

# City and Countryside in Medieval England\*

By JOHN LANGDON

HOW SOCIETIES in the past achieved economic take-off is an issue of considerable interest – and concern – for historians and academics in general. That it is a complicated matter almost everyone agrees, if for no other reason than that such economic take-off has proved elusive for so many countries today. Nor are these questions limited solely to recent centuries. Examples of economic take-off are by no means restricted to the industrialized world, and could often be very wide-ranging over time and geography.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it can be argued that studying these earlier cases – take-off in embryo, as it were – will provide a clearer picture of the sequence of events leading to new levels of economic development.

Medieval England is, in many ways, an ideal society to study in this regard. Its economic development was still at a relatively early stage, yet, as with the rest of Europe, it was undergoing a fairly remarkable economic transformation up to the end of the thirteenth century in particular.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the documents for this period in England survive in remarkable numbers, not only in the famous example of Domesday Book but also in the wealth of manorial records from the thirteenth century onwards, which are unique for Europe, if not the world, at this time. Nevertheless, although there are certainly some notable achievements,<sup>3</sup> systematic work on this wide-ranging and

diverse body of material has only just begun. Of particular interest is the emergence of large, multi-personnel projects, relatively new for the medieval period, that have begun to apply increasingly stringent approaches to the surviving documentary material.

The book under review here, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply*, comes from just such a collaborative effort. The overall project, called 'Feeding the City', has been jointly organized by Bruce Campbell, from the Queen's University of Belfast, and Derek Keene, from the Centre for Metropolitan History (Institute of Historical Research, University of London). Its primary aim is 'to investigate the impact of London's [medieval] demand for food and other supplies on the agriculture and on the distribution systems of the metropolitan hinterland', the assumption being that the 'growth or otherwise of cities, of the urban systems of which they were a part, and of the agriculture that supported them, were inextricably linked'.<sup>4</sup> An impressive array of data, ranging over the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, has been collected by two full-time researchers, James Galloway and Margaret Murphy. Of primary importance for the project are demesne farming accounts and inquisitions *post mortem* (detailing manorial land and other assets, especially again those of the demesne), both of which sources survive in very large numbers for the period under review. Also, the project incorporates large amounts of data from urban records, particularly those dealing with merchants who were prominent in organizing London's food supply.

A critical issue for such projects are the boundaries that the organizers decide to set for themselves, and here the project requires careful scrutiny. For the purposes of the first part of the project and the volume under review here, one of the crucial decisions was to set the study in a fairly narrow time-frame around the year 1300. This was an eminently sensible choice, since the beginning of the fourteenth century marked a time of peak economic activity and population growth and thus

\* A review article of Bruce M S Campbell, James A Galloway, Derek Keene and Margaret Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region c 1300*, [hereafter *Med Cap*] Historical Geography Research Series, 30, 1993, pp x+330, £14.95. The book is published by the Historical Geography Research Group; orders can be obtained through Professor Charles Withers, Hon Editor HGRG, Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, EH8 9XP, UK, or, in North America, through Professor Aidan McQuillan, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 100 St George Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the economic expansion from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries seems to have been remarkably wide-spread, from Sung China to medieval Europe: for example, Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, 1982, pp 319–29; Peter Spufford, *Money and its Use in Medieval Europe*, 1988, pp 72–263.

<sup>2</sup> Spufford, *Money*, pp 109–263; R H Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000–1500*, 1993, pp 79–151.

<sup>3</sup> For those sources available from, say, 1250–1350, which saw a remarkable rise to maturity of several new sources of documents, there have been a number of important studies of a systematic nature since the Second World War. Some of the more prominent of these, concentrating primarily on individual sources such as manorial accounts and court rolls, inquisitions *post mortem* and the Hundred Rolls, are E A Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History*

*of England in the Thirteenth Century*, 1956; J A Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility*, Toronto, 1964; Jan Titow, *Winchester Yields*, 1972; Zvi Razi, *Life, Marriage and Death in a Medieval Parish*, 1980; David Farmer, 'Prices and wages', in H E Hallam, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: II, 1042–1350*, 1988, pp 715–817.

<sup>4</sup> *Med Cap*, pp iii, 1.

provides a very useful datum line to assess economic activity before and after.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the geographical limits were much more problematic, partly because, in some ways, it involved second-guessing the results. Ideally, in order to provide as much area as possible to test the project's theoretical hypotheses, it might have been advisable to set the area covered as widely as possible, surveying, say, all of south-east England, with its western and northern boundaries stretching from Hampshire through Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire round to Cambridgeshire and Norfolk. Clearly, funding and other concerns led Campbell and Keene to opt for a more limited geographical coverage, focusing on the ten counties (in clockwise order) of Kent, Surrey, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex and Essex, which the authors have designated as the 'London region'. In effect, the emphasis geographically is very much upon the Thames basin, since seven of the counties border on the Thames, while another – Hertfordshire – is linked by a tributary, the Lea. Conversely, Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, not being connected to London through inland waterways, seem peripheral, as indeed the data ultimately suggest.

In addition to this geographical limitation, the project also has a rather single-minded focus on the demesne sector. While this is largely forced by the survival of sources, the almost complete absence of the peasant sector in the data is particularly problematic, especially as that sector farmed something like two-thirds of all cultivated land. For the purposes of the study, the authors have assumed that local practice would dictate that, within a particular region, both sectors would operate more or less in concert in terms of farming methods, and thus the patterns revealed by an analysis of demesne farming could be taken 'as broadly diagnostic of the rural economy as a whole'.<sup>6</sup> While Campbell *et al* clearly recognize the fragility of this assumption,<sup>7</sup> on many occasions, however, the potential differences between sectors gets pushed back too far from the analyses (as I shall discuss below).

Nevertheless, from the start, one can say that *A Medieval Capital* is very impressive. Although it deals with the supplying of grain only to London, it is obviously an important topic and one that certainly deserves a full-length treatment. Of particular note is the sheer mass of reading background that is brought together by the authors. The detailed knowledge of the historiography of grain supply,

not only of medieval England but also from a wide range of other areas and time periods, is readily apparent and provides a solid theoretical grounding for the project. In fact, the 'Feeding the City' team takes a rather narrower theoretical framework than one might expect, in that they have opted to analyse their results predominantly from the perspective of Johann Heinrich von Thünen's early nineteenth-century model, which postulated that pre-industrialized cities created specialized zones of agriculture around themselves that were determined largely by transport costs.<sup>8</sup> Such a tight theoretical focus does, however, tend to enforce methodological discipline, which is a particular strength of this work.

Another strength of the volume is its clarity. The methods used in this work are primarily those of historical geography and are consistently presented in an imaginative and thoughtful way. As a result, the monograph is a mine of interesting and stimulating material. Nor is it at all a timid work. The authors are certainly willing to comment on large and controversial issues, particularly in chapter IV and part of chapter V, when they extrapolate from their calculation of the London region's food-producing capabilities to reassess the overall population of England c 1300 and also (more indirectly) of London itself. Somewhat surprisingly, their conclusions go against the current trend of revising these figures upwards and claim that the population of England overall was unlikely to have been more than 5,000,000 and that of London probably not much more than 80,000.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of analysing London's effect upon the countryside, the core of the book revolves around the detailed assessment of crop data from the demesne accounts of 204 manors. As might be expected, the patterns of crop production and disposal did display great complexity. Broadly speaking, von Thünen's model does seem to apply, especially in regards to production, in that crops like oats that did not bear transport costs well were found to be grown in considerable amounts immediately round London, while costlier grains like wheat, which bore transport costs more easily, were the specialties of demesnes much further away from London. Of particular interest was the concentration of demesnes along the upper Thames, especially from Henley down to London, which produced very notable levels of rye or rye-mixtures (that is, maslin and 'mancorn' – wheat-rye and rye-barley combinations respectively), which were clearly destined for lower-class consumption in the capital.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the proportion of grains actually

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, phase II of the 'Feeding the City' project is concerned with the second half of the fourteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> *Med Cap*, p 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, esp p 176.

<sup>8</sup> P Hall, ed, *Von Thünen's Isolated State*, Oxford, 1966.

<sup>9</sup> *Med Cap*, esp p 172.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp 121–2.

sold showed a marked response to metropolitan influences, although the influence here was less obvious than for production because of the tendency of many of the demesnes in the account sample, especially those from monastic or collegiate estates, to transfer much of their grain directly to estate headquarters, thus bypassing the market.

There were some areas in the region, however, where the influence of London upon agriculture was seemingly either non-existent or distinctly ambiguous. One was the Nene valley in north-eastern Northamptonshire, a high productivity area which seemingly displayed a much stronger connection to the ports of the Wash through the pull of overseas markets.<sup>11</sup> More intriguing is the case of Kent, the most impressive grain-producing area in the London region, particularly in its eastern parts, but one, which despite its close proximity to London, seems not to have been tightly connected with the London market at all. This was most clearly evident in price data, which showed Kent often having grain prices 30 per cent or higher than those prevailing in London.<sup>12</sup> For most of the book the authors are remarkably coy about the reason for this, and only in the conclusion are they forthright in bringing up one of the more likely reasons – overseas demand.<sup>13</sup> If so, then we have the curious situation that overseas demand might have been playing a stronger role in the mobilizing of agricultural production of Kent than the presence of London virtually next door. The authors clearly did not want to get into the implications of this in this particular volume, but it leaves a decided question mark in the study.

One of the more intriguing analyses in the book concerned the influence of transport costs. The functioning of the Thames as an important water transport artery, with principal termini at Henley upstream of London and Faversham downstream, is clear not only in the crop production and disposal distributions, but also in the activities of London cornmongers which were very strongly Thames-oriented.<sup>14</sup> As an expression of this, the 'Feeding the City' team inventively mapped transport costs from London, in the form of isopleth lines of equal transport cost from London (like isometric lines on an ordnance map).<sup>15</sup> Due to the notable cost advantage of water transport, these isopleth lines were elongated along the Thames and around much of the coast of south-east England. Clearly demesnes that had relatively easy access to water transport had a great advantage over those that were relatively

land-locked in being able to compete in the London grain market. Although the exercise did not take into account such complexities as those introduced by peasant farming (discussed below), it is path-breaking as a way of vividly illustrating the impact of medieval transport costs.

There are many other good things in this book. In chapter VIII the authors provide an excellent overview of the different strategies adopted by different types of estates (royal, lay, ecclesiastical) regarding the disposal of grain, whether consumed on the manor, transferred directly to estate headquarters, or sold on the market. Surprisingly it was episcopal estates who sold the greatest proportion (59 per cent) of their grain on the market, followed fairly closely by royal (52 per cent) and lay estates (49 per cent). Conventual and collegiate estates – not so surprisingly – came last by a good margin (26 per cent), opting instead to transfer rather more grain directly to their monastic or collegiate headquarters.<sup>16</sup> Although the contradiction between production for subsistence (emphasizing the need for a stable output) and for the market (tending to encourage the increase in output) introduced a complicating factor for demesne agriculture,<sup>17</sup> geographically some areas clearly produced more for the market than others, most notably northern Kent and along the Thames valley upstream from London with a notable cluster of market-oriented demesnes around Henley.<sup>18</sup> Here the Henley-Faversham axis along the Thames had a notable effect, particularly for very marketable grains like barley and wheat,<sup>19</sup> but it certainly was not enough to shift demesnes overwhelmingly towards market production, and, even within a few miles of London, some estates chose to maintain subsistence-oriented policies on their demesne.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, market activity was strong enough to maintain a vibrant market structure in London itself. Chapter VI, although misleadingly entitled 'Links between Producers and Consumers' (since the links discussed are between producers and cornmongers rather than the actual consumers themselves), nevertheless provides much useful and fascinating information about, among other things, the numbers and status of cornmongers, the average size of their transactions, the seasonal patterns of sales and prices, the distribution and size of granaries, trading regulations, credit arrangements, and market information and intelligence. The end result of this

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p 126.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p 67.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p 167.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p 48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p 155.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Britnell, *Commercialisation*, p 118.

<sup>18</sup> *Med Cap.*, pp 156–70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 163, 168–9.

<sup>20</sup> Particularly the dean and chapter of St Paul's Cathedral in London: *Med Cap.*, p 149.

excellent chapter is to show how much the grain market (at least as practised by cornmongers) resembled that described by F J Fisher for London three centuries later.<sup>21</sup>

But useful as this analysis of demesne agriculture and cornmonger activity is, is it nonetheless an illusion as far as describing the total economy? For one thing, the self-reinforcing nature of the materials and assumptions employed in this study are all too obvious. It is hardly surprising that a combination of demesne accounts and extents from inquisitions *post mortem* (emphasizing large-scale farming), an analysis of cornmongers (emphasizing well-to-do corn dealers largely based around London's dock-side markets) and the geographical limits chosen (effectively the Thames basin) would give an interpretation of the grain trade as being largely water-borne, reasonably large-scale and commercialized. Indeed, it is interesting that the presence of cornmongers in London declined just at about the same time as the decline of direct demesne farming,<sup>22</sup> suggesting perhaps that cornmongers could not maintain the same links with the more locally oriented demesne lessees than they had formerly with estate owners and their administrators. The possibility is, then, that the interconnected nature of the sources used by the 'Feeding the City' team, far from giving a broader view of the metropolitan grain trade, is simply tending to reinforce a more detailed view of a particular sector of that trade.

This problem is especially marked in the authors' transport-cost analysis, which is based on the assumption that transport services were commercialized to the degree that they were seen as 'real' costs across all sectors of society. While this possibly applied to water-borne transport, where the owners of boats may have considered them as pre-eminently cash-raising assets that were not tied to other more subsistence-oriented activities,<sup>23</sup> it is much less clear for land transport. First of all, although the 'Feeding the City' team comments on the frequency of horse-hauled carts on demesnes,<sup>24</sup> these facilities were swamped by those owned by peasants, probably by at least five-to-one and possibly very much

more,<sup>25</sup> and a similar domination also probably occurred between peasant and urban sectors.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, it is likely that these peasant transport resources were usually very underemployed, since they were viewed by peasants as convenient accessories to the peasant holding in general rather than being primarily for the market.<sup>27</sup> Certainly, they were idle for much of the year, and so, for example, could easily satisfy the often very heavy transport demands for purveyance campaigns.<sup>28</sup> In terms of hauling his own grain and other goods to market, however, it is likely a peasant's carting facilities in effect were very nearly costless for most of the year.<sup>29</sup> Such a situation would put them in a very favourable situation market-wise against those for whom transport costs were very real, such as

<sup>25</sup> Lay subsidy returns indicate that the ratio of peasant to demesne horses was generally in the range of five-to-one, especially for the more reliable subsidy data before 1290: J Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation*, 1986, pp 188–9. In terms of vehicles the ratio was even larger. Customary carrying services, for example, generally indicate that peasant holders with a virgate of land (usually around 30 arable acres) were expected to have a cart and horses; indeed, this requirement often extended down to the half-virgate level or below (Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp 221–5). If we assume that every 30 acres of peasant arable, equal to, say, 20 sown acres in any one year under a three-course system, had a cart, then the number of peasant carts per 1000 sown acres would be 50. On the other hand, the average number of demesne cart-horses has been calculated by the 'Feeding the City' group at 8.6 per 1000 sown acres for the London Region (*Med Cap*, p 57). Assuming there were two horses per cart (probably a very conservative estimate, since manorial and purveyance accounts often show at least three as being the more usual complement to a cart), this would give 4.3 demesne carts per 1000 sown acres. Since the amount of peasant versus demesne cultivation was probably at least two-to-one, then the ratio of peasant to demesne carts would be a startling 23.3 (ie,  $(50 \times 2)/4.3$ ).

<sup>26</sup> In towns like Ramsey in 1290, for example, horses were a relatively scarce commodity, where there were only 0.2 of them for every urban taxpayer compared to 1.1 per taxpayer in the surrounding rural communities (demesnes being excluded): Raftis and Hogan, *Early Huntingdonshire Lay Subsidy Rolls*, pp 31–56; Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp 188–9.

<sup>27</sup> For example, as indicated in John Langdon, 'The economics of horses and oxen in medieval England', *Ag Hist Rev*, xxx, 1982, p 40.

<sup>28</sup> *Med Cap*, p 59.

<sup>29</sup> Only during such activities as the harvest, haymaking and ploughing, taking up only a third of the year at most and probably much less (Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, pp 73–4, 251), would a peasant's horses be fully occupied on the holding. For the rest of the year, putting it in an economist's terms, the marginal productivity for labour – of both men and horses – was essentially zero, since extra men and horses would not be needed for any particular task like taking goods to market. Effectively, the most significant extra cost would have been from oats for the horses' exertions beyond simply being idle. But even assuming that the very generous feeding rates for demesne cart-horses was replicated at the peasant level, the oats cost for a three-horse team was still less than 2d per day (as calculated from figures given in Langdon, 'Economics', p 33). In short, peasant transport costs were probably minimal compared to the usual 14d per day per cart spent by the crown during purveyance campaigns, which forms the basis of the 'Feeding the City' calculations: James Masschaele, 'Transport costs in medieval England', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd series, XLVI, 1993, p 269; *Med Cap*, p 193.

<sup>21</sup> *Med Cap*, pp 107–10.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p 82.

<sup>23</sup> This may be a debatable assumption, since it implies a considerable degree of professionalization on the part of boat operators on the inland waterway system. Yet, as with carts, the ownership of such boats seems to have been very dispersed and often connected with other activities than carrying, as at Ramsey, where the 15 boats recorded in the lay subsidy return of 1290 were scattered among 15 owners, many of them fishermen: J A Raftis and M P Hogan, eds, *Early Huntingdonshire Lay Subsidy Rolls*, Toronto, 1976, pp 47–56.

<sup>24</sup> *Med Cap*, pp 56–9.

cornmongers and possibly demesne owners whose carting facilities may have been overstretched.<sup>30</sup> It may even have undercut the advantage of water transport, since peasants might have been willing to go quite long distances to take advantage of favourable price differentials.<sup>31</sup> If so, for the peasant sector, transport-cost isopleths around London would be much more like von Thünen's concentric circles (and with a much more gradual cost gradient) than the Thames-distorted version created by the 'Feeding the City' group. This would also reconcile evidence recorded in 1305 for very heavy cart traffic into London that the authors felt constrained to explain away in their emphasis upon a water-borne supply route for London.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of all of this is that it emphasizes very much the dual-sector nature of London's grain supply. Indeed, away from access to water transport, the peasant sector may have been so competitive that it effectively froze out the demesne sector, hence the fact that in the presentations by the 'Feeding the City' people, the intensity of demesne agriculture, especially for the lower-price grains, seems to fade away relatively quickly away from access to water transport.<sup>33</sup> Where demesne production probably held its greatest advantage over the peasant sector was for the overseas trade, where advantages of high-level contacts, the ability to supply very large amounts of grain, easy access to water transport, and a greater propensity to bear capital investment (such as for storage areas) may have been important. Hence, it may be no accident that the high productivity areas for demesne farming as a whole across England seem to be found along the coast in places like eastern Kent, eastern Norfolk, north-eastern Northamptonshire and Holderness, all with good access to overseas markets. On the other hand, the relative weakness of London to mobilize demesne production in its immediate hinterland to the extent, say, of eastern Kent may simply reflect the

competitive situation that existed between demesne and peasant agriculture around London. This does not diminish the importance of London as a force for mobilizing production, but it does make it critical to realize that it was acting on (at least) two separate sectors *in two distinctive ways*. Indeed, recognition of this point raises the possibility that the impact of London was far greater than that indicated by the 'Feeding the City' people, in that taking the two sectors together, or even the peasant sector alone, the area influenced was much more widely diffused than indicated in this volume. As a result, we are increasingly in danger of focusing too narrowly on a sector which – after all – may be very unrepresentative of medieval English farming as a whole.

To avoid this pitfall, we need to inspect the possibilities of examining peasant agriculture much more effectively and systematically than we have in the past. One of the unfortunate effects of *A Medieval Capital* is that it imparts a certain pessimism about the possibilities of studying medieval peasant agriculture.<sup>34</sup> Yet, there is good reason for optimism. Aside from work that has been done on aspects of peasant agriculture,<sup>35</sup> there are many possibilities for future work.<sup>36</sup> As one example of a particularly ignored source in terms of systematic study, peasant inventories have the potential of transforming our knowledge of medieval peasant farming. Occurring in court records of every type, often as the result of confiscations for felonies or debts, peasant inventories often supply considerably useful data. A few have been able to supply yield data,<sup>37</sup> and many more list sown crop acreages and

<sup>30</sup> As indicated by manorial accounts, which often show demesne carts working year-round without any appreciable break: Langdon, 'Economics', p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> This is most obvious in the fifteenth century, from such sources as the Southampton brokerage books, which show people with carts and pack-horses making impressively long journeys (for example, O Coleman, ed, *The Brokage Book of Southampton*, Southampton Record Series, vols IV, VI, 1960–1, esp pp. xxiii–xxxvii), but earlier purveyance accounts also impart a strong sense that small-scale carriers were well accustomed to travelling long distances, as for the 20 carters who were hired to take provisions for the king's army from Nottingham to Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1301: PRO, E101 580/3, m. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Med Cap*, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps most strikingly seen in the 'Feeding the City' team's analysis of demesnes in the top decile percentage-wise for specialization in the various grains produced on demesnes (pp. 114–15) and in their analysis of cropping intensity as an inverse relationship to the amount of winter-sown crops grown (pp. 129–32).

<sup>34</sup> Only on p. 176 is a note of hope supplied; otherwise the message is a pessimistic one: *Med Cap*, pp. 17, 38.

<sup>35</sup> For example, M. M. Postan, 'Village livestock in the thirteenth century', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd series, XV, 1962, pp. 219–49; Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, esp ch. 4; David Postles, 'Customary carrying services', *Jour Trans Hist*, 3rd ser, V, 1984, pp. 1–15; Kathleen Biddick, 'Medieval English peasants and market involvement', *Jour Econ Hist*, XLV, 1985, pp. 823–31; *idem*, 'Missing links: taxable wealth, markets, and stratification among medieval English peasants', *Jour Interdisciplinary Hist*, XVIII, 1987, pp. 277–98.

<sup>36</sup> For example, work is already being done on peasant agriculture from accounts that give good tithe and multure returns (*Med Cap*, p. 176). Similarly, a more detailed analysis of sixteenth-century probate inventories and the like with the possibilities of seeing the 'shadows' of earlier medieval farming is possible (as in the case of the use of probate inventories to shed light on issues such as the size of the medieval peasant plough-team: Langdon *Horses, Oxen*, pp. 231–4).

<sup>37</sup> As on the holding of Walter Shayl of Hampton Lucy, Warwickshire, in 1377: R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*, 1975, pp. 41–2.

animals.<sup>38</sup> Although it would take a great amount of work, a systematic search of manorial rolls, coroners' rolls, eyre rolls, extents of debts, even central court records, would certainly provide a sample in the hundreds if not thousands.<sup>39</sup> At the very least they provide a potential source of comparison with the demesne material, and, as innovative techniques for measuring early modern yields from probate inventories have emerged in recent

years,<sup>40</sup> it may be possible to do more with peasant inventories than currently seems likely.

These must only remain possibilities for the moment. *A Medieval Capital* proves in an exciting and imaginative way what can be done on medieval agriculture with sufficient data. At the very least, the connection between agricultural and urban development has been well established in this study and has provided valuable clues as to how early societies could achieve some elements at least of economic take-off. Finally, even if it should turn out that the findings of *A Medieval Capital* are less broadly applicable than the authors would like us to believe, the book does provide a first-class analysis of what was happening in the demesne sector, making it all the easier for future work on peasant agriculture to site its findings effectively.

<sup>38</sup> A good example found recently in the coroners' rolls by the author while looking for transport information concerned the confiscated lands and chattels of Roger son of Nicholas de Wodecote of Woodcote (in Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire), who, in early August, 1336, held 24 arable acres, of which three were sown with wheat, three with barley, and ten with peas. His stock consisted of two oxen, two horses, and two cows (PRO, JUST 2/25, m 2).

<sup>39</sup> In my study of draught animals, for instance, it was relatively easy to gather together a sample of 52 peasant inventories, mostly taken from secondary sources: Langdon, *Horses, Oxen*, p 178.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Overton, 'Estimating crop yields from probate inventories: an example from East Anglia, 1585-1735', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XXXIX, 1979 pp 363-78; Robert C Allen, 'Inferring crop yields from probate inventories', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XLVIII, 1988, pp 117-25; Mark Overton, 'Re-estimating crop yields from probate inventories', *Jnl Econ Hist*, L, 1990, pp 931-5.