

## IX

# Workers on the Pittington Demesne in the Late Middle Ages<sup>1</sup>

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### SUMMARY

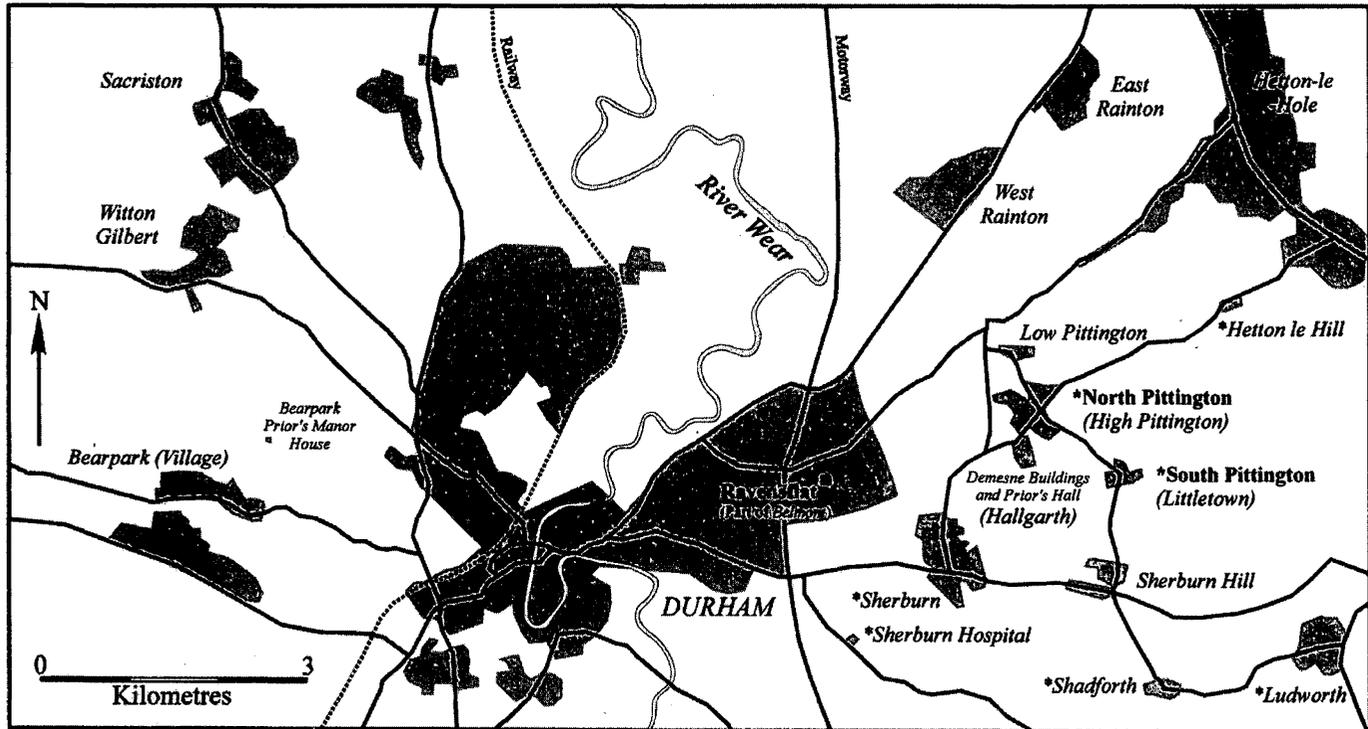
**T**he article is based on the series of Pittington manor accounts from between 1376 and 1452, a period in which changes in the cost of labour and composition of the labour force are well-documented elsewhere in England. The exceptional continuity of the series enables a detailed examination of changes in the rate and composition of wages on one manorial demesne. The unusual accounting practice of naming many of the employees affords a rare glimpse of the impact of these changes on the lives of individuals, revealing some aspects of the process of wage negotiation and the differing experience of males and females. Comparison of the names of lessees of parcels of demesne with those of the demesne workers uncovers surprising changes in the economic opportunities available to agricultural labourers in the period. Although the article constitutes a small case study, its findings suggest ways in which the documentary riches of the muniments of the Dean and Chapter of Durham could be used in the future.

### INTRODUCTION

North and South Pittington, now known as High Pittington and Littleton (see map<sup>2</sup>, figure 1), were possessions of Durham Priory from the second half of the twelfth century at the latest and, in all probability, were among the monks' original possessions in 1083.<sup>3</sup> By 1270 a Middle Pittington was also mentioned in the Bursar's rent roll which seems to refer to the area around the Church of St. Lawrence now known as Hallgarth.<sup>4</sup> This was the site of one of the prior's manor houses, the remains of which are still visible to the north of the

church.<sup>5</sup> Pittington continued to be a favourite residence of the Durham priors into the fifteenth century and, although secondary to their larger manor house at Bearpark, was also used for the *ludi*. These were periods of two or three weeks, occurring four times a year, in which a few Durham monks left the monastic precinct for relaxation.<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps largely as a result of these special functions that the manorial demesne at Pittington was one of only two bursar and terrar manors which continued to be directly cultivated after the second decade of the fifteenth century. By the final quarter of the fourteenth century between approximately 150 and 230 acres were sown each year at Pittington with wheat, barley, oats and various types of peas.<sup>7</sup> Although much of the stock at Pittington was administered through the two stock centres of Holme and Muggleswick, a few beasts for ploughing and haulage and others for luxury consumption, presumably at the prior's table, were administered with the rest of the demesne.<sup>8</sup>

The series of forty-two manorial accounts from between 1376 and 1452 makes Pittington the best documented of the manors of the bursar and terrar during this period.<sup>9</sup> Each account was drawn up by the Pittington serjeant and presented to the bursar and terrar for auditing. The autonomy of the serjeants was carefully restricted, with the bursar and terrar keeping a close eye on the running of the demesne farm. In contrast to many estates, rents do not appear in the manorial accounts because they were administered directly by the bursar. Even though the serjeant took responsibility for receipts from the sale of produce and meadow, it seems the bursar and terrar may have collected this cash at intervals throughout the



**Bold text:** Name used in Pittington Accounts    *Italic Text:* Modern name

\* = Indicates vill which was part of Pittington parish (Sherburn and Sherburn Hospital probably represent the medieval villis of North and South Sherburn). The modern position of some places on the map may be only an approximate indication of their medieval position.

*Fig. 1 Pittington area location map, showing modern built-up areas, road, etc.*

year.<sup>10</sup> Despite this closeness to the central administration, the late medieval series of Pittington manorial accounts is of exceptional value to the historian. This is because of the unusual level of detail they contain about those working on the demesne. It was almost always the practice of the accountants to name individual workers and, in particular, the series of *famuli* names (that is the permanent stipendiary workers) is almost unbroken. Manorial accounts for other English demesnes, such as Crawley in Hampshire belonging to the bishops of Winchester, commonly recorded wage payments as lump sums, making analysis of the workforce much more difficult.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of the Durham Priory material, the naming of agricultural workers is elsewhere confined to rare examples such as the manorial accounts of Glastonbury and Owston Abbeys.<sup>12</sup> Even within the body of surviving Durham Priory accounting material, remarkable for the detail with which workers are named, the Pittington manorial accounts stand out because of their continuity.

A set of such detailed records enables two important ideas to be tested. First, low prices and high wages in the late fourteenth and especially the fifteenth centuries seem to have precipitated a rise in living standards in the English countryside. Thorold Rogers' reflection on this has become famous:

the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth were the golden age of the English labourer, if we are to interpret the wages which he earned by the cost of the necessaries of life.<sup>13</sup>

This impression is confirmed by the comments of contemporaries. In Langland's *Piers Plowman*, completed in the final quarter of the fourteenth century, Hunger proved impossible to satisfy with the simple fare Piers could offer him. The labourers had become more choosy:

Nothing would do but the finest kinds of bread, with names like 'cocket' and 'clear-matin', and only the purest wheat-flour would suffice. Nor would they touch your thin halfpenny beer, but only the most select nut-brown ales the brewers could offer.<sup>14</sup>

The evidence from the Pittington manorial accounts enables these general ideas to be tested on the cases of individual late medieval peasants.

Secondly, this unusual body of records provides a valuable insight into the operations of the demesne workforce and, in particular, the contribution made by the *famuli*. The presence of salaried workers on demesnes, particularly from the late fourteenth century, has long been acknowledged but lack of detail in accounts and leasing policy mean little is known about their precise occupations and conditions of employment.<sup>15</sup>

### TYPES OF LABOUR

Although the *Landbok*, which gave details of services owed on Priory estates, has not survived, there is evidence that customary labour was used on the Pittington demesne in the first half of the fourteenth century. For example, a works account was sewn to the bottom of the Pittington serjeant's account of 1339/40. In it the six bondmen of South Pittington are described as owing two days a week on the demesne for thirty-eight weeks of the year and three days a week for July, August and September. Seven cotmen from the same vill owed seventy-five days in the harvest months. Almost all these works were used for arable tasks and carrying and the only works used in tending the livestock were twelve days washing sheep. However, the cash expenditure on labour section of the manorial account from the same year demonstrates that the majority of work in most tasks was performed by hired labour.

In the series of accounts from 1376/7 there is no mention of labour services. No thorough survey has been made of the final commutation of labour services on the Durham demesnes in the mid-fourteenth century; this would be made difficult by the complete lack of manorial accounting material from Durham manors between the late 1340s and the end of the 1360s.<sup>16</sup> The work of Dr. Richard Lomas has, however, established that commutation of labour services on Priory demesnes began

before the Black Death but was greatly increased and formalized afterwards; thus, sold works were recorded in the serjeants' accounts before the Black Death and in the bursars' accounts after.<sup>17</sup> Separate entries of income from sale of works from each manor were made in the bursars' accounts until the late 1410s but income from this source stopped increasing in the 1380s, suggesting commutation was complete by this stage.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, there may have been some residual exaction of labour services as late as the second decade of the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> In general, however, the lack of any mention of customary labour services in a set of accounts so detailed on other aspects of demesne labour, and the weight of evidence from other Priory material, suggest that all labour on the Pittington demesne was hired by 1376/7.

Two types of hired labour were used at Pittington. Casual labourers were employed in the busy periods of the agricultural year, and in particular during the harvest; they were paid by the day or by the piece. In 1378/9, for example, the serjeant paid for 417 working days, at 3d. each, reaping and binding (*metatio et ligatio*); no indication is given in any of the late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century accounts of how many men and women this involved. These workers also received bread, cheese, beef and beer. Thirty-nine acres of meadow were mown at a rate of 8d. per acre in the same year. Forty-one days' spreading and making of hay (*spersio et levatio feni*) were also bought at a rate of 1½d. each. Weeding (*sarculatio*) was another task for which casual labour was used; 123 days were bought at 1½d. each. The threshing was paid for by the piece at a rate of 4d. per quarter of wheat, 2½d. per quarter of barley, 2d. per quarter of peas and beans and 1½d. per quarter of oats.

In the same year there were eight salaried workers at Pittington, excluding the serjeant himself. These consisted of one carter (*caretator*), five ploughmen (*carucarii*), a plough-driver (*fugator caruce*) and a garthwoman (*mulier gardini*). Their rates of pay were dependent on their role and, perhaps, level of experience. The ploughmen and carter each

received 14s. and a wheat livery of one quarter every twelve weeks. The Durham bursar bought wheat for 3s. 2½d. per quarter in 1378/9 at which price the annual livery of the Pittington *famuli* would have been worth 13s. 11d.; the corn livery was, therefore almost identical in value to the cash stipend.<sup>20</sup> The plough-driver seems to have been a minor *famulus*; although his wheat livery was equal to that of the ploughmen and carter, he only received 10s. cash stipend. The title of his role implies a distinction in the actual process of ploughing. A plough team of eight oxen required two men, one working at the plough tail holding the stilts and guiding the depth and direction of the ploughing, whilst the other walked on the left of the oxen directing the team; the term *fugator* implies the second and less skilled role.<sup>21</sup> The garthwoman also seems to have been a lesser *famulus*. She received a 5s. cash stipend and half a bushel of wheat each week, her role centring around the manorial *curia*. In 1380 she is explicitly recorded as having done the winnowing; expenditure on casual labourers who winnowed was rare, suggesting this may have been her regular task. Occasional references in the grain discharge sections of the accounts hint that she also looked after the poultry and pigs.<sup>22</sup> Her role is comparable with that of the dairymaid (*daia*) on the Winchester bishopric manors and in a thirteenth century estate management manual. The *daia* made a pottage at midday for the other *famuli*, looked after the fire, fed the poultry, milked the cows, made cheese and winnowed half the grain.<sup>23</sup> A swineherd was also employed in certain years on the Pittington demesne; as on the Winchester bishopric and Christ Church Canterbury manors, he was characteristically the lowest paid worker and the irregularity of his appearance in the accounts suggests the precariousness of his position.<sup>24</sup>

The composition of the demesne staff at Pittington did not change significantly over the following seventy or so years before leasing. A body of permanent staff continued to be supplemented by casual hired labour. However, the period did see considerable contraction in sown acreage on the demesne and the number of

labourers employed fell accordingly. By the 1440s and 1450s fewer than 150 acres were sown annually, compared to over two hundred in the late 1370s, and only five permanent workers, including the serjeant, were kept on. No casual labour was used for weeding, mowing and threshing although extra help was still brought in for the harvest. The declining level of detail in the late accounts makes further examination of the reduced workforce impossible.

### PAYMENTS

The cash stipends and wheat liveries of the Pittington *famuli* were supplemented by various customary perks. A pair of gloves (*cirothecae*) was bought for each *famulus* at harvest time and they received a customary payment known as the ladegoose (*ladges*) or inninggoose (*innynnguse*). Expenditure on these perks was usually recorded without the *in precio* prefix, used when payments were made in kind, which implies they were commuted for cash. However, even as late as 1451/2, two of the seven geese at Pittington were used as ladegeese, suggesting that the ladegoose may have been a celebratory feast when the harvest was brought in.<sup>25</sup> Perks were also received on 'le Ploughday' or *die caruce*. This was presumably the feast held on the first Monday after Twelfth Night when work was re-started on the ploughing for the sowing of the spring crops.<sup>26</sup> It is not known what these perks were, however, since entries in the ploughing expenses sections only give cash sums: 12d. was spent on the Ploughday in 1377/8, 10d. was given to the *servientes manerii* on the same day in 1413/4 and 12d. was spent on *dona data servientibus . . . in le ploughday* in 1418/9.

Other estate studies have revealed widespread increases in wage rates across England during the final decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>27</sup> The Pittington accounts contain clear evidence that the rates paid for casual work did rise in this period. The cost of threshing a quarter of each of the three major grains increased by  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the final quarter of the

fourteenth century, though at different times. Similarly, weeders received 2d. per day from 1382/3 rather than  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. previously. It must be recognized that generalization on the movements of *famuli* wage rates is made much more difficult by the unquantifiable customary perks they enjoyed and the dual payment structure which included cash stipends and wheat liveries. There is no evidence, however, that customary perks changed across the period and the corn accounts make it clear that *famuli* were almost always given one quarter of wheat every twelve weeks.

Cash stipends were the most variable element and figure 2 shows changes in the cash stipends of the male *famuli*, including the serjeant of the manor. The *famuli* received their cash stipends in two annual payments and the data in the chart represent payments made on both these days; *famuli* paid on only one of the pay days (*termini*) have not been included. The evidence presented in the chart is striking – *famuli* stipends rose continually between 1376 and 1452 and did so most steeply in the quarter century before 1400.

Comment can also be made on the types of workers who were most likely to benefit from increased cash stipends. In his *Mirour de l'Omme*, written during the 1370s, John Gower reflected that the 'world is going from bad to worse when the shepherd or the herdsman demands to be paid more for his work than previously the overseer used to receive'.<sup>28</sup> This increase in the wages of less skilled workers is well documented on the estates of Christ Church Canterbury; in the half century following the Black Death, for example, the pigmen working on the Canterbury manors enjoyed a sharper increase in wages than other members of the workforce.<sup>29</sup> A similar phenomenon can be observed on the manorial demesne at Pittington. Although the serjeant was manifestly the most skilled of the stipendiaries, his total cash stipend was not always the highest. During the late 1380s the modal stipend for all *famuli* was consistently higher than the 13s. 4d. being paid to the serjeant, the only exception being 1392/3 when serjeant Robert Kirkman received part of his stipend in the form of clothing. In

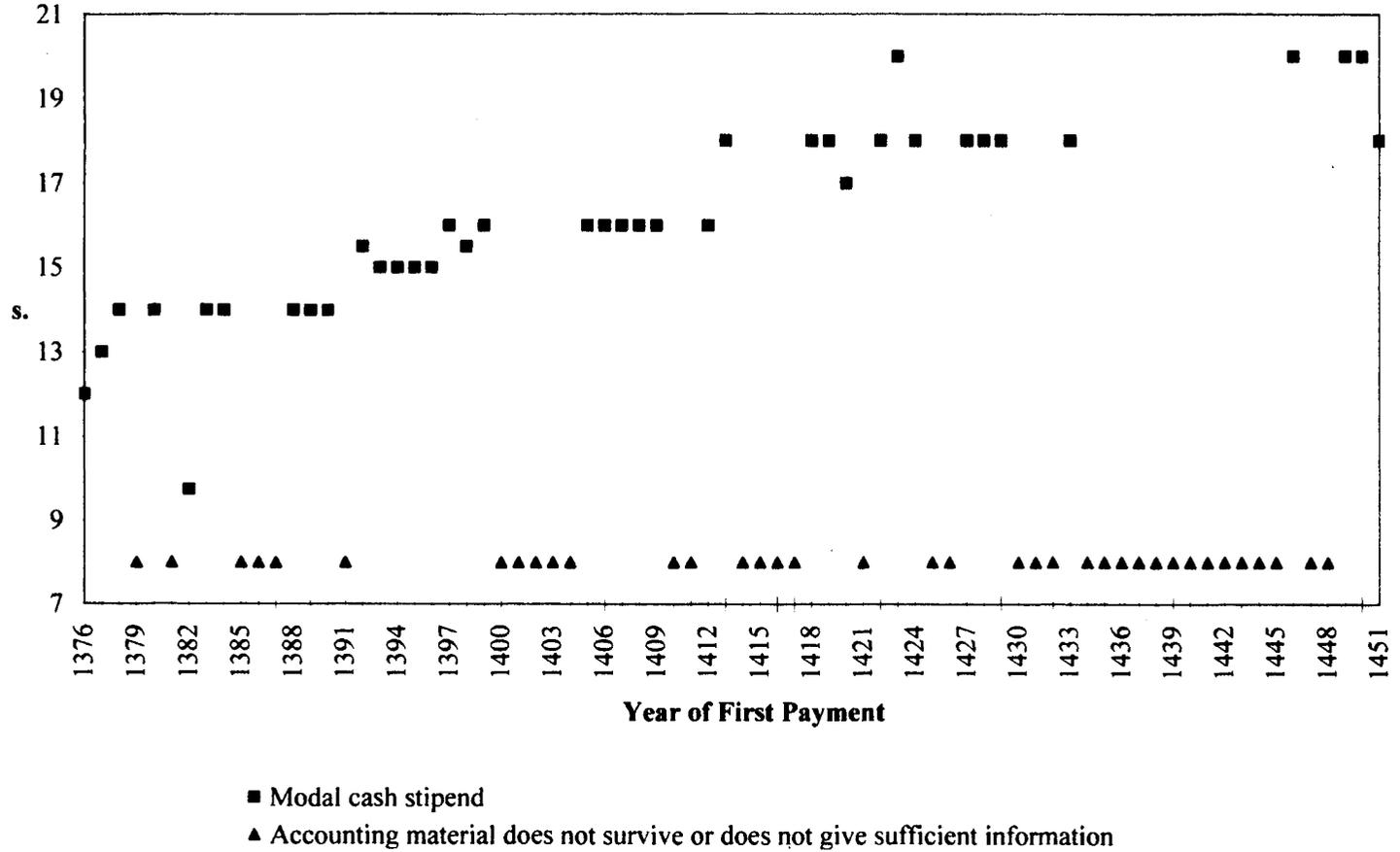


Fig. 2 Modal famuli full year cash stipends on the Pittington demesne, 1376-1452.

the following year, however, Kirkman's 13s. 4d. was the smallest amount of cash received by any male stipendiary and William Roos, presumably a ploughman, took 21s. 8d., the highest recorded annual *famulus* stipend in the series. After 1400, however, when the serjeants' stipends were increased to 20s., they were always among the highest paid *famuli*. It must be pointed out, however, that the serjeants may not have been the worst paid demesne workers before the turn of the century; they may have worked fewer hours than the ploughmen and the carters and would therefore have received a higher notional hourly rate. Nonetheless, the cash stipends of the less skilled *famuli* seem to have risen more quickly than those of the skilled serjeants.

At Pittington the improvement in the cash stipends of the less skilled workers was only enjoyed by males. Throughout the entire series of Pittington accounts from 1376–1452 the garthwomen received the same cash stipend of 5s. Indeed, the wheat livery given to the garthwomen even seems to have fallen by the fourth decade of the fifteenth century. In almost every account from the 1370s until the 1420s the garthwoman received 1 bus. of wheat every two weeks, but in the final five years from which accounts survive she only received 1 bus. every three weeks. This is clear evidence of a widening gap in the wage levels of the least skilled men and women. This contrasts with evidence of migration to York in the same period, which suggests that demand for female labour may have been particularly high, and it seems likely that the cloth manufacturing urban economy in York meant women stood to gain more in a time of labour scarcity.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, the Pittington demesne had never offered substantial opportunities for women and the situation did not improve even when labour was scarce. Even in a period of demographic decline, the supply of women willing to work must have continued to outstrip the limited number of jobs available. Indeed, it appears women may have been further disadvantaged by the cut backs in sown acreage during the fifteenth century.

Recruitment of affordable labour was obviously becoming difficult from the late

fourteenth century on the Pittington demesne as elsewhere in England. Workers were not only demanding higher cash stipends but also wanted higher quality customary perks. Evidence from manorial accounts elsewhere in England suggests there was indeed an improvement in the food given to harvest workers, beginning in the late thirteenth century but culminating in the fifteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately it is not possible to discern any improvements in the diet of Pittington harvest workers because of the declining level of detail with which harvest expenditure was recorded. It became increasingly common during the fifteenth century to enter the *custus autumnpni* as a single cash sum. We are, however, afforded occasional glimpses of gifts given to workers presumably intended, at least in part, to keep them on the pay roll. In 1427/8, for example, Ralph Bose and William Henrison were given cloaks of the value of 4s. 6d. each, in addition to cash stipends of 17s. and 18s. and the usual wheat liveries.

The serjeants' payment arrangements during the late fourteenth century give further insight into the difficulties of securing reliable and affordable labour. From the late 1370s to the early 1380s serjeants Punchon, Hoton and Willy routinely recorded payment of their own cash stipends of 20s. This sum was then regularly crossed out by the account auditors and changed to 13s. 4d.; the serjeants seem to have been claiming more than their employers were willing to pay. The usual purpose of auditors' corrections was the prevention of cheating on behalf of the accountants and it is thus possible that the original entries of 20s represented brazen attempts by the serjeants to defraud the bursar and terrar.<sup>32</sup> Given the regular discovery of the 'deceit', this explanation would seem unlikely. It is more probable that the changes made in the early accounts to the serjeants' stipends are evidence of a process of negotiation: each year the serjeant claimed 20s and presumably argued and lost his case before the auditors. From 1383/4 until 1405/6, however, the serjeants seem to have been content with a payment of 13s. 4d. The account of 1392/3 suggests that the Bursar and Terrar may have

been using other methods of persuasion to keep serjeant Robert Kirkman happy because he received clothing (*garmamentum*) for his birthday in this year worth 6s. 8d., in addition to his cash stipend of 13s. 4d. Even this gift seems to have been a matter of dispute since the accountant's entry of the garment's value at 6s. 8d. was crossed out by the auditors and replaced with 5s.

It is noticeable that wheat liveries to the *famuli* remained more or less stable when cash stipends were rising sharply. This, again, may have been the result of negotiation and reflect the demands of the workers themselves. If grain prices were low in the late fourteenth century then it would have been in the interest of the *famuli* to earn as much cash as possible with which cheap grain could easily be bought. In one instance, as early as 1382, the account explicitly describes a smaller wheat livery to the *famuli*, including the garthwoman, as 'no greater because they will take cash instead' (*et non plus quia quilibet eorum capiet argentum*). Similarly, prior to 1400, pigmen and plough drivers usually received a low cash stipend and a wheat livery, almost always smaller than that of the other *famuli*. In the first decade of the fifteenth century, however, they received high cash stipends and no grain livery. The process of negotiation over the type of wages received is demonstrated even more clearly in the case of Thomas Cowhird, a *famulus* in 1427/8. He worked for the full year but was paid at a daily rate between 11 November and 23 May, receiving in total 26s. and no wheat livery. The phrase '*ex convencione secum facta pro preposito* (sic)' is used for this arrangement indicating that it was specially negotiated with the serjeant. Between 23 May and 11 November 1428 he was employed under the usual terms for 10s. and a wheat livery. Similar preference for cash liveries rather than payment in kind is documented elsewhere in England during this period, including Sedgford (Norfolk) and Adderbury (Oxfordshire).<sup>33</sup>

### WORKING CONDITIONS

The Pittington manorial accounts of the late fourteenth century provide a particularly

striking example of the widely documented phenomenon of rising wage rates. It is much more difficult to know exactly what was expected in return for the payments, at least in the case of the stipendiary *famuli*. Historians have occasionally voiced the suspicion that demesne *famuli* were not expected to work hours equivalent to the modern full-time week.<sup>34</sup> In particular, it has been observed that certain *famuli* on the manors of Glastonbury Abbey worked on more than one demesne in the same year, suggesting they were not committed to a full working week on one manor.<sup>35</sup>

It seems likely that there were pre-defined limits to the amount of work done by the *famuli*. This is suggested by occasional examples of overtime payments made to *famuli* performing extra work.<sup>36</sup> On the Battle Abbey manor of Marley, for example, the *famuli* were paid '*pro diversis cariajis et laboribus per ipsos factis ultra sibi constituta*'.<sup>37</sup> The unusual detail of the Pittington accounts makes them particularly well suited to an examination of this phenomenon. A temporary worker was sometimes described as a *famulus* working *ex curialitate* (e.g. 1398/9). In 1392/3, for example, John Carter was paid an annual stipend of 16s. and the usual wheat livery, but was also employed for ten days as a mower. He was paid 1½d. per day for his mowing whereas the other eight mowers, not described as *famuli* or named, mowed for 8d. per day. The difference in remuneration may reflect the shorter hours mowed by Carter if he was occupied for part of the day in his usual *curia* duties. Of course, it is much more difficult to define what was expected of the *famuli* in terms of workload. An entry in the mowing section of the 1382/3 account suggests that the 'contracts' under which the *famuli* worked may have been governed by time rather than by specific duties. Only four days of mowing were bought in this year because 'the rest was done by the *famuli*'. It seems that the *famuli* did as much mowing as they had time for, and the rest was either done as 'overtime' by them or by casual labourers.

However, the *famuli* were also expected to complete certain tasks. The following extract from the *Seneschaucy*, a thirteenth-century

manual on estate management, implies certain fixed duties for carters:

Bailiff and reeve ought to supervise and find out how many times a day the carts can go, without too much hardship, for hay, corn, timber, or brushwood, and how many times daily the carter can go with a load of marl or compost. At the end of the week the carters ought then to answer that much for each day.<sup>38</sup>

The wording of some Pittington account entries similarly suggests that the auditors expected the *famuli* to perform certain tasks. When twenty-one days of weeding had to be purchased in 1405/6 the accountant had to explain that 'the *famuli* of the aforesaid manor were occupied in various carrying duties for the lord who was at that time at the *ludi*'. Clearly the hiring of so much casual labour for weeding would not, under normal circumstances, have been acceptable to the auditors.

Related to the issue of the workload of the demesne workforce is that of the types of people involved. It has sometimes been assumed that the permanent stipendiaries, at least, were either young unmarried men or widows prepared, in some cases, to live on the demesne. In managerial terms, it would have made sense for certain workers to live in the *curia* and this is the advice given by *Seneschaucy*. The section advising on the employment of carters, quoted above, goes on to say the following:

Every carter ought to sleep every night with his horses and take such care as is necessary to avoid loss.<sup>39</sup>

Such a carter would have had to live within the manorial *curia*. Evidence of actual practice, however, suggests that this advice 'may well have been a counsel of perfection'.<sup>40</sup> Certainly the *famuli* on the manors of Glastonbury Abbey in the later middle ages were not housed on the demesne and it has been suggested that they were from the 'better than middling part of the village community'; some were married, and many appear to have had their own smallholdings. The same seems to have been true on the estates of Ramsey and Westminster

Abbeys and on the bishopric estates of Winchester and Worcester.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, not all *famuli* were family men; the opening of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* describes a different type of smallholding *famulus*, the 'maner deye':

A povre wydwe, somdell stape in age,  
Was whilom dwellyng in a narwe cotage,  
This wydwe, of which I telle yow my tale,  
Syn thilke day that she was last a wyf  
In pacience ladde a ful symple lyf,  
For litel was hir catel and hir rente.<sup>42</sup>

Other examples suggest the men working on the demesne could also be 'stape in age': Henry le Driver, a Cuxham ploughman, was still employed on the demesne at fifty.<sup>43</sup>

The Pittington evidence on these issues is particularly informative. Given the absence of any mention of housing in the series of accounts, it is likely that the Pittington *famuli* lived outside the demesne. This is also suggested by the size of their wheat liveries. Each major *famulus* (excluding the garthwoman and occasional pigmen and plough-drivers) received one quarter of wheat every twelve weeks and a study of maintenance agreements suggests that this could provide 1½ to 1¾ lbs of high quality wheat bread daily, yielding almost 2,000 calories for nearly three people.<sup>44</sup> This evidence is admittedly circumstantial; the *famuli* could have lived alone and sold their surplus wheat. Nonetheless, it is likely that the wheat liveries were intended to form a substantial component of a family diet; as on the Glastonbury Abbey manors, it appears that the Pittington *famuli* were married.

The names of the Pittington *famuli* give an indication of their social status. Of the ninety-five *famuli* whose full names are given in the Pittington series from 1376/7 until 1451/2, nearly fifty-six percent appear in only one or two accounts and only six percent in five or more accounts. These figures exclude female workers since they were only very rarely named. This strongly suggests that a job as a Pittington *famulus* was only rarely a lifelong career. There are, however, several cases of individual *famuli* coming back at a later date to perform casual work. In 1406/7, for example, John Carter and Robert Bell did fourteen and a half days'

Table 1 Pittington agricultural workers identifiable in the 1396/7 rental and printed halmote court records

Name	Earliest and Latest Appearance in Pittington Accounts	Additional Source Used for Identification	Holding
Matilda Gray (18 days extracting seed from wheat)	1376/7	1396/7 rental (SS198, 91)	Previously rented 1½ acres now taken by a different tenant.
William son of Stephen ( <i>famulus</i> )	1379/80	1366 East Rainton court (SS82, 55)	Jointly took 8 acres in Ravensflat for 15 years.
John Spenser ( <i>famulus</i> )	1388–90	1396/7 rental (SS198, 91)	Previously rented cottage in Pittington now taken by a different tenant.
John Hunting ( <i>famulus</i> )	1388–94	1396/7 rental (SS198, 91)	Cottage and 5 acres in Pittington.
Robert Tyndale (swineherd)	1390/1	1396/7 rental (SS198, 92)	Joint lessee of South Pittington.
William Walker ( <i>famulus</i> and temporary mower)	1392–7	1377 West Rainton court (SS82, 141)	Took cottage and six acres in West Rainton for six years.
John Thomson ( <i>famulus</i> )	1393–1400	1396/7 rental (SS198, 91)	Cottage and garden in Pittington.
William Coatham ( <i>famulus</i> )	1393–1410	1396/7 rental (SS198, 91)	Cottage and garden in Pittington.

mowing between them, at a rate of 8d. per day. Robert Bell had been paid 16s. as a *famulus* in the previous account and John Carter had been employed as such during the 1380s and 1390s. This could suggest they had taken over holdings after a period working on the demesne as stipendiaries, and then only returned for short periods to supplement cash income. Undoubtedly, however, not all the male *famuli* were young single men. John Hunting was employed as a *famulus* during the late 1380s and early 1390s and he appears in the West Rainton halmote court entry for 1378, with his wife Cecilia, for damaging a neighbour's property.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, William Coatham who worked on the demesne during the 1390s and early 1400s, was joined by his son Robert in 1409/10 so seems to have been a family man.

## LANDHOLDING

The lack of surviving Priory rentals makes it difficult to determine whether the workers on the demesne held land of the Priory. Similarly, the frequency of the occurrence of common occupational and topographical surnames, such as Carter, can make identification uncertain. The rental of 1396/7, however, yields some information on the Pittington workforce which can be supplemented by the printed records of the halmote courts.<sup>46</sup> Table 1 contains details of the holdings of the only eight Pittington employees, seven of whom were *famuli*, identified in Priory rentals and court records. Rental and court roll references to names identical to those in Pittington accounts more than two decades apart or from distant villages have not

been included. It must be emphasised, however, that identification of two individuals with the same name occurring in a similar geographical area and period can never be certain.

The predominance of stipendiary *famuli* in table 1 could suggest that the casual workers were more likely to be landless. However, the accounts do not name casual workers with any regularity, meaning the discrepancy is more likely to be a result of accounting practice. Most of the examples of landholding *famuli* in table 1 worked on the demesne for more than a year and were very small holders with only five acres or even just a cottage and garden. The main exception is Robert Tyndale, who only worked on the demesne for a year but may have been a more substantial landholder. The identification of Robert Tyndale, the swineherd of 1390/1, with the joint lessee of Pittington with the same name in 1396/7 is risky, but it is possible the two occurrences refer to the same individual and that he may have worked on the demesne before inheriting his father's property.

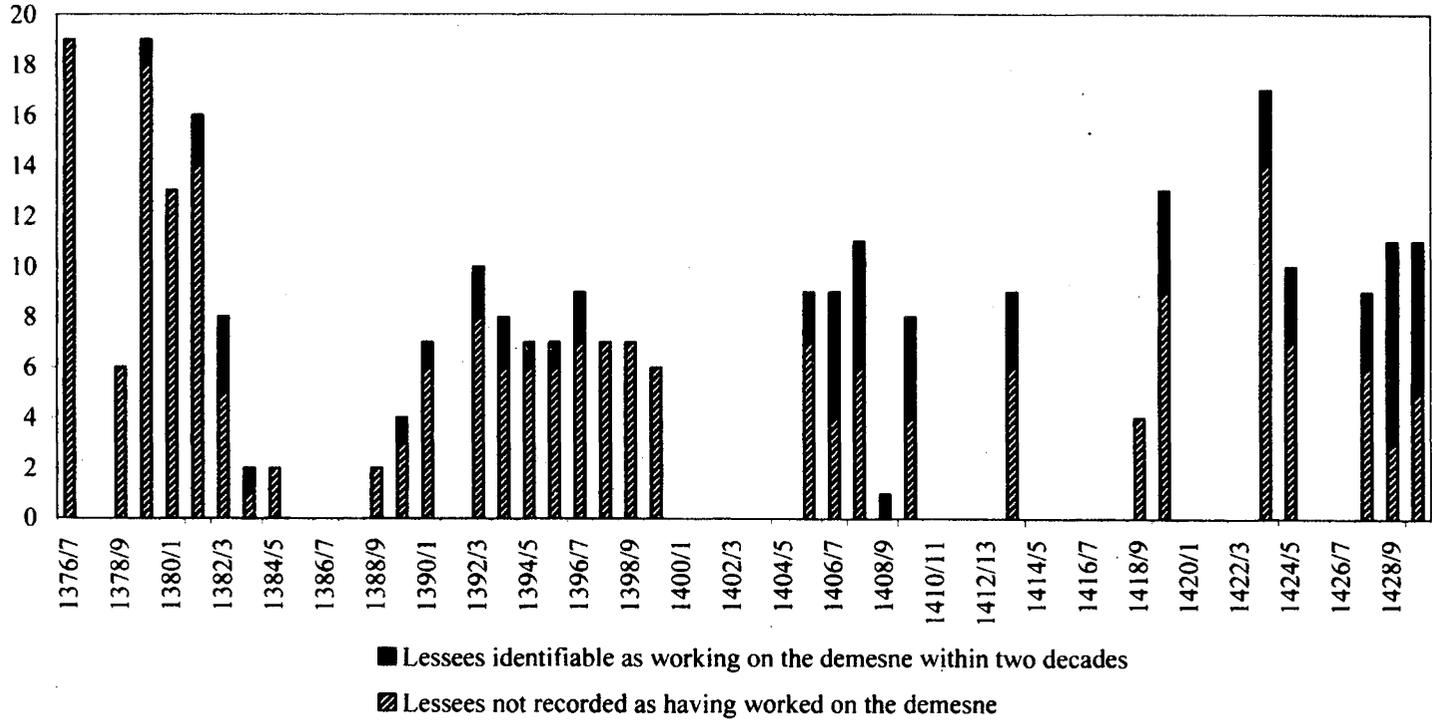
If other Pittington workers of the 1390s held land from the Priory then one would reasonably have expected that they would appear in the rental of 1396/7. Yet only five of the forty individuals named as having worked at Pittington during the final decade of the fourteenth century do appear in the rental. It seems likely, therefore, that most of the Pittington *famuli* were either landless or held land from another landlord. The latter is certainly possible since the bishop of Durham held several villas near Pittington, including Shadforth, Sherburn and Houghton.<sup>47</sup> The only firm conclusion which can be drawn from this evidence is that some Pittington *famuli* rented small pieces of property from the Priory. Whether the proportion was true of the whole body of Pittington *famuli* from 1376/7 to 1451/2 cannot be determined in the absence of further surviving rentals.

During the late fourteenth century it became common for small parcels of 'meadow' (*pratium*), presumably demesne land, to be leased on the Durham manors pertaining to the bursar and terrar. Manorial serjeants were not responsible for the collection of most of the

rents from the villas in which their demesnes were situated. However, the very small size of the demesne parcels, often amounting to fewer than five acres, and the practice of granting leases of only one year, meant demesne leases were recorded in the manorial accounts. By 1376/7 income from sale of parcels of demesne amounted to over one-third of the serjeant's cash income. The accounts give a list of parcels of meadow leased, their lessees and the amount for which the parcels were bought, or an explanation if there was no receipt. This unusual level of detail, and particularly the regular record of names, affords a valuable insight into the identity of the very short-term lessees. Given that at least some demesne workers were small landholders, it might be expected that they would rent these small parcels of demesne land.

Figure 3 charts the incidence of demesne lessees identifiable with demesne workers for names occurring within two decades of each other. The results are striking. After 1390 far more demesne lessees can be identified with demesne workers than in the previous accounts. Certain qualifications are required, however, in the interpretation of the raw data shown in figure 3. Firstly changes in accounting technique meant it was not possible to identify demesne lessees from the final Pittington accounts of the late 1440s and early 1450s; the accountants ceased to name current demesne workers in these years. Secondly, the correlation of names might be expected to improve from the late 1390s because, by this stage, there survive accounts from the preceding and succeeding two decades. Accounts do not survive from the 1350s and 1360s in which the names of the workers and lessees of the 1370s might have appeared. Finally, the difficulty of identifying names with any certainty remains. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the level of change shown in figure 3 is sufficiently pronounced to indicate at least some trend.

Conclusions must of course be drawn with caution from figure 3 because of the small size of the sample. Two factors could have contributed to the increasing prominence of demesne workers as demesne lessees. Wages of both



Empty columns indicate that accounting material does not survive or does not contain sufficient data on lessees or workers

Fig. 3 Demesne workers identifiable as demesne lessees.

stipendiary and casual workers rose during the 1390s and early 1400s and thus increase in income may have enabled workers to lease parcels of land for the first time. Secondly, the Pittington accounts suggest that the mean price of a parcel of meadow land fell sharply in the late 1380s, making them more affordable to agricultural workers. Whilst the mean price per parcel was nearly always above 6s. from 1376/7 until 1384/5, it frequently fell below 4s. from 1388/9. It appears that the workers on the Pittington demesne were probably able to take advantage of economic conditions and seized the opportunity to become lessees of demesne.

### CONCLUSIONS

On one level, the evidence from the Pittington manorial accounts on labour neatly conforms to the classic pattern established for so many other manors in England in the late middle ages. The increasing cost of labour made direct cultivation of demesnes more and more difficult. The changes in patterns of landholding and in annual wages which affected workers on the demesne during the 1390s and early 1400s anticipated the affluence among English agricultural employees for which the fifteenth century is well known. In terms of the modest economic standing of an agricultural worker with little or no land, the lease of a small parcel of demesne constituted a significant change. Unfortunately, the increasingly poor survival of Pittington accounts from the second decade of the fifteenth century does not clarify the relationship between the obviously important turn of the century period and later fifteenth-century economic developments. For example, the impact of the epidemics and famines of the late 1430s is known to have been particularly severe in the Northeast.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the few accounts from mid-century are insufficient to determine the impact of the 'slump of precipitous proportions' which affected England during the 1450s and 1460s.<sup>49</sup> Also regrettable is the difficulty in understanding the relationship between the important years around the turn of the century and those immediately following

the Black Death since no Pittington accounting material survives from the late 1340s until the mid-1370s.<sup>50</sup> Despite these lacunae, the Pittington manorial accounts represent an exceptional body of records, giving valuable insights into a demesne workforce, which await further examination both in the Durham Priory material and elsewhere.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Professor R. H. Britnell for supervising my research and for his valuable comments on the draft of this article.

<sup>2</sup> sources for map: J. B. Harley, R. R. Oliver, R. Fry, *The Old Series Ordnance Survey maps of England and Wales, vol. 8: Northern England and the Isle of Man* (Ashford, Headley Brothers Ltd, the Invicta Press, 1991); C. E. Jackson, *The place-names of Durham* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1916); R. A. Lomas and A. J. Piper, eds., *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals Volume 1: Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, 198 (Newcastle, 1986) (hereafter *SS198*); A. Mawer, *The place-names of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1920); N. Pevsner, revised E. Williamson, *The Buildings of England: County Durham* (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1983). I am grateful to Mr. A. J. Piper and Dr. R. A. Lomas for their help in locating the medieval villis of Pittington parish.

<sup>3</sup> *SS198*, 206; H. S. Offler, ed., *Durham Episcopal Charters 1071-1152*, Surtees Society, 179 (Gateshead, 1968), 8, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *SS198*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Pevsner, *County Durham*, 381.

<sup>6</sup> R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory 1400-1450* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1973), 93-4.

<sup>7</sup> The Pittington manorial accounts do not give estimated sown acreages until 1405/6 so these sown acreage figures were calculated using average sowing rates from fifteenth century accounts.

<sup>8</sup> R. A. Lomas, 'Durham Cathedral Priory as a Landowner and a Landlord, 1290-1540' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1973), 114-5.

<sup>9</sup> Dean and Chapter of Durham, Pittington Manor Accounts (the manorial accounts are easily traceable by year and therefore future references to the Pittington accounts have not been footnoted); A. J. Piper, *Muniments of the Dean and Chapter of Durham: Medieval Accounting Material* (Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections Searchroom Handlist, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> E. M. Halcrow, 'Administration and Agrarian Policy of the Manors of Durham Cathedral Priory' (unpublished B.Litt. thesis, University of Oxford, 1949), 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> N. S. B. Gras, *The Economic and Social History of an English Village* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1930), 298.

<sup>12</sup> D. L. Farmer, 'The *Famuli* in the Later Middle Ages', in *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, ed. R. H. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996), 229; R. H. Hilton, *The Economic Development of Some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London; Oxford University Press, 1947), 140.

<sup>13</sup> J. E. T. Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages; The History of English Labour* (5th edn.; London; Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1901), 326.

<sup>14</sup> *William Langland Piers Plowman*, ed. and trans. A. V. C. Schmidt (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1992), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Some evidence is discussed in Farmer, 'Famuli', 207–36; N. R. Goose, 'Wage Labour on a Kentish Manor: Meopham 1307–75', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 92 (1976), 203–23; M. Mate, 'Labour and Labour Services on the Estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the Fourteenth Century', *Southern History*, 7 (1985), 55–67; M. M. Postan, 'The Famulus; The Estate Labourer in the XIIth and XIIIth Centuries', *Economic History Review Supplements*, 2 (Cambridge, 1954), 1–2; E. Searle, *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its Banlieu 1066–1538* (Toronto; Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 304–9.

<sup>16</sup> Piper, *Medieval Accounting Material*.

<sup>17</sup> Lomas, 'Durham Cathedral Priory', 31.

<sup>18</sup> R. A. Lomas, 'Developments in Land Tenure on the Prior of Durham's Estate in the Later Middle Ages', *Northern History*, 13 (1977), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Halcrow, 'Administration and Agrarian Policy', 109.

<sup>20</sup> Dean and Chapter of Durham, Bursar's Account Roll, 1378/9. This price figure is based on the average cost of wheat purchases *in villa et in patria*.

<sup>21</sup> G. C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1941), 43–6.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Pittington Accounts 1412/3, 1420/1.

<sup>23</sup> Farmer, 'Famuli', 224; D. Oschinsky, *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1971), 289.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Pittington Account, 1388/9; Farmer, 'Famuli', 224; Mate, 'Labour and Labour Services', 61.

<sup>25</sup> Similar practices elsewhere in England are mentioned in C. Dyer, 'Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages: the Case of Harvest Workers', *Agricultural History Review*, 36 (1988), 23.

<sup>26</sup> J. C. Cooper, *Dictionary of Festivals* (London; HarperCollins, 1990), 175.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Farmer, 'Famuli', 232; Searle, *Lordship and Community*, 307; Hilton, *Leicestershire Estates*, 142; M. K. McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community: the Royal Manor of Havering, 1200–1500* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1986), 149.

<sup>28</sup> *John Gower Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. W. B. Wilson (East Lansing, Mass.; East Lansing Colleagues Press, 1992), 347.

<sup>29</sup> Mate, 'Labour and Labour Services', 61.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. P. Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c. 1300–1520* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1992), 290, 358–61.

<sup>31</sup> Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', 32.

<sup>32</sup> This was the view taken by Miss Halcrow in Halcrow, 'Administration and Agrarian Policy', 35.

<sup>33</sup> Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', 26; Farmer, 'Famuli', 227.

<sup>34</sup> J. Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past and Present*, 144 (1994), 30.

<sup>35</sup> Farmer, 'Famuli', 210.

<sup>36</sup> Postan, 'The Famulus', 18.

<sup>37</sup> Searle, *Lordship and Community*, 305.

<sup>38</sup> Oschinsky, *Treatises*, 283.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Postan, 'The Famulus', 40.

<sup>41</sup> Farmer, 'Famuli', 228–9.

<sup>42</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. L. D. Benson (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1988), 253.

<sup>43</sup> Dyer, 'Changes in Diet', 23.

<sup>44</sup> C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153.

<sup>45</sup> J. Booth and W. H. Longstaffe, *Halmota Prioratus Dunelmensis*, Surtees Society, 82 (Durham, 1889) (hereafter *SS82*), 146.

<sup>46</sup> *SS198*, 73–128; *SS82*. The halmote court records from after 1384 are not in print; use of these may make further identification possible.

<sup>47</sup> W. Greenwell, ed., *Bishop Hatfield's Survey*, Surtees Society, 32 (Durham, 1857), 146–57.

<sup>48</sup> A. J. Pollard, 'The North-Eastern Economy and the Agrarian Crisis of 1438–40', *Northern History*, 25 (1989), 94.

<sup>49</sup> J. Hatcher, 'The Great Slump of the Mid-Fifteenth Century', in *Progress and Problems in*

*Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller*, ed. R. H. Britnell and J. Hatcher (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996), 237–72.

<sup>50</sup> Piper, *Medieval Accounting Material*.

