

## 65.10 Chapel and farm: the priory site in the later 14th century

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**Cross-references to Digital Supplement in red**  
**Cross-references to Printed Synthesis in brown**

Although La Grava was no longer functioning as a priory during the 14th century the chapel was maintained, as was some religious presence. A chaplain is mentioned in the bailiffs accounts of 1341/42 (Richmond 1924, 31–2) and in 1364 the grant of the manor to John Bele and his wife, Joan Duylle, was on condition that:

‘they and the survivor of them find for life two chaplains to celebrate divine service daily in the manor for the good estate of the king and Queen Philippa and their children, for their souls when they are departed this life’ (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1361–64, 440).

This was repeated in 1373: ‘they should find two chaplains in the chapel of the said house of La Grave’ (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1370–74, 265). In 1390–92 the clerical subsidies in the archdeaconry of Bedford record two chaplains, John and Nicholas, at Grovebury as well as the prebendary, a vicar, eight other chaplains and two clerks in Leighton Buzzard and presumably the hamlets (Brown 1913, 54) [67.14].

However, bailiffs accounts of 1341/42 also emphasise the agricultural nature of the site: the presence of a pigeon-cote is recorded while they also refer to the construction of two new farm buildings, a cow-house and ‘hakhous’, both of which were built in timber with wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs. Most of the farm buildings seem to have been thatched and these included a stable, dairy-house, and a barn for storing grain. This contrasts with the primary buildings on the site which seem to have been of better quality and were built in stone with tiled roofs: wages were paid to a tiler and his lad for pointing and repairing ‘the hall, chamber, chapel and house beyond the gate’. Goods bought for the work included lath-nails and lime (Richmond 1924, 30–1, 33, 40).

Such bailiffs accounts are typical of those produced annually on most manors throughout the country and summarise the lord’s income, principally from rents and demesne produce, and outgoings. For the demesne, as long as it was farmed in hand, they record receipts, general running and maintenance costs, and details of farm production for both crops and stock for the whole of a single farming year from Michaelmas (29 September) to the following Michaelmas. Such accounts were therefore drawn up after the harvest and breeding season each year and even include an account of outgoings involved in the harvest period itself. By chance the 1341/42 accounts for La Grava contain harvest accounts for two successive years which are useful for comparison. At this time some of the additional properties in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire were not directly administered or run from La Grava but were let out to farm and money payments received instead, as from Northall and Studham. In such cases the manorial demesne was not directly cultivated and therefore did not provide produce for the main manor whose income from such properties came only as rents. Where there was direct cultivation of the demesne, income from produce featured more prominently than that from rents. Parts of the Leighton Buzzard property itself were also leased or farmed out for rent, not only agricultural land but also elements such as the mills and the rights to fish and for warren, though this became more commonplace in the 15th century (CRO: KK944/7).

The 1341/42 accounts provide an insight into the agricultural economy of the manor and more particularly indicate the agricultural activities on the demesne or home farm lands which were both at Grovebury itself and scattered throughout Leighton Buzzard parish – in Leighton Buzzard township, Billington, Clipstone, and Heath and Reach. These accounts thus only relate to a portion of the landscape in Leighton Buzzard parish. Simple analysis indicates a mixed farming economy, although arable farming clearly predominated, in part indicated by the large number of oxen (46 remaining at the end of the year). Oxen, in teams of six or eight, were the usual draught animals for ploughing while a list of repairs seems to indicate that a minimum of seven ploughs were available at anyone time. Other draught animals remaining on the demesne were seven carthorses and six affers (farm horses). A considerable demesne arable acreage would therefore seem to be indicated and this in 1341/42 was cultivated by permanent staff, hired labour and by customary labour, ie the free labour services required from the tenants. However, some of these services, eg for ploughing, had instead been commuted to money payments by 1341/42 [see 6, 67.13].

This arable was largely responsible for producing the c 518 quarters of crops which are recorded. However, this total did include some very small quantities from other sources such as rents paid in kind rather than cash. The total comprised 30.1% wheat, 15.0% white wheat, 29.2% oats, 17.2% dredge<sup>1</sup>, and 8.5% beans and pease, some of which was then disposed of as payments in kind, eg to carters, ploughmen, a cowherd, shepherds, a swineherd, a dairymaid and other permanent and occasional farmhands who are all recorded, although they and others also received cash payments. The remainder was consumed, sold or kept as animal fodder, or as the following year's seed. The yields achieved seem to have varied considerably from crop to crop – from less than twice the seed sown being achieved for dredge to four times the seed sown for white wheat. How typical these crops and yields were on the demesne cannot be known without comparison with similar accounts for the same lands in periods before and after. Unfortunately, only one other bailiffs account providing similar detail has been discovered, for 1389/90, to be discussed below. There are a number of bailiffs accounts surviving for the 15th century but by this time the demesne was not farmed in hand but leased out to others, so include no agricultural details. Certainly the 1341/42 crops seem to have been produced in a year of 'great drought in summer'. The weather was an important factor in medieval agriculture and losses of crops and livestock were often experienced due to bad weather which sometimes led to considerable difficulties, such as the national problems of 1315–22. Such may have been the case at La Grava (although there is no proof) in 1339 and 1340: permission was granted for the cutting down and selling of £40 worth of woods from the lands of Fontevrault and Caen Abbeys generally in the custody of Matilda, Countess of Ulster, in order to raise cash as on those same lands they had 'lost the greater part of last year's [1338/39 farming year] crops by the inclement season' (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1338–40, 368, 467).

Of the crops grown at La Grava in 1341/42 the oats were used partly as food for oxen, sheep and various of the horses, while a sizeable proportion of the beans and pease was used as fodder, particularly for fattening young pigs. An average of about 50 pigs were surviving from each year's litters which had to reach at least two years old before they were considered for slaughter. All the young pigs produced over the three years and recorded had been produced from a basic breeding stock of only four sows and two boars in each year. At the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: dredge was a grain mixture sown as a crop consisting of spring barley and oats, see Campbell, B M S, 2007 *Three centuries of English crops yields, 1211–1491* [WWW document]. Available <http://www.cropyields.ac.uk>, accessed 11 October 2012

the accounted year 490 sheep remained, comprising a breeding stock of only 76 ewes and two rams, together with a remaining adult stock (ie two years old or more) of 83 wethers (castrated rams) and a young stock of 195 hoggetts (one-year-old sheep, here including 60 ewes) and 134 lambs (though only 77 of these had been produced locally – the others were brought in from Essex). Although a reasonable flock for the demesne farm, it is not of any great size and this probably reflects the shortage of permanent pastures and meant a heavy reliance on fodder crops, such as hay from the meadows and folding on the arable land following the harvest. However, much of the stubble would have been removed for thatching.

At this time sheep meat was of poor quality and the sheep would have been kept mainly for their wool, hides and skins, sales of which (including 391 fleeces) are included in the accounts. Particularly noticeable are the high losses of sheep, some 105, through disease (murrain) during the year. Murrain took its toll elsewhere amongst the oxen and pigs but not in the considerable proportions that it did amongst the sheep. Cattle do not figure prominently in the accounts. The 32 remaining cows no doubt provided milk to drink and for conversion into cheese and butter in the dairy house, but as all that year's calves were sold and only eleven bullocks were kept, the rearing of stock for meat does not seem to have played an important part in the economy. This was probably due to the lack of permanent pasture in the landscape and the heavy reliance necessary, particularly during the winter, on the annually produced fodder crops such as hay from the highly valued demesne meadows also recorded in the accounts. These meadows were only available for grazing after the hay crop had been taken off and were possibly flooded for periods during the winter. It is noticeable that very few basic breeding stock are listed overall and from these originated virtually all the animals included in the stock figures. The remainder of the stock was made up in the main of small numbers of adult and/or breeding birds of swans, geese, ducks, capons and fowls, the eggs and young of all these mostly being sold or eaten in the same year. In the case of the pigeons, only the young produced in the pigeoncote during the year are recorded – the adults were presumably too difficult to count!

La Grava's tenants usually had properties elsewhere in addition to their custody of the Fontevrault lands; relationships between these may have developed. Maud, Countess of Ulster, also held the manors of Whaddon and of Bierton and Hulcott, both in Buckinghamshire. During the ten years Maud was lady of Leighton Buzzard manor from 1338 links seem to have developed between that manor and her Whaddon manor which was only about 17km away: Whaddon is mentioned in the bailiffs accounts of 1341/42 as receiving 36 pigs from La Grava, along with beans and pease for fattening purposes and 391 fleeces (Richmond 1924, 33, 36, 40).

The bailiffs accounts for 1389/90 mention the building of a hogscote and repairs to a pinfold, the walls of the bakehouse and a 'gate next to the water' at Grovebury besides details of goods bought for these works – hinges, hooks of hinges, a lock or bolt, lime, laths, ridge tiles, tiles, lath-nails, and 'spykenails'. A gate into the garden, a gate next to the granary, a 'longehous' and a kiln are also mentioned [67.14].