MEDIEVAL QUARRENDON: THE PEOPLE, THE PLACE AND POPULATION CHANGE

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The site now known as Quarrendon Leas is a large green area on the edge of Aylesbury menaced by housing developments. Its natural beauty is complemented by its historical importance, for it contains the remains of, among other things, a medieval village, a thirteenth century church and a Tudor garden. Extensive archaeological investigations carried out at the site have added to our knowledge and understanding but, to date, no corresponding historical work has been done to complement it. Recently, a collection of documents relating to Quarrendon's past was located in the Oxfordshire History Centre. It included a near-complete run of records for the manor of Quarrendon from the first half of the 15th century. The work reported here presents the initial results of an examination of these records that has attempted to sketch something of medieval Quarrendon's built environment, the way of life of the people and the processes driving the ongoing depopulation of the time.

INTRODUCTION

Quarrendon is described in the Victoria County History as 'a small and secluded parish with an area of 1948 acres, […] the grazing lands ranking as the finest in the country.' It adds that 'Quarrendon is situated in the Vale of Aylesbury and the land varies in height only from 238 feet above the ordnance datum on Akeman Street […] to 290 feet in the east. The subsoil is Kimmeridge clay.' (Page 1927, 100–102) Small streams flow across the gently sloping grazing land to drain into the river Thame at the southern end of the site. In the Middle Ages, a network of ditches was constructed to manage the flow of water across the site.

In the past, its archetypal deserted medieval village has been the main reason for studying Quarrendon. Beresford (1987) provides a detailed study of deserted medieval villages, treating them county by county and also placing them in a national context. His figure 12, which shows the geographical distribution of depopulated villages in Buckinghamshire, is striking in that it contrasts the plentiful scattering of sites across the north of the county with their total absence in the Chilterns and the south. Although the causes of depopulation are many and varied, Beresford shows that the change in land usage from growing corn to grazing first sheep and then cattle played a significant part in it, and also helps explain the apparent oddness in Buckinghamshire. More recent work on this topic

is presented by Dyer (2002) and Dyer & Jones (2010).

Much archaeological work has been carried out at Quarrendon. The most extensive investigations have been described by Everson (2001), and the most recent by Farley & Hurman (2018). Farley has also produced an overview of what is known (Farley 2017). But, as Sarah Charlton has pointed out (Charlton 2009), little work has been done on Quarrendon's surviving historical records, in particular, those in the Oxfordshire History Centre, which consist in the main of court rolls (reference E36/10/1/CR) and account rolls (reference E36/10/1/F1). The set of annual account rolls is particularly valuable as it contains a near-complete run from 1389 to 1443. The run of records is valuable because it may contain evidence of trends that emerged gradually over the period. Charlton's piece contains suggestions as to what might emerge from a study of these records: they range from details of the farming practices of the time, to changes in land ownership over the period and the influence of the activities of the lord of the manor.

The Quarrendon records for the period from 1389 to 1443 consist not only of the run of account records but also of the records of courts held at times scattered fairly uniformly across the period. The purpose of the work described here is to examine these records to see what they tell us of late medieval Quarrendon. In this endeavour,

Charlton's suggestions as to what might emerge proved both prescient and very helpful.

SOME BACKGROUND

The Documents

The documents held in the Oxfordshire History Centre are all are written in Latin. The court records, of which there are 22, provide details of the proceedings of two different kinds of court, the manor court and the view of frankpledge. The former covered the manor of Quarrendon, and its main concerns were to levy taxes and to authorise changes in land tenancy within the manor. The latter dealt with Quarrendon and a group of outlying places associated with it: its main concern was to ensure that the customary social arrangements were maintained in all of them. The account records, of which there are 45, provided a detailed account of the financial transactions affecting the manor of Quarrendon during one financial year, which lasted from one Michaelmas (September 29) to the next. The set of documents, by recording the social and financial activities taking place on a manor or a group of manors, allowed both to be controlled for the benefit of the lord of the manor. They reveal much about the workings of the manor and its outliers, but in doing so they often reveal incidentally and unintentionally something about the people of the manor and their activities, much of which was determined by their feudal responsibilities and obligations, although unauthorised activity occasionally crept in.

Regarding the institution that produced the court records, the lord of the manor of Quarrendon had the right to hold a manor court for his tenants, both free and unfree. Besides dealing with land and property transactions and all the matters that arose from them, the court ensured that the customs of the manor were observed (Harvey 1999, 44–45; Stuart 2004, 1–2). The Crown had also granted him the right to deal with a wider range of concerns, which allowed him to exert considerable social control over his tenants; this he did by holding another court known as the View of Frankpledge (Harvey 1999, 45; Muller 2005). At the views, both the local representatives and those of the outliers reported on the state of their social affairs and, among other things, the manorial officials were chosen. The annual accounts were compiled by one of the officials,

usually the reeve, who recorded in considerable detail the year's income and outgoings. While the accounts dealt with the same information as a modern balance sheet, they recorded it in a quite different way (Harvey 1999, 25–38). Although they showed the annual profit or loss, their primary purpose was to ensure that the target for the amount of money to be delivered by the manor to its lord was met.

By 1400, these three types of record had been harnessed to an administrative system known as the Receivership System, which is explained in the next section, and within which they recorded its workings, indicated whether any failings or disputes had been dealt with and showed the amount that the lord of the manor expected to receive. At Quarrendon, the manor court raised money from the land transactions of its tenants and from the fees and fines due from, respectively, their obligations and misdemeanours. The View of Frankpledge ensured that the social arrangements of Quarrendon and its associated group of outliers were in order and that the manorial officials necessary to maintain social order and conformity were in place. As a specific concern at Quarrendon, a watery place, the View took great pains to ensure that the waterways were in good order. And although the reeve compiled the annual record of the manor's overall finances, it was adjusted as necessary to ensure that the lord of the manor received his expected income each year. If the manor had not generated the expected amount, the reeve had to make up the shortfall.

The Administration

By 1400, the vast majority of landlords holding many manors, whose number included the lord of Quarrendon, had adopted the receivership system (Bolton 1980, 207–245). Under this system, manors were arranged in groups, each of which had an administrative centre where its court and the view of frankpledge for the group were held. Quarrendon was the centre for its group, which consisted of Addington, Ballinger, Bierton, East Claydon, East Aston, and Seabrook (Figure 1). Most groups of this kind consisted, more or less, of the manors belonging to their lord in a particular county, and Quarrendon can be seen as the centre for Buckinghamshire. The two that did not belong are also shown but, even so, Quarrendon had frequent dealings with them.
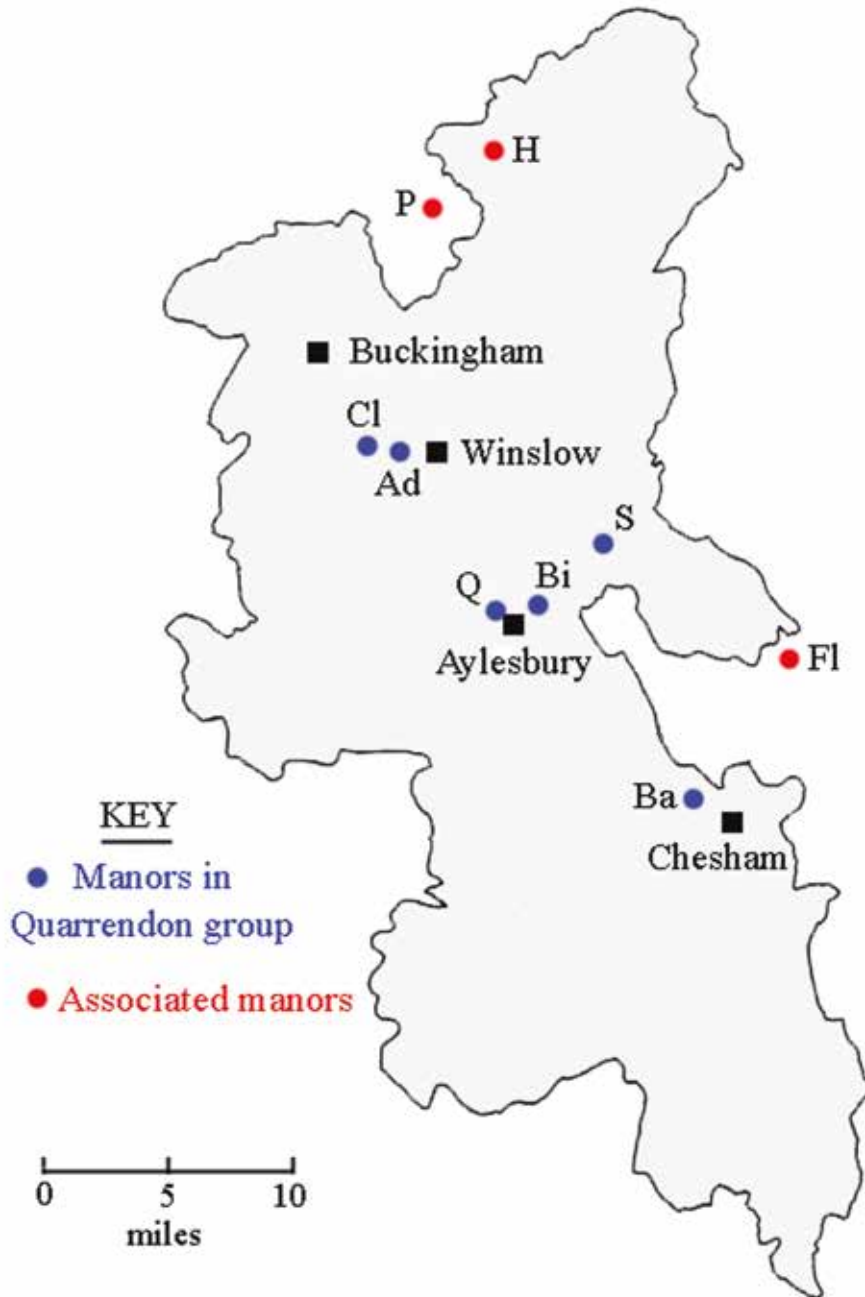
FIGURE 1 The manors of Earl of Warwick, and others, in Buckinghamshire. The manors in the Quarrendon group are: Ad – Addington, Ba – Ballinger, Bi – Bierton – Cl – Claydon, S – Seabrook, Q – Quarrendon. The others are: Fl – Flaunden, H – Hanslope, P – Potterspury
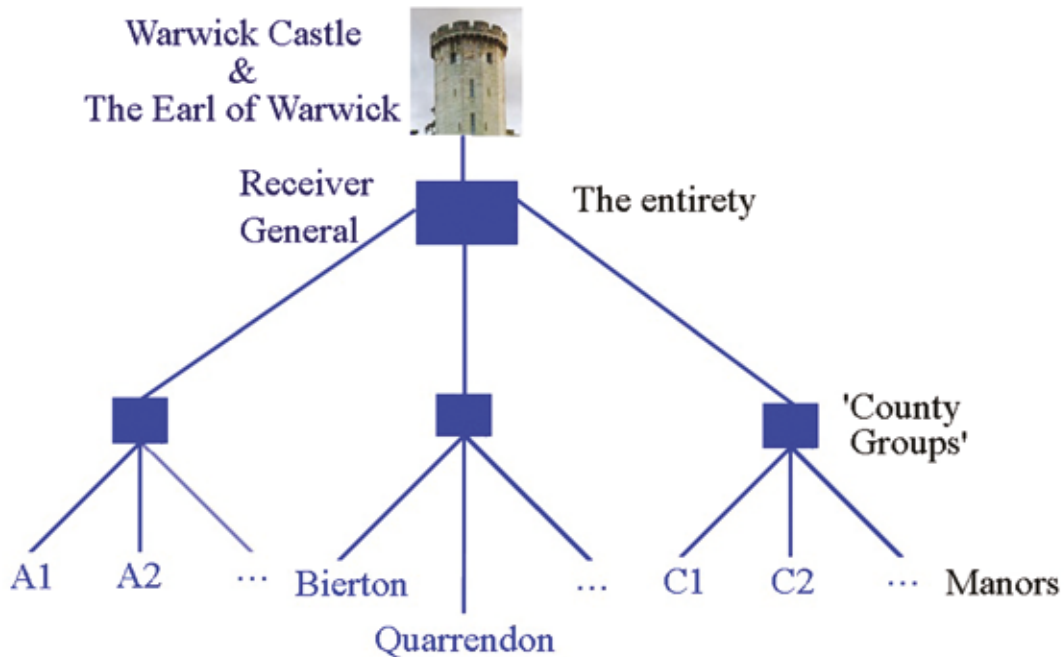
FIGURE 2 The Receivership System hierarch

Under the receivership system the manors and the groupings were organised hierarchically, as shown in simplified and schematic form in Figure 2. At the bottom level, each manor was assigned a receiver to oversee its finances: he checked the accounts, collected the money that was due and passed it up the hierarchy. Similarly, a receiver was assigned to each county group. He checked the manorial accounts combined them to produce a single consolidated account, and gathered all the moneys due before passing both to the top level. There, the Receiver General checked and consolidated the accounts, and gathered all the money before presenting both to the lord of the manor. The receivers at any level could make any adjustments that might be needed. Some of the accounts of Quarrendon's Receiver General have survived and are in the British Library's Egerton Collection. No accounts for the intermediate level seem to have survived.

The Lord of the Manor
The lords of the manor were the earls of Warwick and, to be precise, the lord for most of our period, from 1401 to 1439 in fact, was Richard de Beauchamp, the 5th Earl of Warwick. His grand tomb

in St Mary's Church, Warwick (Saul 2010, 280 & 297–8) is shown in Figure 3, while a portrait sketch copied from a drawing made during his lifetime is shown in Figure 4 (The Countess of Warwick, 1903). Figures 5 and 6, which are slightly adapted versions of diagrams from Barfield (1997), show the manors acquired by the Earls of Warwick between 1268 and 1369. They are more or less the manors that the fifth Earl inherited in 1401. The concentration of manors in Warwickshire and Worcestershire shown in Figure 5 represented the core of the holdings, and demonstrates the benefit of the county-based organisation, while the scatter of the remaining manors shown in Figure 6 illustrates its disadvantage. The unsuitability of grouping by county in the latter case was overcome by grouping the manors in convenient clusters and choosing a suitable one to hold the view. The presence of Quarrendon among the inherited manors and the absence of the other manors in its group probably provides the reason for Quarrendon having been chosen as the meeting place for that group. It alone would have had the administrative expertise and experience necessary to stage the view.

After succeeding his father, Richard de Beau-

Figure 3 Tomb of Earl Richard in St Mary's Church, Warwick

Figure 4 Portrait sketch of Earl Richard

champ acquired a great many more manors primarily as a result of his marriages (McFarlane 1973, 138–9; Ross 1956). His first wife Elizabeth de Berkeley, daughter of Baron Berkeley, brought as her dowry a large group of well-run manors. It was never merged with the existing holding, but remained a separate entity run as it had been before and, rather surprisingly, with the income paid to Elizabeth. After her death, Richard married Isabel le Despenser, daughter of the Earl of Gloucester, who was known to be the richest heiress in England. Her dowry brought even more manors than Elizabeth's, with the result that her husband became the third-richest man in England. Ross (1956, 21–23) gives a complete list of all the earl's manors referred to in this paragraph.

During his career, Earl Richard spent much of his time away from Warwick and, indeed, out of
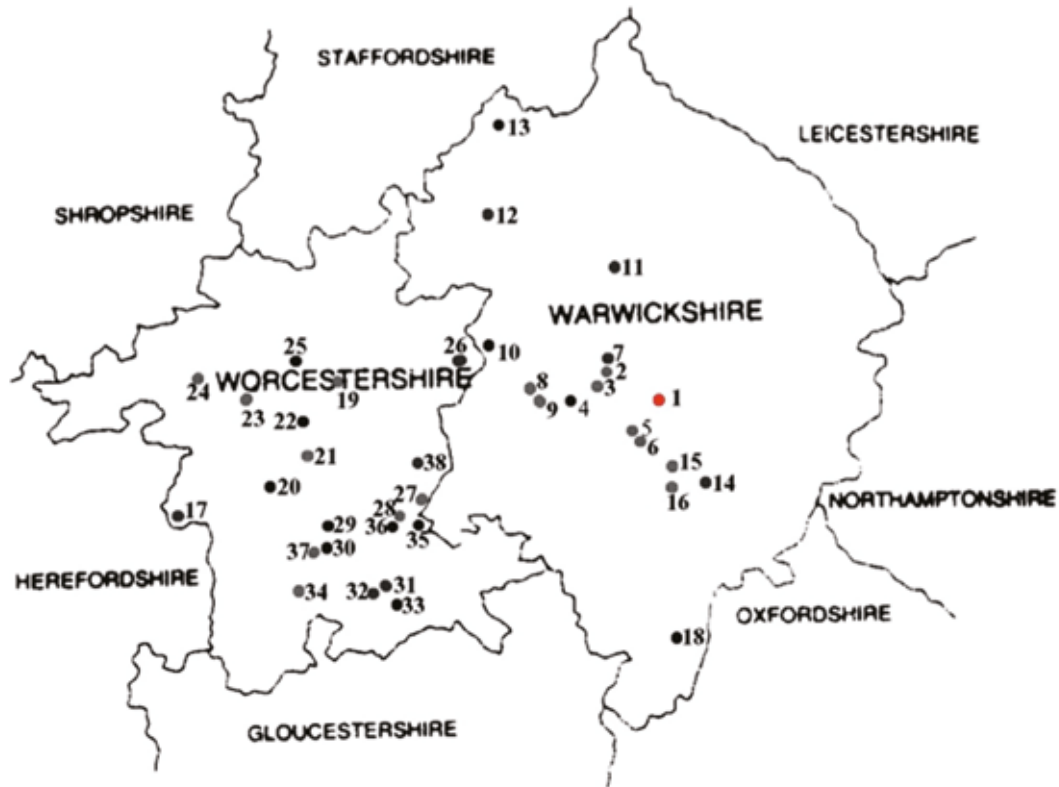
FIGURE 5 Manors acquired by the Earls of Warwick in Warwickshire and Worcestershire between 1268 and 1369. Warwick is marked in red (after Barfield 1997)

the country (Saul 2010, 279). Despite this, he kept a firm grip on the management of his manors, no doubt helped by the mass of documents they generated.

LIFE ON THE MANOR

The documents, in passing, provide us with intimate details of what was happening on the manor. The accounts, in particular, because of their close attention to the cost of everything, also provide detailed accounts of the work on the manor and how it was done.

The following extract from the records of the view of frankpledge held in 1411 shows it trying to tackle one of the abiding concerns of the manor.

The dyke at Bourduescroft is not flowing properly through lack of scouring and the

adjacent high road is flooded to the hindrance of all the men riding along it. The lord of the manor must remedy the matter.

A certain dyke at Uppende is blocked for lack of scouring.

Robert Billyng has still not scoured his ditch at Brookende.

The water course next to Dikedmore is not flowing in its proper channel which is affecting the livelihood of all those whose lands and gardens it has flooded. The person responsible must seek advice from the lord.

William Kyng was unjustly said to be responsible for repairing the bridge at Claydon.

A similar set of reports can be found in the records of most views. Someone was responsible
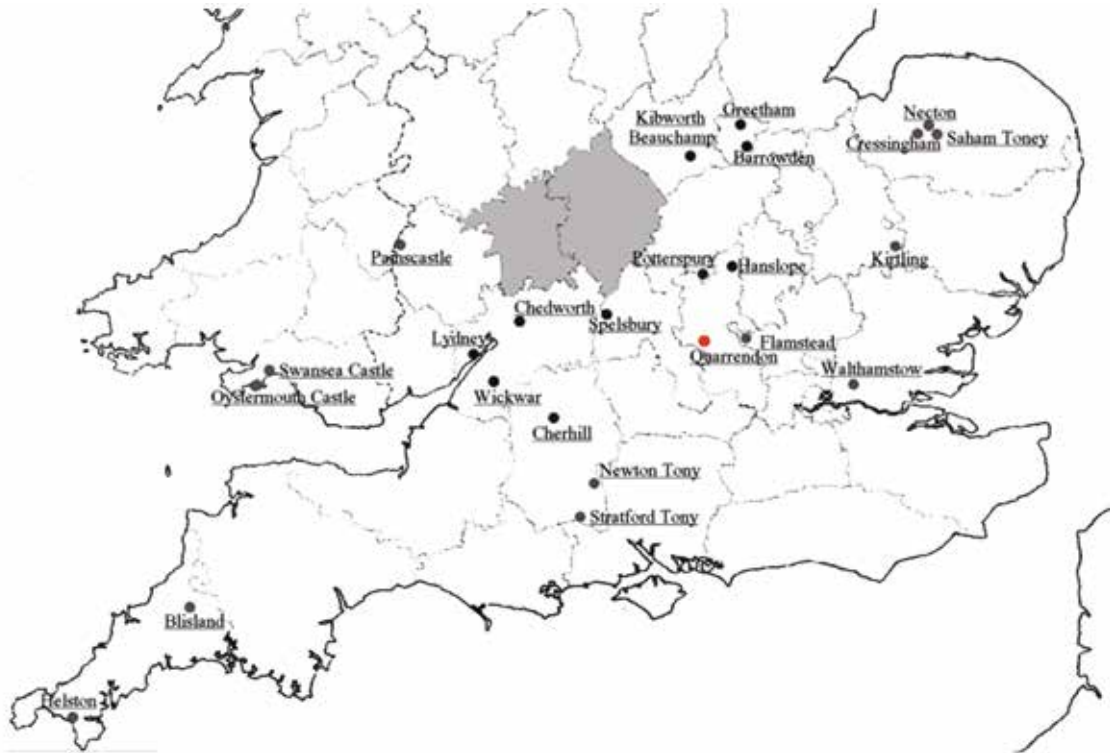
FIGURE 6 Other manors acquired by the Earls of Warwick between 1268 and 1369. Quarrendon is marked in red (after Barfield 1997)

for the maintenance of each drainage ditch, usually because it flowed through their land but occasionally because it was adjacent to it. Clearly, those people were not convinced that it was necessary to keep the dykes clear. Since the roads were flooded and the bridges were in bad repair, or had even collapsed, it seems likely that very few people were travelling through Quarrendon, so they may well have been right. Likewise, the fact that some land was flooded and consequently unusable seems not to have been a matter of concern, suggesting that there was no shortage of land for the customary tenants.

Twenty years later, the accounts for 1430/31 reveal that the lord of the manor was paying for the repairs to a bridge. The details of the costs were recorded as follows:

*For a man to cut wood in the lord's wood
called Ballinger to renew the bridge at the
gate of the lord's manor of Quarrendon
and to load it*   8d

*For 2 men to cart the wood from Ballinger
to the gate*   2/2d

*For 2 sawyers for 3 days to saw the wood
for the main
planks of the bridge*   3s

*For a carpenter for 11 days to shape the
planks for the bridge*   5/6d

*For a lathlayer for a day to prepare and
make the bridge from stone and wood*   6d

The bridge was being renewed using existing stone piers, which after their repair were used to support the replacement planks that crossed the ditch. The wood came from Ballinger, as was usual, and the contributions of the workmen involved were listed in their natural order. In this

case, it was in the lord of the manor's interest to see that the bridge across the moat surrounding his manor house was repaired, but he did subsequently pay for repairs to other bridges. They were needed to keep open the routes through the manor, which would also have been to his benefit, but one might wonder whether he was influenced by the general resistance of his tenants to do such work.

In the years before 1401, a major source of income came from farming the land kept by the lord of the manor for his own use, the demesne land. The following extract from the accounts for 1391/2 gives the details of the work carried out at harvest time that year:

Harvest costs

To reap, bind and manure 336.5 acres of land with customary labour paid at 4d a day   *£10/4/10d*

To hire a man to collect the sheaves in the fields   *5s*

To hire 4 carts to carry the sheaves to the barn   *4s*

To hire 10 men for a day to stack the sheaves in the middle bay of the barn   *3/4d*

To hire 11 men for a day to stack corn and peas   *3/8d*

To hire 20 carts with men for a day to come to the fields to load and carry corn. The cost of their bread and beer is included   *3/9d*

To hire 45 carts with men for a day to come to the fields to load and carry peas to the barn. The cost of their bread and beer is included   *7/1d*

                                   Total   £11/11/8d

All the labour involved would have been provided by tenants who came to fulfill their customary obligations. They had to come on the day they were needed, for which they were paid and provided with basic sustenance. Recording that the sheaves had been stacked in 'the middle bay of the barn' ensured that it was on the record that this had been done, for the other bays would have been set aside for other purposes. The large number of carts was probably assembled by

pooling the carts from nearby farms. When the work described above had been finished, they would all have moved to another of the farms to do the same there. The overall cost of gathering in the harvest was, of course, only one contribution to the overheads incurred to collect its yield: the costs of activities such as manuring, sowing and maintaining the barn are among the more obvious ones. That the income from selling corn and peas in this same year was just over £23 begins to suggest that making a profit from farming was just as difficult 600 years ago as it is today. The images in Figure 7, taken from the Luttrell Psalter (Brown 2006, 48–9), show medieval reaping and stacking. There is no record of women reaping at Quarrendon, but they did glean and were quite well paid for doing it.

Turning to another activity, each set of accounts records the cost of the annual session of repairs and maintenance, which made a considerable contribution to the manor's overheads. The repair and maintenance work done in the financial year 1411/12, to the tiled barn, a furnace at the fishery and the pound, was recorded like this:

For a roofer for 10 days to repair the roof of the barn in various places as necessary   *4/2d*

For 2 men hired for the same to carry shingles, water and anything else   *6/8d*

For 6 men hired to dig up clay and carry it to the barn   *4s*

For a man hired to build a wall between the barn and the stables, of length 5 perches [about 80 feet] and height 7 feet   *7s*

For a new wall between the tiled barn and the kitchen   *12d*

For a man hired for 13 days to make a new furnace in the fishery this year   *6/6d*

For 6 cartloads of clay dug at Aylesbury and carted to Quarrendon   *2s*

For one cartload of clay dug at Wermyngton and carted to Quarrendon for lining the furnace   *1/2d*

For one cartload of stones bought at Whitchurch and carted to Quarrendon for the roofer   *12d*

FIGURE 7 Images of medieval harvesting from the Luttrell Psalter

For a roofer hired for a day to do the roofing — 12d

For 2 men hired to carry the stones, water and anything else for the roofer — 8d

For 2 men hired for 4 days to cut and trim thorns at Bernwood for the new pound — 2/8d

For a cart hired for 7 days to carry the thorns — 16d

For 2 men hired for 7 days to make the hedges around the pound — 5/10d

For carting 2 trees from Bernwood to make a new gate for the pound — 12d

For a carpenter hired for 2 days to make the gate — 10d

More work was done, and the total cost of it all was £13/12/10d. These details of just three of the tasks, though, reveal quite a lot about Quarrendon. Two general observations can be made. Firstly, there were numerous people available with specialist skills, whether in carpentry, roofing or building a furnace. Although his contribution is not included in the extract above, the services of a plumber were also called upon during the year. In fact, he was paid an annual retainer so that he would be on hand to maintain and repair the 'lead above the lord's rooms'. The second observation is that Quarrendon was well-connected to the surrounding area, making use of the resources of Aylesbury, Whitchurch, Wermington and Bernwood. The lord of the manor had the right to the underbrush from Bernwood, which included the thorn bushes. Timber, such as that for the gate to the pound, usually came from 'his forest' at Ballinger, but there is also a passing reference to 'the lord's wood at Bernwood' in the court of 1411.

The walls that were built from the barn to the stables and to the kitchen would have divided the space around the group of buildings at the centre of the manor into distinct areas. Frustratingly, no reason is given for the work but, to make its expense worthwhile, it must have been related to some significant change. Incidentally, the reference to 'the

kitchen', along with the mention of a cook described below, must refer to the kitchen of the manor house, which also contained 'the lord's rooms', which the plumber ensured were water-proof. The description of this campaign of repairs, along with others, makes clear that the manor possessed a central moated compound that contained not only the manor house but also a barn and stables, and was accessible only via the gate leading to the bridge across the moat. The imagined reconstruction illustrated in Figure 8 gives some idea of what the manor may have looked like at this time. It must be stressed that this image was not prepared as a representation of Quarrendon, but is offered here as a general representation of a medieval manorial complex to which it has been shown here that Quarrendon conformed in a number of respects.

The need for the kiln is also not explained, but the expertise to build it, as well as the knowledge of where to source the materials, were clearly available.

The pound was frequently in need of attention: its piled-thorn surround clearly did not wear well. At the beginning of the period there is no mention of the pound, and there may not have been one, as the court records did note the appearance of the odd stray animal, which was always assigned to the care and use of a named individual. However, as the years passed, more and more animals strayed into the manor (red ponies, debilitated horses, geese), to the point that a pound became necessary: soon after, it had to be enlarged. This increase in stray animals was almost certainly related to the change in population examined in the next section.

FIGURE 8 Imaginative reconstruction of a medieval manorial complex, presented here to evoke the appearance of Quarrendon

A few individuals emerge from the documents by rising above the ordinary in some way. The court records are the best source for this, although those who drew attention to themselves in the court inevitably did not do so for the best of reasons. For example, in 1425:

> *John Stefenes attacked Kate Billyng with a dagger worth 4d*

and

> *John Billyng drew his blood in her defence*

while in 1436:

> *Thomas Bellas attacked John Carpenter with a stick of no value and drew blood*

and

> *John Rowman attacked Henry ffilcok with a pikefork worth 2d.*

Although John Billyng was probably defending his wife from John Stefenes, he was still fined because he drew blood, which was considered a serious offence. Henry ffilcok's 'pikefork' was probably a pitchfork. To give its value seems bizarre, but at the time the value of each and every object mentioned in the court was given, which only serves to emphasise that even court records could be used for financial purposes. While two of these attacks, to judge by the weapons involved, ought to have had serious results, attacks of any kind were rare: hardly any others were recorded in the fifty or so years examined here.

The case of one of the few other miscreants whose behaviour was by modern standards 'criminal' was recorded thus at the court of 1411:

> *John Jonell, cook, at around Christmas last year feloniously stole some of the goods and chattels of Mathew Hore, the chaplain, namely, 3 bed covers, 1 pair of blankets and 2 pairs of sheets. He has been taken to the King's Jail at Aylesbury.*

Moving to, one imagines, less pugnacious and more honest people, we find mention in the report from Ballinger presented at the view held in 1414 of Hugh Mortimer. He was among the tenants named for not attending and, although the others were all fined, he was excused because he was *in the King's service.* Now, the grandmother of Richard de Beauchamp, the lord of the manor, was Katherine Mortimer, who had been a person of some importance at the court of Edward III. In the circumstances, it seems likely that Hugh Mortimer was related to her and so to Richard as well. There are, incidentally, no explicit references in the records to Earl Richard by his given name, but there is one to his father, Thomas Beauchamp. The accounts for 1405/6 refer to an earlier tenant of a meadow at Uppend by noting that he held it in the time of *Thomas de Bello Campo.*

The court of 1440 provides the first mention found so far of a member of the Lee family, Benedict Lee. (Chambers (1936) reported that he was first mentioned in the court record of 1438.) It was noted that he had obstructed the road to a field called Hanyesfeld, had returned land and property to the lord and that, as one of the jurors, had presented that the Dean of Lichfield was now one of the tenants of Hanyesfeld. From this it would seem that Benedict was well established at Quarrendon by 1440.

Finally, at the view of 1432, there was a mention in the Claydon presentation of one John Smith, *harper.* The presence of a harper, or perhaps here it should be a harpist, raises all kinds of intriguing possibilities, none of which are resolved by the records.

THE CHANGING POPULATION

The gradual desertion of Quarrendon was taking place before the time of the earliest records, and was by no means completed at the time of the latest ones considered here. Around 1400, various changes were introduced, and these first started an increase in population loss and then combined to cause its continuation. One change was abrupt, while others took place gradually. The abrupt change was from farming the demesne land to renting it. The changes that took place more slowly were the enclosure of increasing amounts of land, and the move from arable farming to sheep farming.

That lords of the manor changed from farming their lands to renting them was part of a nation-wide trend caused by a growing awareness that

their manors could be made both more profitable and also more reliable sources of income, no longer dependent on uncontrollable conditions such as, in particular, the weather. Some had become aware that their manors were actually losing money and that they could, even so, be rented, essentially because the people renting them would have lower, sometimes much lower, overheads. This change happened at different times across the country. At Quarrendon, certain resources had been rented before the earliest surviving records were made. The earliest surviving court record, that of the view held in April 1396, notes that the dovecote, the rabbit warren and the fishing rights to the ditches and moats in the manor were rented by Mathew Hore, the chaplain, and John Carter for 26 shillings and 8 pence *per annum*.

However, the accounts for the financial year 1401/2 note for the first time that the demesne land was rented, along with the right to any fines invoked for trespassing on it and also with the dovecote, to John Newbury for £22 annually. The same accounts record that even the court was rented, for an annual amount of 66 shillings and 8 pence. The entry does not make clear to whom, but it was probably to John Newbury. It would be more accurate to say that the court's profits were rented: the renter paid in advance and, at the end of the year, collected the profit, which was essentially the amount by which the payments from land transactions, the fines imposed and the fees due exceeded the court's overheads. At this point it is hard to see that there was anything else on the manor worth renting.

Soon after everything of value on the manor was rented, changes began to take place in the hamlets at Brookend and Uppend. At Brookend throughout our period there were 8 virgates of land and about 18 cottages reserved by custom for unfree tenants. The number of cottages had been greater than this but had diminished as empty ones had not been repaired and had rotted away. The customary tenants were required to pay a relatively low fixed rent for their lands and accommodation, to keep their cottages in good repair and to provide their labour for a certain number of days each year. From the time of the earliest accounts it is clear that they were struggling to do this. Some of the cottages and plots of land were no longer taken; the people that remained had difficulty in paying what they owed, and appear to have been allowed to pay what they could afford; the remainers were provided with the wood they needed to repair their cottages at the lord's expense. Matters continued to deteriorate until, as the accounts of 1422/23 record, 5.5 virgates and ten cottages, all unoccupied, were rented by Robert Rawlyn, a free man. Two of the remaining cottages were also taken by newcomers. The accounts for 1430/31 show that by then even the remaining cottages had been abandoned, and that all the original tenants had gone. But, while the customary tenants did not want this land, others did. The customary tenants had left with their families, to be replaced by a much smaller number of people. The situation at Uppend was not as bad as this, but was showing signs of following a similar path.

The depopulation of Brookend can be traced through a section in the account rolls headed 'Allowances and rent arrears'. It records reductions allowed in the rent of land and of dwellings in Quarrendon. The customary annual rents were, respectively, 12s for a half virgate and 12d for a cottage.

In the accounts for 1407 this section included six items that explicitly related to Brookend. They included:

Received for half a virgate at Brookend recently held by John Wattes – 3/4d

Received for a cottage at Brookend called Ravenswyk – 12d

Received for a cottage at Brookend called Ailmotes – 4d

The other three entries were similar to these. The expected rent was paid for Ravenswyk, whereas considerable rent reductions were allowed for Ailmotes and the half virgate. While there were some tenants who could not pay their rent in full, there was no sign of abandonment.

In 1410, the 'Allowance and rent arrears' included a sub-section devoted to Brookend which contained 16 entries of which 9 referred to land holdings and 7 to dwellings. All had been allowed a rent reduction, typically to 12d for half a virgate and 4d for a cottage as in the following:

Received for half a virgate from Richard Sprot – 12d

Received for a cottage called Borduescroft – 4d

At this point, almost everyone in Brookend was in financial difficulty. In the next year, 1411, the first signs of abandonment occurred:

A cottage at Brookend called Ravenswyk is in the hand of the lord

A cottage at Brookend called Ailmotes is in the hand of the lord

Two tenants had abandoned their cottages, which automatically returned to the lord of the manor.

Abandonments continued until, in 1422, the complete sub-section for Brookend read:

Five and a half virgates of land in the hand of the lord was demised to Robert Rawlyn for his lifetime for an entry fee, including tax, of 25/3d

10 cottages in the manor were granted to the same Robert for an entry fee, including tax, of 13/6d

A cottage recently held by Robert Philippes was granted to William ffadur for a rent of 20d per annum

A cottage recently held by John Wilkynes was granted to William Selot for a rent of 10d per annum

By this time, more than half of the land and the dwellings at Brookend had been abandoned, allowing them to be rented, at increased rents, by newcomers.

The 1430 sub-section documents the end of this stage of desertion. It records that Robert Rawlyn still held his five and a half virgates and ten cottages and also that:

A cottage recently held by William ffadur has no tenant

A cottage recently held by John Wilkynes and granted to William Selot has no tenant

A cottage recently held by John Compton has no tenant

By 1430, the hamlet of Brookend had been abandoned by its original customary tenants.

The loss of population at Brookend, and other less complete decreases, does seem to result from the rapid change from farming the land to renting it. In 1396, the customary services on the manor had been commuted to cash payments, giving the customary tenants the opportunity to supplement their income. And although subsequently they were still expected to provide their services on demand, perhaps so many days spent on weeding or on harvest work, they were paid for it. But the change to renting destroyed that opportunity, for the renters did all the work themselves. This loss of income dropped all those previously living at subsistence level below it. Many, and particularly those at Brookend, had no option but to leave the manor in search of a better life elsewhere.

Population was also being lost throughout the period by recurrences of the plague after the disastrous outbreak of 1348 and 1349. That Quarrendon suffered outbreaks is clear from the court records such as that of May 1415, which noted that:

A toft and half virgate at Uppende once those of Richard Sprot remain with the lord. As does the same at Brookende. As also do many other messuages, cottages, tofts and virgates on account of the pestilence and also because of want of tenants.

The term 'remain with the lord' in the first sentence indicates that the toft and half virgate still had no tenant. The third sentence reveals that a considerable number of other properties were also vacant, perhaps so many that it was not possible to be sure of their number and so to list them. Clearly, even one recurrence of the plague would have a dramatic effect on any community, let alone one like Brookend that was already struggling to survive.

The impact of the sudden decision to rent the demesne land at Quarrendon, then, produced a correspondingly sudden drop in population, which added to an already existing decrease. It was, however, a one-off contribution. Unfortunately, other changes acted to produce a continuation of its effect. Each sudden departure from the manor left land without a tenant. This land was desirable – it was in the Vale of Aylesbury, after all – and was soon rented either by outsiders or by existing well-to-do free tenants of the manor. Some of the land was made more desirable by its enclo-

sure, a practice that had been occurring increasingly, although not in any organised fashion. For example, at the view of 1415 in an entry for Bernwood it was recorded that:

> *The Woodward is to freely provide those named below with a cartload of thorns to make fences around their closes which are lying open.*

A list of eleven names followed. Nine were to receive one cartload and the others two cartloads.

Common land was also being enclosed, as this presentment from the court of April 1435 records:

> *The Homage present that William Stevenes unjustly enclosed with a hedge of vines the field that was once called Hamesfeld which was common land for all the tenants of Quarrendon time out of mind. And he also enclosed a field called Neyte which should be common land and has been newly ploughed a year ago. And he enclosed a meadow called le Milham that should be common land for all the tenants to graze their beasts time out of mind. And he is ordered to put this right before the next court under a penalty of 6s 8d.*

These two cases do suggest that in the twenty years between them the population had declined to the point that William Stevenes could enclose common land without objection from the customary tenants, perhaps because they were so few and in any case had no need of it. The fact that one of the fields was enclosed with what I have translated as 'a hedge of vines' makes it tempting to think that William had planted a vineyard, which if correct would also be interesting, if for different reasons (The relevant Latin words in the original document are *inclusit cum sepe vine*.)

The other issue was that the newly rented land, both the demesne land and the abandoned customary land, was increasingly being used for sheep, rather than as arable land. That some of the land was enclosed only made it more suitable for sheep. But sheep farming needed fewer men than arable farming. At the extreme, once sheep had been put on enclosed land, they did not even need a shepherd. This meant that opportunities to work, and so to earn, were again reduced. And any work that was available with sheep would hardly have

been suitable: a ploughman, for example, would earn less as a shepherd, even if he could persuade himself to make the change. Those called to do customary work had hoed or performed harvest tasks: in the changed circumstances, the need at the busy time was for sheep shearers. The inevitable result was that more people left the manor, whether to find work that would call on their skills or to find work at all.

This situation pushed population numbers into a downward spiral. As people left, they released their land. It was hired and used for sheep, which caused more people to leave, and so on.

From the resulting chaos, opportunities emerged. There were, for instance, a number of instances of land holdings being exchanged so that a tenant, rather than holding various plots scattered across the manor, might acquire adjacent plots which could then be consolidated and treated as one large holding. The following set of land transactions, all carried out at courts in the three year period centred on 1440, illustrates the process:

> *William More surrendered a half virgate to the use of Richard Dangevyle for a rent of 13/4d per annum.*

> *William More took a half virgate called Kyngeslond once that of Thomas Billyng for a rent of 20s per annum and 12d entry fee.*

> *Richard Dangevyle surrendered half virgate to the use of Thomas Billyng, with no exit fee due by custom because he has many holdings, for a rent of 6/8d per annum.*

Here, in a triangular arrangement, three people have all exchanged one holding for another. Thomas Billyng benefitted most because one of the esoteric customs of the manor favoured those with an accumulation of holdings, which he already had although this transaction did not increase it.

To summarise, the introduction of various changes to farming practice and land management were followed in short order by a shrinkage, in one case a drastic shrinkage, in the population of the hamlets. The change from farming to renting the demesne land triggered a process the continuation of which was supported by other changes. The ease with which common land could be enclosed and land exchanges made only served as reinforcement. The consequence of the changes was unin-

tended: there is no sign of any deliberate intention to force people to leave.

Summary and Conclusions

The preliminary findings from the manor court records and annual accounts of Quarrendon from the first half of the 15th century are presented here. They come from an examination of about half of the total corpus, which provides a regular sampling across the time span. The findings are intended to shed some light on three aspects of medieval Quarrendon. The first is the topography, both of the complete area covered by Quarrendon and, in more detail, of the moated complex at the heart of the manor. The documents reveal the presence of features of the former, but give little information about their locations. They are more forthcoming about the moated core, which contained at least the manor house, two barns (the Great Barn and the Tiled Barn), and some stables, to the extent that it can be seen to conform to a standard type. These building were all regularly maintained and the space containing them was partitioned by walls at different times, which may have been a part of other on-going changes.

Secondly, various people were selected, to all of whom something beyond the everyday had happened, in order to bring out something of the variety of life at Quarrendon. The court records were the more fruitful source, although the people who stood out there were inevitably not of the better sort. The accounts revealed the presence of some rather distinguished people.

The third aspect was the population decrease that was occurring throughout the period. The records not only show that there was a decrease but also reveal the changes that were driving it in this period. In fact, the primary cause was the change by the lord of the manor from farming his own lands to leasing them to others. This change from arable farming to leased grazing led to a dominance of sheep grazing (Everson 2001, 11–14) and so to the further depopulation of the hamlets. It is not easy to follow the progress of this development in the account rolls, though, since their creators were content to show the income from leasing the grazing land and were not interested in how it was used.

All the same, there is every reason to believe that future investigation will prove fruitful. As a small example to justify this claim, consider the following. The annual retainer of the plumber, mentioned above, was a bushel of wheat, for which, in some years, the price 'according to the market' was recorded. In 1405 it was 4d, in 1411 8d and in 1415 12d. So, in the decade from 1405 inflation was raging, but it remains to be seen how this fitted into the long-term pattern. Mention of the market opens up a further avenue that needs investigation. Does it mean the market of Aylesbury? Wherever it was, a listing at the court of 1445 of 'the middle price in the market' for corn and peas shows that its operation was surprisingly sophisticated.

All in all, many documents remain to be examined, just as what they contain remains to be discovered.

Appendix

Referencing the Original Documents
The court rolls and annual account rolls that provide the primary sources for this article have been referred to within it by their year of creation. The two tables of this appendix identify the original documents by giving their Oxfordshire History Centre reference code. Some court rolls share the same reference: this is because the reference has been assigned to a bundle of court rolls rather than to the individual rolls.

TABLE 1 The court rolls

Year	OHC reference
1396	E36/10/1/CR/1
1411	E36/10/1/CR/2
1414	E36/10/1/CR/6
1415	E36/10/1/CR/7
1425	E36/10/1/CR/9
1432	E36/10/1/CR/9
1435	E36/10/1/CR/9
1436	E36/10/1/CR/9
1438	E36/10/1/CR/10
1440	E36/10/1/CR/10
1445	E36/10/1/CR/10

TABLE 2 The account rolls

Year	OHC reference
1391/2	E36/10/1/F1/3
1401/2	E36/10/1/F1/10
1405/6	E36/10/1/F1/15
1407/8	E36/10/1/F1/17
1410/11	E36/10/1/F1/18
1411/12	E36/10/1/F1/19
1415/16	E36/10/1/F1/25
1422/23	E36/10/1/F1/30
1426/27	E36/10/1/F1/34
1430/31	E36/10/1/F1/38

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