

The Demesne Lessees of Fifteenth-Century Wiltshire¹

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I

THE leasing of the manorial demesnes was one of the main developments in the organization of the agrarian economy in the later Middle Ages. The great lords now ceased to cultivate their own demesne lands and began instead to rent them out for a specified and regular amount of cash or produce. But the precise significance of this development has been a source of debate. Did it help to produce a social transformation in the countryside? Were the great lords replaced as cultivators by innumerable village peasants?² Or were they replaced by wealthy outsiders or by men who were already well above the rest of the village population in wealth and social status?³ Although the lessees⁴ have traditionally been seen as emerging from the ranks of the prosperous village peasantry, more recent work has stressed the

importance of men who cannot usefully be called peasants and who must have employed labour on a substantial scale. Such work has been based partially, although not exclusively, on the study of individual estates. But how typical were the estates of the Archbishop of Canterbury or of the Abbot of Westminster? Were the gentry lessees on such estates the beneficiaries of patronage rather than the profiteers of the open market? As with so many problems in the economic and social history of this period, we need many more local and estate studies. The present article seeks to provide one such study, as a contribution to a continuing debate.

It is first necessary to establish the chronology of leasing in this county.⁵ The Wiltshire estates were generally slower than those in other parts of the country in leasing their demesnes. By 1380 leasing was still infrequent and it had made hardly any impact in the chalklands. Instead it was to be found particularly in the north of the county and, to a lesser extent, in the west and extreme south-east of the county. By 1400 leasing had begun to spread into the chalklands and had become the normal practice on the larger lay estates. Thus only three out of twenty-five documented lay manors seem to have been involved in direct cultivation in the period 1400–10. By contrast, leasing had still hardly begun on the ecclesiastical estates: by 1400 only six out of thirty-one such manors had been leased and these had tended to be

¹ This article incorporates a revised version of parts of my thesis: 'Lord and Tenant in Wiltshire, c. 1380 – c. 1520, with particular reference to regional and seigneurial variations' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1976). I am very grateful to Professors F R H Du Boulay and R R Davies for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article. I should also like to thank the owners and their archivists for allowing me to study their records.

² Eg J E T Rogers, *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, Oxford, 1906, pp 274 f; A R Bridbury, *Economic Growth: England in the Later Middle Ages*, Hassocks, new edn 1975, pp 91–2. I have used the term peasant to refer to the holders of customary tenements who worked their own holdings essentially as a family unit and who provided for their own subsistence.

³ Eg F R H Du Boulay, 'Who were farming the English Demesnes at the End of the Middle Ages?', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser XVII, 1965, pp 443–55; B Harvey, 'The Leasing of the Abbot of Westminster's Demesnes in the Later Middle Ages', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser XXII, 1969, p 21, though neither writer suggests that peasant lessees were not important.

⁴ The term 'lessee', rather than the term 'farmer' has been used in order to avoid the ambiguity of the latter term.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of the chronology of leasing in Wiltshire, see my thesis, op cit, pp 100–15. I have here used the term 'leasing the demesne' to refer specifically to leases which included only the demesne, and 'leasing the manor' to include both leases of the demesne and leases of demesne and rents.

only the small and peripheral manors of their estates. By 1420 only two more of our ecclesiastical manors had been leased. Thus although on a national scale it may be concluded that, 'by 1422 the old regime of the manorial lords was practically dead',⁶ in Wiltshire direct cultivation still remained the norm on the ecclesiastical estates. It was not generally until the 1430s and 1440s that most ecclesiastical demesnes were leased. This late development of leasing may well have been common on the chalklands of Wessex.⁷ Furthermore, even after the abandonment of direct arable cultivation, many estates, both lay and more commonly ecclesiastical, continued to maintain large sheep flocks. On the Duchy of Lancaster manors of Aldbourne, Collingbourne and Everley, the arable had been leased by 1399, but large sheep flocks were maintained until 1443; while at Urchfont and All Cannings, which belonged to St Mary's nunnery at Winchester, the flocks were not leased until about 1477.

The Wiltshire demesnes were thus generally late in being leased, but the eventual adoption of these new methods does not seem to have been a response to falling profits in seigneurial agriculture.⁸ The major movements of prices and wages had occurred long before most of the demesnes had been leased. In general, the Wiltshire manors lack good records for the last years of demesne agriculture,⁹ but at Bromham, at least, there is no sign of any immediate crisis in seigneurial agriculture. Wiltshire agriculture, both peasant and seigneurial, was prosperous: a prosperity that was reflected in the movement of rents. For in most of the county rents were stable for the first half of the fifteenth

century, and in some places they even rose. Similarly, landlords seem to have had little difficulty in collecting their rents. For most of Wiltshire (other than in the north of the county and on a few poorer downland villages) it was only in the 1450s and 1460s, and under the impact of an acute depression in the cloth industry, that rents fell and landlords were unable to collect the bulk of their rent revenue. The growing industrial areas of south and west Wiltshire were providing the chalkland farmers with a growing market for the products of the soil: for wool, meat and grain, and thus helped to counter the impact of the general national demographic decline. This general agricultural prosperity would have both affected the chronology of leasing and the fortunes of the lessees themselves.¹⁰

When leasing occurred, the demesnes usually passed in one block to one man, rather than to a collective group.¹¹ There was, it is true, some piecemeal leasing of the demesnes while seigneurial cultivation still continued on the main block, but such a practice seems only to have been prevalent outside the chalklands, as at Bromham. In general, the demesnes survived intact. There were some collective leases that probably survived from the early stages of leasing, particularly in northern Wiltshire, but these were uncommon; thus at Oaksey in 1439, the demesne was held by a group of nine lessees, most of whom were also customary tenants of the manor.¹² Such collective leases did not survive in the chalklands, and the typical lease in the county as a whole was to one man alone.

II

Who then were leasing the demesnes? An attempt to answer this question has been

⁶ G Holmes, *The Later Middle Ages*, 1962, p 147.

⁷ As on the estates of St Swithun's Priory, Winchester; see J Greatrex, 'The Administration of Winchester Cathedral Priory in the time of Cardinal Beaufort' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ottawa, 1973), appendix, p ii.

⁸ Hare, *op cit*, pp 129-32, 139-40, 342-4.

⁹ The most notable exception to this generalization is provided by the Bishop of Winchester's estate. This estate, however, was not included in my survey. Developments on the Battle Abbey manor of Bromham are considered in Hare, *op cit*, pp 338-44.

¹⁰ These sentences summarize the conclusions of a study of rent levels, entry fines, and arrears on a large number of manors throughout the country. See Hare, *op cit*, Ch III.

¹¹ Hare, *op cit*, pp 127-8.

¹² R Payne, 'Agrarian Conditions on the Wiltshire Estates of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Lords Hungerford and the Bishopric of Winchester' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1940), pp 274, 286.

made by building up as detailed a picture as possible of the individual lessees on fourteen Wiltshire manors before 1510. This study has been concerned with the men who were leasing wholesale the demesne arable or pasture. Other resources of the manor, such as rabbit warrens, mills, quarries, and rectory tithes were also leased, but to include them would result in needless complication and distract attention from the main problem of who took over the agricultural land of the manor.

The choice of manors for study was effectively determined by the survival of documentary material,¹³ for such a study could only be undertaken where the documentation was relatively good. The sample is too small for any claims to statistical validity, but it has the merit of including a wide variety of manors. Although it includes a preponderance of large manors, of the manors of large estates and of chalkland manors, this is never to the exclusion of other types. Those manors where the demesne was leased to a group of men rather than to an individual and which were found mainly in the north of the county have, however, been excluded. They were not typical of leasing in this county and to have included them in the calculations would have overweighted the results towards those who were involved in such collective leases. The following study centres around the lessees of our sample group of manors, but other lessees have been included in the discussion, where relevant.

In building up a picture of our lessees and their families the evidence of the manorial records — account rolls, court rolls and rentals — has been supplemented by other sources, such as wills, taxation returns, receivers' accounts and individual leases and deeds. To establish a picture of the background from which our lessees came, it was first necessary to look at the activities of

earlier members of the family; our material is far too limited to rely on information about the individual lessee himself. But the sources rarely provide us with any direct evidence about family relationships, and surnames have therefore had to be used as an indicator of family groups. That this is a reasonable assumption, at least in Wiltshire at this period, is suggested by a more general study of the contemporary manorial material.¹⁴ For it was rare for there to be more than two families with the same name, and when this did occur, a distinguishing *alias* was usually added. Thus the Weylot family of Durrington also produced a Weylot *alias* Carter and a Weylot *alias* Barbour family, although in the latter case the family seems later to have dropped the original name and became known by the alias alone. Families with the same name but occurring on different manors have not been linked, unless there is positive evidence suggesting a relationship between them. Thus when we find a Benger of Alton Barnes acting as a pledge for another Benger, who had come from outside to lease the demesne at Durrington, we may surely suggest the likelihood of some sort of family link. It must be stressed how fragmentary is our evidence. Our knowledge of individual families must inevitably be based on occasional glimpses into their land-holding or other activities. But the fragmentary nature of the evidence should not deter us from trying to ascertain what sort of men were leasing the Wiltshire demesnes.

The fourteen manors in our sample, provided a list of eighty-eight lessees from sixty-seven different families (Table 1). For some of these, little could be discovered about them except for their leasing activities. Thus we know nothing about thirteen of these families save that they leased a particular manor at a particular time. In attempting any quantitative analysis of these lessees a choice had to be made between the family and the individual, as fourteen of the families

¹³ The following manors were included: Enford, Stockton, Westwood, Wroughton, Aldbourne, Collingbourne (Ducis), Everley, Upavon, Durrington, Coombe Bissett, All Cannings, Urchfont, Kingston Deverill, Bromham.

¹⁴ Hare, *op cit*, pp 265–7.

TABLE 1
Leasing families on fourteen Wiltshire manors:
their origins

I <i>Local</i> (active in the village before they leased the demesne)	
Customary tenants	26
Unknown status	8
II <i>Foreign</i> (from families based outside the village)	
Customary tenants	1
Leased demesnes elsewhere	2
Gentlemen	1
Unknown status	7
III <i>Unknown origin</i>	
Unknown before they leased	14
Unknown before and after they leased	13
Total	68

NB Sixty-seven families are known to have leased on the fourteen manors up to 1510, and fourteen of these also leased elsewhere. The Harvests have been included both as a local customary family (for Urchfont) and as a family of foreign lessees (for All Cannings and Durrington). This accounts for the additional entry in the total.

produced two or more lessees. In view of the limitations of the evidence it was considered that analysis in terms of individuals might have distorted the results by giving undue prominence to a few well-documented families. Calculations have therefore been based on families rather than on individuals. It must be stressed here that the family has been used as a means of studying the background from which came our lessees. For the nature of the evidence means that the easiest way of ascertaining this is to look at the activities of fathers or of other relatives. The use of the family should not necessarily imply that there were close economic ties between the farming of the lessee and that of the rest of his family. No doubt, there was often a general co-operation within such families, although our sources are usually silent, but in the main men sought to acquire an independent agricultural

holding. This they were usually able to accomplish, as the study of rentals and court rolls makes clear.

III

As work elsewhere has shown, the lessees were very varied in composition, ranging from local peasants, often of villein origin, to the gentry and wealthy outsiders. But an analysis of the lessees in our sample, summarized in Table 1, highlights the importance of one particular group. For of sixty-seven families in the survey, at least twenty-six were drawn from the ranks of local customary tenants. Moreover, while this figure constitutes 39 per cent of the sample, it is almost certainly an underestimate of the importance of this group. The use of the surname merely provides an indication of descent through fathers, but not through mothers. Furthermore, the documentary limitations conceal the local origins of some lessees. A further eight lessees can be shown to have been active in their respective village before they leased the demesne there, although no record survives of their tenurial status. Finally, nothing is known about twenty-seven lessees and their families in the period before they undertook the leasing of the demesne. Occasionally, enough documents survive for a particular manor to suggest that such a family had indeed come from outside the manor. This is confirmed by other sources for the Bengers and Harvests who both first came to Durrington as lessees and who were linked to families based on Alton Barnes and Urchfont respectively. But such cases are rare. For most manors, the documentary evidence is too fragmentary for us to attach significance to any lack of earlier references. It is clear therefore that at least a large minority, and probably a majority, of the leasing families came from those who had previously been customary tenants of the manor where they later leased the demesne.

However, we can provide a fuller picture of this major group of lessees. Some of the families were to be found on their manor a

century or more before they became lessees, and for some this long-standing tenure on the manor was symbolized in their continued burden of serfdom. At least five families of demesne lessees retained their unfree status into the fifteenth century, at a time when such survival was unusual, though like the Gerveys and the Mascall families they later gained their manumission. But as would be expected, in view of the mobility of the tenant population in this period,¹⁵ other lessees were drawn from among relatively recent immigrants to the village. Families like the Langfords of Durrington did not appear until the fifteenth century, and thus also escaped the personal disabilities of serfdom.

In general, the lessees and the families in this major group were among the tenants of the large standard customary tenements, whether these were virgates, as at Durrington, or half-virgates, as at Stockton. Thus at Stockton in the 1350s there were two ancestors of later lessees, and both held half-virgates.¹⁶ At Durrington the 1388 rental includes the families of three future lessees. One had accumulated a virgate and an additional cottage and few acres, another was temporarily holding two virgates, while a third held no more than a single virgate.¹⁷ The lessees thus came from among the more substantial families of the village, but from a broad based village minority, and not necessarily from among the largest customary tenants. Occasionally the family included someone who was a cottager, but not for long. A newcomer might start as a cottager, either as a craftsman or agricultural labourer, while the son of a substantial tenant farmer might take his first step to independence by setting up home in a cottage. But the ready availability of land meant that such men, and certainly those capable of leasing a demesne, soon moved on to a standard customary tenement.

These lessees came from families who were accustomed to playing an active role in village life. Eight of our lessees had earlier acted as reeve and in addition one had acted as rent collector and another had a father who had been reeve.¹⁸ Now these ten examples may not appear particularly significant when compared with the sixty-seven families in the sample or even with the twenty-four families of local customary tenants. But this figure is a clear underestimate. Very few account rolls survive for Wiltshire manors in the last days of seigniorial cultivation. Our knowledge of who acted as reeve on these manors in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries is therefore very poor.

These lessees had also held other positions of responsibility. They were to be found in charge of the lord's flocks, as a juror for the collection of a royal subsidy, and as reapeeves. Others can be seen playing an active role in the administration of law and order in the village, acting as, for example, pledges and tithing men.¹⁹ In addition to the routine pledging these families are also occasionally seen supporting other lessees. When Richard atte Mere leased Durrington in 1389, John Gilberd was one of two other men who pledged themselves for £100 to secure Richard's lease.²⁰ Such a task clearly required men of greater wealth and repute than the normal pledge. Later John himself became a lessee. Similarly, when John Stannford leased Collingbourne in 1443, his two pledges were both future lessees. Other lessees were to be found in roles additional to their agricultural and administrative ones. They are commonly

¹⁵ Discussed in Hare, *op cit*, pp 265-72.

¹⁶ BM: Add Roll 24394.

¹⁷ Winchester College Muniments (hereafter 'WCM'): 5596; 5950, 5954, 5956.

¹⁸ Thomas Goddard and John Runte at Aldbourne, Richard Cantelowe, Richard Batte and Richard Webbe at Collingbourne, John Daniel at Kingston Deverill, Robert atte Mere at Durrington, and Nicholas atte Mulle at Coombe Bissett (Payne, *op cit*, p 284; PRO: DL 29/710/11446, 737/12071, 737/12076; WRO: 192/32; WCM, 5650a, 4622); John Colet at All Cannings (WRO 192/28); John Gerveys at Enford (Winchester Cathedral Library (hereafter WCL)). Register of the Dean and Chapter, formerly of the Cathedral Priory, vol I f 33).

¹⁹ PRO: DL 29/683/11061; BM: Add Roll 19719; *Feudal Aids*, 1908, V, p 233; WCM: 5650 k.

²⁰ WCM: 5650 m. For another example see PRO: DL 29/685/11087, m2.

found as brewers who regularly broke the assize. The social origins of this group of lessees are thus essentially those of the 'main' families of the village in pre-leasing days:²¹ the substantial tenants of the village whose judicial and administrative activities formed an essential factor in the smooth running of the community. Such lessees were men whose wealth and experience best suited them to the responsibilities of leasing the demesnes.

The role of such local leasing families can perhaps best be seen by looking briefly at an individual and well-documented example. John Hickes leased the demesne at Durrington from 1401 until his death in 1413/14.²² He came of a long-established family of Durrington customary tenants, which had held a virgate or more in 1334/35, 1359 and 1388. In 1411/12 John Hickes held three virgates, and with two others held an additional virgate.²³ Already before he had leased the demesne, John had raised himself far above most of the other customary tenants, though this was not a typical development. But the family was not to last. After his death his lands passed to his son or brother William, but the latter died not long afterwards and in 1428 his widow surrendered her lands.²⁴ The Hickes family was certainly no stranger to responsibility: John Hickes was reeve in 1357-59, and John Hickes, the future lessee, was rent collector from 1399-1401.²⁵ It held other influential posts in the local community, such as those of tithing man and assessor to the manorial court.²⁶ Members of the family could often be found as pledges, including pledging for another lessee.²⁷ As in the 1390s they were regularly to be found as brewers. But legally the family remained a

villain one, as entries in 1391 and 1396 make clear.²⁸ A similar picture of the background and activity of a leasing family could be provided for the Mascalls and Shilvingstoles of Stockton, or for the atte Mere's of Durrington.²⁹

In origin, at least, these men may aptly be described as peasants. But the leasing of the demesnes and the extensive scale of their agriculture provided the opportunities for men to rise beyond the level of the rest of the village peasantry. Thus when later, in 1545, a very selective benevolence was levied, its contributors included a number who were descended from the customary 'peasant' lessees: a Mascal at Stockton, a Goddard and a Shepherd at Aldbourne, and a Cerle at Enford.³⁰ But not all prospered, and Robert Hopkyns *alias* Shilvingstole of Stockton provides a cautionary corrective. When he died, a few years after having leased the demesne there, nothing could be raised for his heriot 'for he had no goods or chattels'.³¹ Even if we should not take this phrase literally, it suggests that, at the very least, Robert's position was not a very prosperous one.

We must now consider those families for which no local customary provenance can be established. Some merely provide very shadowy figures who only appear when they are leasing the demesne. There are thirteen families about which we know nothing prior to the start of the lease or subsequent to its termination. In part such ignorance may result from the fragmentary nature of the documentation, but in other cases it probably represents the reality of the situation. For here were substantial 'foreigners' whose involvement in the village was only temporary.

For some families we are able to demonstrate that they came from outside the manor.

²¹ On the concept of the 'main' families applied to medieval villages see J A Raftis, 'The Concentration of Responsibility in five Villages', in *Medieval Studies*, 1966, pp 92-118.

²² WCM: 5956-5969.

²³ WCM: 5601 a, 5601 C, 5596, 13373.

²⁴ WCM: 5655 q.

²⁵ WCM: Index (Durrington Account Rolls); WCM 5954-5.

²⁶ WCM: 5650 a, 5655 t.

²⁷ WCM: 5650 r & m.

²⁸ WCM: 5650 k & p.

²⁹ The Mascalls and Shilvingstole families are discussed in Hare, *op cit*, pp 209-12. For the atte Meres see the Durrington records in WCM.

³⁰ G D Ramsay (ed), *Two sixteenth-century Taxation Lists*, Wiltshire Record Society (hereafter WRS), X, 1954.

³¹ BM: Add Roll 24382.

Not surprisingly, some of these 'foreign' lessees were drawn from the tenants, customary or otherwise, of neighbouring manors, and often came from a similar social environment to the customary tenants that we have already considered. The Pynkeney family leased the demesne at Upavon in the late fifteenth century, but they were initially described as 'of Rushall' (a neighbouring village).³² John Gyffgor was a customary tenant at Durrington, but also leased the demesne at neighbouring Knighton.³³ Other examples include John Thurborne of Amesbury who leased at Durrington,³⁴ and the Potter family at Coombe Bissett.³⁵

In other cases it is clear that the lessee had come from much further away, although we can then rarely say anything about their social and economic background. But the origins of one such lessee can be particularly well documented and he certainly came from a family of customary tenants. Thomas Weylot *alias* Barbour leased the demesne at Coombe Bissett in the period 1491–1523 and established a family there.³⁶ He was a newcomer to the manor, for he does not occur on any of the plentiful earlier records. But he was evidently a villein of one of Winchester College's other manors, for the College administration took exceptional pains to stress his personal servility, and even described him on the account rolls as a bondman. No doubt it feared that the change of scene might lead Thomas to be regarded, like other foreigners, as a freeman. Fortunately, the records for the College's manor of Durrington, twelve miles away, show that it was from here that he came, and enable us to examine his family background before he moved to Coombe Bissett. For the Durrington records show the presence of a family with both the same surname and the same *alias*, namely Weylot

alias Barbour. Here the Weylots provided many of the substantial and influential members of the village community. They figure regularly on the rentals from 1359/60, holding a half-virgate then and in 1388/89. In 1411/12 one of them held a virgate and another a virgate and additional few acres. Thereafter the family seems to have proliferated, and in 1444 six members of the family were included on the rental. John Weylot *alias* Barbour then held two cottages and eight acres, much less than the others.³⁷ The Weylots played an active part in village administration acting as hayward, ale-taster, tithing-man, assessor to the manorial court, and as rent collectors. They were also to be found acting as pledges for, and executor to, other members of the village community.³⁸ With so many younger sons to support, the Weylots were to be found in several occupations other than those of customary tenant. They provided servants to other lessees, a shepherd, a barber, and a carter, and several who broke the assize of ale.³⁹ But the family was still a bond or villein one. A Thomas Weylot had probably managed to secure his manumission, as he was found heading the free jurors in 1484 and 1485.⁴⁰ But the court rolls show that even in the later fifteenth century the family was regarded as a bond one, although some of its members were certainly trying to throw off this personal servility. One member had left to live in a neighbouring village and after his death had his will proved in the Probate Court of Canterbury, although at his death he was still described on the court rolls as a bondman.⁴¹ Although it is rare for the social origins of our foreign lessees to be so well documented, this example shows how they could be drawn from among the customary tenantry elsewhere, and how they could move some

³² Payne, *op cit*, p 304, PRO: Prob 11/14/20.

³³ WCM: 5655 n.

³⁴ WCM: 5655 u & p, 5603 d, 20013.

³⁵ WCM: 4646–93, 4351 b, 13373, 4396–7; E A Fry (ed), *Abstracts of Wiltshire Inquisitiones Post Mortem*, I, Devizes, 1902–8, p 332.

³⁶ WCM: 4721–52, 4354; PRO: Prob 11/21/12.

³⁷ WCM: 5601 C, 5596, 13373, 5603 d.

³⁸ Eg WCM: 5655 b, 6047, 6034–72, 6073–9, 5656 d, e, g, j, l, m; 5655, t, l. It should be pointed out that pledging entries are uncommon in the fifteenth-century court rolls.

³⁹ Eg WCM: 5950, 5655 e, n, j, 5650 s, 5656 e.

⁴⁰ WCM: 5656 g.

⁴¹ WCM: 5656 i & m; PRO: Prob 11/21/12.

distance in order to undertake the leasing of the demesne.

IV

The lessees that we have so far considered may all be described as peasants or villagers. Although they generally came from among the more substantial members of the village community, they were not markedly distinguishable in wealth, tenure or personal status from the rest of the village population. But while this group probably provided the bulk of the Wiltshire lessees, we also have evidence of men whose wealth and range of interests clearly separated them from the rest of the village community. This is the case despite the absence of the highest ranks of county society from among those who leased the demesne here. In our sample only one lessee was described as a gentleman or a knight.⁴² The limited involvement of such men was probably typical of the county as a whole. The many additional records that have been consulted have revealed no other knight leasing a demesne, only one esquire (John Fferres at Oaksey),⁴³ and only six who were described as gentlemen.⁴⁴

But below this small group of lessees was a group of men who, although they were not described as gentlemen, cannot usefully be called peasants. They were men of substance and standing beyond the boundaries of the village where they leased the demesne. The steward of the manor, for example, was a freeman of more than parochial standing who was capable of maintaining the lord's judicial rights. But they were also to be found acting as lessees, as with John Westbury at Kingston

Deverill⁴⁵ and Thomas Terrante at Enford.⁴⁶ In addition, members of the baronial households also acted as lessees, so that on the Hungerford estate the lessees included the receiver-general (Gregory Westeby at Winterborne Stoke) and the stockman (John Clayden at Sutton Veny).⁴⁷

The wealth and range of activities of such greater yeomen or petty gentry may clearly be seen in the life of John Stannford, a man whose scale of operations had nothing in common with that of the local village population. He was described as 'of Ross-hale',⁴⁸ but his activities spread far beyond that small Wiltshire village. He was an important figure in the administration of the Duchy of Lancaster estates, for he was stockman of the southern parts of the Duchy. Moreover, this was at a time when the sheep-rearing and grazing activities of these manors became most centralized and co-ordinated under the direction of the feoffees of Henry V's will. His responsibility covered the Wiltshire manors of Aldbourne, Berwick, Collingbourne, and Everley, and also manors in Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset. He had to tour these manors seeing to the upkeep of the stock, selling wool and sheep and buying new stock. Something of the scale of his responsibilities may be gauged from the amounts he spent on buying new stock, for in 1432/33 he spent £85 8s 4d (buying 846 wethers) and in 1436/37 he spent £67 13s 4d.⁴⁹ When, a few years later, the duchy ended its direct involvement in pastoral farming and leased out its pastures, it was perhaps not surprising that he should figure prominently

⁴² Sir Walter Hungerford at Everley, PRO: DL 29/694/11235.

⁴³ Payne op cit, p 304.

⁴⁴ Thomas Horton at Westwood after 1518, Richard Hugys alias Baker at Cricklade, John Westley, John Pareham, William Powey, and Richard Page at Brixton Deverill. WCL: Box 40/50, Salisbury Diocesan Record Office (hereafter Sal D & C): Reg. Burgh f 18, Muniments of King's College, Cambridge (hereafter KCM): Ledger Book I, fols 28, 48, 187 and 5. On Page, who was not described as a gentleman on the lease, see Hare, op cit, p 320.

⁴⁵ WRO: 192/32. The Westburys were an important local gentry family. J L Kirby, *The Hungerford Family in the later Middle Ages*, (unpublished MA thesis, University of London, 1939) appendix D; *Victoria County History of Wiltshire* (hereafter VCH), V, 1957, p 34; J S Davies (ed) *The Tropenell Cartulary*, Devizes, 1908, *passim*.

⁴⁶ BM: Harleian Roll V 22.

⁴⁷ Payne, op cit, pp 280-1. Westeby's lease, however, was granted as a financial reward as he lived rent-free on the demesne.

⁴⁸ Eg PRO: DL 29/685/11087; *Cal Close Rl Hen VI*, III, p 495.

⁴⁹ PRO: DL 29/710/11433, 11436.

among the lessees and he leased the large demesnes of Collingbourne and Everley. To stock these he bought the existing duchy flocks there, and was to pay £76 17s 3d for 1,074 sheep.⁵⁰ Stannfords's leasing operations were, moreover, even more extensive than this would suggest. He was already leasing the sheep pastures at Upavon from 1423, and by 1448 he leased the whole of the western part of Upavon.⁵¹ In 1439 he had gained a seven-year period of custody on the manor of an alien priory at Charlton.⁵² Then came the leases at Collingbourne and Everley, and finally in the period 1439–52 he was leasing Rushall.⁵³ It is noticeable that all these manors are to be found in a very restricted part of the county, with each manor lying adjacent, or almost adjacent, to another of the manors on which he had secured a lease. The scale of his agricultural activities thus marked him off from the peasant lessees or from the rest of the village population. As to his origins, earlier references to a Stannford family in this area suggest that he came from a family of substantial freemen.⁵⁴ Interestingly John himself was apparently rector of Rushall.⁵⁵ The family remained prominent in this area in the later fifteenth century.⁵⁶

There were also other lessees whose interests lay outside the manor, but who were primarily merchants or industrialists. None have so far been found among the lessees in our sample, but work on other manors has shown the involvement of such men. At Westwood, but just after our period, Thomas Horton leased the manor (1518–42). He was noted in this part of the country as a great clothier, and was one of three specifically

mentioned by Leland, as pre-eminent in the Bradford — Trowbridge cloth area.⁵⁷ The family's fortunes seem to have been established by his father, John. His cloth-making activities had flourished and by the time of his death he was able to make generous benefactions to churches and his family. His cloth-making interests passed to his second son, the Thomas Horton of our lease. Thomas evidently flourished in the trade, rising to wealth and fame as one of the most important cloth producers of his time. He was variously described as clothier, clothman, clothmaker, merchant, and gentleman — a combination which points both to his industrial and trading activities, and to the social status which his wealth had achieved for him. Some of this wealth he used to establish a chantry and school at Bradford, and other funds were used in his building operations. The latter included houses at Bradford and Trowbridge, as well as extensive building works at the manor house and church of Westwood, where he leased the manor.⁵⁸

The other merchants who were demesne lessees are much more shadowy figures. A John Goddard of Marlborough leased at Mildenhall in 1439.⁵⁹ He was probably the same as the John Goddard of Poulton (a small neighbouring village to Marlborough and Mildenhall), whose will was drawn up in 1443 and proved in 1454.⁶⁰ His will shows a man of great wealth and with very close connections with Marlborough, which was one of the largest towns in the county and an important industrial and trading centre.⁶¹ His bequests included £16 13s 4d to various churches in the area and to the cathedral. He left to his son all his lands and rents in Marlborough, £140 in cash and a debt of £20 still

⁵⁰ PRO: DL 29/685/11087.

⁵¹ PRO: DL 29/682/11058.

⁵² *Cal Close Rl Hen VI*, III, p 495.

⁵³ PRO: SC 6/1057/1 & 2.

⁵⁴ C R Elrington (ed), *Abstracts of Feet of Fines relating to Wiltshire for the reign of Edward III*, WRS: XXIX, 1974, p 145; PRO: E 179/194/42a.

⁵⁵ T Phillippis, *Institutiones Clericorum in Comitatu Wiltoniae*, 1297–1810, privately printed, 1825, p 129.

⁵⁶ William Stannford leased at Upavon from 1455 (PRO: DL 37/53) and there are frequent references to him in the Tropenell Cartulary from 1458 to 1485.

⁵⁷ WCL: 40/50. On Horton see E M Carus-Wilson, 'The Woollen Industry before 1550' in VCH IV, 1959, pp 141–2.

⁵⁸ On his building works at the manor-house of Westwood see D Sutton, *Westwood Manor* (National Trust), 1962.

⁵⁹ PRO: SC 6/1056/10.

⁶⁰ PRO: Prob 11/1/10 fol 78v.

⁶¹ Hare, *op cit*, pp 79–80, 87, 91.

owed to him, and an extensive list of silverware and chests. His daughter was to receive various household goods and 500 sheep, and the cash alone given away to his friends, executors and servants totalled £19. We do not know precisely how John had acquired such wealth, although his link with a mercer of London and the strength of his Marlborough connections suggest that his fortunes may have come from trading activities. His links with Robert Baron, a London mercer, were sufficiently close for Robert to hold £100 of his money and to be one of his executors. His largest bequests to churches (after that to Aldbourne, which was probably his village of origin) went to the three parochial churches of Marlborough and to the Carmelites there. In addition, another executor who held £40 of his money was William Dolman of Marlborough. Finally, if his son and daughter died without heir, his lands and rents in Marlborough were to pass to the mayor and commonalty of Marlborough.

There are few other men, apart from Horton and Goddard, who can be shown to have been closely involved in trade or industry. Only two Salisbury merchants have been identified as lessees anywhere in the county: Nicholas Noble leased Homington, and John Welles, a butcher, leased at Little Durnford.⁶² In addition, the Richard Page of Warminster who leased Brixton Deverill in 1455 was presumably the same person as Richard Page of Warminster, merchant, who had leased some land there from the Chapter of Salisbury a few years before.⁶³ But since there was little value in describing the lessee's occupation on the account roll, or even on the lease, this small group must surely provide an underestimate of merchants' involvement in leasing. Of our examples, only two are given an occupational description on the lease and some of our unknown 'foreign' lessees were probably merchants.

We can thus see a significant group of lessees who, as merchants, officials and large-scale agriculturalists, were separated from the rest of the village by wealth, status and interests. But another feature that emerges from this study is the presence of families who repeatedly leased demesnes: we find both families who leased on several different manors, and those who leased it on one manor but for several generations. Such families had already been involved in agriculture on a larger scale than that of the rest of the village. They may have emerged originally from the ranks of the customary tenant families, but their wealth and interests soon spread beyond that of their native village. The members of such families probably often acted as independent farmers, although there was probably also an element of co-operation. But no doubt they were helped in acquiring a lease by earlier experience of large-scale agriculture or by family help in securing the lease, either through the provision of supporting pledges or in less formal ways.

The Goddards of Aldbourne provide a good example of a family who leased on several different manors. They came from a long-established family of Aldbourne tenants. In 1379 Walter Goddard was a free tenant there and three other Goddards contributed to the poll tax.⁶⁴ They had also held customary land, as the 1431 account roll refers to a messuage and virgate, formerly held by Richard Goddard for rent and works, although it was now leased.⁶⁵ The family may have been involved in leasing from an early stage, for in 1398 a Thomas Goddard was leasing the neighbouring manor of Hinton.⁶⁶ But it is only in the middle of the following century that our information becomes much fuller. Then the family provided two lessees: both men of substance, but whose wealth had probably been derived from very different sources.

⁶² KCM: Ledger Book I, fol 61, 72, 91; *Tropenell Cartulary* II, p 281.

⁶³ KCM: Ledger Book I, fol 5; Sal D & C, Reg Burgh, p 11.

⁶⁴ PRO: E 179/239/193/IIa.

⁶⁵ PRO: DL 29/683/11061.

⁶⁶ PRO: DL 29/737/12073.

We have already considered the probable urban and trading links of John Goddard of Marlborough and Poulton. He was also a lessee, leasing the demesne at Mildenhall from 1451 until at least 1456,⁶⁷ and was eventually succeeded by a John Goddard of Lydiard. His link with the Aldbourne family of the same name is suggested by his will, for its church was to have his largest single bequest to any church, while several Aldbourne men were also among the beneficiaries. His interests seem to have mainly been in trade, but his contemporary, a Thomas Goddard of Aldbourne, seems to have concentrated on agriculture. The latter acted as lessee and reeve at Aldbourne from 1443. He had earlier been a reeve there⁶⁸ and was evidently a man of means. When he became lessee he undertook to pay £61 17s 6d for the 825 wethers of the existing duchy flock, and in the same year he acted as a pledge for the new lessee of the duchy manor of Chipping Lambourne in Berkshire.⁶⁹ Finally, in 1445 he, or a relation with the same name, undertook the leasing of the demesnes at Ogbourne for an annual rent of £50.⁷⁰

By 1460 Thomas had ceased to be lessee at Aldbourne, but this position was retaken by the Goddards in 1468 and they then retained it into the sixteenth century. Richard Goddard leased Aldbourne until 1507, when he was succeeded by a John Goddard.⁷¹ For Ogbourne no evidence survives for the period between 1445 and 1500. But in 1500 Richard's brother John became the lessee, with Richard acting as a pledge for him.⁷² At his death in the following year the same John was also leasing the manor of Eaton.⁷³ In the sixteenth century the family continued to

dominate the lease at Ogbourne, with a Thomas securing it in 1510 and Anthony and another Thomas in 1520.⁷⁴ Finally, a Thomas Goddard leased the manor of Overton, belonging to St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, in 1512.⁷⁵

The leasing activities of the Goddard family point clearly to the way in which a family could lease several manors and produce several generations of lessees. It should be noted, however, that, as with the activities of John Stannford, the manors concerned were concentrated in one part of the county. As a result, at least in part, of these extensive agricultural activities the Goddards rose to great wealth. In the 1525 lay subsidy returns John Goddard was credited with goods to the value of £440 while Thomas Goddard at Ogbourne was assessed at £640.⁷⁶ With this increase in wealth came an accompanying rise in status, though this was rather delayed. Throughout the fifteenth century the Goddards were merely referred to as husbandmen and in 1478 they were even accused of being villeins.⁷⁷ But by 1510 Thomas Goddard of Ogbourne was being referred to as a gentleman.⁷⁸ Finally, the family maintained links with trade. We have already considered the career of John Goddard of Marlborough, and in the 1478 case the list of Goddards included a William Goddard of London. But the interaction between trade and agriculture can perhaps be seen most clearly in the will of a Richard Goddard who died in far-off London in 1505, apprenticed to a grocer. Although a mere apprentice he had two sizeable bequests to dispose of: the 100 sheep and two cows left by his father and which were in the possession of his cousin, Thomas Goddard of Ogbourne; and the 100

⁶⁷ PRO: SC 6/1056/13-14.

⁶⁸ Payne, *op cit*, p 284.

⁶⁹ PRO: DL 29/685/11087.

⁷⁰ KCM: Ledger Book I fol 8.

⁷¹ Payne, *op cit*, p 302; PRO: DL 29/693/11226 & 9.

⁷² KCM: Ledger Book I, fol 172. It is possible that John had already been leasing the demesne before this (the 1478 case refers to a John Goddard of Ogbourne St George) and that the Goddards had dominated the lease for most or part of the intervening period.

⁷³ PRO: Prob 11/12/23.

⁷⁴ KCM: Ledger Book I, fol 226, 241. Thomas had died in 1517 according to his brass: E Kite, *The Monumental Brasses of Wiltshire*, Facsimile Edition, Bath, 1969, plate XVII.

⁷⁵ WCL: Register D & C II, fol 74.

⁷⁶ PRO: E 179/161.

⁷⁷ *The Goddard Family* (Wiltshire Archaeological Society MSS vol 241) provides a transcript of the case taken from the *de banco* roll for 18 Edward IV.

⁷⁸ KCM: Ledger Book I, fol 226.

sheep and two sacks of wool bequeathed by his Uncle Richard.⁷⁹

Other families or individuals also leased several demesnes. The Harveys were a family of customary tenants at Urchfont, active in village life and apparently little different in origin from the rest of the village population.⁸⁰ They leased the demesne, with one possible exception, from at least 1452 to 1510. In addition, other members of the family leased the demesne at Durrington from 1478 to 1512, and at All Cannings (a neighbouring manor to Urchfont) from 1498 to at least 1517.⁸¹ Another example, though coming from a rather different social background, is provided by the Benger family of Alton Barnes. They were a family of freeholders there and were probably linked to a prominent local gentry family of the same name. They leased the demesne in Alton Barnes in 1484 and 1531.⁸² In addition, Thomas Benger and then Richard Benger leased at Durrington from 1512 to 1525. When Thomas first undertook the lease he was supported by Richard Benger of Alton Barnes who acted as his pledge.⁸³ Finally, the Martyn family of Durrington leased the demesnes at Brimmerston, Enford and Amesbury Earls.⁸⁴ We must bear in mind that the chance of documentation surviving for more than one of a family's leases (since our evidence does not come from the family's

own muniments) is extremely small and that it is difficult to establish that two lessees are in fact the same person or members of the same family. In the light of this our five families become much more significant. Such individuals or families were now leasing several demesnes from different lords, usually in a limited area. We are thus seeing a regrouping of the organization of agriculture, and the emergence of a group of men whose agricultural activities spread beyond a single estate. It is a development which is concealed by the tradition of studying an individual estate.

The long length of time for which some leasing families were able to maintain control of the demesnes must also have helped to separate the lessees from the rest of the village population. The Goddards and the Harveys leased the demesnes at Aldbourne and Urchfont almost continuously from the 1450s well into the sixteenth century. Such a pattern was also found elsewhere. Thus in our sample fourteen families are found who provided at least two successive lessees, and some of these provided more than two. At Collingbourne Ducis three members of the Duper family leased the demesne from 1461 to 1522.⁸⁵ Finally at Kingston Deverill John Danyell, his wife and then Stephen Danyell leased the demesne from 1446 to 1487. It was then held by a newcomer, although he had probably already married, or was later to marry Stephen's widow.⁸⁶

V

What conclusions can therefore be drawn as to the kind of men who were leasing the Wiltshire demesnes? The evidence clearly points to the great diversity of such men,

⁷⁹ PRO: Prob 11/15/20.

⁸⁰ Eg WRO: 192/20 c, mm 3, 5, 30; 1, 21, 23; Winchester City Records (now in Hampshire Record Office) Shelf 13 box 6, Urchfont Court Roll; see also Hare, *op cit*, pp 229–31.

⁸¹ The only exception at Urchfont was Robert Wylkins, although he probably married into the family (Hare, *op cit*, p 230). For Durrington see WCM: 6034–66, 20015, 22992 fol 158 v, and for All Cannings WRO: 192/28.

⁸² PRO: Prob 11/21/29; J E T Rogers, *A History of Wages and Prices*, Oxford, 1882, III, pp 709–10. The Bengers were a prominent local legal and gentry family.

⁸³ WCM: 22992 fol 167 v, & 6068.

⁸⁴ WCM: 5656 b; B M Harleian Roll X/18–22; R B Pugh, 'The Early History of the Manors in Amesbury', in *WAM*: LII, 1947–48, 98. Although in this case we have no more than the identical combinations of names and their close proximity to Durrington to link these lessees to the Durrington family.

⁸⁵ PRO: DL 29/687/11134 — 694/11246. In the latter year he was still leasing the demesne and had eight years left of his thirty-one-year lease.

⁸⁶ WRO: 192/32. The relationship is suggested by their wills (PRO: Prob 11/8/11 & 17/25). Bartram came from outside, probably from Winterbourne Martyn in Dorset, where he had intended to found a chantry using lands he possessed there.

ranging from villeins to a knight, from peasant farmers to wealthy merchants. But such a study also points to more positive conclusions. The leasing of the demesnes provided great opportunities for the peasantry to expand their scale of agriculture, and it was the peasant families who, above all else, took advantage of this leasing. Local customary tenants provided by far the largest group (and probably the majority) of leasing families. In addition, men from a similar background were leasing demesnes outside their own village. Such men came from the substantial village tenantry, the holders of the larger standard tenements, men who had played an active part in village life and had often already had experience as manorial and village officials.

By contrast, the higher ranks of county society, the knights and esquires and gentlemen, only infrequently provided lessees. We thus have a very different picture from that on the estates of the Archbishop of Canterbury, where under Archbishop Warham (1502–32) about a third were so described.⁸⁷ There was, however, an important intermediate group in Wiltshire: men who, although they lacked the recognition of gentility, were clearly men of influence and standing beyond the confines of their own local community or village. Whatever their social origins may have been, they were now men of substance who would have to be treated with respect by the manorial lord and his administration.⁸⁸ Some were men who took part in the administration of the great estates, some were involved in industry and trade, while others were involved in large-scale agriculture. Some were men who had emerged out of the ranks of the village peasantry, but who now towered over the rest of the village community in wealth, and had now extended their influence and activities into the neighbouring villages.

Such, men, like the other lessees, appear to have acted as farmers rather than as rentiers. Unfortunately, very little is known about the

conduct of agriculture, on the demesne once this had been leased. Very few leases survive, but these often specifically forbid sub-leasing without the lord's consent.⁸⁹ The detailed provisions concerning the maintenance of the demesne also suggest that at least the greater part of the demesne remained under the direct cultivation of the lessee. Moreover, where subleasing took place, this could be of the whole demesne or manor, as occurred on one occasion at Durrington. When William Harvest renewed his lease here in 1498 he was allowed to sublease it, but only to his brother John.⁹⁰ In the same year William left Durrington to lease the larger demesne at All Cannings and John became lessee at Durrington. The wills of the lessees also suggest that they were involved in agriculture on a large scale. The will of John Goddard of Ogbourne, for example, refers specifically to 1,100 sheep which belonged to him and which were held in three flocks.⁹¹ Stephen Danyell, a lessee at Kingston Deverill, bequeathed at least 500 sheep in his will.⁹² Such benefactions may well not represent the total size of their flocks, but simply those which were included in specific benefactions. Moreover, the large scale of sheep farming is also indicated by the scale of sheep purchases made from the Duchy of Lancaster by John Stannford and Thomas Goddard when they first leased the duchy demesnes. The general impression of the documents is therefore that the lessees were agriculturalists rather than rentiers.

But such large-scale agricultural activity may seem to conflict with the general picture of the later Middle Ages as one of high wages and low profits. Very little is known directly about the profitability of leasing since we lack documents concerning the lessee's agricultural activities. But some general points

⁸⁹ WCM: 22992 fol 58 v.

⁹⁰ WCM: 22992 fol 158. This should presumably be seen as a reversion clause rather than as strictly allowing sub-leasing.

⁹¹ PRO: Prob 11/12/13.

⁹² PRO: Prob 11/8/11.

⁸⁷ Du Boulay, loc cit, p 450.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pp 444–5.

may safely be made. Although the early leasing in the early and middle fourteenth century may have been a seigneurial response to falling profits, this does not seem to have been the case in the fifteenth century in Wiltshire. Prices were then fluctuating but with no downward trend, and demesne agriculture survived intact until the final decision to lease the demesne wholesale. At Bromham at least, the leasing of the demesnes did not result in any significant fall in the lord's income.⁹³ Here, the prosperity and demands of an extensive and wealthy urban and industrial population helped to maintain the profits of agriculture, both of peasants and of lords.⁹⁴ Thus, with the exception of the north of the county, Wiltshire saw generally rising or static rents, despite what was happening elsewhere in England. The close links between arable farming and the great sheep flocks that provided manure as well as wool and meat, also helped to make large-scale agriculture profitable. The lord could still make profits, but there were ways in which the lessee could increase these. His administrative overheads were much less, for he had neither to maintain a large administrative machine nor a far-flung estate. It is significant that when one person is found leasing several demesnes, as with John Stannford, they are all concentrated in one small part of the county. Because he could maintain a close eye on his lands he was probably able to do without a reeve, or at least he could keep a much closer eye on any officials than had the monastic administrators in their audits. He was able to escape the great and expensive burden of 'paper-work' which the old system had imposed. Moreover, leasing provided opportunities for investment in agriculture at a time when agriculture remained a major source of profit, and when the instinct to acquire land remained unabated. The culmination of mercantile dreams was to establish their families as country gentlemen

who were no longer required to work in trade or industry.⁹⁵ This brings us to the incalculable social returns of leasing. It provided opportunities for the large-scale, if temporary, acquisition of land at a time when land was of considerable importance for social status. When Thomas Horton leased Westwood was he really concerned with the financial returns of this small manor, or did its attractions lie in being, in effect, a manorial lord?

VI

The leasing of the demesnes was producing a group of men who were cultivating on a scale far beyond that of the customary peasant farmers. But this development must not be seen in a vacuum. For at the same time, a similar development was taking place among the customary tenants of the chalkland manors. Here was emerging a group of men who cultivated two or more of the customary virgates. This can be seen particularly clearly at Durrington where an exceptionally good series of rentals survive. In the fourteenth century each of the seventeen virgates was usually held by a separate tenant, although in 1388 one tenant held two virgates. But by 1441 there were four men who each held two virgates, while by 1506, three men each held two virgates and another two each held three virgates.⁹⁶ By the latter date therefore, seventeen such holdings had been divided up among only ten men. The five men who now only held one virgate could no longer be described as among the leading farmers of the village. The large and growing scale of chalkland agriculture linked the leasing of the demesnes and the growing stratification among the customary tenancies. Thus John Martyn, a Durrington butcher and member of a prominent leasing family, was also one of

⁹³ Hare, *op cit*, pp 135-6.

⁹⁴ See *supra* note 10 and Hare, *op cit*, Ch III.

⁹⁵ A familiar story, exemplified in Wiltshire at a slightly later date in the career of William Stumpe. (Carus-Wilson, *loc cit*, pp 146-7).

⁹⁶ Although many of the Durrington rentals are undated they may be closely dated on internal evidence. The rental for 1505/6 is WCM: 5606 A^a.

the leading customary tenants in Durrington. In 1505/06 he held three virgates there while a John Martyn jun held another two virgates. Both these developments helped to characterize the chalklands in the sixteenth century as an area of large-scale capital-intensive agriculture.⁹⁷ This was reflected in the 1524 taxation returns which showed a concentration of wealthier taxpayers in this region and particularly in the area of the Marlborough downs.⁹⁸

The economic prosperity of the lessees and of these new greater tenants was also leading in the chalklands to social change and to a development that was to prove so significant in the later evolution of Wiltshire agriculture. This was the rise of the gentleman farmer, 'a man of education and leisure, who might take part in the government of a borough or serve as a steward to some great landowner', and a type who was to be so characteristic of the farming of the sheep and corn parts of the county in the succeeding centuries.⁹⁹ For although our lessees were rarely described as gentlemen, they probably already merited such a description. Their activities and horizons had already spread far beyond the agriculture and life of their village. We find them with influential and time-consuming tasks as baronial or royal officials. They could be active in the law. They could be concerned to provide a formal education for their children, so that we find representatives from several leasing families among the Wiltshire

entrants to Winchester College and New College, Oxford.¹⁰⁰ They mixed with families who were clearly gentry ones. We cannot provide a clear picture of the activities and social milieu of such families, but the scraps of evidence which we possess suggest that there was a substantial group of lessees who can more appropriately be described as gentleman-farmers than as peasants. But such gentleman-farmers were not just the product of the leasing of the demesnes, for they also resulted from general changes within the rural population: from the growing stratification of the tenant population and from the declining social distinctions between free, customary and leasehold tenures.

Any conclusions must therefore be rather ambiguous, reflecting both the importance of the local peasant families and the richer, large-scale farmers whose interests and activities had spread far beyond a single village. Some of the latter were men who had risen from among the village tenantry, but others were wealthy outsiders. But this study should also point to the need for further work elsewhere. In particular, we need more studies that are not restricted to individual estates; that take into account the possibility of one man leasing several demesnes and that explore the relationship of the lessees to the changes in rural society, both those among the group later known as the gentry and those among the peasantry. Ultimately, only further studies will do justice to the diversity of the demesne lessees. It was a diversity which aptly reflected the many forces that were moulding and transforming the society of later medieval England.

⁹⁷ E Kerridge, 'Agriculture 1500-1793' in *VCH* IV, 1959, pp. 57-8, 64.

⁹⁸ Based on the maps in, J Sheail, *The Regional Distribution of Wealth in England as indicated by the 1524-5 lay Subsidy Returns* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1968), pp 345 ff.

⁹⁹ Kerridge, loc cit, p. 64 (the quotation is his).

¹⁰⁰ I am very grateful to Professor G Lytle for providing me with a list of the Wiltshire entrants to these colleges.