

THE FARM ACCOUNTS OF THE MANOR OF HENDON, 1316—1416

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In the fourteenth century farm accounts were usually kept by tally, and as few farmers could read or write, figures were seldom entered on paper; still less frequently are written accounts preserved to the present day. Thanks to the care of the monks and their successors, the yearly account rolls of the Manors of Westminster Abbey have survived in excellent order and condition from the days of the Monastery, often in regular sequences, which adds to their historical value. Findings from the rolls of the Manor of Hendon for the years 1316 to 1416 are here described.

The first date, 1316, marks the taking possession of Hendon by the Abbot of Westminster following the gift by Royal Charter of Edward I in 1295⁽¹⁾ in soul alms for his Queen Eleanor, after an alienation of nearly a hundred and fifty years. The coincidence of the exact century ending in 1416 is due to the death in that year of John atte hegge, who farmed the manor, collected the rents, and made the accounts for the very long period of forty years from 1376; after his time there is a deterioration in the regularity of accounting—apparently there was no one of equal ability to take his place.

Until these farm accounts were examined, historians of Hendon seemed to suppose that the farming community there kept its rustic peace undisturbed from Saxon times. The writer hopes to achieve two aims, to show how Hendon did, at the time of the Black Death, emerge to play a worthy part in the national crisis, and then to demonstrate how farm accounts may be used in history.

In the fourteenth century Hendon was an established settlement of scattered farms and cottages lying along the east side of Watling Street, with its southern end bordering the 'vill' of Hampstead, five miles from Charing Cross. Its church and manor farm stood, as the name of Hendon implies, on the high down, about a safe mile away from the traffic on the highway, surrounded by the fields and woods of the demesne, gradually yielding to cultivation.

Farm accounts are often thought dull and they do repeat year after year under the same headings of income and expenditure. A long series, like this one, which covers a period of a century, can be used to illustrate economic change such as the introduction of cash payments made to avoid labour due, or the rise in wages and prices after the Black Death, which happened all over the country and has been recorded often by writers on the fourteenth century. In this paper the writer attempts to bring out only what throws new light on the history of Hendon and its people, especially at three eventful times:

1. The organization of the manor as the home farm of Westminster Abbey in the early part of the century.
2. The life and work of John atte hegge, the first man to lease the demesne, in the latter part, during the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V.
3. The unexpected effects of the Black Death in Hendon, and the effort of the monks to combat them.

The reorganization begun in 1316, after Westminster Abbey resumed ownership, was carried out over a number of years. It was undertaken methodically and with no reasonable expense spared, so that much of the income from rents (about £24) and sales was used up in stocking the farm, repairing the mill, walls and barns, and building a new manor farm now to be called a Rectory, as the residence of the Abbot as Rector.

The head of the catering department at Westminster Abbey was the cellarer, and in accordance with the old tradition that drink comes before meat with Middlesex men, the granger was under him. A farm manager was appointed each year at Michaelmas when the farmers' year ended after the harvest and before the winter ploughing and sowing began. In addition to supervising the farm work and forestry, he had to collect rents both in cash and in kind and make his account to the granger who brought a clerk to write it. In the early years, a man from the estate department at the monastery called a 'serviens' made the account. Later the most capable and trustworthy local farmer (called 'prepositus'—i.e. placed first among his neighbours) was tried, and if he proved a success, continued for two or three years. In the quiet season (October to November) the Abbot himself came down to hunt in the Great Wood (now Highwood) and to hold a court (the perquisites of this and other courts are shown as a comparatively small sum in the yearly accounts).

The Norman plan of making a detailed survey of newly acquired property, instituted by William the Conqueror with his Domesday Book, was followed in Hendon and the procedure was the same on a small scale.⁽²⁾ A jury of twelve local farmers made a list of all tenants by name, the acreage of their holdings, the rent they paid yearly at the four quarters in money, in kind and in labour. The court consisted of three monks from Westminster. As the survey was made in 1321, five years after the takeover, it may be assumed that it represented the policy of the Abbot, and that its details were already in force. The accounts are based on it through the century and Hendon was to be the home farm for the Abbey. Its produce was not (as heretofore) to be sold, but its grain was to be delivered to Westminster to feed the monks, their servants, workmen, and the large numbers of visitors from Kings to beggars: its timber (thirty large oaks each year) went to continue the building of Henry III's new Abbey now nearing completion; its logs to make fires in the Abbey rooms, its firewood to heat the brewhouse and bakehouse ovens.

In the summer of 1320 the serviens, Sayer de Brokesheued, made several journeys to buy cattle at fairs at Staines, Burnham, Kingston and Stortford with the granger, Philip de Sutton. They bought farm horses at about 11s. 0d., 12s. 0d. with foal (eight in all), three cows averaging 12s. 4d. each, one pig and nine piglets for 9s. 6¼d., and twenty-two fowls for 2s. 8d. The total was £7 2s. 8½d. and the expenses for each journey 14d.

That same summer a garden was being made behind the church by assarting (clearing a land from forest) up to the Downhegge Wood to the north-east, at a cost of 12s. 7d., followed by digging and planting at a cost of 4s. 5d., carried out by three men from Lotharlei (the old name for Mill Hill) who were paid 2s. 0d. for four days' work. The crop was peas and beans (our broad or horse beans), and there may have been apple and pear trees put in, as these were favourite fruits yielding about 10s. 0d. annually, in the survey.

The Abbot of Westminster, as Rector of Hendon, seems to have found the old Church farm inadequate to house his large train, and its barns too small for his home farm, hence the decision to build on demesne land in Parson Street where there was more room.

Under the heading 'Custos domus' during the first decade covered by the account,

there are long lists of building materials bought, and details of the wages of craftsmen, mostly from Westminster, who were paid 3*d.* to 4*d.* a day, nearly double the wage of local men. In the account for 1319 to 1320 a carpenter had meals at the manor farm table from 2 July to Michaelmas, and another carpenter had meals from 2 July to 6 August, and were charged with one quarter of wheat for their bread. In the account for 1319 to 1320 a tiler and his boy worked for eight days, and bread and meat for them and other workmen totalled £4 7*s.* 0*d.* The total expenses for the year 1321 to 1322 are high—£29 12*s.* 8½*d.*—including carpenters' wages for making doors and windows for the solar, with hundreds of nails. Evidently the house itself was under construction, and as there is no entry for either bricks or timber, it may be assumed that it was made of timber cut from Hendon Woods. The 1321 survey records a large house with curtelage and a croft newly erected in Parson Street. In 1326 there was a special account for the period of greatest activity—July 2 to Michaelmas—made by two monks and the serviens from Westminster. Rents amounting to £24 8*s.* 0½*d.* were collected, expenses being cut to balance exactly.

The process of roofing was perhaps unusual because the roofs of the three barns (the great barn, the hay barn, and the corn barn) were all thatched and then tiled over the thatch. Wages were paid for cutting reeds by men, and collecting the reeds by women; thousands of tiles were brought by cart from Westminster and there are bills for them and the various kinds of nails needed.

It looked as though the roofs would be on the three barns ready for the harvest, and the Abbot would be able to stay at his new Rectory for the first time when he came to hold his Courts and enjoy his hunting in the autumn of 1326. So the case is proved that Hendon's earliest manor house on the Parson Street site was built between 1319 and 1326, and called the Rectory. The last one, called Tenterden Hall after its last owner, was demolished in 1931.

G. M. Trevelyan in his *English Social History* writes:

The demesne lands of monastic manors, administered by the Abbey's own officials direct, had often been admirable examples of estate management and agricultural improvement, but in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the demesne lands of the Abbeyes were increasingly let out on leases to laymen, who either farmed them or sub-let them to others. In this way the lay control and enjoyment of monastic wealth began long before the final Dissolution.

This happened in Hendon, and the first man to lease the demesne was John atte hegge whose forebear had been a juryman for the 1321 survey. The accounts were made by him for the last forty years of our period, beginning in 1376 until 1416; and his lease was for the demesne with meadows and pastures, including customary works, on payment of £24 a year. All through his career he was arranging for the Abbey new leases of other farms and land to the more enterprising farmers to whom freedom from customary labour and dues paid in kind was an incentive. He also built up his own holding with new rents and leases, subletting as it suited him. It was no surprise, therefore, when the writer was fortunate enough to find his will at the Guildhall,⁽³⁾ to see that John atte hegge was a rich man by the standards of his time. Translated, this will reads:

In the name of God, Amen. Sunday 11 February in the fourth year of the reign of King Henry the fifth after the Conquest, A.D. 1416, I John atte hegge, sane in mind but sick

in body, make my will in this way. First I leave my soul to God omnipotent, blessed Mary and all his saints, and my body to be buried in the church of blessed Mary of Hendon aforesaid.

Item I leave to the High Altar for tithes forgotten 8s. 4d.

Item I leave to each priest being on the month and day of my death 12d., and to each order of friars of London 6s. 8d.

Item I leave to each of my godsons 12d.

Item I leave to be spent on the King's way towards London 100s.⁽⁴⁾

Item I leave to the highway towards the church of Hendon 40s.⁽⁴⁾

Item I leave for a breviary to be bought for the said church 26s. 8d.

Item I leave to Isabelle Moraunt 20s. and two cows.

Item I leave to Thomas Bukberd my kinsman a tenement called Slattons.⁽⁵⁾

Item I leave to Alice and Joan daughters of the said Thomas Bukberd 20s. or two cows.

Item I leave to Peter Goldesburgh and my daughter Joan all my lands and tenements with their appurtenances wherever they may be, or in whose hands, to her and to her heirs.

Item I leave to my executors all the debts which are owed to me to be disposed according to their will for my soul.

The residue of all my goods moveable or immoveable I leave to the said Peter and Joan my daughter that they may order and dispose of them for my soul as seems best. Of this will I make the said Peter Goldesburgh and Joan my daughter my executors.

Signed with my seal. Given at Hendon on the above day and year.

John atte hegge asks to be buried in Hendon Church and leaves enough money to it to give him a place of honour there. Immediately before the High Altar in the old part of St. Mary's Hendon, now the Lady Chapel, is a large floor monument, of which Mr. Francis Eeles (Ecclesiastical Commissioner) wrote in 1931:⁽⁶⁾

the earliest monument is the large slab of blue marble lying in the midst of the old chancel and containing the indent of a splendid fifteenth century brass, long since removed.

It needs only one more piece of evidence, now fortunately found, to prove that this is certainly the tomb of John atte hegge.

In Gough's 'Sepulchral Monuments' (1797)⁽⁷⁾ is this passage:

In Hendon Church, Middlesex, under two men praying to a cross, on which in a rich tabernacle sits a Virgin and Child:

'Hic jacet Johes Atte hegge qui obiit p'imo die Marcii anno d'ni MCCCCXVI. Et Angurie uxor ejus que obiit XI die Octob. anno d'ni MCCCCVIII.'

So the beautiful brass was there in 1797. Now there survive only the shining nails and indents which, though blurred, still tally with the Gough description. Peter Goldesburgh, husband of Joan atte hegge, was a goldsmith, as we learn from his will⁽⁸⁾ and the modest but dignified brass tablet in the church, both recording that he died in 1422. He, too, had an only child, his 'bona et jocalia Agnes', to whom he left the intriguing collection of gold and silver vessels and ornaments in their hiding places with his diamonds, baleys and pearls.

John atte hegge, born about the time of the Black Death of a respectable local family

farming probably at Cowhouse,⁽⁴⁾ in South Hendon, showed initiative and courage when as a young man he leased the demesne farm and at the same time managed the rest of the manor for Westminster Abbey. For forty years he was responsible for the whole of Hendon, with loyalties due both to the Abbot and to his own people. During the Peasants' Revolt, when relations between landowners and workingmen were badly strained, he kept the balance, for there is no record of rioting, burnings and bloodshed such as occurred at St. Albans and elsewhere. His place in history is with the forerunners of the yeomen of England whose independence and enterprise made the nation great in the century after him.

The plague known as the Black Death was brought into England by ship early in 1348 and spread over the country during the summer, reaching London by the winter of the same year. It is first mentioned in the Hendon accounts for Michaelmas 1348 to Michaelmas 1349, which give early evidence of the trouble in an estate near London. Unlike references in Court Rolls, it gives no list of tenants who died, but is based on some unexpected additions of routine entries about cattle, wages and food and such ordinary things. Taken together these details build up a scene of fear, tragedy and emergency which must have been suffered in many other places where no written account now survives.

The Hendon Farm accounts are continuous for the fourteenth century, indeed there are three of them for the crucial year 1348 to 1349.

When the first began at Michaelmas 1348, Henry le Whyte was serviens, as he had been for the previous two years. It was the time of winter ploughing, with harvests gathered and Christmas rents not yet due, when the account closed and Henry le Whyte disappeared. He may have died, an early victim, or simply gone away. Robert de Tarpesfeld, monk bailiff of Westminster Abbey, came down and appointed a local tenant, William de Houchon, to collect rents and act as prepositus for the time being. By 12 May 1349, when the granger, Richard Martyn, was superintending Houchon's account for the Easter quarter, Martyn fell victim to the plague and William Houchon either fled or himself died—the latter alternative seems more likely, as his animals were sold and there is no further mention of his name.

This second week in May seems to have been the worst week of the plague in the district north and west of London. On 15 May the Abbot of Westminster, Simon de Bircheston, died at the Rectory of Hampstead with twenty-six of his monks⁽⁹⁾ and almost certainly many of the villagers. Hampstead farm accounts cease altogether for six years from 1347 to 1353. The other great Benedictine Abbey at St. Albans, north of Hendon, lost Abbot Michael de Mentmore and forty-six monks about the same time, and Court Rolls of six manors of St. Albans in the British Museum give a total of over four hundred tenants who died (without mention of their families).⁽¹⁰⁾

We have no Court Rolls of this date to give definite figures for Hendon, and there are only seven people who may reasonably, because of definite statements like 'defunctus' or 'mortuus', or payment of heriot in the Perquisites of Court accounts, be assumed to have died of plague. Only one, Richard Martyn (mentioned above) was a monk, and as eight monks, mentioned by name, are stated to have been in the manor during the fateful time, it seems they had taken refuge there, and been more fortunate than the others at Hampstead, whose fate some of the Abbey authorities, including the Abbot's brother, Richard de Bircheston, inquired into from Hendon.

John Bond, who became prepositus on 12 May 1349, survived to hold the office for three more tranquil years. His task at the height of infection must have been terrible.

His account, normal at first sight, is remarkable for the large number of animals grazing in Hendon pastures that summer. When Houchon finished, Bond says he took over twenty-six cows (a fair average for the herd), but in his own account for 12 May to Michaelmas 1349 he counted seventy-five cows and a great increase in heads of cattle and horses. He records that they came in small groups accompanied by a *serviens* or *prepositus* from places in Middlesex, Hertfordshire and Essex, nearly all in May. A new granger, John le Henri, came from the Abbey to cope with the emergency, for on the back of John Bond's roll we find his more detailed account of which animals belonged to each manor, who was in charge of them, and what charges could be claimed, for board of the men and keep and care of the cows, oxen and horses. Were they ever paid? With the help from monks staying at the Rectory, who took tallies and held Courts, he organized the reception of these evacuees. It is from his bills for meals at the manor farm table that we get names, dates of arrival and departure, which, taken with Bond's wages bills, are particularly useful in helping to identify manors, by the wages of the local carters who drove their animals home when infection was less virulent.

In May 1349, for example, Abraham dele Clerk (*sic*), *serviens* of Mulsham, arrived with eight cows and calves. His board was charged till July, and on 22 September he took eight cows with six bull calves back to Mulsham. A Hendon drover named Rolf went to help on the journey and was paid one shilling for the return there at 2*d.* a day. This confirms that Mulsham is Moulsham near Chelmsford in Essex, 40 miles from Hendon, a journey not impossible to do with cattle, returning alone, in six days. Now Mulsham was a Manor of Westminster in the fourteenth century, and this leads to the discovery that all the other places from which men and cattle took refuge in Hendon likewise belonged to the Abbey—Aldenham (Hertfordshire), Ashford (Middlesex), Bermestre, Datchet, Greenford, Halleford in Shepperton, Hampstead, Kensington, Knightsbridge, Neasden, Rochford, Teddington, West Hampstead, Whitchurch. The invasion of Hendon by such numbers of strangers driving their cattle in May 1349 was therefore no panic-stricken flight, but an orderly evacuation from affected Westminster manors to the home farm of Hendon. Not only was the reception organized, but Hendon was under helpful supervision, at least till the end of the year, for the accounts mention by name eight monks who stayed at the Rectory during the year, and there may have been more. Thomas de Combrakt, first called 'brother', is soon 'monk bailiff', as was Richard de Bircheston, while Nicholas de Lytlington, who came as granger to take a tally in 1348, was promoted in 1349 'to inspect the state of the manor and ride on the same errand to Aldenham'. He became the great building Abbot in 1360, his special work the south west block of the Abbey with the Jerusalem Chamber and College Hall. Obviously promotions came quickly when so few were left.

Although casualties were lighter on the farm, labour shortage was still a problem during and after the Black Death, and we find these arrangements made:

- (a) No cattle were accepted without their own *prepositus* in charge.
- (b) Some, like William Borde of Rochford, who brought a plough team of oxen and horses (*affri*), has a carter, John Sanders, with him to look after them; otherwise the *prepositus* had to do it himself. William Herring, *prepositus* of Teddington with only two horses of his own, was deputed to 'look after the cattle in the field'.

- (c) The wages list is longer this year. Extra men were paid the usual 2*d.* a day to work in the dairy (milking?) and to act as carters and butchers. Later they drove the animals home, and it is interesting to read how many had with them calves, foals and bullocks born in Hendon. Some few sold a beast before going home, but most of the sales were for heriots from which we get the small authentic lists of dead tenants.

As the granger makes his detailed accounts of quarters of wheat eaten by men from Hertfordshire, Essex or Middlesex manors, and oats for the horses of visiting monks, it becomes clear that Hendon was a place for refuge from the plague in that critical summer of 1349. With Westminster Abbey itself badly infected, and all its evacuated monks dead at Hampstead, the Rectory in Parson Street, providentially built about twenty years before, provided a safer headquarters for the small body of monks who survived, on whom fell the reorganization of the abbotless monastery. So history was made in quiet Hendon.

NOTES

The Westminster Abbey rolls kept in the Muniment Room are well indexed and described. They are in Latin, and have to be transcribed before they can be translated. In this article the year is always mentioned to make easier reading, and from it the reference number may be obtained in the card index. The year runs from Michaelmas of each year to Michaelmas of the next, the date changing at the end of March.

- 1 1295 Charter of Edward I: W. A. doc. 17012 and 17013.
- 2 Brett James, *Transactions of London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, Vol. VI, Part IV, p. 559.
- 3 Will of John atte hegge of Hendon, 11 February 1416/7: London Guildhall, C.C.L., 359 Brown.
- 4 The different directions of the King's Way to London and the highway to the Church suggest that he lived in south Hendon. The name 'atte hegge' may derive from the only boundary of the manor which was a hedge—that to the south bordering Hampstead. Cowhouse is in that position and from it London would be south and Hendon Church north. No documents remain prior to 1316 owing to the alienation, so proof is circumstantial only.
- 5 Thomas Bukberd was prepositus of Cowhouse from 1420 onwards. His legacy, the field Slattens, lies on the present field path to Hendon from Page Street, Mill Hill. This is unfortunately the only piece of land named in the will. If John atte hegge had had more children surviving to divide his estate we might know more.
- 6 *The Parish Church of St. Mary Hendon—a short history and description*, by Francis Eeles (1931).
- 7 Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments of Middlesex*, Vol. 2, p. 27.
- 8 Will of Peter Goldborough: London Guildhall, 1422 More 97.
- 9 He was reburied later beneath the East Cloister by the Library door. The twenty-six monks have a communal grave nearby in the South Cloister.
- 10 Dr. A. E. Levett in *Studies in Manorial History*, Vol. 2, pp. 248–87.