

# **Manorial Court Roll Inventories as Evidence of English Peasant Consumption and Living Standards, c.1270-c.1420<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Introduction**

William Lene, a peasant from the village of Walsham le Willows (in Suffolk, eastern England; see map), died late in October 1329. The Walsham manorial court roll, which is the record of the proceedings of the local seigniorial or manor court, includes a list of the dead man's property. This list is termed an inventory, and it purports to describe the goods of Lene on the day he died. Various kinds of farming equipment, crops, animals, and household items are listed. Each item is given a valuation, and the total value of the goods is also stated. The inventory is followed by a list of expenses for which William's estate was liable, which include funeral costs, and post-mortem gifts to his children. The reasons for this document's inclusion in the court roll are not made explicit. One possibility is that William died intestate, or without making a will (there are hints that he perished in a fire). The manorial lord, by ordering the inventory and expenses to be drawn up, seems to have been exercising the right to administer the estates of his intestate servile (or villein) tenants.<sup>2</sup>

This document provides an exceptional insight into the material circumstances of an early fourteenth-century peasant. Not surprisingly, since its publication in 1998 it has attracted the attention of a number of historians.<sup>3</sup> William was a wealthy villager, known to have held at his death some 40 acres (16 hectares) of land. His lifestyle appears very comfortable by the standards of the contemporary peasantry. The most notable features of his inventory are the large numbers of animals and poultry, and the significant quantities of stored grain and legumes. These are suggestive of an ample and varied diet enjoyed by William and his family. However, the inventory also includes non-essential 'luxury' items such as a two table-cloths, a chair, and two towels.

This paper asks how far Lene's much discussed inventory is essentially an isolated survival. How common is it to find other listings of this type surviving

embedded in manorial court rolls, or other manorial documents? Where others can be traced, are they as complete as the Lene example, and do they offer as much detail and valuable information? To what extent do other similar surviving inventories suggest that Lene was untypical in the high consumption levels and living standards he enjoyed? In considering such questions, the paper also devotes attention to the reliability of such court roll inventories.

The focus here is on the period from the late thirteenth century to about 1420. By the mid-fifteenth century, inventories of the goods of individual deceased peasants generated by the church courts' probate system are available in numbers adequate for study. Before that era, probate inventories of persons of peasant status are almost entirely unavailable. This increases the potential value for the earlier period of the inventories preserved in manorial archives, as opposed to church court archives.

### **Previous research**

Existing work has identified and discussed further lists of peasant goods which, like that concerning William Lene, are preserved in the manorial records. It can thus be said immediately that Lene's inventory is far from unique, though nothing quite its equal in richness of detail has so far been discussed in published research. Work has been done on the content of some of these lists, and what it can tell us about the peasant economy. Some of the most notable work of this kind is briefly described here. However, it is fair to say that there has been relatively little study of the reasons for the creation of the manorial inventories, and thus of their value as evidence.

In a well-known 1965 article, Field discussed the lists of *principalia*, or principal chattels of the peasant holding, which are contained in the court rolls of certain Worcestershire manors. The *principalia* were the main household utensils and farming equipment belonging to a tenant holding, such as carts, ploughs, harrows, pots and pans, and tables. The *principalia* were typically recorded when a holding came into the lord's possession through tenant death, the surrender of a holding by a tenant, or the flight of the tenant. The *principalia* were deemed to belong to the lord, and changed hands along with the holding. By implication the *principalia* lists are incomplete, because they do not include the peasant's own possessions, most notably animals and crops.<sup>4</sup> The *principalia* lists differ in essence from the Lene inventory, and from the 14 inventories discussed in subsequent sections of the present paper.

Whereas the *principalia* lists detail movable property that remained with a peasant holding, the second and more common type of inventory purports to describe all a peasant's own chattels, for example on the occasion of his death (as in the Lene example). Another difference between this second category of inventory and the *principalia* lists is that the *principalia* lists appear to be a distinctive feature of the manorial records of a particular county (Worcestershire), whereas examples of those lists which feature the peasant's own goods are found in sources of much wider geographical origin.<sup>5</sup>

The *principalia* lists are among the sources that Dyer has used to explore the peasant economy. Dyer has also exploited examples from the second larger category of peasant inventory found in court rolls.<sup>6</sup> Hilton also made use of examples from the two categories of peasant inventory.<sup>7</sup> There have also been attempts to use the court roll inventories of peasant chattels, as opposed to the *principalia* lists, to study aspects of peasant production. Most notably, Stone has used occasional inventories of this type to investigate peasant cropping strategies, crop yields, and stocking densities, while Langdon made restricted use of such inventories to establish the relative importance of horses and oxen as draught animals on peasant farms.<sup>8</sup>

### **The inventories collected**

The remainder of the present paper is a discussion of a small collection of 14 lists of chattels, which have been found in the manorial records of 11 villages (see map).<sup>9</sup> The earliest list in date is about 1271, and latest is dated 1416. The lists are referred to below as inventories for convenience, though unlike the Lene example, none of the 14 lists is described in the source itself as an inventory. No attempt has been made to search deliberately for such inventories in manorial documents. Rather, these scattered examples have been collected in the course of work on the sources carried out for other purposes. The appendix details the goods listed in each inventory and the valuations (where given), plus some information on the inventoried individual. The items in the inventory have been grouped by me into a number of different categories.

Why were the inventories created? Often the sources provide no explicit answer to this question, but it must nonetheless be addressed if appropriate use is to be made of the lists.

It is obvious that all the court roll inventories were made on seigniorial instructions. Each of the 14 listings and valuations of an individual's goods seems to owe its existence to one of three distinct kinds of seigniorial right or privilege. The first is the landlord's right to seize all the chattels found within his lordship belonging to felons, fugitives, and outlaws. It appears that all the persons whose goods are listed in inventories 1 to 8 had been subject to the system of royal criminal justice. Most of these people are described in the manorial source as felons.<sup>10</sup> Details are few, but it is clear that the individuals in inventories 1 to 8 had either been convicted of a felony (serious crime) in the royal criminal courts, or had at least been accused of such a felony. Again, the manorial sources are not specific about what had happened to each person following the criminal accusation against him. Some may have appeared before royal justices and perhaps been convicted, while others had evidently fled justice.<sup>11</sup> Whatever had happened, the relevant fact from the landlord's point of view was that the individual had become absent from the community. As such, his goods were deemed forfeit to his manorial lord.

By claiming the chattels of felons, fugitives, and outlaws, these landlords were in effect assuming a privilege normally confined to the crown. Records of royal criminal justice, notably the eyre rolls (containing proceedings before the itinerant justices) and coroners' rolls frequently describe the lands and chattels of felons that were forfeit to the crown. Very often, those royal records do not give details of the lands and chattels, but restrict themselves to a valuation of the property.<sup>12</sup> Some of the landlords who took felons' chattels for their own use had been given this privilege by royal grant, but many others evidently asserted the right to the chattels without any obvious justification.<sup>13</sup>

The available manorial court roll information suggests that the normal course of action was for a lord to instruct local appraisers to examine and value the goods of the felon (or alleged felon). Their findings were then written up in an inventory which was usually incorporated into the manorial court rolls, though in some cases, the inventory formed a separate document.<sup>14</sup> The inventory presumably allowed the lord to ensure later that he had received all the goods, or the full proceeds of their sale. It is not clear whether the lord claimed the right to take only the goods of felons who were his villeins, or whether the right was held to extend to freemen also.

The second scenario in which a lord would order the compilation of an inventory was when one of the lord's villeins had fled the manor, or had been in some

way disobedient (appendix, inventories 9 to 11). In this scenario, the land and chattels of the villein were forfeit to the lord. Again, the order to document the goods and their valuations seems to have been made in order that the lord could be certain he had received everything due to him. This kind of villein flight from the manor is a well known feature of the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was a period in which tenants had a growing incentive to move in order to escape servitude and pursue new economic opportunities.<sup>15</sup>

The final kind of seigniorial right behind the making of an inventory is that of the lord's supervision of villein inheritance. Three of the inventories (numbers 12 to 14) apparently concern villeins who had either died intestate, or without heirs, or with heirs who were minors. The lord seems to have intervened in these cases to ensure the proper administration of the personal estate of the deceased. Thus in the final three examples in the appendix, the basic motivation behind the creation of the inventory was perhaps the same as in the William Lene example with which this paper began. However, in contrast to the Lene example, the sources summarized in numbers 12 to 14 in the appendix do not include a list of payments made from the estate, such as legacies.

Previous discussions of villein will-making and intestacy have pointed to cases where the lord's concern with the movables of intestate villeins was clearly driven by a wish to seize those movables.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that such a motivation lay behind the making of inventories 12 to 14 below. However, the sources do not contain specific information to that effect. It is notable that those three inventories, unlike many among inventories 1 to 11, are not accompanied by a seigniorial order to seize the inventoried goods for the lord. Instead, it is possible that in these three instances the motivation behind the making of the inventory was simply to obtain an accurate account of the goods of the deceased, so that it could later be checked that the goods had been disposed of properly by the administrators.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that court roll inventories could be made for a number of different reasons. Are the three groups of inventories identified here of equal value as evidence of peasant consumption and living standards? It is arguable that the inventories of felons' goods, and the inventories connected with inheritance (numbers 1-8 and 12-14) are of greater value than those relating to fleeing villeins (nos. 10-11). Those whose flight from the manor was premeditated would presumably have taken as many of their goods as possible with them. This would mean that the inventories of such

people are likely to be incomplete, featuring mainly items that could not easily be carried, or were not worth taking. Equally, though, even some of those accused of felony who fled their homes, presumably at short notice, may still have had the opportunity to take possessions with them. This factor presumably helps explain the absence of cash from most of the inventories.

Beyond this, it is difficult to do more than speculate as to how the reasons for the inventories' creation may affect their historical value. It is interesting, for example, that the inventories of felons' chattels seem to be restricted solely to those items found within the lordship.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is possible that the inventoried felons owned additional goods outside the relevant lord's domain. Such a restriction on the location of the goods inventoried does not appear to affect the inventories connected with inheritance, though it is hard to be certain. On the whole, the differences between the three groups of inventories, in terms of their value as evidence about consumption and living standards, cannot be shown to be especially marked.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of the inventories as a source**

Documentary sources which provide detailed information on the lifestyles and economic activities of the peasant households of medieval England are rare. The court roll inventories are therefore inherently valuable as evidence. Yet as will be shown further below, these sources have serious limitations, which may explain why they have not been more widely used.

An obvious advantage of these inventories is the depth of social coverage they provide. The inventories are not concerned solely with the peasant elite. The appendix does include some inventoried individuals who occupied quantities of land typical of the upper strata of the peasantry. The most notable are Robert Osebern, who at one stage in his life held a virgate (approximately 30 acres/12 hectares), and perhaps also Walter Baynard (no. 10), who held two-thirds of a virgate in the 1390s. Yet many of the other inventories collected here relate to smallholders. A good example is Richard Peper of Bunwell, Norfolk (no. 2). A typical East Anglian smallholder, Richard had access to about four acres of arable land only.

As a source for household possessions and living standards, the main rivals of the inventories are the lay subsidy rolls. One strength of the inventories is that they can be used in conjunction with the lay subsidy returns so as to provide a fuller

picture of the least well off peasants. The lay subsidies were royal taxes assessed on movable property, and levied from a large swathe of the rural and urban population.<sup>19</sup> Household by household lists of the property assessed for the subsidies survive for many places, and they have been widely used as a source. However, many household possessions were exempt from taxation. Also, when a subsidy was assessed, a minimum threshold for tax liability was usually set. Accordingly, if one owned taxable goods below a certain value (often 10 shillings), one was exempt. As a result, the lay subsidy returns tend to tell us about the more prosperous sections of village society, and about a restricted number of their household possessions.<sup>20</sup>

Another strength of the inventories is that one can make wider use of the manorial documents in which the inventory is located, in order to find further information on the inventoried individual. Thus in all but one of the 14 examples collected here, we have information on the quantity of land held by the person concerned at the time the inventory was made. In the one case where such secure landholding information cannot be located (Thomas By), and in numerous others where we do have it, it is possible to identify alternative or additional indicators of the individual's social and economic status. This can be done because court rolls typically contain a wide range of information on individual villagers. Indeed, it is arguable that if one does not have information on land held by the inventoried person, or on other aspects of his or her background and standing, it is very hard to make sense of the information in an inventory, because the place of the individual in the social hierarchy will remain unclear. Numerous promising inventories have been excluded from consideration in research for this paper, simply because we do not have sufficient additional information of this kind.

A final strength of the kind of manor court roll inventories discussed here is that, in theory at least, they are comprehensive. The question of whether items were in practice omitted from the inventory by the appraisers will be discussed in a moment. For now, it is sufficient to note that the inventories purport to list all the movables belonging to the inventoried individual that could be found. As already noted, this feature distinguishes the inventories from the lay subsidy lists, which systematically exclude numerous items. This feature also distinguishes the inventories from the Worcestershire *principalia* lists, which, as already noted, only detail the 'principal chattels' attached to the holding, and leave out the peasant's own possessions.

It has been argued that, just as the *principalia* lists exclude the peasant's own possessions, so the inventories like those discussed here may in fact exclude the *principalia*. In support of this suggestion, it has been pointed out that a well known court roll peasant inventory, that of Robert Oldman of Cuxham (Oxfordshire) dated 1349-52, names no bed, table, or chair. A possible explanation is that these items belonged to the *principalia*.<sup>21</sup> If correct, this would imply that when using inventories of the type discussed here, one would have to be very cautious when making inferences about absences from the lists. However, it must be stressed that several of the inventories collected here include not only the peasant's own goods (most notably, crops and livestock), but also items typically treated as part of the *principalia*, such as carts, pots, and pans. Therefore, if an item does not appear in one of the inventories in the appendix, it seems unlikely that this is because the appraisers were obliged to exclude it. Again, one is tempted to question how widely the distinction between the *principalia* and the peasant's own possessions was observed outside Worcestershire.

The most significant drawback of the manorial court roll inventories of peasant goods is their rarity. Inventories of this type are very widely scattered, and much searching is required before one can assemble even a small collection like the 14 discussed here. Furthermore, as already noted, to interpret an inventory of this type properly, it is preferable to have some background information - ideally, data on landholding - on the inventoried individual and his or her household. This means some inventories from an already small surviving number must be excluded from consideration. Court roll inventories are clearly inferior to the lay subsidies, therefore, in terms of number of peasant households covered. On the other hand, it should be noted that the inventories, unlike the detailed lay subsidy lists, continue to be available for the period after 1332, though the wide chronological scattering of the inventories does have its disadvantages. Also, as the case of William Lene shows most powerfully, a full and detailed inventory can tell historians a great deal, even though it only concerns a single household.

Another key potential difficulty of the inventories is that items could be omitted, or undervalued. As noted above, it seems that the local villagers who appraised the goods were in theory supposed to list everything. However, this did not stop fleeing peasants taking items with them when they left. Nor did it mean the appraisers would not be tempted to keep items for themselves, and exclude them from the inventory. Langdon identified inventories which have explicitly been affected by

the latter practice.<sup>22</sup> There is no evidence that those who drew up the 14 inventories in the appendix kept items for themselves, or allowed others to take them, but this does not mean it did not happen.

Very often, an inventory is so brief that it is hard to believe that it is a full list of everything a peasant owned. An extreme example of this is Richard son of Thomas Shepherd, of Ruyton, Shropshire (no. 3). A 1341 inventory states that the movable goods of Richard, a felon, consisted only of cloths worth 12d., and 2d. in silver coin. That this was all he possessed perhaps seems unlikely. There is no way of being certain. However, it must be remembered that many of the inventoried individuals were caught up in crime. These people are especially likely to have been poor, and perhaps belonged to the margins of rural society. Lists containing a very small number of possessions and very low valuations are therefore to be expected. Some of the manorial inventories seem to support the evidence on felons' chattels provided by the eyre rolls of the royal itinerant justices. The typically very low valuations of felons' goods in the eyre rolls, sometimes as low as 3d. or 4d., have been taken to reveal rural society's 'poverty-stricken underworld'.<sup>23</sup>

Another possible explanation for the brevity of many inventories is not that goods had been removed before the inventory was taken, but that certain items were excluded because they were of too low value. In particular, the 14 inventories make relatively little mention of ceramic tableware such as pots, jugs, and bowls. This is surprising in the light of archaeological evidence from deserted medieval village sites which indicates that peasants possessed large quantities of ceramic pottery.<sup>24</sup> One possible explanation for the contrast is that eating and drinking vessels were excluded from the written inventories because they were of such low value.<sup>25</sup> In response, it should be noted that while appraisers clearly focused on the more valuable items in compiling the 14 inventories, most notably the livestock, they did include lesser items worth just a couple of pence. Several inventories mention goods of marginal value, such as the wood and earthenware vessels in the inventories of Thomas Webster (no. 8) and Richard Collys (no. 9). We cannot assume, therefore, that where tableware is not mentioned, this invariably means it was present in the house but not recorded. Where ceramic tableware was present in any quantity, one would guess that the combined value of the various items would have led to a group of vessels being recorded. Moreover, any metal tableware, such as pewter, is likely to have been of sufficient value to have been worth recording.

A final difficulty of the inventories is that they can be hard to decipher. The lists are usually written in a mixture of Latin and English, and contain unusual nouns spelled in a variety of ways. In order to determine what objects are being referred to in an inventory, and to establish the context for its creation, it is necessary to devote careful research to each particular example.

### **Findings from the inventories collected here**

Now that some remarks have been made about the character of the court roll inventories and the question of their reliability, it is possible to examine the evidence provided by this small set of examples on the question of consumption patterns and living standards.

The main issue to be examined is the extent to which the inventories show the possession of consumer goods in the domestic living space (i.e. among the items grouped under ‘household goods’ for each inventory in the appendix). ‘Consumer goods’ in the present context are defined as non-essential or ‘luxury’ items that were not fundamental in domestic production processes, or in feeding and clothing the family. Thus, items like pots and pans, butter churns, and kneading troughs are regarded as essential utensils needed in processing foodstuffs, including foodstuffs intended for sale, and not as consumer goods. The category of consumer goods, by contrast, includes items such as jewellery; other household furnishings not needed for food preparation (e.g. basins and ewers for washing); tableware, bedding, clothing, and fuel beyond the bare minimum required for each household member; and beds, tables, and chairs.<sup>26</sup>

Some of the inventories do mention non-essential consumer goods, some of which would presumably have been purchased on the market. These include the candlesticks noted in the inventory of Thomas Bettes, and the clothing of Custancia Herring (no. 12), which comprises six items, including two fur-lined garments. Four individuals had chests or coffers, and one of those also possessed an aumbry, or cupboard. Overall, however, the material world of the peasant domestic interior emerges from these inventories as rather simple and bare. Only two individuals (perhaps the wealthiest in the group) owned a table, and none owned a bed. Bedding (sheets and blankets, but not bedcovers) was possessed by four individuals, and in minimal quantities only. In quite a number of the inventories, the household goods

consist mainly of kitchen utensils such as pots, pans, tripods, vats and the like. Although historians have argued recently that the beginnings of a ‘consumer revolution’ in England should be located in the later middle ages rather than in the sixteenth century or later periods, there is relatively little in these inventories to support the idea that the expanding ownership of domestic consumer goods evident in later sources was particularly widespread in the rural world of the period before c.1420.<sup>27</sup>

The number and variety of household goods is generally low in these inventories. Only three out of the 14 inventoried persons had more than 10 items in the category of ‘household goods’. There is a striking contrast, in terms of numbers of household goods, between these medieval inventories and the probate inventories of the sixteenth century, such as those for rural Lincolnshire analyzed by Muldrew. Muldrew found that the average number of ‘goods in the house’ in those probate inventories rose from 104 in 1535-45, to 175 in 1579-99.<sup>28</sup> Many of the household furnishings that occur in just a minority of the medieval inventories, and in small numbers, are much more common and numerous in the sixteenth-century Lincolnshire inventories. Examples include beds,<sup>29</sup> sheets, mattresses, chests, and tables. Further, the later probate inventories feature many ‘luxury’ items that are not found in the 14 medieval lists at all, such as chairs, forms (benches), pillows and pillowcases, silver spoons, salt cellars, dishbanks (racks for dishes and plates), coverlets, quilts (‘twilts’), cushions, various types of pewter tableware, and ‘painted cloths’.<sup>30</sup>

One could of course argue that the early modern appraisers of goods were simply more thorough in their work than their medieval manorial counterparts. This is hard to prove either way. Furthermore, as noted earlier, it seems likely that many of those for whom the medieval inventories were made belonged to a relatively low social stratum. In the early modern period probate inventories were more likely to be made for the more prosperous sections of rural society – notably the yeomen – than for its less well off members, such as the poorer husbandmen and labourers.<sup>31</sup> As such, by comparing the small collection of individuals in the 14 medieval inventories with the probated population of sixteenth-century rural Lincolnshire, we may be looking at two essentially different sections of the respective societies. However, even if we focus just on probably the wealthiest individual among the 14 - Robert Osebern, who died c.1297 – his total of 29 household items (the maximum among the court roll inventories) is still well below the averages recorded for the sixteenth century.

In addition to a comparison of the court roll inventories and those early modern probate inventories investigated by Muldrew, it is also instructive to compare the court roll inventories with early examples of probate inventories dating from the fifteenth century. An important collection of such documents comes from York diocese. Among the published inventories in this group it is possible to identify some 14 examples dated 1456 to c.1500, relating to persons of 'peasant' status. That is, the documents concern men either described as 'husbandman', or resident in a rural parish and associated with an inventory that includes livestock and grain crops.<sup>32</sup>

The contrasts between the court roll inventories and the fifteenth-century York inventories are significant, though not quite as great as those distinguishing the former from the sixteenth-century probate inventories. In particular, it should be stressed that some of the York probate inventories are, like their earlier court roll equivalents, rather brief, and include relatively few household items. A good example of this is the inventory of John Faysby of Huby, dated 1463. This inventory lists only 14 basic household items. As is also typical of the court roll inventories – a point that will be explored further in a moment – the vast majority of Faysby's inventory, in terms of value, consists of his livestock, rather than his household goods.<sup>33</sup> Yet some of the other Yorkshire probate inventories reveal individuals whose domestic interiors were apparently much more amply furnished and equipped than their counterparts among those documented in court roll inventories. Eleven of the 14 probate inventories list over 30 household items, for instance, and several have 70 or 80 such items. Also, there are a number of items that feature quite frequently in the fifteenth-century probate inventories, but do not feature at all in the court roll inventories. Examples include beds, and pewter tableware.<sup>34</sup>

Again, it could be objected that the individuals for whom a probate inventory was made represent the upper echelons of Yorkshire village society, and so cannot be meaningfully compared with the people in the court roll inventories, since the latter were poorer in relative terms. One could make the case, for instance, that the pre-Black Death peasant elite may have owned household goods of a number and variety comparable to that of their counterparts in the later fifteenth century, but that we do not have the relevant inventories for the earlier period to be able to show this.

On this point it is worth looking again at the inventory of Robert Osebern, who is probably the person among the 14 in the appendix who best fits the description of a pre-plague elite villager. Robert possessed a number of 'luxury' household

furnishings at the time of his death, such as sheets, a towel, and a feather mattress. However, his inventory still suggests a much lower level of comfort and display within the house than those of fifteenth-century Yorkshire peasants such as Thomas Kirkeby, whose partly illegible 1482 inventory includes numerous bed covers, a banker (a bench covering) with eight cushions, and a mazer (maple wood drinking cup) bound in silver.<sup>35</sup> On the basis of surviving inventories one could even argue that the household of William Lene of Walsham le Willows represents a different and somewhat simpler world in material terms than that of the later fifteenth-century Yorkshire peasantry. William represented the very elite of the peasant society of his time. His inventory comprises some 49 household items, including luxuries like textiles (four linen sheets and four coverlets), towels, and a chair. Yet these were exceptions. The bulk of the objects in his house were utilitarian items used in food preparation, and no bed or tableware (such as plates, cups, or dishes) is mentioned in the inventory.<sup>36</sup>

Overall, then, although the sample of evidence examined here is small and difficult to interpret, it does provide signs that even at the elite levels of village society, the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed less expenditure among rural families on household goods and furnishings than did the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the examples taken from court rolls, objects in the household tended to represent a quite a small proportion, by value, of the inventory.<sup>37</sup>

Instead, one often finds that most of the inventory's value derived from livestock, grain and fodder, and farming equipment. For example, 17 per cent of the total value of Robert Osebern's inventory lay in household goods, with 26 per cent in animals, 44 per cent in grain and fodder, and 10 per cent in farming equipment. Osebern, though, was a relatively wealthy villager who owned an unusually large number of household goods, perhaps because he had more disposable income to spend on such things than most people. If we examine the smallholders, the concentration of wealth in the form of livestock, grain, and productive equipment is more striking. Most notably, in the case of Richard Peper (inventory date 1331), 74 per cent of the value of the inventory came from livestock, 21 per cent from grain and fodder, but only four per cent from household goods. It has been argued previously that in the medieval period, and especially in the earlier part of the period examined in this paper, peasants tended to devote any surplus income to investment in livestock and equipment, rather than to expenditure on consumer goods.<sup>38</sup> Peper's inventory,

and some of the others collected here, support that conclusion. For a fuller picture of consumption and expenditure patterns, of course, it would be necessary to have information on topics such as diet and spending on buildings. Unfortunately, however, the inventories shed relatively little light on these issues.

The 14 inventories in the appendix support the idea that some peasants were quite well supplied with livestock, even prior to the Black Death. This is an argument that has been advanced by David Stone.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, not every individual among the 14 discussed here possessed much livestock. Three men have no animals at all listed, and for two (Walter Baynard and Thomas Bettes) there is recorded only one mare and one horse, respectively. Baynard and Bettes both fled their respective manors apparently for reasons unconnected to crime, and perhaps decided to take their animals with them. Given the possibility for the removal of animals prior to the inventory being taken, it is difficult to know how to interpret the absence of animals, or the mention of just a single beast. It seems probable that, if anything, the inventories are likely to understate an individual's actual number of livestock.

Bearing this in mind, it is notable that if one looks at cases where the inventory lists more than a single animal, the concentration of livestock on the holding is often quite high. Again, Richard Peper, with an arable holding of just over four acres, offers the most striking example. His two cows, two horses, one steer, one colt, and eight sheep represent a stocking density of at least 170 livestock units per 100 sown acres, at a period when the equivalent average stocking density on landlords' demesne farms was 36.5.<sup>40</sup> Eight further individuals held more than one animal, and for seven of those a livestock density can be calculated. In six cases, the figure exceeds the average for demesne farms in the equivalent period.<sup>41</sup> Such animals provided valuable manure for the family's arable land, as well as an important source of food and additional income.

Further evidence of peasants investing heavily in their livestock is provided by the relatively high valuations often given to animal fodder. Six inventories mention chaff, straw, forage, fodder, hay, or a combination of these with values ranging from 2s. 3d. in the case of Robert Osebern, to somewhere between 10s. and 15s. in the case of Walter Baynard.<sup>42</sup> The high value attached to animal fodder can be seen, for example, from the fact that in the inventories of Osebern and John Hendecorn, the valuations of the straw, forage, and chaff are substantially higher than those given to carts and ploughs.

The court roll inventories investigated here provide little sign that peasants in the period studied made extensive use of the market to purchase non-essential consumer goods for the household. Furnishings and utensils in the house such as tables, chests, cupboards, bedsheets, and blankets are mentioned in several inventories, but they are not universal, and they appear in small numbers compared with equivalent sources for later periods. Just as important as far as household goods are concerned are basic utensils, especially pots, pans and other items used in food processing and preparation. However, there are signs that while consumption of marketed luxuries was comparatively limited, this is not necessarily indicative of a low living standard in all cases. Many peasants, including smallholders, invested significantly in their livestock and maintained a high ratio of animals to arable land. This had the potential to boost the productivity of arable holdings, and to bring benefits to the diets of the families concerned.

## **Conclusion**

It is now possible to return to the questions with which this paper began. Clearly, the celebrated inventory of William Lene of Walsham le Willows is not unique. Other listings of peasants' goods written up in manorial records exist, and they are essentially similar in nature to Lene's. Such inventories describe, in theory at least, all a peasant's movable property.

Given historians' typical and necessary reliance on indirect inference and abstract modelling when discussing the medieval peasant economy, a source that purports to list everything a peasant household possessed would seem very valuable. However, it is right to question how far a more intensive study of court roll inventories can change the existing picture of peasant consumption and living standards between the later thirteenth century and the early fifteenth century. For one thing, inventories could be regarded as a fairly unreliable source, on the grounds that items were probably removed or omitted before or during the appraisal and listing of the goods. Clearly, each inventory must not be regarded as listing absolutely everything that the peasant owned. However, the presence of some low value and portable objects in several lists suggests that goods were not always removed by departing peasants or others before the appraisal took place, and that appraisers did not always ignore cheaper items when making their inventories. If nothing else, it

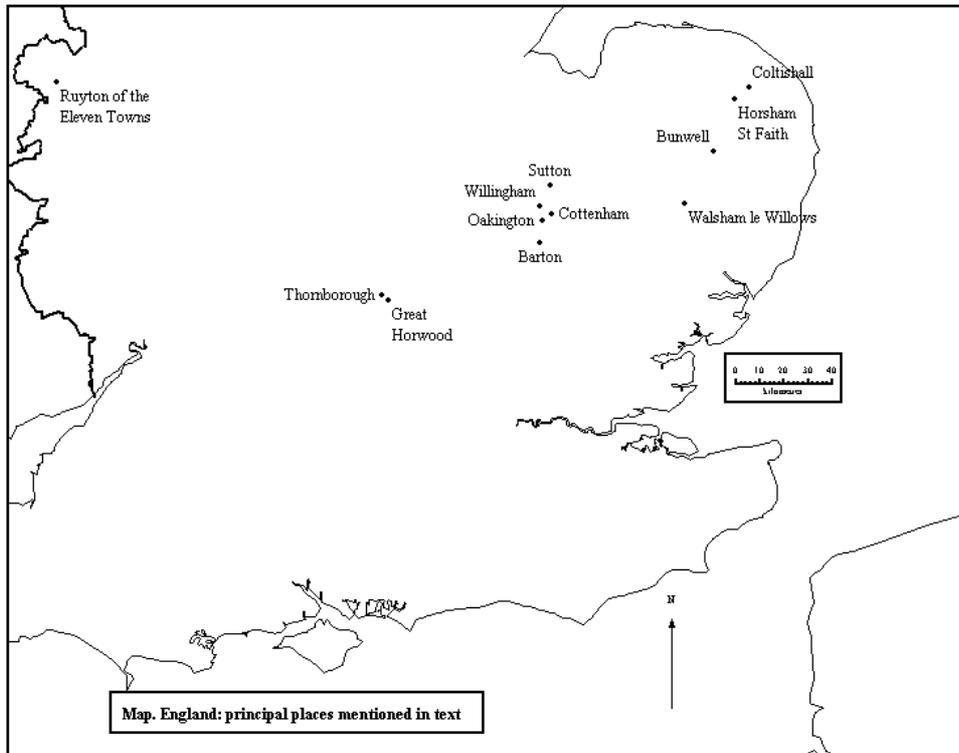
seems likely that the court roll inventories are more comprehensive than the detailed lists of goods assessed for lay taxation purposes.

The other main reason why it might seem mistaken to place much weight on the evidence of the inventories is that usable examples are so scattered. As such, it is hard to be sure how typical the inventoried individuals are of the peasantry as a whole. One response to this problem is to try to gather a much larger corpus of inventories. However, this may prove difficult in practical terms. In order to locate occasional manorial court roll inventories it is necessary to search through a great deal of material, with no guarantee of success when one embarks on each new set of records. A single researcher is unlikely to consider it worthwhile to set out on a deliberate search for previously undiscovered court roll inventories. Preferable is some form of collaborative enterprise, where a number of researchers working independently and for other purposes on the relevant materials agree to pool any examples they have found already, or come across in the future. Extending a search for peasant inventories beyond manorial court rolls into other legal sources such as the coroners' rolls would throw up different problems but would be worthwhile, as long as attention is restricted to inventoried individuals for whom landholding data or other background information can be provided.<sup>43</sup>

As for the 14 inventories collected here, none of them is as lengthy as that of William Lene. Yet this is not necessarily because the inventories investigated here are less complete than Lene's. Rather, the contrast is just as likely to indicate basic differences in the ownership of goods among the different strata of the peasantry. It is no accident that the inventory among the 14 that most resembles William Lene's is that of Robert Osebern. In terms of wealth and position within village society, Osebern was not far below Lene. As such, Osebern possessed roughly the same range of goods as Lene, if not in the same quantity and variety within each category.

In many respects, however, Lene's inventory has much in common with the examples in the appendix. In general, a key characteristic of all the lists is that the bulk of the inventory, in terms of either wealth or numbers of items, is made up of livestock, grain, farm tools, and utensils and equipment used in domestic commodity production, rather than items in the house beyond the minimum needed for feeding, sleeping, and clothing the family. Clearly, the number of inventories gathered here is relatively small, and any conclusions based upon them must therefore remain tentative. What these examples seem to indicate, however, is that few peasants in this period

appear to have had either the wish or the opportunity to devote much expenditure to domestic comfort or display, and focused instead on spending on the productive capacity of their holdings.



## Appendix. fourteen inventories from manorial court rolls, c.1271-1416

Nos. 1-8: Inventories of the chattels of felons, fugitives and outlaws

(1.)

		<i>Valuation</i>
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Robert Osebern</b> Thornborough (Buckinghamshire)	
<u>Date</u>	c.1297	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Robert hanged himself (felony)	
<u>Land held</u>	1279-80 1 virgate, 1289 ½ virgate	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	Possibly reeve 1281 [senior manorial official]	
<u>Animals</u>	1 old mare	12d.
	2 cows	7s. 10d.
	1 steer	2s.
	1 calf	8d.
	4 sows	18d. each
	1 lamb	9d.
	3 geese	6d.
	3 hens & 1 cockerel [ <i>gallinum</i> ]	4d.
	1 cat	½ d.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	5 b wheat	2s. 6d.
	1 ½ b beans and peas	7½ d.
	Chaff	3d.
	Forage/straw [ <i>foragium</i> ]	2s.
	4 acres sown with wheat	2s. per acre
	1.5 acres sown with barley	3s. per acre
	1.5 acres sown with beans & peas	2s. per acre
	4 acres sown with oats	14d. per acre
<u>Farming equipment</u>	1 ladder	3d.
	1 horsehair rope	-
	Plough	5½ d.
	1 cart with full harness	8d.
	1 winnowing fan	8d.
	1 plough with full gear	18d.
	1 spade, 1 ?boring tool [ <i>terbula</i> ] & 1 fork	1½ d.
	1 harrow	1d.
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	1 axe & 1 bill with 2 sickles [ <i>fautillis</i> ]	3s.
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 brass pot & 1 pan	3s.
	1 vat, 3 tubs with 1 small tub	18d.
	1 trough [ <i>alveolum</i> ]	4d.
	1 tub with salt	3d.
	1 lead [ <i>plumbum</i> ; large pot e.g. for brewing]	15d.
	1 tripod	1½ d.
	1 grain measuring vessel [ <i>batus ad mensurandum</i> ] with 2 sieves	1½ d.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	1 basin	1½ d.
	1 coffer	18d.

	1 form [bench] and 1 table with 2 trestles	6d.
	2 baskets	1½ d.
	Towel	1d.
	1 feather mattress [ <i>plumale</i> ; possibly a pillow]	8d.
	2 sheets	6d.
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	1 cloak [ <i>mantellum</i> ]	18d.
	1 supertunic	6d.
	1 hood	6d.
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Other</u>	The barn 'in which he hanged himself'	3s.
<u>Unidentified</u>	1 <i>varill'</i>	4d.

Total value (where given)

(2.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Richard Peper</b> Bunwell (Norfolk)	
<u>Date</u>	December 1331	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	RP committed a felony and was outlawed	
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage and 2.5 acres 0.5 rods of customary land; 1 acre of free land. Perhaps an additional 0.5 acre on lease.	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	Hayward (a manorial official), 1331	
<u>Animals</u>	2 cows	5s. 6d. each
	1 steer	5s.
	1 horse	4s.
	8 sheep	18d. each
	1 horse	3s. (erased)
	1 colt [young horse]	2s.
	2 geese	6d.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	2 q barley	4s. per q
	Straw	2s.
	Hay	8d.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	1 coulter [front blade of a plough that made a vertical cut in the soil]	5d.
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-	
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 brass pot	18d.
	1 brass pan	6d.
	1 tripod	3d.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	

<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Total value (where given)</u>		51s. 3d.

(3.)		
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Richard son of Thomas Shepherd</b> Ruyton (Shropshire)	
<u>Date</u>	June 1341	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Richard was a felon	
<u>Land held</u>	1 'nook' of land, rent 4s. per annum	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	-	
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	-	
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	Cloths	12d.
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	-	
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	Silver	2d.
<u>Total value (where given)</u>		Rent 4s. Goods 14d.

(4.)		
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>John Hendecorn</b> Cottenham (Cambridgeshire)	
<u>Date</u>	2 inventories, July 1344 & December 1347	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Indicted as felon and fled the manor	
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage & 10 acres, plus fen (marsh) land	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	2 affers [workhorses] (1344)	10s.
	3 piglets (1344)	2s.
	1 mare (1347)	18d.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	Crops on his land valued July 1344 at:	32s. 6d.
	Value of crop of fen & meadow, same date:	7s.
	2 q drage (1347)	6s. 8d.
	1.5 q peas (1347)	5s.
	Straw, chaff & forage (1347)	8s.
	2 acres maslin [mixture of wheat and rye] valued (1347) at:	12s.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	1 cart (1347)	4d.
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-	

<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	-	
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	(1347)	2s.
<u>Total value (where given)</u>	1344:	49s. 6d.
	1347:	36s. 9d.

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(5.)		
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Thomas By</b> Barton (Cambridgeshire)	
<u>Date</u>	January 1361	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Thomas fled, accused of crime	
<u>Land held</u>	Uncertain, probably either a 9 acre or 4.5 bond tenement	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	Chief pledge [head of a tithing, the basic unit of local peacekeeping], 1357-60. Married: his wife Matilda charged in May 1362 with failing to maintain their bond tenement.	
<u>Animals</u>	2 mares	8s.
	1 ox	8s.
	3 cows [later another man successfully claimed one of these cows as his property]	18s.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	3 q wheat, in sheaves	15s.
	5 q drage	20s.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-	
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 brass pot and 1 pan, each of capacity 2 gallons	3s.
	1 vat, (&) 1 barrel	3s. 4d.
	1 quern [hand-mill] for grinding malt	2s.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	3 pigs, slaughtered & salted	9s.
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Total value (where given)</u>	-	

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(6.)	
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>John Houlone</b> Willingham (Cambridgeshire)

<u>Date</u>	April 1386	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	John was a felon	
<u>Land held</u>	1 cottage with adjacent croft and 1.5 acres	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	1 black steer	4s. 6d.
	1 black heifer [young cow]	4s.
	1 ruby heifer [later successfully claimed by another man as his own]	4s. 6d.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	1 stack of fodder	5s.
	Crop of 0.5 acre and 1 rod sown with rye	3s. 4d.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	5 willow timbers [ <i>ligna salicina</i> ]	6d.
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	-	
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Total value (where given)</u>	-	

(7.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>William Edys</b> Barton (Cambridgeshire)
<u>Date</u>	October 1392
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	William was a felon, and fled the manor
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage with 4.5 acres
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-
<u>Animals</u>	-
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	1 q wheat 3 q barley 1 q peas, estimated, unthreshed [ <i>in tass</i> ']
<u>Farming equipment</u>	6 small spars
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-
<u>Household goods</u>	
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	-
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-
<u>Clothes</u>	-
<u>Cash</u>	-

Total value (where given) 11s. 4d.

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(8.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Thomas Webster</b> Willingham (Cambridgeshire)	
<u>Date</u>	March 1416	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Thomas was a felon	
<u>Land held</u>	1 cottage, December 1411 to December 1415	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	Called 'common weaver', 1412; also had illegal fishing nets	
<u>Animals</u>	-	
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	-	
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	1 pound of wool	2d.
	4 slays [instrument to beat up the weft]	3d.
	1 pair of old cards [for combing fibres], 3 iron combs	4d.
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 kimmel [ <i>kemelyn</i> ; a tub]	6d.
	1 kneading-trough	1d.
	1 churn [for making butter]	1d.
	1 small brass pan	12d.
	1 tripod	3d.
	1 earthenware pot [ <i>olla terrea</i> ]	1d.
	4 platters, 7 dishes and 3 saucers [ <i>sawser</i> ] of wood	
	1 old goose-pan [large stew-pan]	
	1 gridiron	3d.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	1 blanket	8d.
	1 sheet	4d.
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Other</u>	1 boat	40d.

Total value (where given)

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*Nos. 9-11: Inventories of the chattels of fleeing or disobedient serfs (villeins)*

(9.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Richard Collys</b> Coltishall (Norfolk)	
<u>Date</u>	December 1383	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Richard forfeited all his lands and chattels to the lord at death for 'disobedience', probably connected to the 1381 revolt	
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage and 10.5 acres	

<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	1 cow	
	1 yearling calf	
	3 suckling calves	4s.
	1 pig	
	2 stots [draught horses]	
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	6 q 4 b barley, in sheaves	4s. per q
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	1 cloth ' <i>de Wordeston super le Stodeles</i> ', length 30 ells [ell=45 inches/114 centimetres] Woollen and linen cloths	
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	Vessels of brass, wood and earthenware [ <i>terrea</i> ]	
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	-	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Total value (where given)</u>	-	
<hr/>		
(10.)		
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Walter Baynard</b> Great Horwood (Buckinghamshire)	
<u>Date</u>	December 1397	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Fled manor	
<u>Land held</u>	Two-thirds of 1 messuage and virgate	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	1 mare	4d.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	Hay and <i>puls</i> '	10s.
	Drage, with straw [ <i>dragg</i> ' & <i>stramen</i> ]	5s.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	1 cart	2s.
	1 <i>ben' puls</i> ' [possibly <i>bende</i> ; part of plough?]	8d.
	3 pairs of traces and 4 caps with 2 rings [part of harness]	10d.
	Stick [ <i>bacul</i> '], ox-bow, fork etc	5d.
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	7½ pounds of woollen thread	2s. 6d.
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 vat	2s.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	1 coffer	6s. 8d.
	2 small chests	4s.
	1 aumbry [ <i>almeri</i> ; cupboard]	4d.
	1 table	4d.

	1 stool and 1 table	8d.
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Unidentified</u>	1 <i>fauy</i>	4d.
<u>Other</u>	'Old fuel' [ <i>focal' vet'</i> ]	2s.
<u>Total value (where given)</u>		38s. 1d.

(11.)		
<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Thomas Bettles</b> Oakington (Cambridgeshire)	
<u>Date</u>	March 1402	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Fled manor	
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage and 10 acres, 'wasted'	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-	
<u>Animals</u>	1 horse	4s.
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	Chaff	8d.
	Hay and forage	5s.
	Wheat and barley straw	6d.
	straw [ <i>stipula</i> ]	14d.
<u>Farming equipment</u>	1 cart with wheels	3s.
	1 dung-fork with 1 shovel	14d.
	*Plough and cart harness	22d.
	Board of poplar wood [ <i>Pepler bord'</i> ], 2 ladders with 1 pair of bellows	10d.
	*?linchpins [ <i>In leynses cum horsheep</i> ]	3d.
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-	
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	1 bushel [vessel used as bushel measure], 1 <i>harsene</i> and 1 dish	15d.
	*2 sieve rims [ <i>Remes de le Sevys</i> ] with 2 pots for ale	6d.
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	*2 candlesticks [ <i>candelabra</i> ], 1 sieve rim [ <i>reme de le seve</i> ], and 1 <i>bastencrop cum swevyll</i> [?'flail]	9d.
	2 chests with one strongbox [ <i>cum i. Tred'</i> , i.e. <i>tredoure</i> ] with 2 coffers [ <i>cum ii. cofris</i> ]	5s.
<u>Foodstuffs</u>	-	
<u>Clothes</u>	-	
<u>Cash</u>	-	
<u>Total value (where given)</u>	-	22s. 1d.

\*These items are erased and excluded from the total value, reason unclear

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*Nos. 12-14. Chattels listed in connection with inheritance, especially intestacy, no heirs, heirs are minors*

(12.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>Custancia Herring</b>	<i>Valuation</i>
<u>Date</u>	Horsham St Faith (Norfolk) c. January 1271	
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Not stated, perhaps intestacy or lack of heirs	
<u>Land held</u>	Total 1 acre 1 rod, on lease	
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	Sister of Walter Herring, from a villein (serf) family. No evidence she was married.	
<u>Animals</u>	21½ sheep 'from a legacy' 7½ sheep 'ex altera parte' A 'moiety' of 4 oxen [ <i>bov</i> '] & 2 calves	
<u>Grain &amp; fodder</u>	0.5 combs peas 1 comb 1 b barley 0.5 b wheat 0.5 comb barley 'bought from B. Ruddoc' 4 combs barley 'from her own land'	
<u>Farming equipment</u>	-	
<u>Craft equipment/materials</u>	-	
<u>Household goods</u>		
<u>(a) food preparation</u>	-	
<u>(b) Furnishings</u>	1 blanket	
<u>Foodstuffs</u>		
<u>Clothes</u>	2 tunics, of ?blue cloth and russet 1 cape [ <i>capa</i> ] 1 lined supertunic in green [ <i>furat' de vert</i> '] 1 lined cloak [ <i>clamid' furrat</i> '] 1 woman's gown [ <i>rochetus</i> ]	
<u>Cash</u>	Silver	2s. 6d.
<u>Unidentified</u>	2 <i>Reymal</i> ' [reins?]	9½ d.
<u>Total value (where given)</u>		-

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(13.)

<u>Name &amp; location</u>	<b>John Welleman</b>
<u>Date</u>	Coltishall (Norfolk) January 1305
<u>Reason for inventory</u>	Not stated, probably intestacy
<u>Land held</u>	1 messuage with 2 houses, 3.25 rods of land, & 1 rod & 3 'abuttals' of marsh
<u>Other indicator of status</u>	-
<u>Animals</u>	3 sheep 1 piglet

Grain & fodder	2 q 1.5 b barley 1 b peas 1 b beans	
Farming equipment	-	
Craft equipment/materials	Cloths	4s.
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	-	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 tunic	10d.
Cash	-	

Total value (where given)

(14.)

Name & location **Margaret, daughter of John Courtegamen**  
Sutton (Cambridgeshire)

Date March 1357

Reason for inventory Margaret died when her heirs were minors

Land held 1 messuage with a croft of 'mollond', 1 messuage and selion [strip of field land] with a 'wyght', and one 'place' of land

Other indicator of status Possibly never married.

Animals 1 cow  
2 mares  
1 yearling calf  
2 sheep

Grain & fodder 4 b wheat  
1 q barley

Farming equipment -

Craft equipment/materials -

Household goods

(a) food preparation 1 brass pot, capacity 1.5 gallons 4s.  
1 pan, capacity 3 gallons 3s.

(b) Furnishings 2 sheets  
2 blankets 6s. 8d.  
1 chest 40d.

Foodstuffs -

Clothes One robe, sold for 7s. 3d.

Cash -

*Sources:* No. 1: *Luffield Priory Charters Part II*, ed. G.R. Elvey (Buckinghamshire Record Society Vol. 18, 1975), 356-7. No. 2: Cambridge University Library Manuscripts Dept. [CUL], Buxton MSS 68/7. No. 3: Shropshire Archives, 6000 /7113. Nos. 4 and 11: CUL, Queens' College Boxes 3-4. Nos. 5 and 7: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Archives XXXVII/1-2; for Barton holding sizes, see C.R. Elrington, ed., *The Victoria History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely Volume V* (London, 1973), 168. Nos. 6 and 8: Cambridgeshire Record Office L1/177-8. Nos. 9 and 13: Cambridge, King's College Archives COL/362, 368; the latter cited in B.M.S. Campbell, 'Population pressure, inheritance and the land market in a fourteenth-century peasant community', in R.M. Smith, ed., *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), 101, and checked against original. No. 10: Oxford, New College Archives 3915. No. 12: Norfolk Record Office NRS 19497 42 B. No. 14: CUL, EDC 7/4 B; cf. E.N. McGibbon Smith, 'Reflections of reality in the manor court : Sutton-in-the-Isle, 1308-1391', (University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2006), 173, 247.

### **Abbreviations, measures**

#### *Volume (dry)*

b=bushel, equivalent to 35.2 litres

q=quarter, comprising 8 bushels, and equivalent to 2.8 hectolitres

l comb, equivalent to 4 bushels

#### *volume (fluids)*

1 gallon, equivalent to 4.5 litres

#### *area*

1 acre, comprising 4 rods, and equivalent to 0.4 hectares

#### *money*

12 pence (d.) equalled 1 shilling (s.). 20s.= 1 pound (£)

### **Glossary**

Chaff	Outer husks of grain separated by threshing, used mainly as animal food (fodder)
Coffer	A box or chest
Croft	Enclosed plot of land
Drage	A mixture of oats and barley
Forage	Fodder, animal food
Messuage	Area of land occupied by a dwelling house and outbuildings
Steer	Young ox (beef animal)
Virgate	A peasant holding of approximately 30 acres

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the archivists of all the repositories cited for permission to consult records in their care, and to David Hinton and Phillipp Schofield for comments on this chapter. The usual disclaimers apply.

<sup>2</sup> R. Lock, ed., *The Court Rolls of Walsham le Willows 1303-50* (Suffolk Records Society 41, 1998), 132-5. For landlords' concern with intestates, see P.R. Schofield, 'Intestat et pratique testamentaire des paysans en Angleterre et pays de Galles au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in N. Vivier, ed., *Ruralité française et britannique XIII<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup> siècles. Approches comparées* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 207-18.

<sup>3</sup> For example, P.R. Schofield, *Peasant and Community in Medieval England, 1200-1500* (Basingstoke and London, 2003), 213-14; C. Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), 26; M. Prestwich, *Plantagenet England 1225-1360* (Oxford, 2005), 457-8; M. Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk: An Economic and Social History, 1200-1500* (Woodbridge, 2007), 59-60; P. Schofield, 'Stratégies économiques et sociales des élites rurales dans l'Angleterre médiévale', in F. Menant et J-P. Jessenne, eds., *Les élites rurales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2007), 229-41 (p. 235).

<sup>4</sup> R.K. Field, 'Worcestershire peasant buildings, household goods and farming equipment in the later middle ages', *Medieval Archaeology*, 9 (1965), 105-45; see also P.V. Hargreaves, 'Seigniorial reaction and peasant responses: Worcester Priory and its peasants after the Black Death', *Midland History*, 24 (1999), 53-78 (pp. 60-2).

<sup>5</sup> The only published discussions of *principalia* outside Worcestershire that I have identified concern examples from Norton, Hertfordshire, a manor of St Albans abbey: A.E. Levett, *Studies in Manorial History* (Oxford, 1938), 190-1, 216. Mention should also be made of the custom by which a lord was entitled to the value of one third of the goods of a deceased tenant (a 'terciar'). This custom also gave rise to some surviving lists of peasant goods; see W.F. Mumford, 'Terciar on the estates of Wenlock priory', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society*, 58 (1965), 68-76. Like the *principalia* lists, however, these terciar lists are distinct from the larger category of inventory that is the main concern of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200-1520* (revised edn., Cambridge, 1998), 169-75.

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Hilton, *A Medieval Society. The West Midlands at the End of the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 99-105; R.H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), 42.

<sup>8</sup> D. Stone, *Decision-Making in Medieval Agriculture* (Oxford, 2005), 264-7; J. Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation: the Use of Draught Animals in English Farming from 1066 to 1500* (Cambridge, 1986), 176-9.

<sup>9</sup> In the case of John Hendecorn (appendix, no.4), two inventories, which contain no duplicate items, have been combined.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Osebern (appendix, no. 1) was a suicide, or one who had committed a felony 'against himself'.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Peper (appendix, no. 2) had been outlawed; Thomas Webster (no. 8) was said to be imprisoned in Cambridge castle at the time of the inventory.

<sup>12</sup> For use of the valuations of chattels in eyre rolls as a guide to the social status of killers, see J.B. Given, *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England* (Stanford, 1977), 67-70, 170-2.

<sup>13</sup> For an example of a charter granting a lord (in this case Syon Abbey) the right to the chattels of felons, fugitives, and outlaws on his estates, see E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c.1275-1535* (Cambridge, 1922), 103-4; for friction caused by lords who claimed the right to felons' chattels in place of the king, see R.F. Hunnisett, *The Medieval Coroner* (Cambridge, 1961), 127, 145-6.

<sup>14</sup> The inventory of Thomas Bettes (appendix, no. 11) was written up only on a separate small piece of parchment that fortunately has been preserved between the larger membranes of the court rolls. Robert Osebern's inventory seems also to have been preserved in a separate document, not in the court rolls. One occasionally finds court roll entries which mention the forfeiture of chattels, but give no details. For instance, an entry from the court rolls of Thornbury (Gloucestershire) states that 100 shillings were due to the lord from the chattels of William le Bedel, forfeit because he killed Robert de Gopeshull and is a fugitive: Staffordshire Record Office, D.641/1/4C/2 (30 September 1344). Bedel's chattels may have been listed in a separate document, now lost.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. E.B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Later Medieval England, c.1380-c.1525* (Stroud, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> See Schofield, 'Intestat'.

<sup>17</sup> In the case of John Welleman (appendix, no. 13), the court roll entry says the goods should be sold to pay the debts of the deceased. Also, inventories 12 to 14 do not include systematic valuations of goods, which perhaps also suggests that the movables were not being listed solely to establish their monetary value to the lord.

<sup>18</sup> This is made explicit only in the sources relating to Thomas By (no. 5).

<sup>19</sup> J.F. Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property, 1290 to 1334: a Study in Mediaeval English Financial Administration* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934).

<sup>20</sup> B.M.S. Campbell and K. Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death. An Atlas of Lay Lordship, Land and Wealth, 1300-49* (Manchester, 2006), 316.

<sup>21</sup> N. Alcock, 'The medieval peasant at home: England, 1250-1550', in C. Beattie, A. Maslakovic, and S. Rees Jones, eds., *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe c.850-c.1550. Managing Power, Wealth and the Body* (Turnhout, 2003), 449-468 (pp. 459-61). For Oldman's inventory, see P.D.A. Harvey, ed., *Manorial Records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire, c. 1200-1359* (Oxfordshire Record Society 50 and Historical Manuscripts Commission JP 23, 1976), 153-9.

<sup>22</sup> Langdon, *Horses*, 177.

<sup>23</sup> Dyer, *Standards of living*, 180-1; Given, *Society and Homicide*, 67-70.

<sup>24</sup> D.A. Hinton, 'Deserted medieval villages and the objects from them', in C. Dyer and R. Jones, eds., *Deserted Medieval Villages Revisited* (Hatfield, 2010), 85-108 (pp. 96-104).

<sup>25</sup> For the low values of ceramic vessels, see Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 173.

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- <sup>26</sup> This distinction between consumer goods and essential utilitarian items follows that in R. Britnell, 'Movable goods before the industrial revolution: England c.1300', in M. Boone and M. Howell, eds., *In but not of the Market: Movable Goods and the Late Medieval and Early Modern Economy*, 28 March 2003 (Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten: Brussels, 2007), 71-80 (p. 71). I am grateful to Professor Britnell for providing me with a copy of this study.
- <sup>27</sup> For the late medieval beginnings of a consumer revolution, see especially M. Kowaleski, 'A consumer economy', in R. Horrox and W.M. Ormrod, eds., *A Social History of England, 1200-1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 238-59.
- <sup>28</sup> C. Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation. The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke and London, 1998), 24-7, where the author draws a contrast between his data and the evidence of medieval peasant inventories and *principalia* lists.
- <sup>29</sup> Includes 'beds', 'bedstocks', and 'bedsteads'.
- <sup>30</sup> These examples are drawn from the inventories dated 1550-1600 of Lincolnshire individuals engaged in agriculture, printed in R.W. Ambler and B. and L. Watkinson, eds., *Farmers and Fishermen: the Probate Inventories of the Ancient Parish of Clew, South Humberside 1536-1742* (Hull, 1987).
- <sup>31</sup> T. Arkell, 'Interpreting probate inventories', in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose, eds., *When Death Do Us Part. Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 72-102.
- <sup>32</sup> P.M. Stell, ed., *Probate Inventories of the York Diocese, 1350-1500* (York Archaeological Trust, York, 2006). These York inventories are also in used in P.J.P. Goldberg, 'The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity in later medieval England: a material culture perspective', in M. Kowaleski and P.J.P. Goldberg, eds., *Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2008), 128-44, and Dyer, this volume.
- <sup>33</sup> Stell, ed., *Probate Inventories*, 618. Of Faysby's total inventory value of £17 13s. 2d., £14 12s. was in livestock.
- <sup>34</sup> For examples of beds and pewter, see Stell, ed., *Probate Inventories*, 611, 640-1, 660, 671, 676, 678. For the greater peasant ownership of pewter vessels in the sixteenth century compared with the medieval period, see Dyer, *Standards*, 174-5.
- <sup>35</sup> Stell, ed., *Probate Inventories*, 647-8.
- <sup>36</sup> As Bailey remarks about Lene, 'he possessed a varied range of basic personal and household possessions, but few luxury goods': *Medieval Suffolk*, 60.
- <sup>37</sup> My findings here accord with those of Goldberg, 'The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity'. This study based on inventories argues for a distinctive peasant value system in relation to later medieval material culture, in which there was relatively little focus on the acquisition of household goods. This peasant value system is contrasted with the urban or bourgeois value system. Goldberg also shows how significant household luxuries such as cushions and spoons begin to appear in rural inventories of the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, having been absent from fourteenth-century examples. Goldberg uses three pre-1400 rural inventories, including those of William Lene and Robert Oldman.

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<sup>38</sup> Dyer, this volume; Britnell, ‘Movable goods’; also Goldberg, ‘The fashioning of bourgeois domesticity’.

<sup>39</sup> Stone, *Decision-Making*, 264.

<sup>40</sup> For demesne stocking densities, see B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture 1250-1450* (Cambridge, 2000), 172-83. A holding of 4.125 acres is assumed for Peper. Peper may be usefully compared with Gilbert le Shepherd of Hinderclay, Suffolk, who is revealed by a 1308 court roll inventory to have held a house and 4.5 acres of land, plus pigs, piglets, cows, oxen, and sheep at a very high stocking density of 195 units per 100 sown acres: Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 61. As Bailey notes, ‘this example illustrates powerfully the pitfalls of judging economic well-being solely on the size of a family’s arable holding’.

<sup>41</sup> The six are Osebern: 50 units per 100 sown acres; John Houlone (appendix, no. 6): 213 units per 100 sown acres; Collys: 62 units per 100 sown acres; Herring: 488 units per 100 sown acres (this calculation assumes Herring possessed half of the four oxen and two calves mentioned in the inventory, and is thus perhaps an overestimate); Welleman: 49 units per 100 sown acres; and Margaret, daughter of John Courtegamen (appendix, no. 14): 84 units per 100 sown acres (calculation perhaps an underestimate because based on the generous assumption that Margaret’s holding was five acres). The stocking density on Hendecorn’s holding was below the demesne average, at 33 units per 100 sown acres. Only a rough indication of the stocking density on Thomas By’s holding is possible. If one assumes By held a nine acre as opposed to a 4.5 acre bond tenement (these were the two main holding types on the manor in which he lived), one arrives at a figure of 62 units per 100 sown acres.

<sup>42</sup> Baynard’s inventory includes *fenum & puls’ precii 10s., dragg’ & stramen precii 5s.* It is not clear how much of this was for use by his animals.

<sup>43</sup> For some optimistic remarks about the possibility and value of collecting a large sample of peasant inventories, in this case for the study of peasant agriculture, see J. Langdon, ‘City and countryside in medieval England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 43 (1995), 67-72 (pp. 71-2).