

Fig.1

# MANOR OF ALCISTON

## DISTRIBUTION OF PARTS AMONGST PARISHES

Based on rentals and surveys 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries

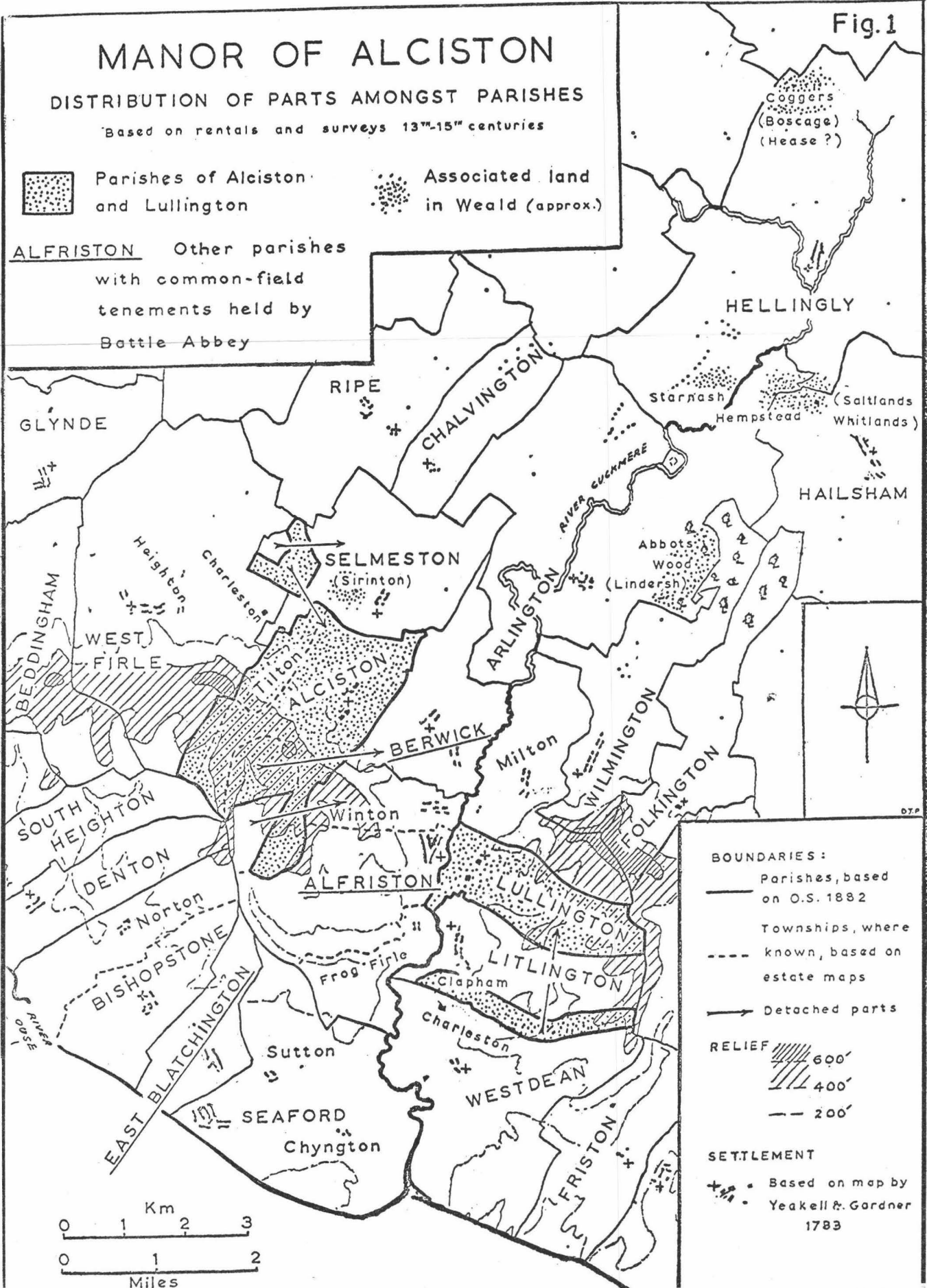


Parishes of Alciston and Lullington



Associated land in Weald (approx.)

ALFRISTON Other parishes with common-field tenements held by Battle Abbey



**BOUNDARIES :**

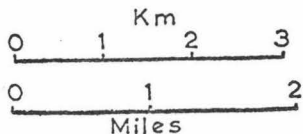
- Parishes, based on O.S. 1882
- Townships, where known, based on estate maps
- Detached parts

**RELIEF**

- ▨ 600'
- ▧ 400'
- 200'

**SETTLEMENT**

- + Based on map by Yeakell & Gardner 1783



D.P.



# ALCISTON MANOR IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES<sup>1</sup>

BY JUDITH A. BRENT

Alciston Manor, together with other lands in Sussex and elsewhere, was bestowed by William the Conqueror on his Abbey of Battle. The manor remained in the ownership of the Abbey until the Dissolution when it was granted to Sir John Gage. Apart from being one of the largest of the Battle Abbey manors it is also of interest in that demesne farming continued there to a very late date. Moreover, it is remarkable in that its economy and the economic conditions of its tenants can be studied in the light of an unusually full body of surviving documentation, chiefly a long series of complementary account rolls and court rolls.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly its size, its fertile soils, its suitability for sheep farming and its comparative accessibility to Battle partly explain why Alciston was retained as the home farm. Like many other Sussex manors its lands extended into other parishes (see Fig. I).<sup>3</sup> A rental and custumal<sup>4</sup> drawn up in the time of Edward I shows these outlying areas to have been quite large. Besides 34 tenants at Alciston itself, holding between them eight hides and two wists<sup>5</sup> (approximately 612 acres), there were nine tenants holding 2½ hides (at least 180 acres) at Telton, a hamlet west of Alciston, 37 tenants holding ten hides and one wist (about 581 acres) at Alfriston, Lullington and Clopham and 17 tenants holding four hides (176 acres) at East Blatchington. Three tenants are mentioned at Sirinton (probably Sherrington in Selmeston) and 18 at Old Shoreham and Bramber. The remaining lands were in the Weald, Alciston like many other downland manors having its woodland in this area. 'Boscase' and 'Sternerse' (the present Starnashe Farm) we know from later evidence were at Hellingly and 11 tenants are listed there.

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a Bristol M.A. thesis, 'Alciston Manor in the Later Middle Ages', by Mrs. J. A. Brent (née Wooldridge).

<sup>2</sup> Sussex Archaeological Trust, G44/1-139 and G18/1-55.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to thank Mr. D. J. Pannett for drawing the map.

<sup>4</sup> *Custumals of Battle Abbey*, ed. by S. R. Scargill-Bird (Camden Society, 1887), pp. 26-41. Original MS., P.R.O. E315/57.

<sup>5</sup> The custumal states that four wists make one hide but does not tell us how many acres made up one wist. That this varied a great deal from place to place has been shown by Mrs. E. Searle in her article, 'Hides, virgates and tenant settlement at Battle Abbey' in *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, vol. 16 (1963), pp. 290-300. For these calculations I have used evidence from later account rolls and a rental of 1433 (P.R.O. E315/56). Thus one wist at Alciston and Telton is taken as 18 acres, at Alfriston as 17 acres, at East Blatchington as 11, at Lullington as about 22 acres.

'Saltland,' which lay partly in Hailsham and partly in Arlington, had four tenants and 'Lindershe' in Arlington two.

Arable farming at Alciston was combined with sheep farming.<sup>1</sup> The chief crop was wheat and normally about half of this was sent to Battle, the rest being used as seed or consumed on the manor. The *Inquisitio Nonarum* of 1341 notes flocks of 3,000 sheep at Alciston with Lullington<sup>2</sup> and the account rolls themselves show flocks of over 2,000. Battle was supplied with large numbers of sheep (some 300-400 before 1349) and boon workers occasionally received a dozen or so. However, the large flocks at Alciston were kept primarily for their wool, the total clip often amounting to over 2,000 fleeces and up to ten sacks of 'big' wool. Moreover, Alciston fleeces were of better quality and higher value than those produced in the west of Sussex. Alciston formed the centre at which wool from the surrounding Abbey estates was collected. The merchants and wool weighers gathered there to weigh the clip and treat with the steward; the merchants' servants packed the wool there before it was transported.

Besides sheep, the stock at Alciston included horses, oxen, cows (kept primarily for their milk), pigs (the most important source of meat for the household), chickens, geese, ducks and pigeons. The dairy formed a considerable source of profit, as many as 23 pises or weys<sup>3</sup> of cheese (worth 8s. each at times) and 15 weys of butter (worth 10s. each at times) being produced per year. The best cheeses were sent to the Abbot and Prior; the rest went to the cellarer or were used at the harvest supper. Some butter was sent to Battle each year but much was used for sheep ointment. Four and a half pipes (probably about 567 gallons) of cider per year were produced on average and were mostly consumed by the bailiff, by guests of the manor, by the *famuli* (regular servants) and other workers. The output of tiles was large, reaching 42,000 in 1429-30, many being sold in the neighbourhood, especially to the manor of Lullington, the rest being used at Alciston.

The labour force of the manor can be divided into three: the *famuli*, the customary workers and the hired labourers. In the years immediately before the Black Death the *famuli* consisted of some 40 people but about 15 of these were probably employed at Lullington.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the arable farming arrangements at Alciston, see P. F. Brandon, 'The Common Lands and Wastes of Sussex', an unpublished London Ph.D. thesis (1963), and 'Arable Farming in a Sussex Scarp-foot Parish during the Late Middle Ages', in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, vol. 100 (1962), pp. 60-72. For pastoral farming, see M. Melville, 'The Pastoral Custom and Wool Trade of Medieval Sussex, 1085-1485', an unpublished London M.A. thesis (1931).

<sup>2</sup> See R. A. Pelham, 'The Distribution of Sheep in Sussex in the Fourteenth Century', in *S.A.C.*, vol. 75 (1934), pp. 129-35.

<sup>3</sup> One wey amounted to 196 lbs. at Alciston.

They included the serjeant, the master servant, the messor, six ploughmen (two at Lullington), two harrowers, seven drivers, one carter, two ewe shepherds, six shepherds, one boy shepherd, one oxherd, one cowman, one pigkeeper and boy, one goosekeeper and one dairy maid. The custumal of Edward I shows that customary work included threshing, winnowing, carrying, ditching, ploughing, harrowing, breaking clods, washing and shearing sheep, hoeing corn, mowing and gathering hay, reaping, carting manure, sowing, fetching grain and mending the sheepcote. It is difficult to say how many of these services were still being performed on the eve of the Black Death, but there is evidence that customary workers were augmented by hired workmen for reaping and binding, threshing, winnowing, harrowing and mowing. The remainder of the hired labour consisted of craftsmen: the smith, thatcher, tiler, carpenter and mason with the labourers helping them.

Such was the character of Alciston manor before the Black Death, the impact of which can now be examined. Sometime between January and April of 1349 the plague reached Alciston. The average number of deceased tenants recorded at a session of the manor court of Alciston was three. No deaths were in fact recorded at the January court but at that held on 14 April 24 are noted. Between this date and June the plague would seem to have been at its most severe for at the court held on 10 June no less than 39 deaths are recorded. A further 15 are noted at the court held on 1 August but by October the plague seems to have worked itself out; no deaths are recorded at courts held on 8 September and 7 October.

It is possible to get some idea of the regional distribution of the deaths as the entries in the court rolls are divided into tithings. Thus at the April court, 14 of the deaths are at East Blatchington, five at Lullington, two at Telton, and three at Alciston; in June, five are at East Blatchington, 13 at Lullington, six at Telton, six at Alciston and nine at Hellingly; in August, seven at Lullington, one at East Blatchington, one at Alciston and six at Hellingly. It would therefore seem that East Blatchington was most severely affected before April, whereas the other places suffered between April and August.

The court rolls only give actual holders of tenements. There is no way of discovering the numbers of brothers, women, children and servants who died. Moreover, without a contemporary rental it is only possible to get a very rough estimate even of the proportion of tenants who died. The only material available is in fact the rental *temp.* Edward I and in the case of Alciston itself a rental of 1336,<sup>1</sup> some 13 years before the Black Death. The former lists 105 tenants at Alciston, Telton, Lullington, Alfriston, East Blatchington and Hellingly, and in 1349, 78 tenants from these same

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O., SC 11/639.

localities are noted as having died. This represents a proportion of two-thirds if there was no increase of population during the intervening 50 or 60 years. For Alciston itself, however, for which better evidence is available, the proportion is just under one third. Thirty-one tenants are listed in the rental of 1336 and ten tenants have their deaths recorded in the court rolls.

It seems possible that some of the outlying parts of Alciston manor might have been harder hit than Alciston itself. For instance, 16 wists of land were owned by Battle Abbey at East Blatchington, at the time of Edward I and these were held by 19 people. The court rolls show 10½ of these wists made vacant by the deaths of ten persons (the remaining dead tenants only held cottages and in some cases an acre or two). This reinforces other evidence that the coastal areas of Sussex were particularly badly hit. Research on the records of the Honour of the Eagle (almost equivalent to the Rape of Pevensey) has shown that nine villages on the coast were rendered desolate.<sup>1</sup> Seaford, too, which adjoins East Blatchington, suffered very badly, partly from the pestilence and partly from French raiders.<sup>2</sup>

Seventy-eight deaths meant that 78 tenements were made vacant. How many of these remained in the lord's hands and how many were claimed immediately? Of the 24 holders reported as victims to the plague at the April court, seven tenements were claimed immediately and 17 remained in the lord's hands. At the June court, nine tenements were claimed and 30 remained unclaimed together with the 17 from the previous court. At the August court nine of the 15 newly-vacated tenements were claimed as well as two from the April court and seven from the June court. This meant that by August only 34 of the 78 tenements had been claimed and that 44 remained in the lord's hands.

In 1352, however, 17 tenements still remaining in the lord's hands are listed. There is no record in the court rolls of the other 27 being claimed, but perhaps another court was held whose rolls have not survived or the omission is due to the confusion at the time. Nor is it possible to state with any certainty what happened to the 17 tenements. A few drop out of the 'defects of rent' section of the account rolls in the 1350s, presumably as they are claimed. In 1366 a new rental was drawn up, to which reference is made in the account rolls. From this date the old defects of rent disappear. It looks as though these were written off completely. There is evidence that some customary land was taken in to the demesne at this time and planted along with the rest of those lands, items

<sup>1</sup> V.C.H., *Sussex*, vol. 2 (1907), p. 182. This probably included the later occurrences of the plague in 1362 and 1379. See also L. F. Salzman, ed., *Ministers Accounts of the Manor of Petworth 1347-1353* (Sussex Record Society, vol. 55), p. xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Lower, 'Some Memorials of the Town, Parish and Cinque Port of Seaford', in *S.A.C.*, vol. 7 (1854), pp. 81-83.

such as 'sown 27 acres on lands formerly niefs' occurring in the account rolls. It is thus possible that a large amount of unclaimed land was either absorbed in this way or allowed to go to waste.

However, if this land was without tenants there is evidence from the 'farm' section of the account rolls that the lord was finding it possible to re-demise some of his leased tenements which also became vacant. In 1349-50, out of 26 tenements at farm, 11 were vacant and in three other cases he received a reduced rent. From 1349-50 a new item appears in the farm section: 'sums received from the demise of native lands in the lord's hands.' It would seem that these lands were let annually in small parcels. The account roll for 1361-2 shows some 74 acres being let to 32 different people mostly in parcels of two to three acres. Some of these lands may represent certain of the 17 unclaimed customary tenements which the lord leased temporarily or they may all be vacant farmed tenements. It is clear that though quite large amounts of land came into the lord's hands and remained unclaimed in 1352, he was able to let out a proportion of them and thus recoup himself.

With regard to the tenements that were claimed, an analysis of the claimants shows that in the majority of cases they were taken up by relations. Fourteen of the 34 tenants whose holdings were claimed by October 1349 were succeeded by sons, ten by wives, four by daughters, two by kinsmen, one by a brother and one by a relative who was probably a niece. In only two cases were tenements claimed by persons who were probably not relations and in only two cases is it stated that the heir was under age. Wives who took over the holdings of their dead husbands frequently remarried and the lands passed into a new family. Some families suffered decimation, like the Melewards, Plots, Potmans and Monks and some may have died out as no reference is found to them in subsequent court rolls.

Neither account nor court rolls suggest that the mortality was particularly severe in 1361-2, but plague is mentioned in the account rolls as a reason for labour shortage in 1425-7 and 1440-1. Probably the population never again in the medieval period reached the total on the eve of the Black Death. A rental of 1433<sup>1</sup> lists 24 tenants at Alciston. In 1336 there were 31.

To see how the Black Death affected the economy of the manor one must turn to the account rolls. Unfortunately there is no complete account for the year 1348-9 as William King, the serjeant, himself died before June 1349. The account roll covers the period June to Michaelmas 1349 when John of Whatlington was serjeant. It is possible to gauge how the day-to-day running of the manor was affected. The agricultural calendar was not much upset: winter and spring sowings were probably complete before the plague came. The lord's rents were reduced through the deaths of tenants

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. E315/56. For an exemplification of this rental see Sussex Archaeological Trust, G45/13.

and grain, stock and wool prices were very low. In the case of wool, this may mean that the 1349 clip was inferior or that the price had to be reduced because of the lack of buyers. There is no mention of merchants coming to superintend the weighing of the wool this year and it seems that the lord himself had to bear the expenses of sending some, if not all, the wool to London to get rid of it. 'Packing wool . . . 5s. 6d. Carriage of the said wool to London in three carts with seven men and 15 horses for five days there and back . . . 10s. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.' Repairs to ploughs and houses and purchases of household equipment were curtailed. There is evidence of higher wages being paid: reaping and binding now cost 8d. per acre for wheat (previously 7d.), 10d. per acre for barley (previously 8d.) and 9d. for beans (previously 8d.). Winnowing is also now paid at 6d. per quarter as opposed to 3d. per ten bushels before. Moreover, the lord had to pay hired labourers to hoe and mow vacant tenements.

The plague had probably spent itself by Michaelmas 1349 but its impact can be seen clearly from the account roll for the period Michaelmas 1349-Michaelmas 1350. The lord continued to lose through defects of rent but some tenements were re-let and others planted. No wool and little grain, stock or other produce were sold and much had to be spent on the repair of ploughs presumably because this was neglected in the previous year. The wages of hired labourers continued high: reaping and binding still cost 8d. per acre for wheat, 10d. per acre for barley as in 1349, 9d. per acre for peas and vetch (8d. per acre in 1348) and 7d. for oats (5d. in 1348). Threshing rates are also high: 6d. and 4d. per quarter for wheat (3d. for threshing and winnowing 10 bushels in 1348), 3d. for barley (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 10 bushels in 1348) and 4d. per quarter for oats. Beans were now threshed and winnowed at 4d. per quarter (previously 1d. for 10 bushels). Money was paid by the lord on harrowing and mowing vacant tenements and on washing and shearing perhaps 500 sheep of dead tenants.

Moreover, the wages of the *famuli* were now higher. The master servant now received 10s. instead of 7s., the messor 11s. instead of 6s. and carters and ploughmen 9s. instead of 6s. Shepherds previously paid 4s. and 5s. 6d. now received 6s. and 8s. and the boy shepherd 4s. instead of 3s. Drivers are paid 3s. instead of 2s. 6d. and harrowers 4s. instead of 2s. 6d. Even the pigkeeper received 7s., an increase of 1s. and the dairy maid's 3s. 6d. is 6d. more than before. This represents in a number of cases an increase of about 75 per cent. and in the rest between 20 and 50 per cent. Shortage of labour was forcing the lord to pay higher wages.

The year 1350-1 might be called one of recovery at Alciston. The wool clip was large and this, together with the clip from the previous year, brought in a large profit. Wheat fetched high prices this year and receipts from sales of stock were particularly high. Large



sums were spent on harrowing and mowing vacant tenements but wages paid for reaping and binding were lower than in 1349, probably due to the Royal Proclamation. Some wheat was paid at a rate of 7*d.* per acre and the rest of the wheat and barley at 8*d.* Oats cost 5*d.* per acre and beans 7*d.* The effect of the Statute of Labourers can be seen in the payments made to the *famuli* which now return to the 1347 rate in all cases as the statute ordered. 1350-1 was an abnormal year.

Profits sank again in 1352-3 (the roll for 1351-2 is not extant), but gradually things were returning to normal. Receipts increased as tenements were claimed and farms re-let. Income from sales of grain and stock, if it did not reach pre-Black Death levels was never as low as in 1349-50 and the acreage sown was not decreased. Work continued on the upkeep of ploughs and houses and wages of craftsmen, labourers and *famuli* were little altered, though the lord continued to pay out money for harrowing and mowing vacant tenements and for washing and shearing tenants' sheep until 1356.

With so few account rolls for the period before the Black Death and so few after which can be compared directly (since after 1360 Lullington is no longer included in the account), it would be unwise to draw too many conclusions as to the effect of the Black Death on the economy. It seems, however, that at Alciston as on many other estates,<sup>1</sup> the plague only caused a slight and temporary dislocation and that if more evidence were available it might well be found that at most its effect was to intensify tendencies already at work. Changes undoubtedly did take place and Alciston, like so many manors, shared in the late medieval agrarian decline,<sup>2</sup> but its position as a home farm meant that this was less marked and came later than elsewhere. It is now proposed to examine grain and wool production and the financial aspects of demesne farming between 1360 and 1490 to see how this depression manifested itself; an attempt will be made to assess the factors bringing about these changes.

The largest arable acreages were sown in the 1380s and 1390s; peak years being 1381-2, 1387-8, 1390-1 and 1396-7 with 475, 458, 444 and 452 acres being planted respectively. After this there was a gradual decline. In the year 1474-5 only 187 acres were sown, in 1475-6, 193 and in 1483-4, 194. The slight recovery which followed immediately on this may well have been only temporary: the absence of any account rolls after 1495-6 prevents us from seeing if this trend continued.

<sup>1</sup> See A. E. Levett, 'The Black Death on the Estates of the See of Winchester', in *Oxford Studies on Social and Legal History*, vol. 5 (1916), p. 101 and also 'The Black Death on the St. Albans Manors', in *Studies in Manorial History presented to A. E. Levett*, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> For the classical statement of this thesis see M. Postan, 'The Fifteenth Century', in *Economic History Review*, 1st series, vol. 9 (1939), p. 160.

Output of grain was influenced by the weather and by seeding rates, which varied from as little as 2½ bushels per acre for wheat when not much seed was available to three bushels in good years. Bearing this in mind, output follows more or less the same pattern as acreage sown; for example the average issue of wheat in the 1450s was only half what it was in the 1370s. Most of the lord's income was derived from sales of demesne farm produce and of this grain formed the major part. Receipts from this source were inevitably affected: in the 1480s income from sales of grain averaged under £30, less than a third of the average in the 1370s.

There is no mention in either court rolls or account rolls of parts of the demesne being leased to tenants as on so many other estates and it seems likely that many of the marginal lands where fodder crops had been grown were allowed to return to grass.<sup>1</sup>

How far was less demand for grain an important factor determining this decline in arable farming? An analysis of the consumption of wheat and barley shows that less was being sent to Battle and less used by the household. The Battle Abbey account rolls<sup>2</sup> show that in 1357-8 the Abbey absorbed 460 quarters of wheat and 300 quarters of barley from all manors and *in patria* (in the neighbourhood) and in 1381-2, 475 quarters of wheat and 445 quarters of barley. In 1488-9, only 339 quarters of wheat and 143½ quarters of barley were received and in 1498-9 only 181½ quarters of wheat and 170 quarters of barley malt. Moreover, from the limited material available, it seems likely that there was some decrease in the number of monks during the later Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, how far was yield ratio an important factor in influencing production? A full scale analysis of yield ratios is not possible due to the lack (either because rolls are missing or because parts are illegible) of consecutive rolls providing the necessary information. From the evidence available, it seems unlikely that falling yield ratios caused the gradual downward trend at Alciston. Rather it was the decrease in demand combined with the rising wages of hired labourers and increasing costs of farming—discussed presently—which made it both unnecessary and undesirable for the lord to cultivate the more marginal lands at Alciston.

Sheep farming suffered a similar decline after the first decade of

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of this see P. F. Brandon, *S.A.C.*, vol. 100 (1962), pp. 69-72.

<sup>2</sup> 1357-8: Henry Huntington Library, B.A. 144; 1381-2: H.H.L., B.A. 146; 1488-9: H.H.L., B.A. 273; 1498-9: P.R.O., S.C.6 H.VII, 1874. For evidence from account rolls in the Henry Huntington Library I am indebted to Miss B. R. Chapman for her notes from photostats made for Lord Beveridge, and now deposited in the Palaeography Department of the University of Durham.

<sup>3</sup> V.C.H., *Sussex*, vol. 2 (1907), p. 54, and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses* (1953), p. 59.

the 15th century, flocks of only 800 being recorded in the 1480s. The number of sheep kept in stock varied according to the incidence of disease, and a severe attack of murrain might mean that flocks did not reach their previous numbers for many years. For instance attacks of murrain in 1432-3, 1436-7 and 1437-8 reduced the flock to 998 at Michaelmas 1438, and it was not until 1444-5 that the flock again surpassed 2,000. However, the gradual decline both in the size of flocks and in the number of fleeces sold cannot be attributed to attacks of murrain. A general decline in sheep farming and the wool trade has been noted after the mid-14th century<sup>1</sup> and the wool sales at Alciston for the most part reflect the downward trend in wool and cloth exports from England. The lord's income from this source reached its lowest point in 1475-85 when receipts averaged just under £8, less than one quarter of the average for the peak years between 1400 and 1415.

It has been suggested that the sharp decline in the size of flocks can be partly explained by the fact that Lullington was at farm after 1466.<sup>2</sup> A further and more important factor also suggested is the decline in the value of Sussex wool.<sup>3</sup> It has been shown that though this was priced at eight or nine marks (£5 6s. 8d. and £6) per sack at the end of the 13th century, by Edward IV's reign its value had fallen to £2 10s. 0d. per sack and was the poorest of any county. The export trade in Sussex wool itself came to an end and was replaced under Edward IV by kerseys, but even then not in great quantities. A further explanation for the decreasing numbers of sheep can be given. It has been plausibly argued that manure was the most important product of the Sussex sheep.<sup>4</sup> If this was the case, as the demesne acreage decreased, fewer sheep would be needed for the benefit of tillage.

The labour force of the manor was made up of the *famuli*, the customary workers and the hired labourers. Gradually however, the relative contribution of these underwent considerable change. At the time of the Peasants Revolt a large amount of hired labour had to be drawn on because the tenants refused to do their customary work of harrowing and mowing; and in 1408-9 it seems that a final commutation of works took place and hired labour was used in most husbandry tasks. For instance, sheep washing and shearing had been the responsibility of the customary worker until this time but in the account for the year 1418-19 payment for this task occurs 'because they have sold their works'. When the 1433 rental was drawn up the only services required were those of carting dung and shocking corn, these being incumbent on two tenants in Hellingly.

<sup>1</sup> E. Power, *The English Medieval Wool Trade* (1941), pp. 36-38.

<sup>2</sup> M. Melville, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97, 126.

<sup>4</sup> J. Cornwall, 'Farming in Sussex, 1560-1640', in *S.A.C.*, vol. 92 (1954), pp. 54, 63.

The number of *famuli* employed did not alter much over the period. In the 1380s there were some 23 and in the 1480s the master servant and two of the ploughmen were no longer employed. However those *famuli* employed were working for longer periods and this, with the general rise in individual wages, meant that the wage bill was greatly increased. In 1418-19 all members of the *famuli* received a substantial rise in *stipendia* (the annual salary), in many cases an increase of one-third. The ploughman's salary rose from 6s. to 8s. per year, the cowherd's from 5s. to 7s. and the dairy maid's and boy shepherd's from 3s. to 4s. The shepherd, who had received a rise of 1s. in 1418, had further rises in 1441 and 1445 when his salary was brought into line with that of the chief shepherd who was paid 8s. With regard to *vadia* (wages paid on a weekly basis to members of the *famuli*) rates hardly vary at all. Shepherds, ploughmen and the cowherd for instance were paid 7d. per week until 1487-8 when they received 7.8d. However, the rate paid out by the lord in *vadia* is higher because he was forced to employ *famuli* for longer periods because of the shortage of customary labour. Adding together the *stipendia* and *vadia* paid to various servants in the 1360s and comparing them with the totals for the 1490s, a substantial increase can be seen; 91 per cent. for shepherds, 50 per cent. for ploughmen, 145 per cent. for the messor, 78 per cent. for the cowherd and 30.7 per cent. for the boy shepherd.

There is evidence of higher rates paid for hired labour. Between 1422 and 1437, milking both cows and ewes was paid at 2d. per week. Between 1438 and 1440, 2½d. per week was paid for milking ewes and from 1441 onwards 3d. Milking cows remained at 2d. per week until 1445 when this was increased to 3d. In 1408-9, sheep washing was paid at 3d. per 100 and shearing at 5d. per 100, but after 1416-17 washing and shearing combined was paid at 10d. per 100, an overall increase of 2d. per 100. Milking rates had increased by 50 per cent. and sheep washing and shearing rates by 25 per cent.

Having examined the effects of the late medieval agrarian decline on the landlord we must now turn to the peasant. Studies of many estates have revealed a class of rich peasants accumulating extensive holdings<sup>1</sup> but at Alciston this was not the case. Rentals and court rolls show that the average holding was very small. In 1433 the largest holding at Alciston and Telton was 27 acres 3 rods, and out of 24 tenants 16 held less than 10 acres each, the average holding being 9.66 acres. The situation was much the same in 1489.<sup>2</sup> The total number of tenants was again 24, of whom 14 held under 10

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Hilton, *The Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (1947); 'Winchcombe Abbey and the Manor of Sherborne', in *Univ. of Birmingham Historical Journal*, vol. 2 (1949-50), pp. 31-52; R. H. Tawney, *The Agrarian Problem in the 16th Century* (1912), pp. 57-97.

<sup>2</sup> P.R.O., SC 11/639.

acres. The largest holding was only 28 acres 3 rods and the average holding only slightly higher than in 1433, i.e. 9.75 acres. A similar situation existed in other parts of the manor. The largest holding at Alfriston was 20 acres in 1433 and in 1498-9.<sup>1</sup> At East Blatchington the largest holding was 39½ acres and the average holding 11 acres 1 rod in 1433. Only at Lullington were holdings larger: the largest being 48 acres and the average 19 acres. The holdings are so small it seems impossible that the tenants could have made a living from them. However, the peasants of Alciston had other sources of income. Tenant, like lord, had his flock of sheep. It is impossible to say how large a flock the holder of one wist was entitled to keep. Stray references in the rentals and court rolls show that this varied a great deal. For instance, a holding of ten acres had pasture rights for one calf, two oxen and 13 sheep, one of nine acres for three cows and 30 sheep, and others of eight and seven acres for 30 sheep, while a holding of six acres had pasture for two oxen, two cows, one horse and 60 sheep. In any case, it is evident that villeins' flocks were not limited to these numbers. The accounts for agistment on the demesne show that many flocks were kept and further evidence can be obtained from the fines recorded in the court rolls for trespassing with sheep. The actual numbers of sheep are not always stated, but when they are, it is possible to establish at least the minimum size of a tenants' flock. Of men who appear in the 1433 rental, the court rolls show that William Potman owned at one stage 20 sheep, John Meleward 40 ewes and 150 wethers on two separate occasions, William Alman 100 sheep and Thomas Alman 100 ewes and 30 lambs. There is evidence, too, in other parts of the manor: at Alfriston John Byden was fined on several occasions for flocks of 200 and even 300; at Lullington, Thomas Swan had a flock of 200; at East Blatchington, Thomas Geffrey had 300 and Richard Frenche 200. As only a small proportion of the fleeces from such flocks would be needed for the tenant's own use, the rest were probably sold to the dealers who bought the lord's wool; thus the tenant's income was considerably supplemented. The fines for trespassing with animals show that most tenants owned two or three cows, a horse, up to ten pigs and in some cases up to four oxen. These could be sold if surplus to their needs.

The income of many of the peasants was further eked out by money wages and payment in kind. Although in many cases *famuli* and casual labour were recruited from landless sons and brothers, a number of those who appear as landholders in the rentals were receiving wages. The account rolls show that William Potman was shepherd of the ewes from 1437 until 1461 just as John Potman (probably his father) had been before him; a John Potman was

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. SC. 11/641, 2.

bailiff between 1455 and 1475. The Alman family provided a bailiff in William (between 1445 and 1452); John Draper who held 16 acres in 1433 was bailiff at that time, i.e. between 1422 and 1441. John Motteregge, who held only half an acre, was in fact the miller. At Alfriston a large number of persons holding only cottages were engaged in trade or were in receipt of wages for a variety of employment. Robert Crane, who held a cottage and three rods of land according to the 1433 rental, had a shop, and John Crane, a cottager with four acres, owned the smithy next to the cross.

There is another factor which helps to explain the small holdings of the peasant. There is evidence that some tenants held lands of other manors adjacent to Alciston manor, as well as in the outlying parts of the manor itself. Richard Stone, for instance, held one wist at Alfriston and one at Lullington and many of the families holding lands of Alciston manor in East Blatchington, like the Semans, Chopyns, Jeffreys, Frenches and Hollibones also held land of the manor of East Blatchington.<sup>1</sup> John Cogger, a Hellingly tenant, held land of the manors of Eastridge, Horselunges and Maffeyes also in Hellingly.<sup>2</sup> The rentals are not concerned with the sub-letting of lands and there is evidence to show that some tenants held land which they were leasing from other tenants. Richard Chuk of Alfriston, for instance, who appears from the 1433 rental to hold one cottage and nine acres was also at that time holding a grange and 16 acres on a 19-year lease from Simon Benet.

Finally, although only small amounts of land were held by individuals, the group holdings of some families might be large. Four members of the Rukke family held between them 38½ acres at Alciston in 1433 and the Page family 43½ acres between five members. At Lullington, John and William Roper, who can be definitely identified as brothers, held between them 45 acres in 1433, and John and Richard a Stone, also brothers, held some 48 acres in 1486-8.

There is much evidence of frequent changes in occupancy even if this did not result in the concentration of several holdings. The court rolls supply us with some evidence of this, but rentals illustrate it better. A comparison of those for Alciston and Telton shows that out of 24 separate holdings in 1433 only four remained in the same family by 1489. Many holdings, especially the smaller ones and the cottages, changed hands five or six times, excluding transmissions from father to son or husband to wife. In some cases this was due to land passing to daughters and to widows who then re-married, but mostly no hereditary connection can be traced between successive tenants.

More prosperous tenants often hired extra labour or let out parts of their holdings which might be inconveniently situated or hard

<sup>1</sup> Court Rolls, Sussex Arch. Trust, DR/1.

<sup>2</sup> Court Rolls, Sussex Arch. Trust, A/570-72.

to work. In most cases holdings sub-let are cottages or small pieces of land, but sometimes as much as three wists were leased. Tenants frequently let pieces of land to their brothers; guardians often let out lands until the heir came of age. Sub-letting also provided relief to those tenants who, through old age or infirmity, could no longer cultivate their holding.

A comparison of the subsidy rolls of 1296, 1327, 1332 and 1525<sup>1</sup> and the rentals reveals considerable movement of population among peasant families. A large number of old-established families which were in the area in the 14th century have disappeared by 1433 and the rest have mostly gone by the 16th century. This is especially so at Alciston, where only five names which appear in the 1498-9 rental are the same as those in 1433, the remainder, some 20 families, being new. Although in some cases families may have moved to other areas, in a large number of instances it seems that a failure of male heirs was responsible for the family dying out. For example, at the time of Edward I, Richard Alman held one wist at Alciston and by the 1450s William Alman, who was bailiff, held two wists there. William died without male heirs and his daughter Joan married Richard Slewright, the holding thus passing into this family. There are many instances of new families acquiring lands by marrying rich heiresses or widows. The case of Thomas Gaston illustrates what could be achieved by a good marriage. The rental of 1498-9 shows that he held five cottages in the right of his wife, who was the widow of John Archer. The latter himself had acquired some of his property by marrying the daughter of John Broke. The last reference to Gaston is in 1506; by 1522 his cottages were in the hands of Elizabeth, the wife of Richard Ticehurst, so it seems likely that she was his daughter.

As in the study of its economy so in the study of its peasantry Alciston's position as home farm of Battle Abbey is the determining factor. The fact that demesne land was not available may partly account for the small size of the average peasant holding, but demand for land was probably less pressing than on some estates: the peasants' income was supplemented in some cases by wages, which were rising, and in many instances by the sale of wool from quite considerable flocks of sheep. On the whole it seems likely that Alciston peasants shared in the general prosperity enjoyed by the peasantry on so many estates in the later Middle Ages.

Decreasing demand combined with increasing costs were probably the chief factors behind the decision to finally lease the demesne at Alciston in 1496. Yet the fortunes of the manor seem to have been improving just at the time when demesne farming was abandoned. Perhaps a changed policy on the part of the new Abbot,

<sup>1</sup> W. Hudson, ed., *The Three Earliest Subsidies for the County of Sussex, 1296, 1327 and 1332* (Sussex Record Society, vol. 10) and J. Cornwall, ed., *The Lay Subsidy Rolls 1524-5* (Sussex Record Society, vol. 56).

Richard Tovy, appointed in 1490, and a desire to increase revenues and simplify the administration, may have been the immediate cause. Unfortunately the series of account rolls ends with the abandonment of demesne farming, so that it is difficult to see if the lord benefited as the rentier. The material available, however, suggests that the position of the lord was by no means unfavourable. A lease of the manor in 1536 shows that he received £60 rent as well as considerable supplies for his household, including 100 quarters of wheat, as much as was being sent to the Abbey in the last years of demesne farming. By handing over the demesne to a lessee the Abbot secured a sure income, unaffected as the profits of demesne farming had been by the fluctuations of the market; moreover he had no more wage bills to pay.

On the other hand the farmers were not in a bad position. Lease prices remained steady, £60 in 1496 as in 1536 and the length of leases was increasing (the first lease was for ten years while that of 1536 was for 99). There were evidently some men at Alciston wealthy enough to take up a lease, but as the evidence reveals an almost complete absence of a class of sufficiently rich men, it may well be significant that the first lessee came not from Alciston but from Battle.

A study of both demesne farming and of the peasantry has revealed several differences between Alciston and other manors. Although the symptoms of decline noted elsewhere in the later Middle Ages are perceptible at Alciston, here it was not only less marked but also came later, and demesne farming was continued to an unusually late date. Moreover, while a very active land market and a considerable mobility of population are in evidence at Alciston, peasant holdings remained noticeably small, and there is no sign of a class of rich peasants. It is in these remarkable features that the special interest of Alciston lies.