

AN EARLY 15TH-CENTURY CHESTERFIELD RENTAL

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Although the second largest town in Derbyshire and until the 19th century the only corporate borough apart from Derby, much of Chesterfield's early history remains obscure.¹ The medieval records of both borough and manor have perished almost without trace,² and at no stage during the middle ages did a single family dominate landownership in the town to such an extent that a large accumulation of records has survived.³ It is thus very pleasing to discover, among the muniments of Lord O'Hagan now preserved in the Lancashire Record Office, a rental of 1411 of the property of a Retford merchant named John Rowley in Chesterfield, where he was a free tenant of the manor, which throws a little more light on the history of the town towards the end of the middle ages.⁴

Lord O'Hagan, to whom I am much indebted for permission to print the rental, is fourth in descent from Sir Thomas O'Hagan (1812–85), created Baron O'Hagan in 1870, who the following year took as his second wife Alice Mary Towneley, a co-heiress of the Lancashire family of that name.⁵ Her ancestor, Richard Towneley of Towneley (about 1550–55), married in 1511 Elizabeth, the daughter and heiress of Henry Foljambe of Walton, near Chesterfield,⁶ and it seems most likely that it was through this marriage that the Towneleys acquired the rental. It is difficult to establish exactly when the estate described in the rental came into the Foljambe's hands and it is possible that two deeds elsewhere in the Towneley papers refers to the property.⁷ In 1452 John Whytecote of Harpswell [Lincs], esq. and Elizabeth his wife, quitclaimed and confirmed to Thomas Pikawe (or Pekawe) of Gainsborough [Lincs], merchant, and Simon Norton of Krygeston Fraunklayn [?Criggleston, West Yorks], all their right in land and other property in Chesterfield which Elizabeth had held jointly with Alexander Roley, formerly her husband, by the gift of John Roley of Retford, merchant. This John Roley might be identical with the man holding in Chesterfield in 1411 or, and this seems more likely at this date, his son. By the beginning of the 16th century, however, the estate appears to have been absorbed into the Foljambe family's extensive property in and around Chesterfield.⁸

Little has been discovered of John Rowley⁹ other than the rental printed here and his appearance at Chesterfield in the subsidy of 1431, when he was described as a merchant of Retford holding one free tenement in socage valued at 20s. a year.¹⁰ Apart from the £40 at which the manor, held by Joan Countess of Kent, was valued, Chesterfield's contribution to the subsidy came from 15 free tenements valued at between 5s. and £2, which suggests that Rowley's was of about average size for the town at this date. Precisely what the duty of owing soke in the manor court meant in the 15th century is impossible to say in the absence of any records of the court. Rowley was himself a collector of taxes in Nottinghamshire in 1419 and 1432, when on both occasions he was described as being 'of Retford',¹¹ and in 1426 his name appears among a group of northern merchants of the Staple at Calais who were granted a licence to ship wool and other goods into Hull free of subsidy.¹²

The estate described in the rental consisted of several scattered pieces of farmland, a capital message, two gardens, two tenements, a property called *Le Garret*, and five *seldae*, or stalls. Some 14½ acres are specified as arable, three roods of meadow are mentioned separately and a further seven acres of land have no use indicated. To this must be added a parcel of land where the acreage was given but has been erased, a parcel for which no acreage is given and several small tenancies near the end of the

rental whose holdings are not described at all, so that altogether the property probably included about 25 acres. In several cases sufficient detail is given to establish where the land was situated and its rent per acre (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Location of main holdings of arable and meadow, acreage, total rent and rent per acre

<i>Location</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Total rent</i>	<i>Rent per acre</i>
super Brokhull'	3 acres land and meadow	2s. 4d.	—
super loundhill'	3 roods meadow and 2 acres land	1s. 6d.	—
super loundhill'	2 acres	6d.	3d.
super Halywelcroft	1½ acres	1s. 6d.	1s. 0d.
in campo de Dunston	1 acre land	9d.	9d.
in Bysshopmylncroft	3 acres land	3s. 0d.	1s. 0d.
	2 acres land	2s. 4d.	1s. 2d.
	1½ acres land	1s. 6d.	1s. 0d.
	4 acres land	4s. 0d.	1s. 0d.
super Marketstedcrofte	½ acre land	6d.	1s. 0d.
super Pesscroft	½ acre land	6d.	1s. 0d.

Some of the land lay to the west of Chesterfield in Newbold and Dunston; *Brokhull*, for example, can be identified with Brockwell Hill, an area of high ground near Holme Hall between Linacre Brook and Holme Brook.¹³ *Loundhill*, not recorded by Cameron, may perhaps be connected with Loundsley Green, for which the earliest form noted by Cameron, *Lownsley Green*, dates only from 1742 and which lies to the south of Holme Brook not far from Brockwell Hill.¹⁴ Presumably also in Newbold was the unspecified acreage of arable yielding 3s. a year *in feodo de Neubold*, while in the same general area Rowley had one acre *in campo de Dunston*, the only entry in the rental providing definite evidence for the survival of openfield arable around Chesterfield at this date.

In the town itself Rowley had small parcels of arable, none of them more than two acres, in *Halywelcroft*, presumably land to the immediate north of Holywell Street; in *Bysshopmylncroft*, presumably either in the vicinity of the Dean of Lincoln's mill on the Rother to the north of the town or perhaps near Bishop's Mill Lane leading towards it; and on *Marketstedcrofte*, probably the land to the south of Market Place below Low Pavement.¹⁵ *Pesscroft* is not recorded by Cameron and cannot be located. The rental also refers to a small parcel (the acreage has been erased) on *Market stewartcroft*. If this is interpreted as 'brothel croft' and, as seems likely, the area referred to was near Low Pavement, this is interesting not merely as an early reference to vice in Chesterfield but one in a part of the town whose reputation in this respect survived until modern times.¹⁶ Finally, there is a parcel called *le Potterpyngle*, a name not recorded by Cameron which cannot be identified, unless it is related to the *Porter's Pingle* which occurs in a corporation rental of 1773.¹⁷

The rental includes enough entries to provide some idea of the average rent of arable in Chesterfield in the early 15th century, which, as Table 1 shows, appears to have been 1s. a year. Two parcels yielded slightly more or less and one, on *Loundhill*, considerably less.

An interesting feature of the document are the five *seldae*, or stalls in the Shambles. As Chesterfield's new market was laid out late in the 12th century at the western edge of the existing town, part of the site, instead of remaining an open market such as survives there today, was built upon by small but permanent stalls, which formed a quadrangular

block intersected on both axes by narrow alleys or rows. Although the names of the rows have apparently changed over time the general form of this part of the town has probably changed little since the early middle ages.¹⁸ Two of Rowley's stalls are located precisely, in Butcher Row, which seems to have been an alley running from north to south near the western edge of the Shambles.¹⁹ Here one stall was let at 3s. a year and another at 2s.; two other stalls whose position is not mentioned also produced 2s. a year, while a fifth was let at 4s.

The rental includes two tenements, one let for 16s. a year, the second-highest rent for any single item in the estate, and the other for only 1s., a curious disparity unless the second was completely ruinous. There is also a building called *Le Garret*, let at 13s. 4d. a year, and two gardens, one producing 2s. and the other 8d. The second appears to have been held in conjunction with what was clearly the main property in the rental, a capital message worth 30s. a year, whose location is unfortunately not stated.

Since every entry but one includes the name of the tenant it is possible to show how the estate was divided between them (Table 2). Heading the list is John Barber, who

TABLE 2
John Rowley's tenants and their holdings

<i>Name</i>	<i>Holdings</i>	<i>Total rent</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>
John Barber	Capital message 30s.; garden 8d.; 1½ acres land 1s. 6d.; 4 acres land 4s.; ½ acre land on Markstedcrofte 6d.	36s. 8d.	33·3
Adam Litst'	Tenement 16s.	16s. 0d.	14·5
Richard Sherman'	<i>Le Garret</i>	13s. 4d.	12·1
Roger del Assh	3 acres land and meadow on Brokhull' 2s. 4d.; 3 roods meadow and 2 acres land on Loundhill' 1s. 6d.; 1½ acres on Halywelcroft 1s. 6d.; — on Market stewcroft 6d.	5s. 10d.	5·3
Henry Herwe	not stated	5s. 0d.	4·5
William de Brampton	2 acres on Loundhill' 6d.; le Potterpyngle 4s. 6d.	5s. 0d.	4·5
Aveyn' Cook	Stall	4s. 0d.	3·6
John Chapman	2 Stalls	4s. 0d.	3·6
Mariot Chene	3 acres land	3s. 0d.	2·7
Richard Assh	Land in the fee of Newbold	3s. 0d.	2·7
William Grenelef	2 acres land in Bysshopmyncroft	2s. 4d.	2·1
John Cartwright	A Garden	2s. 0d.	1·8
Richard Bawkquell	not stated	1s. 2d.	1·0
Philip Brigmon'	A tenement	1s. 0d.	—
Richard de Brampton	1 acre in the Field of Dunston	9d.	—
Robert Knyfsmyth junior	not stated	9d.	—
John Fayrchild	½ acre land	6d.	—

NOTE: An unnamed tenancy of 5s. for two stalls is omitted from this table but the rent has been included in the total in calculating percentages in the final column

held the capital message and garden together with six acres of land in three separate places. He is followed by two other substantial tenants, one of whom held an unnamed tenement and the other *Le Garret*. These three tenancies together provided 60 per cent of Rowley's entire income; Barber alone paid a third of the total. The remaining 14 tenants had very small holdings, mostly consisting of a few acres of land or a stall and only one worth more than 5s. a year. It is hardly possible to say very much about the tenants individually; they or others of their name appear in scattered medieval deeds or as local office-holders, but little is known of any in particular.

Apart from Rowley and his tenants, one other name appears in the rental. This is Richard Hawson, vicar of Chesterfield between 1409 and 1438,²¹ who some time before 1411 had held four acres of arable then let to John Barber.

None of the estate was in Rowley's own hands in 1411, although he may have held property elsewhere in Chesterfield which he farmed directly. The position of steward of the estate was clearly occupied by the main tenant, John Barber, of whom again nothing else is known. Although Barber's name does not appear in the rental itself as bailiff, three endorsements note that for each of the 12-month periods ending Michaelmas 1413, 1414 and 1415 Barber accounted with Rowley for all the receipts due from the rental. The original document is dated 15th May 1411, but it is difficult to be sure of exactly the period it was meant to cover. Possibly it was intended to run to Michaelmas 1412 and was then used as the basis for the following three years' receipts.

John Rowley's rental, spanning four years early in the 15th century, provides a fairly detailed picture of an average-sized free tenant's holding on the manor. His property included farmland, stalls in the Shambles and other buildings; it was divided between 17 tenants, most of whose holdings were very modest and one of whom acted as his steward. The rental casts a little more light on Chesterfield's history at a time when few other documents tell us much about the town. We should know far more, for example, if rentals survived for any of the other 14 free tenants assessed to the subsidy of 1431, but until more material of this kind is found and, if possible, published, we shall have to be content with such fragments as that printed here.

REFERENCES

- ¹For a summary of the present state of knowledge see J. M. Bestall, *Early and medieval Chesterfield* (History of Chesterfield, i) (Bestall *Chesterfield*) (Chesterfield, 1974).
- ²For the borough muniments see John Pym Yeatman, *Records of the borough of Chesterfield* (Chesterfield and Sheffield, 1884); for the manor the only records prior to the 16th century noted by the National Register of Archives Manorial Documents Register are a court roll of the Crown for 20-21 Richard II (1396-98) in the Public Record Office Special Collections (SC2/165/26), and the rental printed here, which is wrongly described as a rental of the manor.
- ³See, however, the muniments of the Foljambe family of Osberton, Notts., preserved in the Nottinghamshire Record Office, which is probably the largest single source of private medieval records relating to Chesterfield.
- ⁴Lancashire Record Office, DDTO/I/11/52-89. I am most grateful to the County Archivist for kindly giving permission for the document to be printed and for much help in the preparation of this article; I am also grateful to John Blair of Brasenose College for help with various points.
- ⁵G. E. Cockayne (ed.), *The complete peerage* (new ed., revised by H. A. Doubleday, G. H. White, Lord Howard de Walden), x (1945), 44-6.
- ⁶*Burke's landed gentry* (18th ed., 1965), i, 668.
- ⁷Lancashire Record Office, DDTO/K/24/77 and K/32/53. Six other items in the collection, dating from between 1377 and 1502-3, also refer to Chesterfield.
- ⁸Mr. Adrian Henstock of the Nottinghamshire Record Office kindly informs me that there is no Rowley material in the Foljambe collection or elsewhere in his office.
- ⁹The place-name occurs in Devon, Hertfordshire, Staffordshire, Northumberland and Durham, but it seems most likely that John Rowley's name came either from the parish of Rowley in the West Riding, four miles south-west of Wetherby, or the hamlet of Rowley, eight miles north-west of Hull in the East Riding.
- ¹⁰*Inquisitions and assessments relating to feudal aids*, i (1899), 276; Bestall, *Chesterfield*, 79 and 85.
- ¹¹*Calendar of the Fine Rolls 1413-1422*, 299; *ibid.*, 1430-1437, 105.
- ¹²*Calendar of the Patent Rolls 1422-1429*, 349. The calendars of the close rolls, charter rolls, ancient deeds and will of the two prerogative courts (there are no 15th-century Lichfield wills) have been searched for the relevant period without success.
- ¹³Kenneth Cameron, *The place-names of Derbyshire* (Cameron) (English Place-Name Society, xxvii-xxix, 1959), 278.
- ¹⁴Cameron, 235.

¹⁵See Bestall, *Chesterfield*, esp. 125–45, for the medieval topography of the town generally.

¹⁶*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, sv. Stew, sb², 4; there have been prosecutions for soliciting on Low Pavement within recent years.

¹⁷*The history of Chesterfield; with particulars of the hamlets contiguous to the town* (London and Chesterfield, 1839), 35.

¹⁸Bestall, *Chesterfield*, 134–41; Philip Riden, 'The origin of the new market of Chesterfield', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, forthcoming.

¹⁹Bestall, 137–8; the name is not recorded by Cameron.

²⁰Isaac Herbert Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue of Derbyshire charters in public and private libraries and muniment rooms* (London, 1906); Yeatman, *Chesterfield records*.

²¹Keith Hugo (ed.), *The parish church of S. Mary & All Saints, Chesterfield* (n. pl., 1969).

APPENDIX

The text which follows contains a full transcript of John Rowley's rental. Wherever possible contractions have been expanded and the inserted letters printed in *italic*; elsewhere omissions are represented by an apostrophe.

[Lancashire Record Office, DDT0/I/11/52–89]

[membrane 1]

Rentale Johannis Rowley facta apud Chestrefeld XV ^{mo} die Maij Anno regni regis Henrici quarti duodecimo	
De Roger odel Assh' pro iij acris terre & prati super Brokhull' per annum	iis iiijd
De eodem pro iij rodís prati & ij acris terre super loundhill' per annum	xviijd
De Willelmo de Brampton' pro ij acris super loundhill' per annum	vjd
De eodem pro le Potterpyngle per annum	iijs vjd
De Rogero Assh' pro vna acra & dimidio super Halywelcroft per annum	xviijd
De eodem pro [erasure] dimidio super Market stewcroft [erasure] per annum	vjd
De Richardo de Brampton' pro vna acra in campo de Dunston per annum	ixd
De Mariot Chene pro iij acris terre per annum	iijs
De Johanne Barbour' pro capitale messuagio per annum	xxxxs
De eodem pro vno gardino per annum	viijd
De Ricardo Sherman' pro Le Garret per annum	xiijs iiijd
De Aueyne' Cook pro j seldo per annum	iijs
iis . iijs	
De ij seldis in Le Bochaur' rawe per annum	vs
De Ad Litst' pro j tenemento per annum	xviid
De Johanne Cartwright' pro j gardino	ijs per annum

[membrane 2]

D e Ricardo Asshe' pro terris in feodo de Neubold per annum	iijs
De Willelmo Grenel' pro ij acris terre in Bysshopyncroft per annum	ijs iiijd
De Johanne Barbour' pro j acra & dimidio terre per annum	xviijd
De eodem pro iiiij ^{or} acris terre nuper in tenuta Ricardi Hawson vicarii per annum	iijs
De Johanne Fayrchild pro dimidio acra terre per annum	vjd
De Johanne Chapman' pro ij seldis per annum	iijs
De Philippo Brigmon' pro j tenemento per annum	xijd
De Roberto Knyfsmyth juniore per annum	ixd
De Rycardo Bawkquell per annum	xiiijd
De Johanne Barbour pro dimidio acra terre super Marketstedcrofte per annum	vjd
De eodem pro dimidio acra super Pesscroft	vjd
De Henricus Herwe per annum	vs
Summa totalis	vli ixs xd

[dorse of membrane 2]

Memorandum quod Johannes Barbur' de Chesturfeld Computavit cum Johanne de Roweley de Retford merchaund' de omnibus receptis istius rentale reddendis pro anno regni regis Henrici vti primo vsque ad festum Sancti Michelis archangeli per j^m annum integerrimum

Memorandum quod Johannes Barbur' de Chesturfeld Computavit cum Johanne de Roweley de Retford merchaund' de omnibus Receptis istius Rentale reddendis pro anno regni regis Henrici vti primo vsque ad festum sancti Michelis archangeli per ij^m integerrimum

Memorandum quod Johannes Barbur' de Chasturfeld Computavit cum Johanne Rowley de Retford merchand' de omnibus Receptis istius Rentale Reddendis pro anno regni regis Henrici vti primo vsque ad festum Sancti Michelis archangeli per iij^m annum integerrimum

TRANSLATION

Rental of John Rowley made at Chesterfield, 15 May, 12 Henry IV.	2s	4d
From Roger Assh for 3 acres of land and meadow on Brokhull per year		18d
From the same for 3 roods of meadow and 2 acres of land on Loundhill per year		6d
From William of Brampton for 2 acres on Loundhill per year	4s	6d
From the same for the Potterpyngle per year		18d
From Roger Assh for 1½ acres on Halywelcroft per year		6d
From the same for [erasure] half on Market stewcroft [erasure] per year		9d
From Richard of Brampton for 1 acre in the field of Dunston per year	3s	
From Mariot Chene for 3 acres of land per year	30s	
From John Barber for a capital messuage per year		8d
From the same for a garden per year	13s	4d
From Richard Sherman for the Garret per year	4s	
From Aveyn Cook for 1 stall per year	5s	
From 2 stalls (2s and 3s) in the Butcher Row per year	16s	
From Adam Litst for 1 tenement per year	2s	per year
From John Cartwright for 1 garden	3s	
From Richard Assh for land in the fee of Newbold per year	2s	4d
From William Grenelef for 2 acres of land in Bysshopmylncroft per year		18d
From John Barber for 1½ acres of land per year		
From the same for 4 acres of land formerly in the tenure of Richard Hawson, vicar, per year	4s	
From John Fayrchild for ½ acre of land per year		6d
From Philip Brigmon for 1 tenement per year		12d
From Robert Knyfsmyth the younger per year		9d
From Richard Bawkquell per year		14d
From John Barber for ½ acre of land on Marketstedcroft per year		6d
From the same for ¼ acre on Pesscroft		6d
From Henry Herwe per year		5s
Sum total	£5	9s 10d

Memorandum: that John Barber of Chesterfield has accounted with John of Roweley of Retford, merchant, for all the receipts of this rental due for the first year of the reign of King Henry V up to the Feast of St Michael the Archangel through the first whole year.

Memorandum: that John Barber of Chesterfield has accounted with John of Roweley of Retford, merchant, for all the receipts of this rental due for the first year of the reign of King Henry V up to the Feast of St Michael the Archangel through the second whole year.

Memorandum: that John Barber of Chesterfield has accounted with John Rowley of Retford, merchant, for all the receipts of this rental due for the first year of the reign of King Henry V up to the Feast of St Michael the Archangel through the third whole year.