

Harvest Customs and Labourers' Perquisites in Southern England, 1150-1350: the corn harvest¹

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I

IN manorial documents of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries a recurrent theme is the speedy and efficient use of the customary labour force on the demesne at harvest. August and September were months when demands on the customary tenants were greater than in any others. These coincided with the counter-pressure of the tenants' own harvest. Perhaps in order to lessen any clash of interests, and to ensure work of a satisfactory standard, a widespread and well-regulated system of labourers' perquisites existed. The tenants fulfilled their obligations and took their rewards; so much is common knowledge.² While perquisites were not confined to harvest alone, it was then that a tenant probably stood to benefit most from them, and it is in their description of harvest allowances that the sources elaborate most. Despite much work on harvesting and harvest customs, perquisites have attracted little attention. When we examine them more closely two aspects stand out. First, there is the customary relationship between lord and tenant in which the provision of certain sorts of carefully defined labour was rewarded with an equally well defined structure of payments in kind. Secondly, there is the measurement of the perquisite, or the way in which it was allocated. Although little is known about measurement in rural England six or seven centuries ago, customals contain much information on a variety of measures. Maitland once suggested that a man's limbs were the things with which

Nature had endowed him to measure distance and quantity.³ In fact, the villagers of the thirteenth century relied on the size of their limbs and on the strength in their bodies to measure many of the perquisites of harvest. These two themes (the customary relationship and the measures) are largely inseparable, for the size of the perquisite depended upon local custom. A fair amount of fragmentary detail is known about both, but it is only when we study manorial customs as widely as possible that their unity and ubiquity become clear. This article seeks to describe harvest perquisites throughout southern England, and it is based primarily on the customals of the great ecclesiastical estates in East Anglia, the west Midlands, the south-east, the south, and the West Country. Recourse is made wherever possible to manorial account rolls to show how customs worked out in practice. Throughout, the discussion is limited to those men and women, usually of servile status, who owed labour services on the demesne as a part of their rent.

II

By the thirteenth century the custom of rewarding harvest labour with sheaves of corn was both old and widespread.⁴ Sheaves were often given for the range of tasks on the demesne: reaping, binding, stooking, carting, and stacking. Reaping, for which we have most information, was commonly rewarded with one sheaf for each half-acre, a half-acre representing the day's labour. However, there were some manors where tenants took three sheaves a half-

¹ I am very grateful to Dr P. D. A. Harvey for reading this article in draft and for making many suggestions, without committing him in any way to the views expressed.

² R. V. Lennard discusses perquisites in so far as they affected harvest yields in 'Statistics of corn yields in medieval England: some additional critical questions', *Economic History*, III, 12, 1937, pp. 325-49.

³ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, Cambridge, 1897, p. 428.

⁴ The *cotsetle* of the eleventh-century *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum* received a sheaf for reaping an acre of oats a day: F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, Halle, 1903, pp. 445-6.

acre,⁵ and others where the customary reward was as many as four sheaves a half-acre.⁶ On many manors, labourers, including reapers, were given the normal harvest sheaf (in contrast to those sheaves which, as perquisites, were of a different size), though customals often specified which sheaf was the perquisite.⁷ But there were manors where reapers were given special sheaves which differed in size from harvest sheaves. Statements which contrast the size of the two sheaves are rare; those that occur suggest that the reaper's sheaf was often larger than the harvest sheaf.⁸ Where the reaper's sheaf was specially measured, there were two main ways in which this was done. First, there are occasional statements about the precise length of the binding (*corrigia*): the sheaf *per corrigiam* is quite common, the definition of the *corrigia* is rarer. Secondly, some perquisites were bound with the longest stem available. These two ways may be contrasted with the way in which sheaves of stubble were measured. This was often more haphazard, such as the amount a man could encircle in an arm.⁹

The human body was used to provide standard lengths for the customary binding. On a number of manors in Somerset the circumference of the reeve's head, or that of the hayward, was the basis. At Stogursey and Rodway, in 1301, the reaper's perquisite was tied in a binding which stretched twice round the hayward's head.¹⁰ This measure was also used at Dundon

(1287) and North Curry (1314).¹¹ A commoner measure was the distance from the sole of the foot to the knee. This was used in manors in Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, and Oxfordshire.¹² At Frampton-on-Severn (Glos., 1301), it appears that this binding was the garter around a man's leg.¹³ A variation on this custom was observed at Inkpen (Berks.) where the binding was measured in the following way: the hayward took a length of binding, placed his foot in the middle, and knotted together the two ends above his knee, leaving room to place his hand quite easily between the binding and his knee; the loop so formed then became the circumference of the sheaf. The customal also laid down that the hayward (or whoever was used as a standard) was to be of medium height, "neque nimis longus neque nimis curtus."¹⁴

In addition to lengths which, in their origin, appear to have allowed for variations, there are examples of bindings of an exact length. At Woolstone (Berks., 1221), for example, the customal recorded a length of 52 inches, and that of Hurstbourne Priors (Hants., c. 1270-80), one of 4½ feet.¹⁵ There are two examples from manors of Battle Abbey, both 3¾ feet long.¹⁶ An extremely interesting point of detail occurs in the Hundred Roll entry for Haseley (Oxon.)

¹¹ H. C. Maxwell-Lyte, ed., *Two registers formerly belonging to the family of Beauchamp of Hatch*, Somerset Rec. Soc., xxxv, 1920, p. 36; *Calendar of the manuscripts of the dean and chapter of Wells*, Hist. MSS. Comm., 1907-14, I, p. 334.

¹² Crawley (Hants., c. 1280): N. S. B. & E. C. Gras, *The economic and social history of an English Village*, Harvard Economic Studies, xxxiv, Cambridge, Mass., 1930, p. 235; Brightwell (Berks.): B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 58v; Merton and Burbage (Wilts, 1340): Hampshire Record Office: Mottisfont Priory register, 13M63/3, fos. 75r, 90r; Mongewell (Oxon., 1279): *R.H.*, II, p. 774.

¹³ "... per ligamen quod possit circuire tibiam [inter] plantam pedis et genu..." (a binding which goes around the leg from the sole of the foot to the knee): P.R.O., E 142/8, m. 6.

¹⁴ B.M., Loans MS. 29/55, fo. 24v.

¹⁵ K. A. Hanna, ed., *An edition with introduction of the Winchester Cathedral customal*, M.A. thesis, Univ. of London, 1954, II, p. 637; I, p. 298 (hereafter cited as *W.C.C.*). I am grateful to Mrs Hanna for permission to use her thesis.

¹⁶ Brightwalton (Berks.) and Bromham (Wilts.): S. R. Scargill-Bird, ed., *Customals of Battle Abbey*, Camden Soc., n.s., xli, 1887, pp. 61, 78-9.

⁵ As at Osmington (Dorset, 1317): B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fo. 10r. At Ilmer (Bucks., 1337) the rate was three sheaves a day: P.R.O., SC 11/79.

⁶ As at Knowle and Holfield (Dorset, 1317): B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fos. 16v, 21r. At Fordington (Dorset, 1322) the tenant of a *ferlynglond* received eight sheaves for each acre reaped: P.R.O., E 142/23, m. 5.

⁷ E.g., the tenth sheaf cut, or the last sheaf carted.

⁸ At East Winterslow (Wilts., 1327) the perquisite was "one great sheaf": *Abstracts of the inquisitions post mortem relating to Wiltshire from the reign of king Edward III*, I, Wilts. Arch. & Nat. Hist. Soc., 1909, p. 3. At Haseley (Oxon., 1279) the cottars were given "one great sheaf, such as they could bind in one binding"; here the binding measured 2½ feet, and the sheaf so bound stands in implied contrast to the harvest sheaf: W. Illingworth, ed., *Rotuli Hundredorum*, Record Comm., 1812-18, II, p. 772 (hereafter cited as *R.H.*).

⁹ See Appendix.

¹⁰ P.R.O., E 142/8, mm. 7, 9.

where the length of the customary binding was said to measure $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet and one barley corn. This provides an obvious link with linear measure in general, for three barley corns were held to make an inch. Presumably the corn was included to ensure that the binding really did measure $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet.¹⁷

As we have seen, one method of measuring the sheaf on the bishop of Winchester's manor of Crawley (Hants.) used the band stretching from foot to knee. The same custumal provided an alternative. The tenant could bind his sheaf with the longest stalk growing on the land over which he reaped: "debet eligere ligamen suum de blado longiori in dicta terra excepto blado de tuff" ad dictam garbam ligandam aut recipiet garbam per corrigeam. . .¹⁸ At first sight, the reference to "blado de tuff" seems obscure, but a comparison of the Crawley custumal with others helps establish the meaning of the phrase. On another of the bishop's manors, Knoyle (Wilts.), the sheaf was bound with a sheaf cut from the same corn reaped; at Tidenham (Glos., 1306) the sheaf was tied in a stalk of the corn reaped, yet cut near the ground; at Godalming (Surrey) the binding was cut as near the ground as possible; and at Borley (Essex, 1308) the *tofshchef* was tied in a binding which was "... cut, not dragged from the ground by its roots."¹⁹ The "blado de tuff" at Crawley and the *tofshchef* at Borley were probably identical. While the corn was reaped in the usual way, high on the stem, the corn stalk used as a binding for the perquisite was cut right down at ground level.²⁰

¹⁷ R.H., II, p. 773; P. Grierson, *English linear measures*, Reading, 1972, p. 14.

¹⁸ Gras, *op. cit.*, p. 235; above, n. 12.

¹⁹ B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 67v; *Abstracts of the inquisitiones post mortem for Gloucestershire*, v, 1302-58, Index Library, British Rec. Soc., XL, 1910, p. 69; P. Woods, 'The parsonage or rectory manor of Godalming and a fourteenth-century custumal thereof', *Surrey Arch. Coll.*, XXII, 1909, p. 133; W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce in the Early and Middle Ages*, 4th edn, 1905, p. 579; the etymology of *tof* is obscure: it does not appear to be noticed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or the *English Dialect Dictionary*.

²⁰ This appears to have been a common practice in the Middle Ages: I have traced examples in at least fifteen counties in southern England. Its advantages are discussed by F. G. Payne, 'The retention of simple agricultural techniques', *Gwerin*, II, no. 3, 1959, pp. 129-30.

The size of the perquisite was then determined by the length of the *one* stalk.

General statements of custom are more common in custumals than the precise definitions of the *corrigia*. For example, the Glastonbury Abbey surveys c. 1235-52 describe perquisites in considerable detail yet never state the length of the customary binding.²¹ However, many custumals contain entries suggesting that a customary binding was used. Typical entries are those which mention simply "a binding," the "fair sheaf," the "measured sheaf," the "standard sheaf," the "lawful sheaf," and the "sheaf of the measure of the manor."²²

III

Apart from the binding used, perquisites were often distinguished by their name. We have already noted the *tofshchef* at Borley. The *copschef* occurs at Knoyle (Wilts.) where at harvest the tenant had a choice: he could take the thirteenth sheaf from each acre of corn he reaped or he could take one "copsef per anti-

²¹ C. J. Elton, ed., *Rentalia et custumaria . . . monasterii beate Marie Glastonie*, Somerset Rec. Soc., v, 1891 (hereafter cited as *Rentalia*).

²² Sources in order of quotation: Welbourne (Lincs., 1288): P.R.O., C 133/51/9, m. 8; Steeple Ashton (Wilts., 1341): P.R.O., SC 11/699, m. 6, and the estates of the bishop of Worcester in 1299: M. Hollings, ed., *The Red Book of Worcester*, Worcester Hist. Soc., 1934-50, I, p. 95, III, p. 302, IV, p. 374; Melksham (Wilts., 1296): P.R.O., SC 11/711, and Wantage (Berks.) and Swyncombe (Oxon.): M. Chibnall, ed., *Select documents of the English lands of the abbey of Bec*, Camden Soc., 3rd ser., LXXIII, 1951, pp. 50, 88 (hereafter cited as *S.D.B.*); Charlton and Netherhampton (Worcs., c. 1240): W. H. Hale, ed., *Registrum . . . Prioratus beate Marie Wigorniensis*, Camden Soc., xci, 1865, pp. 72a-b, Odiham (Hants., later thirteenth century): P.R.O., SC 11/589; at Lavant (Sussex) a tenant had been accustomed to take a sheaf bound in "a strap of assize," but the service and thus the perquisite had lapsed by the time the custumal was compiled, c. 1284: B. C. Redwood and A. E. Wilson (eds.), *Custumals of the Sussex manors of the archbishop of Canterbury*, Sussex Rec. Soc., LVII, 1958, p. 20; Ashbury (Berks.): S. R. Wigram, ed., *The cartulary of the monastery of St Frideswide at Oxford*, II, Oxford Hist. Soc., xxxi, 1896, p. 357 (the editor has placed this custumal under "Hungerford," but it probably refers to Ashbury: the heading reads "in manerio de E."—pp. 356, 317, n. 1); Lambourne (Essex, 1283): St Paul's Cathedral Library: WD 16, *Liber* 1, fo. 42v: I am grateful to Mr A. R. B. Fuller, the cathedral librarian, for access to this MS.

quam mensuram" for each half-acre.²³ The same choice confronted the virgater at Kingston Deverill (Wilts.), a manor of Netley Abbey. For each half-acre reaped he could take two *copsiue* or the tenth sheaf.²⁴ The choice had once existed at Lacock (Wilts.) but had been abandoned by about 1280 when the new custumal was compiled.²⁵ It appears from these examples that the *copschef* was smaller than the harvest sheaf, two being equivalent to one harvest sheaf. If so, this suggests it was measured in a special way. The etymology of *copschef* is not at all clear, but it possibly means "head-sheaf" or "tall sheaf."²⁶ The examples of the *tofschef* discussed above seem to refer quite clearly to a long binding rather than a long sheaf, so perhaps the *copschef* was a different sheaf again, or perhaps it just meant that the binding used was "tall." Our limited evidence has suggested that some perquisites were larger than the harvest sheaf, but the *copschef* (and perhaps the *tofschef*) appears to have been smaller in circumference. The *meneschef* is a second sheaf named in the Borley custumal. It was a sheaf given for carting the stooks from the fields, and was recorded as a perquisite for the same service at Isleham Magna (Cambs., 1279) and at Waltham (Hants.). As a "middling" sheaf, the *meneschef* was not measured specially but was taken from among those on the cart.²⁷ The *reveschef* occurs in custumals mainly from the West Country.²⁸ At Arne (Dorset, c. 1175-80) when the customary tenants helped cart the harvest home, they received (presumably individually) four *garbe ad reusief* on each day they so worked.²⁹ At Sturminster Newton (Dorset) the cowherd received one *revesef* for each half-acre he cut when pressed into reaping; and the ploughman at

Overton (Wilts.) was given one *reyuesschef* for the same service.³⁰ Other examples of named sheaves include the *workcef*, provided for a day's reaping at Bladon (Oxon., 1279), and the *wensief* ("wain-sheaf") which occurs in two Glastonbury custumals, Sturminster Newton (Dorset) and Longbridge Deverill (Wilts.).³¹ This was a perquisite for carting sheaves, and, like the *meneschef*, was a normal harvest sheaf. At Forncett (Norfolk) by 1273 the *custumarii* were allocated 4 bushels of barley "pro eorum reposesof"; here the reapers' perquisites had been commuted in part for a lump gift.³²

IV

The distinction between the harvest sheaf and the perquisite was certainly an old one,³³ and it appears to have been observed in many different parts of the country. However, once reaping and binding had taken place, it was only natural that the rewards for binding, stooking, carting, and stacking were taken from among the harvest sheaves.³⁴ On many manors, this custom extended to reaping too, the reapers simply taking a sheaf "from the row" (*de renco*). In the Glastonbury Abbey surveys this phrase was used to contrast the harvest sheaf with the sheaf *per corrigiam*.³⁵ Examples of the sheaf *de renco* occur in several custumals from the south and west of England.³⁶ It was, of course, a "middling" sheaf, its allocation supervised by

²³ *Rentalia*, p. 93; *W.C.C.*, II, p. 467.

²⁴ *R.H.*, II, p. 851; *Rentalia*, pp. 88, 135.

²⁵ F. G. Davenport, *The economic development of a Norfolk manor, 1086-1565*, 1906, appendix VIII, p. xxxvii.

²⁶ On some manors of Shaftesbury Abbey in the later twelfth century gifts of sheaves "ad ligamentum" were contrasted with sheaves "sine ligamento." The former were probably in a customary binding, the latter were probably ordinary harvest sheaves: B.M., Harley MS. 61, fos. 57v, 60r, 61v-62r, 65r.

²⁷ There were exceptions to this general rule. At Wrantage (Somerset, c. 1314), a manor of Wells Cathedral, a stacker received a sheaf "per corrigiam": Somerset R.O.: DD/CC/131911A/4/10.

²⁸ *Rentalia*, pp. 59-61, 156, 160-3.

²⁹ As at Sixpenny Handley (Dorset, c. 1175-80): B.M., Harley MS. 61, fo. 57v; Chilbolton (Hants.), Ham and Little Hinton (Wilts.): *W.C.C.*, I, pp. 224, 348, II, pp. 614-15; Swainston (I.O.W., 1354): B.M., Add. MS. 6166, fo. 120v; and Benham (Berks., 1341): P.R.O., SC 11/46.

²³ B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 66v.

²⁴ Wiltshire Record Office: 492/30.

²⁵ W. G. Clark-Maxwell, 'The customs of four manors of the abbey of Lacock', *Wilts. Arch. & Nat. Hist. Mag.*, XXXII, 1902, p. 332.

²⁶ *English Dialect Dictionary*, sv "cop-".

²⁷ Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 579; *R.H.*, II, p. 505; B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 28v.

²⁸ Perhaps "reeve-sheaf": it may have taken its name from the way in which the reeve sometimes acted as an independent arbitrator of sheaf-size.

²⁹ B.M., Harley MS. 61, fo. 61r.

one of the manorial officers.³⁷ At Bitterne (Hants.), however, the tenant who reaped half an acre a day took the best sheaf he could from that half-acre.³⁸

On other manors the reaper still took his sheaf *de renco*, but each man's allocation was made in advance: he took the tenth sheaf he cut, or any other specified. In fact, there are examples of the tenth, thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, twentieth, and fiftieth.³⁹ This custom was well developed on two Hampshire manors of the abbey of Bec. At Monxton the virgater received the seventeenth, eighteenth, or last sheaf he reaped each day, while at Quarley he took the seventeenth sheaf, save on Tuesdays and Thursdays when he took nothing.⁴⁰ At Stockton (Wilts., c. 1250) a cottar could take the sixteenth sheaf for reaping half an acre of wheat, and the fourteenth sheaf for half an acre of oats.⁴¹ These examples suggest a regional custom centred in the south and west, but it is possible that it was much more widely spread. Certainly, it was found in Kent where tithe disputes show that the custom of reaping for the tenth sheaf was known.⁴² Reaping for the

³⁷ At Knowle (Dorset, 1317) the reaper's sheaf was a *garba mediocris de renco*: B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fo. 16v; at Whitchurch (Hants.) the reaper received *una garba mediocris per liberacionem servientis*: B.M., Harley MS. 1616, fo. 32v.

³⁸ B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 28v.

³⁹ Tenth: Alciston (Sussex, c. 1284): *Customals of Battle Abbey*, p. 28; Kingston Deverill (Wilts.): Wilts. R.O.: 492/30; at Knowle (Dorset, 1317) the tenant who collected up sheaves took the tenth out of 60: B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fo. 16v; thirteenth: Knoyle (Wilts.): B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 66v; Chippenham (Wilts., 1282): P.R.O., SC 12/16/52; fourteenth: Stockton (Wilts., c. 1250): *W.C.C.*, II, p. 469; fifteenth: Winterbourne Stickland (Dorset, 1334): B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fo. 37r; sixteenth: see Stockton above; seventeenth: Monxton, Quarley (Hants.): *S.D.B.*, pp. 46, 58-9; eighteenth: Monxton (Hants.), Hungerford (Berks.), Brixton Deverill (Wilts.): *ibid.*, pp. 46, 67-9; Hinton (Wilts., 1341): P.R.O., SC 11/699, m. 3; Wishford (Wilts., 1315): C. R. Straton, ed., *Survey of the lands of William first earl of Pembroke*, Roxburghe Club, 1909, II, p. 548; twentieth: Marlborough and Tilshead (Wilts.): *Abstracts of the inquisitions . . . relating to Wiltshire . . . Henry III*, III, 1903, p. 162, vi, 1906, p. 359; fiftieth: Milburne (Dorset): *S.D.B.*, p. 90.

⁴⁰ See n. 39. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² R. Graham, ed., *Registrum Roberti Winchelsey*, I, Canterbury & York Soc., LI, 1952, pp. 358-9; C. E.

seventeenth and the twentieth sheaf was also practised in Oxfordshire in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. At Waterperry in the 1330's and 1340's the harvest was regularly reaped "ad xx garbam," while at Forest Hill, in Edward I's reign, the harvest was reaped "pro xvij garba."⁴³ Where a custom like this was established there is little reason why we should expect to find it recorded on account rolls. Thus it may have been widespread while remaining largely hidden from view. A search through other account rolls may yield some further examples.⁴⁴

V

Alongside the many examples of attempts to define the size of the perquisite and the conditions under which it was taken, there is a great deal of less detailed information. The more cryptic entries can usually be interpreted in the light of those examples discussed already. Thus, where reapers simply took a sheaf from those they had cut, this was obviously a sheaf *de renco*.⁴⁵ With binding, stooking, carting, and stacking, tenants often received one of the last sheaves bound, one of the last stooked, one from the last cartload of the day, or one of the last stacked.⁴⁶ These were middling sheaves,

Woodruff, 'Some early visitation rolls preserved at Canterbury', *Arch. Cant.*, xxxii, 1917, p. 153.

⁴³ Bodl. Lib.: MSS. Ch. Ch. c. 27, Osney rolls 48-59; c. 26, Osney rolls 20, 22.

⁴⁴ At Westcot (Bucks.) in 1299 the reeve's explanation for the small amount paid out in reaping was "non plus hoc anno quia residuum mescebat ad garbas": P.R.O., SC 6/763/16; at Wroughton (Wilts.) in 1312 the twentieth sheaf took the place of cash when the residue of corn was reaped after the *magna precaria*: ". . . residuum bladi metebatur pro xx garba ad tascham": Winchester Cathedral Library: box VI, roll K, m. 3. I am grateful to Canon F. Busby, the hon. archivist, for access to the Cathedral's MSS.

⁴⁵ As at Brompton (Somerset, 1343): ". . . he shall have a sheaf from among those reaped": P.R.O., SC 11/564.

⁴⁶ Binding: Buckland and Abload (Glos., c. 1265): W. H. Hart, ed., *Historia et cartularium monasterii sancti Petri Gloucestris*, Rolls Ser., 1863-7, III, pp. 64, 167; stooking: Cakeham and Sidlesham (Sussex): W. D. Peckham, ed., *Thirteen customals of the Sussex manors of the bishop of Chichester*, Sussex Rec. Soc., xxxi, 1925, pp. 7, 30; carting: Ferring (Sussex): *ibid.*, p. 72; stacking: Bishops Cleeve (Worcs., 1299): *Red Book of Worcester*, IV, p. 336; Hutton (Essex): *Customals of Battle Abbey*, p. 95.

"neither the largest nor the smallest."⁴⁷ Occasionally, an extra ray of light is shed on the way things worked. At Wishford Parva (Wilts., 1315), for example, the customary tenants carted sheaves all day if required and took one sheaf each, or, at the least, one sheaf for every three cartloads they took from the fields.⁴⁸

There were, as we might imagine, exceptions to these general rules. At Cherhill (Wilts., 1265) when a virgater carted sheaves, he and a fellow tenant joined forces, and together they took each day "four sheaves of corn selected and of the best." At Ringstead (Norfolk, c. 1240) a tenant who carted sheaves received "the best sheaf he could take from the last cartload," a privilege shared by the tenants at Winterbourne Monkton (Wilts.), Sturminster Newton (Dorset), Kingston Deverill (Wilts.), and Woolstone (Berks.).⁴⁹ These examples stand in contrast to those where the carter's perquisite was the *meneschef*. Tenants could obviously take an unfair advantage of their lord's generosity. This seems to have been the case at Povington (Dorset), a manor of the abbey of Bec. When the custumal was compiled around the middle of the thirteenth century the scribe saw fit to explain why those who carted sheaves in autumn had been disciplined over the sheaves they took as perquisites. The men, it was claimed, had taken advantage of the laxity of successive bailiffs in taking at the end of the day's work four sheaves each, the largest they could bind. This practice was stopped, and the lord's action justified by a scriptural quotation. Henceforth the carters were limited to one normal sheaf each. Fairness, as interpreted by the lord of the manor, triumphed over the self-interest of the tenants, but the episode is an interesting example of the elaborate lengths to which the lord felt obliged to go in order to change a local custom.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ As at Tidenham (Glos., 1306): *Abstracts of the inquisitiones* . . . Gloucestershire, v, p. 69, and Osmington (Dorset, 1317): B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fo. 10r.

⁴⁸ *Survey of the lands of . . . earl of Pembroke*, II, p. 548.

⁴⁹ *Abstracts of the inquisitiones . . . relating to Wiltshire . . . Henry III*, I, p. 43; W. H. Hart and P. A. Lyons, eds., *Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia*, Rolls Ser., 1884-93, I, p. 409; *Rentalia*, pp. 61, 82; Wilts. R.O.: 492/30.

⁵⁰ *S.D.B.*, p. 62.

Elsewhere, to ensure that the lord was not cheated, the reeve, hayward, or bailiff was often on hand to distribute the perquisites. At Holworth and Osmington (Dorset, 1317) the reapers received three sheaves from the hands of the bailiff (*serviens*) for each half-acre they cut. Similar restraints operated on some of the manors of St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, at Monxton (Hants.), and at Shrivenham (Berks.).⁵¹ At Thursford (Norfolk), a manor of Binham Priory, two carters received between them two sheaves "of any sort of corn which the bailiff wished to give them." The reeve at Cutsdean (Worcs., c. 1240) exercised similar discretion, for the binder took "such a sheaf as the reeve wished to give him."⁵²

VI

Some sources suggest that the provision of sheaves was one phase in the development of an older tradition. The custumal of St Swithun's Priory is particularly illuminating here. At Ham, near Hungerford (Wilts.), the virgater who carted sheaves received his lunch or two sheaves in the evening; at Patney (Wilts.) the same gifts were offered; while at Wroughton (Wilts.) the cottar who reaped half an acre a day was given one sheaf "for a meal."⁵³ Such arrangements were by no means confined to the one estate or to the one county. At Tilshead (Wilts.), for example, the *custumarii* took one sheaf of corn each in place of their supper on those days they carted. At Eastbourne (Sussex, 1253) twelve cottars worked when summoned; their lord supplied food, except in autumn when he gave them sheaves only. Smallholders at Sandon (Herts., 1297) were given one sheaf each for their food every Wednesday throughout harvest. At Hindringham (Norfolk) the tenant who stacked sheaves received one meal "ad primam" from the lord, provided his own

⁵¹ B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fos. 10r, 15v; *W.C.C.*, II, pp. 445, 487, 566; *S.D.B.*, p. 46; C. D. Ross, ed., *The cartulary of Cirencester Abbey, Gloucestershire*, 1964, II, p. 435. Their participation supplied an element of independent, disinterested judgement, just as the use of the reeve's head provided an independent measure.

⁵² B.M., Cotton Claudius D. XIII, fo. 80r; *Registrum . . . Wigorniensis*, p. 103b.

⁵³ *W.C.C.*, I, p. 342, II, pp. 370, 480.

lunch, and received a sheaf in the evening. Another tenant, who carted three times in autumn, was allowed, presumably on each occasion, bread and cheese or a sheaf.⁵⁴ Perhaps the provision of sheaves had developed from an earlier and more general distribution of food, of which the three or four autumn *precarie* "ad cibum domini" were survivors. The constant provision of food would have proved expensive to maintain and cumbersome to administer. The gift of a sheaf was a simple way of avoiding the expense while maintaining the goodwill of the tenant. If the provision of sheaves originated, at least in part, in this way, it represented a stage in the changing nature of harvest "payments." We have seen how at Forncett towards the last quarter of the thirteenth century the distribution of sheaves had been superseded by a lump gift of grain to the customary tenants.⁵⁵ A few other examples of the continuing process can be traced in custumals, and many account rolls show harvesting "ad tascham," suggesting the final withdrawal of customary labour and its rewards. On some manors changes occurred quite early on. By about 1240 the tenants of the abbey of Ramsey at Ringstead (Norfolk) were receiving a lump sum of 12d. "for the sheaves they used to receive."⁵⁶ The difficulty which faced the manorial lord and his auditors was that the cost of the perquisites, when assessed in terms of cash, could outstrip the value set on the work. When this was discovered action was taken, as at Odiham (Hants., later thirteenth century). Walter le Bole, a semi-virgater, had received one sheaf "de assisa" for each half-acre he reaped, but the custumal noted that the service had lapsed because the perquisite had proved more valuable than the work.⁵⁷ Another more restricted example comes from the manors of Milton Abbey in Dorset. At Osmington various manorial labourers (*operarii*) were given 6d. "for the sheaves they were accustomed to receive in autumn," provided that the

harvest had been reaped by customary labour. At Lyscombe the ploughmen and the shepherd each received 12d., while at Woolland each ploughman was given 7d. for their sheaves.⁵⁸

VII

These *operarii* on the Milton Abbey estates were not full-time *famuli* but tenants whose conditions of tenure included service as manorial workers when required. It was common on a number of manors in Dorset for people in this position to receive sheaves at harvest, perhaps in recognition of their service throughout the year rather than for any one harvest task, perhaps because their position as *operarii* excluded them from boonwork, thus (but for this concession) depriving them of the perquisite. The early twelfth-century surveys of Melbury Abbas and Compton Abbas recorded gifts of sheaves to the swincherd "when the tenants reap," while at Sixpenny Handley (c. 1175-80) each ploughman received a sheaf when reaping took place, and a further two sheaves when the harvest was carted home.⁵⁹ In the same way the cowherd and swincherd at Sturminster Newton received a sheaf each when the main body of tenants reaped.⁶⁰ At Bleadon (Somerset) the shepherd received a generous perquisite of barley sheaves for his work with the demesne flock: "a load of barley sheaves, as large as he can bind together, lift, and carry away. . ."⁶¹ Elsewhere, special provision was made for those whose duties involved a long stint at harvest. At Bromham (Wilts.), for example, the hayward and shepherd each received sixty sheaves "of middling corn" for watching over the demesne at harvest, a service which must have meant a lot of night work.⁶²

Harvest was an especially busy time for the reeve, yet he was compensated in part by the

⁵⁴ *Abstracts of the inquisitions . . . relating to Wiltshire . . . Henry III*, xi, p. 360; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, i, p. 64 (no. 188); St Paul's Cathedral Library: WD 16, *Liber 1*, fo. 141r; B.M., Stowe MS. 936, fos. 2v, 7r.

⁵⁵ See n. 32. ⁵⁶ *Cartularium . . . Rameseia*, i, p. 411.

⁵⁷ P.R.O., SC 11/589.

⁵⁸ B.M., Add. MS. 40886, fos. 10v-11r, 27v, 29r.

⁵⁹ B.M., Harley MS. 61, fos. 48v, 49v, 57v.

⁶⁰ *Rentalia*, pp. 93-5.

⁶¹ E. Smirke, 'Notice of the custumal of Bleadon and of the agricultural tenures of the thirteenth century', *Memoirs . . . communicated to the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1851, p. 207.

⁶² *Custumals of Battle Abbey*, pp. 81-2.

free board he usually received at the lord's table.⁶³ On one or two manors we find that an extra allowance was made to the reeve, namely the ears of corn which dropped from the sheaves into the carts when carting was in progress. These odd sweepings were known as *brut-corn* or *brot-corn*. The perquisite was recorded in the custumals of Laughton (Sussex) and Odiham (Hants.). A variation of this custom was recorded at Meonstoke (Hants., c. 1272), where, at the third autumn *precarie*, the reapers were given bread "made from the corn which falls from the sheaf." Elsewhere, things did not always fall out so favourably. At Cuxham (Oxon.) the *brot-corn* was accounted for by the reeve, and the amount swept up entered on the account roll.⁶⁴

Ultimate responsibility for the honesty of the customary work-force at harvest seems to have lain with the hayward or beadle. On their shoulders fell the burden of ensuring that any loss or damage to the crops was made good. They were to guard against pilfering, and against the careless handling of sheaves. To help them meet this obligation the lord of the manor sometimes gave them a small piece of land sown with demesne seed, from which they made good any defects in the harvest.⁶⁵ In turn the beadle and hayward would have had power to extract satisfactory work from the reapers and other labourers. In this way they were helped, firstly, by the obligation placed on many freeholders and *custumarii* alike to supervise their *familia* or the *custumarii* in general at the *precarie*; and, secondly, by the *ripereve*, a man hired or elected from among the tenants themselves for

the duration of the harvest.⁶⁶ The perquisite could always be withheld if there was any slackness.⁶⁷

VIII

As we have seen, account rolls can provide the detail which shows how some of the customs were applied. On occasion they provide information which went unrecorded in the extent or custumal, or which fills out our knowledge where no custumal now survives. At Sevenhampton (Wilts.), for instance, the short extent made no mention of harvest perquisites, yet a contemporary account roll (1272-3) shows that sheaves were given for reaping, one per half-acre, provided that the work was extra to the normal week-work and the autumn *precarie*.⁶⁸ This was probably a principle widely adopted. While it is unlikely that other account rolls will add greatly to the examples discussed above,⁶⁹ the information we have considered is probably enough to suggest that custumals were not just repositories of theory. While customary labour remained important to the demesne economy, it was probably common for tenants to receive sheaves at harvest.⁷⁰ Where account rolls remain silent, other sources suggest this,⁷¹ and accounts themselves often recorded such customary perquisites as the sower's *sedlop*, or the mowers' sheep (*madschep*).⁷² Where these continued, it may not be so unlikely that some of the colourful customs considered here did too.

⁶⁶ At Cuxham the *ripereve* appears to have been sent to the manor by the landlord: Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 145, n. 9.

⁶⁷ As is implied at Overton (Wilts.) where the beadle was to hand over the perquisite "provided the land is reaped satisfactorily": *W.C.C.*, II, pp. 464-5.

⁶⁸ M. W. Farr, ed., *Accounts and surveys of the Wiltshire lands of Adam de Stratton*, Wilts. Arch. & Nat. Hist. Soc., Records Branch, XIV, 1959, p. 48.

⁶⁹ See p. 18.

⁷⁰ Not that customary labour would have accounted for all the harvest; frequently it did not. At Overton (Hants.) in 1232 23s. 2½d. was paid in reaping and binding "to those who had no sheaves": Lord Beveridge, 'Westminster wages in the manorial era', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., VIII, no. 1, 1955, p. 30.

⁷¹ See n. 42, and W. O. Ault, 'Some early village by-laws', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, XLV, 1930, p. 211.

⁷² As at Combe (Hants.), where the *sedlop* is recorded in the account rolls of 1306-8: *S.D.B.*, pp. 151, 164; the *madschep* is described in Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 112, and I hope to discuss it more fully elsewhere.

⁶³ H. S. Bennett, *Life on the English Manor*, Cambridge, 1937, pp. 177-8.

⁶⁴ P.R.O., SC 11/877, m. 3d, SC 11/590; B.M., Loans MS. 29/55, fo. 5v; P. D. A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village*, Oxford, 1965, p. 47; the meaning of *brot-* is given in *ibid.*, p. 47, n. 3.

⁶⁵ As at Sutton (Hants.): P.R.O., DL 43/8/26, m. 1d, and Badbury (Wilts.): *Rentalia*, p. 60. At Hardwick (Cambs., 1251) the beadle received a rood of wheat called *dewerode*, while at Kelshall (Herts., 1251) the beadle received an allowance of grain to make good any losses: B.M., Cotton Claudius C. XI, fos. 138v, 145r. Other references to the responsibility of beadle or hayward at harvest on the Glastonbury Abbey estates may be found in *Rentalia*, pp. 95, 103, 141.

APPENDIX

Sheaves of Stubble

Human attributes other than the size of the head and leg were used to determine the size of the sheaves of stubble and reeds. The measures employed were the picturesque ones which attracted the attention of Coulton and Bennett.⁷³ The number of sheaves of stubble which a customary tenant collected up in the wake of the harvest for one work was either a straightforward number, for example, 25, 50, or 100,⁷⁴ or a certain number of heaps, each containing a certain number of sheaves, usually five, sometimes ten.⁷⁵ The perquisite was one of the sheaves bound up in the course of the day. The colourful descriptions of the Glastonbury Abbey surveys refer not to the perquisite itself but to the size of the

⁷³ G. G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village*, Cambridge, 1925, pp. 46-7; Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

⁷⁴ North Waltham (Hants.): B.M., Egerton MS. 2418, fo. 47r; Bitterne (Hants.): *ibid.*, fo. 28v; Balsham (Cambs.): B.M., Cotton Claudius C. xi, fo. 124r. At Damerham (Wilts.) fifty sheaves of reeds were collected for one work: *Rentalia*, p. 108.

⁷⁵ Sixteen heaps each of 5 sheaves at Swanthorpe and Aldershot (Hants.): F. J. Baigent, ed., *The Cronchal records*, Hants. Rec. Soc., 1891, pp. 87, 98; 15 heaps each of 5 sheaves at Overton (Wilts.): *W.C.C.*, II, pp. 458-9; 10 heaps each of 5 sheaves at Sutton (Hants.): P.R.O., DL 43/8/26; 8 heaps each of 10 sheaves at Bincombe (Dorset, 1376): *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, III, p. 381; 5 heaps each of 10 sheaves at Mapperton (Dorset) and at Meonstoke (Hants.): P.R.O., E 142/23; B.M., Loans MS. 29/55, fo. 5v.

ordinary sheaf of stubble or reeds.⁷⁶ The intention behind them was to ensure that the work was done properly, that the sheaf was the correct size. Thus, the sheaf of stubble had to be a size which would fit snugly under an arm, the hand gripping the edge of the tunic.⁷⁷ A variation involved the hayward or reeve measuring the sheaf: it was stood in the mud, the hayward then gripped his hair below his ear, and the sheaf was passed through the circle so formed. If it left no mud on the hayward's face or arm it was too small, and the tenant was under suspicion of shoddy work. No mention was made of any perquisite.⁷⁸ While it is easy to dismiss this sort of custom as unlikely to have happened, account rolls show that large quantities of stubble were sometimes gathered in, so it may not be too fanciful to suppose that these checks were carried out.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ At Damerham (Wilts.) each sheaf of reeds had to be of a size "which a man can take up in an armful": *Rentalia*, p. 108.

⁷⁷ As at Nettleton (Wilts.), Sturminster Newton (Dorset), Bincombe (Dorset), Swainston (I.o.W.), and Swyncombe (Oxon.): *Rentalia*, pp. 68, 82; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, III, p. 381; B.M., Add. MS. 6166, fo. 121r; *S.D.B.*, p. 88.

⁷⁸ As at Longbridge Deverill (Wilts.) and Inkpen (Berks.): *Rentalia*, p. 135; B.M., Loans MS. 29/55, fos. 24v-25r.

⁷⁹ At Thorney (Sussex), 1295-6: "in MCC garbis stipule colligendis ad xij opera, videlicet C garbas pro j opere": P.R.O., SC 6/1030/30. In 1380, 4,000 sheaves of rush were provided for Thomas Arundel from his Cambridgeshire manors, but probably not all by customary labour: M. Aston, *Thomas Arundel*, Oxford, 1967, p. 223, n. 4.

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