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## LATE-CONTINUED DEMESNE FARMING AT OTFORD

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As it is not very usual to find a demesne continuously exploited by its lord as late as the mid-fifteenth century, with detailed accounts of the process, the manor of Otford is worth a short paper to show how an attenuated cultivation by the archbishop was carried on until 1444.

The numerous demesnes of the archbishopric, mostly lying in Kent, Sussex and Surrey, had with few exceptions been leased out by 1422 when a surviving *valor* gives a fairly comprehensive view of the estates.<sup>1</sup> The Cathedral Priory had gone over to rents as a matter of policy in the 1390's, and it is not unlikely that the archbishop's council had the same policy in train. The fact that a few widely-spaced manors like Tarring, Stoneham and possibly Wadhurst in Sussex, Otford, Wingham Barton, and possibly Teynham in Kent were still directly exploited, in whole or in part, as late as 1422 strengthens the impression that the supply of the archbishop's itinerant household was one reason for continued demesne-farming on selected manors.

It should be noted at the outset, however, that the demesne lands on the archbishop's manors were often rather small in comparison with the lands of the tenants. To put it another way, the major part of the archbishop's income from land, throughout the medieval period, was from rents. So the interest of his demesne exploitation derives less from watching a "high-farming" policy like that of certain monasteries than from the information its records give us about farming methods and, indeed, the local communities.

In the thirteenth century the issues of Otford demesne and the rents of tenants were jointly answered for by a bailiff and a reeve in one great undifferentiated account.<sup>2</sup> Accounts of the same sort survive from 1315-16 and 1322-3, where the accounting officer is called a serjeant (*serviens*), and from 1355-6 where he is called reeve (*prepositus*).<sup>3</sup> But from 1382-3, when something like a consecutive series begins again, the demesne is always left to the serjeant,<sup>4</sup> the collection of the tenants' rents to the reeve.<sup>5</sup> This process of differentiating accounts is con-

<sup>1</sup> Lambeth Palace Library, Cartæ Miscellaneæ, vol. xi, no. 89. It is hoped to discuss the whole problems of farming the demesnes in a forthcoming book on the archbishop's estates in the middle ages.

<sup>2</sup> *Brit. Mus. Add MS* 29,794 (account of 1273-4); Lambeth Court Roll collection (abbreviated *L.R.*) no. 831 (account of 1296-7).

<sup>3</sup> *L.R.* 832-4.

<sup>4</sup> *L.R.*, 835-6, 838, 841, 846, 846a, 849, 850, 853, 857-8, 860, 863, 865, 868, 871.

<sup>5</sup> *L.R.*, 839, 842, 844-845a, 847, 854, 854a, 859, 861, 864, 866, 869-70, 872, 874.

tinued and emphasized in the fifteenth century. We have a series of parker's accounts from 1400.<sup>1</sup> After the demesne is wholly leased out in 1444 we have not only the farmer's account, but a continued serjeant's account, answering for the profits of the leased demesne and for the residence at Otford which the archbishop retained and used. And then, from about 1450, the large manor of Otford was broken up into a number of separately-accounting collectorates: the *borgha* of Otford under its reeve, the *borgha* of Shoreham, and the once-dependent settlements at Chevening, Sevenoaks and Weald, each under its collector (usually styled reeve), and Whitley (*Whytcliff*) woods under a forester. All these accounts continue with few important breaks till Cranmer's time.<sup>2</sup>

The present concern is with the extent of the demesne and with what the serjeants' accounts tell of its cultivation. The Domesday survey simply says that the manor of Otford was assessed at eight sulungs, that there was tenant-land for forty-two ploughs and demesne for six. The bare statement of Domesday is borne out and vastly amplified by two detailed medieval descriptions of the demesne. A custumal of c. 1284 shows some 665 acres of arable scattered in fourteen parcels, ranging in size from 1 to 153 acres, about 55 acres of meadow in twelve parcels, and an indeterminate amount of wood, park and pasture land. The demesne description in this custumal is set out here in translation:<sup>3</sup>

In 'La Combe' 68 acres; by the sheepfold 1 acre 1 virgate; *sub orto* Pycard 23a.; in 'Wycham' 26a. 3v.; in 'Northfield' 153a. 3v.; in 'Estfeld' 83a. 3v.; in the croft of 'Wenlagh' 1a. 3v.; in 'Tylefeld' 12a. 3v.; in the field by Preston 58a. 2v.; in the field on the north and east side of Shoreham church 55a.  $\frac{1}{2}$ v.; in the field by the sheepfold and vill of Shoreham 26a.  $\frac{1}{2}$ v.; at 'Wodelond' 34a.; at 'Halstede' 80a.; in 'Morelegh' 40a. *preter Alvetum*.

Pasture in 'Robeloteslond' 25a. besides *Alvetum*; a park and some other woods there; in 'Gevlmed' 6a.; in 'Littelmed' 1a. 2v.; by the house of John Planez 3a.; in 'Meleton' 11a.; in the same meadow 4a. 2v.; in 'Rodbrok' 9a. 2v.; in 'La More' 6a. 2v.; at 'Southmell' 1a. 3v.; between the course of two streams (*aquarum*) 3a.; in 'Redon' and water 2a. 2v.; in 'Stywmed' 6a.; in 'La Wore' 1a.

A description of the demesnes as they were in 1515-16 has also

<sup>1</sup> *L.R.*, 847, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The numerous later accounts, mostly in Lambeth Palace and the Public Record Office, need not be referred to here.

<sup>3</sup> Dean and Chapter of Canterbury MSS, E24, fo. 69v. This is a copy, probably of the late fifteenth century, of a custumal and rental remade under Archbishop Pecham from a roll of Elias of Dereham, archbishop's steward c. 1207-14, covering almost all the archbishop's estates.

chanced to survive on the parchment cover of an Otford court-roll belonging to Elizabeth's reign.<sup>1</sup> It is a hasty scrawl, but provides a comparison interesting enough to reproduce here :

A mesurement of the demeanes of Otteforde anno vij<sup>o</sup> H.viii. In Estfeld lyeng frome the lompytt and the path way leding frome Otteforde to Seale uppon the hill ward, 62 acres 8 dayworks 3 perches.

In Northfeld in one pece called the Eighteen acre there is [*sic*] 18 acres 18½ dayw.

In a nother feld called the 14 acres there is 14 a. and no mow.

In Whythill there is . . . ½ a. 3 dayw. 3 p.

In the Faston there is 43a. 7 dayw. 1 p.

In a feld called the Combe and that half (?) to the hill there is in one pece lieng in le[n]ght toward Shorham 66½ a. 6½ dayw.

In a nother pece lyeng in the bottom under Coridlebushe (?) there is 10 a. 15½ dayw.

Item in the fosse Undergrenhill called the Drowwaye [Droveway] for the farmershope there is 2 a. 3 dayw.

Item in a nother pece that is the hanger and side of the Mydlehill and so compasse [*sic*] the side of Stomblebussh and the Shotte above Cradlebushe there is 25 a. 12 dayw.

Item in 2 peces mowe that lyeth at the Foxe . . . and Blackbushe, and boundith to the Highways leding from Ottford toward Woodland there is 15 a., and 1 a. lyeng between the parsons 3 a. and Mr. Palmer.

The sum of acres with the Combe 120½ a. 7 dayw., beside 31 a. that I cannott calle to mynd.

Item there is in Oxenlease 10½ a.

Item there is in Little Newe Park as to met him [measure it?] square 26 a. 18 dayw.

Item there is in Gret New Park as we met him in 2 parts without the diche of the mede called Multon 60½ a. 14½ dayw.

Item there is taken into the mede that was Gret Nupark 3 a. and 5 the . . . of the 2 nuparks and Oxenlease is 100 a. 3 r[ods] 2 dayw.

Item there is in Wickham 24 a. 3 r. 5 dayw. 7 p.

Item there is in the medes called the Blossse medes 7½ a. 8 dayw. and thereof in 2 parks . . . must have one . . . and then hath the lond in Redbrok 3 r. 6 dayw.

Item there is in Mylton mede as far . . . now within the diche 16½ a., and thereof the tenants hath one acre.

Item there is in the . . . mede 8 a., and the tenants have 1 a. 15 dayw.

Although this description is in places obscure or defective, a general comparison with the description of the thirteenth century is possible.

<sup>1</sup> De L'Isle and Dudley MSS, Roll 478. I am indebted to Viscount De L'Isle, V.C., for his kind permission to make use of his family papers.

Of the thirteenth-century demesne fields, only four can be readily identified in 1515. Of these, the Combe and Wickham remain much the same, but North field and East field have been to a greater or lesser extent split up. The entirely changed nomenclature of the other fields cannot disguise the fact that some further splitting up has taken place. Names of demesne fields sown with various crops in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are given in the serjeants' accounts, and some of these do not appear in either of the lists printed here. From an inspection of all these sources, one must conclude that North field, East field, the Combe and Wickham had a continued identity from Edward I's day to that of Henry VIII, and that the field of 50-60 acres at Shoreham lasted through the fourteenth century, though all of these were liable to a certain morcellation while retaining their names. But the other parcels changed their names, and probably their boundaries, much more freely. In addition, meadow land and park land could in the later middle ages be cropped, while portions of supposedly arable land seem to pass out of cultivation altogether.

It is hard to calculate the nominal size of the demesne in 1515, but it seems a little smaller than it had been in 1284. A very different question is how much of the demesnes were actually laid under crop during the period of the archbishop's demesne exploitation. The situation is set out concisely in the Table. This shows that even in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century a much smaller proportion of the demesne was cultivated than can be accounted for by fallow, and that even this amount contracts strikingly in the second quarter of the fourteenth century. From the middle of the fourteenth century to the middle of the fifteenth the contraction of the cropped area goes on, with ups and downs in particular years. From 1419 onwards the serjeant even seems to become self-conscious about the total area cropped, for he develops the habit of comparing the current acreage with that of the previous year.

Parallel with the contraction of the cropped acreage went the reduction in the number of full-time ploughmen employed by the lord. Domesday said there were six ploughs on the demesne, and six *famuli caruce* we find in the accounts until about 1393. Thereafter the number is four.

The Table also shows the relative importance of the different crops. Wheat production was predominant, and of this a high proportion was sold on the local market or delivered to the archbishop's household. Production of oats declined steadily from 1418, but the stability of spring barley cultivation is remarkable. The sowing of legumes was of minor importance, and by 1432 had almost ceased. The whole picture is one of an attenuated but viable economy lasting out the near-century 1355 to 1444, and kept going more to supply the

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household in London or north-west Kent than for any other ostensible reason.

TABLE  
ACREAGES OF DEMESNE SOWN

Year	Wheat	Barley <sup>1</sup>	Oats	Peas	Vetches	Beans	Total
1273-4 <sup>2</sup>	94½	42½	118	7	15½	—	277
1315-16	135	24 + 28	113	9	6½	—	315½
1322-3	108	17 + 23	125	2	7	—	282
1355-6	66	15½ + 30	58	7	15½	6¼	198½
1382-3	88	8 + 32	60½	12	12	—	212½
1391-2	69½	5 + 28	44	11	11	—	168½
1399-							
1400	70½	8¼ + 25½	47½	6	10½	—	168¼
1405-6	70½	8¼ + 28½	40	4	8	—	159½
1410-11	69	8¼ + 36½	55½	6	7½	2	184¾
1413-14	69½	6 + 25	53½	4½	12	—	170½
1417-18 <sup>3</sup>							187
1418-19	87	5 + 20	59½	4	6½	—	182
1422-3	73½	4 + 19	34	8	8	—	156½
1426-7							163
1427-8	71½	35	33	8	8	—	155½
1428-9	64½	30	48	—	8 <sup>4</sup>	—	142½
1430-1							151¾
1431-2	65½	43½	43½	—	—	—	152½
1436-7							136
1437-8	54½	44	33	12	—	—	143½
1438-9							143½
1439-40	64	48	28	12	—	—	152
1440-1	71	44½	30	8	—	—	153½
1443-4	63	57	27	5	—	—	149½

Fifteen accounts over the period specify what crops were sown on particular fields. This is not enough to demonstrate a particular rotation technique, though clearly some sort of alternation was practised in the larger fields, while some of the marginal pieces seem only to have been laid under oats. Looking at a cropping table over the available years, the most striking fact is the way in which the larger fields were themselves divided among different crops in any one year, and also were liable to have only a small proportion of their area cropped in any particular year. East Field was the most continuously and fully cropped one. In 1284 we are told it contained about 84 acres. From 1315 to 1440 it can be seen at intervals, now wholly under wheat, or wheat and winter barley, now under spring barley,

<sup>1</sup> Where two figures are given under barley, the first signifies winter, the second spring, barley. Note decline of winter barley cultivation.

<sup>2</sup> Calculated this year from amounts of seed sown (Add MS 29,794).

<sup>3</sup> Total acreage of years where crops are not specified is known through the account for the subsequent year.

<sup>4</sup> All destroyed by flood.

oats and legumes in some unpredictable combination, occasionally under barley alone. Although there are one or two years when the field was wholly blank, it was, in recorded years, rarely cropped over less than 60 to 80 acres. But East Field was the exception. North Field was in operation over the whole period, yet after 1322 never more than about 40 of its supposed 154 acres were sown; during the later middle ages some 20 to 40 acres of its surface were generally sown with blocks of wheat, spring barley and, occasionally, oats. In 1432 it was specified that 26a in the south of the field were under wheat, 18a in the northern part under barley.<sup>1</sup> Roughly the same things could be said of the Combe, though this was cropped a little more fully. The big field in Shoreham was quite fully cropped till 1391, after which no record of cropping exists at all. Other fields seem only occasionally and marginally cropped, though a demesne field at Milton was considerably used in the fifteenth century.

If, as is apparent, the demesne arable was increasingly under-exploited from the mid-fourteenth century onwards, what was happening to it? The evidence is fragmentary, but there may be two or three complementary explanations. Small portions of the demesne fields were being let off to tenants by court-roll, for rent.<sup>2</sup> Also, some demesne land, like some tenant-land, was going out of cultivation for lack of people willing or able to cultivate it.<sup>3</sup> Finally, it is possible that some of the demesne went out of cultivation because the soil was not good and was easily abandoned during a period of economic recession.<sup>4</sup> The leasing process is visible in a small way at least by the early years of the fifteenth century. Decayed rents and land left in the lord's hand are more apparent in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. But they are also concurrent processes.

This tale of diminishing tillage is only one aspect of the archbishop's demesne economy at Otford. It is necessary to look briefly at the proceeds and expenses of demesne farming.

<sup>1</sup> *L.R.*, 860.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., in 1404-5 the assized rents are swollen by a number of "new" rents (not necessarily new that year), including 1s. 4½d. from William and John, sons of Adam Sweyneslond, for 2a. 3r. lying in North Field and the Combe, let to them by court roll, and 4 dayworks by the sheepfold let to Adam Sweyneslond and his heirs forever for 4d. and the service of supplying lime to Otford manor whenever necessary (*L.R.*, 839).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., in 1437-8 some 23a. of demesne land in Shoreham was let to various persons at 8d. an acre. But all other demesne lands and pastures there brought in nothing for lack of a *conductor*, and were occupied by the lord's sheep (*L.R.*, 863).

<sup>4</sup> There seems to be an analogy in an *Inquisition post mortem* (vol. xi, no. 363), where an estate in Ickham is described in 1362 as consisting of "a capital messuage and 120 acres of arable, dry and sandy, of which 80 acres may be sown every year, but this year only 31 acres are sown, and of these 8 acres are sown with beans, peas and vetches."

Demesne income is clearly set out in the serjeant's accounts. It consisted first and foremost of the proceeds from selling corn (indifferently to the archbishop's household or on the local market), livestock and the wool and woolfells of the lord's flock of 200 to 300 sheep. After these things in order of value came the miscellaneous group which the account-rolls call "Issues of the manor", and which include rents from hiring out the archbishop's pastures and his carts, and selling pannage, brushwood from his copses, pigeons from his dovecote, and so on. Up to c. 1428 the sale of corn and stock accounts for about two-thirds of demesne proceeds, but thereafter only for a half or less, because in 1428 the annual fee-farm of Sundridge, worth £22 12s. and for long leased to the Isley family, was brought on to the serjeant's account. The general truth about demesne proceeds is that they fluctuated considerably from year to year, according to the abundance and price of corn, but that no clear trend upward or downward is discernible.

Demesne costs in the fifteenth century likewise fluctuated. For instance, nearly £14 were spent in 1382-3 in repairing the manorial buildings used for the archbishop's registrar, clerks and esquires. In 1402 a further £20 were spent on building repairs, and about £20 on buying sheep. On this side of the account, however, a marked trend can be observed in the rising cost of labour. Up to c. 1428 the annual labour bill was rarely near £10. From then until 1444 it was always well over £10, and in the last year of demesne farming amounted to nearly £23. That year the lord's surveyor had to make new agreements with the *famuli* for their wages.

When the buildings were repaired, the workers paid, and the fields tilled, the lord should have something to show for it, and this something consisted in the money and provisions supplied to the household, at Lambeth or elsewhere. While reeve and serjeant each to some extent paid over both cash and kind, the vast bulk of the reeves' liveries were in money, the serjeants' in wheat, oats, meat, ale, hay and wood. Such deliveries, whether  *victualia*  or  *pecunia numerata* , are always entered on the "discharge" side of the account, but must, of course, be distinguished from expenses. When the archbishop's household took supplies, it normally purchased at, or allowed the serjeant, current market prices. In some ways the year-by-year delivery to the lord is a good index of the estate's profitability, especially if the arrears are inconsiderable and the capital investment reckoned in, for such payments represent a physical flow of wealth more certain and calculable than the "charge" side of accounts, which were simply statements of what was in theory owing. The Otford serjeants certainly supplied their lord steadily right up to the end of demesne farming.



The difficulty of striking a modern balance with a medieval account, or even appreciating a medieval account with medieval eyes, has often enough been remarked. It is not possible to point to a clear accounting reason why the lord leased off his whole demesne in 1444. Several developments may have played a part in the decision. Archbishop Stafford succeeded Chichele in 1443, and the arrival of a new lord was sometimes the occasion for a new start by the financial organization. Secondly, the cost of working the demesne was undoubtedly becoming high. Thirdly, there were men ready to take on the demesne-lands, work themselves, pay a regular rent to the lord, and go on supplying his household with provisions against cash when required. The questions of labour and of the new farmers may, in conclusion, be briefly discussed.

The rising cost of labour has already been alluded to. In 1443-4 the surveyor, William Stevens, had not only to convert the corn liveries of the *famuli* to money at a rate favourable to them, but had to arrange for the serjeant to be subsidized by payments from outside *super husbandriam faciendam*.<sup>1</sup> Even though the standing labour force had been reduced since the earlier fourteenth century, and now stood at four ploughmen, a carter and a shepherd,<sup>2</sup> they came expensive when their wages and liveries were added up. Nor was the difficulty one of commanding customary services, as it was in other parts of England, since the customary services of tenants on these west Kentish manors of the archbishop did not count for very much. On the analogy of Wrotham and Bexley, it was more difficult in the later middle ages to keep the Kentish *famulus* sweet.<sup>3</sup>

Labour-services at Otford, such as they were, came to an end with the final leasing of the demesne. Portions of the demesne were being let out before the complete leasing of 1444. The first farmer who comes to notice was the then serjeant, Thomas Brounswayn, who in 1402-3 took the demesne lands and pastures with 9 acres of meadow in Shoreham for seven years at £3 6s. 8d. *per annum*.<sup>4</sup> In 1414 he was holding them for term of life,<sup>5</sup> but by 1418 they had passed to a member of the well-to-do Otford family of Dorkynghole,<sup>6</sup> and by 1427 to Robert Tymberden,<sup>7</sup> whose family were also local tenants of

<sup>1</sup> L.R., 871, 872.

<sup>2</sup> L.R., 853.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., at Bexley in 1350 the bailiff reported that the value of liveries claimed by the *famuli* must be allowed, *et famuli aliter non potuerunt haberi* (L.R., 240); at Wrotham in 1401 extra pay was allowed *in rewardo facto omnibus famulis manerii ut melius se haberent in servicio domini* (L.R., 1142).

<sup>4</sup> L.R., 838.

<sup>5</sup> L.R., 850.

<sup>6</sup> L.R., 853. That this family was of some financial standing is indicated in *Early Chancery Proceedings* (Public Record Office, Class C1), File 24, no. 258 (1464). I owe this reference to my former pupil, Miss Margaret Avery.

<sup>7</sup> L.R., 857.

long standing. In 1437-8, a bad year, only 23 acres of the Shorham demesnes could be leased, and those were taken up by various persons for a short term at 8d. the acre.<sup>1</sup> But in 1439 the Shoreham demesnes were all let again, by court roll, at £3 *per annum*, to four men who continued to hold them severally for some time: John Sepham, John Reeve, butcher, Thomas Blakenham and Thomas Lane.<sup>2</sup> At the same time John Multon took up an acre of the Otford demesne which lay next to property of his own for 1s. p.a. In 1440 an acre of North Field was rented at 6d. a year to Thomas Court, whose own lands lay adjacent.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in 1444, the whole demesne of Otford (less Shoreham, which by now was considered separate) was let to one Richard Clerk, clerk, for eight years at £15 6s. 8d. p.a., on condition that the archbishop should maintain the buildings belonging to the husbandry unless the farmer himself, his servants or animals were responsible for the damage.<sup>4</sup> Major leases like this were made not by court roll but by private indenture between the parties. Henceforward, the Otford demesnes, less the small pieces previously leased off, were held by a single farmer, who took over the whole stock, including the demense sheep, which was priced at £20. The farmer held the outer court of the manor, with buildings including the "Baileychamber". The palace remained to the archbishop, to be used and coveted by the Tudors.<sup>5</sup>

The hidden strength of the early farmers, whose story does not concern us here, is suggested as well by place-names as in any other way. There is a Multon meadow in the demesne survey of 1515. Multons were again farming the demesne in 1536, and George Multon,<sup>6</sup> the father-in-law of Lambarde, was by then styled "gentleman". As for the other first farmers, the one-inch O.S. map perpetuates two of their names in Timberden Bottom and Sepham Farm. The latter is a patronymic traceable back to the thirteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *L.R.*, 863.

<sup>2</sup> *L.R.*, 865.

<sup>3</sup> *L.R.*, 868.

<sup>4</sup> P.R.O. Ministers' Accounts (S.C.6), 1129/1.

<sup>5</sup> See a paper by the present writer in *English Historical Review*, lxxvii, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Westminster Abbey Muniments*, no. 14303; cf. *Prerog. Court of Canterbury*, Will Register "Thower" quire 20 (will of Robert Multon of Otford, 1532).