. 151-73; G. Sreenivasan, 'The Land-Family Bond in England: Reply', *P&P*, 146 (1995), pp. 174-87.
[577] French and Hoyle, 'English Individualism', pp. 602-3.
[578] Rosamond Faith, 'Peasant Families and Inheritance Customs in Medieval England', *AgHR*, 14 (1966), p. 77.

crucially important that this land be the family holding.[579] She found that on three manors of the Battle Abbey estates sixty out of the first sixty nine permanent land transfers recorded were family transactions before the Black Death.[580] She went on to show that the family-land bond was 'in practice abandoned' during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as 'peasants still apparently want to pass on land to their children, but it no longer matters that it should be traditionally "family land"'.[581] Faith recognised that the underlying demographic changes of this period were responsible for such radical change, with peasants assiduously holding onto the family land during a period of relative scarcity in the thirteenth century, and then freely buying and selling their land when there were increased opportunities after the Black Death. Does this presuppose that agricultural tenants in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had abandoned their peasant mentalities and were now acting economically rationally? Frank Ellis has similarly imbued the family-land bond with a specific mentality unique to peasants, emphasising its importance as 'more than just another factor of production which has its price: it is the long term security of the family against the hazards of life, and it is part of the social status of the family within the village or community'.[582] There have similarly been studies which have emphasised the break in the family-land bond across the early modern period. In their study of Terling in Essex Keith Wrightson and David Levine, for example, found that not one holding in their sample remained 'in the name' in the sense of passing by inheritance in the male line between 1600 and 1700.[583]

From the above discussion it becomes apparent that the family-land bond was strongest when land was scarce and relatively weak when land was abundant. However, as Whittle has questioned, if this bond were so important to peasants why were they so eager to

[579] Ibid., p. 86.
[580] Ibid., p. 88.
[581] Ibid., p. 86-7.
[582] Ellis, *Peasant Economics,* p. 8.
[583] David Levine and Keith Wrightson, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700* (Oxford, 1995), p. 30.

abandon their land during the increased opportunities of the fifteenth century?[584] If it was to rid themselves of any derogatory status attached to serfdom, could they not have sought commutation of their status rather than abandoning the family land? Impersonal factors, such as institutional restrictions and socio-economic trends, perhaps better explain the changes in the family-land bond than any latent 'aspirations [of] keeping the name on the land'.[585] As Whittle went on to question: why should the retention of a specific holding be seen as a defining feature of the peasantry at all?[586] After all this was not a phenomenon unique to peasant society, with most gentry families clearly holding an emotional attachment to specific land, retaining the family manor for generations. Indeed, this sentimental attachment may well have been even stronger for members of the gentry, many of whom derived their name from the manor they held, whilst its possession was uniquely tied up in their economic, social and political status in society.[587] Did a son who purchased a holding during his father's lifetime in the fifteenth century suddenly shed his peasant ancestry? The continuity of surnames on certain holdings does not necessarily represent a peasant mentality, but this continuity of ownership did have important consequences for the dynamics of village life, social memory, and for the potential formation of agrarian capitalism. The weakening of the family-land bond was especially important because it went hand-in-hand with an increasing commercialisation of land, creating opportunities for engrossment but also potential dangers for families who were not so fortunate. It was these core dynastic families who had survived throughout the fifteenth century who became defenders of custom from the mid-sixteenth century as landlords increasingly sought to combat inflation by increasing entry fines or rents, much akin to the tenant-right dispute on the Dean and Chapter's estate.[588] Was there a strong

[584] Whittle, 'Individualism and Family-Land Bond', pp. 60-1.
[585] Faith, 'Peasant Families', p. 92.
[586] Whittle, 'Individualism and Family-Land Bond', pp. 60-1.
[587] A. T. Brown, 'The Families Behind the Worm Tales: the Conyers and Lambtons, 1350-1640', *Cleveland History*, 100 (2011), pp. 99-110.
[588] See chapter 3 above.

continuity of family-ownership upon the estates of the Dean and Chapter of Durham and were these families able to capitalise from the rising agricultural prices of the sixteenth century, coming to form a rural elite characterised by 'economic independence' and 'social aspiration'?

Peter Larson has recently suggested that the 'priory's conversion to leasehold would cost tenants in the long run by eliminating heritable right'.[589] It is far from clear, however, that the tenurial changes of the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries did in fact destroy the family-land bond upon the Priory's estate. Table 25, for example, shows the survival of surnames on the Dean and Chapter's estate from the fifteenth to the early-seventeenth century, with 213 individual family names in 1495/6, of which thirty-six were still surviving in the 1620s, some seventeen per cent.[590] This represents the number of family names present on the main agricultural holdings of the Dean and Chapter's estate rather than either the number of tenants in total or the number of holdings. For instance, at Harton multiple holdings were leased by the Newtons, and likewise the Laws and Cliftons held multiple leases at Cowpen Bewley which would only be counted once. This table also shows the uneven distribution of the Dean and Chapter's tenants, with a group of townships in the south-east of Durham which had significantly larger populations centred around Billingham, Wolviston, Newton Bewley and Cowpen Bewley. The townships which had the highest levels of turnover often did so because outsiders purchased substantial portions of the village, such as at North Pittington where the wealthy merchant Henry Anderson acquired leases of two-fifths of the land or at Over Heworth where Thomas Whitehead, a relative of Dean Whitehead, acquired over half of the leases. However, this was relatively rare and most

[589] Larson, 'Peasant Opportunities', p. 148.
[590] R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989); W. H. D. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1889), appendix; DCD/E/BA: List of Tenants, With Rents and Valuations, Temp ~ Dean Hunt (1620-38).

townships contained a core group of families in the early-seventeenth century which had been there since at least the fifteenth century and some from the late-fourteenth century. For example, Chilton was held in two halves by the Maltby and Kay families from the end of the fifteenth century until the early-seventeenth century, as Newton Ketton was by the Cotesforth and Stelling families. The Cliftons, Lawes and Marshalls remained on their farm holdings at Cowpen Bewley throughout this period, as did the Willeys, Whites and Heighingtons at East Merrington and the Robinsons and Laxes at West Merrington. These represent the bare minimum of actual inheritances, showing only those holdings which descended in the primary male line, keeping, as it were, 'the name on the land'. This is surprising not because it represents the survival of a latent peasant mentality, but because these tenants were leaseholders during some of the largest upheavals in rural society in this period: the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536; the Dissolution of the Cathedral which was their landlord just a few years later; the Rising of the North in 1569 in which many of these tenants participated; and the tenant-right dispute between the Dean and Chapter and their tenants in the 1570s. It is this last which may go some way towards explaining why there was such a strong inheritance of holdings because, although the Council of the North rejected their claims of tenant-right, a kind of customary leasehold developed on the Dean and Chapter's estates.[591]

[591] See section 1.

Table 25: The Survival of Family Surnames on the Dean and Chapter's Estates from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century

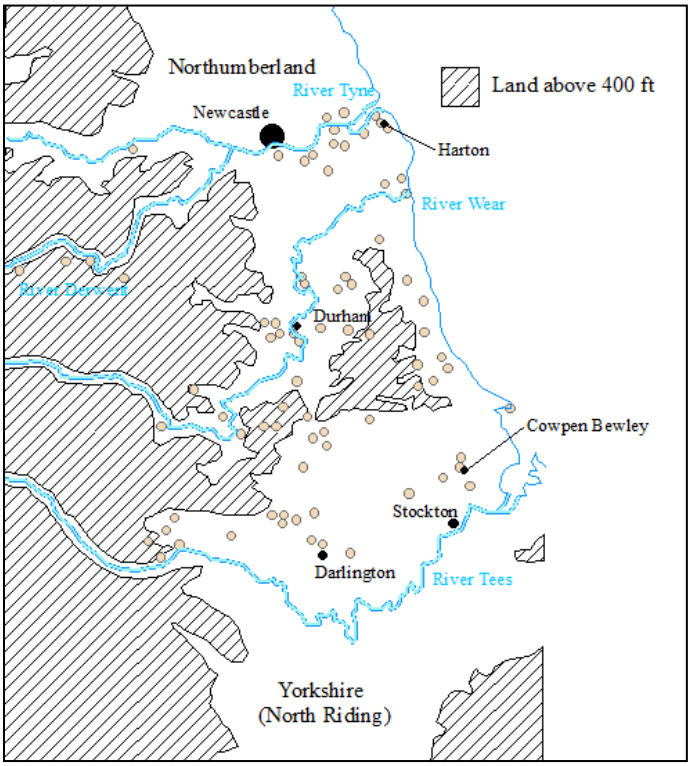
Dean and Chapter Townships	No. of surnames in 1495/6	No. of these still there in 1539/40	No. of these still there in 1580	No. of these still there in 1620s	Percentage Survival
Wallsend	7	2	2	2	29%
Over Heworth	11	0	0	0	0%
Nether Heworth	4	2	1	1	25%
Monkton	2	2	2	0	0%
Hedworth	6	2	1	0	0%
Harton	8	4	4	4	50%
Westoe	7	3	1	0	0%
Southwick	5	2	1	1	20%
Fulwell	3	1	0	0	0%
Wearmouth	4	1	0	0	0%
Dalton	3	0	0	0	0%
East Rainton	8	2	2	1	13%
West Rainton	8	2	2	1	13%
Moorsley	3	1	0	0	0%
North Pittington	6	2	1	1	17%
Cowpen Bewley	12	5	3	3	25%
Wolviston	18	9	3	3	17%
Newton Bewley	10	4	1	1	10%
Billingham	24	8	6	3	13%
Aycliffe	28	11	6	4	14%
Feryhill	11	5	5	2	18%
East Merrington	13	5	4	4	31%
Mid Merrington	4	2	2	1	25%
West Merrington	2	2	2	1	50%
Burdon	2	1	0	0	0%
Chilton	2	2	2	2	100%
Newton Ketton	2	2	2	1	50%
TOTAL	**213**	**82**	**53**	**36**	**17%**

Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989); W. H. D. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1889), appendix. DCD/E/BA: List of Tenants, With Rents and Valuations, Temp ~ Dean Hunt (1620-38).

The following case studies of Harton and Cowpen Bewley explore the survival of these core dynastic families and whether or not their survival for multiple generations enabled the rise of a rural elite. These two townships were chosen because of their geographical diversity, with Harton on the south banks of the Tyne and Cowpen Bewley amidst the more densely-populated townships in the fertile south-east of Durham. Both townships were returned to the newly-formed Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral, and

both saw the survival of a core group of families from at least the late-fifteenth to the early-seventeenth centuries.

Map 3: The Dean and Chapter's Estates: Harton and Cowpen Bewley



Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989)

Harton township was an appendage of Jarrow and had been one of the Priory's original possessions, containing no demesne land or freeholdings, but comprising of twenty-one bondlands of 48 acres.[592] The bursar's rent-books provide snapshots of the tenants of Harton from the late-fourteenth century onwards as shown in table 26.

[592] *Durham Priory Rentals*, p. 203.

Table 26: Durham Cathedral Tenants of Harton from the late-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century

Bursar's Rent Book, 1396/7			Bursar's Rent Book, 1495/6		Elizabethan Survey, 1580			Survey ~ Dean Hunt, c. 1620-38	
Tenants	**Holdings**	**Rent**	**Tenants**	**Rent**	**Tenants**	**Rent**	**Fine**	**Tenants**	**Rent**
Thomas Neuton	2 bondlands	56s 8d	William Newton	54s 4d	Thomas Newton	54s 7d	£20	Thomas Newton	54s 7d
John Neuton	2 bondlands	56s 8d	Richard Newton	54s 4d	Richard Newton	54s 7d	£20 (lot)	Widow Newton	54s 7d
William Taillour	2 bondlands	53s 8d	Robert Taillyour	54s 4d	Robert Taylor	54s 7d	Unknown	Edward Taylor	54s 7d
William Page junior	3 bondlands	77s	John Person	54s 4d	Thomas Pearson	54s 7d	£14 10s	Thomas Pearson	54s 7d
William Page senior	2 bondlands	56s 8d	Jacob Atkinson	54s 4d	Andrew Atkinson	54s 7d	£11 3s 4d	William Atkinson	54s 7d
Ralph Kitchin	2 bondlands	50s	Thomas Grayden	54s 4d	Thomas Kitchin	54s 7d	£8 3s 9d	Rowland Sotheron	54s 7d
Robert son of William	2 bondlands	48s	Richard Betson	54s 4d	Thomas Hutchinson	54s 7d	£10	George Sheffield	54s 7d
John son of William	3 bondlands	72s 6d	William Bertram	54s 4d	Vidua Brompton	54s 7d	£8 3s 9d	Thomas Brompton	54s 7d
John son of Robert	3 bondlands	75s	Robert Alanson	54s 4d	Robert Chamber	54s 7d	£20 (lot)	John Smart	54s 7d
William Taillour	1 toft and 16 acres	9s 8d	John Newton	54s 4d	Vidua Wilkinson	54s 7d	£20 (lot)	John Smart	54s 7d
John son of William	1 cottage with garden	10d							
Henry Smith	1 cottage with forge	3d							
John Smith	1 cottage	6d							
Total	**21 bondlands**	**£27 12s 11d**		**£27 3s 4d**		**£27 5s 10d**	**£132 10d**		**£27 5s 10d**

Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989); W. H. D. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1889), appendix. DCD/E/BA: List of Tenants, With Rents and Valuations, Temp ~ Dean Hunt (1620-38).

It is clear that by the late-fourteenth century the original holdings were still intact but they had been accumulated amongst the remaining tenants so that each person held at least two bondlands. Henry Smith, presumably the village blacksmith, held a cottage with a forge, and several other cottagers still existed, but the leading families were as follows: William Page junior with three bondlands, William Page senior two bondlands, Ralph Kitchin two bondlands, Thomas Newton two bondlands, John Newton two bondlands, William Taillour two bondlands and a toft, John son of William three bondlands, Robert fillio William two bondlands, and John son of Robert three bondlands.[593] Thus by the end of the fourteenth century, the remaining families had engrossed their neighbours' holdings, so that each remaining tenant held between 96 and 144 acres of land, and showing few signs of stratification. This was before the monks implemented any kind of uniform process of syndication or a top-down process of reorganisation, perhaps suggesting that this was the tenants' preferred distribution of land.

By the rent-book of 1495, these engrossed holdings had become officially sanctioned by the monks, and thus the entire township was leased out to the remaining tenants as a syndicate with each tenant holding a tenth portion of Harton. If there were initially twenty-one bondlands of 48 acres, this represents a total acreage of approximately 1,000 acres, and so each holding was just over 100 acres, for which tenants owed 54s 4d rent per annum. It is important to note that these tenants were no longer bond tenants but, with the syndication of Harton, had become leaseholders: this engrossment and change of tenure was not particularly significant in the fifteenth century, but would become increasingly important to their descendants in the sixteenth century.[594] Although it is unclear how far this was at the behest of their tenants, it was this official recognition of these enlarged holdings by the monks which

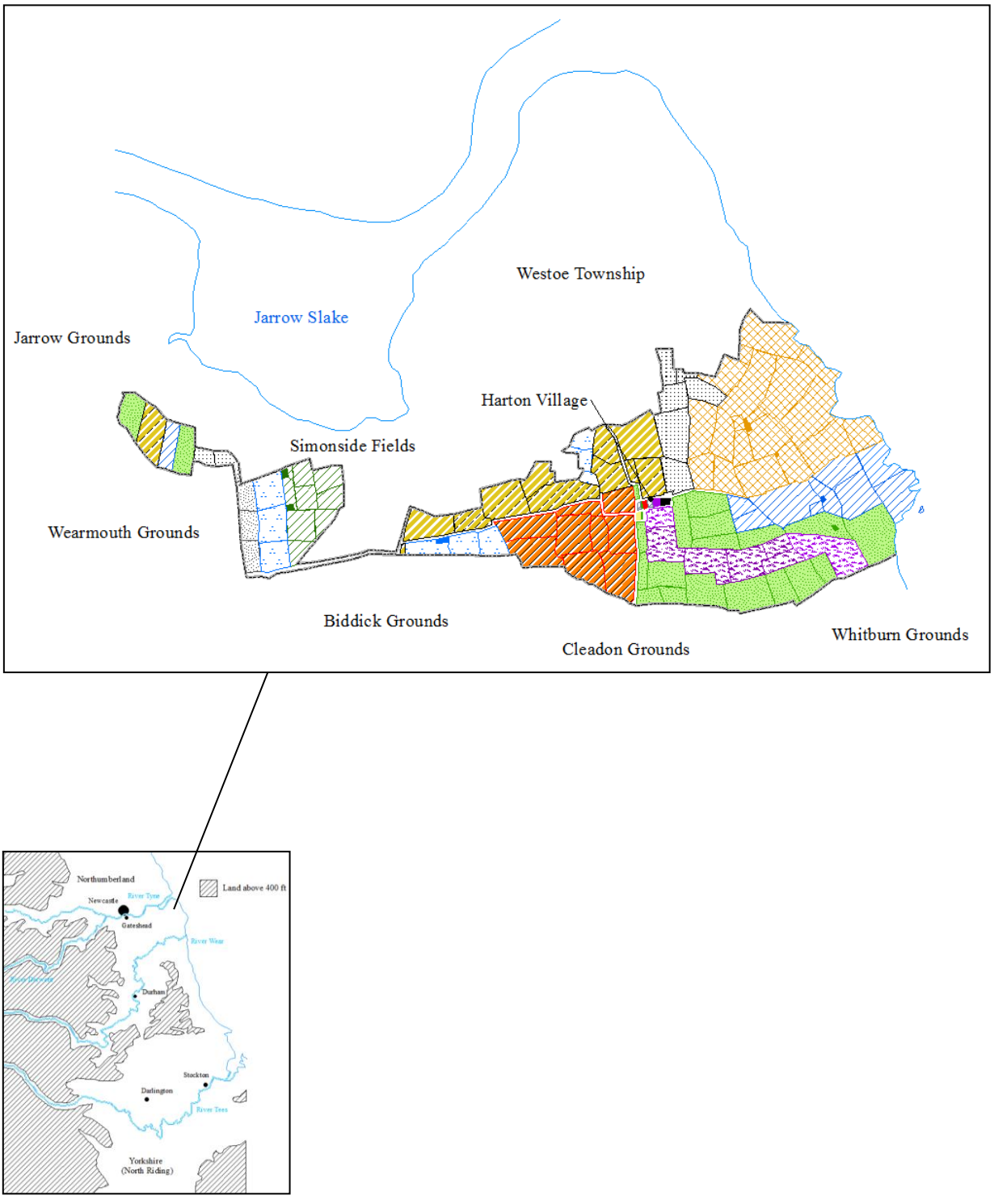
[593] Ibid., p. 79.
[594] Ibid., pp. 142-3, 203.

was significant, for if the holdings remained as they were in the 1396/7 rent-book, then tenants would have still had the option of fragmenting their holdings, but this was less likely after the syndication of their lands.

The Newton and Taillour families both survived the fifteenth-century recession, but the Kitchins, Pages and numerous other families had disappeared. However, the Kitchins reappear in the 1539 rent book and again in the Elizabethan survey of 1580, suggesting that this disappearance was only temporary, perhaps because of a minority at the time of the 1495 rent book.[595] The tenants at Harton had also acquired pasture rights in the nearly township of Simonside, which similarly belonged to Durham Priory. Originally at Simonside there were nine husbandlands of thirty acres, nine cottages of six acres, and nine cotterels, three of which were three acres and six of half that size.[596] Simonside had become depopulated across the course of the fifteenth century and from 1489 onwards was leased as enclosed pasture to the Priory's tenants from the surrounding townships of Harton, Southwick, Fulwell, Wearmouth, Westoe, Monkton and Hedworth.[597] This was presumably an example of depopulation and enclosure which was undertaken by negotiation between landlord and tenants during the relative land-abundance of the fifteenth century.[598] Map 4 shows these holdings at Harton in the eighteenth century. Although two holdings had been accumulated and two others had been fragmented, there had been surprisingly little change in the overall distribution of land in the township since the fifteenth century, showing the enclosed fields at Simonside to the west of the village belonging to each of the main Harton holdings.

[595] DCM Bursar's Book M; *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 225-6.
[596] *Durham Priory Rentals*, p. 203.
[597] DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15.
[598] Ian Blanchard, 'Population Change, Enclosure, and the Early Tudor Economy', *EcHR*, 23 (1970), pp. 427-45.

Map 4: Harton Township Survey Map, 1768



Source: DCD/E/AA/1-2: Dean and Chapter Survey of Westoe and Harton, 1768

An Elizabethan survey of 1580 and a survey taken in the early-seventeenth century, both included in table 26 above, show the long-term survival of many of these families into the early-modern period. The Newtons, Taillours, and Kitchins survived, all descended from the Priory's bond tenants of the fourteenth century, whilst the Atkinsons and Pearsons still held land from the fifteenth century. The importance of entry fines is also made abundantly clear by this survey, in which Harton has an annual rental value of £27 5s 10d, but entry fines forming a total of £132 10d.[599] Of course these entry fines were only taken once every 21 years (or a third taken every seven-year renewal) and so the fine was hardly extortionately high, especially given the size of these holdings and the accompanying pasture rights.[600]

Despite the Henrician Statutes of the Cathedral explicitly stating that these 21-years leases were not to be inherited, and many of the disputes between the Dean and Chapter and their tenants up to the 1570s arising because of this issue, it is clear that there was nothing hindering sons from inheriting the family holding.[601] Indeed, it is quite surprising to see such continuity of surnames on certain holdings despite the fact that their tenure was clearly leasehold, supposedly the most commercially-vulnerable type of tenure. It is perhaps all the more surprising given the fact that many of these tenants, or their close relatives, were involved in the Rising of the North in 1569, with the individuals in table 27 named as receiving pardons at Harton. Given the difficulties the Dean and Chapter were experiencing with their tenantry in these decades this might have provided an ideal reason for eviction, but would undoubtedly have caused widespread discontent in a region which had proven so volatile in the previous thirty years. The status quo was, therefore, to be maintained.

[599] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 225-6.
[600] See chapter 3 above.
[601] *Statutes of the Cathedral Church of Durham*, pp. 95-7.

Table 27: Pardons received by participants in the Rising of the North from Harton in 1569

Harton Pardons	
Thomas Pereson	Yeoman
Thomas Hutcheson	Yeoman
Andrew Atkinson	Yeoman
Christopher Newton	Yeoman
Richard Pereson	Yeoman
John Chamber	Yeoman
John Carr the younger	Yeoman

Source: *Calendar of Patent Rolls Elizabeth, v, 1569-72*, pp. 81-114

The inheritability of these leases continued into the seventeenth century with the following holdings being renewed by their families.[602]

Table 28: A reconstruction of the lease renewals of the primary holdings at Harton, c.1540-c.1640

Lease Renewals, 1540-1640
Thomas Newton (1566, 1585, 1594, 1610, 1628)
Richard Newton (1585, 1595, 1627)
Thomas and William Pearson (1560), Thomas Pearson (1578), William Pearson (1595, 1611)
Richard Pearson (1573, 1593), Thomas Pearson (1611, 1627)
Robert Taylor (1560, 1575), Robert and Edward Taylor (1593), Edward Taylor (1610), Robert Taylor (1627)
William Atkinson (1591), James Atkinson (1601)
John Chamber (1588), Robert Chamber (1597, 1615)
Thomas Hutchinson (1587, 1607)

Source: DCD, Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1640.

Presumably the widows of Brompton and Wilkinson were either unable to hold on to their holdings or remarried and the transmission of their holdings followed under a different name, for the surnames do not reappear in the Dean and Chapter leases for Harton.

If all of the above surveys are put together, the strength of this inheritance pattern on nearly half of the holdings at Harton is beyond doubt. The Newtons and Taillours remained on their holdings from the late-fourteenth to the early-seventeenth centuries, whilst the

[602] DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15.

Kitchins, Pearsons and Atkinsons retained their holdings for over a century. These families remained on their land from bond tenants of the fourteenth century, accumulating holdings into the larger leases of the fifteenth century, and forming some of the Dean and Chapter's yeoman tenants of the early-seventeenth century.[603] This was not out of some emotional or irrational 'peasant mindset' which they attached to their holding, but a combination of their desire to remain tenants of Durham Cathedral and economic pressure as land became increasingly scarce during the sixteenth century. The leases of the Dean and Chapter show that most holdings were renewed at least once, and the majority were inherited across several generations. This only includes holdings which were transmitted 'in the name' of the male line, and so total inheritance, through female descent, was likely to be even greater with many widows being recorded as owning a holding in various surveys across these centuries. Similarly, the wills of these lessees show that one of their main preoccupations was with the inheritance of their leases, whilst the few times these leases appear in their inventories they are valued at between £40-£100; a not inconsiderable sum for a piece of land whose annual rent was only 54s 4d.[604] Far from representing a peasant mentality, the strength of this family-land bond is perhaps most significant in revealing a surprising degree of continuity in village life: despite the Dissolution of the Cathedral and wholesale changes in religious practices; despite the change of their tenure and the subsequent tenant-right dispute with their new protestant landlords; and despite the uprisings of the Pilgrimage of Grace and the Rising of the North in which many of these villagers participated, these core dynastic families continued to farm their holdings generation after generation.

One of the greatest problems facing the English peasantry in the thirteenth century was their inability to acquire enough capital in order to either re-invest in agriculture or to

[603] *Durham Priory Rentals*, pp. 79, 142-3; DCM Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15.
[604] DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3; DPRI/1/1617/N1/2.

noticeably increase their standard of living.[605] This was because a combination of seigniorial extractions, fragmented holdings, and the inherent unpredictability of medieval agriculture often meant that they could not produce a sufficiently large enough marketable surplus to achieve anything more than meeting their basic subsistence needs. Were the sixteenth-century descendants of these medieval peasants able to accumulate wealth over the course of the sixteenth century, using their enlarged holdings to engage in commercial agriculture and so profit from the rise in prices across this century? In essence, was capital formation now possible in rural society in a manner not achievable before and did this emerge because of a cultural change from a peasant mentality or as a result of demographic change, the removal of institutional constraints, and increasing market opportunities? [606] Did these families come to form a rural elite which was 'characterised by an economic independence and a degree of social aspiration not common to the English tenantry at large' as David Marcombe argued for their descendants?[607] In their probate inventories, William Pearson (d. 1616) and Thomas Hutcheson (d. 1609) were both described as yeomen, whilst James Atkinson (d. 1605) was described as a husbandman, with their moveable goods all being valued above £100, as follows:[608]

Table 29: Total Value of the Surviving Probate Inventories of Harton Tenants, 1540-1640

Testator	Date Proved	Total Value
John Chamber	d. 1596	£103 1s
James Atkinson	d. 1605	£164 3s 4d
Thomas Hutcheson	d. 1609	£129 13s 4d
William Pearson	d. 1616	£153 13s 4d
Thomas Newton	d. 1617	£189 15s 10d

Source: Durham Probate Inventories: DPRI/1/1596/C2/2; DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3; DPRI/1/1609/H12/2; DPRI/1/1616/P5/3; DPRI/1/1617/N1/2

[605] See introduction to section 3 for further discussion.
[606] For a methodological comment on the use of probate inventories for discussing wealth see the introduction to section 2 above.
[607] Marcombe, 'Church Leaseholders', p. 255.
[608] DPRI/1/1596/C2/2; DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3; DPRI/1/1609/H12/2; DPRI/1/1616/P5/3; DPRI/1/1617/N1/2.

Although much of the value of their inventories came, as would be expected, from livestock and agricultural goods, they also possessed modest household goods, with two of the oldest families, the Newtons and Pearsons, possessing the highest valued household goods, livestock and clothes. This could suggest that the longevity of these families in the township was creating an elite with a noticeably higher standard of living, but it must also be noted that these two inventories were proved over two decades after the first inventory and so could represent nothing more than the inflationary trends of the period.

Table 30: A Breakdown of the Types of Wealth in the Surviving Probate Inventories of Harton Tenants, 1540-1640

Testator	Date	Grain	Livestock	Household	Clothes	Lease	Debts Owed	Debts Owing
John Chamber	d. 1596	£42	£50	£7 11s	£2	-	6s 7d	-£9 13s
James Atkinson	d. 1605	£40 10s	£14	£6 10s	£2	£90	£1 19s	-£56 5s 5d
Thomas Hutcheson	d. 1609	£54 6s	£56	£7 3s	£6	-	£5 1s	-£29 15s
William Pearson	d. 1616	£44	£70	£33 13s	£6	-	-	-
Thomas Newton	d. 1617	£49 13s	£70 8s	£22 15s	£7	£40	-	-£12 16s

Source: Durham Probate Inventories: DPRI/1/1596/C2/2; DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3; DPRI/1/1609/H12/2; DPRI/1/1616/P5/3; DPRI/1/1617/N1/2

Were these leaseholders producing a large marketable surplus and thus benefiting from the increase in prices across the sixteenth century? Certainly their farm sizes suggest that they were, and their probate inventories reveal a large degree of mixed farming on their primary holdings supplemented by the additional pasture at Simonside fields. David Levine and Keith Wrightson have argued in their work on Whickham that the 'agriculture practiced on these lands was predominantly pastoral' especially in the highland areas but 'even in the intermediate foothills and the eastern lowland zone, where crops of oats, rye, barley, wheat and peas were grown, animal husbandry remained the mainstay of the rural economy'.[609] They concluded that 'livestock generally accounted for 70-80 per cent of the total valuation of farm goods' of copyholders on Whickham; a proportion which is true for William Pearson

[609] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 87.

and Thomas Newton, but there was a greater degree of parity between livestock and grain on the other farms.[610] For example, John Chamber (d. 1596) had oxen and a *stott* worth £26, cows worth £10, three *whies* and a *stirke* worth £3, a mare worth £3, nineteen ewes worth £4, eleven *hogges* worth £1 13s 4d, seven hens and two cocks worth £1 6s 6d and all the corn sown and not sown worth £40.[611] Certainly, the grain would be marketable, but much of the above livestock would have provided the family with a varied diet rather than enabling large-scale sales. There is a similar focus on arable produce in James Atkinson's inventory (d. 1605), with four oxen worth £3, four *stottes* worth £3 6s 6d, and two mares worth £7, but with six score thraves of wheat, and ten of bigge, with oats, peas and hay worth in total £36 13s 4d.[612] Likewise, Thomas Hutcheson (d. 1609), possessed six oxen worth £31, five cows, two *stottes*, and two calves worth £11 10s, two *whies* worth £2, 24 ewes and *hogges* worth £4 6s 6d, and six *twinters* worth £1, with a horse and mare worth £6, one cock and hens worth 3s, however, he too possessed wheat and oats sown in the ground worth £30, and corn in the garth valued at £20, and hay and oats worth £1.[613] Even the families who possessed the most substantial amounts of livestock still had considerable arable interests, as William Pearson (d. 1616) possessed oxen, a horse and two mares worth £40, a cow, two *whies*, three *stirks*, and two sows worth £20, forty sheep worth £10, and all the crops on the ground and hay valued at £40.[614] Lastly, Thomas Newton (d. 1617) possessed eight oxen worth £36, five cows and four *stirkes* worth £12 10s, thirty six sheep worth £9 10s, one cow worth £2 10s, one nag worth £1 10s, a horse and mare worth £7, three hens and two pigs worth £1 8s, and hay worth £2, but again possessed corn in the garth and sown worth £41.[615]

[610] A stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a whie was a heifer up to three years old ; a stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a wether hogge was a yearling-male sheep; a gimmer hogge was a ewe between first and second shearing; a twinter was a two-year old beast, usually a cow.
[611] DPRI/1/1596/C2/2.
[612] DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3.
[613] DPRI/1/1609/H12/2.
[614] DPRI/1/1616/P5/3.
[615] DPRI/1/1617/N1/2.

The numbers of livestock were not enough to suggest commercial pastoral farming on any large scale, with oxen often accounting for half the value of their livestock, clearly emphasising the importance of arable farming to these tenants. The other notable difference between these Harton tenants and those of Whickham was in the grain grown, with Levine and Wrightson finding that 'oats and rye occur in the largest quantities, with wheat coming a poor third', whereas these inventories show much greater quantities of wheat. It was James Atkinson who possessed six score thraves of wheat with lesser amounts of bigge, peas and oats, whilst the other common combination was of wheat and oats. Levine and Wrightson further demonstrated the 'secondary nature of arable farming in Whickham' by the fact that the 'value of corn is almost equalled on average by that of hay grown for fodder'.[616] The few times hay is individually mentioned in the inventories of Harton tenants it is rarely valued at more than a few pounds, showing not only the greater importance of arable farming at Harton but also the value of their additional pasture at Simonside fields. The overall impression created is not one in which animal husbandry was the mainstay of agriculture and is a far cry from other regions such as the midlands where Hoskins found that 'the average farmer's livestock was worth almost twice the value of his crops'.[617] The average farmer in the lowland regions of Durham generally possessed a plough team of oxen, several horses, under ten cows, and less than fifty sheep, with the usual cacophony of swine and poultry. This tended to be enough livestock to keep their lands well-fertilised, but was hardly sufficient for large-scale commercial farming; six or seven cows being in Hoskins' mind 'enough for the milk, butter and cheese that were made and mostly consumed on the farm'.[618] It is only in the probate inventories of much more substantial tenants that we tend to find pastoral farming on a significant scale, such as the Shadforths explored in chapter nine below whose grain was

[616] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 88.
[617] Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 159.
[618] Ibid., p. 159.

worth over £150 and whose livestock was valued at over £300, or members of the gentry whose additional land allowed for a greater exploitation of pastoral farming.

Did the economic activities of these tenants truly represent a cultural change from a 'peasant to a non-peasant mindset'? If we compare these agricultural activities with those found by Kosminsky for peasants in the thirteenth century it is clear that the scale of this agriculture had noticeably increased because of the enlarged holdings at Harton. Kosminsky found that up to 57 per cent of unfree holdings and up to 80 per cent of free holdings had less than eight acres of land in four East Midlands counties in 1279-80, whilst in Bedfordshire in 1297, 85 per cent of taxpayers had either one draught animal or none at all.[619] However, the north-east of England was never as densely populated as other regions of the country, and even before the Black Death holdings were generally much larger in the north-east, as for example at Harton where bondlands were typically forty-eight acres, much larger than the national average. Although the scale of this agriculture increased across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because of their enlarged holdings, there does not appear to have been any qualitative break in farming practices or mentality. It is doubtful, for example, whether a fourteenth-century peasant would have farmed these 100-acre holdings any differently than their sixteenth-century descendants.

The other main concentration of land owned by Durham Cathedral was focused on the heavily-populated townships in the fertile south-east of the Palatinate. Cowpen Bewley is broadly representative of these townships and shows that the above processes at work at Harton were not unique to the north-east of the Palatinate, with a similar gradual engrossment of holdings and the survival of certain families throughout, but it also reveals the continuation of smaller cottage-holdings, something seemingly absent at Harton. Cowpen Bewley was surrounded by a cluster of other townships held by Durham Cathedral in this period,

[619] Kosminsky, *Agrarian History*, p. 216; Hilton 'Rent and Capital Formation', p. 197.

including Billingham, Newton Bewley and Wolviston. At Cowpen Bewley there were originally sixteen bondlands of thirty acres. By the end of the fourteenth century, there was still a core group of bondlands, but with a diverse range of cottagers holding fragments of land.[620]

[620] *Durham Priory Rentals*, pp. 93-6.

Table 31: Durham Cathedral tenants of Cowpen Bewley from the late-fourteenth to the mid-seventeenth century

Bursar's Rent Book, 1396-7			Bursar's Rent Book, 1495-6		Elizabethan Survey, 1580			Survey ~ Dean Hunt, c. 1620-38	
Tenants	**Holdings**	**Rent**	**Tenant**	**Rent**	**Tenant**	**Rent**	**Fine**	**Tenant**	**Rent**
Bond tenants			Robert Clifton	62s 2d	Robert Clifton	£3 0s 2d	£15 (lot)	Robert Clifton	£3 0s 2d
W. Pulter junior	2 bondlands	(10s.). 20s.	William Clifton	59s 9d	Vidua Pickering	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	William Law	£3 0s 2d
William Arsom	2 bondlands	20s	William Lawe	26s 10d	William Marshall	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	George Clifton	£3 0s 2d
William Thorp	2 bondlands	20s	William Lawe junior	28s 2d	Robert Lawrence	£3 0s 2d	£16 (lot)	William Marshall	£3 0s 2d
William Schephird	2 bondlands	20s	Robert Lawe	10s 1d	William Lawe	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	John Lawrence	£3 0s 2d
John Pulter	2 bondlands	20s	Robert Shoroton	£4 17s	Nicholas Lawe	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	John Browne	£3 0s 2d
Richard Golding	2 bondlands	20s	Thomas Shoroton	58s 5d	George Davison	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	Robert Johnson	£3 0s 2d
Gilbert Johnson	2 bondlands	20s	John Stevenson	59s 5d	Marmaduke Grene	£3 0s 2d		Henry Webster	£3 0s 2d
Thomas Schorueton	2 bondlands	(7s) 20s	Thomas Cuke	21s 6d	Richard Whildon	£3 0s 2d	£20 (lot)	John Rawes	£3 0s 2d
William Thorp	1 bondland	7s	Edward Dawson	53s 8d	William Clifton	£3 0s 2d		Richard Davison	£3 0s 2d
Cottagers			William White	£4 15s	Marmaduke Grene	12s		John Browne	8s
John Wodroffe	1 cottage and 6 acres	(3s.). 5s 10d.	Thomas Marshall	29s 7d	John Burne	8s		Marmaduke Clifton	4s
Richard Pulter	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 10d	John Robinson	6s 8d	John Busby	8s		Christopher Wilson	4s
William Monc	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 10d	William Cleveland	6s 10d	9 cottages	30s 10d		John Browne	12s
Steuenson	1 cottage and 6 acres	6s 8d.	John Lawe	4s	Christopher Cotes	4s 4d		William Rawes	3s 4d
William Roger	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 10d	Thomas Marshall	9s				John Busby	8s
Thomas Murt	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 10d	Robert Shoroton	3s 4d				George Cooks	3s 4d
Agnete Postell	1 cottage and 1 acre	(2s.). 3s.	Thomas Shoroton sen.	5s 10d				George Clifton	2s
William Monc	1 cottage with garden	18d	John Shoroton senior	18d				John Meggison	3s 8d
The same	1 cottage with garden	12d	Rel. William Calvert	3s				John Winds	4s
William Pulter j.	1 toft 6 acres	4s 3d	John Baker	4s				John Rutligh	3s 4d
Robert Woodroff	1 cottage	15d. 12d.	John Shepehird	3s				George Clifton	3s 4d
Robert Bernard	1 cottage with garden	12d	William Hogeson	8s				John Atkinson	4s 4d
Gilbert Bois	2 cottages, 4 acres	3s 4d ob							
Gilbert Monc	1 cottage with croft	6d							
'Litilsteuen'	1 cottage with croft	18d. 12d.							
John Wodroffe	1 cottage	3d							
John Stephan	1 cottage	3d							

Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989); W. H. D. Longstaffe and J. Booth (eds.), *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis: Containing Extracts from the Halmote Court or Manor Rolls of the Prior and Convent of Durham, 1296-1384*, Surtees Society, 82 (1889), appendix. DCD/E/BA: List of Tenants, With Rents and Valuations, Temp ~ Dean Hunt (1620-38).

The major tenants, holding two bondlands each, were William Pulter junior, William Arsom, William Schephird, John Pulter, Richard Golding, Gilbert son of John, Thomas Schorueton, and William Thorp. However, there were many cottagers, even in the late-fourteenth century, who clearly held no large agricultural holdings here, except for the few acres which accompanied their cottage. The bursar's rent book of 1495 shows a higher turnover of family surnames than found for Harton above, but that the Stevenson and Shoroton surnames survived. A high number of these smaller rents persisted, clearly belonging to cottages with small amounts of land attached to them. It is likely that some of these cottagers were family members of those who held the larger bondlands, for example, in the 1390s Richard Pulter held a cottage whilst William and John Pulter held bondlands. The rent book of 1495/6 shows that these could be parents who gave over the family holding to sons and retired to a cottage with a small plot of land; for example, Robert Shoroton and Thomas Shoroton both held substantial holdings, but a John Shoroton senior and a Thomas Shoroton senior are amongst those with small rents, indicating a cottage holding.[621]

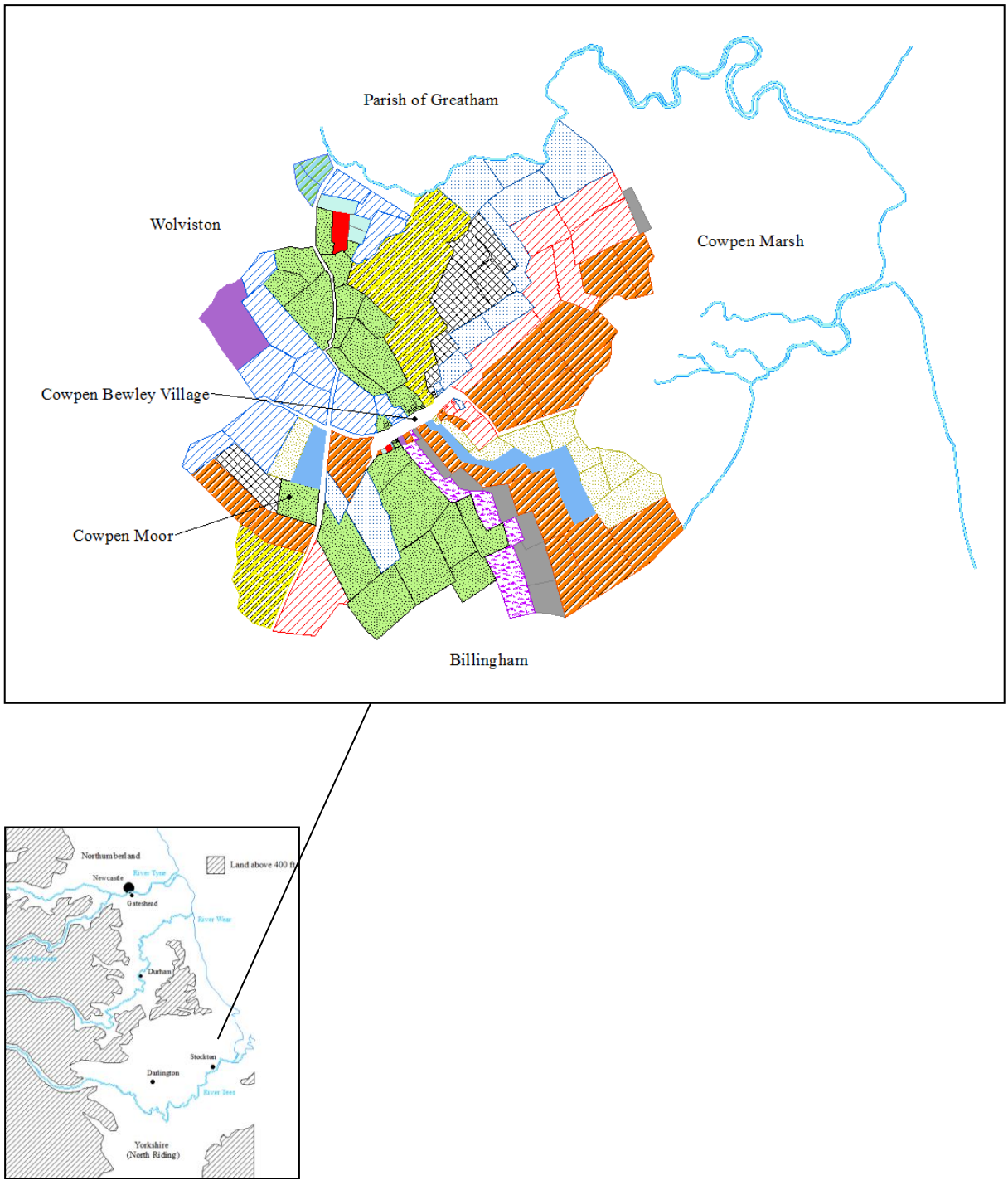
The Shoroton and Stevenson families were still substantial holders, but the Lawes, Cliftons and Whites had clearly replaced the other major families by the end of the fifteenth century. Cowpen Bewley underwent the process of syndication later than at Harton, but by 1524 these bondlands were converted into leaseholds so that ten tenants leased the majority of land in the township.[622] In 1424, ten messuages and seventy-six acres of freehold land were recovered at Cowpen Bewley, which if added to the original sixteen bondlands totalling 480 acres, the total acreage was somewhere in the region of 1,000 acres.[623] An eighteenth century survey of the township gives the total acreage at 1,648 acres, but by this period much

[621] Ibid., pp. 157-9.
[622] Ibid., p. 209.
[623] Ibid., p. 209.

of the moor had been enclosed, whilst each holding had considerable pasture rights upon Cowpen marsh to the east of the village, which together accounted for the extra 600 acres of land.[624] Thus if there were ten leasehold tenements, each would have approximately 100 acres with accompanying pasture rights upon the moor and marsh; a roughly comparable amount to their counterparts at Harton. The map below shows these holdings after enclosure of the moor to the west of the village, and also the considerable acreage of marshland to the east of the village, but once again showing that these holdings were largely intact in the eighteenth century.

[624] DCD/E/9/AA/1-2: Plan and Survey of Cowpen Bewley, 1774.

Map 5: Cowpen Bewley Township Survey Map, 1774



Source: DCD/E/9/AA/1-2: Dean and Chapter Survey of Cowpen Bewley, 1774

The bursar's rent book of 1539 shows that, unlike at Harton, there was still a proliferation of smaller rents, clearly representing these cottages which survived into the sixteenth century, perhaps because of the moor and marshland nearby.[625]

Table 32: Cowpen Bewley in the Bursar's Rent-Book of 1539/40

Tenants	Rent
Widow of Robert Clifton	60s 2d
John Clifton	60s 2d
John Lawe	60s 2d
Robert Lawe	60s 2d
Hugh Herrison	60s 2d
John Webster	60s 2d
William Sheroton	60s 2d
Robert Greyne	60s 2d
John Elstone	60s 2d
John Forster	60s 2d
Robert Lawe	12s
John Lawe	4s
Christopher Greynhorne	8s
Robert Doune	4s
John Crawforth	3s 4d
John Busby	8s
Widow of Coke	3s 8d
Margarita Tugall	2s
Thomas Maysone	3s 8d
John Wodrof, senior	4s
Thomas Peyrte	3s 4d
John Wodrof, junior	3s 4d
Robert Cawarde	4s 4d
The tenants	23s 6d

Source: DCM Bursar's Book M

The Sheratons still survived, but they were the last of the families from the fourteenth-century rent books, with the newer families of Clifton and Lawe becoming the dominant landholders in the township. By the time of the Elizabethan survey in 1580 this process was

[625] Bursar's Book M.

complete and the Shorotons had completely disappeared, leaving the Lawes and Cliftons as the leading leaseholders in the township.[626] Again there was a proliferation of cottages, which were unfortunately dismissed by the surveyor as '9 cottages in sundry occupations'. In the Elizabethan survey of 1580, nearly every holding was included in the Dean and Chapter's lottery system: was this because the tenants refused to accept leases, especially given that their lands were relatively late in being syndicated compared to Harton? Despite these controversies, the registers of lease renewals show that there was a remarkable continuity of holdings, with almost every holding being renewed at least once, even including several of the small cottages.

Table 33: Reconstruction of the lease renewals of the primary holdings at Cowpen Bewley, c.1540-c.1640

Lease Renewals, 1540-1640
Clifton, William (1572), Clifton, John (1586), Clifton, Robert (1591, 1593, 1612), Clifton, George (1613, 1622)
Pickering, Janet (1566, 1587), Pickering, John (1595), Pickering, Thomas (1622)
Marshall, William (1564), Marshall, Lawrence and William (1587), Marshall, Lawrence (1605), Marshall, William
Lawrence, Robert (1580, 1595), Lawrence, John (1610, 1627)
Lawe, William (1575), Lawe, John (1595)
Lawe, Nicholas (1575, 1595, 1613)
Dalton, Ralph (1549), Dalton, Robert (1559)
Davison, Robert (1592), Davison, Richard (1606, 1622)
For a Cottage, rent 16s: Burn, John (1588, 1606, 1618, 1624)
For a Cottage, rent 3s 6d: Maison, John (1598, 1610)
For a Cottage, rent 4s: Wilson, Christopher (1593, 1612)

Source: DCD, Dean and Chapter Registers, 1-15, 1541-1640.

How did these families in the more fertile south-east of the Palatinate fare compared to their counterparts at Harton and was there a difference in the agriculture practiced by these tenants? None of the leaseholders are called yeomen as some of the tenants were at Harton,

[626] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. 242-3.

with many not being given a status, and Robert Lawe (d. 1551), John Lawe (d.1603), William Marshall (d. 1590), and John Pickering (d. 1607) all being described as husbandmen.[627]

Table 34: Total Value of the Surviving Probate Inventories of Cowpen Bewley Tenants, 1540-1640

Probate Inventories		
Deceased	**Status**	**Inventory Wealth (Debts Owing)**
Lawe, Robert (1551)	Husbandman	£83 4s 6d (£17 10s 8d)
Clifton, John (1587)		£139 17s 10d (£59 7s 8d)
Marshall, William (1590)	Husbandman	£115 11s (£96 13s 1d)
Lawe, William (1593)		£183 13s 11d (£13 15s 9d)
Lawe, John (1603)	Husbandman	£145 13s (£31 6s)
Pickering, John (1607)	Husbandman	£227 17s 1d (£17 0s 10d)
Lawe, John (1630)		£306 19s 1d (£248 3s 8d)
Clifton, Robert (1631)		£143 2s 6d

Source: Durham Probate Inventories: DPRI/1/1551/L1/1-2; DPRI/1/1587/C6/1; DPRI/1/1590/M4/2-4; DPRI/1/1593/L2/3-4; DPRI/1/1603/L3/2; DPRI/1/1607/P8/3-4; DPRI/1/1630/L1/3-4; DPRI/1/1631/C6/2-3

Inferring too much from this difference in status between husbandman and yeoman would be dangerous, however, as many of these Cowpen Bewley tenants possessed more household goods than their counterparts at Harton, with a consistency which suggests that around fourteen per cent of the total value of their inventories came from household goods.[628]

Table 35: A Breakdown of the Types of Wealth in the Surviving Probate Inventories of Cowpen Bewley Tenants, 1540-1640

Testator	Date Proved	Grain	Livestock	Household Goods	Debts Owing
Robert Lawe	d. 1551	£31.0	£37.0	£15.0	-£15.0
John Clifton	d. 1587	£60.0	£58.0	£21.0	-£59.0
William Marshall	d. 1590	£45.0	£43.0	£29.0	-£97.0
William Lawe	d. 1593	£54.0	£61.0	£25.0	-£14.0
John Lawe	d. 1603	£51.0	£57.0	£28.0	-£32.0
John Pickering	d. 1607	£71.0	£73.0	£34.0	-£18.0
John Lawe	d. 1630	£165.0	£98.0	£24.0	-£248.0
Robert Clifton	d. 1631	£66.0	£51.0	£23.0	Unknown

Source: Durham Probate Inventories: DPRI/1/1551/L1/1-2; DPRI/1/1587/C6/1; DPRI/1/1590/M4/2-4; DPRI/1/1593/L2/3-4; DPRI/1/1603/L3/2; DPRI/1/1607/P8/3-4; DPRI/1/1630/L1/3-4; DPRI/1/1631/C6/2-3

[627] DPRI/1/1551/L1/1-2; DPRI/1/1587/C6/1; DPRI/1/1590/M4/2-4; DPRI/1/1593/L2/3-4; DPRI/1/1603/L3/2; DPRI/1/1607/P8/3-4; DPRI/1/1630/L1/3-4; DPRI/1/1631/C6/2-3.
[628] Ibid.

There is an even greater focus on arable farming in the inventories of these leaseholders from the south-eastern part of the Palatinate: two inventories described the deceased as possessing thirty-four and thirty-six acres of sown corn, not only showing the importance of arable farming but also the fact that these were tenant-farmers who were not subletting their lands. For example, Robert Lawe (d. 1551) possessed livestock worth £37 2s 3d, of which the majority came from his eight oxen worth £20, whilst he also possessed thirty six acres of corn worth £12, and further wheat, bigg, peas and hay worth £16 13s 4d.[629] William Lawe (d. 1593) possessed cows and old *stirks* worth £12 13s 4d, two *stirks* worth 24s, a calf worth 6s, eight oxen worth £20, two horses and mares worth £7, two mares worth £3 6s 8d, eighteen ewes, seventeen *hogges* and two tuppes worth £13 16s 4d, a mallard and duck worth 8d, 12 hens and a cock worth 5s, with corn in the garth and hay worth £12, and £24 16s 8d more corn.[630] John Lawe (d. 1603) possessed eight oxen worth £20 13s 4d, four cows worth £7 13s 4d, two *stirks* and a heifer worth £3 3s 4d, two calves worth 16s, six mares and a horse worth £13, nineteen ewes and two tuppes worth £7, thirteen sheep worth 52s, seven swine worth 33s 4d, with corn in the barn and garth worth £22, hay in the garth worth £8, and corn in the field worth £10.[631] John Lawe (d. 1630) possessed eight oxen worth £32, eight cows worth £21 6s 8d, further animals worth £8, thirty seven sheep worth £14 6s, five horses and mares worth £18, but in corn in the barn and garth he possessed the enormous sum of £150. However, he also owed considerable debts, especially to people from York, Kirby and Ripon, amongst which he owed £35 to alderman Agar of York, and £10 to alderman Hoyle of York , coming to the total of £248.[632] It is likely that he was involved in the grain trade in some form larger than his holding here at Cowpen Bewley could possibly

[629] DPRI/1/1551/L1/1-2.
[630] DPRI/1/1593/L2/3-4.
[631] DPRI/1/1603/L3/2.
[632] DPRI/1/1630/L1/3-4.

facilitate.[633] Robert Clifton (d. 1631) possessed corn in the barn and garth worth £35, and corn sown in the ground worth £20, with all the hay worth £3, and four oxen worth £12, four cows worth £10, four *stirks*, three *whies*, and four calves worth £10, a brown cow worth £2 10s, two horses, two mares and a foal worth £11, seventeen sheep worth £4 7s, and several pigs.[634] John Clifton (d. 1587) possessed eight oxen worth £19, four cows and two *whies* worth £8 6s 8d, six *stirkes* worth £3, four calves worth 16s, ten horses and mares worth £15, five foals worth £3 13s 4d, twenty two ewes, a tuppe and thirteen sheep *hogges* worth £6 15s, two sheep *hogges* at Newton worth 5s, three swine, two pigs, worth 29s, with all the corn in the laith and garth worth £28 10s, eleven acres of sown corn in the field worth £11, and all the hay worth £6 13s 4d.[635] William Marshall (d. 1590) possessed nine oxen worth £22 10s, four cows worth £8, two *stirks* worth 26s 8d, two horses and a mare with a foal worth £6, with the hay worth £6, thirty four acres of winter and spring corn worth £32, five ewes and three lambs worth 29s, a filly and a ewe worth 24s, four old swine and three pigs worth 23s, five hens and a cock.[636] John Pickering (d. 1607) possessed eight oxen worth £22, five cows worth £14 3s 4d, a heifer worth 32s, another heifer worth 30s, a *stirk* worth 26s 8d, a *stirke* and heifer worth 34s, three calves worth 12s, a horse, mare and a foal worth £14, a ewe and lamb worth 10s, a ewe and lamb worth 10s, another ewe and lamb worth 10s, another ewe and lamb worth 10s, fourteen more ewes and lambs worth £5, twenty sheep *hogges* and a tuppe worth £5 6s 8d, a sow and five pigs worth 13s 4d, two sows worth 15s, five swine hogges worth 28s 4d, six heifer hogges worth 15s, a cock, eleven hens and two capons worth 5s, four ducks worth 2s, two ricks of hay worth £4, pease in the garth worth £5, wheat in the

[633] A stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a wether hogge was a yearling-male sheep; a whie was a heifer up to three years old; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a gimmer hogge was a ewe between first and second shearing.
[634] DPRI/1/1631/C6/2-3.
[635] DPRI/1/1587/C6/1.
[636] DPRI/1/1590/M4/2-4.

garth worth £3 12s, bigg worth 50s, wheat in the barn worth 54s, with corn in the field worth £36.[637]

It thus appears that the vast majority of these tenants were engaging in arable farming, with a rough parity between the value of their grain and livestock, but even this is slightly deceptive for by far the greatest value of their livestock came from their plough oxen. This belies the common portrayal of the North as being dominated by a pastoral economy by contemporaries and further brings into question Levine and Wrightson's view that even in the 'intermediate foothills and the eastern lowland zone…animal husbandry remained the mainstay of the rural economy'.[638] Certainly at Whickham, with its extensive moorlands, the pastoral sector was important, but just a few miles closer to the coast on the Dean and Chapter's lands at Harton there was a higher degree of arable farming, whilst there can be little doubt that grain was very much the 'mainstay' of the agricultural economy of the more fertile south-east region of the Palatinate despite the close proximity of moorland and marshland for additional pasturage. This is further confirmed for the fifteenth century by the high quantities of grain with which Durham Priory's tenants were paying their rents.

Was there a Retreat into Subsistence in the Fifteenth Century?

Commercial farming was not simply a matter of market-awareness, but of market-orientation through the selling of agricultural produce on the market. It can be seen from the above examples that many of the Dean and Chapter's tenants were commercially farming their holdings in the sixteenth century, and were thus able to benefit from the increase in grain prices. At Cowpen Bewley, for example, it was common for tenants to have some thirty-four or thirty-six acres given over to arable farming, whilst at Harton tenants possessed

[637] DPRI/1/1607/P8/3-4.
[638] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 87.

six-score thraves of wheat, ten of bigg, with oats, peas and hay.[639] It would be expected that the Dean and Chapter's tenants were practicing commercial farming throughout this period, especially when we consider that their tenants possessed holdings of around 100 acres with accompanying pasture rights, but it is dangerous simply to equate farm size with increasing commercialisation, especially in the economic conditions of the fifteenth century. In the Dean and Chapter's townships, where holdings were generally of equivalent size and there were relatively few smallholders, it is likely that there was relatively little demand for agricultural produce. How far did these tenants retreat from commercial agriculture during the fifteenth century in the face of low prices and high wages?

In his analysis of the model peasant farmer, Harry Kitsikopoulos suggested a man, his wife, and their three offspring, one of whom was a son of working age, would be capable of farming eighteen arable acres, whilst perhaps also having sufficient time to serve as wage labourers on other farms for as much as eighty days per year. 'If three adults were more than sufficient to manage an 18-acre holding, it ought to have been largely on farms whose minimum size was a virgate that there was substantial need for extra-familial labour.'[640] There have been further complications to modelling household consumption and production because historians have tended to use adjectives like 'small' or 'large' to describe holding sizes. Ellis approved of the term 'small farmer' because it 'lacks emotive connotations' but it is of limited use because 'it has little theoretical content. It is not possible to set a farm size limit in the domain of peasant economics'.[641] This is particularly problematic in anthropological studies of modern peasantries because of the diverse types of agricultural practices: from the labour-intensive rice paddies of China, to the land-intensive scrub-burning of South America.

[639] DPRI/1/1551/L1/1-2; DPRI/1/1605/A6/2-3.
[640] Harry Kitsikopoulos, 'Standards of Living and Capital Formation in Pre-Plague England: A Peasant Budget Model', *EcHR*, 53 (2000), p. 243.
[641] Ellis, *Peasant Economics*, pp. 12-3.

This is less problematic when studying English agriculture in a historical context because the main distinctions in land use were primarily between pastoral or arable farming, but there are still problems nonetheless because historians have given the term 'small' different meanings in different periods. This was especially emphasised by Leigh Shaw-Taylor in his recent article about agrarian capitalism.[642] For example, most medievalists would follow Kitsikopoulos in considering holdings of above 30 acres as being substantial, with Whittle similarly considering farms of 30 acres or more as large, and those of over 100 acres as very large in the period between 1440-1580.[643] Levine and Wrightson wrote of farms over 50 acres as being large in the seventeenth century, whereas Mingay writing of the eighteenth century, treated farms of up to 100 acres as small, and particularly singled out farms of below 25 acres as being 'very small'.[644] Of course, these historians are using value-laden terms in order to compare the size of holding with the average size of the period: thus the change in acreage represents the general engrossment of holdings across the periods. The problem, however, is thrown into sharp relief when a holding of 25 acres has gone from being considered 'large' to 'very small' in the space of the four centuries considered here. This is further complicated when studying the ratio of family labour compared to hired labour because household sizes changed across time, with Cicely Howell for example, using a multiplier of 5 for the period 1280-1345, of 3.96 for 1371-1490, and 3.34 for 1550-1700.[645] It is unlikely, therefore, that a family in the early-modern period could consistently rely on having a son of working age to help on the farm, thus creating the need for even further hired labour in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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[642] Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of Agrarian Capitalism', pp. 22-3.
[643] Jane Whittle, 'Tenure and Landholding in England, 1440-1580: A Crucial Period for the Development of Agrarian Capitalism?', in Bas van Bavel and Peter Hoppenbrouwers (eds.), *Landholding and Land Transfer in the North Seas Area* (Turnhout, 2004), p. 242.
[644] Levine and Wrightson, *Poverty and Piety*, pp. 25-6. G. E. Mingay, 'The Size of Farms in the Eighteenth Century', *EcHR*, 14 (1962), pp. 480-2.
[645] Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance*, pp. 162-3.

Robert Allen tried to provide a conceptual framework for measuring the sizes of farms by the amount of labour required to operate it, thus bypassing the many problems associated with such descriptions as 'large' or 'small'. In his words:

> 'Several types of information suggest that a family could operate a farm of 50 or 60 acres without much hired labour. A farm of more than 100 acres was run predominantly with hired (or, in the middle ages, coerced) labour. These divisions are, of course, subject to many qualifications, but roughly speaking, peasant farms were less than 60 acres, while capitalist farms were more than 100 acres. Farms of 60 to 100 acres were transitional, employing roughly equal amounts of family and hired labour.'[646]

Leigh Shaw-Taylor, although being very complementary of Allen's conceptual clarity, believed that he vastly over-estimated the size of holdings that a family could actually work, thus: 'Allen believes that the 60-acre threshold for family farms holds good over the period from the middle ages right through to the early-twentieth century. But south midland farms of 30 to 60 acres could clearly not be run without considerable wage labour in the middle of the nineteenth century'.[647] It thus seems reasonable to place the limit of what could be worked by a family at between a virgate and thirty acres, however, there must be considerable flexibility in such a threshold, given different agricultural practices and the changing size of households across the intervening centuries.

The majority of pre-plague holdings could not support much hired labour in England, especially if around half of all peasant families held less than half a virgate. As Kitsikopoulos concluded, 'given the limited number of such large holdings, coupled with the abundance of smallholders, it becomes apparent that supply [of labour] far exceeded the existing demand'.[648] Even in the north-east of England where holdings tended to be slightly larger than the national average because of the relative ratio of land to people, there was limited need for hired labour except at the busier times of the agricultural year. This situation was

[646] Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, p. 57.
[647] Shaw-Taylor, 'Rise of Agrarian Capitalism', p. 17.
[648] Kitsikopoulos, 'Standards of Living', p. 243.

reversed with the advent of pestilence, but it was not a linear progression from increasing farm sizes to more hired labour. One of the reasons for the rapid expansion of the pastoral sector was because it was less labour intensive: the combination of high wages and low grain prices was prohibitive to large-scale arable farming unless there was high demand in the locality such as in the hinterland of London. Larger holdings, therefore, did not necessarily mean more hired labour: a son could watch forty sheep on ten acres of land, whereas it would take two men to plough and harvest the equivalent of wheat.

The rent-books of the bursars of Durham Priory provide unique insights into the actual payment methods and collection strategies used by tenants and landowners alike, revealing the endless struggle both parties went through during this process. A well-documented, but nonetheless significant element of this process is how common it was for rents to be met by goods paid in kind rather than cash.[649] Miranda Threlfall-Holmes and Richard Lomas both questioned how far this situation was imposed upon tenants by the Priory as a preferred method of sourcing their supplies, or if this represented a chronic lack of coin in the region, but the more interesting implication of this payment in kind is whether or not it resulted in a retreat from commercial farming. A tenant required to pay his rent in cash must engage with markets on a reasonably large scale, if only to meet his rental obligations and purchase necessary goods outside of the household. However, a tenant who paid his rent in kind did not possess this coercive element, and so could retreat into relative subsistence with remarkably little interaction with the market. As the constables of Knightlow Hundred in Warwickshire remarked in the fourteenth century, peasants are 'cultivators, they do not buy but they sell'.[650] Although peasants would need to engage with the market in order to purchase certain necessary goods, if the main stimulus of finding money to pay rent was

[649] M. Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets: Durham Cathedral Priory, 1460-1520* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 136-61; Richard Lomas, 'A Priory and its Tenants' in Richard Britnell (ed.), *Daily Life in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 103-24.
[650] R. H. Hilton, 'Medieval Market Towns and Simple Commodity Production', *P&P*, 109 (1985), p. 7.

removed, could tenants retreat into relative autarky? Is this what happened on the estates of Durham Priory during the fifteenth century?

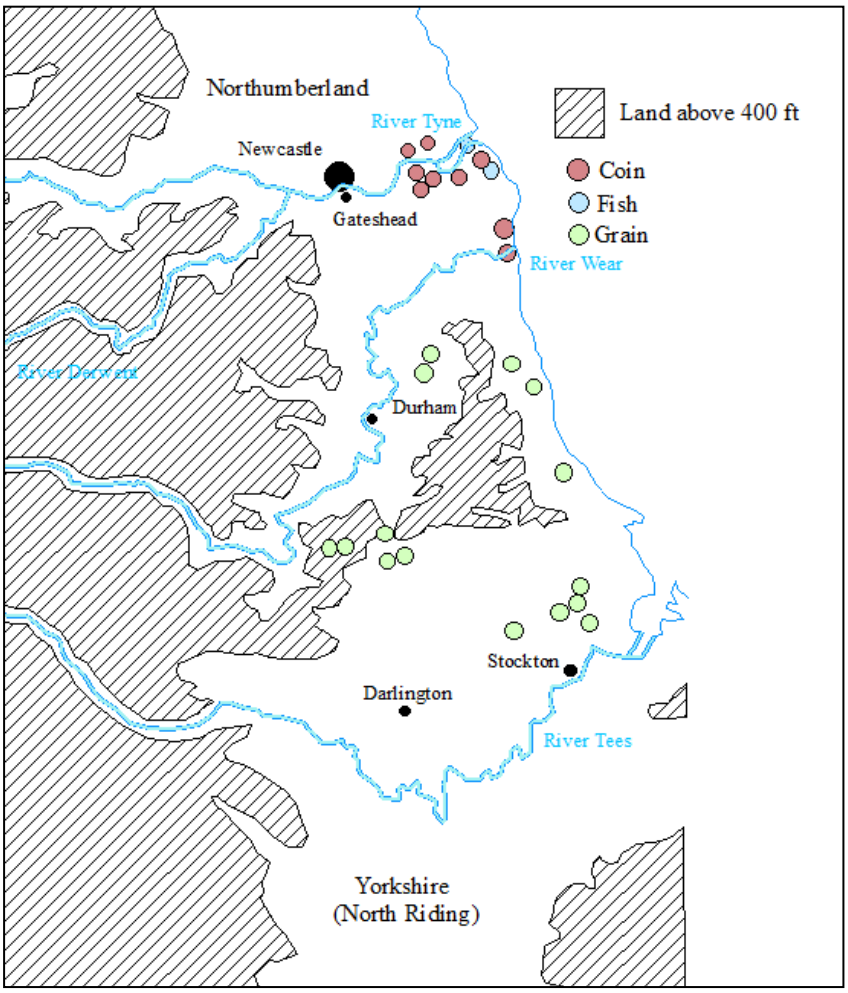
A typical entry from the bursars' rent-books looks like the following for John Calvert of Hesilden:

- '+ From John Calvert per annum 73s. 10d.
    - Whereof he paid at the court of Pittington 6s. Also he paid in 8 quarters of wheat 32s. Also in 8 quarters of barley 24s. Also in 4 quarters of oats 5s. Also in 4 chickens 12d. And thus quit.'[651]

If the geographical pattern of payments is taken into consideration there is ample evidence of townships in specific regions paying in predominantly the same fashion. The tenants of Cowpen Bewley, Wolviston and Billingham, for example, paid in grain, those of South Shields in fish, and others at Willington and Harton paid in cash. There was thus a remarkable tendency for places near Tynemouth and Wearmouth to pay in cash, and for areas in the more fertile regions of Durham, such as Billingham in the south-east, to pay in grain as can be seen from the map below.[652]

[651] *Durham Priory Rentals*, p. 156.
[652] *Durham Priory Rentals*, pp. 130-97.

Map 6: Payment Methods of Durham Cathedral Priory Tenants in 1495/6



Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989)

Was this a system the monks of Durham Priory imposed on their tenants in order to meet their own needs? Miranda Threlfall-Holmes estimated that the Priory attained over ninety-five per cent of its grain in this manner, as well as around half of its meat and fish, and various other resources that the monks needed.[653] It cannot be a happy coincidence that the Priory sourced so much of its grain through payment of rents in kind, and this surely represented some kind of pre-arranged system of payment. Such a conclusion is confirmed by the rent-books, with grain payments often being very regular from all the tenants of an area in each year, only deviating by a few quarters of a certain grain as a tenant could not make the

[653] Threlfall-Holmes, *Monks and Markets*, pp. 136-61.

payment in that type. The clearest example of this is from Hesilden in 1538/39, where each tenant is initially recorded as paying in one quarter of wheat, eight quarters of barley, and one quarter of oats when the rent-book was first drawn up, only for these entries to be occasionally crossed out at a later date as the actual amounts collected were entered.[654] Although some of the payments appear to have been pre-arranged by the Priory, there were others which were left more flexible. In the above example of John Calvert, the Priory preferred payments of around eight quarters of wheat, eight quarters of barley and four quarters of oats from their tenants of Hesilden in 1495/96, however, how tenants met the rest of their rents was left much more to chance.[655] Thus John Calvert paid part of his rents in four chickens. This appears to have been entirely the choice of the tenants, and the large proportion of tenants still not paying directly in coin is intriguing. There does not seem to have been a shortage of coin in the region generally, as a large proportion of tenants met at least part of their rents in 'pecunia', but the widespread use of payment in kind, especially in cases where this does not appear to be an imposition of Durham Priory, suggests that tenants were at least amenable to the idea of paying rents in kind. At no point did this devolve into simple bartering, and it is clear that the market-value of goods was maintained wherever possible, with all goods given a monetary, if slightly fictitious, value.

Did these payments in kind represent, rather than a shortage of coinage, a general retreat into self-sufficiency by the Priory's tenants? Richard Britnell argued that 'landlords founded small, unambitious markets perhaps more to accommodate the poor than for profit'.[656] These markets were intended for small transactions of foodstuffs in order that peasants could meet their rental requirements, whilst providing local blacksmiths and traders with a useful supplement to anything they grew. If tenants were not required to make rent

[654] DCM Bursar's Book L.
[655] *Durham Priory Rentals*, p. 156.
[656] Richard Britnell, 'The Proliferation of Markets in England, 1200-1349', *EcHR*, 34 (1981), pp. 209-21.

payments in cash, then certainly one of the incentives to become market-oriented had been removed, for they could meet their rental obligations with their own produce without reference to an outside market. Although this is hardly proof that tenants in the fifteenth century retreated into subsistence-oriented agriculture, for many tenants it did remove one of the coercive forces which had required their engagement with the market. A perfect example of this is from the rent-book of 1495/6 for Hesilden where five tenants owed identical rents of 73s 10d per annum.[657]

Table 36: Payment Methods of Hesilden Tenants in 1495/6

Tenant	Wheat	Barley	Oats	Cash	Other
W. Twedall	8 quarters, 32s.	8 quarters, 24s.	4 quarters, 5s.	6s. 8d.	4d.; 2s. 8d.
W. Wilkynson	8 quarters, 32s.	6 quarters, 18s.			6s.; 4s.
John Calvert	8 quarters, 32s.	8 quarters, 24s.	4 quarters, 5s.		6s.; 4 chickens
Robert Birden	8 quarters, 32s.	5 quarters, 15s.	4 quarters, 5s. 4d.	8s. 10d.; 12s. 8d.	
John Ranaldson	8 quarters, 32s.	8 quarters, 24s.	3 quarters, 4s. 4d.	3s.; 6s. 8d.	2s. 4d.; 17d.

Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989), p. 156

Hesilden tenants, therefore, met over eighty per cent of their rental obligations in wheat, barley and oats. Given that these tenants were now in possession of much larger holdings and that they were likely to possess enough livestock to meet their other dietary requirements, it seems probable that they only engaged with the market to purchase necessary goods.

There were still some townships, however, which were meeting their rents predominantly in cash, situated primarily on the banks of the Tyne or at Wearmouth. Whereas the vast majority of the Priory's agricultural tenants elsewhere were paying in a mixture of wheat, oats and barley, these tenants were still meeting the majority of their rental

[657] *Durham Priory Rentals*, p. 156.

obligations in cash, often at the various meetings of the halmote court. This can be seen in table 37 below, where Harton tenants were predominantly paying in cash.[658]

Table 37: Payment Methods of Harton Tenants in 1495/6

Tenant	Cash	Fish	Other/Unspecified
Robert Taillyour	7s; 2s; 12s 8d; 16s 8d	15s	12d
William Newton, j.	10s; 10s 2d; 13s 4d; 3s 10d	2s 6d	10d; 13s 8d
William Bertram	10s; 20s; 13s 4d		3s 4d; 12d; 6s 8d
John Person	8s; 13s 4d; 7s; 20s		32d; 3s 4d
Jacob Atkynson	6s 8d; 12s 6d; 8s 4d; 5d	21s 3d; 5s	
Richard Betson	16s; 10s 8d; 6s 8d	10s	5s; 6s
Thomas Grayden	6s 8d; 10s; 9s; 3s 4d		20s; 4s 4d; 12d
Robert Alanson	5s 4d; 14d; 14d; 6s 8d; 13s 4d	6s 8d; 6s 8d; 13s 4d	14d
Richard Newton	10s; 20s; 13s 4d; 3s 4d		4s; 3s 8d
John Newton, j.	10s; 10s; 10s; 13s 4d	5s; 7s	2s 5d; 2s 8d; 3s 8d

Source: R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper (eds.), *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, Volume I Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (1989), p. 156

In order to meet such rents in cash, these tenants would have had a much more coercive reason for visiting markets than many of their counterparts to the south of the Palatinate. Whether this was because Harton tenants were able to market their goods more easily because of their closer proximity to Newcastle or because there was a shortage of coin elsewhere in the region which was only remediable close to a major port is unclear. The implication is that a much higher percentage of the produce of these Harton tenants was reaching a real and discernible market than their counterparts at Cowpen Bewley. In order to meet such rents, the Priory's tenants to the south of the Tyne were clearly engaging with markets even in the fifteenth century at the very least in order to meet their rents, thus suggesting that a major port such as Newcastle was a sufficiently large market for these tenants to sell their produce even during the fifteenth century. What is perhaps also slightly surprising is the regularity of payments in fish at Harton: although not nearly as large as payments in cash, they do feature quite often, with salmon, cod, herring and dogdrayff all

[658] Ibid., pp. 142-3.

being mentioned. It is more remarkable given that there is no evidence of fishing equipment in the probate inventories of their descendants in the sixteenth century. For much of the late-sixteenth century the Dean and Chapter received very little for the fishing rights in the Tyne, which by 1614 were recorded as being worth £11 1s 8d, but in decay of £9 8d, whilst there were only a handful of people described as fishermen in the parish registers of All Saint's parish, Newcastle, during the seventeenth century.[659] Presumably the extra shipping and pollution associated with the take-off of the coal industry on the Tyne from the mid-sixteenth century prohibited local fishing opportunities which had existed for their fifteenth-century ancestors.

During the fifteenth century, a period of low prices and high wages, it is likely that many agricultural producers withdrew partially from the market, especially from creating large surpluses of grain, given its labour intensity. As John Hatcher has recently shown, if wages increased as much as was once believed, farming a 40-acre holding would have been prohibitively expensive, whilst even if wages increased less sharply it was still much less profitable than it had been before the Black Death.[660] Although, the above discussion is largely speculative, it is clear that many of the Priory's tenants had few coercive pressures to engage with markets, whilst there were few positive incentives to producing a large marketable surplus. Indeed, the aggregate figures of rent taken in kind only serve to reinforce this picture. Using the rent-book of 1495/6 Lomas calculated that 428 quarters of wheat, 733 quarters of barley, 311 quarters of oats, 199 sheep, 115 cattle, 104 items of poultry, 30,000 red herring and 1,000 dogdraff were acquired by these means, with a further 105 payments in the form of labour.[661] These were all agricultural goods which never reached a discernible market of any kind, but were taken as rent by one of the largest landowners in the region,

[659] DCM Transumpt of Accounts: 1614; private communication with Andy Burn, Durham History Department.
[660] Hatcher, 'Unreal Wages', pp. 1-24.
[661] Lomas, 'A Priory and its Tenants', pp. 119–20.

with only a few townships close to a highly-commercialised port needing to market their goods in order to pay their rents in cash. It was this relative self-sufficiency and limited expenditure which differentiated members of the upper peasantry or yeomanry and the parish gentry: the former may have retreated into relative self-sufficiency, thus improving their living standards, whereas the latter tried to maintain a social position that their economic base could no longer sustain.

Conclusion

The change of tenure and organisation of the Cathedral's holdings across the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries was perhaps most remarkable not because it led to the rise of a rural elite, but because it led to a general prosperity amongst most of their tenants. After the Black Death, these tenants engrossed holdings of anywhere between c.50-c.150 acres of land, but it was the process of syndication and leasing which officially recognised these consolidated holdings as the permanent form of landholding on their estate. In the face of a rising population in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, these holdings did not fragment, but nor were they subsumed into larger leaseholds by outsiders. Although several families remained upon their holdings in each township for generations, there were few instances of a single person holding concurrent leases in a township or of significant sub-letting before the second half of the seventeenth century.

This group of church leaseholders in the sixteenth century bore many resemblances to their thirteenth-century predecessors. The evolution of these tenants into yeomen in the sixteenth century came about through a combination of institutional changes and market opportunities rather than any significant change in mentality. During the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the ancestors of these tenants engrossed their dead neighbours' lands into

consolidated holdings, which the Durham monks officially recognised and converted to engrossed leaseholds. The joint pincers of high wages and low prices were not conducive to creating a large marketable surplus in the fifteenth century but when this situation was reversed in the sixteenth century their descendants had much greater incentives to engage in more commercially-oriented agriculture. There were remarkably few signs of any qualitative break with their predecessors or even a slow transformation of mentalities, and French and Hoyle's description of a medieval peasant as a 'petty entrepreneur, who looked for market opportunities' is equally as apt for the church leaseholders of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries as for their peasant ancestors.[662] However, where these tenants really differ from the traditional medieval peasant is in the size of their holdings which enabled them to engage in commercial agriculture whilst maintaining a considerable number of livestock for a varied family diet; something which Kosminsky's peasants of the late-thirteenth century could never have hoped to achieve because of their fragmented holdings. It is, therefore, difficult to describe these tenants as peasants because of the increased opportunities for capital formation and market-engagement which the size of their holdings offered, but equally there was a remarkable continuity in the economic and social outlook of the Dean and Chapter's tenants across this transitional period. The evolution of this group of church leaseholders in rural society was not necessarily a story of cultural change, but one of changing institutional constraints and market opportunities, as they were often passively benefitting from the unearned increment of high inflationary trends in the latter period.

The family-land bond, if such a term is removed of any emotive connotations of a peasant mentality, was certainly strong on the Dean and Chapter's estate, with many families inheriting their holdings for generations, and some continuing to hold their land from the late-fourteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century. In this respect the change of tenure had

[662] French and Hoyle, *Earls Colne,* p. 38.

relatively little effect, despite Larson's suggestion that the 'priory's conversion to leasehold would cost tenants in the long run by eliminating heritable rights'.[663] These core village families did not accumulate significantly larger holdings than relative newcomers, and although there are indications that some of these older families, such as the Newtons and Pearsons of Harton, may have possessed a slightly higher standard of living than their neighbours, this was far from a significant discrepancy. This situation led to a general rise in the prosperity of the majority of the Dean and Chapter's leaseholders, a modest rise it must be said, but one which was shared by most in the village and which led to relatively little stratification of landownership on their estate.

The relatively small-scale and even distribution of this land amongst the Cathedral's tenants in the fifteenth century can readily be shown by a comparison with other significant groups of leaseholders. Demesne lessees, who were to become an increasingly important feature of rural society from the fifteenth century onward, were a 'small but significant group in fifteenth-century society' who were to become even more important during the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.[664] Roger Heritage served as Chris Dyer's exemplar of this agricultural capitalist, a forerunner of sixteenth-century commercial farmers, whose farm consisted of about 500 acres of land, a rabbit warren and a windmill, for which he paid £20 per annum rent. His inventory reveals he possessed two teams of oxen, two ploughs, two carts, forty cattle, twelve horses and 860 sheep, suggesting farming operations on a 'scale six, eight or even ten times greater than those of a normal peasant cultivator'. The scale of these operations was not just significantly larger than those of the average peasant, but was also much larger than that of any of the church leaseholders found here.

[663] Larson, 'Peasant Opportunities', p. 148.
[664] Dyer, 'Capitalists in Fifteenth-Century England', pp. 1-24.

Roger Heritage may well have been in a relative minority during the fifteenth century but this was to become a much wider phenomenon across the sixteenth century as Majorie McIntosh found for the manor of Havering across this period. Between 1200 and 1500, she described Havering's economic and political forms as growing 'in precocious fashion, marked by unusual personal freedom and widespread prosperity for the tenants, considerable co-operation among them in running their community, and exceptional independence from outside control'.[665] During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries 'power was shared among nearly two hundred middle-level families working 20-100 acres of land or supporting themselves through craftwork or trade.' However, between 1460 and 1500 immigration 'climbed to an unprecedented level' with the newcomers including several extremely wealthy tenants and many poor people. 'In the 1460s three powerful outsiders with London and court connections invested heavily if temporarily in Havering land. Sir Thomas Cook bought up c.900 acres, Avery Cornborough acquired c.1,200 acres, and Sir Thomas Urswick gained c.500 acres.' She concluded that 'economic power and influence over religion and local government, formerly distributed among more than a hundred families of yeomen, husbandmen, and craftsmen/traders, were by 1620 concentrated into the hands of just a few gentlemen and nobles with great landed estates'.[666] This was a stratification of land beyond what was common on the Dean and Chapter's lands, and although there was the occasional influx of wealthy merchants like Henry Anderson into a village, this was a relatively rare experience. By the late-eighteenth century, holdings at both Harton and Cowpen Bewley showed some signs of engrossment and fragmentation, but the broad distribution of landholding laid down in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries was still evident. The survival of this landholding pattern represented the institutional constraints upon tenants as part of the Dean and Chapter's estate, which not only greatly affected the tenure, rent, and

[665] McIntosh, *A Community Transformed*, p. 1.
[666] Ibid., p. 1.

inheritability of property, but also the potential size and stratification of holdings within a village. Path dependency was, therefore, very important in rural society across this period, with the redistribution of land undertaken during the low population levels of the fifteenth century producing a relatively modest rise of the church leaseholder who shared much in common with their neighbours. The same could not be said of the bishops' estate.

Chapter 9

Divergent Experiences: Yeomanry and Smallholders

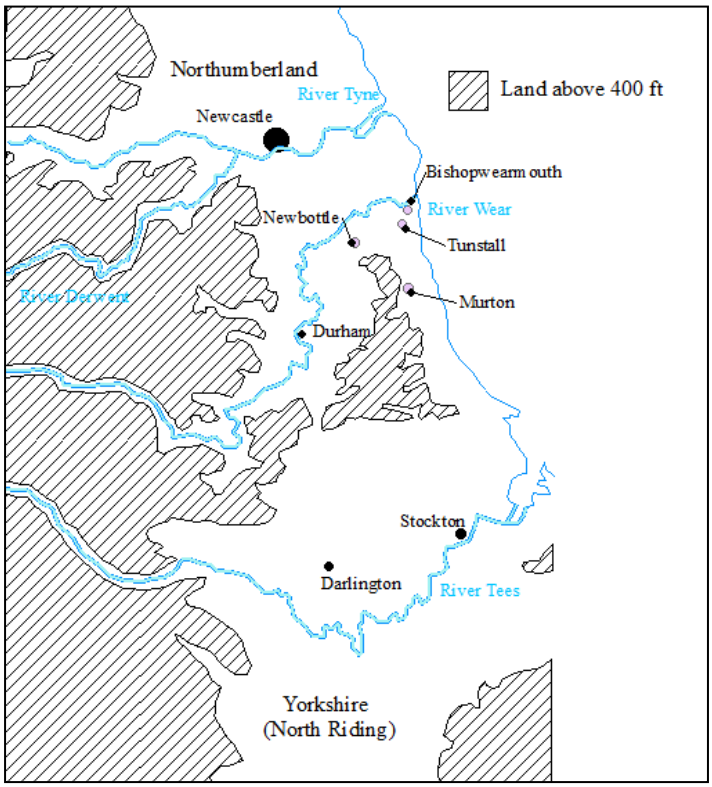
The Stratification of Landholdings on the Bishops' Estate

The divergent development of the ecclesiastical estates of Durham explored in section one had profound effects upon the tenantry of Durham, and as a result their experiences greatly differed across the sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, all of the agricultural land owned by the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral was leased for 21 years. Although they faced the controversy over entry fines in the 1570s, this was ultimately resolved and fines appear to have become fixed from the 1620s onwards at three years' improved rental value, which ensured that entry fines would keep pace with inflation in the future. This led to the general rise of the church leaseholder, but their example was far from the uniform experience of tenants in the Durham region. Indeed, it was perhaps atypical of the norm. The manors of the bishops of Durham contained a mixture of every type of tenure possible, from customary tenants in Weardale to tenants-at-will, copyholders, freeholders, and leaseholders throughout the Palatinate.[667] Even this brief summary fails to portray the myriad tenures which existed on the bishops' estate, with some leaseholders holding land for anywhere between forty and ninety nine years, whilst perhaps half held for 21 years, and by the early-seventeenth century the rest were holding for three lives.[668] This chapter explores the consequences of these developments for their tenants, investigating how far they faced

[667] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU.
[668] See chapter 3 above.

different problems and potential opportunities as a result of the difference in estate management undertaken by the bishops and the Dean and Chapter.

Map 7: The Manors of Bishopwearmouth, Newbottle, Tunstall and Murton



Several case studies of the bishops' townships reveal the disparity between the experiences of Durham tenants as a result of the differences between the two ecclesiastical estates detailed in section one. The transformation of holdings, or at times, lack thereof, can be seen at Newbottle, a typical village on the bishops' estate which evolved from a combination of demesne land and bondland into a village with an equal distribution of copyhold and leasehold land. Table 38 shows the village in Hatfield's survey, revealing the tenure and structure of the holdings in the late-fourteenth century.[669]

[669] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, pp. 158-161.

Table 38: Newbottle Tenants in Hatfield Survey, 1380s

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	RENT
DEMESNE LAND:		
Hugh Baynton	13 acres and 1 rode	18s 9.25d
John Wilkinson	26 acres and a half	37s 6.5d
William Tillton	25 acres	35s 5d
William Belle	10 acres	14s 2d
William Johnson	5 acres	7s 1d
William Robertson	36 acres	51s
John Syvewright	5 acres	7s 1d
William Stephanson	20 acres	29s 0.5d
William Flesschewer	49 acres and 3 rodes	70s 5.75d
John Geryngh	25 acres	36s 6.5d
John Hoggeson	13 acres	18s 9.25d
Richard Saddesson	30 acres	42s 6d
Richard Shalton	23 acres	32s 11.25d
John Flech	10 acres	14s 2d
William Elisson junior	20 acres	28s 4d
John Taillour	5 acres	7s 1d
Aforesaid tenentes		17d
BOND LAND:	Each bovate contains 12 acres of land	
Hugh Baynton and William Shilton	3 cottages and 3 bovates	18s
John Wilkynson and Richard Flexhewer	3 cottages and 4 bovates	23s
John Bell	1 cottage and 1 bovate	6s
William Robynson and William Stephan	3 cottages and 3 bovates	18s
John Geryng and John Syvewright	2 cottages and 2 bovates	12s
John Rogerson	1 cottage and 2 bovates	12s
John ten	1 cottage and 1 bovate	6s
Richard Toddesson and Hugh Baynton	3 cottages and 3 bovates	16s
Richard Shilton and Richard Flesschewer	3 cottages and 4 bovates	18s
William Elisson	1 cottage and 1 bovate	6s
John Taillour	1 cottage and 1 bovate	6s
The aforesaid William Elisson	7 acres of land	3s 6d
William Robertson	1 cottage and 1 bovate	6s
The same tenants	1 acre of land	6d

Source: W. Greenwell (ed.), *Bishop Hatfield's Survey: a Record of the Possessions of the See of Durham*, Surtees Society, 32 (1857), pp. 158-61

It quickly becomes apparent that holdings were different sizes, with tenants often holding a mix of former demesne and bond land, and the latter often forming smaller cottage holdings, although it is clear that several of the tenants had already accumulated many of these

holdings. Even at this early date there were signs of a stratification of holdings appearing which was dissimilar to the pattern at Harton, with the likes of John Wilkinson holding twenty-six and a half acres of former demesne land, and jointly holding three cottages and four bovates alongside a Richard Fleschewer. This Richard Fleschewer also jointly held a different three cottages and four bovates of land alongside Richard Shilton, whilst a William Fleschewer, presumably a relative, held another forty-nine acres of former demesne land.[670] Some of these larger tenants were therefore able to accumulate holdings of between forty and fifty acres of land, usually as a combination of former demesne land and bondland. At the other end of the spectrum were men such as John Taillour who held a cottage and a bovate of land, as well as five acres of former demesne land, or John Bell who similarly held a cottage and bovate, but this time with ten acres of former demesne land. These smaller holdings, of around twenty acres of land, would have been sufficient to provide for their families, but these tenants would have struggled to produce a significant marketable surplus compared to some of their larger neighbours. Overall, however, the degree of stratification of these holdings should not be overemphasised, especially not in the economic conditions of the fifteenth century which will have provided these smaller tenants with some compensation in the form of relatively high real wages.

By 1588 and the Elizabethan survey, the old distinction between former demesne land and bondland had been replaced by that between leasehold and copyhold tenure, but there was no simple equation which saw demesne land become leasehold and bondland become copyhold.[671] The process of consolidation and stratification seen earlier had become much more developed, with several larger messuages created, half of which were leasehold and the other half copyhold, whilst there was a profusion of smaller holdings surviving as cottages, whose owners appear to have had little relation to the owners of the larger, consolidated

[670] Ibid.
[671] See chapter 3 above.

messuages. The Chiltons were clearly the leading family here by the sixteenth century, for Thomas Chilton the elder possessed a copyhold messuage with rent of 65s, Thomas Chilton the younger held a similar messuage at a rent of 46s 8d and a cottage, whilst William Chilton held two separate leases of messuages with rents of 42s 6d and 27s 4d respectively, and a Robert Chilton held the lease of a messuage, cottage and garth for 39s 2d. The agricultural rental income of Newbottle, less the watermill and perquisites of the court there, came to around £33, out of which the Chilton family were responsible for £11 worth of land; a clear sign of their dominance of the village holdings.[672] There was a profusion of cottages, held by both copyhold and leasehold tenures, who bore no discernible relationship to those farming the larger holdings. Although many of these cottagers were widows and some were likely to be elderly relatives, some of these small cottagers undoubtedly earned the majority of their incomes as wage-labourers on the farms of their larger neighbours, especially on those of the Chiltons.

Table 39: Newbottle Tenants in the Elizabethan Survey of 1588

[672] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU.

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	RENT
COPYHOLDERS:		
Aton widow	1 messuage	57s
Surret widow	1 messuage	71s
Thomas Chilton the elder	1 messuage	65s
Thomas Chilton the younger	1 messuage	46s 8
William Coupon	1 messuage	51s 6d
Robert Chilton	1 cottage	8s
Thomas Appleby	1 cottage	6s 8d
Henry Aton	1 cottage	8s 2d
Widow Rogerson	1 cottage	2s 4d
George Ireland	1 cottage	3s 6d
Christopher Coupon	1 cottage	3s
Margaret Hobson	1 cottage	2s 1d
Storie widow	1 cottage	6d
Stodderd widow	1 cottage	18d
Thomas Chilton the younger	1 cottage	5d
Ralph Robinson and Ralph Brough	2 closes	6s
TOTAL:		**£17 17s 4d**
LEASEHOLDERS:		
George Willow	1 messuage	52s 4d
William Chilton	1 messuage	42s 6d
William Chilton	1 messuage	27s 4d
Robert Chilton	1 messuage	39s 2d
Rolland Brough	1 messuage	44s 6d
John Surret	1 cottage	4s
Christopher Coupon	1 cottage	4s
George Borrows	3 closes	20s
William Willou	Watermill	53s 4d
TOTAL:		**£18 11s 1d**
PERQUISITES OF THE COURT:		26s
TOTAL:		**£37 14s 5d**

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU

Another snapshot is afforded by the parliamentary survey of the 1640s, which gives a detailed picture of the village and also an opportunity to explore entry fines in some depth, although unfortunately not for leaseholds.[673]

Table 40: Newbottle Tenants in the Parliamentary Surveys of the 1640s

[673] *Parliamentary Surveys*, pp. 158-60.

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	LENGTH	RENT	IMPROVEMENT	FINE
LEASEHOLDS:					
John Rutter	Water corn mill, pasturage	3 lives	£2 13s 4d	£10	
Mary Stephenson	1 messuage	21 yrs	£1 17s 5d	£10 10s, Jury £7	
John Chilton	1 tenement	21 yrs	£1 7s 5d	£7 10s, Jury £5	
John Chilton's widow	1 tenement in Newbottle	21 yrs	£1 19s 2d	£9, £6	
George Watson	1 tenement	21 yrs	£2 6s 8d	£10, Jury £8 8s	
Ann widow	1 tenement	21 yrs	£4 16s	£14, Jury £16	
William Ranson	Half of an oxgang	21 yrs	4s	£4	
Robert Sharpe	[Blank]		£2 2s 6d		£8/£12
William Surrett	[Blank]		4s		£1
Bernard Robinson	High Hayning		6s		£3 or £4
Ellinor Bee	Her part of High Hayning		Unknown		£3 or £4
COPYHOLDS:					
William Ranson	1 cottage and 1 oxgang		Below	5s	
Idem	1 messuage and 1 oxgang,		£1 10s 8d	10s	
George Watson	4 parts of 1 cottage		1s 1d	7d	
George Lilburne, gent.	1 messuage, 26 acres, and 1 oxgang		£2 6s 8d	13s 4d	
Richard Haswell	1 cottage		2s 6d	1s	
Robert Ayton	1 messuage and 1 acre of land		8s 2d	5s	
Anthony Ranson	1 cottage with a garth		2s 6d	1s 8d	
Ann Wilson	1 cottage and 1 acre of land		3s	6d	
Robert Chilton	33 acres land, 3 oxgangs of husbandland		£3 6s 8d	£1	
John Chilton	1 cottage and 5 acres		8s	2s	
Robert Chilton	[Blank]		£2 17s		
William Surrett	[Blank]		£3 11s		
Math Smith	[Blank]		6s 8d		
George Chilton	[Blank]		3s 6d		
Widow Sanderson	[Blank]		6d		
Nicholas Blakelock			3d		

Source: D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham. Vol. II,* Surtees Society, 185 (1972), pp. 158-60

The Chiltons were still one of the leading families, having accumulated around half of the copyhold land in the village: Robert Chilton possessed a cottage, thirty-three acres of land, three oxgangs of husbandland and four of moorland for which he paid £3 6s 8d rent but only £1 as an entry fine; he also possessed further undescribed lands worth £2 17s rent; and John Chilton held a cottage and five acres for 8s rent and 2s entry fine; with a George Chilton holding further land worth 3s 6d in rent. John Chilton and his widow Alice also held a 21-

year lease of a tenement with a rent of £1 7s 5d, which was estimated to be worth £7 10s upon improvement, and another 21-year lease of a tenement with an outhouse, garth and two acres of land in every field held by £1 19s 2d rent, which was estimated upon improvement at £9.[674] There are signs that these substantial holdings were advancing the Chiltons, for in 1575 a John Chilton, husbandman, died with an inventory valued at just £36, but by 1627 George Chilton, yeoman, died here with £266 in moveable goods, and likewise a Robert Chilton, yeoman, died with goods worth £294 15s in 1636, and a seemingly different Robert Chilton died just a year later with goods similarly worth £293 6s.[675]

The prevalence of subletting in rural society during this period is very difficult to estimate. The Dean and Chapter's tenants were primarily tenant-farmers still in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries and subletting does not appear to have become prevalent upon their lands until the second half of the seventeenth century, but it is entirely possible that families such as the Chiltons could profit from the stagnant rents of these copyholds by subletting them for a more commercial rent. Several of their probate inventories show quite substantial amounts of agricultural goods suggesting that they were farming their own lands, such as that of Robert Chilton (d. 1637), who possessed corn in his garth worth £43, a further £15 worth of corn on the ground, £7 worth of hay and straw, and plough and waine gear valued at £16. He also possessed the usual cacophony of animals, including six oxen worth £26, five cows, two *stirkes*, and three calves worth £16, over two dozen sheep worth £7 10s, a horse and a mare worth £5, and four swine worth £2.[676] Although there are definite signs that they were farming at least some of their lands, it does not preclude the possibility they were also subletting some of them. For example, a substantial proportion of George Chilton's inventory is actually made up of bonds and debts owed to him from around a dozen

[674] Ibid.
[675] DPRI/1/1575/C2/2; DPRI/1/1627/C4/3; DPRI/1/1636/C4/4; DPRI/1/1637/C3/3-4.
[676] DPRI/1/1637/C3/3-4.

individuals, perhaps suggesting that he was using his property differently from the other Chiltons.[677] These larger holdings provided the Chiltons with opportunities either to sublet or to engage in commercial agriculture, producing a larger marketable surplus than their smaller neighbours, which in turn enabled them to purchase up further lands, reinforcing their prominence in the village in a cyclical fashion.

It becomes quickly apparent that the bishops' copyhold land was radically losing its real value: the rent had not been increased since the depths of the mid-fifteenth century recession and yet agricultural prices had increased sixfold in the intervening period. If just the rent and entry fines for copyhold land in Newbottle are taken into consideration, it is clear that the bishop was not accruing any benefit from the inflation of the period.[678]

Table 41: Entry Fines on the Bishop's Copyhold Land at Newbottle in the 1640s

Annual Rent	Entry Fine	Yearly Value
£1 10s 8d	10s	0.33
1s 1d	7d	0.53
£2 6s 8d	13s 4d	0.28
2s 6d	1s	0.4
8s 2d	5s	0.61
2s 6d	1s 8d	0.64
3s	6d	0.15
£3 6s 8d	£1	0.3
8s	2s	0.25

Source: D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham. Vol. II,* Surtees Society, 185 (1972), pp. 158-60

At no point did the bishop collect even a year's rent as an entry fine for his copyhold land here. There was, therefore, a very large divergence between rents and prices upon his copyhold land, meaning that all of the agricultural profits of the period were accumulated by his tenants. By means of comparison with their tenants just a few miles away at Harton on the

[677] DPRI/1/1627/C4/3.
[678] *Parliamentary Surveys*, pp. 158-60.

Dean and Chapter's lands, the bishop was here charging £1 as an entry fine for copyhold land worth £3 6s 8d in rent in the 1640s, but the Cathedral could be seen charging entry fines of £20 for a 21-year lease of land worth only 54s 7d per annum as early as the 1570s.[679] This not only meant that tenants were accruing more of the profits for their labour on the bishops' copyhold lands, but it also meant that smallholdings were much more viable for there were less financial pressures upon them.

As shown in section one, the composition of the bishops' estate was very diverse, and so the experience of Newbottle cannot be taken as representative of their entire estate. By comparison, Bishopwearmouth was one of the villages on the bishop's estates which was transformed from a mix of former demesne land, bond land and cottages in the late-fourteenth century, into entirely copyhold land, except for the windmill, fishing rights, and one cottage of fifteen acres which were held by leases.[680] There was, therefore, no straightforward conversion of bondland into copyhold land, nor former demesne land into leasehold land as might be expected from the example of Newbottle, and the exact composition of tenures in the sixteenth century remained different on almost every village regardless of the tenurial structure of the fourteenth century.[681] In the fourteenth century there was a remarkable symmetry of holdings here at Bishopwearmouth, with all the former demesne land held in ten-acre parcels, the bondland held as one messuage and two bovates of land, each bovate containing fifteen acres of land, and the cottages containing either six or twelve acres of land.

[679] Ibid., pp. 158-60; *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis,* pp. 225-6.
[680] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, pp. 132-4; Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU; *Parliamentary Surveys*, pp. 164-74.
[681] See chapter 3 above.

Table 42: Bishopwearmouth Tenants in Hatfield Survey, 1380s

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	RENT
DEMESNE LAND:		
John Hobson	10 acres	18s 4d
William Gray	10 acres	18s 4d
William Wearmouth	10 acres	18s 4d
Adam Rudd and John Sunderland	10 acres	18s 4d
Cecilia wife of John Nowell	10 acres	36s 8d
Robert Robinson	10 acres	18s 4d
Robert Warden	10 acres	18s 4d
Aforesaid Cecilia Nowell	10 acres	18s 4d
Robert Parish and Thomas Sheperdson	10 acres	18s 4d
Giliana Gamell and Cecilia Nowell	10 acres	18s 4d
William Birdesman	10 acres	18s 4d
Thomas Sheperdson	10 acres	15s 8d
John Robinson	10 acres	15s 8d
Emma widow of William Robinson	10 acres	15s 8d
John Sunderland	10 acres	15s 8d
Stephan Carter	1 acre called Forland	2s
BOND LAND:	Each bovate contains 15 acres of land, and works	
John Hobson	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
William Gray	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
William Wearmouth	2 mess and 4 bovates	62s 1d, and 12 bushels of oats
Thomas Sheperdson and Cecilia Nowell	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
John Sunderland	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
Cecilia Nowell	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
John Hobson and William Gray	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
Robert Wardon	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
Cecilia Nowell	1 mess and 2 bovates	31s ob, and 6 bushels of oats
MILL:		
Bond tenants of Wemouth, Tunstall, Refhop and Birden	Mill	[blank]
COTTAGES:		
Robert Payn	1 cottage and 12 acres	10s 4d
Idem Robert	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 6d
Juliana Gamell	1 cottage and 12 acres	10s 4d
Thomas Shepherd	1 cottage and 12 acres	10s 4d
John Hobson	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 6d
Thomas Marshall	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 6d
Robert Robinson	1 cottage and 6 acres	5s 6d
Nicholas Gamell	1 cottage and 6 acres	8s 2d
Thomas Bullok	1 cottage and 12 acres	10s 4d
Cecilia Nowell	1 cottage and 12 acres	4s

Source: W. Greenwell (ed.), *Bishop Hatfield's Survey: a Record of the Possessions of the See of Durham*, Surtees Society, 32 (1857), pp. 132-4

This is slightly deceptive, however, for there were tenants who had a much larger share than others, for example, William Wearmouth who had accumulated two messuages and four bovates of bondland and a further ten acres of demesne land, or Cecilia Nowell, the widow of John Nowell, who held twenty acres of demesne land with a share in another ten acres, and two messuages and four bovates of bondland outright, with a further messuage and two bovates alongside Thomas Sheperdson, and a cottage with twelve acres of land.[682]

By 1588, all of the land here had been converted to copyhold tenure, and in his large study of the Palatinate, Surtees despaired of recording all the tenants for they 'are too numerous and their tenures too trifling to be transcribed.'[683] However, it is well worth the effort, for there was once again the accumulation of much larger holdings, with the survival of only three cottagers, two of whom were widows and the other a tenant of one of the larger holdings. Although the survey does not include exact details of the holdings, the rents paid are at least indicative of the general amount of land held, and reveals the disparity within the village. For example, John Thompson had accumulated land worth £6 17s 4d, and there were several other holdings worth over £4 in rent, whereas George Clarke had a holding worth 6s 8d, and there were numerous tenants who held land worth around 20s. It is also clear that the Sheppsons (or Sheperdsons) had acquired substantial amounts of land: William Sheppson a messuage with a rent of 28s 8d; his wife a messuage with a rent of 10s 6d; John Sheppson a messuage with a rent of 64s 8d; and Richard Shepson a messuage with a rent of 63s 4d.[684]

[682] *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, pp. 132-4.
[683] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 224-6.
[684] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU; *Parliamentary Surveys.*

Table 43: Bishopwearmouth Tenants in the Elizabethan Survey of 1588

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	RENT
COPYHOLDERS:		
Robert Patteson	1 messuage	39s 8d
Thomas Hilton	1 messuage	£4 20d
Christopher Whorton and William Patteson	1 messuage	£4 6s 8d
George Gouis	1 messuage	21s
William Sheppson	1 messuage	28s 8d
William Riddell	1 messuage	26s 4d
The wife of William Sheppson	1 messuage	10s 6d
George Clarke	1 messuage	6s 8d
John Blenkinskoppe	1 messuage	21s
Adam Holme	1 messuage	42s 8d
John Sheppson	1 messuage	64s 8d
John Thompson	1 messuage	£6 17s 4d
Widow Watson	1 messuage	68s 2d
Margaret Persons	1 messuage	42s 6d
Richard Sheppson	1 messuage	63s 4d
Widow Wilkinson	1 messuage	41s 8d
Ralph Bowes, gent.	Parcel of ground	3s
John Hoote	Parcel of waste ground	12d
Christopher Whorton	Cottage	6d
Widow Chamber	Cottage	12d
Widow Colier	Cottage	12d
Philippe Hall	Waste plot	4d
TOTAL:		£39 9s 2d
LEASEHOLDERS:		
Thomas Sparrow	Windmill	40s
Robert Patteson	Cottage with 15 acres	15s 4d
TOTAL:		55s 4d
PERQUISITES OF THE COURT:		12s
TOTAL:		£42 16s 6d

Source: Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates in County Durham, April 1588, Sede Vacante, P.M. Richard Barnes, ASCRefB1CHU

How far were these larger tenants able to capitalise on the increase in agricultural prices during the sixteenth century? Were they engaging in commercial agriculture on a significantly larger scale than their smaller neighbours or their counterparts on the Dean and Chapter's estates? William Pattinson, for example, died in 1614 with twenty acres of wheat

sown on the ground worth approximately £30, with a further £10 10s worth of wheat, £16 of peas, £8 13s 4d of bigg, and £6 of oats in the barn, garth and stackyards, and £3 6s 8d worth of threshed hay and straw.[685] Related to this arable agriculture were two of his most valuable types of livestock: ten oxen worth £40 and six horses with two foals worth £14 16s 8d, for which he possessed two ox harrows and two horse harrows, along with the rest of their furniture. His other main livestock farming consisted of nine cows worth £20, and forty-one ewes and other sheep worth £10 10s, along with a sow and seven young swine worth £2 10s, and a cock, four hens, two capons and two geese. It seems likely, therefore, that the majority of his farming was geared towards arable agriculture, with his livestock providing variety to the family's diet as well as cheese and wool for sale. A similar prevalence is visible in the inventory on the death of John Thompson in 1616, who possessed twenty-five acres of wheat and bigg worth £37 10s, and twenty-two acres of peas and oats worth £22.[686] However, his larger holding enabled him to incorporate more livestock onto his farm than some of his neighbours, with twelve oxen worth £54 and five horses and mares worth £13 and two *stags* and a foal worth £3 10s and it is clear that a mixture of these animals were used to work on the farm, with two ox harrows and two horse harrows, and various other horse-gear. His other livestock included ten cows worth £20, six *whies* worth £6, and twenty nine ewes worth £7, twenty six gelded sheep worth £7, and twenty lambs worth £2 10s. The output of this extra pastoral farming is also evidenced by the thirty-four cheeses he possessed worth 13s 4d, five stone of butter worth 16s, and a further three beef flicks and a bacon flick.

Adam Holme's inventory on his death in 1618 reveals considerably fewer agricultural goods than those of John Thompson, which is roughly in line with the size of their respective holdings.[687] As the largest single landholder in the village it is natural that John Thompson

[685] DPRI/1/1615/P4/3.
[686] DPRI/1/1616/T9/2.
[687] Survey of Durham Bishopric Estates, ASCRefB1CHU.

would also possess the largest agricultural concern, and once again shows that these tenants were often farming their own lands with little relatively little evidence of subletting. For example, Adam Holme's smaller holding only allowed him to grow corn on the ground worth £20, with a further £22 worth in the stack-garth. However, it was in the livestock he kept where the real discrepancies appear, for he only possessed six oxen worth £28, six cows worth £12, four mares worth £11, and sixty sheep worth £15 13s 4d: John Thompson's larger holding giving a greater scope for pastoral farming.[688] Although Adam Holme had a smaller potential for commercial agriculture here, this does not take into account all of his land, for his will makes it clear that he was also leasing land in Ryhope, upon which he had crops growing worth £13 6s 8d and three oxen, one mare, a waine and plough gear worth in total £15.[689] It is deceptive, therefore, to draw too many conclusions from a single village without reference to their holdings outside the area, although it is perennially difficult to link them without direct reference in a document such as a will. The above three inventories were all proven in the 1610s, but a later inventory survives for one of the Shepherdson family who were such prolific landholders here in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.[690] The inventory taken on the death of George Shepherdson in 1635 shows a reliance on arable farming with twenty acres of wheat and bigg, and twenty-four acres of peas and oats being grown worth together £50 13s 4d, a further £7 10s worth of wheat in the stack-garth, but he also possessed a not inconsiderable pastoral concern with eight oxen worth £36, nine cows, three *stirkes*, and two calves worth £22, five draught horses worth £18, two 2-years old *stags*

[688] DPRI/1/1618/H23/3.
[689] DPRI/1/1618/H23/1-2.
[690] A stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a hogge was a yearling sheep; a whie was a heifer up to three years old; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a gimmer hogge was a ewe between first and second shearing; and a stag was a young colt.

and two foals worth £5, twenty nine ewes and *hogges* worth £5 6s 8d, and fifteen lambs worth £1 13s 4d.[691]

Table 44 shows a summary of the different types of wealth found in their probate inventories, which reveals that livestock often accounted for more of their wealth than grain. However, the most valuable livestock were always oxen and horses, which were by their very nature an extension of arable farming being used for ploughing. The high value of livestock here is not representative of a pastoral economy but rather of their ability to keep work animals in a high density on their lands.

Table 44: A Breakdown of the Types of Wealth in the Surviving Probate Inventories of Bishopwearmouth Tenants, 1540-1640

	Arable	Livestock	Household Goods	Clothes	Debts Owed	Debts Owing
William Pattinson	£86.84	£87.83	£25.33	£3.00	£8.41	-£42.58
John Thompson	£72.95	£116.53	£15.13	£4.50	£5.05	N/A
Adam Holme	£72.05	£96.83	£47.02	£5.00	N/A	-£16.10
George Shepherdson	£67.03	£90.33	£16.38	£4.00	£115.07	-£60.32

Source: Durham Probate Inventories: DPRI/1/1615/P4/3; DPRI/1/1616/T9/2; DPRI/1/1618/H23/3; DPRI/1/1635/S6/1

Were they able to use these substantial holdings and agricultural pursuits to increase their standard of living? All four were described as yeomen, and their net wealth was considerable even if their household goods and apparel were sometimes modest.[692] Certainly, Adam Holme possessed considerable household goods, but unfortunately it is only summarised in his inventory and so cannot be explored further. One of the major differences between these larger tenants and their counterparts on the Dean and Chapter's estates is revealed by their probate inventories which show a diversification away from purely agricultural pursuits. For example, George Shepherdson had an eighth share in a ship worth £20 and also numerous debts owed to him, some of which were quite considerable and,

[691] DPRI/1/1635/S6/1.
[692] DPRI/1/1615/P4/3; DPRI/1/1616/T9/2; DPRI/1/1618/H23/3; DPRI/1/1635/S6/1.

judging from their surnames, appear to be from neighbours: John Hilton owed £20, Christopher Shippson owed £30, Raiph Holmes owed £10, Christoper Pattinson owed £10, and John Nicholson owed him £6.[693] John Shepherdson also held the lease of the bishops' fishing rights in the River Wear and limestone quarries in the waste grounds at Bishopwearmouth, which included 'all lime pits and houses already digged … with free liberty to dig and make so many lime pits and quarries within the said premises as shall please him. And also to build and erect thereupon two limehouses for laying and keeping lime in and for the persons employed about the said lime pits to live in.'[694] Applying lime or marl to agricultural lands helped raise yields by neutralising soil acidity caused by prolonged farming and leaching from heavy rainfall, with Sunderland as the 'only exporter of lime between the Humber and the Forth', long enjoying 'a virtual monopoly on this trade in north-eastern England'.[695] It was this same John Shepherdson who was one of the partners in the colliery at Harraton on the Wear, which Hatcher described as becoming a 'great colliery long before the Civil War'. In 1603 it was said there were 6,000 chaldrons of coal lying on its banks, and in 1630 it was contributing 6,000-10,000 tons annually to shipments from the Wear. A partnership involving John Shepherdson and his family was running Harraton in the early-seventeenth century which in Hatcher's words 'provided the driving force behind its development'.[696] These entrepreneurial activities were producing sufficient profit to be ploughed back into the land, as William and John Shepherdson purchased John Shaklock's portion of Murton manor in 1624, which comprised of a messuage, twenty acres of arable, twenty of meadow, thirty of pasture, fifty of furze, and fifty acres of moor.[697] The Shepherdsons were thus spurring on industrial growth and agricultural innovation on a much larger scale than either their peasant ancestors or their counterparts at Harton.

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[693] DPRI/1/1635/S6/1.
[694] *Parliamentary Surveys, vol. 2*, p. 173.
[695] http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/sites/default/files/work-in-progress/lime_glass_pottery_paper.pdf
[696] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 255.
[697] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 8-9.

The parliamentary survey of the 1640s allows for a much more detailed view of these holdings, which were still all held by copyhold tenure, except for the windmill, fishing rights and a solitary cottage. Many of the above patterns persisted, with numerous tenants holding multiple copyholds of land. Edward Harper, in right of Isabel his wife and widow of Thomas Bryan held three copyholds worth £4 4s 7d; Thomas Fewler and Ann his wife held five copyholds worth in total £4 19s 3d; whilst the Sheperdsons were still represented in the village by John Shipperdson the younger, heir to his father, who held three copyholds worth a combined total of £6, the largest rent in the village.[698] There were also increasing signs of non-agricultural tenancy here, with Richard, the brother and heir of Thomas Johnson, holding a dwelling house, hall and chamber, with a shop and moiety of some lands, and Martin Watson who held the lease of the windmill and who held a dwelling house, hall and chamber, and a shop now made into a chamber.[699]

[698] *Parliamentary Surveys, vol. 2,* pp. 164-74.
[699] Ibid.

Table 45: Bishopwearmouth Tenants in the Parliamentary Surveys of the 1640s

TENANTS	HOLDINGS	RENT	FINE
COPYHOLDS:			
Thomas Ayre	2 messuages, 15 acres of land, 12 acres of husbandland		6s 8d
Idem	1 rood of land, 1 parcel of land, and a cottage	10s	2d
Idem	4th part of 12 acres of land, 4th part of 20 acres of land		5s
Idem	4th part of a parcel of meadow	£3 2s 1d	4d
Edward Harper	9 acres of land, a messuage, cottage and 12 acres	For all three	£1
Idem	1 cottage	For all three	2s
Idem	3rd of a messuage, 10 acres of land, 30 further acres	£4 4s 7d	9s 6d
Thomas Robinson	1 messuage and a garth	For both	1s
Idem	Moiety of a moiety of a cottage	3s 4d	3d
John Nicholson	Half a messuage,12 acres, 2 acres in each field	£2 10d	3d
Idem	6 acres of land, 2 in each field, and 15 acres	5s 6d	6d
Idem	1 acre in each field, Eastfield, Southfield, Westfield		1s 4d
Idem	1 little Crosse house,		1d
Idem	1 little house		2d
Robert Pattinson	Moiety of a messuage, moiety of 30 acres and 15 acres	£1 19s 10d	5d
John Johnson j.	Half of a cottage and half of 10 acres	For all five	1s 8d
Idem	1 messuage and a garth	For all five	4d
Idem	1 cottage, barn and garth, and half of 10 acres	For all five	1d
Idem	4th part of 12 acres of land, 4th part of 20 acres	For all five	5s
Idem	4th part of a parcel of meadow	£1 13s 5d	3d
Thomas Fewler	3rd part of 10 acres of land, and 3rd part of 30 acres	For all five	4s 9d
Idem	3rd part of a tenement and 40 acres of land and 40 acres	For all five	2s 2d
Idem	Moiety of a whole tenure formerly John Roxbyes	For all five	1s
Idem	1 messuage late of the Lord's waste	For all five	1s 8d
Idem	6 acres of land in every field of Wearmouth	£4 19s 3d	1s
John Shippardson	1 cottage and garth	For all three	1s
Idem	1 tenement called East Place	For all three	£1
Idem	Moiety of house with barns, stables, oxenhouses,	£6	2s 5d
[page missing]			
Martin Watson	1 cottage		1s
Thomas Smith	3rd part of a 3rd of a messuage	9s	1s 8d
Eliz. and Margaret	1.5 acres of arable land in 3 fields		6d
Eadem	1 cottage with garth		2d
Eadem	A house, moiety of a messuage and 45 acres		3d
Eadem	3 roods of land lying in 3 several fields	Fewler, etc	6d
Richard Johnson	Dwelling house, a hall, chamber, and a shop	8s 9d	1s 1.5d
Martin Watson	Dwelling house, hall, chamber, and shop now a chamber	1s 1.5d	2d
William Coxon	Moiety of a cottage	3d	1s
Isaach Watson	1 messuage adjacent upon the hallgarth	Pattinson	6d
George Lilburne	A parcel of land, and numerous houses in Sunderland		3s 4d
Idem	A parcel of land		4d
John Harrison	Parcel of land with all houses and staithes, etc		4d
…Burdon	A parcel of ground lying in Bishop Wearmouth saltpans		2d
Robert Holliday	Moiety of a parcel of ground with a house	6d	4d
Ralph Holme	2 cottages and 12 acres of land, and 10 acres	£2 2s	10s
John Surfield	1 house		
LEASEHOLDERS:			
Martin Watson	Wind corn mill	£5	
John Shippardson	Fishing in the river Wear, and quarries of limestone	5s, 6 salmon	
Thomas Smith	1 cottage and garth and 15 acres of land and meadow	15s 4d	

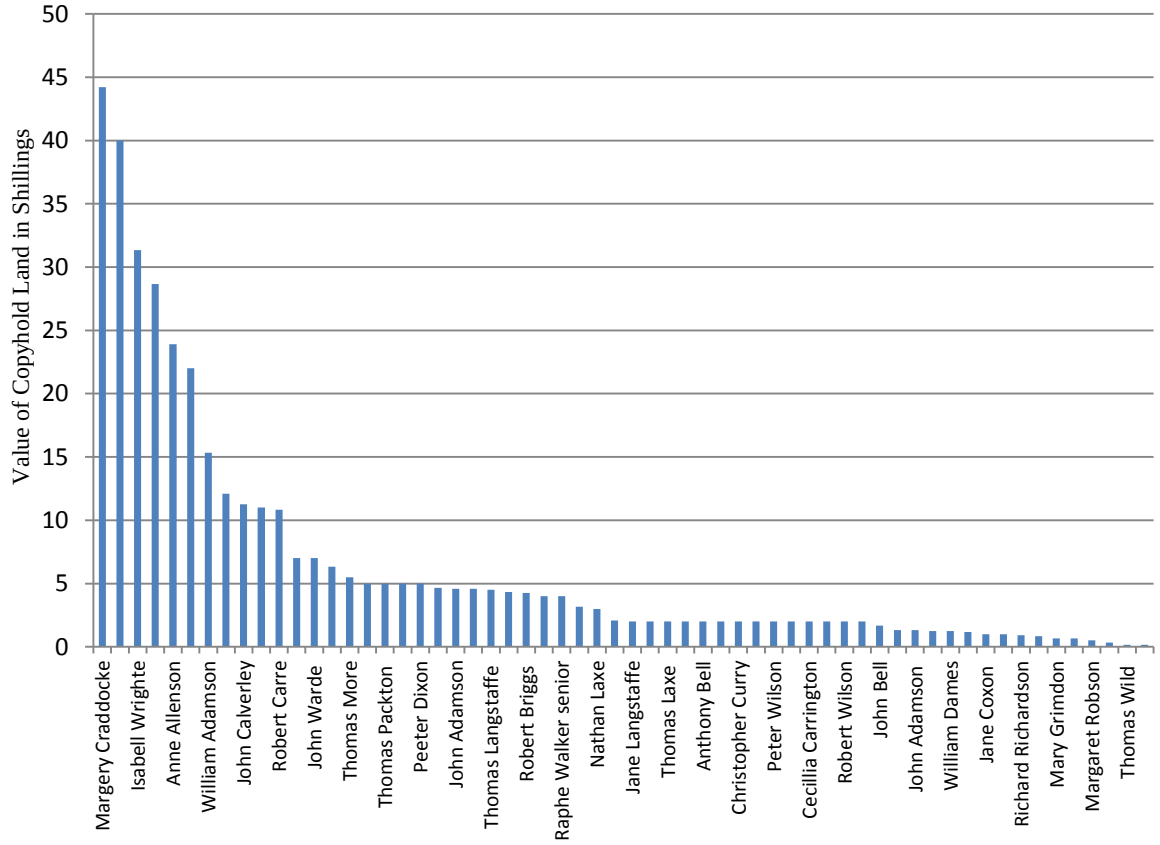
Source: D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham. Vol. II,* Surtees Society, 185 (1972), pp. 164-74

There is also a particularly revealing entry for Thomas Fewler and his wife, Ann, who paid £4 19s 3d for their five copyholds, which included several substantial holdings, but also a third part of ten acres of land, a third part of thirty acres of former bondland, and a third part of ten acres of former demesne land 'by demise of Margaret Jarvis widow of Ralph Jarvis from St Martin the Bishop in winter for 100 years paying £6 yearly at Martinmas and Pentecost.'[700] This entry shows the substantial value of this land above the rent or entry fines paid by the bishop's tenants, for they were paying more to sublet this one piece of land than they were paying to the bishop for all of their much larger holdings in total.

These examples reveal the sheer complexity of the tenurial structure upon the estates of the bishops of Durham, with individual tenants possessing multiple holdings of disparate sizes, some of which were clearly inherited by widows and thus divided into thirds, and others being sublet in portions. If this is compared to the Dean and Chapter's holdings at Harton the importance of understanding a village's position within its larger estate becomes central to understanding rural society in this period, with the holdings at Harton suffering very little fragmentation even by the eighteenth century.[701] It was the lack of any uniform directive from the bishops of Durham which allowed for the steady accumulation or fragmentation of holdings upon their lands in a way which was not possible on the Dean and Chapter's estate since their syndication of holdings in the fifteenth century. This led to different opportunities for the accumulation of land; a perfect example of this stratification of holdings comes from Bishop Auckland. The below graph shows the value in shillings of all the copyhold land found here in the 1640s.

[700] Ibid.
[701] See chapter 8 above.

Figure 25: Total Value in Shillings of Copyhold Land on the Manor of Auckland in the 1640s



Source: D. A. Kirby (ed.), *Parliamentary Surveys of the Bishopric of Durham. Vol. I*, Surtees Society, 183 (1966), pp. 15-34

There was a multitude of people with rents worth less than 5s, some cottagers, and others owing rent for small parcels of land, but there was also a group of more substantial tenants owing rents of over 20s. These included: Margery Craddocke, widow of Henry Maughen, who owed rents worth a total of £2 4s 2d; Ann Bayles who held six copyholds by widowright which were worth £2; Isabell Hodgson who held eight copyholds by widowright worth £1 2s; John Walker who possessed land worth £1 8s 8d; Anne Allenson who held seven copyholds by widowright worth £1 3s 11d; and lastly Isabel Wright, widow of Bryan Wright, who owed rents worth £1 11s 4d.[702] Not only does this example show the high degree of stratification in the size of holdings but also the extraordinary importance of widows in the inheritance of

[702] *Parliamentary Surveys, vol. 1*, pp. 15-34.

land and future transmission of holdings, with five of the six people with rents of over 20s being widows. Why this should be so is not immediately apparent, although it likely represents the disruption caused by the Civil War and Scottish occupation on everyday life, with a generation of husbands killed during the conflict.

David Levine and Keith Wrightson found a similar degree of stratification on the bishops' manor of Whickham in the early-seventeenth century which they associated with the impact of more extensive coal-mining from the 1620s onwards. They described how the distribution of landholding 'underwent significant change', as the middle-range of holdings of one to three oxgangs 'which had retained their integrity up to 1600 had largely disappeared as separate units and their lands had been redistributed' creating a greater degree of stratification on the manor. There was an increasing number of very large accumulations, and by 1647, there were five holdings of more 'than fifty acres, two of them falling in the eighty-hundred acres range and one being no less than 170 acres', some of which had been 'built up by families notable in 1600'.[703] This is very reminiscent of the above findings for Newbottle and Bishopwearmouth, and was part of a much larger process of stratification which was happening on the bishops' estate. Indeed, the proximity of the coal trade may well have acted as an inhibiting factor in this engrossment as the middle-range of copyholders could supplement their incomes with wain carriage and thus better resist the financial pressures exerted by some of their larger neighbours for longer. The other consequence of this process was the proliferation of tenants who held 'only a house or cottage and/or garden, garth and tiny parcels of land of less than one acre' which had swollen from twenty six in 1600 to sixty six by 1647.[704] This development was heavily dependent on the increase in coal production which provided these copyholders with the increasing opportunity for wage labour from the late-sixteenth century onwards.

[703] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, pp. 137-8.
[704] Ibid., pp. 137-8.

Unlike on the Dean and Chapter's estate, holdings had not become standardised across this period on the bishop's estate, which had long-term consequences for the stratification of land on their manors. It enabled some tenants to accumulate much larger holdings than their neighbours, several of whom were able to engross considerable amounts of land, which enabled them to produce over fifty acres of grain, alongside keeping around ten oxen, the same number of cows, around five horses, and sheep flocks in the region of fifty. Certainly, these were not substantial landholders, but they increasingly came to dominate the villages where they held land, especially as many of their neighbours held significantly smaller holdings. It was this relative difference in the size of holdings which created a real sense of stratification on the bishops' estate compared to the relative uniformity on the Dean and Chapter's lands, with these smaller tenants often working as wage labourers on the holdings of their more substantial neighbours. These smallholdings were still financially viable on the bishops' estate because many of them held their lands by copyhold tenure and so their rents and entry fines stagnated. It was their larger neighbours, however, who were in the best position to create a marketable surplus and thus profit most from this increasing divergence between prices and rents across the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries.

The Rise of a Yeoman Elite

Robert Brenner argued that France's stagnant agrarian growth was a result of 'the continuing strength of peasant landholding into the early-modern period.'[705] By comparison, he argued that it 'was disintegrating in England' and 'with the peasants' failure to establish essentially freehold control over the land, the landlords were able to engross, consolidate and

[705] Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', p. 54.

enclose, to create large farms and to lease them to capitalist tenants who could afford to make capital investments'.[706] However, it has been shown by Hoyle and others that, far from being weak as Brenner believed, some forms of copyhold tenure were incredibly strong, with recourse to royal courts who often ruled in favour of the copyholders.[707] Even if this is taken into consideration, there are still numerous examples of copyholders purchasing the freehold rights to their lands, especially in the sixteenth century as stagnant rents provided dual opportunities: landlords in increasing financial trouble, and tenants who could increasingly afford to benefit. The Radcliffes, for example, inherited the manor of Hawthorn from the Claxtons and held it until 1607 when Francis and Edward granted the whole manor and vill in several parcels to their tenants: Richard White of Hawthorn, William Sharpe of Hesilden, and Marmaduke Hethfield of Hawthorn, who purchased on behalf of themselves and of Robert Marshall, Thomas Shadforth, Thomas Sharpe, Robert Forster, James Robinson, Richard Wolfe, William Unthank, George Jurdeson, Thomas Todd, and William Thompson.[708] The financial crisis of the Lumleys provided similar opportunities for their tenants to purchase lands with John Lord Lumley alienating Murton in eight portions in 1566 to his tenants, reserving a free rent of £21 6s 8d, eight hens and eight shillings.[709] The purchasers were Richard Rede, Thomas Yonge, Thomas Shadforth, Anthony Dune, John Gregson, William Unthank, John Shaklock, and John Robinson, husbandmen of Morton, in consideration of £341 6s 8d to be paid to Lord Lumley.[710] In 1624, John Shaklock granted his lands here, which presumably therefore represented an eighth of the total manor, to William and John Shipperdson, comprising a messuage, twenty acres of land, twenty of meadow, thirty of pasture, fifty of furze, and fifty of moor. Another example of this process can be seen on the

[706] Ibid., p. 49.
[707] R. W. Hoyle, 'Tenure on the Elizabethan Estates', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Estates of the English Crown, 1558-1640* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 163-168.
[708] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 15-17.
[709] See chapter 4 above.
[710] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 8-9.

manor of Eppleton, which was purchased by the Herons from Robert Epplinden in 1391, and remained in their family until they sold the manor to the sitting yeoman tenant, John Todd. In 1519 Sir William Heron leased half the lordship to Todd for 99 years, reserving an outrent of £11. The purchase money, whatever it was, had been more than anticipated because Todd was empowered to retain the outrent, and to take the rents of Heron's manor of North-Hart till he had received the sum of £108, advanced to Sir William in his necessities. By a subsequent deed, Sir William released all claim to the future produce of the outrent, and conveyed the entire and unencumbered property of the manor to John Todd. In Surtees' words: 'however common the transaction may now appear, this was perhaps the first instance within the Bishopric, of a tenant acquiring the estate and manorial rights of his landlord.'[711]

These examples were not isolated incidents and show the profits that could be made from direct agricultural production in the sixteenth century as well as the potential avenues of advancement in a period of relative upheaval in the landed structure of Durham. One of the more interesting examples of this is the Shadforth family, who can be seen in several of the above transactions, buying pieces of land throughout several manors in Easington ward during the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. In 1566, Thomas Shadforth purchased what was described as an eighth part of the manor of Murton from Lord Lumley. This was the same manor which the Shepherdsons of Bishopwearmouth later purchased their way into and it is hardly surprising to see this combination of improving families enclosing the whole townfield at Murton in 1640, some fifty or so years after an earlier, partial division had shown the lands to be 'better suited to pasture than tillage'.[712] George and John Shadforth also purchased the manor of Eppleton piecemeal from George Collingwood, esq., acquiring a seventh portion in 1601, a moiety by 1617, with his son, Thomas, acquiring the whole manor

[711] Ibid., pp. 217-9.
[712] R. I Hodgson, 'The Progress of Enclosure in County Durham, 1550-1870', in H. S. A. Fox and R. A. Butlin (eds.), *Change in the Countryside: Essays on Rural England, 1500-1900* (London, 1979), p. 94.

in 1630.[713] It was this same George Collingwood, esq., who was one of the supervisors of George Shadforth's will in 1617, as well as one of the witnesses, although a certain amount of this may have been self-interest for he was recorded as being owed £900 by George Shadforth, presumably for part of the purchase of Eppleton.[714] Furthermore, the Shadforths also possessed a moiety of the vill of Whardon, which is explicitly mentioned in George Shadforth's will in 1617, out of which he expected his executors to collect £500 in the space of just ten years for the satisfaction of his daughter's filial portion; a clear sign of the profitability of agriculture in this period.[715] Lastly, the family was also leasing the manor of Tunstall from the bishops of Durham. This was one of the very long leases granted out by the bishops, which in the parliamentary surveys is shown as being in two portions: one which passed from King James I, through the hands of several people before becoming John Shadforth's, was an 80-year lease with a rent of £10 13s 4d, but which on improvement was estimated at £96; the other which was similarly an 80-year lease, was granted to Richard Middleton who demised it to John Shadforth, had a rent of £2 13s 4d, and which on improvement was estimated at £24.[716] The value of these leases should not be underestimated and were clearly treated as a commercial asset owned by George Shadforth upon whose death in 1617, were valued as worth £600.[717]

The Shadforths were one of numerous Durham yeomen who were able to make profits from commercially farming their lands, taking considerable risks to purchase further lands, which were used in a cyclical fashion to increase their wealth and social standing. The inventory of George Shadforth in 1617 is revealing for the amount of livestock he possessed upon his leased lands at Tunstall. There were seventeen acres of hard corn and seventeen

[713] Surtees, *History of Durham, vol. 1*, pp. 217-9.
[714] DPRI/1/1617/S3/1.
[715] Ibid.
[716] *Parliamentary Surveys*, p. 154.
[717] The following from his inventory: DPRI/1/1617/S3/2-3.

acres of ware corn valued at £60, as well as some six lodes of threshed oats, and twenty thraves of wheat valued at £7. However, he clearly used Tunstall more for pastoral farming, with eight draught oxen worth £44, fourteen cows worth £35, a bull worth £2 10s, twenty nine ewes praised at £10 3s, several mares and foals worth around £18 in total, two *whies* worth £5, nine *stottes* valued at £24, eight calves praised at £4 4s, twenty tuppes worth £6, seventy two old sheep on the hills valued at £25 4s, nineteen lambs worth £4, and four swine, twelve geese, and twenty hens and chickens.[718] The emphasis on this pastoral farming is clearly visible in other possessions at Tunstall such as the thirty fothers of hay worth £10, whilst the commercial produce of such farming is also visible in the twelve stone of butter valued at £2, and the sixty cheeses praised at 6d each. He also possessed a not inconsiderable amount of agricultural wealth on his lands at Murton, where fifteen acres of hard corn and fifteen acres of ware corn were also growing worth £30, and a further forty-six thraves of wheat in stacks worth £10, and one hundred and ten thraves of oats worth £16 10s, as well as twenty-eight fothers of hay worth £8 8s. Here are Murton he also possessed six oxen worth £30, forty-one old sheep praised at £12, six cows and a bull worth £14, three cows, one being new calved £6, three *stotts*, three *whies*, and a bull *stirke* worth £11 2s, two calves worth £1 4s, and fifty three lambs worth £8 16s 8d. He was also owed considerable sums from the likes of Sir Henry Anderson who owed him £200, Ralph Featherston who owed £100, Thomas King who owed £80, Edward Daile who owed £47, and Mr Robert Cooper of Durham who owed £40, and he had desperate debts which included a bond owed by Roger Lumley for £64.

[718] A stirke was a young bullock or heifer; a hogge was a yearling sheep; a whie was a heifer up to three years old; a stotte was either a young castrated ox or a heifer; a fother is a cart-load.

Conclusion:

George Shadforth, by virtue of his extra holdings, was thus able to engage in commercial farming on a much larger scale than either the Dean and Chapter's leaseholders or the larger of the bishop's copyhold tenants. Indeed, the scale of his operations was not overly dissimilar from many members of the gentry, with over £150 worth of grain, and nearly £300 worth of livestock. However, it is his other possessions which reveal the primary difference between himself and his gentry neighbours: his apparel, for example, only came to £13 6s 8d, whilst the only plate or jewellery mentioned were his six silver spoons worth £1 10s, with the entirety of his household goods only approaching £25: in Trevor-Roper's words 'he had yeoman tastes, yeoman methods, yeoman habits. He did not have to keep up the port of a gentleman…and half his prosperity was due to this saving'.[719] It was this section of society who increasingly swelled the ranks of the gentry who, as Mervyn James found, were 'rich farmers, previously content with the traditional title of 'yeoman', [now] eager to be called gentry'.[720] This was a general phenomenon of the period, with J. T. Cliffe noting that between 1558 and 1642 'it was the yeomanry who represented the greatest source of recruitment [into the gentry] and in fact roughly half the Yorkshiremen who bought their way into the gentry in this period can be identified as yeoman farmers'.[721] As Trevor-Roper went on to comment, the rise into the gentry of successful yeomen 'seems incontestable', with yeomen farming their lands directly often able to build up properties 'worth three or four squires put together' and were found 'able yearly to dispend betwixt three and five hundred pounds'.[722]

[719] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 9.
[720] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, pp. 71-2.
[721] Cliffe, *Yorkshire Gentry*, p. 19.
[722] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 9.

It was families like the Shadforths and Shepherdsons of the Wear valley noted above whose sons found their way to the University of Cambridge in the second half of the seventeenth century, with successive generations matriculating at Peterhouse, Trinity and Christ colleges.[723] The social aspiration of this burgeoning group in the English countryside during the late-sixteenth century was in part predicated upon their agricultural profits, but it also acted as a motivation for further economic dynamism, especially in the north-east of England where the collapse of the Neville affinity, stagnant rents on the bishop of Durham's lands, and early industrialisation provided considerable opportunities for their fulfilment. The sheriff of Durham created a list in the seventeenth century which detailed those 'freeholders and grandjurymen who were styled gentlemen and yet did not bear arms', giving an annual value of their estates. It is hardly surprising to see the names of Anthony Shadforth of Tunstall and Thomas Shadforth of Eppleton there with estates valued at £160 and £300 per annum respectively, as well as John Shepherdson of Bishopwearmouth with a valuation of £160 per annum: three of the highest valuations for non-armorial freeholders in Easington ward.[724] Further indications of the increasing living standards and social aspirations of this dynamic group can be seen in the Hearth Tax of 1666, which describes Thomas Shadforth, gent., of Eppleton as owning the thirteen-hearth Eppleton Hall, whilst the next biggest house in the village similarly belonged to him with three hearths. Indeed, of the four other paying households at Eppleton only Ralph Hall was taxed on two hearths, with the other households and a further three non-paying households described as possessing only a single hearth, clearly demonstrating the prominence the family achieved within the village.[725] Similarly, a

[723] John Venn and J. A. Venn (ed.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 47 and 60.
[724] Charles Henry Hunter Blair, 'Durham Armorials of the Seventeenth Century', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th Ser., 15 (1938), pp. 156-203.
[725] *County Durham Hearth Tax*, p. 55.

Ms Mary Shadforth was taxed on a seven-hearth house at Tunstall, which was once again the largest house by a considerable margin, with fourteen non-paying households also present.[726]

On the estate of the bishops of Durham, and more broadly upon several estates of the laity, the fifteenth century thus appears to be a period of general engrossment, but unlike on the Dean and Chapter's estate where the structure of landholding persisted into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, land continued to be engrossed and fragmented on a far greater scale, leading to the rise of a rural elite and a large group of smallholders. It was this experience which perhaps fits best with national trends in England, with Outhwaite describing the 'later Middle Ages as a, perhaps even *the*, great era of engrossment', and Chris Dyer similarly suggesting that rural society underwent an important restructuring in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[727] Dyer concluded that a much 'higher proportion of holdings reached thirty to sixty acres, but very large accumulations of land, containing a hundred acres or more, were quite rare'.[728] At the south Devon village of Stokenham, the main landholders were reduced in number between 1347 and 1390 from 147 to 120, and the average amount of land held by each tenant rose from thirty-one to forty-five acres.[729] He estimated that if 12-15 acres of land was the amount that could provide a family with all of the grain that it needed, then in 1280 in the East Midlands at least 42 per cent of rural households were inadequately provided, and therefore had to buy at least part of their food.[730] By comparison, in 1480 about two-thirds of rural households in the midlands had enough land to produce all of the grain for their consumption needs.

This restructured rural society came under increasing pressure as the sixteenth century progressed because of rapid population increase, with Joan Thirsk describing how 'in the

[726] Ibid., p. 60.
[727] Outhwaite, 'Progress and Backwardness', pp. 1-18.
[728] Dyer, *Making a Living*, p. 294.
[729] Ibid., p. 294.
[730] Dyer, *An Age of Transition?*, p. 175.

sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries men made war upon the forests, moors, fens with a zeal they had not felt for some three hundred years.'[731] For example, Swain found that fifty-one copyholds in the Colne manor in 1527 had become 102 by 1617, whilst only 'twenty-five copyholders held less than twenty acres at the earlier date, no fewer than eighty-two did so ninety years later.'[732] Appleby similarly found that the manor of Irthington had twenty customary tenants in 1502, which had doubled by 1611, and at Cumwhitton where twenty-nine tenants at the earlier date became sixty by 1603.[733] When studying the Elizabethan Duchy of Cornwall, Graham Haslam found that seven of the seventeen conventionary manors showed marked increases in the number of tenants between 1570 and the first two decades of the seventeenth century. For example,

> 'by 1617 the number of tenements at Tintagel had increased from fifty recorded in the second quarter of the fourteenth century to eighty. At Moresk the number had grown from fifty to sixty. The manor of Stoke Climsland consisting of 100 tenements in the fourteenth century, had increased to 159. Tywarnhaile grew from twenty five to fifty five, Tibesta from fifty to sixty three, Liskeard from eighty to 104 and Calstock from eighty to 144.'[734]

Moreover, he found that several of the copyholders had engrossed much larger holdings within some of the manors as, for example, at Bradninch where 'six copyholders possessed 688 acres between them out of a total of 2,377 acres of copyhold land in the manor in 1615'.[735] The above trends were commented upon by Levine and Wrightson when analysing the bishops' manor of Whickham, where some sixty-eight copyholders in 1600 became 101 by 1647, with a concomitant rise in the near-landless tenants from twenty-six to sixty-six.[736] The sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries thus formed a bipolar period for much of

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[731] Joan Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England' in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *AHEW* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 2.
[732] J. T. Swain, 'Industry and Economy in North-east Lancashire, circa 1500-1640' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1983), figures cited in Outhwaite, 'Progress and Backwardness', p. 9.
[733] A. B. Appleby, 'Agrarian Capitalism or Seigneurial Reaction? The North West of England, 1500-1700', *AHR*, 80 (1975), pp. 574-94.
[734] Graham Haslam, 'The Elizabethan Duchy of Cornwall: An Estate in Stasis', in R. W. Hoyle (ed.), *The Estates of the English Crown, 1558-1640* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 106-7.
[735] Ibid., p. 108.
[736] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, p. 138.

landed society, with the rise of yeoman families like the Shadforths and Shepherdsons who were farming their holdings, taking risks to purchase further lands and entrepreneurially engaging in other commercial activities arising in the region, and the proliferation of smallholders and wage-labourers who increasingly struggled in this period.

Section 3

Conclusion

The divergent development of the two ecclesiastical estates detailed in section one had long-term consequences for the tenantry of Durham and resulted in quite different experiences across the fifteenth, sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. On the estate of Durham Cathedral Priory tenants gained holdings of roughly equal size before the process of syndication was introduced, as, for example, at Harton where the tenants each held approximately two bondlands. However, the process of converting these holdings to leasehold was extremely important for the long-term development of the estate not only because of the change in tenure but also because it fixed these consolidated holdings as the standard unit of landholding on their estate. This meant that these holdings generally did not fragment under the population pressure of the sixteenth century, but neither were they accumulated further, with few signs of subletting before the mid-seventeenth century and similarly few examples of individual tenants holding multiple concurrent leases in a single township. This situation led to the rise of church leaseholders: tenants who formed part of the husbandmen and yeomen of the period, who possessed sufficient land to take advantage of the economic opportunities of the sixteenth century, and engaged in commercial agriculture, which culminated in a reasonable, if unspectacular, standard of living.

By comparison, the lack of any uniform policy on the bishops' estate meant that there was often a much larger accumulation of holdings by individuals or families. In the late-fourteenth century the composition of their estate was not all that dissimilar to the Priory's, with varying amounts of former demesne and bondland interspersed with freeholds,

copyholds and exchequer-land carved out of the waste. Although some engrossment had already occurred by the time of Hatfield's survey in 1380, this was but a precursor of what was to happen across the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By 1588, there were families such as the Chiltons who held around a third of all the land in Newbottle, and individuals such as John Thompson who held land worth over £6 in rent, whilst at the other spectrum there were groups of cottagers or smallholders with very little access to land. This was a process which Levine and Wrightson commented upon at Whickham from the 1620s onwards but which was part of a much larger polarisation of holdings upon the manors of the bishops of Durham.[737] It is likely that the coal industry was actually an inhibiting factor at Whickham because it provided middling farmers with a ready income supplement in the form of wain carriage. This increasing stratification of land was reinforced in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries as these larger neighbours could make substantial profits from agriculture, leading to further purchases of land and thus ensuring their continued dominance of these villages.

The divergent development of these two ecclesiastical estates, therefore, had significant consequences for their tenants, affecting not only the tenure by which they held land and subsequently the levels of rent and entry fines they paid, but also the potential for future engrossment or fragmentation of their holdings. Peter Larson concluded for the late-fourteenth century, that 'the bishopric peasants clung to their concept of community, avoiding change, while many of their Priory counterparts embraced the new opportunities'. On the estate of Durham Priory 'communities fragmented', while on the bishops' estate 'they remained strong'.[738] He went on to argue that 'on the Priory estate we have what appears to be a "crisis of order" with a struggle over agriculture, rather than for moral and religious dominance, which struggle seems to have faded by 1400. Many of the tenants dwindled in

[737] Levine and Wrightson, *Whickham*, pp. 137-8.
[738] Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, pp. 237-40.

consequence, becoming little more than subtenants of the syndicate members and all but disappearing from the court records…the villages of the bishopric estate remained steady in their course'.[739] In the long term, however, the process of syndication fixed these holdings, whereas the lack of any change on the bishops' estate enabled the rise of a village elite over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By the early-seventeenth century, the composition of both estates had changed quite dramatically with the rise of a class of modest leaseholders on the Dean and Chapter's estate. These church leaseholders were still tenant-farmers who displayed little sign of any qualitative change in economic or social outlook by the early-seventeenth century, many of whom were farming the same lands their fourteenth-century ancestors had been. They were no longer peasants for they were engaging in commercial agriculture and employing hired labour, but nor were they taking full advantage of the many economic opportunities of the late-sixteenth century.

In contrast, the much greater degree of stratification of holdings which occurred on the bishops' estate across this period led to the emergence of a group of substantial farmers who were approaching the gentry in terms of wealth and social standing. Families like the Shepherdsons and Shadforths of the Wear valley were distinctly and qualitatively different, not only from medieval peasants but also from the rank and file of church leaseholders. By the early-seventeenth century these families had come to form a rural elite who accumulated capital and land, using their profits from commercial agriculture to purchase further land and to finance entrepreneurial forays into the flourishing industries of the region. These families similarly accumulated social and cultural capital through their relationships with the local gentry, and could be seen setting aside substantial marriage portions for their children, providing for their children's education at university, being listed amongst the wealthiest

[739] Ibid., p. 229.

non-armorial freeholders in Easington ward, and purchasing substantial property like the thirteen-hearth Eppleton Hall.

The tenants of the Durham region more broadly were often prospering, and it was the likes of Lord Lumley who could be seen selling his estate piecemeal to his husbandmen tenants: the struggles of rentier landlords in this period of high inflation slowly passing agricultural profits down the social ladder.[740] It is no surprise that the Shadforths originated as one such husbandry family, who used this opportunity to acquire a portion of Murton manor which was to fund further purchases throughout Easington ward. Similarly, when the Shepherdsons of Bishopwearmouth were seeking to acquire freehold land their gaze quickly fell upon Murton, where they were able to purchase an eighth from other tenants. These agricultural tenants were both ambitious enough, and because of the relatively stagnant rent of their land, financially capable enough, of effectively purchasing considerable amounts of freehold land. On the former-Neville estates of Raby and Brancepeth, the tenants were similarly able to make considerable gains, with the Crown being much more interested in stability in the region. The Homberton survey of 1572 noted many wealthy and substantial tenants doing well and, with regard to the tenants of Brancepeth in particular, pointed out how they had 'great vast ground to keep their cattle and plenty enclosed ground for the succour and maintenance of them in winter', and how the country surrounding was 'plentiful of all things, the soil good and bountiful for corn and grain'.[741] As David Reid concluded, 'they could hardly fail to have profited from low fixed rents and rising prices.'[742]

The institutional context was thus vital for understanding the living standards, social aspirations and wealth of Durham tenants in the early-seventeenth century. Although the relative opportunities of the bishops' estate may have attracted more entrepreneurially-

[740] See chapter 4 above.
[741] Reid, *Durham Crown Lordships*, pp. 18-22.
[742] Ibid., pp. 18-22.

minded tenants, it is likely that it also cultivated such an economic and social outlook amongst its existing tenants, with the rise of career families amongst the gentry on their estate such as the Bellassis family. Likewise, the Shepherdsons had similarly humble backgrounds to the Newtons, Taillours and Pearsons of Harton, but by the early-seventeenth century were amongst the wealthiest non-armorial freeholders in Easington ward, whilst the latter were still effectively tenant-farmers. Phillipp Schofield has explored the ways in which lords acted as 'filters' for exogenous factors affecting tenants in medieval England, but the current thesis suggests that institutional constraints were even more significant than this, creating real structural impositions upon how tenants could, and often did, respond to the market opportunities of the late-sixteenth century.[743] It was in the restructuring of rural society in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that this new path dependency was created, which affected the long-term development of rural society into the early-modern period. Studies of the conflict between landlords and tenants in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries have only served to confirm the importance of precedence and the previous history of estates with the focus on custom. This section has shown that the divergent development of estates could have much more long-term and wide-ranging consequences than is often recognised, not only affecting the tenure and rent of land, but also the potential accumulation of holdings by their tenants. This in turn had a significant impact upon their living standards, social aspirations and ultimately for the formation of agrarian capitalism in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries in England.

[743] Phillipp Schofield, *Peasants and Community in Medieval England, 1200-1500* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 35.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Timing of Change

There has been much debate over the timing of many of the most important changes across this period primarily because the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have often been studied separately. It is clear from developments in Durham that changes wrought in the former period greatly influenced rural society in the latter, creating the need for a greater understanding of these two centuries. Even those few studies which have focused upon this transitional period have differed about the timing of change, with Howell arguing that: 'our discussion of the early modern period must therefore begin with a prelude, 1440-1520, in which we must view a modern society through the perhaps distorting medium of medieval archival practice', whilst Yates has suggested that change was often evolutionary rather than revolutionary with no evidence of 'rapid and revolutionary changes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' in Berkshire.[744] James and Pollard have created a dual narrative of these developments in which the north-east of England has been seen as lagging behind national trends, with Pollard arguing that the region recovered much later from the fifteenth-century recession which has supplemented James' thesis that the transition from a 'lineage society to a civil society' was delayed into the sixteenth century. James concluded that 1570 was a crucial turning point in the development of the region, arguing that:

> 'not only the gentry, but society as a whole, was involved in this pattern of change; and particularly after 1570, when the speed at which the kaleidoscope revolved markedly increased. The years between the Northern Rising and the Civil War were

[744] Howell, *Land, Family, and Inheritance,* p. 58; Yates, *Town and Countryside,* p. 23.

> characterised by economic and demographic growth, and by exceptionally rapid social transformation.'[745]

Undoubtedly the downfall of the Nevilles played a major role in this thinking, especially in removing the feudal, and predominately Catholic, old guard from the Durham countryside. Overnight, the single largest lay landowner disappeared along with any alternative sources of patronage and prosperity that they could offer; a landowner, moreover, who had owned over a fifth of all lay manors in the Palatinate, including the castles of Raby and Brancepeth.

Nevertheless, James was aware that there was much more going on in the Durham countryside than the political downfall of the Earls of Westmoreland could account for, and he went on to explain that 'the fall of the Nevilles, the rise of the coal industry, [and] the changes in agriculture all made their contribution'.[746] In all of these areas there was a definite speeding up of changes which were already underway, as for example, in the coal industry. Much of the above research has shown that landlords within the Palatinate were precociously aware of the financial benefits of coal-mining, with the Thorntons making inroads into the Durham countryside in order to acquire significant coal deposits in the fifteenth century. Similarly, the ecclesiastical estates of Durham exploited their coal reserves, which if sometimes limited and on restrictive leases, was still often profitable, especially for the bishops of Durham. However, despite this early interest in the coal industry, 'we are driven' as John Hatcher concluded, 'unerringly to the 1570s and the 1580s as the turning-point. Between the later 1560s and the later 1590s shipments of coal rose fourfold', which was for the 'seasale trade alone. In the ensuing twenty-five years shipments virtually doubled again to reach an average of over 400,000 tons a year in the early 1620s'.[747] Before this period, the exploitation of coal was primarily undertaken by landowners to supplement their incomes,

[745] James, *Family, Lineage, and Civil Society*, p. 178.
[746] Ibid., p. 178.
[747] Hatcher, *British Coal Industry*, p. 78.

but from the second half of the sixteenth century it became a driving force in the regional economy.

There were still other changes in the 1570s which were of crucial importance in deciding the nature of the relationship between landlords and tenants for several centuries to come. It was in the 1570s that the dispute between the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral and their tenants was resolved, with the Council of the North ruling in 1577 that it 'appeareth by an ancient book and register of leases…that the lands in contention…had been letten for years by lease' and that the tenements 'should not be holden by tenant right'.[748] Although the end result of this dispute is still unclear, with the tenants possessing virtually inheritable rights over these leaseholds, it was another crucial step in recognising the changes already undergone on the Priory's lands, and which culminated in the rise of the church leaseholder on their estates. By comparison, it was in the 1570s and 80s when the bishops of Durham began to face some of their most difficult challenges with the vast leases taken of their lands and their coal mines, and a rent charge of £1,020 imposed upon them, whilst inflation slowly undermined the rest of their income. It was in the next few decades that Bishops James and Neile, when faced with these problems, set about converting almost half of their leasehold land from 21-year leases to three lives, which provided yet more problems for their successors of the early-seventeenth century.

The balance of landed resources within the Palatinate also underwent significant changes in the second half of the sixteenth century: not only did the Neville's disappear, but several other landowners slowly sold portions of their estates, such as the Lumleys and Conyers. Towards the end of the fifteenth century there were numerous families with five or more manors, including the Nevilles, Lumleys, Bowes, Hiltons, Eures and Claxtons, with a whole host of gentry families possessing between three and five manors. By the end of the

[748] *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

sixteenth century, and primarily because of changes wrought in the second half of that century, only the Bowes were in this position and that was primarily because of their Protestant loyalty to Elizabeth. Conversely, there was a great influx into the Palatinate in the second half of the sixteenth century from three primary sources: Newcastle merchants, the deans and prebendaries of the new Cathedral, and the prosperous yeomanry who were emerging as a significant social and economic group because of the increasing stratification of landholding across the sixteenth century.

The 1570s and 80s were significant decades for almost every section of landed society in Durham, however, it would be deceptive to think of these decades as a 'turning point'. Some of these events, like the Dean and Chapter's dispute with their tenants, were actually the culmination of over a century of change on their estates and represented recognition of this transformation rather than a significant divergence from past practice. Other changes, rather than being the culmination of a process of change represented the beginnings of change, such as the re-emergence of the parish gentry whose numbers rapidly grew from the 1570s onwards. Still other changes, like the forfeiture of the Nevilles, had a significant impact on the politics of the region by removing a source of local patronage and power, but for many of their agricultural tenants there was surprising continuity of low and beneficial rents until the Crown sold much of this land in the early-seventeenth century. The timing of many of these changes, however, reveals the importance of studying the period from the late-fourteenth century to the early-seventeenth century as a whole, for the consequences of changes wrought in the earlier period did not end with the middle ages, but continued to affect rural society for centuries to come. It has been shown here that the previous development of estates in the late-fourteenth century was extremely important in creating a path dependency upon their lands, which in some cases fixed various aspects of agricultural life for centuries to come.

Mechanisms of Change

The traditional explanatory factors of change in pre-industrial societies have traditionally been summarised as belonging to one of three broad models based upon either demographic changes, the extent of commercialisation, or class relations.[749] In primarily agrarian societies, demography was one of the most fundamental dynamics which could have a severe impact on the demand for land, labour, and food, thus influencing levels of rent, wages and prices respectively. As such, changes in demography have been seen as fundamentally important in producing structural transformations of these societies, often as demographic crises pushed the supply or demand of the above resources to a tipping point. Another factor which has been seen as fundamental in affecting change was the extent of commercialisation, which has received increasing attention over the past few decades and is responsible for our view of medieval society as being much more market-oriented, or at the least market-aware, than was once thought, with the work of David Stone, Ben Dodds and Richard Britnell showing that peasants were often responsive to fluctuations in markets.[750] This was important because the increasing penetration of markets often went hand in hand with the increasing commercialisation of land, labour, food and services. However, there are limitations with using market-penetration as an explanatory factor, not least its circular nature: there were more markets therefore peasants became more market-oriented, which in turn produced more markets and thus a greater market-orientation. It was this and what he deemed to be demographic determinism that Brenner reacted against, advocating class relations as the fundamental explanatory factor of change. Brenner argued that it is the 'surplus-extraction relationship that defines the fundamental classes in a society', and that it

[749] John Hatcher and Mark Bailey, *Modelling the Middle Ages: the History and Theory of England's Economic Development* (Oxford, 2001).
[750] Stone, *Decision-Making*; Chris Dyer, *Making a Living*; Britnell, *Britain and Ireland* ; Dodds, *Peasants and Production.*

was changes in these relationships which were the key mechanism for much broader transformations of pre-industrial societies.[751]

For a generation of historians fed on the prodigious output of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, demography has obviously taken centre stage in much of the historiography and rightly so for it clearly played a very important role in the transformation of rural society: the Black Death, for example, was more than just a catalyst for processes already underway and had profound effects on rural society. After the price crash of the 1370s, there was at least a century of population stagnation, or perhaps even decline, during which all sections of rural society were impacted: parish gentry alienated their manors to their larger knightly neighbours; the revenues of the two largest landowners in the Palatinate fell by over 40 per cent; and tenants accumulated larger holdings, with low rents and greater personal freedoms. Although the inflation of the sixteenth century was partially caused by debasement of the coinage, it is clear that many of the problems faced by rural society in this century were caused by rapid demographic increase. Rentier landlords struggled to increase their rents to keep pace with inflation, leaving the aristocracy and larger landowners at an economic disadvantage compared to the parish gentry who often still farmed their own lands. The consolidated holdings of the previous century, moreover, did not break apart as population increased, meaning that the countryside quite literally could not sustain the equivalent population it had done before the Black Death: some people being forced to carve a cottage-holding on the waste, others working as agricultural wage-labourers on the farms of their more fortunate neighbours, and still others going to the burgeoning cities of Newcastle or Sunderland in search of employment. Indeed, how far the Newcastle coal trade owed its success in the late-sixteenth century to this exodus from the countryside is a question that has yet to be answered.

[751] Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure', pp. 10-12.

Overall movements in demography were important in producing the conditions for change in rural society during this period, but Brenner highlighted problems with this interpretation by his comparisons with Eastern Europe: the same exogenous impact had different endogenous effects. Brenner's thesis was that serfdom came crashing down in Western Europe, supposedly because of population decline, but in Eastern Europe serfdom was in the process of being re-imposed because of a similar demographic decline.[752] His argument has often been questioned, not only because of the historical accuracy of his arguments but also because of their theoretical underpinning in which he asserted that class relations were of primary importance. One of the principle deficiencies of neo-Marxist ideas of class relations is a tendency to portray pre-industrial societies as a zero-sum game in which lords can only gain at the expense of their peasants and vice versa. However, his critique of the demographic model is significant because it highlighted the importance of other factors which could radically affect how rural society adapted to the challenge of demographic change. Why, for example, did population increase in the thirteenth century lead to a fragmentation of peasant holdings but population growth in the sixteenth century saw large-scale engrossment of holdings? There were clearly other factors at work here which were at least as important as demography, commercialisation or class relations. Demographic factors were a key dynamic in the creation of various socio-economic trends, but how rural society adapted to them was not a linear or predictable process. As Larson argued, 'in a time of upheaval, after the death of more than half the population, with economic difficulties, men and women put their worlds back together; they just did not use the same building blocks in the same order'.[753] Of course, this is widely acknowledged by historical demographers and often embraced by them, but the demographic model has become so pervasive that in many

[752] Ibid., pp. 10-64.
[753] Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, p. 240.

works it seems as though population fluctuations are *the* determinant of change in pre-industrial societies.

It has long been recognised that there were many structural differences in agrarian societies which helped to produce, accelerate or inhibit change, one of which was the geographic importance of regions. Joan Thirsk was one of the greatest proponents of the importance of understanding the role of regions in agrarian history for they often influenced, amongst other things, the extent of manorialisation, population density, market opportunities, and above all the type of agriculture practiced. Likewise, W. G. Hoskins in one of the earliest papers of the *Agricultural History Review* noted that historians seemed to be pre-occupied with 'land-ownership and land-occupation, and to give little consideration to land-use', questioning if this was because 'some of our best historians of the land have been trained as lawyers, and none as a farmer?' He advocated that 'the history of farming must be studied on a regional basis' because although 'England may be a small country…no country in the world has such a diversity of soils, climates, natural resources, and topography, in such a small space'. In short, he acknowledged the importance of 'manorial history and organisation, land-tenures, and so forth', but concluded that 'we must get down to earth: to crops, animals, soils, buildings, and implements'.[754] There has been much work on both of these aspects of agrarian history since the inception of the *Agricultural History Review,* but there have been 'remarkably few recent studies of estates in the century following the dissolution of the monasteries (as opposed to studies of rural communities)'.[755]

This thesis has shown that estates provided structural restrictions upon landowners and tenants in this period which were as real and as important as the weather, soil conditions, market opportunities, or indeed population movements. For example, if one considers the

[754] W. G. Hoskins, 'Regional Farming in England', *AgHR,* 2 (1954), p. 11.
[755] Hoyle, 'Aspects of Crown's Estate', p. 1.

village of Whickham as Levine and Wrightson have, was the experience of these copyholders more representative of a burgeoning coal village or the typical experience of townships upon the bishop of Durham's estate? Placing a village within the institutional context of the estate it was a constitutent part of is as important as placing it within a geographic or geological topography. The monks of Durham Cathedral Priory and the Bishops of Durham faced the same demographic crisis in the late-fourteenth century, but how the two institutions reacted differed greatly, creating long-term structural differences between their estates which had significant consequences for their sixteenth-century counterparts. These differences in the development of their estates had profound effects upon their tenants, providing them with entirely different opportunities and challenges. There may have been differences between the two estates prior to the Black Death which affected their decisions, but it was their choices from the late-fourteenth century which had long-term consequences for the divergent development of these estates, and for their tenants. This institutional context was vital for understanding the living standards, social aspirations and wealth of Durham tenants in the early-seventeenth century. In other words, if we chose a village which happened to belong to the Dean and Chapter of Durham Cathedral in the late-sixteenth century our impression of the Durham countryside would be radically different than if we chose one belonging to the bishops of Durham.

The different household demands of the monks of Durham Priory and the bishops of Durham resulted in qualitative differences in the management of their coal resources just as John Hare's study showed differences in the agrarian policies of the monks of Winchester Cathedral Priory and the more itinerant bishops of Winchester: the institutional context once again explaining the differences in the exploitation of both agricultural and industrial resources.[756] The divergent development of the two ecclesiastical landowners in Durham

[756] Hare, 'Bishop and Prior', pp. 211-2.

from the late-fourteenth century created distinctly different tenurial structures, which in turn affected the potential opportunities and challenges of both landlords and tenants in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. It was this same path-dependency which posed such problems for rentier landlords in the sixteenth century, with the likes of the Lumleys and Conyers forced to sell their ancestral estates piecemeal, often to their own tenants who were increasingly benefiting from rising agricultural prices. Although there were some large lay landowners who took managerial decisions to change the tenurial structure on their lands and so increase rents, such as the Ninth Earl of Northumberland, it is clear that the institutional history of land was still fundamentally important in the early-seventeenth century; it is no coincidence that the one area of the Percy's estate which remained unimproved was the former-monastic land at Tynemouth.

The divergent development of these two ecclesiastical estates from the late-fourteenth century onwards was fundamentally important because it affected the tenurial structures upon their lands, not just affecting the ability of their successors to respond to the inflation of the sixteenth century, but also affecting levels of rent, and even the potential stratification of holdings. In short, the challenges and opportunities these landowners and tenants alike faced in the late-sixteenth century may well have been created by rapid population increase, but their ability to respond to these events was heavily affected by the structural imposition of the estate that their lands were a part of. This thesis must therefore conclude on the slightly dissatisfactory note of a call for future research into the role of estates in the transformation of rural society. Systematic research needs to be undertaken into the differences between varying types of estates: did the estates of all monastic houses differ from their episcopal counterparts and how far was this as a result of their different household requirements? How did ecclesiastical estates differ from their lay counterparts and how far were the former more conservative than the latter? Although demography, commercialisation, and class relations

were key dynamics which often combined to produce change in pre-industrial societies, there were crucial structural impositions which affected the outcome of these changes; none more so than estate management and institutional constraints.

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