

Servants and labourers on a late medieval demesne: the case of Newton, Cheshire, 1498–1520*

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Abstract

The paper examines the relatively under-explored subject of late medieval demesne personnel through the example of Newton, Cheshire. Based on an unusually rich set of accounts, the paper discusses the contracts, tasks and wages of Newton's servants and labourers and seeks to locate the former in relation to established types of medieval *famuli* and early modern servants of husbandry. The paper argues that, in contrast to some recent historical research, the balance of power at Newton lay with the landlord.

Given the detailed research undertaken on the medieval landed estate, it is perhaps surprising that our knowledge of a key aspect of the estate, its personnel, is relatively poor. This is especially so for the fifteenth century, a period that lies between two historiographically distinct pictures of labouring life: the combination of customary labour and permanent manorial staff (the *famuli*) of the high middle ages; and the servants in husbandry and day labourers of the early modern period.¹ For example, D. L. Farmer recently noted the gradual disappearance of the traditional *famulus* in the fifteenth century; he suggested that they 'probably survived in some form ... [b]ut one does not know'.² One reason often given for this lack of knowledge is the widespread leasing of farms during the fifteenth century which means that the records of large estates no longer record how demesnes were managed nor their personnel. Yet not all lords leased their demesnes and, if the focus is moved from large institutional estates to smaller and more compact holdings, it is possible to find illuminating documentation on the fifteenth-century workforce.³

* I would like to thank Dr Peter Fleming and Dr Philip Morgan for their support and comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹ For the medieval period see M. M. Postan, 'The *Famulus*. The estate labourer in the xiith and xiiith centuries', *Economic History Rev.* (hereafter *ECHR*), supplement 2 (1954), and E. Searle, *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its banlieu, 1066–1538* (1974), pp. 304–13. Labour in the early modern period has received greater attention. See, in particular, Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (1981); A. Everitt, 'Farm Labourers', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500–1640* (1967), pp. 396–465; and A. H. Smith, 'Labourers in late sixteenth-century England: a case study

from north Norfolk', *Continuity and Change*, 4 (1989), pp. 11–52, 367–94.

² D. L. Farmer, 'The *famuli* in the later Middle Ages', in R. Britnell and J. Hatcher (eds), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England. Essays in honour of Edward Miller* (1996), p. 236.

³ Examples are C. Dyer, 'A small landholder in the fifteenth century', *Midland Hist.* 1 (1971), pp. 12–14 and R. A. Lomas, 'A northern farm at the end of the middle ages: Elvethall manor, Durham, 1443/4–1513/4', *Northern Hist.* 18 (1982), pp. 35–7.

This article examines the workers on the non-manorial estate of Newton, Cheshire. Between 1497/8–1536 it was held by Humphrey Newton, gentleman (1466–1536), who personally drew up a series of accounts for the holding. These provide an unusually rich source of contracts for full-time workers and references to day labourers at Newton in 1498–1506 and 1519. Several important questions can be addressed by the evidence. Did Newton's full-time workers conform to conventional definitions of *famuli* or servants of husbandry? What influenced the size of the workforce, types of tasks and wages at Newton? And, of particular importance, what was the relationship between the landlord and his labour?

I

The Newton estate lay in the upland region of north-east Cheshire on the banks of the river Bollin, in the shadow of the Cheshire peaks. Its nearest towns were Macclesfield, five miles to the south and Stockport, just over six miles to the north. Technically Newton was not a manor as it had no manor court; nor was it an independent township, but part of the nearby township of Butley. Only a few tenancies were attached to the holding. Between 1498 and 1505 there were at most two messuages, two cottages and a mill rent which brought in between £2 – £4 per year.⁴ Newton was smaller than the extensive institutional estates that comprise the majority of studies of estate management and personnel. According to currently accepted criteria Newton was a 'small' estate. The size of the demesne can be partially gauged from Humphrey Newton's *inquisition post mortem* of 1536. The estate comprised 252 acres, consisting of 100 acres of land, 20 acres of meadow, 40 acres of pasture, 26 acres of wood and 66 acres of moor. Despite the historian's suspicions of inquisitions, the total figure appears reasonable when set against the limits described in local land deeds.⁵ Newton shared the mixed economy of Cheshire with a combination of animal husbandry and crop growing. Cattle predominated, with income also derived from a small flock of sheep (around 50 ewes, 21–27 lambs and 1–4 rams), a few pigs and hens. Poor climate and soils made oats the dominant crop, although wheat, barley, peas and rye were also grown. Other sources of income included pannage, the rabbit warren, and wood sales.⁶

From the early thirteenth century the estate was held by the Newtons, a gentry family of modest income and, until the sixteenth century, of one major holding. Humphrey Newton was a lawyer in his locality and served as a steward for several Cheshire and Staffordshire manorial courts. His services were required as a witness of deeds and marriage agreements, and in arbitrating disputes between neighbouring gentry. Like other gentlemen, Humphrey's fortunes improved with a successful marriage. In 1490 he married the local co-heiress Ellen

⁴ The dependency of Newton on Butley is detailed in PRO, STAC 2/30/86, and [B]ritish [L]ibrary, Add. MS. 42,134A. For the Newton tenancies: Bodleian Library (hereafter Bodl.), MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 29r, 32r, 35, 37v, 38v, 41ar, 42v, 43r, 47r.

⁵ PRO, CHES 3/67/4 (IPM); STAC 2/30/86 (boundary details). For small estates see E. A. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century*

(1956); Dyer, 'A small landholder', and R. H. Britnell, 'Production for the market on a small fourteenth-century estate', *EcHR* 19 (1966), pp. 380–8.

⁶ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, e.g. fos. 24, 27ar, 29–31 and 38v. For a recent consideration of the economy of medieval Cheshire, see P. Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire, 1277–1403* (1987), pp. 78–92.

Fitton of Pownall (d. 1536); in 1506 he acquired the 460-acre Pownall estate (near Wilmslow), and lands in mid-Cheshire. Humphrey was an energetic landlord who undertook an ambitious programme of improvement at Newton. In his first six years at the estate, Humphrey rebuilt a corn mill, built a fulling mill and a fishery, and marled the soil, altogether raising Newton's value from £11 *per annum* to over £14.⁷

His energy is also seen in the management of Newton. There was no extensive estate apparatus and Humphrey oversaw and managed the land himself, arranged and supervised building projects, and dealt directly with local traders. There were few labour services, a situation observed generally throughout Cheshire.⁸ The tenants at Newton simply provided a few hens and one or two days reaping at harvest. For assistance Humphrey depended principally on wage labour. There was a combination of those employed for a long period, usually a year, for a fixed wage; and those hired on a daily wage. The groups are not mutually exclusive: some workers employed for the year also picked up daily wages during seasonal work.

The following discussion of those workers is based on a remarkable series of accounts found within a commonplace book compiled by Humphrey Newton c. 1498–1524.⁹ Of particular note are a series of estate accounts dating from 1498 to 1506, that is, between the time of Humphrey's inheritance of Newton and the acquisition of Pownall, when Humphrey was perhaps most focused on Newton. There is little that is systematic or formulaic to the accounts and a diversity of items are juxtaposed, including rentals, lent accounts, harvest records, clothing and food purchases, animal sales, and building works. Information on wage labour is found generally in lists of debts, harvest accounts and investment projects; and more specifically in a series of wage accounts. The problems in exploiting the material arise out of the purpose of the accounts. They are not a series of daily accounts, nor ones offering yearly totals of profit and loss. Rather they cover major items of expenditure like building projects; annual expenses such as lenden accounts; and outstanding debts. Not all are dated or can be confined to a single year. Not every labouring task undertaken at Newton is listed. Nor were they ever intended to record every day labourer's work at Newton: those whose wages were promptly paid feature infrequently if at all. Yet there are important advantages to these accounts. As shall be shown below, they offer fuller information on individual workers than found in the more common lists of wages; and all were written by the lord himself and not by an intermediary, hence offering a more personal side to the accounts. The richness of the material results in a complex web of information which this article organises by discussing

⁷ A discussion of Humphrey Newton is found in D. Marsh, "I see by sizt of evidence": information gathering in late medieval Cheshire, in D. E. S. Dunn (ed.), *Courts, counties and the capital in the later middle ages* (1996), pp. 71–92; and in J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire* (2 vols, 1877, 1880), I, pp. 118–27; II, pp. 203–7. For Humphrey's marriage: PRO, CHES 3/67/5, SC6/HENVIII/297, m. 6. Estate value: Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fo. 24r, BL, Add. Ms 42,134A, fo. 9r.

⁸ P. H. W. Booth, *The financial administration of the lordship and county of Chester, 1272–1377* (1981), p. 4, and

Morgan, *War and Society*, p. 85.

⁹ This is Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, a 129 folio miscellany also containing legal, religious and literary items. A printed list of contents can be found in *Historical Manuscripts Commission*, 2nd Report, pp. 80–1. For examples of its literary and religious contents, see R. H. Robbins, 'The poems of Humphrey Newton, esquire, 1460–1536', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 65 (1950), pp. 249–81, and D. Youngs, 'A vision in a trance': a fifteenth-century vision of Purgatory, *Medium Aevum* 67(1998), pp. 212–34.

the issues of contracts, composition, tasks and wage rates for the full-time workers and day labourers.

II

The bulk of the work at Newton fell on full-time workers whom Humphrey grouped together in his accounts as 'servauntes'. What distinguished a servant in the middle ages is a difficult subject. Historians have defined the term in a narrow and specific sense: those hired by one master for a long period, usually a year, and who were resident within the household. As a consequence the servants were usually young and unmarried.¹⁰ Contemporaries, however, were not so exacting and used the term in a broad sense: it could refer to anyone employed for a wage and included both the agricultural day labourer and the domestic or 'life-cycle' servant. At times it was used as a synonym for *famuli*, those full-time employees who performed basic tasks on the demesne such as ploughing, carting and looking after the animals.¹¹ The following discussion adopts Humphrey's term 'servant', while questioning how far the Newton workers conform to the modern definition of the term.

Information for the group is found primarily in a series of accounts of wage payments for the years 1499–1505 with a single account in 1519.¹² Each account contains brief, individual records of workers that begin with the name, wage, duration of the contract and, commonly, the day of hiring. They are followed by Humphrey's notes on his financial exchanges with each worker. For example:

memorandum. William Hogh was hired at Candilmas anno predicto [i.e. 1499] for xis & if he desired eny bountieth if I wold to gif hym etc. Item he hath resceyved of my wife a payr housecloth price xd. Item at Stopford fer iijs iiijd. Item I must gif hym for Raufe Rider vis iiijd. Item I most gif hym ijd þat I borrowed. Item I gaf hym on goodfriday ijd anno xv. Counted with hym on allthursday even & I have gifyn hym xvjd þat I borrowed & þe seid iiij for Raufe & also the seid ijd. Item I have geven hym ijd of his wage on the seid even. Item ijd for his bowe. Counted with hym on Seynt Jame even & so we be mete. I have paid hym xix grots of his wage which was all sicut apparet. Item for Nicholl Lees iiijd & so we be mete as for þis yer.¹³

It is possible that the accounts echo formal agreements made between Humphrey and the servants.¹⁴ Fifty contracts, for 31 different servants, were recorded in the eight years. Of those,

¹⁰ Kussmaul, *Servants*, pp. 6–7; P. J. P. Goldberg, 'Female labour, service and marriage in northern towns during the later middle ages', *Northern Hist.*, 22 (1986), p. 21; and L. R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death* (1991), ch. 9.

¹¹ P. W. Fleming, 'Household servants of the Yorkist and early Tudor gentry, 1460–1560', in D. Williams (ed.), *Early Tudor England* (1989), p. 19; Kussmaul, *Servants*, p. 6; B. A. Hanawalt, *The Ties that Bound: peasant families in medieval England* (1986), p. 63; Postan, 'Famulus'; C. C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a changing society. The estates*

of the bishopric of Worcester, 680–1540 (1980), p. 142; and Farmer, 'The *famuli*', p. 210.

¹² Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 25r-v, 33r, 33v, 39av, 41av, 43v, 46v and 61v.

¹³ *Ibid.*, fo. 25r. Punctuation added, English words expanded. 'Stopford' is the town of Stockport. The sentences referring to borrowed money are crossed out, perhaps indicating repayment.

¹⁴ Compare the opening lines of the contract with servants' contracts referenced in P. J. Jones, *The Household of a Tudor Nobleman* (Illinois, 1917), pp. 48–9.

43 contain the date of hire, with a further five containing an end date. Studies have shown that a traditional date of hire existed in England, most often Michaelmas in the south and Martinmas in the North.¹⁵ Newton did not follow that tradition as a number of different hiring times occurred. Some appear more frequently than others: Epiphany (seven times), Candlemas and Easter (four times each). Other hiring days included the Exaltation of the Cross, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day. With no main hiring date, it suggests that the servants were not recruited annually from market towns and fairs. They do, however, bare close similarities to the flexible contracts operating in late sixteenth-century Norfolk.¹⁶ The overlap in the contracts complicates any calculation of the number of servants at Newton during any one year. At any one date there appears to have been approximately five workers, with a mix of men and women (usually at least two or three men each year). The figures can be compared to the number of full-time workers on other estates. The manor of Elvethall, Durham, totalling 240 acres, kept seven *famuli* comprising a reeve, carter and five others. At the larger Essex estate of Porters Hall, with its 300 acres of arable, eleven servants were hired.¹⁷ The number of full-time workers at Newton thus appears commensurate with the estate's size.

The duration of the contract is noteworthy. It has been claimed by both contemporaries and modern historians that workers in the later middle ages were reluctant to accept long term contracts, particularly those running for a year. Rather they preferred employment on a daily or weekly basis that offered the possibility of accumulating higher wages and more leisure time.¹⁸ Yet workers continued to be employed on long-term contracts, as Humphrey Newton's servants clearly demonstrate.¹⁹ Forty of the 50 contracts at Newton were for a full year, and some workers' contracts were renewed for a second or more year. Indeed the men at Newton were particularly attached to the estate. Only 12 different men are recorded as servants between 1498–1505, with half renewing their contracts for a second year. John Aleyn worked at least six years at Newton. Female workers were less likely to stay at Newton. Nineteen women are recorded with only around a third renewing for a second year.²⁰

It was the women who were also more likely to end their contracts early. Both Margery Broke and Margery Henshouse left Newton after half a year. The contracts of two others acknowledged the possibility of early departure. Humphrey hired Ellen Porter for a year 'provided þat she may be lose at eny quarter', and Margery Davey was hired 'providet that she shall be lose opon a

¹⁵ e.g. A. S. Kussmaul, 'The ambiguous mobility of farm servants', *ECHR* 34 (1981), pp. 222–3, and *idem*, *Servants*, pp. 50–1.

¹⁶ S. A. C. Penn and C. C. Dyer, 'Wages and earnings in medieval England: evidence from the enforcement of labour laws', *ECHR* 43 (1990), p. 365. Although a few servants received money at Stockport fair, their hiring dates differ from one another and are unconnected with the fair. Smith, 'Labourers in late sixteenth-century England', p. 15.

¹⁷ Lomas, 'Elvethall', p. 36. Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 213. See also Fleming, 'Household servants', pp. 27–8 and R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (1975), p. 34.

¹⁸ A view recently aired by Mark Bailey, 'Rural Society', in R. Horrox (ed.), *Fifteenth-century attitudes* (1994), p. 162. See also Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p. 142, Penn and Dyer, 'Wages', pp. 367–9, M. K. McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community. The royal manor of Havering, 1200–1500* (1986), p. 161.

¹⁹ J. Hatcher, 'England in the aftermath of the Black Death', *Past and Present* 144 (1994), p. 28, and J. L. Bolton, 'The world upside down'. Plague as an agent of economic and social change' in W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley (eds), *The Black Death in England* (1996), p. 47.

²⁰ Cf. Goldberg, 'Female labour', p. 21.

quarter warnyng'. It is not clear here who would actually do the warning, but it is likely to have been the employees. At Writtle, Essex, for instance, servant agreements included the stipulation that an employee must give a quarter's notice before leaving.²¹ A few Newton workers preferred to be held on shorter contractual terms. Jane Short, for example, was contracted for a quarter year and half year in 1499 and 1500 respectively. John Aleyn was hired for a quarter year; his contract was renewed twice, so he worked three-quarters of a year all told. But, as these show, even those on short-term contracts did not necessarily leave once their term had ended. Nicholas Lees was the only one on a weekly rate, but his total work term in 1499 extended to a quarter year.²² It is also noteworthy that Short, Aleyn and Lees were hired on year-long contracts in subsequent years.

Humphrey's ability to hire workers on long-term contracts and with no apparent need to hire at town fairs is partly explained by the composition of the work force. A proportion was already familiar to him. Significantly they included the tenants of the two messuages at Newton, Thomas Lees and Philip Grene. Margery Henhouse was probably related to Humphrey's cottage tenant of the same surname.²³ Some appear recruited through family connections. From Thomas Lees's family came Phyllis, Janet and Nicholas Lees. Other family connections are suggested in the pairings of Bess and Thomas Astill and Emma and John Aleyn. Ellen Newton may have been one of Humphrey's kin as it was not uncommon to have family, even offspring, employed as servants.²⁴ A long-term connection was with the Houghs of Wilmslow. In the time of Humphrey's father, Richard Newton (1441-97), one John Hough of Wilmslow worked for five years at Newton; while his descendants William, James and John Hough worked under Humphrey Newton.²⁵ Overall many shared a patronymic with families neighbouring Newton: for example, Wittonstall, Davenport and Broke. Other servants, particularly the women, are harder to trace. They may have come to Newton asking for work when a previous servant left; and perhaps came from farther afield than the Newton area.²⁶

It is difficult to determine the status of all the servants, a situation perhaps indicative of their lowly rank. Those for whom something is known include those drawn from Humphrey's tenants. Both the Lees and the Grenes rented their messuages from Humphrey for 14s. *per annum*. Both produced sufficient cereal to sell oats, rye and barley to Humphrey, and the Lees sold him pigs; they, therefore, did not rely entirely on wages for their income. The Lees were not sufficiently wealthy to buy their own plough as they borrowed one from Humphrey, but they had some local standing: one of the family, Humphrey Lees, was a constable of the township of Butley.²⁷ The Houghs of Wilmslow were a more prominent family whose members appear regularly in administrative records as yeomen or husbandmen. Servants of the surnames

²¹ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 33v, 39av. Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 203.

²² Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 25v, 33r.

²³ Cf. tenants of Richard Clervaux who also became his servants, A. J. Pollard, 'Richard Clervaux of Croft', *Yorkshire Arch. J.*, 50 (1978), p. 159. Z. Razi, 'Family, land and village community in later medieval England', *Past and Present* 93 (1981), p. 389.

²⁴ Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 35.

²⁵ The Houghs lived for at least forty years within 1½ miles of Newton: PRO, STAC 2/30/86.

²⁶ e.g., 'Bes Bower was her wantyng of a quarter': Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fo. 33v.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 27ar, 30r, 36r. PRO, STAC 2/30/86. Could Humphrey Lees have been named after his family's lord and employer? 'Humphrey' was not a name commonly used in the locality.

Wittonstall and Davenport presumably belonged to known families in the locality.²⁸ Overall, the servants were from families of lesser social standing than the Newtons, all non-gentle, but with a few having some social significance in the local townships.

Historians are divided over whether servants necessarily lived within their employer's household.²⁹ The evidence from Newton suggests a mix of non-resident and resident. The tenant-servants remained in their own messuages; for example, Thomas Lees' rent was sometimes deducted from his wage as servant. It is noteworthy, however, that Thomas was unmarried during his term at Newton and after his marriage only worked for day wages. It also seems plausible that the women who ended their contracts early lived outside the Newton estate. On the other hand, a known resident was William Hough. In a declaration made by Hough in 1531, he stated that around 1501 he 'was sum tyme dwellyng' with Humphrey at Newton.³⁰ He was young and unmarried at the time as Humphrey noted William's marriage in 1501–2. Like Thomas Lees, once married William only worked on a daily basis. Another likely boarder was William's brother, James Hough, the only worker identified as a child in the accounts. The timing of James's employment suggests he was William's replacement.³¹ For others the evidence is less forthcoming. John Aley's residence is suggested by the payment of 4*d.* to 'go home'. One possible indication is the purchase of 'house cloths' for the servants, especially as William Hough received some. Hence, that Richard Coke was given house cloths, hose and shoes could suggest that he was a resident servant. Another possibility is the reference to 'housill'. Although a term generally associated with shriving, Humphrey's use may be related to household provision.³²

What work did the servants undertake? With no extensive or highly structured estate organization, the workers at Newton were less specialised than on larger estates.³³ With the exception of a wet nurse, no one is recorded in relation to a particular job such as a shepherd, carter or ploughman as the *famuli* were usually identified. Rather responsibilities were shared among the servants and their work overlapped.³⁴ The tasks undertaken were variously connected with the soil (digging, ditching, marling and turfing), crops, livestock and their produce, major buildings (such as the mills and fishery), and non-manual labour involved in running the household. Some work was shared by both sexes. The reaping and the gathering of corn is the clearest example and is discussed below. In general the pattern of work appears to conform to the recognised sexual divisions of labour. Some work, such as wet-nursing, was necessarily exclusively female.

²⁸ Hough: PRO, STAC 2/30/86, CHES 24/65, CHES 25/16. For Wittonstall see Earwaker, *East Cheshire*, I, pp. 148–9; and for the prolific Davenport family see, for example, the index in G. Ormerod, *The history of the county palatine of the city of Chester* (3 vols., 1882).

²⁹ For those who believe the definition of a servant should include residence within a household, see Kussmaul, *Servants*, pp. 5–7 and Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 184. Those against include Hilton, *English Peasantry*, pp. 31–2 and Hanawalt, *Ties*, pp. 164–5.

³⁰ John Rylands University Library Manchester (hereafter JRULM), Bromley-Davenport Mss, 'Newton by Mottram', 3/100/7.

³¹ James's first record begins with a 13*d.* payment 'to the wedding of his brother', Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fo. 41av.

³² *Ibid.*, fos. 33v, 41av, 43v.

³³ Cf. R. H. Britnell, 'Minor landlords in England and medieval agrarian capitalism', *Past and Present* 89 (1980), p. 7.

³⁴ Compare C. E. Moreton, *The Townshends and their world. Gentry, law and land in Norfolk, c. 1450–1551* (1992), p. 137; R. H. Britnell, 'The Pastons and their Norfolk', *AgHR* 36 (1988), p. 135; and M. K. McIntosh, 'Servants and the household unit in an Elizabethan English community', *J. Family Hist.* 9 (1984), p. 12.

The traditional female business of brewing was mentioned in the records of four women, but no man. One brewer, Ellen Newton, is also found undertaking the female task of cheese making. Jane Short had her wages deducted for losing flax and hemp, mishaps that may indicate the predominantly female work of spinning.³⁵ On the other hand, there were a number of male-dominated tasks, which included digging and clearing ditches, spreading marl, ploughing, maintaining buildings, and undertaking 'iron work'. One task exhibiting a clear division of work between the sexes was turf cutting. At a set time, 'turve time', this employed around a dozen people, with a mix of servants and day labourers. For example, in 1499 eight people were employed to cut the turf and five to lay the turves on grass or hay so that the wind could dry the peat – to 'wyndrawe'. There is a precise division of labour with the men digging the peat for the women to 'drawe'.³⁶

Whereas all undertook some manual labour, a few servants performed non-manual tasks and assisted in the management of the Newton estate. These tasks were entrusted to a few servants, roughly two a year, and always male: they were in effect the top positions in Newton. It was these men who travelled to local towns and fairs on Humphrey's behalf. For example, James Hough went to Macclesfield to pay a dyer a 6s. 8d. debt Humphrey owed. They were delegated the tasks of overseeing and paying other estate workers, duties traditionally associated with the bailiff. Richard Coke counted the harvest of 1503; and Thomas Astill, Thomas Lees, Philip Grene, William Hough and John Aleyn frequently paid workers their wage on behalf of Humphrey Newton. William Hough's special position in the household is suggested by his presence alongside Humphrey's wife in witnessing or paying servants' wages. Humphrey also used the men as witnesses on small local land transfers. One or two servants were trusted with more domestic matters. Hence, Hough and Astill oversaw the dowry payments Humphrey made to his future brother-in-law, Robert Vawdray; and Grene gave to a second future brother-in-law, John Birtils, part of the promised dowry.³⁷ It suggests that Humphrey's servants were not confined to soil and animals as *famuli*, but undertook tasks generally assigned to the household servant. These examples also intimate that, like the household servant, a close relationship may have existed between the servants and the lord.

The relationship between Humphrey and his servants is brought into focus in their financial relations. Studies show a wide variety in wages across estates, even within the same county.³⁸ That wages could be high in the fifteenth century was recognised by statute; one acknowledged that the 'common servant of husbandry' might receive 15s. in cash and 3s. 4d. in cloths, with senior workers collecting in excess of 20s. Receiving around this rate were the *famuli* at Elvethall manor, Durham, where the reeve received £1 *per annum* and six other men had 16s. each. Elsewhere, however, servants received far less. On the Millom estates in

³⁵ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 33v, 46v. It is possible that they covered the duties of dairymaids. Among the growing number of works on women's work in medieval England, see S. A. C. Penn, 'Female wage earners in late fourteenth century England', *AgHR* 35 (1987), pp. 1–14; and H. Graham 'A woman's work...'. Labour and gender in the late medieval countryside' in P. J. P. Goldberg (ed.), *Woman is a worthy wight: Women in English society*

c. 1200–1500 (1992), pp. 126–148.

³⁶ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fo. 28r.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 27av, 29v, 34cv, 47v; JRULM, Bromley Davenport Mss, 'Newton by Mottram', 3/100/7; BL, Add. Ms 42,134A, fo. 2r.

³⁸ M. Mate, 'Labour and labour services on the estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the fourteenth century', *Southern Hist.* 7 (1985), pp. 55–67.

Cumberland in 1513–4, servants' wages ranged from 8s. to one mark.³⁹ Similarly, at Newton, yearly wages did not reach high figures: they varied between 5s. and 14s. 4d. with a large concentration around 7s.–8s. Female wages were fairly uniform. In the 22 figures available, a payment of 8s. occurs 11 times and 7s. seven times. Male wages are more varied and usually higher. Of 21 contracts available, seven took between 5s.–7s., four between 8–10s., with 10 commanding wages of 11s. and over. It confirms the generally held view that male workers were more highly paid than their female counterparts. It also suggests that female work was perceived as less skilled than male work; no female had a 'managerial' role for example.⁴⁰ Differences between the wages of male workers probably reflected age, experience and work allocation. The higher wages were received by those men with greater responsibilities: William Hough (11s.), Thomas Lees (12s.), Thomas Astill (13s.), John Aleyn (13s. 4d.) Philip Grene (14s. 4d.). Length of service was perhaps a determinant. An example is John Aleyn. In 1500 he was employed on a quarterly wage of 20–22d.; between 1501–2 he worked for 6s. 8d. a year; this rose to 7s. in 1502–3 and 8s. in 1503–4. The lone account for 1519 records Aleyn receiving 13s. 4d. for the year.⁴¹

It is debatable whether those wages alone would have enticed servants onto long term contracts at Newton. Similar wages elsewhere in England have compared unfavourably with what was achievable by labouring on day rates (discussed for Newton below) where much higher returns were possible.⁴² It suggests, therefore, that other forms of remuneration were influential. In other households servants could expect allowances of grain and provisions of food and drink.⁴³ Unfortunately, little of this aspect of housekeeping is recorded in Humphrey's account book. No grain allowances are mentioned: this may reflect an absence of documentation, but the Newton estate appears to have been perennially short of grain. A chance reference reveals that ale was provided for the servants: when a servant failed to brew ale she was docked 2d. which was used to 'by ale to þe servants'. Only one servant was paid largely in food and drink: Kate Williamson was hired for a year 'for mete and drynk & cloth as much as comes to vs'.⁴⁴ What is known, however, is that the majority of Newton servants received a 'bountieth', either in money or in kind. The term, presumably referring to the generosity of the giver, was a bonus. Examples include Ellen Porter, hired for 7s. and a handkerchief, Nicholas Lees hired for half a year for 5s. 4d. and a pair of shoes, and Laurence Bridge hired for 6s. 8d. and a 'bountieth' worth 4d.⁴⁵ Other estates offered their servants 'tips' or perquisites in an attempt to encourage workers to their estates.⁴⁶ Was Newton doing the same? References to the Newton 'bountieth'

³⁹ D. L. Farmer, 'Prices and Wages, 1350–1500', in E. Miller (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, III, 1348–1500 (1991), p. 487. Fleming, 'Household servants', p. 24; A. J. L. Winchester, 'The castle household and demesne farm at Millom in 1513–14', *Trans. Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Soc.* 83 (1983), pp. 89–95; Hatcher, 'Aftermath', p. 29; Lomas, 'Elvethall', p. 43.

⁴⁰ Hilton, *English Peasantry*, p. 103, Bennett, *Women*, p. 83.

⁴¹ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 33r, 41av, 43v, 61v.

⁴² Some comparative examples are given in Penn and

Dyer, 'Wages', pp. 369–70.

⁴³ In some instances the *famuli's* food deliveries were worth more than cash wages: Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', p. 481.

⁴⁴ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 39av, 46v.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, fos. 33v, 39av.

⁴⁶ Penn and Dyer, 'Wages', p. 371. For estates offering 'tips' see I. Kershaw, *Bolton Priory. The economy of a northern monastery, 1286–1325* (1973), p. 55; P. D. A. Harvey, *A medieval Oxfordshire Village. Cuxham, 1240–1400* (1965), p. 77; Hatcher, 'Aftermath', p. 29.

suggest it was not always a particularly important part of the wage. Katherine Skenham did not bargain over her 'bountieth': she is recorded as saying it 'shold be worth as plese my wife & me [Humphrey]'. Similarly William Hough 'desired eny bountieth if I wold to gif hym'.⁴⁷ In these instances, the 'bountieth' was left to Humphrey's discretion, with little role as an incentive. It may once have had more power, but was now more a symbolic gesture by the landlord.

The contract was written in terms of money, but how much were the servants getting in cash? It has been argued that fifteenth-century servants were in a position to demand and secure entirely monetary payments. Salaries at Elvethall, for example, were almost entirely paid in cash; the exceptions were allowances against rent.⁴⁸ However, Humphrey's servants did not, or were not able to, demand payment entirely in money. Rather, a substantial proportion was delivered in kind, including payments of pigs and apples. Clothing was a main form of payment. At one extreme was the contract with Jane Short who was hired for a quarter year for a kirtle worth 18*d.* But other servants received at least part of their wages in clothing. Sometimes money was given for the servants to buy clothes themselves; at other times Humphrey made the necessary purchases; but all were deducted from the wage. Payments appear frequently in the form of hats, shoes, kirtles and gowns. Phyllis Lees, for example, was paid 4*d.* in shoes and 3*d.* for a kirtle, 'sleaves', apron and smock. Humphrey's concern for his servants' appearance is understandable as dirty and torn clothing were viewed as signs of the lord's impoverishment or his tightfistedness. There is nothing to suggest a special Newton livery, although Richard Coke was bought a tawny jacket and white hose.⁴⁹

Even when money was given to the servants, it could be tied to a particular event. Servants were given money for travelling to places such as Manchester and Doncaster and for trips to the local markets of Stockport, Congleton and Macclesfield. Money was given for family affairs, particularly weddings: Humphrey gave Katherine the nurse 12*d.* to go to her sister's wedding, and 4*d.* to John Aleyn to attend his brother's wedding. A regular payment was for attendance at local ales, such as those at Prestbury parish church.⁵⁰ In at least some cases it was presumably the servants themselves who made formal requests to Humphrey for financial assistance or advances – they evidently received them. Together the examples also illustrate the distances the servants travelled and the absences Humphrey allowed. The servants' movements do not appear to have been harshly restricted.

Those payments involving cash highlight an important role for credit. Humphrey sometimes lent money to his servants. Thomas Lees, for example, was lent 3*s.* towards his marriage. A few lent money to Humphrey: of William Hough, Humphrey recorded 'I have gifyn him xvid þat I borrowed' and Humphrey owed Phyllis Lees 'her wage & money þat I boroed'. The servants also borrowed and lent to each other. In most accounts there are references to Humphrey paying part of one servant's wage to another. As regards Phyllis Lees, Humphrey wrote 'she most alowe me iiij*d.* þat I allowed Philip in his rent wheche she boroed of Philip'.⁵¹ It is not clear from the examples whether money physically changed hands, or the transactions were on paper. It is

⁴⁷ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 25r, 33v.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hanawalt, *Ties*, p. 165; Lomas, 'Elvethall', p. 46.

⁴⁹ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 25r, 39av, 41av.
For the significance of clothing, Fleming, 'Household

servants', p. 24.

⁵⁰ e.g. Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 25r, 33v.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 25r, 33r, 43v.

possible that the Newton district suffered a cash shortage which would explain payments made in kind, or payments by exchange such as the account of Thomas Lees where his debts to Humphrey for cloth (6*d.*), a loan (10*d.*) and rent (3*s.* 6*d.*) were 'all set in his wage'.⁵² Yet there is no clear evidence for a cash shortage, simply the general advantage of using credit.

The debts existing between different members of the Newton estate may have closed some of the social distance between the master and his servants. Humphrey's terminology, 'lent' and 'borrowed', suggests a degree of equality between the parties concerned. But did the servants have a choice in the matter? Humphrey took advantage of his servants. Wage payments were often irregular and sometimes overdue. Nicholas Lees was owed 16*d.* of his previous year's hire, which was better than Emma Aleyn who, in her third year of hire, was owed a large part of her previous two years' wage.⁵³ Humphrey benefited from delayed payments. Debts were a recurrent and important part of Newton estate management. Several pages of accounts reveal the substantial sums they could reach. With Humphrey embarking on a series of high cost investments on his estate – the fulling mill, fishery and marling – delaying immediate payment to servants helped sustain the cash flow to finance the projects. At the same time Humphrey did not extend his own loans indefinitely, nor write-off debts. If a servant was ill or away, wages were docked. When Philip Grene was sick for two days and 'lie alle day on þe axes' he had to repay Humphrey the 2*d.* spent on hiring another worker. Thomas Astill owed Humphrey money for the time when he was too ill to fey the marl, dig the turf or sow the seed, and when he let the plough lie because he attended his mother's funeral.⁵⁴ Damaged ale, lost sheep or grain, and spoilt cheese, were deducted from the servants' wages.

Wage payments were often, therefore, a complex mix of cash, kind and promises, as the following examples illustrate. The first comes from an account with John Aleyn. Note the unpaid 'bountieth' and the actual amount given in 'untied' cash.

Counted with John Aleyn for alle thyngs, & so I have geven hym his yere except viijd <sol viijd> the day & yer abovesaid and so we be mete for þe last.

Item I hired from þe xx day anno xix^o for a yer for viiis & a per gloves. Item the seid John receyved vid ob at þe wyndam opon a rekenyng. Item ijd in a skyn. Item iiijd per Bradford. Item ijd for ?feny for flessch. Item iiijd to a weddyng. Item for a bonet of Philip xvid. Item for Thomas Lees xijd. Item to Werall vid for shone [shoes?]. Item viijd to William Parsons. Item xijd to William Jammy. Summa vis. We accompted afor Jamys [Hough] & so I ought hym ijs & gloves wherof I have paid hym xijd rend xijd.⁵⁵

A second example demonstrates further the small amount received in cash: Ralph Rider got only 5*d.* in cash of 18*d.* owed him. But the example also reveals that Humphrey did not have it all his own way.

Memorandum, counted with the seid Raufe the wennysday afor the fest of seynt Andrewe. And after his awne reconyng he was xviijd behynde of his yers wage & he wanted v weks of his terme day fro þe seid wennysday <to newyersday>. And for thalowance of þe said v weks I asked vijd and for a new pikfork irnes <he proferd> id and for a forkesho ob. and for a

⁵² *Ibid.*, fo. 25v.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, fos. 37r, 43v.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, fo. 33v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, fo. 43v. Angle brackets denote interlineations.

sicle id which he had lost and for William Hogh iiijd which he oughed hym. The summe of the allowance by his agreement is xiijd ob, & so ther remaynes due to Raufe iiijd ob and I have geffyn hym vd to have his goode report afor my wife and the seid William [Hough] & oper and so we be mete.⁵⁶

The example suggests a level of negotiation over wages on the part of the servants. Ralph had calculated and was claiming his wage arrears and Humphrey wished to have his 'goode report'. It suggests a prominent role for Humphrey's wife and one perhaps that the servants could exploit. Throughout the accounts, the relationship between Humphrey and his servants is revealed as an interactive one. As previous examples have shown, although aided by other servants, it is Humphrey who discusses contracts, often pays their wages, lends and borrows. In turn the servants made their opinions known to him. Negotiations were not always harmonious. A hint of the controversies occurring over payment arises in the case of Ellen Porter who claimed late wages for seven weeks work, but Humphrey disagreed: 'she seid departid at vij weks end as she seis: and I say she feyned her syk & did nozt iiij weks & marred ij burthen of goode ale'. Who won the case is not disclosed. Humphrey had several problems with one Ellen Newton. Her list of faults, including failing to brew the ale and marring the cheese, led to her early dismissal.⁵⁷ Although Humphrey appears the dominant partner, he could not assume his position and power would always secure a compliant labour force.

III

Newton also employed day labourers for a daily wage. These included hired craftsmen employed on large projects on the estate such as the mill buildings, and the smith who mended the plough, made plough irons and a wagon. But the majority of day labourers were agricultural workers. These included, first, those hired to work on specific projects supporting the specialised craftsmen, for example, carters needed to transport marl and turf; second, those who undertook regular maintenance tasks on the estate, such as trimming hedges and clearing gutters; and, third, the seasonal workers, particularly the harvesters. These were not separate or distinct groups; workers performed a broad range of tasks and were flexible in their work. An example is Robert Barlow who dug the marl, maintained the mill and weir, ditched, quick-set, reaped and threshed in the harvest.⁵⁸

Barlow also illustrates that the labourers were not necessarily strangers to Newton or transient workers. Barlow, from neighbouring Mottram St Andrew, was conceivably the yeoman who worked alongside Humphrey Newton as a warden for a fraternity in Mottram (and who stole cattle in the township).⁵⁹ Servants undertook extra labouring duties, suggesting that they had time on their hands and a desire to supplement their wages with day labouring. (It is not known whether the accounts simply record the 'worth' of the task or a 'real' payment; the latter would imply that Humphrey was willing to provide supplementary work and wages to already hired hands.) Tenants also assisted: William Small, lessee of a house in Newton, worked in the orchard and reaped the harvest. Other neighbours from Mottram were employed. Henry Mottershead,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, fo. 25v.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 33v, 46v.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, fos. 27ar, 31av, 32v, 34cv, 37r, 38r and 48r.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, fo. 46r; PRO, CHES 25/16.

from a yeoman family long associated with the Newtons, worked on the mill and weir, and killed cattle, swine and boar on the Newton estate; he was probably a butcher. Workers also brought family members with them. William Small and his sons ditched together, and relations Richard and Thomas Lymmey, and William and Ambrose Lyngard, marled the Newton fields.⁶⁰

The largest group of day labourers were the harvesters, for whom we have information in the accounts for the six years 1499, 1500, 1501, 1503, 1504 and 1506. The accounts mainly record shearing or reaping, although a few mention ploughing and threshing. The accounts comprise lists of workers hired, days worked, and occasionally wages paid and the fields harvested. Newton's accounts are particularly interesting because they shed light on a non-manorial farm of fewer acres than the manors generally analysed for harvest workers. Although Newton contained 100 acres of land, only a small proportion was ploughed at any one time. As a result the numbers of harvesters at Newton range only between 16 and 22 each harvest: 18 in 1499, 20 in 1500, 21 in 1501, 18 in 1503, 22 (plus children) in 1504, and 16 in 1506. Around 75 work days were needed to reap the harvest.⁶¹ Figures can be compared with the 52 workers employed to supplement the servants in harvest in the 300 acres of Porter's Hall, Essex; it required 222 work days in one harvest.⁶²

The Newton harvesters included a large proportion of women. Elsewhere in medieval England, female harvest labour was both large scale and varied. For example, at Stafford castle, Staffordshire, in the mid-fifteenth century, women can be found hay-making, reaping barley and peas, gathering and binding the grains.⁶³ The figures for Newton are higher than most, perhaps because they focus on reaping. On average the female workers comprised over half the harvesters at Newton. In 1500 the proportion rose to 75 per cent. Furthermore, women worked a high percentage of the work days recorded. In one account women worked collectively 50½ days compared to 20½ days by the men. Individual women worked several days: Alice Prestknave for as many as 11½ days. In common with other studies, the harvest lists show that female workers were not only the single or the widowed. Fourteen of 45 women were specifically noted as married and others share a common surname with several male workers. The majority of wives were mentioned with their husbands in the usual manner of husband's name 'and wife'; the exception was 'Janet Dale and her husband'.⁶⁴

Unlike harvesters in the early modern period, the Newton workforce was neither itinerant nor simply employed for the cereal harvest.⁶⁵ Humphrey drew upon familiar and neighbouring resources. Tenants provided regular help both as part of their 'boon' rent, and also without boon for which they received a daily wage like other labourers. William Small, who leased a house at Newton, worked a harvest, as did his wife and relation, Thomas Small. It is likely that the reapers Richard, Margery and Kate Wyatt were related to John Wyatt, the miller at Newton. Several servants assisted, although generally their presence was not substantial. Help also came

⁶⁰ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 27av, 35v.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, fos. 31av, 34cv, 38r, 43r, 45v, 48v.

⁶² BL, Add. Roll, 66,051, Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 214.

⁶³ PRO, SC6/988/12, fo. 1d. In Millom 14/31 hired harvesters were women, although a higher proportion of male labour came from servants: Winchester, 'Millom', pp. 91–2. See also M. Roberts, 'Sickles and scythes:

women's work and men's work at harvest time', *History Workshop J.* 7 (1979), pp. 3–28; Penn, 'Female wage earners', pp. 7–11.

⁶⁴ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 31a, 45v. *cf.* Penn, 'Female wage earners', p. 10.

⁶⁵ Smith, 'Labourers in late sixteenth-century England'.

from those who laboured at Newton at other times: for example, Alice Prestknavé helped dry turf and Roger Pymlot marled the Newton fields.⁶⁶ The number of family groupings is high. Across the six accounts there are six members of the Lees family, five Prestknaves, Robert Barlow, his wife and children, three Colyns and numbers of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister pairings. Taking the harvest of 1501 as an example, a breakdown of the 21 workers gives four Lees, three Mottrams, two Mottersheads and the couples of Small, Pymlot and Mereman. A high percentage of harvesters returned to work a second or more harvest. In five of six accounts between a half and two-thirds of the workers can be found working in another harvest. In 1503 14 of the 18 workers had or would work another harvest.⁶⁷ Of course, a short run of accounts is likely to underestimate the actual number.

As it is often held that day labourers could collect higher sums from working day rates than from a yearly wage, it is important to consider the day wages at Newton. Although the fragmentary evidence prevents a calculation of what individuals earned in any one year, sufficient references exist to provide day rates for various tasks on the estate. They were below the payments received by the oft-cited southern labourers and those reported in recent work on northern towns.⁶⁸ The Newton unskilled workers commanded between 1–2*d.* per day depending on the task in hand. Robert Barlow, for example, was paid 12*d.* for twelve days ditching and ridding; far lower than the average of 4–5*d.* per day.⁶⁹ The payment of 1*d.* was also the wage for labourers who maintained the mill. Male turf diggers received 1–2*d.*; the female turf dryers collected 1*d.* per day, sometimes less. The more skilled 'iron work' paid higher at 2*d.* per day, and the carpenter collected 3*d.* per day; both lower than those found in general analyses of fifteenth-century workers. They were not, however, unique for small northern estates: the estate at Millom, for example, paid several labourers 2*d.* per day.⁷⁰ Similarly the evidence for Newton harvest workers points to a wage of 2*d.* per day. In 1499 Christopher Lees was accounted 2*s.* 2*d.* for 13 days shearing; Elizabeth Fandon was paid 13*d.* for 6½ days work; the children of Barlow were given 8*d.* for their total of four days work. For the harvest of 1503 the total of 74½ days worked amounted to 12*s.* 5*d.* As these examples show, there was no wage differential between the sexes for the harvest work; perhaps because reaping was considered a low status activity. The equality is consistent with the findings of Middleton and Hanawalt, although it contradicts the more recent work of Poos.⁷¹ Newton's wage was lower than that received by harvesters in southern England. Poos gives the average figure for Essex as 4*d.* for men and 3*d.* for women. But the rate does not appear unusual when compared with other northern estates. The harvesters at Millom (another small estate), for instance, were paid 2*d.* each, regardless of sex, and reapers at Stafford castle received food worth 2*d.* per day.⁷² Even 2*d.* per day would give the Newton labourers 10*s.* in sixty days (one of the higher servant's wages at Newton). Nevertheless,

⁶⁶ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fo. 40r.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, fos. 38r (1501), 43r (1503).

⁶⁸ J. E. Thorold Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* (8 vols., 1866–1902), III, p. 000. D. Woodward, *Men at Work. Labourers and building craftsmen in the towns of northern England, 1450–1750* (1995).

⁶⁹ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 27ar and 37ar. Thorold Rogers, *Agriculture and Prices*, III, pp. 617–20.

⁷⁰ The average carpenter's wage for 1430–1500 was over 5*d.* a day: Farmer, 'Prices and Wages', p. 471. Winchester, 'Millom', pp. 92–3.

⁷¹ C. Middleton, 'The sexual division of labour in feudal England', *New Left Rev.* 113–4 (1979), p. 161; Hanawalt, *Ties*, pp. 150–1; and Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 217. See also Penn, 'Female wage earners', pp. 8–9 and Hilton, *English Peasantry*, pp. 101–2.

those at Newton would have needed to work for longer periods to achieve the sums reached by workers on day rates elsewhere in England.

IV

In drawing the evidence together, consideration is given to the questions advanced in the introduction. First: the nature of the workforce. During 1498–1506 the Newton estate was worked by a combination of full-time workers and day labourers. Of the former, Humphrey does not elaborate beyond the appellation of 'servauntes'. Most conform to the accepted definition of a servant: they were on long term contracts, for a fixed wage, with some resident in the household, although Humphrey also employed those living elsewhere. They appear to share close similarities to the servants of husbandry of the later sixteenth century (like those in Norfolk). They appear less like traditional *famuli* in that they were not employed as ploughmen or shepherds, but performed, as on other small estates, a variety of tasks and travelled on business outside the estate. Indeed some workers combined their mowing and ditching with duties such as witnessing deeds and overseeing dowry payments, tasks more 'household' in nature. It suggests that the workers at Newton were not sharply divided between household/domestic and estate/agriculture as on larger estates and implied in courtesy treatises. Certainly Humphrey did not have the extensive lands or household rooms which warranted a large staff with finely demarcated duties.

Humphrey was able to recruit servants on long-term contracts, a possibility often denied to other fifteenth-century employers. What tempted the employees to work at Newton? It was unlikely to have been high cash wages. Compared to other wage rates, the Newton wages were relatively modest, the 'bountieth' was financially slight, and few servants received the majority of their wage in cash. Humphrey was not seemingly pressurised into enticing servants with high monetary wages. If economic reasons played a part in the recruitment of servants, it may have been related to the day rates for labourers. These low rates presumably made it harder for someone to achieve the high yearly income documented elsewhere in England; and servants could always supplement their work with day rates. Another possibility is that concealed non-monetary forms of payment, such as food (about which little is known for Newton), may have been substantial.

Perhaps Newton's attraction lay outside economic incentives. Recruitment and retention may lie with the size of the Newton estate, Humphrey's active presence at Newton, and his familiarity with employees that included tenants and near neighbours. Humphrey was no distant employer. He dealt with his workers personally, directing their work, negotiating their pay, and often paying them himself. A note that Humphrey paid his marlers 'at þe marle pit' illustrates his contact and close supervision. His part in their lives also extended beyond work. Humphrey's brief reference that he had paid Philip Grene at the wedding of William Hough implies that he attended the nuptials. One of his accounts was dated in relation to the marriage of a servant

⁷² Poos, *A Rural Society*, p. 212; Winchester, 'Millom', pp. 90–1. PRO, SC6/988/12, fo. 1d. See also Kershaw, *Bolton Priory*, p. 50, and P. Bowden, 'Agricultural prices, farm profits and rents', in Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History* IV, pp. 609–10, 864.

called Thomas Lees, suggesting it was the most significant date that came to mind.⁷³ It was a familiarity in which the servants regularly travelled to local markets and ales, received loans and collected bountieths. Perhaps Humphrey was perceived as a good lord.

Was it a relationship in which the servants had a dominant hand? Most of the recent historical work highlights the bargaining power of the employees; and the Newton workers do appear to be asserting their demands. A few chose shorter contracts, or ended them early; they kept track of their payments and claimed arrears. At times Humphrey's own recording of events suggests he was answering their 'awne reckonyng'. Yet it is important to emphasise that ultimately they were Humphrey's records, as it was his organisation of servants, his delayed payments, his decision to discharge. There is little evidence that Humphrey felt controlled by his workers. On the contrary: evidence is available to show how he was able to draw on them to engage in law-breaking. There is a Star Chamber case of 1529 in which Humphrey was accused of inciting a group of men to destroy wood and redirect a weir in the lands of a neighbour in Mottram St Andrew.⁷⁴ The group consisted of Humphrey's tenants and servants. No other examples of the Newton servants being used in that way are known, yet by itself the case demonstrates the willingness (or compulsion) of Humphrey's servants to commit crime on his behalf. In the complex reading of the lord/employee relationship offered by the Newton accounts, it is Humphrey's power – whether achieved through proximity, leniency, good lordship or fear – which is most striking.

⁷³ Bodl., MS Latin Misc c 66, fos. 33r–v, 40r.

⁷⁴ PRO, STAC 2/6/205.