

SIGNS OF CHANGE IN A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE COMMUNITY

by

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In medieval society one essential difference between the freeholder and the villein was the right of the free man to alienate his land at will, something supposedly denied to the serf. A free tenant 'enjoyed a large power of disposing of his tenement by act *inter vivos*, though this was subject to some restraint in favour of his lord'.¹ Alienation by a villein 'certainly could not be effected without the lord's leave'.²

Yet in practice, by the fourteenth century, a flourishing market in land occupied by unfree tenants seems to have come into being. The licence of the lord had, indeed, first to be obtained but, from the frequency with which this took place, it would appear to have been little more than a formality. By the device of surrendering the land in question to the lord, to be followed by the admittance of the new tenant, who in reality was the purchaser, the transfer was accomplished.

We felt that an examination of land transfers in a particular village could well be of value to students of medieval agrarian history. For this purpose a study has been made of the court rolls of the three manors in the Middlesex vill of Tottenham.³ Land transfers have been tabulated and those which would appear to have been genuine sales, made to purchasers not of the family of the original occupier, have been recorded separately. The changing level of activity of the land market, if such it may be called, has thus been made clear, and this over a period of thirty years during which a fairly complete run of court records has been preserved.

I

This Middlesex township appears to have had an economy based on arable cultivation combined with animal husbandry, in particular the rearing of sheep. In an earlier paper⁴ we have sought to establish that there were twenty-four arable fields and that the economy was similar to the one Dr. D. Roden found existing in the Chiltern Hills region, and in some adjacent areas, such as north-west Essex.⁵

During the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries Tottenham was divided into three manors, Bruce, Daubeny and Pembroke, Bruce being sometimes referred to as Fawkoner and Daubeny as Balliol.⁶ The courts of the Bruce and Daubeny manors generally met twice yearly, those of the Pembroke manor met more frequently, three or even four times, and, too, were recorded in greater detail. Occasional court proceedings have been preserved from the year 1318, most of the early ones in a rather rudimentary manner. It is not till after 1375 that we have a fairly continuous run and a full and complete series only exists for the years between 1392 and 1409.

Table 1. Court records in existence from 1375.
Bruce manor. All courts between 1375 and 1413.
Daubeny manor. 1375, 1377-1381, 1383, 1390-1409.
Pembroke manor. 1377, 1381, 1384, 1392-1413.

Between the years 1375 and 1413 mention is made of 269 transfers of land, a figure which includes those taking place on the death of the tenant and those occurring during the tenant's lifetime. In some recordings the details are incomplete; the area, and/or the fine, is not stated. There is a generous proportion, 231 instances, where all particulars have been preserved and these have been arranged in the accompanying series of tables. These have been sub-divided into four periods. The first covers the years 1375 to 1391, in which a full record only exists for the Bruce manor. The three sub-divisions which follow, 1391-1399, 1399-1405 and 1406-1413, would appear to demonstrate that certain significant changes were taking place in the manorial economy, a particular example, in fact, of changes in agrarian society which were occurring in many parts of England at the time. In each division, as already stated, a separation has been effected between the sum total of 231 transfers and the 147 which appear to be genuine sales.

It will be seen from the tables that more transfers per year were made during the last ten years of the reign of Richard II, but that where sales were concerned there was a gradual increase in activity which was at its peak in the years 1406-1413.

Table 2A. 1375-1391.

| <i>Area</i> | <i>All transfers</i> | | <i>Actual sales</i> | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0- 1 acres | 20 | } 83% | 14 | } 88% |
| 1- 2 acres | 10 | | 5 | |
| 2- 4 acres | 14 | | 10 | |
| 4- 6 acres | 3 | } 11.5% | 2 | } 9% |
| 6-10 acres | 3 | | 1 | |
| 10-15 acres | 1 | } 5.5% | 1 | } 3% |
| Over 15 acres | 2 | | 0 | |
| No area given | 8 | | 6 | |
| Messuages | 9 | (4 separately) | 6 | (3 separately) |
| Total transfers | 65 | (53 areas stated) | 42 | (33 areas stated) |

Table 2B. 1391-1399.

| <i>Area</i> | <i>All transfers</i> | | <i>Actual sales</i> | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0- 1 acres | 22 | } 59% | 16 | } 73% |
| 1- 2 acres | 11 | | 4 | |
| 2- 4 acres | 9 | | 4 | |
| 4- 6 acres | 7 | } 25% | 2 | } 18% |
| 6-10 acres | 11 | | 4 | |
| 10-15 acres | 5 | } 16% | 2 | } 9% |
| Over 15 acres | 6 | | 1 | |
| No area given | 12 | | 6 | |
| Messuages | 21 | (3 separately) | 6 | (1 separately) |
| Total transfers | 86 | (71 areas stated) | 40 | (33 areas stated) |
| Yearly average | 10.75 | | 5 | |

Table 2C. 1399-1405.

| <i>Area</i> | <i>All transfers</i> | | <i>Actual sales</i> | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0- 1 acres | 11 | 69% | 9 | 80% |
| 1- 2 acres | 11 | | 8 | |
| 2- 4 acres | 5 | | 4 | |
| 4- 6 acres | 2 | 25.5% | 2 | 20% |
| 6-10 acres | 8 | | 3 | |
| 10-15 acres | 0 | 5.5% | 0 | |
| Over 15 acres | 2 | | 0 | |
| No area given | 6 | | 5 | |
| Messuages | 4 | (1 separately) | 3 | (1 separately) |
| Total transfers | 46 | (39 areas stated) | 32 | (26 areas stated) |
| Yearly average | 7.75 | | 5.3 | |

Table 2D. 1406-1413.

| <i>Area</i> | <i>All transfers</i> | | <i>Actual sales</i> | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 0- 1 acres | 15 | 63% | 13 | 63.6% |
| 1- 2 acres | 11 | | 10 | |
| 2- 4 acres | 17 | | 12 | |
| 4- 6 acres | 4 | 12% | 3 | 12.7% |
| 6-10 acres | 4 | | 4 | |
| 10-15 acres | 12 | 25% | 8 | 23.7% |
| Over 15 acres | 5 | | 5 | |
| No area given | 3 | | 2 | |
| Messuages | 10 | (1 separately) | 4 | |
| Total transfers | 72 | (68 areas stated) | 57 | (55 areas stated) |
| Yearly average | 9 | | 7 | |

In almost all cases where no area was given, this appears to have been small.

The amounts of land transferred were, generally, small, though, as the period advanced, increasing in size, especially in the last years of Henry IV. The reasons for this increase, and the greater activity of these last years, will be adequately explained. Before this is attempted it can be said that, in relation to the size of the holdings of the Tottenham peasants, perhaps the areas involved were not so small. A Pembroke rental of 1368 showed that, while one tenant, Thomas Harding, held $54\frac{3}{4}$ acres, the average holding was only of seven acres.⁷ So far as can be ascertained from the area of land held by villagers at time of death, there would not appear to have been any great change since 1368. A John Greneford rented over 50 acres but he, again, was an exception. Hence if, in the latter part of the rule of Richard there were seven sales of over six acres, in the early part of Henry's reign only three, yet in the latter years of Henry IV these increased to seventeen, by then, at least, quite considerable areas were involved for a peasantry of the type living in the village. Of course, even then 63.6% of sales were of four acres or less, yet four acres could represent half the size of the typical holding.

II

Some interesting facts emerge from the Tottenham rolls which will be commented upon before entering on the task of seeking an explanation for the increased number of larger sales towards the end of the period being examined. In seven instances the actual prices paid for the land were given and are set out below.

Table 3.

- i. 15 Richard II, BRUCE MANOR, Messuage, 11½ acres land, 2 acres meadow⁸
Price £5.16.8. Entry fine 13/4.
- ii. 16 Richard II, PEMBROKE ½ acre meadow, Price £1, Entry fine 1/-
- iii. 19 Richard II, BRUCE MANOR⁹ Messuage, 8 acres land, 1 acre meadow
Price £3.13.4. Entry fine 10/-
- iv. 4 Henry IV, BRUCE-PEMBROKE combined court¹⁰ Messuage, 4 acres land, ½ rod meadow
Price £6.6.8. Entry fine 5/-
v. 3 acres land¹⁰ Price £1.1.8. Entry fine 2/-
- vi. 5 Henry IV, BRUCE MANOR¹¹ 2 acres land, Price £1. Entry fine 1/6.
- vii. 6 Henry IV, PEMBROKE MANOR¹² 1½ acres land, Price 12/- Entry fine 1/6.

No consistent pattern as to the price of the land emerges, nor as to the ratio between price and the entry fine paid. As the value of land in different parts of the township must have varied it could not be expected that there would be a uniform value. There is an approach to uniformity in the last three sales quoted, where a price of from 7/- to 10/- an acre is found. Even here there is a considerable divergence. Most surprising at first glance is the payment of a pound for half an acre of meadow, yet this is not so surprising when one remembers the comparative scarcity of meadow in Tottenham. In early fourteenth century extents meadow was valued at 2/- or 2/6 an acre,¹³ when the total value of rent and services per acre of arable was about 4½d. In the year 1407, in Bruce Manor, an agreement was made between the lord and the customary tenants whereby most services were commuted and a new overall rent of sevenpence an acre fixed for the future. If, as has been asserted, the normal value of land at the time was twelve to fifteen times the annual rent, Tottenham values do seem to bear some relation to this ratio.

Another interesting feature is the number of tenants who on their death left their land 'to be sold at the best price obtainable so that the money could be distributed for the benefit of the soul of the deceased'. Two tenants left such instructions in Richard II's time, but in the last few years of Henry IV five individuals were sufficiently concerned for the welfare of their souls to desire such action to be taken.¹⁴ Maybe this was a manifestation of that greater concern with man's mortality so prevalent in the late Middle Ages. In a time of war, pestilence and famine, when the four horses of the Apocalypse seemed to have been let loose, all ranks of society were very conscious of the transience of human life. This has been so vividly depicted by J. Huizinga in his masterly book *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.

III

The court rolls of the three manors show that over the years 1375 to 1413 92 individuals sold, 94 bought, land. Of the sellers 62 appear once only, of the buyers 64. Until 1405 there are no signs of particular accumulation in the hands of any single person and the areas involved were not large, generally of four acres or less. A few of the more substantial peasants, those who appeared regularly serving on juries or as tithing men, as reeves, woodwards and so on, were found more than most as purchasers in these transactions. Of them Thomas Fynch was most prominent, acquiring in all $17\frac{3}{4}$ acres of arable and 2 acres of pasture in seven purchases during the period. At his death Fynch held 29 acres of land. Of the sellers the most regular was Cristina Edes who, after the death of her husband in 1394, would appear to have obtained the wherewithal to live by selling small portions of her inheritance at brief intervals. She figures on ten occasions between 1394 and 1409, selling half an acre here, three quarters of an acre there, and finally a messuage, two acres of arable and one of meadow. The largest single purchase was of a messuage, $23\frac{1}{2}$ acres of land and 3 acres of meadow in 1394 by Thomas Pernell, 'gundeler' of London, this a hint of things to come.¹⁵

In 1409, when Thomas Fynch died, his land passed into the hands of one John Drayton, clerk to Roger Walden, the lord of the Pembroke manor. Walden had been in the entourage of the late king and had been imprisoned after the triumph of Henry Bolingbroke, but released a few years later. Drayton was the most active of a number of men specified as 'servants of the lord' who, in the latter years of Henry's reign, bought on a larger scale. This, together with the intrusion in the same period of many more London citizens, must be assumed to have formed a disturbing outside influence.

Buying of Tottenham land, free and customary, by Londoners had occurred from time to time in the fourteenth century. The ease with which villein land could be bought and sold no doubt facilitated the process. In 1392 the lordship of the Daubeny manor passed to John of Northampton, a prominent figure in the internecine disputes which troubled London during the last quarter of the century. Sir Nicholas Twyford, a goldsmith and alderman, became lord of a Bruce sub-manor, named Twyford, after him. Adam Bamme, another alderman and goldsmith and a number of lesser men appeared in the records during Richard's reign. They included Thomas, Duk, John Kynge, John Arnold 'coriour', Walter Savage 'scriptor', Alan Frampton 'cordwainer' and the aforementioned Thomas Pernell. During the rule of Henry IV they were joined by many more; Henry Cook 'bocher', William Lambard 'pouchmaker', Thomas Brydlington 'draper', Alan Everard 'mercier', John Shalyngsford, John Balshin, John Walpole, Fremyngham, all described as 'of London'. Cook acquired in all two messuages and twelve acres and, from the frequency with which he was charged with trespassing in the lord's meadow and wood with numerous bullocks, would appear to have been already engaged in the trade of supplying London with its beef. In the Tudor period this became a principal Tottenham occupation and Cook seems to have been a pioneer therein.

But it was the activities of Drayton and, to a smaller extent, William Misterton and William Lovelane, fellow 'servants' of Roger Walden, which chiefly accounted for the upsurge of larger sales in the years after 1405. In that brief span of years Misterton purchased 19 acres of arable and one acre of meadow, Lovelane $12\frac{3}{4}$ acres of arable and a quarter acre of meadow, Drayton, in eight transactions, $73\frac{1}{4}$ acres of arable and $3\frac{3}{4}$ acres of meadow.¹⁶ Some of Drayton's purchases would appear to have been complete

holdings, 12 acres in 1406, 19 acres and 14 acres in 1408, 17¼ acres in 1409. Such a rapid accumulation in the hands of one person was quite unprecedented.*

Perhaps too much should not be made of all this. After all, the total area of villein arable was some 1,100 acres, so that even Drayton had bought only a small proportion of the whole. Yet the sudden increase in the number of London citizens entering the area, this coinciding with the appearance of Drayton and his two fellow officials, does indicate a striking change in the old pattern of land transfers. In an earlier paper dealing with the 1459 Tottenham terrier¹⁷ it has been noted that most of the old families whose names recur again and again in the fourteenth century records had by then disappeared. John Drayton himself figured as tenant of 181¾ acres of customary and 4 acres of free land. That the upheaval which resulted in the departure of the old families had its beginnings in the events of the reign of Henry IV seems very probable and, if so, these events would well merit the application of that over-used word significant.

IV

In many respects the economic development of Tottenham in the fifteenth century did not follow the normal pattern. At a time when most manors had entered on a period of economic decline the position in our manor was very much the reverse of this. The decisive change took place somewhat later than the court rolls which we have been investigating yet it would appear to have been part of the same process, one by which a more economically advanced society was eroding the traditional nature of the village. This fundamental event was the re-union of the three manors, in 1427, by one John Gedeney, yet another London alderman, this time a member of the Drapers' Company. Important changes quickly followed.

Few accounts for the manors have survived for the early years of the century. Two Fawkoner accounts for 7/8 Henry IV and 12/13 Henry IV show surpluses of £20.12.4 and £15.2.6 respectively. A Daubeny account for 4/5 Henry V gives £13.6.5½ as the surplus.¹⁸ The manorial surpluses given in a succession of account rolls following on Gedeney's entrance on the scene are set out below.

Table 4.¹⁹

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Surplus of united manors</i> |
|---------------|---------------------------------|
| 5/ 6 Henry VI | £94. 17. 8 |
| 7/ 8 ,, | £88. 16. 1½ |
| 8/ 9 ,, | £83. 9. 4 |
| 9/10 ,, | £126. 12. 8 |
| 10/11 ,, | £116. 12. 11 |
| 11/12 ,, | £118. 7. 10 |
| 12/13 ,, | £123. 6. 11½ |
| 15/16 ,, | £118. 11. 5 |
| 16/17 ,, | £103. 1. 2½ |
| 17/18 ,, | £125. 10. 2½ |

* In almost every one of Drayton's purchases either no fine was imposed (this was rare) or pardoned in whole or part, because the purchaser was 'a servant of the lord'.

The substantial rise, after the initial fall, in the income of the manor was achieved in various ways. Rents were raised. The demesne, formerly leased in small parcels, was, in 7/8 Henry VI, farmed out as a whole for £40 per annum, which was a very large increase indeed. The rents of the mill also rose and in 7/8 Henry VI there was the first reference to the farm of a fulling mill. In the year 16/17 Henry VI a sale of 22,000 'breeks' appeared, a figure which rose to 52,000 in the following year. Most illuminating of all, perhaps, was the *elimination of arrears by the baliff from 8/9 Henry VI onwards*. This would appear to be a sure sign that the estate was being managed much more efficiently; with almost everything farmed out, in essence it might be said to have been a business run for profit.

It is suggested that in the first decade of the century changes which moved in this direction were already becoming evident. So many London burgesses, officers of the lord too, were buying land, presumably as an investment, not as a source of food and other necessities for the occupier. This process was occurring in the neighbourhood of most large towns during the late medieval period, particularly so near London, the largest of them all.

The 1459 terrier tells a story²⁰ which implies that subsequent to 1413 further changes working in the same direction had taken place. In 1459 51 out of 120 tenants had less than five acres of land, 24 of these no land in the fields at all, nothing but a cottage plus, perhaps, a garden. No doubt these were employed at fulling, at brick manufacture, or as servants for richer tenants. Ten of these latter held between them 555 acres of customary land, 55% of the total recorded acreage. And of these John Drayton, in his final years, was the largest. (Unfortunately, it is not possible to tell from the terrier whether any of the ten were London burgesses.)

Can it be said that by the mid fifteenth century the manor of Tottenham was being run as a capitalist business enterprise? *Undoubtedly such an assertion would go beyond what is warranted by the facts*. There is no evidence of large scale enclosure. Admittedly, in the previous century the courts occasionally referred to various small pieces of land as being enclosed; and there were a few attempts to enclose common land, but these were thwarted. The terrier shows that, with few exceptions, each of the larger tenants had his holdings mainly concentrated in one area and had his house therein. But even though these groups of holdings almost took the form of a more or less compact farm, there is no suggestion that they were enclosed.

In the fifteenth century tenants' services, apart from haymaking, had been commuted, naturally so, as the demesne lands were leased. Yet a *custumal*²¹ which is of about the same date as the terrier makes it clear that they were still regarded as customary tenants. The feudal framework was still in being.

Nevertheless, great changes had taken place, having their beginnings in the incursion of so many citizens of London in the opening years of the century, simultaneously with the purchase of land on quite a large scale by officers of a manorial lord. In this essay it is suggested that the Tottenham documents reveal in some detail the process by which a traditional village community could be undermined through contact with a more developed commercial society. Eventually this process was to accelerate so much that by 1619, the year of the making of the Dorset survey,²² Tottenham fields were almost completely enclosed, while in the nearby villis of Edmonton, Enfield and Walthamstow much common cultivation still went on.²³ No doubt many other areas were having similar experiences to those of Tottenham. This study may perhaps have shed light on the

actual mechanism by which rural communities were being transformed in the fifteenth century. The more records from manors in other parts of the country can be examined in minute detail, as has been done by Andrew Jones in his essay on Leighton Buzzard,²⁴ the greater will be the clarification of the factors which led to the disintegration of feudal society.

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NOTES

- ¹ Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, Cambridge 1895, I, p. 310.
- ² *Ibid.* I, p. 365.
- ³ The court rolls for the fourteenth century have been published in *Tottenham Manorial Rolls I, 1318-1377* (Borough of Tottenham, Libraries and Museum, 1956) and *Tottenham Manorial Rolls II, 1377-1399* (Borough of Tottenham, Libraries and Museum, 1961). Those for the years 1399-1413 are contained in *Bruce Castle Museum Archives M.R.26, 1-14* and *M.R.27, 1-47*.
- ⁴ D. Moss and I. Murray, 'A Fifteenth Century Middlesex Terrier', in *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, 1974, XXV, pp. 287-8.
- ⁵ D. Roden, 'Field Systems of the Chiltern Hills and Their Environs', in *Studies of Field Systems of the British Isles*, (Cambridge, 1973).
- ⁶ D. Moss and I. Murray, 'Land and Labour in Fourteenth Century Tottenham' in *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.*, 1973, XXIV, p. 199.
- ⁷ *Ibid.* p. 201.
- ⁸ T. M. R. II, op. cit., pp. 60-61.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* p. 79.
- ¹⁰ *Bruce Castle* op. cit. M.R.27, mem 38.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* M.R.27, mem. 33.
- ¹² *Ibid.* M.R.27, mem. 28a.
- ¹³ D. Moss and I. Murray, op. cit., p. 200.
- ¹⁴ T. M. R. II, op. cit., p. 261. *Ibid.* p. 313. *Bruce Castle*, op. cit. M.R.26, mem. 3. *Ibid.* M.R.27, mem. 18. *Ibid.* M.R.27, mem. 11. *Ibid.* M.R.27, mem. 8.
- ¹⁵ The earliest instance known of a London burgess acquiring land in Tottenham is found in a mid twelfth century charter (Middlesex County Record Office Archives XVIII, 46) where we read that Henry the Earl, son of the King of Scots, grants seven score acres in the Hanger to Uchred of London, with sac and soc, toll and team and all liberties.
- ¹⁶ *Bruce Castle*, op. cit. M.R.27, mem. 25, 18, 14, 12, 9.
- ¹⁷ D. Moss and I. Murray, 'A Fifteenth Century Middlesex Terrier', op. cit. p. 293.
- ¹⁸ *Bruce Castle*, op. cit. M.R.10, mems. 15-13.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.* M.R.10, mems. 12-2.
- ²⁰ D. Moss and I. Murray, 'A Fifteenth Century Middlesex Terrier', op. cit. *passim*.
- ²¹ *Bruce Castle*, op. cit. M.R.36.
- ²² *The Dorset Survey Field Book*, Greater London Record Office (Middlesex Records), Accession 695/9.
- ²³ Mr. D. O. Pam has drawn our attention to the many attempts made, from the late fifteenth century onwards, to enclose the village fields in the other two townships of the Edmonton Hundred, Edmonton and Enfield. In those villages the enclosure on the whole was prevented. In Tottenham the attempts began earlier and, unsuccessful at first, triumphed completely in the course of the Tudor period. Was this due to the closer proximity of London? The events in Edmonton and Enfield have been ably described by Mr. Pam in *The Fight for Common Rights in Enfield and Edmonton* (Edmonton Hundred Historical Society Occasional Paper, New Series No. 27).
- ²⁴ Andrew Jones, *Land and People at Leighton Buzzard in the Later Fifteenth Century*, in *Economic History Review* Second Series, XXV, 1972, pp. 18-27.