

The Isle of Axholme, 1540-1640:

Economy and Society

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Abstract

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the rapid growth of population produced both pressure on land and an increase in the demand for corn, the supply of which was inelastic, resulting in inflation of food prices compared with manufactured commodities. The consensus of many writers is that the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer because the larger farmers who could market surpluses of food, and also increase their landholding, benefited at the expense of the smaller farmer, who produced only sufficient for subsistence. Economic change produced social change.

Almost fifty years ago, Thirsk maintained that drainage schemes in the 1620s in the Isle of Axholme changed its agricultural economy from pastoral to arable. This thesis will add to her work by demonstrating that economic and social structures were the result of interactions between a number of elements within the Isle's communities of which inheritance practices were a major factor. Partible inheritance, by which landholdings could be divided successively to the point of being no longer able to support a family, had a number of effects: the availability of small plots of land, creating an active land-market, especially for the entrepreneurial farmer; emigration by those unable to make a living from any land they had held, which became available for others; immigration for the purpose of renting or buying these small parcels of land; the growth of debt (credit); and the development of secondary occupations. The economic and social structures of a community were consequently altered, particularly in favour of those who could offer security for their borrowings, and there was a widening divide between the richest and poorest members of society.

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Abbreviations

AASL	Architectural and Archaeological Society of Lincolnshire
LAAS	Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society's Reports and Papers
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives Office
N.U.M.D.	Nottingham University Manuscripts Department

Abbreviations of village names on charts and tables use the first three letters of the name, e.g.

Alt	Althorpe
Bel	Belton
Cro	Crowle
Epw	Epworth
Hax	Haxey
Gar	Garthorpe
Lud	Luddington
Ows	Owston
Wro	Wroot

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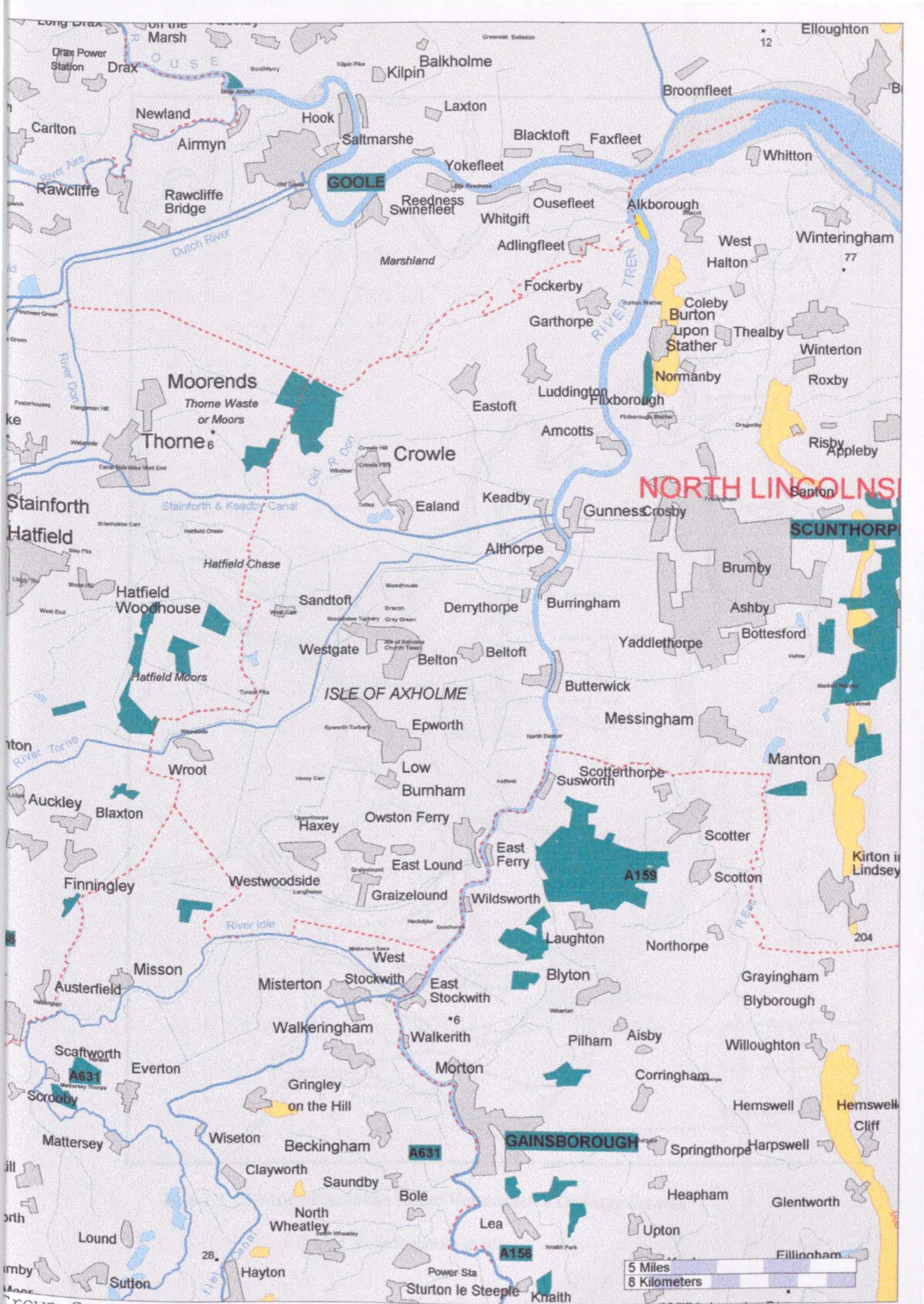
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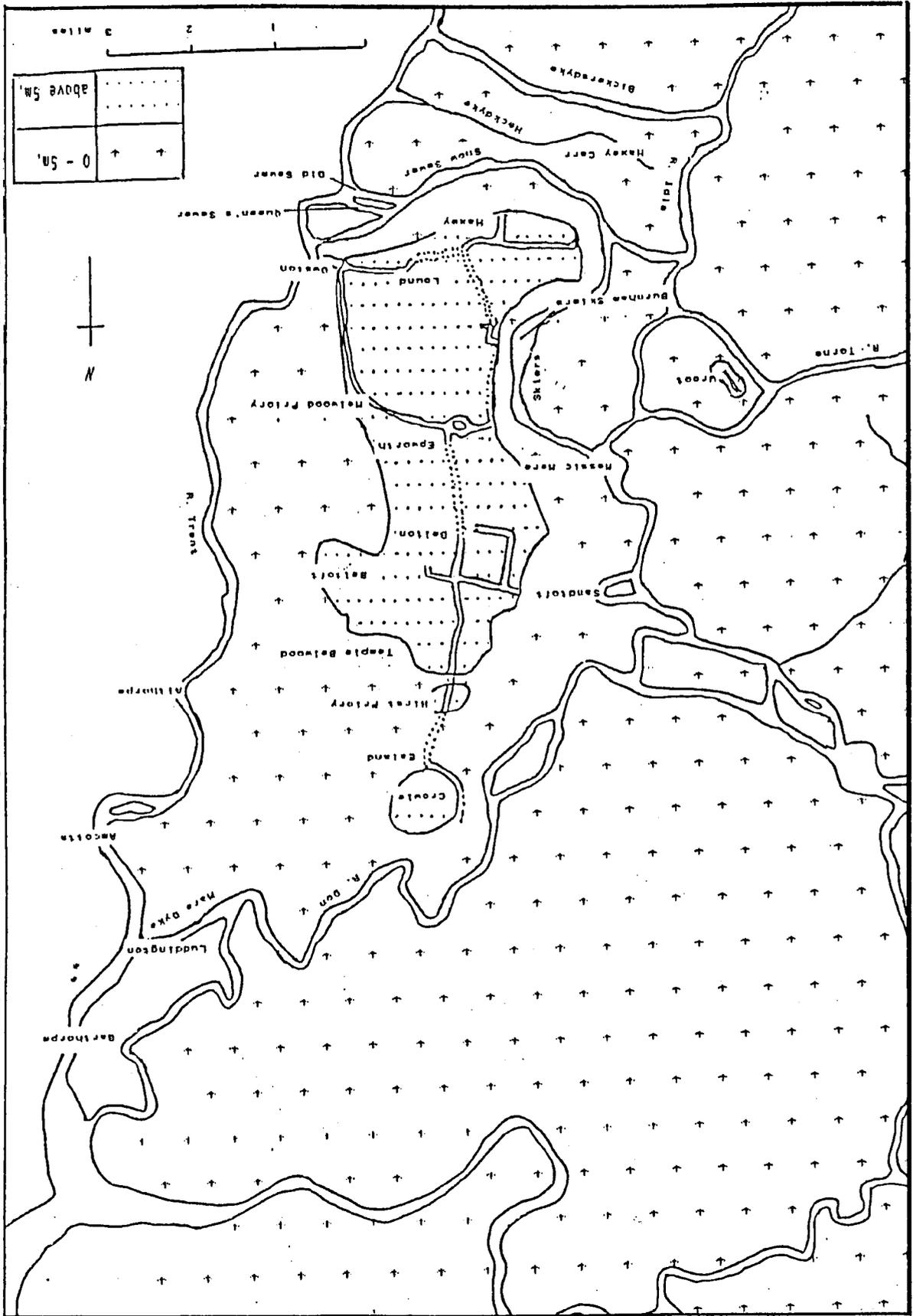
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(based on Stonehouse et al)

Map 1.1 The Isle of Axholme before Vermeyden's Drainage Scheme



Introduction

The Isle of Axholme is situated in the north-west of pre-1974 Lincolnshire, separated from the main part of the county by the river Trent and by part of Nottinghamshire. To-day it is still subject to floods and can revert to an island status as happened in 1974; attempts to drain the land had been carried out in the post-Conquest period, and may have occurred earlier, but had not been effective. The first major attempt in the early modern period was carried out in the 1620s by a Dutchman, Cornelius Vermuyden, and even his efforts were far from successful.

In 1953, when Thirsk published her article on the Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden's drainage scheme,¹ studies in local history were much influenced by detailing links between the topography and the agricultural economy, a view that she emphasised by proposing that Vermuyden had changed the Isle's farming system from pastoral to arable; in effect, he had altered the topography by draining marshes to produce land suitable for crops. Before the drainage scheme was started in 1626, Axholme was seen by Thirsk as an area economically distinct from its neighbours, where much of the land was flooded for over four months a year during the winter by the Humber and the river Trent.

Like other similar areas, such as the Lincolnshire Fens, parts of Cambridgeshire, and the Somerset Levels, the inhabitants had adapted to the topography by making good use of the natural resources, supplementing their diets with water-fowl and with fish from the pools and rivers, and using the natural vegetation of reeds to construct houses of mud and stud, with thatching for roofing. It must be pointed out, however, that topography was not the sole determinant of the agrarian economy because many Midland counties of England had been converted from arable to pastoral farming when there was a dearth of population, and the production of wool was less labour-intensive as well as economically very profitable in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²

Later writers, such as Wrightson and Levine and Margaret Spufford,³ saw the latter part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries - the period covered by Thirsk's Axholme

article - as a time when the large landholder increased his holdings and wealth while the middling farmer diminished in status and declined into poverty; put simply, 'the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer'. This phenomenon was linked to three factors in English life that influenced each other, namely, that there was a rapid growth in population which put pressure on land. This in turn caused the price of corn to increase. The third factor to influence the cost of cereals was a series of poor harvests. Although the price of corn rose enormously, there was no corresponding increase in agricultural wages. Thus large landowners had a surplus of corn to sell at market in good harvest years, but in poor years they could live off previous profits, so enabling them to continue farming. By contrast, the middling landowner produced only sufficient food to support his family in years of abundance, but had no reserves to draw on in lean times. Thirsk refined the view that the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer by saying that this was not a universal trend, but only occurred where wheat and meat were produced on a commercial basis. Economic pressures in the best grain growing and best meat producing counties, she maintained, encouraged the growth of large farms.⁴ The impression gained from these comments is that the rise of the large farmer and the decline of the small simply happened.

In the same article, however, Thirsk put forward the concept that change in one element in the structure of a community, such as enclosure or the conversion of arable to pasture, produced tensions elsewhere.⁵ Another influence she cited was that of partible inheritance, which resulted in the development of secondary occupations because subdivisions of land had reached a state where parcels of land were so small they were incapable of supporting a family. Spufford, in her studies of the communities of Chippenham and Orwell, where partible inheritance was practised, dismissed it as having no importance:

Inheritance customs had little bearing on this movement towards larger farms, except insofar as the common practice of trying to provide the younger son or sons either with a cottage or a couple of acres, or a cash sum out of the proceeds of the main holding made the latter more vulnerable.⁶

The influence of partible inheritance appeared, therefore, to occupy a paradoxical status: on the one hand, it apparently had no effect on the growth of larger farms and the increase in the number of smallholders, yet on the other, it resulted in the development of secondary occupations because landholdings by themselves were too small to support a family.

Because of the length of time between Thirsk's original Axholme article and the subsequent developments in the remit of local historians, it was decided to re-examine Thirsk's observations, and, at the same time, explore the effects of partible inheritance on the economy and society of the Isle in the period 1540-1640, concentrating particularly on the lives of yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers, though considering other members of society where relevant.

At all stages, original documents (or printed copies) have formed the basis of research, including parish registers, Bishops' Transcripts, wills, inventories, and deeds. Two main approaches have been adopted: a broad concentration on facts and figures to arrive at an overall picture, which will also allow comparisons to be made with other areas of England, and, secondly, a 'micro' approach with a concentration on single documents to derive as much information as possible about an individual's life in his community.

The first chapter concentrates on the background topography and history of the Isle, and this is followed by an examination of the relevant literature to illustrate how the subject of local history has developed and grown over nearly half a century. This is followed by a discussion of population changes to include a comparison with other communities, life expectancy, age at marriage, intervals between child-bearing, and migration, all of which affect the local economy and social structure. A chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of the effects of partible inheritance on land, money, and moveables, and explores the possible effects of family composition on the decisions of will-makers. Occupational and social structures arising from partible inheritance and the development of secondary occupations are the subject of a subsequent chapter, while another examines the relative wealth and material possessions of members of different social groups. A final chapter concentrates on studies of

individuals from these groups to attempt to reconstruct their lives in some detail, and put flesh on the 'bare bones' of the statistics.

¹ J. Thirsk, 'The Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', *Agricultural History Review* 1 (1953), pp. 16-28.

² W. G. Hoskins (with a commentary by C. Taylor), *The Making of the English Landscape*, (1988), pp. 96-8.

³ K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling*, (1979), and M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴ J. Thirsk, 'English rural communities: structures, regularities, and change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in B. Short (ed), *The English Rural Community*, (Cambridge, 1992), pp.50-1.

⁵ Thirsk, 'English rural communities', p. 45.

⁶ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p. 166.

THE ISLE OF AXHOLME: ECONOMY AND SOCIETY, 1530-1640.

Chapter 1 Topography and historical background

The Isle of Axholme illustrates perfectly the interrelationship and interaction between man and his environment. This chapter will show that the topography has been a major determinant in its settlement and economy, and how man, in turn, has modified the environment for his own advantage.¹ It will also show that the post-medieval pattern of agriculture was a continuation of the pre- and post-Domesday pattern though by 1540 a secondary industry of hemp and flax growing and processing had been added to the economy. It will also demonstrate that outside influences played a greater part in shaping the economy and society.

Location

The Isle, which is situated at the boundary of three counties, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire, lies in the north-west part of Lincolnshire, rather strangely isolated from the remainder of the county by the river Trent, which forms the eastern boundary. (Map 1.1 - frontispiece) Prior to Vermuyden's drainage scheme of 1626, the western and northern boundaries with Yorkshire were formed by the rivers Idle, Torne, and Don, which flowed sluggishly in a peat-filled valley, and which were liable to flooding. The southern boundary with Nottinghamshire was marked by Bickersdike, which is a man-made drain probably of medieval origin. Axholme consisted formerly of nine parishes: Althorpe, Belton, Crowle, Epworth, Haxey, Luddington and Garthorpe, which were combined during the period under study, Owston, and Wroot. Table 1.1 on page 6 gives the acreages of the parishes. (Map 1.2)

Because there were no roads linking the Isle to its surrounding areas, access from the eastern bank of the Trent to the Isle was by means of a number of ferries, including those at East Stockwith, East Ferry, East Butterwick, Owston, and Burringham. There were also ferries

on the western side of the Isle, for example, North Ferry, west of Epworth, which probably enabled people to have access to Wroot, Thorne, and Doncaster along the rivers and dikes. The Isle was particularly isolated during the winter months, from about November to April by flooding from the four rivers which formed its boundaries. ²

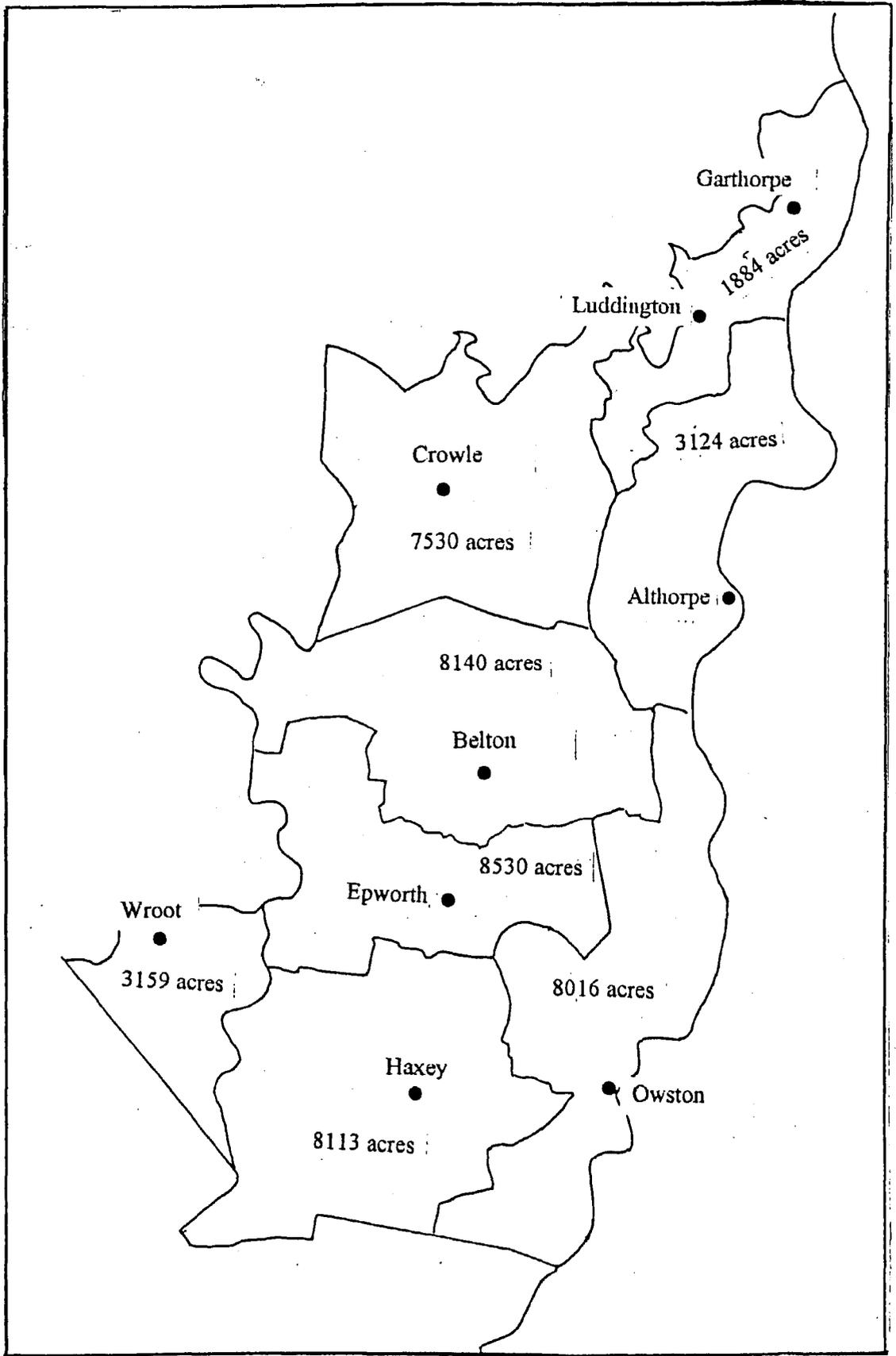
Table 1.1 Areas of parishes in the Isle of Axholme.

Parish	Area (acres)
Althorpe	3124
Belton	8530
Crowle	7530
Epworth	8140
Haxey	8113
Luddington & Garthorpe	1884
Owston	8016
Wroot	3159
Total	48,496

Apart from Crowle, the larger parishes occupy areas of higher ground and marsh, while the smaller parishes are situated mainly on islands which rise slightly above the silt. There were no settlements on the peat moors and level silts, which were the subject of drainage by Vermuyden and later engineers. (see map p. 33)

Topography

The Isle is about sixteen miles long on a north-south axis, and varies from six to nine miles in breadth on an east-west axis. The topography of the Isle may be divided into three broad categories: the central spine; the area just below the fifteen foot contour (about five metres); and the areas subject to flooding. These link in well with what may be termed 'a hierarchy of usefulness': the most fertile and best-drained land was used for arable farming;



Map 1.2 Isle of Axholme - areas of parishes

the band below this was suitable for hay meadow; and the lowest wettest land was used as commons for pasture, peat cutting, fishing, fowling, and hemp retting. The topography in Axholme determined the pattern of settlement and the type of economy that evolved before Vermuyden's time.

In geological terms, underlying the Isle is a base of sandstone overlain by Mercian Mudstone laid down about 200 million years ago. The mudstone rises to form the central spine of the Isle, which reaches a maximum height of 140 feet (about 43 metres) near High Burnham, a small settlement situated about midway between Haxey and Epworth. Apart from Crowle, which is near a separate island of mudstone, the major settlements of Belton, Epworth, Haxey, and Owston are all situated on the central spine.

During the last Ice Age, the Humber gap was blocked in the area of the modern bridge, and the Humber Lake was formed. This vast lake stretched from north of the present Humber to Lincoln with small islands, usually identified by the place-name element 'holme', scattered in it. Clays, probably brought down by the rivers, were deposited on the underlying sandstone and mudstone to form an almost level layer on the top. After the lake drained, sand was blown across the area, accumulating on the western slopes of the central spine.³ This central ridge has very fertile soils which are suitable for grain and leguminous crops.

About six thousand years ago, the climate grew warmer, encouraging the growth of trees, but a subsequent, wetter period, when the sea level rose, helped to destroy the trees. The slow-moving rivers to the west of the spine laid down clay deposits, and frequent flooding, coupled with the impermeable nature of the clay, produced peat bogs in the west, while, on the eastern side, the tidal Trent laid down silt deposits along the low-lying ground to the east of the central uplands, from an area north of Owston to the confluence with the Humber. An examination of the spot heights on the 1:25 000 Ordnance Survey maps shows that much of the land surrounding the central spine is at sea level or not much higher than nine feet (three metres).

In some respects, Axholme was similar to the Somerset Levels in that it suffered from two types of flooding:⁴ sea-flooding and river flooding. The river Trent, tidal beyond Gainsborough, has a bore, the 'Aigre', which can be up to ten feet high with the right combination of tides and wind, and which can overflow the banks when deposits of silt are laid down.

River flooding is more difficult to control, mainly because the whole of the Isle, apart from the central spine and isolated islands, are at or near sea-level so that rivers meander and flow slowly, with the result that silt is deposited in their beds, which further inhibits their flow. The river Trent often flooded after heavy rain because of its enormous catchment area. Prior to Vermuyden's drainage scheme, the western rivers Idle, Torne, and Don flowed into each other in such a way as to create uncertainty in some places as which river was which at any given point. Because of their slow-moving character, they were likely to flood, especially after periods of heavy rain, changing their courses as the floods receded. The floods created pools, lakes, and streams, of which the largest of these pools was called Messic Mere, which lay about two-and-a-half miles north-west of Epworth, and covered about a hundred acres. According to a map of 1596,⁵ the Mere was a broadening out of the river Idle; there was a watercourse called the Skyers which flowed from its south-eastern corner, following the western contour of the central spine, round the southern end of Haxey, and thence joined the Snow Sewer to discharge into the river Trent at Owston through three outlets, one of which was named 'the Queen's New Sewer', which suggests that it was constructed during Elizabeth I's reign.

Early evidence for the watery nature of the Isle is found in the entries of Domesday Book in its references to the 66 fisheries spread throughout the villages and to the 'marshes ten leagues long and three wide'.⁶ It is likely that the onset of wetter weather in the 1320s, which produced flooding in the Witham valley and along the fen-edge in the south of Lincolnshire also affected flood levels in Axholme, increasing the waterlogging of the ground.⁷ In 1548, when Edward VI was trying to remove all traces of Catholicism, including chantries, the

people of Amcotts asked for their chantry chapel to be spared because it was two miles from their parish church, so that in winter the parishioners could not attend services in winter time 'without great peril because the way was altogether inundated'.⁸ The inhabitants of West Butterwick made a similar claim on behalf of their chantry.⁹

John Leland visited Axholme between 1535 and 1543, arriving from the West Riding of Yorkshire by means of a small boat along the river Idle. He found that the land from Bickersdike to Messic Mere was 'fenny, morische, and full of carrs'.¹⁰ William Dugdale, an eighteenth century visitor, saw it as a 'fenny tract and for the most part covered with waters'.¹¹ He claimed that, before Vermuyden's drainage, there was a constant state of flooding through the tides so that the water stood at three feet deep, and boats could pass across the floodwaters surrounding the Isle to Hatfield Woodhouse in the northern areas. Likewise, Haxey Carr was overwhelmed so that 'large boats laden with twenty quarters of corn' could pass from the river Idle to the river Trent.¹² He also observed that, in February, 1642, the inhabitants of nearby Misterton, Nottinghamshire, pulled down a sluice and the floods rose to a height of at least three feet.¹³

Settlements

The settlements in the Isle are closely linked with the nature of the topography: in an area subjected to periodic and regular flooding the difference in height of two or three feet could mean the difference between being able to establish a settlement or not. It has been observed that 'on the edge of the fens two or three feet difference in altitude can make all the difference in the type of fen and its use'.¹⁴ Comparisons between the present-day fifteen foot contour line and earlier maps¹⁵ demonstrate remarkable similarities in demarcating the boundary between earlier, pre-drainage settlements and cultivation and the land liable to flooding. This differentiation is still demonstrable to-day, in that the area above five metres in height contains the strip fields around Haxey, Epworth, Belton, and, to a lesser extent, Owston. By contrast, the areas subject to flooding in the pre-drainage period, which lie

almost uniformly at sea level, and which lie below the level of the banks of the formerly meandering rivers of Idle, Don, and Torne, contain much later farmsteads, evidence of the eighteenth and nineteenth century practice of placing the main farm buildings near the centre of the steading after parliamentary enclosure.

All the main settlements and many of the smaller ones were townships with their own field systems and commons, such as Burnham, Westwoodside, Craiselound and East Lound in Haxey parish. In Belton, Beltoft and Woodhouses were townships, though Churchtown, Carrhouse, Grey Green, Bracon, and Westgate are best considered as hamlets within the parish with no separate field system.¹⁶ All the larger villages have polyfocal plans, and all the south Axholme villages have linear roadside developments. There is also evidence of medieval village planning, for example, at Haxey, and at Upperthorpe and east Lound in Haxey, where there are settlements laid out on former open field strips.¹⁷

The major parishes of Haxey, Epworth, Belton, and Owston are characterised by straddling the Mercian Mudstone ridge, which provided very fertile soils, and the lower land which was liable to flooding. As a broad generalisation, the shapes of the settlements are mainly linear in development, a result of the topography. A road ran along the central north-south axis from the edge of Haxey Carr northwards to where the land north of Belton dropped down to the marshes separating the central spine from the islands of Ealand and Crowle. The settlements of Haxey and Epworth lay to one side of this north-south road, but the village of Belton was partly bisected by it though there was a later development at Westgate on an east-west orientation.

The village of Haxey was a planned development¹⁸ with two lines of tofts at right angles to the main street, which ran down from the parish church to the south-north road, which ran from the edge of Haxey Carr, through Epworth and Belton, to the edge of the marshes separating the central spine from the small low-lying island on which Crowle stood. It is not possible to state when the planning of Haxey occurred though it is likely to have the work of one of the Mowbrays, who were lords of the manor of Epworth in the post-Conquest

period. As with other settlements, separate townships developed subsequently, including Upperthorpe, and Low Burnham which had their own field system. Place-name evidence for new developments are to be found in areas such as Newbig. The parish includes the fertile land of the central spine, the carr land to the south and west, a turbary on the low-lying ground to the north, and a 'coneygarth' north of the planned village used for the breeding of rabbits. There was intercommoning with the Nottinghamshire village of Misterton on the southern carr lands though the growth of population in the late sixteenth century produced pressure on this land, which became the subject of boundary disputes. With Heckdike forming the boundary between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire and the branch of the river Idle which encircled the higher ground to the south of Haxey, the low-lying ground would have been subject to floods in the winter, and some of it may have been under water all the year round, as suggested by Dugdale.¹⁹

Epworth's settlement clustered round the market place, which was near both the church and the Mowbray manor house, the Vinegarth. There was a line of tofts running in a roughly north-west orientation towards Ellers, a secondary settlement, and towards the ferry, which connected Epworth with the rivers Idle and Don. The presence of a ferry may indicate that the land west of Epworth was permanently flooded because the road terminates in land remote from the village. Apart from the Ellers, Epworth did not produce any other secondary settlements because the size and shape of the parish, which is sandwiched between the much larger parishes of Haxey to the south and Belton to the north, and the parish lies in a narrower part of the central spine, with marshy land lying to the east and west. Ellers may indicate the progress of land reclamation; the place name means 'alders'.²⁰

The parish of Belton contains a number of small townships and hamlets, and presents something of a problem in analysing its development. Its earliest development seems to have taken place round the church in the area known as Church Town. The main settlement is linear, with tofts at right angles on both sides of the south-north road. The tofts on the western side have a clearly defined back lane though those on the eastern side do not. A road

leads westwards from the junction of the south-north road towards Westgate and Sandtoft. Another track leads eastwards to Bracon, the placename indicating heathland, and Beltoft. The latter is mentioned in Domesday Book as having one carucate of land taxable and land for one plough,²¹ and like other settlements is linear in pattern.

The village of Owston (Ferry) is the only other major settlement on the central spine. A motte and bailey castle, known as Kinnard's Castle was built on a height overlooking the river Trent in 1095. It was used and fortified by the Mowbray family until 1174, when it was destroyed by Henry II after the family was unwise enough to back one of his rebellious sons against him. The parish church was subsequently built in part of the bailey. The early map shows a linear development of tofts on either side of the road running downhill from the castle and also along the bank of the Trent. The outlines of the original tofts which lay along the river are discernible, and, to a certain extent, are those lying on the north side of the road running from the river.

To the north of the central spine lay a watery stretch of ground, where the general elevation of the land is at three feet above sea-level or lower. The village of Crowle lay on an island north of this area, and at the time of Domesday Book was one of the largest settlements in the Isle. It was given to Selby abbey, and had thirty-one fisheries that were of considerable commercial importance. The village shows an approximately north-south linear orientation with the church lying to the west of the main street. The settlement lay near a branch of the river Don, which meandered in great loops, almost coming back among themselves, and even after the drainage of 1626, a map shows a marshy area called Broad Flete between the southwestern part of the village and the river Don.²² Of major significance was the largest expanse of peat moor, or 'waste', in the country which lay to the north-west. It is interesting to note that a ridge of higher ground, Crowle Hill, which rises to a height of more than fifteen metres, was not settled.

Settlements located just perceptibly above flood-level include Wroot, Luddington, Garthorpe, Amcotts, and Althorpe. At Wroot, an outcrop of Keuper Waterstone produced a

narrow band of higher land, and the village street follows its curve. Even after Vermuyden's drainage, and as late as the 1720s, boats laden with twenty quarters²³ of grain were recorded as sailing during the summer months from the Trent across the flood waters to Wroot, which is about eight miles from the nearest access point of the Trent.²⁴

Luddington before the Drainage was sited on an island formed of the river Don to the north and the Mare Dyke,²⁵ and the Trent on the east. The maximum height of the land at Luddington is four metres. The modern church is situated on a small mound about five feet above sea level, which is surrounded by flat land, and the present writer was informed that this land is still subject to flooding; the land to the east of the church is still known as the 'Church Mere'.²⁶ On the same island stands Garthorpe, which at one time had a market, granted by charter to Selby abbey during the reign of Edward I.²⁷ The market was later transferred to Crowle in 1305, probably because of silting problems in the river Don.²⁸ The maximum height of the land there is ten feet.

The village of Amcotts lies on a small hillock no more than fifteen feet high, and originally may have been an island in the river Trent. A large staithe was excavated in the summer of 1856 so that its large oak piles and other planks could be removed for use elsewhere. The erection of staithe and embankments may have been used to divert the flow of the river to the eastwards, enabling the land to be joined to the low-lying ground to the west.²⁹ A female skeleton, probably of Roman origin was dug up in the peat moors near Amcotts in 1747.

There are numerous small settlements which are situated almost imperceptibly above flood level, such as Eastoft (Crowle parish) and Sandtoft. Eastoft was formerly situated on the river Don, and was a station for the Keepers of the Game. Sandtoft was an island in the river Idle, and had a station for the royal Keepers of the Game in the period from Domesday onwards, as well as a ferry across the river to Hatfield Chase.

There are three deserted sites in the northern part of the Isle, namely *Marae*, Tetley and Waterton, and High Burnham between Haxey and Epworth was probably depopulated after 1086 for the more favourably sited Low Burnham.³⁰

The fact that the land surrounding the central spine, before Vermuyden's drainage, was subject to inundation from about November to May clearly limited the extent to which the inhabitants were able to expand without encroaching on valuable arable land, meadow, or pasture. Judging by the existing pattern of unenclosed fields, especially on the southern side of Haxey, it seems that the limit of arable farming was at about the fifteen foot (4.5m) contour, below which level the land was subject to flooding or was waterlogged. By reference to the Ordnance Survey map of the area³¹ and by the use of a grid, it has been possible to estimate the area of land available for settlement and farming for the main settlements. (Table 1.2)

Table 1.2 Percentage of land available for settlement and farming

	Area (acres)	Area above 5m (acres)	Available (%)	Other (%)
Belton	8530	1200	22.5	77.5
Crowle	7530	1920	25.5	74.5
Epworth	8140	1920	23.6	76.4
Haxey	8113	2280	28.1	71.9
Owston	8016	960	12.0	88.0

It will be seen that the proportion of land available for settlement and agriculture was small compared with that for the marshlands; this affected the agricultural economy, orientating it towards pastoralism where cattle could be grazed on the carrs during the summer months, and either sold off at market in the autumn, or brought onto the central spine during the wet months of winter. It is not yet clear whether this pattern obtained in the northern parts of the Isle round Althorpe, Garthorpe, and Luddington where the land consisted of silt brought down by the river Trent at flood times, and was more likely to be oriented towards arable farming.

The period from Domesday to the Dissolution

Domesday Book, the Mowbray family charters, and the account books of Selby abbey are the main sources of information on the agriculture and population of Axholme in this period.

Domesday Book, which omits Wroot from its survey, shows that a mixed type of agriculture was practised in Axholme because plough teams and meadow are mentioned. The topography was dominated by water because of the number of fisheries which was noted. By taking account of the number of ploughs and the areas a plough-team could plough it is possible to arrive at an estimate of 11,880 acres of arable land. Table 1.3 summarises the information from Domesday Book.³²

Table 1.3 Summary of agricultural and economic information from Domesday Book.

Parish	Area (acres)	Arable (acres)	Meadow (acres)	Woodland	Fisheries
Althorpe	3124	480	-	-	-
Belton	8530	1920	-	2l x 2l*	11
Crowle	7530	1920	30	1l x 1l	31
Epworth	8140	1920	16	1l x 1l	11
Haxey	8113	3960	3	3f x 3f	10
Luddington & Garthorpe	1884	480	-	-	-
Owston	8016	1200	6	1l x 1l	3
Total	45,337	11,880	55	see notes	66

Notes: l = league; f = furlong. There is no general consensus on the exact values to be ascribed to leagues or furlongs. It is possible that 12 furlongs constituted a league, with a furlong consisting of 220 yards.³³

All the above values for arable land, meadow, and woodland must be treated with great caution, but the information does highlight that the area of land for arable farming

represents about one-quarter of the total area of Axholme, with only a small amount of meadow. The woodland included some pasture as well as a place for pigs to forage; the fisheries were used on a commercial basis.³⁴ With only about one-quarter of the total land area suitable for arable farming, and allowing for meadow, woodland, and housing, the remainder was taken up by the marshy land which was used for grazing cattle during the summer months. Domesday records that 'the Marshes' found round Luddington and Garthorpe covered about 45 square miles, while two areas round the lost village of Waterton were described as waste, as were parts of Luddington and Garthorpe. In spite of the relatively small area of land suitable for arable farming, the density of the plough teams on the better-drained fertile soils was twice that of the adjoining area of Hatfield Chase.³⁵

Darby gives a misleading impression of the Domesday population, putting it at three persons per square mile, which he appears to have derived from counting the number of freemen, villagers, and others (=227), and dividing the approximate area of 77.8 square miles by this figure.³⁶ The Domesday population should be calculated using a multiplier of the order of 4.5, to arrive at an approximate total of 1023, which would give a population density of 13.87 persons per square mile. The parish of Wroot has not been included in the calculations. Though the population density appears low, a different picture is obtained by considering only the 'higher' land - in this context, land above fifteen feet. Table 1.4 gives a population density based on the area of land above fifteen feet for five of the parishes.

Table 1.4 Population density on arable land.

	Total area (square miles)	Area above 15ft (square miles)	Population	Population density (sq.ml)
Belton	13.33	3.5	284	81.1
Crowle	11.48	1.0	153	153.0
Epworth	12.72	3.0	135	45.0
Haxey	12.68	5.0	234	46.8
Owston	12.52	2.5	100	40.0

Though it must be acknowledged that pre-Dissolution references are scanty, and we have no information on the effects climatic changes or the Black Death had on the economy and society in the region, it is likely that there would have been few alterations in the existing agricultural and economic practices because the inhabitants of the Isle had established their own self-supporting economy and way of life. The Isle of Axholme and the Somerset Levels enjoyed similar topographies, with what have been termed 'hierarchies of usefulness,'³⁷ that is, the areas of most fertile and best-drained soil was used for arable farming, the lower land below this was used for hay meadows ('ings'), and the wettest for pasture, peat cutting, fishing and fowling. This last-named, which was inundated periodically provided turbaries and pastures, which, with improved drainage, could become meadows. Thus, apart from the traditional agricultural economy of pastoral and arable farming, there was a 'supplementary' economy because the winter flooding provided supplies of water fowl, fish, and eels; in Epworth Manor the local people were permitted to catch fish on Wednesdays and Fridays under the terms of a charter granted to them by an earl of Mowbray in 1360.³⁸

The Mowbray family

There were two major manors in Axholme until the sixteenth century, Epworth and Crowle. When Geoffrey de Wirce, who had been granted these by William the Conqueror, died without issue, the Crown gave the whole of Axholme to Nigel d'Albini, who had two sons, Roger and Henry. The former assumed the name of Mowbray when he inherited Epworth manor, Crowle manor having been given to Selby abbey (Benedictine) before 1086.³⁹

The Isle was the largest and most important of the Mowbray lands, and by 1298 provided three times the income of the next largest manor.⁴⁰ Though the main spine of the island was kept under the demesne of the Mowbrays, parts of the low lying land were granted to lay and ecclesiastical tenants so that they could reclaim the waste, an important feature of

the Mowbrays' administration as their charters refer to dikes, channels, and embankments. The charters also allude to fisheries and turf, giving an insight to both the watery nature of the terrain and to the economy. From the food rents it is apparent that wheat, rye and barley were grown, with barley being the biggest crop, which the accounts from Selby confirm.⁴¹

The Mowbrays' fortunes fluctuated throughout the years, sometimes supporting the Crown, at others plotting against it. Perhaps the most notable of the Mowbrays was John (died 1368), who granted the famous 'Mowbray Charter' to the occupiers of common land in 1360, giving them rights on fishing, the collection of turves, and other benefits.⁴²

When the Mowbray family died without heirs during the reign of Henry VII, Epworth manor passed through the hands of the Howard, Berkeley, and Stanley families. In 1551, the lordship and manor was granted to Edward, lord Clinton and Say, after it had passed to the Crown when the current earl of Derby, Edward, had died without issue.⁴³ Crowle manor, which had reverted to the Crown at the Dissolution, was later granted to lord Clinton and Say by Edward VI though it reverted to the Crown c1565.⁴⁴ The manor courts came under the rule and survey of the Court of Augmentations which received all its profits.⁴⁵ In the reign of Charles I, the land formerly belonging to Selby abbey was conveyed to the City of London, then through several owners from whom it passed to the Pierrepoint family, which came to hold the earldom of Manvers.

One of the unusual features of the Island's economy was the system of food rents, for example the granting by Roger de Mowbray of six baskets of barley annually to the monks of Sandtoft, a cell of St Mary's abbey, York. The food-rents indicate that barley was probably the main crop with wheat, oats, and rye also being grown. The remanence of food-rents into the late thirteenth century is probably due to the fact that the Mowbrays were resident in the Isle until then.⁴⁶ The Mowbrays claimed warren in the marshes and woodlands, and reserved part of a natural sewer, the Skiers, for their own use for the retting of hemp, thus indicating that the crop was grown and processed in this period. They encouraged the assarting of waste land and the reclamation of the low-lying areas in the Isle. In the charters there are references

to dikes, channels, and embankments, as well as fisheries and turf.⁴⁷ Cattle were pastured in the wooded parts of Axholme, and sheep grazed on the marshes.⁴⁸

Monastic foundations

The Mowbrays granted land to a total of twelve monastic foundations of which Selby abbey was the greatest beneficiary, being given initially the wapentake and warren of Crowle, and subsequently the remainder of the northern part of Axholme, including Luddington and Garthorpe.⁴⁹ The abbey derived a very substantial income from its estates in Axholme, as a summary of the Bursar's accounts shows. Between them, Ancotts, Crowle, Eastoft, Garthorpe, and Luddington provided £128 14s. 8d. from fixed and other rents in 1398-9.⁵⁰

The accounts from the abbey show that boars, swans, rabbits, capons, and fish were transported for the abbot's consumption, by water from Crowle to Selby. Some of the animals may have been carried live as 1s. 8d. was allowed for oats for feeding the rabbits.⁵¹ In 1398-99, the abbey granger received 70 quarters of wheat, 276 quarters of barley, and 25 quarters of beans and peas, together with 35 pigs, 45 coneys (rabbits), 57 pike, small and large, 815 eels, and 840 roach, as well as 20 swans and 61 ducks, thus providing an insight into the nature of the agricultural economy at the end of the fourteenth century.⁵²

The accounts also give evidence of attempts to maintain the Mere Dike, for five gallons of red wine, at a cost of 4s 2d, were provided for the Commissioners of Sewers at a session at Crowle, and four gallons of red wine were provided for a similar session at Garthorpe, costing 3s. 4d.⁵³ For the services of ten men for one day to repair defects in Mere Dike, a sum of 3s. 4d. was paid, and one man was paid 4s. 0d. without food, to clean out reeds and grass in the same drain.⁵⁴

Though Selby abbey was the recipient of the largest areas of Mowbray land, the family also granted land to other monasteries and priories. The priory of St Oswald, Nostell, near Wakefield, (Augustinian) was given land for a cell at Hirst, between Belton and Crowle in

the early twelfth century, and received further grants of land and fisheries subsequently. It is probable that only one canon lived there.

The abbey of St Mary's, York, was granted two charters to establish monastic cells in Axholme. A charter of William, earl of Warrenne, of the twelfth century states that he has given the brethren of St Mary's, York, 'Henes' and the moor and marsh about it to do with as they pleased though there is no evidence that there was ever a monastery there.⁵⁵ The island of Sandtoft was granted as a hermitage to St Mary's by Roger de Mowbray between 1147 and 1186 for the support of one monk of their house.

The Gilbertines of Sempringham (Lincolnshire) were given 81 acres of land in Haxey parish, plus an area of marsh, and other land in Owston and Kelfield.⁵⁶ There is no evidence that the Gilbertines built a cell or larger building in the Isle. The Augustinian priory at Newburgh (Yorkshire) received the gift of the churches of Haxey, Belton, and Owston,⁵⁷ and may have built the staith at Owston.⁵⁸

Roger de Mowbray, who went on two Crusades,⁵⁹ gave the Templars part of the advowson of Althorpe church, a chapel at Burnham, a mill, a fishery, and small areas of land scattered throughout Axholme.⁶⁰ A 'camera'⁶¹ was founded at Belwood c.1145. In 1182, they were given land at Keadby, some marshland and woodland, and the vaccary, land, and wood at Belwood.⁶² There is no evidence of their farming activities or organisation in the Isle, except that they built a sluice, called the 'Nofdyke', to link their lands with the Trent, constructing a staith between Amcotts and Keadby,⁶³ which suggests some sort of trading by boat. After the dissolution of the Order in 1308, the house passed to Richard de Belwode, possibly because, like South Witham preceptory, Lincolnshire which the Hospitallers did not take over, it had suffered decay.⁶⁴

Other monastic foundations which received grants of land from the Mowbrays were Byland (Savignac, Yorkshire), Monks' Kirby (alien Benedictine, Warwickshire), North Ormsby (Gilbertine, Lincolnshire), St Leonard's, York (alien Benedictine), and the secular cathedral of St Peter at York. The most unusual grant was to Welford (Premonstatensian,

Northamptonshire): not only was it granted land in Owston and Kelfield, common pasture there, and a house at Melwood, but it was granted a licence to keep a mastiff.⁶⁵

The most important foundation was a Carthusian priory founded between 1397-8 by Thomas Mowbray, Earl of Nottingham, earl marshal of England, and afterwards duke of Norfolk, which included the Priory in the Wood, which was a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary at Low Melwood, Epworth. It was endowed with 100 acres of land in Epworth, the advowsons of Epworth and Belton, and the priory of Monks Kirby.⁶⁶ The original foundation was for a prior and twelve monks. Though the charterhouse was flourishing and numbers had increased by 1449, numbers subsequently declined until at the Dissolution it had only twelve monks. The priory was dissolved in 1538. The site of the priory is mid-way between Epworth and Owston on a hill overlooking the Trent.

Though the Mowbrays donated land to the religious orders outside the Isle as well as founding one within Axholme, the land was, almost without exception, in the fenny and waste areas, which could be drained or reclaimed by members of their communities, or by the Islonians working for them, thus fulfilling their (Mowbrays') intentions of assarting and reclaiming. There are many mentions of marsh, dikes, fisheries, and warrens in the details of the grants of land. Apart from the lands given to Selby abbey, it is difficult even to estimate the total area of land granted to the different abbeys or priories partly because few actual areas are given.⁶⁷ The land granted to Selby abbey accounted for approximately 28.5 per cent of the total area of the Isle, and there is a total of between 417 and 527 acres actually referred to in different parishes for the other foundations.

Medieval drainage

There were attempts to improve the drainage the Isle in the period between 1066 and 1626, when Vermuyden initiated his drainage scheme though it is very difficult to determine when they occurred. In the northern part of Axholme Mare Dike, which flowed from a bend in the old river Don near Luddington to an outfall with a staithe north of Amcotts, and which is

marked on the Ordnance Survey map,⁶⁸ was almost certainly constructed by an abbot of Selby in the thirteenth century. The abbots of Selby were amongst the improvers of the drainage, for, in the reign of Henry V, a jury presented to the Commissioners of Sewers, who sat at Crowle, that one

'Geoffrey Gaddesby, late abbot of Selby, did cause a strong sluice of wood to be made upon the river Trent, at the head of a certain sewer, called Mare Dike, of a sufficient height and length and breadth for the defence of the tides coming in from the sea, and likewise from the fresh waters descending from the west, part of the before-specified sluice to the said sewer into the said Trent, and thence into the Humber, and performed the same upon free good will and charity for the ease of the county.'⁶⁹

This sluice was pulled down in the time of John de Shireburne, a successor to Geoffrey Gaddesby, probably because it was instrumental in causing flooding on the landward side by preventing surface water from draining away. De Shireburne made new sluices, but they were too high and broad and insufficiently strong so that stone sluices, sluices of strong timber, consisting of two flood gates, each four feet in breadth and six feet in height were constructed. He also directed that bridges should be built on the sluices sufficiently long and broad for carts and carriages to pass over. Wardens were elected to keep them in good repair, and the freeholders were asked to scour and cleanse the sewer called the Mare Dike from the sluice to the bridge at Luddington called 'Lane End Brigg'.⁷⁰

South of Haxey the Snow Sewer, which was an extension of Burnham Skiers, a stream flowing from Messic Mere, drained into the Trent through three channels - the Snow Sewer itself, the Old Sewer, and the Queen's New Sewer. This suggests that the last-named outfall was constructed during Elizabeth I's reign. Between the Snow Sewer and the county boundary with Nottinghamshire, were Heckdike and Bickersdike.⁷¹ Heckdike stretched for about a mile inland from its outfall on the Trent, and Bickersdike linked the river Idle with the Trent; both are so straight in construction as to be man-made or straightenings of natural outfalls. Both Heckdike and Bickersdike are evidence of attempts to drain the carrs north of

Misterton, Nottinghamshire, and Haxey. There are eighteen records of the Commissioners of Sewers for the Isle of Axholme between the reigns of Edward III and Charles I, appointing commissioners to oversee the maintenance of the river banks.⁷²

From the Dissolution to 1640

'The Post-medieval period was characterised by two opposing strands: on the one side the continuation of an insular and essentially Medieval form of land-use and culture, and on the other a series of major changes to the landscape and economy instigated by outsiders.'⁷³ The 'outsiders' were the purchasers of monastic and chantry land who became non-resident landlords, and who frequently sold on their land very quickly after acquiring it. One major instigator of a major change in the landscape, and, thereby, in the agricultural economy was Vermuyden who introduced a drainage scheme of Hatfield Chase and the Isle in 1626.

At the dissolution of the monasteries, what is likely to have been about one-third of the Isle of Axholme's area came into the possession of the Crown. The fate of Selby abbey's land has already been covered, but it is important to realise that not only monastic land came onto the market in the late 1530s and early 1540s, but that there were also chantry lands available for purchase, following the Act of 1547. As has been stated above, the possession of the manor of Epworth was also in a state of flux because the Earl of Derby's lack of issue had resulted in the reversion of the manor to the Crown before it was sold to Lord Clinton and Say. Though it is difficult to trace the numerous sales of monastic and chantry lands because they changed hands quite quickly, it is clear from deeds and the calendars of Patent Rolls that there was a great deal of land available.⁷⁴ According to Knowles,⁷⁵ there were three main classes of purchasers of monastic lands: local landowners, who were often patrons or titular founders; individual courtiers; and officials of the Court of Augmentations. Such people often sold their land, which resulted in a new class of buyers, from about 1542, who purchased large estates and scattered properties, and who, in turn, sold them off in bundles or parcels. These latter purchasers were often small groups of men, usually Londoners, who formed a

syndicate, investing in real estate as a source of private income. A result of these transactions was the betterment of the well-to-do and younger sons of country gentlemen. Like the remainder of Lincolnshire, the Isle of Axholme had no major families: As Hodgett writes:

‘Lincolnshire was then [in the 1530s-60s] a county with relatively few great landowners who dominated the local scene. Moreover, it was, in a sense, leaderless in the early Tudor period, since no great family with clear precedence like, for example, the Percies in Northumberland emerged in the shire between the death of viscount Beaumont in 1507 . . . and the entry into Lincolnshire affairs of Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk in the second and third decades of the sixteenth century.’⁷⁶

Hodgett maintains that the county ‘aristocracy’ consisted mainly of ‘middling rich yeomen’. In Axholme, there are people who called themselves ‘gentlemen’, like the Eures and at least one branch of the Coggan family, from Epworth, but they are the exceptions. Though some monastic land was bought up by the so-termed gentry, much of it was purchased by Londoners, and sold on, for example, the land formerly belonging to Nostell priory was granted to John, earl of Warren, who disposed of it to William Breton of London, who sold it to Alexander Bannister of Epworth. He, in turn, sold it to Sir Peter Eure, who sold it to Thomas Brewer, who settled it on his daughter on her marriage to John Taylor of Newland, near Rawcliffe, Yorkshire.⁷⁷

The areas of chantry land at Epworth (2), Haxey, Belton, Kinnard’s Ferry and Butterwick, both in Owston parish, Althorpe, and Amcotts,⁷⁸ were sold off as the following example illustrates:

Grant to Thomas Sydney of Walsingham, Norfolk, and Nicholas Halswell of Gathers, esquire, Somerset, (1) the land in the tenure of Thomas Philipson, in Epworth, which belonged to the late chantry of St Mary and St Katherine, Epworth; a close of land called Hardehill Croft in the tenure of Thomas Maw, and a toft and meadows in the tenure of John Hill, which belonged to the late chantry of Holy Trinity, Epworth.⁷⁹

Farming

The medieval pattern of farming continued into the modern period. Pastoral farming was the most important agricultural activity: in the summer the peat fens which were sufficiently dry were used for grazing, with cattle brought in from other districts.⁸⁰ The moors round Crowle on either side of the river Don, known as the Lincolnshire Moors and the Yorkshire Moors, contained 3,458 acres of land, and were claimed to provide sufficient land to graze 12,000 cattle, some of which came from outside the Isle.⁸¹ The carrs south of Haxey and west of Epworth and Belton contained 14,079 acres; there was intercommoning between Haxey and Misterton, Nottinghamshire. These areas dried out after flooding, and were used for grazing cattle during the summer months; in the winter, the cattle were brought onto areas of pasture on the central spine. The main livestock that were kept included cattle, sheep, horses, and pigs, with cattle the most important. Table 1.5 gives the median number of animals for the three main social groups derived from inventories.⁸²

Table 1.5 Median numbers of animals for yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers.

	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers
Cattle	19.0	12.5	3.5
Horses	7.0	5.5	2.0
Sheep	50.5	22.5	7.5
Pigs	8.5	11.0	4.5

Arable farming was carried out on the higher ground and along the Trent bank in the north-eastern part of the island round Luddington and Garthorpe, which had very rich land. Areas of land held by individuals were often small because of the practice of partible inheritance though richer yeomen and husbandmen were found to purchase small parcels of land during their lifetime, only to disperse them when they came to draw up their wills. Table 1.6 gives the median areas of arable land in the main social groups.

Table 1.6 Median areas of land (acres)

	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers
Arable	26.5	6.5	2.2
Meadow	8.5	6.5	1.5

Wheat, rye, barley, oats, and peas formed the main crops. It is likely that there was a four-course crop rotation in Westwood manor,⁸³ which was part of Epworth manor, and which comprised about one-quarter of the area of the Isle, and which had a high proportion of arable land. In 1607, 60 per cent of the land was under the plough; 13 per cent was meadow; 10 per cent was pasture, with a similar percentage enclosed; and just over 4 per cent was categorised as arable-meadow-pasture. The picture of Westwood presented by Thirsk is somewhat misleading in that it gives the impression that the Isle's economy was principally arable whereas pastoral farming predominated. The tenor of Thirsk's argument in 'Axholme before Vermuyden' was that his drainage scheme changed the agricultural economy from pastoral to arable, something not entirely borne out by this emphasis on Westwoodside.

Axholme was a major centre for hemp and flax production from the medieval period to the nineteenth century, with the wetlands providing ideal sites for retting the plants to produce the fibres suitable for spinning and weaving. Retting of the hemp and the flax, was carried out in special pools or in the streams or dikes. Under the Mowbray charter, the inhabitants had the right to use the streams and pools in the Isle for retting, with the exception of the Skyers, which was reserved for the lord of the manor. Retting is carried out in still water, producing poisonous substances so it was carefully controlled through manorial customs and bylaws.⁸⁴ Retting pools were concentrated in specific areas, and were a common feature in Axholme. An area in East Lound, for example, is still called 'the Rates', and an aerial photograph of Haxey has revealed a vast agglomeration of retting pits though it is not yet clear whether they were all in use at the same time.⁸⁵ The producing and processing of hemp and flax was an important secondary occupation for many of the Isle's inhabitants

especially if their landholding was small and inventories are full of references to pools, equipment for separating the fibres and breaking them, to spinning wheels, and looms for weaving the threads into different grades of cloth, from sacking to linen.

The Isle also had deposits of gypsum, from which plaster was being made as early as 1298 at Gainsborough,⁸⁶ and are still visible in Epworth parish.

Intercommoning

One of the problems facing the inhabitants of the Isle was that of common land, particularly in the area between Haxey and Misterton, Nottinghamshire, where there was intercommoning. This area, along with another to the west of the central spine, was subject to flooding during winter months and at times of heavy rain, as has been indicated above. From 1532 to late into the reign of Elizabeth I there were boundary disputes, which reflect the increase in population and the added pressure on land as well as commercial interests. Haxey Carr, the area in question, was used by the inhabitants of Haxey, Owston, and Misterton for grazing cattle during the summer months.

On 20 February, 1532/3, Henry VIII wrote to the Commissioners of Sewers, asking them to make enquiries to protect everyone's interests regarding the intention of the inhabitants of Misterton to build a bridge 'on the water of Bycarsdyke' and their request to do so in order for them to have access to grazing land in West Stockwith. The wording of the request to the Commissioners is interesting in that the king wrote, 'We therefore willing to have first knowledge not only to what hurt discomodity or annoyance the making of the said bridge be to us [that is, the king!] or to any other farmers or subjects'. All those called before the Commissioners from Nottinghamshire, as might be expected, were fulsome in the praise of the former bridge which had fallen into a ruinous state.

The outcome of this enquiry resulted in a Memorandum, which stated:

That ther should be no house beldyd at the same bryge end and it to be kept that there should be no man with no cattill then no thyng eles that should be hurtful nayther to

them of Isle the eles to no other naburs and he that dwellys at the bryg to kepe the key and bryge lokyd upon a faston [fastening] on a payn [penalty] and they to mend the Stokwyth Bryge as they were wonted afore tyme and hebdkke * when it neds'.⁸⁷

[* This must refer to Heckdike, which indicates it was in existence then if not earlier.]

The building of the bridge appears to have caused friction between the three communities of Haxey, Owston, and Misterton because there were disputes during the reign of Elizabeth I. A Commission by Letters Patent to twelve commissioners dated 4 July 1571 was charged to make an enquiry into the right of common and soil of a 'certain common lying between the Water of Bycarsdyke and Haxey, commonly called Haxey Carr, and diverse other controversies touching and concerning the same'. The Commissioners decided that the inhabitants of Haxey and Owston as well as those of Misterton-cum-Stockwith should have, use, and enjoy intercommoning in the Haxey Carr lying between Haxey and Bickersdike. They all were allowed to dig turves for fuel though they were prohibited from selling them to 'foreigners', that is, those outside the area, and no ground was to be cut or dug for turf nearer to Bickersdike and the river Idle than three hundred yards - a clear attempt to prevent erosion of the banks which would have led to flooding.

For the footbridge standing over Bickersdike, which had been causing controversy, it was adjudged that it was to be used as a footbridge only, that is, no carts or wagons or horses, and it was to be maintained at the expense of the inhabitants of Misterton. In addition, an illegal ford had been made across Bickersdike which enabled thieves to drive cattle out of the Isle. To prevent this, a gate with rails was to be erected 'in such wyse as no passage may be but throwe the said yate, which shall be contynually maynteyned and reedified by the inhabitants of Mysterton and kept locked from sonne set to sonne ryse, except it be openyed upon nedeful and necessary occasions by the Constable of Mysterton'. The inhabitants of Haxey were to be responsible for building the gate and rails though the people of Misterton were to give twenty marks to Haxey residents.

The disputes continued, however, and on 16 May, 1596, the Commissioners were asked to arbitrate on the position of the county boundary. (See map on p. 30)⁸⁸ The people of Misterton claimed that Heckdike, north of Bickersdike, was the boundary, which they called the North Carr, so that this piece of land belonged to the Duchy of Lancaster, and therefore to them. The inquiry was held at West Stockwith on 18 September, 1596, when witnesses were called. Roger Tyledlaxe, who was about 64 years of age, and who had been a bailiff of the manor of Epworth for about thirty years, stated that he always believed the whole of Haxey Carr to have been in Lincolnshire, that he had never heard of a North Carr, and that Bickersdike was the county boundary. The repairs to the banks of Bickersdike had been raised through a levy paid to the grand juries of the manor of Epworth. Others complained that people from Misterton used the bridge as a way for stealing cattle, and to graze their cattle wrongfully on Haxey Carr. A certain Robert Thornhill had made a ford through Bickersdike, which was a hindrance to navigation. Witnesses from Nottinghamshire averred that Heckdike was the boundary, and they had done the repairs to the dikes. Unfortunately, the outcome of this dispute is not known, but it points to the tension that existed between the two communities when there was the danger of over-grazing, and when population increases were producing pressures on land. The present county boundary lies along Bickersdike.

Population changes

The changes in population are the subject of Chapter 3, but may be dwelt upon briefly. Because of its fertility, extensive meadows, and commons, the Isle was able to support a large population during the Middle Ages. The first 1377 Poll Tax recorded a total of 1736 tax payers which may indicate the number of adults though such figures have to be dealt with care as the 1380 poll-tax receipts show a great variation from the 1377 figures.⁸⁹ Based on the Ecclesiastical Survey of 1603, the villages of Belton, Crowle, and Haxey were supporting populations in excess of 1100, while Epworth had 800, and the total for the whole of the Isle was 6,044, and 6,076 in 1642, using the Protestation Returns. While the population of north-

west Lincolnshire declined slightly between 1603 and 1676, the population of southern Axholme rose: by 1676 Belton had a population of 1245, Epworth had 1003, and Haxey had 1439, an increase of 21 per cent over the 1603 totals. An examination of the parish registers indicates that while certain families predominated over a long period of time, there was nevertheless a constant movement of families into and out of Axholme. The influx may have come from the eastern side of the river Trent, where people were made homeless either as a result of failing villages or forced desertions by landowners converting from arable to pastoral. In 1675, it was reported that 'it was the right to cut turves that "draws multitudes of the poorer sort from all the counties adjacent to come and inhabit this Isle."' ⁹⁰

Vermuyden's drainage scheme

Probably the most important event in the history of the Isle occurred in 1626 when Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutchman, was employed by Charles I to drain Hatfield Chase and the Isle of Axholme.⁹¹ (See map 1. 4 on p. 33)⁹² The whole process was riven with corruption from the outset, and Vermuyden was revealed as an out and out liar, cheat, and hypocrite. A year after his accession, Charles I decided that the fenlands of Axholme were insufficiently productive, in the sense that little revenue came into the royal purse from these crown lands. Charles entered into an agreement with Vermuyden by which the latter would drain the areas and receive in return one-third of the newly-drained land, which amounted to about 60,000 acres - this figure includes Hatfield Chase as well as Axholme. The king would claim half the drained land, with the result that the Islonians were faced with the loss of nearly two-thirds of their common lands. As Thirsk has pointed out, what Vermuyden was planning to do was substitute one economy with another, predominantly arable farming in place of pastoral.⁹³ The Islonians, as might be expected objected to this, citing the Mowbray Charter of 1360, and claiming that both the king's and Vermuyden's actions were illegal. There were, therefore, conflicting desires - the Islonians wanted to maintain their way of life; Vermuyden had to satisfy his shareholders and to pay his workmen. Though he had not received the consent of

the local population, which was a prerequisite in his contract with the Crown, Vermuyden went ahead with his project

His basic plan, as far as Axholme was concerned, was to straighten the meandering courses of the rivers Idle, Torne, and Don on the western side of the Isle, and to create an outfall into the river Trent at Althorpe by cutting across the flat lands between Belton and Crowle. Vermuyden's drainage must have affected Crowle badly because he removed the navigable branch of the river Don, and left them surrounded by large tracts of marshy ground which previously had been navigable in boats over the surface of the meres, or by guts and lodes,⁹⁴ which connected one stretch of water with another.⁹⁵ In addition, he wanted to create a new drain from the river Idle to the Trent south of Owston and north of West Stockwith. There are two maps illustrating the drainage completed by Vermuyden, one of which shows the Snow Sewer no longer part of the drainage system, the other showing the opposite. As there is no sign to-day of any outfalls at Owston, it is likely that the Snow Sewer was omitted from the plan.

When work started on the drainage of Haxey Carr in 1628, riots broke out when materials were destroyed, workmen abused or assaulted, and construction work damaged. Dutch and Flemish workers brought into the Isle to undertake the construction of the dikes were thrown into rivers, and the Islonians broke down the banks, filled ditches, and burnt tools. To deal with the riots, Vermuyden armed his overseers and a man was killed. The Crown did nothing to bring the killers to justice, except bring in the militia to quell the riots. The ringleaders of the riots were sent to London to the Court of Star Chamber, while others were imprisoned, to be released on a surety of not repeating offences. Further riots broke out in 1629 and 1630, and were suppressed by the militia.

In the early 1630s, the Islonians refused to agree to any division of their common land. Commissioners surveyed the drained lands, confirmed, and delineated Vermuyden's third. They further proposed that the Crown have 2620 acres of the newly-drained land, leaving about 6000 acres to the local inhabitants. Vermuyden then purchased the Crown's

share. The areas of common land in Epworth and Westwoodside were 14,079 acres and round Crowle were 3,458 acres, which were reduced respectively to 5,929 acres, a loss of 42 per cent and 1,815 acres, a loss of 52 per cent. To add to his disrepute, Vermuyden manipulated the legal processes to his own advantage. In 1631, some of the ringleaders of the riots had been fined £1000 by the Court of Star Chamber for their part in the 1628 disturbances. By offering to have the fines rescinded, Vermuyden tried to bribe the ringleaders into agreeing to the threefold division of the newly- drained lands. Some did agree, but other freeholders refused, and the scheme came to nothing.

In 1636, Vermuyden tried the same approach. First, he said he would claim damages from the Islonians, then offered to free them from any damages if they agreed to settle with him on the tripartite division of the land. Though altogether 370, including some who had no right of common, agreed, only a minority of those entitled to actually did so. An offer of £400 was made by the drainers to those who could not find employment to buy materials to make sacking and cloth.

The whole episode reveals the corruption of the government: the Privy Council had provided resources to quell the riots; the Court of Exchequer condoned Vermuyden's attempts at blackmail, and approved the final award to Vermuyden, even though only a minority of the local population had agreed to it; and the local Commissioners of Sewers, who had been persuaded to turn a blind eye to the events in the Isle in case they were sympathetic to the Islonians.

The riots continued throughout the Civil War, for example, in 1642, when the local inhabitants were under the impression they were to be invaded, they destroyed the flood gates at Snow Sewer and a sluice at Misterton, with the result that about 4000 acres were flooded. This was repeated after the sheriff had had the gates and sluice repaired. The Islonians claimed they had been given the worst of the land and also that land previously not liable to flooding had become so.

Other fenland areas

Though it is a truism to state that every area or region is unique, it is worthwhile to examine other fenland areas to compare their features with those of the Isle of Axholme so that any common features may be compared. Two of the several fenland areas that may be considered are the those in southern Lincolnshire and in Cambridgeshire and the Somerset Levels.

Like Axholme, the Fens, the word may be used to denote both the Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire fenland, were seen by outsiders as waste and unprofitable, with a backward populace. The fen people's economic organisation was incomprehensible to outsiders, who considered the populace as sub-human. Only by drainage, outsiders believed, which would get rid of the fenlands, would produce a land that was profitable. 'Piety and profits demanded, it was felt, the reclamation of both.'⁹⁶ The fen people considered their habitat quite differently because it offered abundant grazing, with small areas of fertile arable land. They could supplement their income by fishing and fowling, as well as being able to gather reeds for fuel and for thatching roofs. Any proposals, as will be seen, to drain the Fens met with strong opposition.

Unlike Axholme, the Lincolnshire Fens were affected by encroachment from the sea, but like the Isle were flooded internally by slow moving rivers from the Midlands. In the Holland region of Lincolnshire there was a ridge of silt shaped like a horseshoe along the northern and western sides of the Wash, which provided land for settlement. The earliest settlements were spaced along this ridge all of them linear in shape. In the twelfth century, possibly because of a rise in population which produced pressure on land, there was inter-community co-operation to drain the fenlands both seawards and inland by the construction of dikes and embankments.⁹⁷ The silt lands had to dry out, and the marsh on the seaward side of the dikes and embankments had to have the salt washed out, but both provided excellent grazing for cattle and sheep. Because new land was created, fields were added to the original two-field system which had been prevalent in the villages, and new settlements sprang up in

the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. No comparable attempts to drain the Axholme wetlands have been discovered, apart from the abbot of Selby's construction of Mere Dike, and the construction in the southern part of the Isle of Bickersdike and Heckdike.

A consideration of Domesday Book for Holland's larger settlements shows that, like the Isle of Axholme, fisheries featured largely in the economy of only some of them: Bennington, Gosberton, Holbeach, Whaplode, and Wrangle had no fisheries recorded, while Pinchbeck had four fisheries with 1500 eels, and Spalding had six fisheries worth thirty shillings. On the other hand, the two villages with fisheries have no records of meadow though Bennington (20 acres), Gosberton (12 acres), Holbeach (80 acres), and Whaplode (92 acres) did. Domesday Book recorded that Wrangle was waste because of flooding by the sea.⁹⁸

The Isle of Axholme differed from the Lincolnshire Fens with regard to monastic involvement. The extensive land holding of Selby abbey has already been delineated. The foundation of the small cells at Henes, Hirst, and Sandtoft were all dated from the early to mid-twelfth century, with the Templars having a *camera* founded in the mid-twelfth century; the Carthusian house at Melwood was a late foundation, 1397-8. By contrast, the Lincolnshire Fenland had three Benedictine houses, at Crowland (f. before 1066), Deeping (f.1139), and Spalding (f.c. 1087), with two Cistercian houses at Haverholme (f.1137) and Revesby (f.1142).⁹⁹ No monastic foundations were made on the reclaimed land in Holland. Though much of the land in Axholme granted to the mother houses was mainly in the commons or wetlands, it is difficult to understand why no major foundation was made there in the post-Conquest period when land could have been obtained from the Mowbray family, who were willing to make grants, and where an order like the Cistercians would have welcomed both the solitude and the opportunity to drain and develop the land.

As with the Axholme wetlands, the Lincolnshire Fens were used for pastoral farming with heavy grazing by cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, and geese in the summer. In the winter they were inundated when fishing and fowling were possible. Meadow was not plentiful though

suitable parts of the fen were reserved for meadow, and enclosed until the hay harvest.¹⁰⁰ Arable farming was an important but a subsidiary economy, and food was imported into the region. The Fenland was also used for the growing of hemp, and a weaving industry developed alongside this. Thirsk comments that the size of land holdings was small, yet offers no reason for this. The most likely reason is that partible inheritance was practised in the Fens as it was in the Isle of Axholme, something that will be explored in greater detail later.

During the early years of the fourteenth century there was a climatic deterioration when rainfall appears to have been much heavier. Combined with coastal inundations, there was great destruction of land after 1300: arable land was reduced, and pastoral farming was badly affected, especially in south Lincolnshire. The salt marshes were encroached by the sea, and the production of salt declined. By the 1330s there was flooding in the Witham valley and along the Kesteven fen edge. In the Fens, much of the reclaimed land was lost, and most of Lindsey also was waterlogged, with flooding round Grimsby, and along the southern bank of the Humber which had been affected by inundations.¹⁰¹

In the Cambridgeshire village of Willingham, the arable area in three open fields was between 1000 and 1200 acres, with the remainder of the parish, 3000 acres, as fen.¹⁰² The size of this parish contrasts with some of those in Axholme, for example, Belton had 8530 acres and Haxey 8113 acres. About one-third of the arable acreage was given to wheat or maslin, and about half of the total was used for barley. Of greater importance to the people were the fens as stock farming and dairying made it economical for small holders to survive. 'The arable acreage was not in any case important here. . . A tenant of a half-yardland of about fifteen acres of meadow and marsh was, in Willingham, a wealthy yeoman. It was not the acreage of arable but the possession of fen commons and the stock which went with them, which mattered.'¹⁰³

At the edge of the Fens,¹⁰⁴ the difference of two or three feet in altitude can make all the difference in the type of land and land use. Ravendale, in his study of the Cambridgeshire

fen edge, saw a pattern of economy which was similar to that in the Lincolnshire Fens and in Axholme. The number of fisheries in Domesday Book gave an indication of permanent wetness, and the fen 'crops' of turves, for fuel and house building, reeds, for thatching, and sedges, also for thatching were of a part with the other fenland areas. The winter flooding gave the land fertility, while in the summer the land was used for pasturing. Cheese production and leather products were linked to the pastoral economy of grazing cattle, sheep, and pigs. Like Axholme, intercommoning was practised though, because there was a difficulty in Cambridgeshire of marking the boundaries as the land was flooded in winter, the system was very complex.¹⁰⁵ Hemp was grown as a crop on the edge of cultivated areas.¹⁰⁶

In the Somerset Levels, Williams analysed the causes of flooding as the physique of the region, tidal behaviour and marine siltation, and rainfall.¹⁰⁷ This applies to the Lincolnshire Fens and, to a certain extent, to the Isle of Axholme because of the flooding by the Trent inland - that is, by virtue of the Aigre, which can produce flooding with water from the Humber. There were, however, few mentions in the Domesday Book of fisheries in the marsh areas; in contrast with both Axholme and the Lincolnshire Fens, the Levels had plentiful meadow lands, for example, Burnham had 300 acres and Huntspill 120 acres,¹⁰⁸ though there were some small areas recorded at Glastonbury (62 acres) and Sowey (30 acres). On the other hand, a twelfth century survey of Glastonbury abbey showed that the cellarer had a fishery at Middlezoy of which the abbot owned one part and the abbey the other two parts. At Andedeseay there was another fishery from which the abbot received 2000 eels.¹⁰⁹

Williams has produced a 'hierarchy' of usefulness amongst the moors that varied with the state of their drainage: pools, water-covered moors, and natural watercourses, which were abundant in fish and fowl; periodically water-covered land, which produced turbaries and pastures, which in turn improved drainage so that meadows evolved that were flooded occasionally; and flood-free arable land of 'islands' and uplands.¹¹⁰ Such an analysis can be applied to all fenland areas, and can be helpful in determining which areas are suitable for pastoral or arable farming.

There were three striking features in the Somerset Levels:

- (1) the lack of any evidence for land reclamation on the coastal clay;
- (2) the avoidance of peat soils because they were acid, sterile, and deficient in plant nutrients. The peat areas were also subject to long periods of inundation, and in the Somerset Levels the waters were trapped in the peat moors for months on end because their general level was six to ten feet below that of the level of the clay, and below the level of the rivers. Even if the water was able to drain away, the peat remained waterlogged, and was thus of little use. As there was a liability to swell up in wet weather, with height variations of upto six feet, the peat soils were unable to support drainage structures;
- (3) there was evidence of a concentration of reclamation in distinct and definite areas.¹¹¹

The second and third points apply to the Isle of Axholme in that areas near the rivers Idle, Torne, and Don were almost certainly flooded all year round because of the accumulation of peat. Leland in his 'Itinerary' commented that 'from the west point of Bickers Dike up a long to the great Mere, the soyle by the water is fenny, and morische, and ful of carres', and 'the fenny part of Axholme berith much galle, a low frutex swete in burning'.¹¹² Leland's comments provide a good summary of Williams's categories.

With the exception of the coastal clay belt, the emphasis in farming was almost entirely pastoral, and the piecemeal reclamation of the fen had helped to intensify the pastoral predominance. Like the Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire Fenland and Axholme, the marshland provided fishing, fowling, reed-cutting, and peat digging. Numerous fisheries existed in the rivers, and there were artificial weirs ('gurgites'), which caused the waters to flood the surrounding moors, and which was the cause of much antagonism, as happened when the abbot of Selby constructed flood gates on Mare Dike.¹¹³

All fenland areas have some characteristics in common. First are slow-moving rivers, which produce flooding in the winter months, which deposit silts that enrich the land, and

which provide abundant grass in summer. In the winter the floods provide fish and fowl, and the peat and sedges allow fuel to be collected and reeds for thatching. Secondly, such features provide for a mainly pastoral form of agriculture, with cattle and sheep able to graze in the summer months. Where there is arable land wheat, barley, oats, peas, and hemp are grown. As a consequence of the pastoralism, related industries, such as dairying, meat, and cheese production, developed.

¹ To avoid repetition, the Isle of Axholme will be referred to as 'the Isle' or 'Axholme'. The inhabitants refer to themselves as 'Islonians'.

² J. Thirsk, 'Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', *Agricultural History Review* 1 (1957), p.24.

Dr Thirsk comments that 'much of the commons, of course, lay under water in winter from November until April.

³ V. Cory, *Hatfield and Axholme*, (Cambridge, 1985), pp.17-21.

⁴ M. Havinden, *The Somerset Landscape*, pp.149-150.

⁵ W. B. Stonehouse, *The History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme* (1839), insert.

Stonehouse states that this is a compilation of earlier maps. Hereafter Stonehouse. There is also a map drawn up by a Special Commission, Exchequer King's Remembrancer No 7041, in the context of determining the boundary between Nottinghamshire, which comprised part of the Duchy of Lancaster, and Lincolnshire, whose lands had reverted to the Crown when the Mowbray line had become extinguished.

⁶ P. Morgan and C. Thorn (eds), *Domesday Book: Lincolnshire*, 63, 26.

⁷ G. Platts, *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire*, p.153.

⁸ C. W. Foster and A. H. Thompson (eds), 'Chantry certificates for Lincoln and Lincolnshire, returned in 1548 under the Act of Parliament of 1Edward VI', *AASL XXXVI* (1922), Part II, p.25.

⁹ 'Chantry certificates', p.256.

¹⁰ L. T. Smith (ed), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535-12543*, Vol I, pp.37-8.

¹¹ W. Dugdale, *A History of Imbanking and Drayning* (1762), p.141.

¹² Dugdale, *Imbanking*, p.144.

¹³ Dugdale, *Imbanking*, p.146.

¹⁴ J. R. Ravendale, *Liable to Floods*, p.46.

¹⁵ Maps in J. Stonehouse and T. C. Fletcher, *Read's History of the Isle of Axholme*.

¹⁶ R. Head, H. Fenwick, and H. Chapman (et al), 'Sites and finds from the Isle of Axholme', in R. Van de Noort and S. Ellis, *Wetland Heritage of the Ancholme and Trent Valleys* (Humber Wetlands Project, Hull University, 1998), p. 279.

¹⁷ Van de Noort and Ellis, p.279.

¹⁸ This was agreed with K. A. Leahy, Curator of Scunthorpe Museum in 1995, after a metrological examination of the areas of the tofts and of the overall shape of the settlement. It is not possible to suggest a date for the planning of the settlement, except that it is almost certainly post-Conquest, and may have been done by one of the Mowbrays, who were lords of the manor.

¹⁹ Dugdale, *Imbanking*, p.144.

²⁰ M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (1993), p. 220.

²¹ *Domesday Book*, 63, 22.

²² Lincolnshire Archive Office, Crowle Manor Map 9/1 (1796).

²³ A quarter, in weight, varied depending on the type of crop, but here is equivalent to eight bushels, which is 480 pounds *avoirdupois*. See C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, p.153.

²⁴ F. Baker (ed), *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol 25 Letters, 1721-1739, pp.224-5.

²⁵ Mare Dike was an artificial drainage channel, probably constructed under the aegis of an abbot of Selby, whose manor it was prior to the Dissolution.

²⁶ On a visit to Luddington, the present writer was given information by one of the churchwardens on the problems of flooding which have caused the graveyard to be on the northern side of the church where the land is slightly higher.

- ²⁷ P. F. Fleet, *Markets in Medieval Lincolnshire*, p.99 (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Nottingham, 1989).
- ²⁸ Fleet, p.104 and *C. Ch. R.* III, p.53.
- ²⁹ Stonehouse, p.380.
- ³⁰ Van de Noort and Ellis, p. 279.
- ³¹ Ordnance Survey, Scunthorpe, Sheet 112, 1:50 000 First Series.
- ³² *Domesday Book*, 63, 5-26. The calculations are 49.5 ploughs x 120 acres x 2. The carucate was an area of 120 acres, the area a team could plough, and multiplication by two is to allow for one-half of the land to lie fallow each year.
- ³³ Finn, p.54.
- ³⁴ The abbot of Selby obtained huge supplies of food, including eels, from his manor at Crowle. See *infra*.
- ³⁵ M. Dimin, 'The drainage history of the Humberhead Levels,' in R. van de Noort and S. Ellis, *Wetland Heritage of the Humberhead Levels*, (Humber Wetlands Project, Hull 1997), p. 21.
- ³⁶ H. C. Darby, 'Domesday England', in H. C. Darby (ed), *A New Historical Geography of England*, pp.47-57. Hereafter Darby.
- ³⁷ M. Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset Levels*, pp.25-28.
- ³⁸ John de Mowbray granted by deed to the freeholders in 1360 numerous privileges, including the right to dig for turf, trees, and roots; to dry flags (reeds) to cover the ridges of their houses; and to put their hemp to be retted in the waters of the wastes except in the Skyers in Haxey parish. This information is drawn from T. C. Fletcher (ed), *Read's History of the Isle of Axholme*, pp.19-20. The 'Mowbray Charter', as it is referred to, was used by the Islonians in the nineteenth century when parliamentary enclosure was mooted, as a result of which mainly the lands drained by Vermuyden, that is, the former marshes, were enclosed.
- ³⁹ D.E. Greenway (ed), *Charters of the Honour of Mowbray, 1107-1191*, p.xlvi. Hereafter Greenway. I am indebted to Dr. D. Marcombe for drawing my attention to this book. Much of the following information is derived mainly from Greenway.
- ⁴⁰ Greenway, p.xlvi.
- ⁴¹ Greenway, pp. 1 - liii.
- ⁴² See fn.48.
- ⁴³ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, Edward VI, Vol II, p.203 (16 November 1551): 'Grant to the lord Clynton and Saye of the lordship and manor of Epworth and parks of Melwood and Belgraves within the Isle of Axholme, and the advowson of the rectory of Epworth, late of Edward, earl of Derby, the manors of Crull (Crowle), Luddington, Estoft (Eastoft), late of Selby abbey, Yorkshire,' together with chantry lands in Epworth, which belonged to the chantry of St Mary and St Katherine in Epworth.
- ⁴⁴ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, Edward VI, 1550-1553, pp.203-212, and Calendar of Feet of Fines, 1-18 Elizabeth, p.135 in Foster Library, LAO.
- ⁴⁵ Stonehouse, p.404.
- ⁴⁶ Greenway, pp.xlvi-xlvii.
- ⁴⁷ Greenway, p.li.
- ⁴⁸ Greenway, p.liii.
- ⁴⁹ Greenway, Charters 257 and 258.
- ⁵⁰ J. H. Tillotson (ed), *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Account Rolls from Selby Abbey*, provides much of the following information., especially pp. 46-8.
- ⁵¹ Tillotson, p.68.
- ⁵² Tillotson, pp.142-146 and 181-191.
- ⁵³ Tillotson, p.122.
- ⁵⁴ Tillotson, p.79.
- ⁵⁵ Dugdale, *Monasticon*, III, p.617.
- ⁵⁶ Greenway, Charter 264.
- ⁵⁷ Greenway, Charter 196.
- ⁵⁸ Stonehouse, p.61fn.
- ⁵⁹ B. A. Lees (ed), *Records of the Templars: the Inquest of 1195 with Illustrative Documents*, p.255fn states that 'in 1147 he seems to have gone on the Second Crusade, and in 1186 he again took the Cross and went to the Holy Land. Taken prisoner at the battle of Hittin in 1189, he was redeemed by the Templars in the following year. He died in Palestine not long after.'
- ⁶⁰ Greenway, Charters 273 and 276.
- ⁶¹ 'Camera' - small estate (of Hospitallers). See R E Latham, *Revised Medieval Latin Word-List*,

- p. 65. The term is used by D M Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire*, p 146 when referring to Belwood.
- ⁶² Greenway, Charter 276.
- ⁶³ Lees, *Templars*, p.255fn.
- ⁶⁴ C. Platt, *Medieval England*, (1978), p. 60.
- ⁶⁵ Greenway, Charter 285.
- ⁶⁶ *Victoria County History*, p. 158. The endowment of Monks' Kirby included the manors of Newbold on Avon, Coppeston, and Walton, the appropriated churches of Newbold and Monks' Kirby, and the advowsons of Withy Brook, Warpenbury, and Sharnford. (p.158 fn).
- ⁶⁷ The areas of land held by monastic foundations have been derived from Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicorum* (various volumes).
- ⁶⁸ Ordnance Survey Sheet 112 Scunthorpe (1:50 000 series) grid reference 859 165.
- ⁶⁹ Read, p.48.
- ⁷⁰ Dugdale, *Imbanking*, p.142.
- ⁷¹ Bickersdike - 'by carrs dike', that is, a dike by the carrs, areas of land overgrown with rushes, reeds, shrubs, and small trees.
- ⁷² Dugdale, *History of Imbanking and Drayning*, p. 142 for the period from Edward III to Henry V, and M. E. Kennedy, 'Commissioners of Sewers, 1509-1649:an annotated list', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology*, 19 (1984), pp. 83-6.
- ⁷³ Van de Noort and Ellis, p.281.
- ⁷⁴ Sets of deeds are to be found in Lincolnshire Archives, and reference to them is to found in chapter 6.
- ⁷⁵ D. Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs*, pp. 283-6.
- ⁷⁶ G.A. J. Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, pp. 4-5.
- ⁷⁷ Stonehouse, pp.352-3.
- ⁷⁸ Foster and Thompson (eds), 'The chantry certificates for Lincolnshire, returned in 1548 under the Act of Parliament of 1 Edward VI', *LAAS XXXVI* (1922), Part II, pp.183-294.
- ⁷⁹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, Edward VI, Vol V (1 May 1553), p. 56.
- ⁸⁰ Cory, p.35.
- ⁸¹ Thirsk, 'Axholme', p.23.
- ⁸² Much of the research has been centred on wills and inventories. The will was in two sections: the will, which devised land and buildings, and the testament, which disposed of personal property. Probate of a will required, under a statute of 21 Henry VIII, c.5, that four reputable persons were required to make an list and valuation of the moveable items of the deceased.
- ⁸³ Thirsk, 'Axholme', p.19.
- ⁸⁴ Van de Noort and Ellis, p.287.
- ⁸⁵ I am grateful to Mr Kevin Leahy, the Director of Scunthorpe Museum, for drawing my attention to this photograph.
- ⁸⁶ Platts, *Medieval Lincolnshire*, p.126.
- ⁸⁷ G. Dunston, *The Rivers of Axholme*, pp.111-113.
- ⁸⁸ This map was made in pursuance of Special Commissions 38 Elizabeth (1596). Only the southern parts of the Isle were surveyed as they were the parts relevant to the dispute. It is interesting to see the development of Haxey along the edge of the carr and on two small islands - Park, Newbig, and Netherthorpe. From Stonehouse, *History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme (1839)*.
- ⁸⁹ Graham Platts - personal communication.
- ⁹⁰ Van de Noort and Ellis, p.282, quoting from D. Neave and S. Neave, 'Rural population and land use in Humberside from the sixteenth to early nineteenth centuries', in S. Ellis and D. R. Crowther (eds.), *Humber Perspectives: a Region Through the Ages* (Hull, 1990), p.381.
- ⁹¹ Much of this account is based on C. Holmes, *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire*, pp.123-6.
- ⁹² This is a copy of the Josias Arlebout map of 1639. Source Stonehouse *op cit*.
- ⁹³ Thirsk, 'Axholme', p.17.
- ⁹⁴ gut - 'narrow channel'; lode - 'reach of water'.
- ⁹⁵ Read, p.249.
- ⁹⁶ J Thirsk, *Fenland farming*, p.4.
- ⁹⁷ This is covered in great depth in H. E. Hallam, *Settlement and Society: a Study of the Early Agrarian History of South Lincolnshire*.
- ⁹⁸ The sections of *Domesday Book* for these settlements are as follows: Bennington 15, 2; 12, 49::

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- Gosberton 7, 36:: Holbeach 1, 32-3; 11, 1, 12, 83-4:: Pinchbeck 14, 99; 57, 52:: Spalding 11, 2; 14, 97; 57, 54:: Whaplode 1, 33; 12, 83-4; 57, 54:: Wrangle 12, 63; 57, 36.
- ⁹⁹ These dates were obtained from D. M. Owen, *Church and Society in Medieval Lincolnshire*, Appendix 3, pp.147-153.
- ¹⁰⁰ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, pp.22 and 24.
- ¹⁰¹ G Platts, *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire*, pp.152-3.
- ¹⁰² M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p.121.
- ¹⁰³ M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p.115.
- ¹⁰⁴ J. R. Ravendale, *Liable to Floods: Village Landscape at the Edge of the Fens, AD 450-1850*, p.46.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ravendale, *Floods*, p.15.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ravendale, *Floods*, p. 58.
- ¹⁰⁷ M. Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset Levels*, p. 6.
- ¹⁰⁸ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p. 23.
- ¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Somerset levels*, pp. 26-7.
- ¹¹⁰ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p. 25.
- ¹¹¹ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p. 41.
- ¹¹² Leland, pp. 37 and 38.
- ¹¹³ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p. 170.

Chapter 2 Literature Survey

During the past forty to fifty years, different approaches have been adopted towards the study of local history. This chapter will present an overview of these approaches then consider in more detail the major concerns of local historians, concerns which are relevant to the present study.¹

In the 1950s, there was a conflict in the minds of local historians as to whether their studies were to be considered as 'national history localised' or 'local history *per se*' as H P R Finberg defined their dilemma. Finberg did not see local history as a contribution to national studies, rather that 'the family, the local community, the national state, and the supra-national society [was] as a series of concentric circles. Each requires to be studied with constant reference to the one outside it'.²

By contrast, W G Hoskins developed a method of study by a comparative method whereby it was possible to expand from a particular to a

thematic comparison and contrast. . . Farming methods could be analysed through comparing incidences of crops and livestock. . . On a wider canvas, elected urban economies could be contrasted by comparing whole occupational categories in different towns.³

This approach was one adopted by many local historians, so that if Hoskins's Wigston Magna was characteristic of open-field farming then another open-field system could be compared with it.⁴ The comparative technique started by selecting a community, or group of communities, or an occupational grouping. Comparisons were then made usually on a single theme, such as, population or wealth or inventories, thus giving them an 'economic' cachet; such comparisons were, however, static.⁵

A different approach to the categorising of rural communities was adopted by Joan Thirsk, who considered farming regions as offering scope for analysis and study. She stated that there is an interconnectedness between topography, the type of economy linked with it, and the social organisations that are characteristic of the first two factors. 'Pastoral

communities have one structure, arable communities another.⁶ This approach demonstrates the complexity of the interactions between the numerous aspects of a community and its surrounding area, in which an alteration in one parameter can produce wide-ranging, even unexpected, changes. An example of this is the conversion of arable land to pasture which resulted in a reduction in the demand for labour: this could cause a movement in the population seeking work elsewhere, or the unemployed developing a secondary employment.

The link between topography and economy was the approach advocated by Thirsk in 'Fenland Farming'⁷ and in her study of Lincolnshire's farming regions.⁸ From the study of the numbers and types of farm animals, crops, field-systems, and the like there developed a wider study of the local economy and its social structures with a consideration of the topography and population changes. 'Topography' is an umbrella term for the physical factors defined by Thirsk as 'soils, sub-soils, altitude, relief, rainfall'.⁹ Thirsk further developed the concept of a link between topography and the type of farming that was likely to be found into a close description of the farming regions of England, which was included in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales IV*.¹⁰

Arising from Thirsk's approach, Professor Alan Everitt expanded this framework to include the concept of different types of countryside each of which had its own distinctive characteristics. Before this, Kerridge had adopted a system of defining farming countries some of which were very large, such as the 'Midland Plain', which 'stretches from Shropshire to the Vale of York and north Lincolnshire, and from Wiltshire to the Vale of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire'. Kerridge claimed in justification that the region was one 'disjointed rolling plain' though it is clear that such a vast area must contain variations and differences.

Thirsk's *England's Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History, 1500-1750* offers an analysis of the English farming regions into eight basic types. These types are broad generalisations based on topography, population, economy, and social structures, the unifying theme being that each different region produces different agricultural systems which affect the structure of the local society. Because of the size of Thirsk's regions, there are bound to be

variations even within short distances so her classifications have to be considered as broad assertions. Even within her regions, it must be remembered that farming systems may be changed to suit the current agricultural need, as happened with Myddle in the sixteenth century.¹¹

A further refinement in the description of farming regions was the concept of *pays*, which was developed by French geographers, who said that 'distinctive countrysides. . . were the products of physical differences in geology, soil, topography, and climate; and also of differences in settlement history and rural settlement, which gave each *pays* a distinctive way of life'.¹² Overton points out that Thirsk's maps of *pays* is closely related to her original map of farming regions published in 1967. He comments that *pays* help in generalising about the general look of a landscape and the prevailing economic and social structures, but they are of little use for analytical purposes, and he goes on to demonstrate that neither *pays* or farming regions types are homogenous with respect to farm type in an area he studied in Norfolk and Suffolk.¹³ Overton observes that 'identifying agricultural regions in the past is not a matter of discovery. . . but creation'.¹⁴

As stated above, Thirsk proposed the link between topography, the type of agriculture practised, and social structure. In her view, the growth of secondary occupations was associated with pastoral communities, a theme developed by Jones, who saw 'concentrations of rural domestic industries [appearing] in areas of densely-populated pastoralism'. This process was 'strengthened in Tudor times by the increasing pressure of population, and by systems of partible inheritance, which finally sliced the size of holdings too small to support a family purely by farming'.¹⁵

Enclosure and the conversion of arable to pasture altered the structure of communities, bringing with it tensions because it changes the amount of work available to labourers as well as altering the opportunities for employment of younger people. Small villages were depopulated or much reduced in size, and could, according to Thirsk, be changed from 'egalitarian, peasant communities into estate villages, dominated by a squire'.¹⁶ According to

Allen, enclosure was important in destroying the English peasantry because, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, farmers were evicted and, their land seized, it was amalgamated into larger farms, and converted to pasture. Eviction enclosure 'resulted in the elimination of peasant farming', though the evidence he adduces for the scale of eviction is not clear.¹⁷

Enclosure and the conversion of arable to pasture did not occur in Axholme, rather the opposite, for in 1626, Vermuyden, a Dutch adventurer, with the approval of Charles I, set about the drainage of parts of the Isle which resulted in the loss of about one-third of the common land which had hitherto been used for grazing. As happened in eighteenth century Northamptonshire, when parliamentary enclosure adversely affected small landholders or renters because they lost common rights,¹⁸ this led to rioting because of a loss of vital grazing rights and the need to find alternative sources of income.

Though there may appear to be a complete dichotomy between the approach to local history as exemplified by Hoskins and by Thirsk, this is not necessarily the case if the 'national' links adumbrated by Hoskins are disregarded. While the 'Hoskins approach' concentrated on one aspect of a community, and while Thirsk looked at a larger picture, she was involved in making comparisons between the crops, their yields, the number of cattle, and so on, and such comparisons could effectively cover the whole of England.

When studying any local community, it is possible to produce a 'model' of the elements subject to alteration - topography, economy, the population that can be supported, and the social structures that arise. If other factors, such as failures in the grain harvest, national economic trends, such as the demand for wool, or plague, are included, one is faced with an equation with a large number of variables. Each 'variable' can be the subject of individual study, but it must be considered in the context of other factors. Dyer, for example, commented that there was a relationship between living standards and movements in population, but the two interacted in very complicated ways.¹⁹

Population change and inflation were two other factors that were introduced into the study of the interrelationship between topography, economy, and society. In Dyer's study of

standards of living in the late medieval period, he explores both the realities of life for all levels of English society in a period of war, pestilence, and rebellion, and also the effects of population change. He demonstrates that the reduction in birth-rate from 1350 until after c. 1520 affected the social and economic developments. The assertiveness of the lower orders meant that 'agrarian systems could be modified only through conscious decisions by the peasants'. Although sons of peasants were able in some places to inherit smallholdings, or acquire them on their own initiative, such accumulations could easily break up in the next generation in the late fourteenth century, a situation not altered until the early sixteenth century.²⁰

By contrast, the population of England almost doubled between the 1540s and the 1701, showing a decline in the rate of increase in the 1560s and 1660s. Between 1522 and 1525, the population was estimated to be 2.5 million, which increased to 2.77 million in 1541, and further grew to 4.10 million by 1601, reaching about 5.05 million in 1701.²¹ It is difficult to account for this growth in population, especially after one-and-a-half centuries of decline prior to this, but it may be accounted for by a general improvement in prosperity, which in turn enabled couples to marry earlier. As a consequence, higher fertility, coupled with a drop in the death rate because of a decrease in epidemic diseases, resulted in population growth. Under this stimulus of a growing population, agricultural prices rose, land values increased, the demand for land became more intense, and there were limited improvements in farming techniques, such as the use of lime and marl, and the floating of water meadows. Agricultural production was increased through extensions to cultivated areas.²²

The effects of population growth combined with poor or disastrous harvests for the period of study have been examined in at least two studies, with the writers coming to the conclusion that, in simple terms, 'the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer'.²³ Bowden concluded that population increase led to greater poverty.²⁴ While farm wages increased in money terms threefold between 1500 and 1640, from 4d. to 1s. per day, the cost of living rose by sixfold.²⁵ This growth brought about pressure on land, and, together with a series of

disastrous harvests - in 1555-6, 1586, 1595-7, 1629-30, and 1647-9, resulted in an increase in the price of corn.²⁶ 'In a peasant economy, climate indirectly influenced demand because purchasing power was largely determined by the size of the harvest.'²⁷ The larger landowner in corn-growing areas benefited in years of plenty by being able to send his surplus to market while in years of dearth he could feed his family; by contrast, the middling farmer was disadvantaged in years of scarcity by being barely able to feed his family.²⁸ Overton has demonstrated that the farmer with 100 acres of wheat could expect his income to rise as the yields fell while the smaller farmer's income decreased with a poor harvest. The demand for grain was inelastic, so in bad years the reduction in the quantity of grain was more than offset by the rise in price, thus a farmer's income could be above that of a normal year.²⁹

As a further development in establishing the relationship between population growth and the price of grain, Thirsk proposed that the rich grew richer only in areas where corn was grown for market.³⁰ A further refinement that Thirsk has made is that inheritance customs were the 'engines' for the development of secondary occupations, especially where partible inheritance had reduced the size of holdings to such an extent that they were no longer viable.³¹

It is abundantly clear that Thirsk's approach to the study of small communities through an examination of the connections between their topography, population, economy, and society has had a considerable impact on the studies of other local historians, for example, Goody *et al* who debate the effects of inheritance practices on families.³² As Thompson observes, 'intentions in inheritance systems, as in other matters, often eventuate in conclusions very different from those intended'.³³ For this reason some of the studies of local communities will be examined to test the validity of Thompson's comments, particularly when this thesis, at least in part, will be considering the interactions of topography, economy, and society together with the effects of inheritance customs. There are three approaches to this task: first, to look at individual studies one by one, to examine the effects of the interactions between the four 'variables', or, second, to consider the four variables as treated

by each study separately while at the same time addressing the particular theme that each writer is exploring, or, thirdly, to look at a combination of two of the variables - topography and agricultural practices together because they are so closely linked, population changes, and social structure, at the same time exploring the main theme of each writer. By adopting the third strategy, the differences between the variables in several locations may be considered and compared. For the purpose of these analyses and comparisons a range of locations will be considered, ranging from the Midland Plain, the Fenlands, parts of Cambridgeshire and Essex, and Somerset.³⁴ While it might seem important to begin with the review of the link between topography and agriculture, it is worthwhile to examine first the changes in population to see whether the local patterns reflect the national ones.

Population changes

The major contribution to the study of population is the magisterial *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*,³⁵ which made an aggregative analysis of 404 English parishes. From this sample, the national totals of births, marriages, and deaths were arrived at, and population figures produced. Analyses of the data also produced a wide range of information, such as, marriage trends, mortality crises, and the age structure of the population.

While changes in population in communities have almost become academic studies in themselves, it is clear that there are complex interactions between fluctuations in population in a village and its social and economic life. There has been much debate on the causes of changes in population and economic development, and the debate on theories of historical progress centres on whether demographic determinism produced pre-industrial economic development or whether class struggles between peasants and landlords were the instigators. These differences in theoretical outlook, based on a Marxist or neo-Malthusian opinions - what has been termed 'the Brenner debate' - have occupied historians in heated discussions.³⁶ For many historians, such as Postan, demographic factors were the most important, and class relations were disregarded. For Brenner, the change in relations between landlords and peasants, brought about by the huge drop in population following the Black Death, when land

lay vacant, and the landlords faced a loss in rents - what Brenner refers to quaintly as 'surplus-extractions relations'³⁷ - affected long-run trends in the distribution of income and economic growth. In an introduction to The Brenner Debate, Hilton observes that

Brenner does not see that his view of class struggles is based on an assumed static situation even though there were changes in 'the forces of production', such as new technology. . . [and] the land/labour ratio is of crucial importance in a society where peasant production predominates. It can hardly be doubted that the conflict over rent will result in different outcomes where there is an abundance of land and a shortage of tenants as compared with the situation characteristic of western Europe around 1300, where land was over-occupied to such a degree that with a shortage of pasture and an overcrowding of infertile arable, the productivity of agriculture was severely reduced.³⁸

In contradiction of Brenner's views regarding the need for landlords to maximise their incomes from rents, Bowden noted that the income for landlords derived from a variety of sources, and for the large landowner the revenue from rents was £500 from a total of £2,500 - £3,000 for Sir Thomas Temple of Stowe.³⁹

Although it is outside the period of this study, an excellent illustration of the effects of the land/peasant ratio and its knock-on effects on economy and social organisation is provided by Razi's analysis of Halesowen in the medieval period where impartible inheritance was the custom.⁴⁰ Before the Plague, land was in short supply so some sons and daughters of land-deficient tenants left the village; many, however, preferred to remain, resulting in large numbers of kin groups 'composed of several conjugal families whose members lived in separate but closely situated households'.⁴¹ In the period after the Plague, there was an abundance of land because of the sharp decrease in the size of the population, which reduced pressure on inheritance. Thus, adult children were able to settle on vacant holdings in neighbouring townships, resulting in cottages falling empty and becoming dilapidated. This emigration of young villagers and further outbreaks of Plague in 1349-75 greatly increased the

number of deceased tenants who had no children to succeed them, the consequence of which was immigration between 1350 and 1395 when the in-comers took over the vacant plots.⁴² A subsequent low-survival rate of families, the result of low male replacement rates and high mobility was the cause not only of population decline but also social change.⁴³

As shown earlier, the general picture of English population change in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is one of increase with some decrease post-1650, yet studies of individual communities do not always bear this out. The village of Myddle, in Shropshire, for example, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a village with a very stable community, with a population that remained virtually unchanged at about 340 people between 1561 and 1580. Though the baptism rate was 24 per 1000, the burial rate was 25 per 1000, so that the population barely maintained itself. There appears to have been no significant change in the birth rate during Tudor and Stuart times, though the death rate fluctuated: 25 per 1000 from 1561 to 1580; 19 to 20 per 1000 between 1661 and 1680; and 23 to 24 per 1000 from 1681 to 1700.⁴⁴ While there was some migration, mobility occurred only over a short distance.⁴⁵

In his study of Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, in which he includes the parish of Ashow, Alcock found difficulty in establishing the growth in population because the parish registers had been kept so badly.⁴⁶ The only way he could obtain a population figure was by counting households, which are found in the Stoneleigh Abbey surveys, estate surveys, and the Hearth Tax returns. Table 2.1 gives the reconstituted populations.

Table 2.1 Total numbers of households in Stoneleigh.⁴⁷

Year	Stoneleigh	Ashow	Total	Population*
1533	110	22	132	528-594
1597	121	27	148	592-666
1664-5	149	24	173	692-779
1766	201	27	228	912-1026

* Multiplier for households of 4.0 to 4.5

The increase in the sixteenth century may have occurred because of the creation of small farms on land previously pasture or woodland. Without the parish registers which begin for Stoneleigh in 1634, with only Bishops' Transcripts for Ashow from 1634, and which breaks off in 1640, it is difficult to comment on the population growth.

Spufford's study of Orwell, a Cambridgeshire village, situated on the western clay plateau where the villages were shrinking illustrates a similar situation.⁴⁸ Orwell had a thirteen per cent drop in numbers from 1525 to 1664. The subsidy returns of 1524 recorded 52 taxable households and 46 in 1563. The Hearth Tax of 1664, which Spufford states is an underestimate, gave 45 households, yet a register of tenants in 1650 listed 54 households.⁴⁹ The baptismal trends suggest fewer families in 1660s than in the 1570s, so the population remained fairly static. Yet there was an excess of baptisms over burials in the period 1570 to late 1650s, and, despite mortality crises, there was a natural increase of just over 300 from 1574 to 1635. Though Orwell should, on these figures, have been a rapidly growing community - and there is evidence of new building - the parish registers show that it was actually shrinking, because, although the number of baptisms rose from the 1570s to the 1590s, they decreased thereafter until the 1660s. The decline began in the 1590s even though there was a record number of marriages, which, Spufford claims, indicates a decline in the number of child-bearing couples and emigration outweighing immigration.⁵⁰

By contrast, Spufford's study of Willingham in the fenland shows that there was a rapid expansion of population. In 1525, there were 25 taxpayers, and in 1563 there were 105 households. By 1664, the number of households had risen to 134.⁵¹ The rise was so great that Willingham became one of the most densely populated in Cambridgeshire, with 30 households per 1000 acres.⁵² The rise in population is partly accounted for by the fact that there was an excess of baptisms over burials from 1559, when the registers begin, to 1656, with the exception of the crisis years of 1617 and a number of years in the late 1620s. Spufford found it difficult to relate the population increase or decrease to the number of people who were able to take up tenancies of land and farm it. In 1575, there was a minimum

of one hundred tenants, compared with the bishop's estimate of 105 households in 1563. By 1603, there were 125 houses, and in 1664, the Hearth tax returns showed 135 houses.⁵³ There was a large degree of mobility both into and out of Willingham, which was related to the amount of land held and the numbers of landholding members in it.⁵⁴

The records for Chippenham, a village on the chalk uplands of Cambridgeshire, and the third village in Spufford's study are so incomplete or unreliable - 'the 1603 Ecclesiastical Census provides such an outlandish figure that it can only be disregarded'⁵⁵ - that no really valid statement can be made about its population although Spufford herself concludes that 'the fragments of information which are available on the size of Chippenham suggest a relatively stable community apart from a short period of growth in the 1630s'.⁵⁶

The evidence for population changes in the Essex village of Terling, which lay in the clay lands, given by Wrightson and Levine is limited in terms of actual statistics.⁵⁷ They used family reconstitution to obtain their figures as well as the Subsidy Returns of 1525 and Hearth Tax of 1671. In 1525, there were 70 households, which using a multiplier of 4.75 yield a population of 330 people. This had risen in 1671 to 122 households, a population of about 580 people.⁵⁸ The latter part of the sixteenth century saw an excess of baptisms over burials, which produced a surplus population over and above replacement levels. By the first quarter of the seventeenth century, the numbers of baptisms and burials were coming into equilibrium. The reason which Wrightson and Levine propose for the increase in population is that the age at marriage for both men and women was lower than that found in most English family reconstitution studies.⁵⁹

In *Fenland Farming*⁶⁰ Thirsk considers in broad terms the population of Holland, one of the ridings of Lincolnshire. Villages were grouped mainly along a belt of silt which ran approximately parallel with the coastline though subsidiary hamlets had sprung up on the coastal marsh and along the fringe of the fen following drainage; inundated, undrained fen to the north and west was a barrier to further settlement.⁶¹ The population density in the wapentakes of Kirton and Skirbeck in Holland was higher than that found on the clays, wolds,

or heaths of Lincolnshire: Skirbeck had 18 families per 1000 acres, and Kirton had 19.6. By comparison, Walshcroft, situated mainly in the clay vale, had 15.6 families per 1000 acres in 1563, and Boothby Graffoe on the limestone and clay had 10.7 families per 1000 acres. Comparison of sizes of settlements showed that in Holland 75 per cent had more than 40 families, of which half had 70 families, whereas, in the rest of Lincolnshire in 1563, more than 70 per cent had at the most 40 families.⁶² In the mid-sixteenth century, a good middle-sized town had 150 families or more. Holland had six such towns besides Boston, and there was a concentration of large towns in the Kirton wapentake: Kirton had 228 families, Swineshead had 209, Pinchbeck had 200, and Spalding 154.

The larger density of population in the fenland areas might give the impression of burgeoning communities; a consideration of changes in Wyberton, a fenland village about three miles from Boston, and Wrangle, situated on the silt ridge, about eight miles north-east of Boston, gives a different picture.⁶³ In the Diocesan Population Return of 1563, Wyberton had 62 households, which included the hamlet of Brothertoft, which yields a population of about 294.⁶⁴ From 1539 to 1640, there were 1,565 baptisms and 1,980 burials, which gives a deficit of - 415 persons. Only in the decade 1600-1610 was there an excess of ten baptisms over burials, and the biggest deficits were in the decades 1540-49 (-81), 1550-1559 (-73), and 1630-39 (-70). Further analysis of these statistics is beyond the remit of this study, but it is clear that Wyberton was far from being able to replace its population. It may be that the town of Boston acted as a magnet for what was a small community in 1563 and subsequently.

In 1563, Wrangle had 76 households, which converts to 361 people. Unfortunately, the parish records do not begin until 1601, and there are no burial records for the year 1629. Nevertheless, the picture of population change that emerges is similar to that of Wyberton. Between 1601 and 1640, there were 150 more burials than baptisms - the 1630s were the worst, with 186 baptisms compared with 282 burials, a deficit of -96. During the period 1601-40, there were 265 marriages, which, without further analysis, suggests either emigration or late marriage.

To summarise briefly: though the national picture of population change shows an increase, this is not always reflected in local situations, such as Myddle, Orwell, Wyberton, and Wrangle, where there was very little change or a significant decrease. Only by a closer examination of the available documents, especially the parish registers, if available, is it possible to determine whether there was migration to or emigration from a particular village, part of which may be explicable by studying the local inheritance patterns.

Topography and agricultural economy.

There has been a number of studies of the links between topography, economy, and social structure, and a few will be examined to illustrate these links. While Thirsk's analysis of farming regions suggests that some regions were better suited to arable farming while others were suited to pasture because of their topography, it must be made clear that the two are not inextricably linked because an agricultural economy can be changed depending on circumstances and demand.

The parish of Myddle, situated near the English-Welsh border, lay in an area of rich soil suited to arable farming, but it is an example of the conversion of arable land to pastoral in the sixteenth century when it had achieved stability through the permanence of a major group of families, and through making the ordinary tenant secure in his possessions through the clearing of large stretches of woodland. As a consequence, the open fields were abandoned and over a thousand acres were cultivated to make pasture, which led to a change to a pastoral economy.⁶⁵ This change benefited the inhabitants during the period of rising grain prices when the yeomen and husbandmen were able not only to survive but to flourish. Myddle, in the sixteenth century, was 'essentially a community of small pastoral farms and tenements, with a few larger farms supporting minor gentry'.⁶⁶ Few people had a personal estate of more than one hundred pounds, if debts are excluded,⁶⁷ and there was an emphasis on working in money rather than goods, which was reflected in the bequests in wills for money rather than animals, suggesting a large number of owner-occupiers.⁶⁸ As Professor Hey

explains, the raising of livestock for market offers an explanation for this emphasis on money. There was much buying and selling of land, with the result that there was a widespread provision of credit, usually in the form of bonds, indicating that there were many small owner-occupiers.⁶⁹

Professor Hey gives no reason for the decision to change from arable to pastoral farming, nor for the lack of population growth during a period when the picture for England showed an overall growth, but it is interesting to speculate whether there was a connection between the two.

Stoneleigh in Warwickshire is a good example of a parish with two distinct types of topography with two types of agricultural economy.⁷⁰ It lies in a region divided by the Avon: to the north-west there are mixed soils, including heavy clays, which were used by medieval potters, and this is the Arden, which was heavily forested, and had enclosed fields, with isolated farmsteads more common than nuclear villages. Here there was pastoral farming. To the south-east was the 'felden' region, which was dominated by open-field villages; there was almost no woodland, and arable farming predominated.

According to Alcock, 'an individual's position in the village economy was accurately indicated by the size of his landholding', and to a lesser extent this also correlated with his social position.⁷¹ In Stoneleigh, farms in the felden region varied widely in size from those that were barely smallholdings to a small number in the 100 to 200 acre range. There was a shift to larger farms between 1597 and 1766. Arable farming was concentrated on the open fields, with a three year rotation: winter corn (wheat and rye), spring corn (oats, barley, peas, and beans), and fallow. Small amounts of flax and hemp were grown, and though the processing was labour-intensive, it was important to the village economy.⁷² In the Arden region pastoral farming, especially dairying, was important. It appears that stock was reared, but the sale of cattle was of equal importance to the sale of dairy produce, particularly cheese, and wool. Warwickshire cheese was of 'moderate importance'.⁷³

In their study of Terling, Wrightson and Levine aimed to

discern the manner in which national and local developments intersected in a period in which the evolution of English society was peculiarly influenced by the nature of their interaction,⁷⁴

returning to earlier ways of approaching local history. They also saw four principal forces at work in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the socio-economic adjustments to demographic expansion; the integrating influence of a more aggressive state; the impact of religious reformation; and the expansion of educational opportunity.⁷⁵ Throughout these changes, however, the conditions of life, and particularly the vulnerability of the populace to harvest fluctuations, or epidemic disease, remained the same. At the same time, there were only minor changes to the hierarchical structure of society. With a rising population, there was an increasing pressure on the inelastic resources of food, with the result that prices grew while wages did not grow at anywhere near the same rate because the labour market was saturated. Thus, those dependent on wages saw their living standards eroded, and in years of bad harvests, when prices of food escalated, their situation became extremely difficult. A consequence of the increase in population was that it was redistributed, with the surplus population being channelled towards districts which had the capacity to support a large population, for example, the Fenland.

Wrightson and Levine, having stated their broad aims and examined the interactions affecting society, turn to the familiar links between topography, economy, and social structure. Terling's land was of good quality, lying on a boulder clay plateau. Because the whole parish had been enclosed, there was no communal husbandry. Mixed agriculture was practised: wheat production became more important than barley after 1570, and this was supplemented by keeping a large number of sheep, and a smaller number of cattle and pigs. Thus Terling was well able to feed itself with grain, meat, milk, butter, and cheese.⁷⁶ It had been calculated that an arable farmer with 30 acres of land might make an annual farming profit of £14 to £15, ensuring a margin of £3 to £4 once family subsistence had been met.⁷⁷ In bad harvest years this margin could be wiped out.⁷⁸ It thus follows that a farmer with fewer acres

would make a smaller profit, and in bad years be in financial difficulties. There was a large number of leasehold and copyhold smallholdings, and there was a frequent turnover of the freehold and copyhold lands. An analysis of the reasons for the changes showed that the sale of land was almost as significant as inheritance.⁷⁹ What is not clear from this analysis is whether the sales of land were the result of holdings becoming too small because of inheritance practices.

Spufford's study of three Cambridgeshire communities provide further information on the link between topography and agricultural economy, and the changes that occurred in the fortunes of the middling-sized landholder. In addition to linking topography, population change, the local economy, and social structure, including the effects of manorial control, Spufford added another dimension, namely, how the effects of the various changes in the economy and social structure were linked to something perceived nationally, that the rich grew richer at the expense of the middling landowner, something already noted by Wrightson and Levine. Like the latter, Spufford had a wider remit in her theme, namely to present her villagers as sentient human beings.⁸⁰

Spufford's saw that the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer because the larger landowners were able to increase the size of their holdings. They were able to do this because others were fragmenting theirs by making provision, not only for the eldest male heir, but also by trying to provide for other children by hiving off parts of their land. In addition, the main beneficiary of a will was often lumbered with having to provide money for his siblings, thus involving him in future debt which could only be paid for income from his holdings. This happened in Orwell, which was situated on a clay plateau, where arable farming was practised. The economic pressures on the smaller farmer, combined with an increase in the population, led to the disappearance of the middling-sized landholder through the sub-division of plots, and enabled the larger landholder to purchase land and to engross.⁸¹ Though Spufford makes the disappearance of the middling-sized landholder an important part of her

theme, she does link the diminishing sizes of the plots of land with inheritance customs though averring that they had little or no effect on the society of Orwell.⁸²

In Chippenham, on the chalk lands, which had a mixed agricultural economy with an emphasis on milk production, with cheese-making as a by-product. The small farmers suffered so that many had been forced out between 1560 and 1636, because of enclosure and a change in land tenure. By 1544, only copyholders were important, and between 1560 and 1636 the holdings of 15 to 60 acres disappeared. There were two areas of common, the Heath and the Fen, but, in 1565, about one-third of it was enclosed by the lord of the manor so that the villagers lost their right to pasture their animals there; they were able, however, to fold their cattle and pigs on the Heath.⁸³ Because the population was static, Spufford concludes that there must have been considerable emigration. There is no definite evidence that the smaller farmer had to sell because of the unprofitability of his corn crop during the bad harvest, but Spufford quotes Professor Goubert's words:

'The more substantial *laboureurs*, those who had surplus crops to sell, sold them at considerable profit since the price of cereals had risen two, three, or even four times. Thus enriched they bought up lands from their debtors among the small peasants'.⁸⁴

Willingham, the third of Spufford's communities, was typical of fenland villages in that only about one-quarter of the parish was taken up with arable farming while the remainder was fen, about 3,000 acres in extent, allowing people to supplement their living by fishing, fowling, and using the fenland resources.⁸⁵ About 200 acres of demesne arable land were sold in fragments of about one acre between 1603 and 1720, which allowed for the development of peasant dairying. With a small amount of arable, a man in Willingham could be described as a yeoman even though he had very little or no land; he did, however, have cattle, which provided dairy products, and cheese-making was important.⁸⁶ In 1575, 28 out of 40 copyholders had a half-yardland, which would suggest an area insufficient for subsistence, but the large acreage of the fen has to be taken into account. 'A half-yardlander in Willingham was a wealthy man'.⁸⁷ By 1603, there were only twenty tenants with half-

yardlands: some had lost land while others had acquired more. Spufford comments that a quarter of the copyholds had been split, suggesting that these divisions had been forced 'on unwilling men by their inability to hold onto their land in the difficult circumstances' of the late sixteenth century though, by her accounts, inheritance customs resulted in the diminution of the size of landholdings in all of Spufford's three communities.⁸⁸

A number of studies of fenland areas has been made, which reveal several common characteristics: levels of usefulness; the ability of fen-dwellers to use the environment to supplement their standards of living; a mixed agriculture, but with an emphasis on pastoralism; and attempts to drain the fenland.

In *The Draining of the Somerset Levels*, Williams defines a 'hierarchy' of usefulness among the fens that varied with the state of their drainage which can be applied to most fenland areas: pools, water-covered moors, and natural watercourses, which are abundant in fish, fowl, rushes, and reeds; periodically water-covered land, which provided turbaries and pastures, and which, with improved drainage, became meadows that were flooded occasionally; flood-free 'islands' and uplands suitable for settlement and for arable farming.⁸⁹ In Somerset, with the exception of the coastal clay belt, the farming emphasis was almost entirely pastoral, and the piecemeal reclamation of land intensified this predominance.⁹⁰ As with other similar territory, attempts had been made to reclaim the fen to produce land suitable for agriculture in post-Conquest times to support a growing population. Subsequent, more widespread draining in the eighteenth century led to the loss of commonable peat wastes, which in turn produced changes in the traditional economy. In 1800, a commoner remarked that

there was a time when these commons enabled a poor man to support his family and bring up his children. Here he could turn out his cow and pony, feed his flock of geese, and keep his pig.⁹¹

In *Liable to Floods*, Ravendale noted that in the Cambridgeshire fens two or three feet difference in altitude could make all the difference in the type of fen and its use: he considered

the twenty-foot contour as marking off the land safe from even great floods. The main settlements were centres of arable cultivation, with subsidiary centres developing out in the waste for the flocks and herds, using place names as evidence for this, rather as happened in the Lincolnshire Fens from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.⁹² He saw the number of fisheries as an indication of permanent wetness. As in Somerset, the fen provided turves and reeds and sedge for thatching. Osiers were used for building, and hemp was grown as a crop at the 'frontier with the ploughland'.⁹³ Pastoral farming predominated with cheese production as a by-product; sheep and horses were also bred, and provide evidence for how husbandry varied with the topography.⁹⁴

Thirsk studied the Lincolnshire fenlands, both in the south of the county and in the Isle of Axholme, both of which presented a picture similar to that painted by Williams and Ravendale.⁹⁵ The rearing and fattening of cattle and horses predominated, and barley was grown as a fodder crop. Dairying and cheese-making were secondary occupations. During the winter, when the fen was flooded, beasts were brought onto drier, enclosed pastures. At this time fishing and fowling came into their own.⁹⁶ 'One of the clues to a man's place in the economic scale was the number of his cattle', or so Thirsk claims.⁹⁷ During the sixteenth century there was an increase in the number of farmers with large herds and flocks, which implies an increase in the size of landholding. Yet there were problems: population growth meant finding adequate pasture and commons, and all the while the condition of the fenland deteriorated owing to the neglect of the drains, a situation not improved by the Dissolution of the monasteries, which had often been responsible for their maintenance. As in the Cambridge fenland, hemp was grown in about 14 per cent of the area, and its processing provided secondary occupations.⁹⁸ Because the amount of land for crops was small, and because farming units were small - 60 per cent were of five acres or less - food was 'imported'. Thirsk comments that 'the evidence of Danish settlement in Holland [Lincolnshire] may explain the unequal distribution of freehold and copyhold land between the three wapentakes, but it does not account for the prevalence of small holdings throughout the

division in the sixteenth century'.⁹⁹ In stating this, she ignores the possible effects that partible inheritance may have had and the benefits to them of their natural resources.

A slightly different approach to regional differences has been adopted by Whittle and Yates in their examination of areas of Berkshire and Norfolk.¹⁰⁰ Their main theme is the effects of contrasts between strong and weak manorial control - the manorialised Midlands and non-manorialised East Anglia: in the Midlands impartible inheritance was common while partible inheritance predominated in East Anglia. Though both areas were dominated by mixed farming, the landholding pattern was different, producing different social organisations. In Norfolk, landholdings could be bought, sold, mortgaged, split, or amalgamated. The more prosperous tenants engrossed, and amalgamated their holdings to enlarge their farms. This, in turn, led to an increase in the number of tenants with more than 50 acres, but the proportion of tenants with less than one acre increased, leading to the polarisation of society.¹⁰¹ In Berkshire, by contrast, the size of holdings was predominantly in yardlands or virgates,¹⁰² with customary tenure for life rather than of inheritance. The result was that there was little market for land because land was not divided.¹⁰³ This resulted in marked differences between the population densities: Norfolk had 7.4 persons per 100 acres to Berkshire's 4.9.¹⁰⁴ Whittle and Yates state that there was little economic diversification in Berkshire yet remark on industries such as milling and tanning, with outwork for the Newbury cloth industry; in Norfolk, there was also a cloth industry, especially for worsted cloth. They conclude that, while there was a contrast in documentation and manorial structure, the nature of rural society was the same.¹⁰⁵

Social structures

As noted earlier, differing types of topography can produce differing farming economies and social structures. Pastoral farming was less labour-intensive than arable, and in areas with a rising population there was the likelihood of emigration as the economy could not absorb the surplus labour.

In traditional pastoral regions the yeoman and husbandman were able to weather the storms brought about by the rises in the price of grain in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This was true of Myddle, where there was 'monumental stability' through the longevity of peasant families and 'a solid core of middling-sized farmers'.¹⁰⁶ There was a concentration on rearing beef, as the inventory of Humphrey Hauner, a gentleman and a freeholder, who had 79 per cent of his farm goods invested in livestock, illustrates.¹⁰⁷ During the sixteenth century, the number of occupations recorded was small, but in the last two decades, the number increased. Immigration into Myddle produced a greater stratification within the community, and there was a fall in the total number of those farming their own land, who improved their economic status as the number of husbandmen diminished and the number of yeomen increased.

During the sixteenth century, Myddle was mainly a community of small pastoral farms and tenements, with a few large farms supporting minor gentry. The community was strengthened by the stability of some of the families: tenement farmers formed the core, and their property only went out of their hands at the death of the last male heir. The new owners of tenements often turn out to have married into such a family, and to have inherited the property when there was no surviving male to succeed. The stability of the community is borne out by an examination of the names in the parish registers: only two-fifths of the surnames in the registers belong to the old-established families, but if the total number of entries is considered, then four-fifths are those of long-established families. Community ties were strengthened by intermarriage between the old families in the parish.¹⁰⁸

In Stoneleigh, mixed agriculture was the main occupation. There were equal numbers of yeomen and husbandmen; the proportion of labourers, in the seventeenth century, may have been equal to the combined numbers of yeomen and husbandmen.¹⁰⁹ There was an increase in the number of landless, or almost landless, cottagers, which were dominated by labourers and the poor of the village as well as many of the craftsmen. The craftsmen included two shoemakers, three tailors, a baker, tanners, carpenters, blacksmiths, and millers,

but no butcher. Most of the craftsmen also farmed, and their wealth was dominated by farming stock and crops; the tanners were the wealthiest persons because of the value of the hides. Innkeepers also were men of status in the community though the ale-houses were generally kept by the wives of smallholders or widows as a means of supplementing their income.¹¹⁰ Four village crafts formed part of a wider economy: fulling, wire-drawers, which probably served the Coventry cloth trade by supplying wire for wool-carding combs, a gun-maker, and a glass-maker. By 1600, there were at least six fulling mills fed by the streams and rivers flowing through the parish. The fullers probably provided a service for the Coventry clothiers because few of their inventories list amounts of cloth.¹¹¹

Some secondary occupations developed of which the most prominent was spinning, especially of flax. At the beginning of the seventeenth century there was evidence for small-scale flax-growing, and some villagers were occupied with the processing of hemp and wool. One villager had a linen wheel, a woollen wheel, and a 'hatchell' for combing flax to separate coarse fibres from the fine ones. Though weaving was a secondary occupation, there were professional weavers.¹¹²

For Spufford, the key problem is how the economic changes affected, not the rich yeoman or the labourers, 'but that considerable proportion of the population who held an 'average' holding', that is 'the disappearance of the small landholder'.¹¹³ She lays the blame on a series of bad harvests, which benefited the large landholder while the middling-sized farmer went under because he could produce only sufficient to support his family in bad years as happened in Orwell and Chippenham. Bad harvests did not affect Willingham, but the sub-division of holdings led to changes. These changes in economic/social status brought about by the engrossing of the corn-growing uplands and fragmentation of holdings in the stock-rearing fens led to a polarisation of village society with considerable differences in wealth owned and acreages farmed by yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers. More than half the labourers were landless though the better off had upto four acres on which to grow grain, husbandmen had less than ten acres of arable, and may have been indistinguishable from the

better of labourers. In a similar way, yeomen had a wide range of acreages, from four acres to over one-hundred. Such wealth was rare, and the median holding for yeomen was 92 acres and £180 in goods.¹¹⁴ What Spufford mentions, but discounts, are the effects on the economy and society of her three communities of inheritance practices which diminished the size of holdings, making them unviable, and why only the middling farmers were affected so adversely.

In their study of Terling, Wrightson and Levine linked the growth of population and the series of bad harvests with effects on the economy and society. Their main theme is that there were processes at work which brought about 'new forms of cultural differentiation. Inequalities of wealth became more marked and produced intergroup conflicts of interest charged with ideological passions'.¹¹⁵ Because Terling was a corn-producing area, market trends were the reason for the change in its rural economy: the smaller landholders farmed for subsistence while the larger farmed commercially because there were good opportunities for marketing with the growing demand from London.

The picture of the economic-social structure is one of a vibrant and diversified community, which encompassed not only agricultural labourers, but also craftsmen who made and maintained agricultural equipment and also a wide range of traders in foodstuffs and clothing. A reflection of the growing prosperity was the appearance of bricklayers, masons, and plumbers. In addition, there was a number of miscellaneous occupations, such as ropemaker, cutler, barber, and chandler.¹¹⁶ Multiple occupations were the most common amongst the wealthier tradesmen who had diversified their activities, and also amongst the poorer men who made to make a living by doing many tasks.¹¹⁷

The later sixteenth century saw improvements in the standards of living in the middling-sized farmer, with a change to better quality bedding, and a move to pewter, even silver, tableware. Housing also improved giving further evidence of a better financial status, though it should be noted that such improvements were not necessarily confined to the middling and larger landowners. From their researches, Wrightson and Levine concluded that

the community of Terling was constantly changing because there was mobility of the population.

Like Spufford's Cambridgeshire, Thirsk's fenland had few, if any, gentry. 'The fenland village was differentiated more at the summit than the foundation. Its aristocracy was not a single squire and his family, but a substantial group of middling-rich yeomen.' The fenland differed from Leicestershire in its distribution of wealth rather than its resources as it had a higher proportion of small farmers and a lower proportion of very wealthy ones.¹¹⁸ Between 1530 and 1600, the main change was an increase in the numbers of herds and flocks. Though Thirsk does not say so, this must imply that some farmers increased the size of their landholding, yet she does not dwell on how or why this occurred. In some places in Holland, as has been shown above, there was an increase in population though this was not universal, *viz.* Wyberton and Wrangle, which might be the reason for holdings to be sub-divided to the point that they became uneconomical, and Thirsk does comment on the large number of holdings, sixty per cent of which were of five or fewer acres. Set against this, however, is the fact that the fens offered its population means of supplementing their food supply through fishing and fowling, with other benefits such as turves and reeds. As with other fenland areas, dairying was a secondary occupation.

Inheritance customs

Although the effects of inheritance customs are largely discounted as having any effect on the economy and society of local communities by such writers as Margaret Spufford, this is not a view universally accepted. Where impartible inheritance was the custom, the result was that those effectively disinherited left their communities, taking their labour, skills, and money away, leaving them impoverished. Impartible inheritance, as found in Spufford's Cambridgeshire communities was rarely 'pure', however, as testators tried to make provision for siblings by the division of land or property, or by stipulating that sums of money be paid to them on reaching the age of majority, usually twenty-one years, leading to fragmentation of

holdings. On the other hand, partible inheritance also led to fragmentation of farming units which led to the formation of a large class of smallholders, who eventually would result in poverty-stricken landholders as shown in a study of medieval Kent by Homans.¹¹⁹ A different view was offered by Baker, who made a study of the inheritance customs in medieval Gillingham, Kent.¹²⁰ He concluded, from a survey of 1447, that there had been numerous changes in land occupation, which produced both fragmentation and consolidation. This was the result of two features of gavelkind, namely partible inheritance and free alienation of holdings amongst their holders. Whereas partible inheritance led to fragmentation, the latter led to consolidation.¹²¹

In his investigation of inheritance patterns in Odiham, Hampshire, Stapleton adopts an anthropological approach of 'families consciously planning and pursuing a strategy for the benefit of future generations' through appropriate, that is, financially beneficial, marriages or ensuring that the process of inheritance kept the major source of income intact.¹²² The nature of Stapleton's study is selective in that the poor are excluded. It is not clear, however, whether middling families really had a mind-set that thought in terms of 'strategies', and he weakens his argument by stating that whatever strategies were adopted, they were not necessarily successful. Odiham's farmers, who represented about one-third of the families studied, appear to have declined in social and economic status, possibly because they practised partible inheritance, but, apart from two examples, no evidence is adduced by Stapleton.¹²³ Manufacturers and craftsmen gave the community its stability though no evidence is offered regarding their inheritance practices. He comments that family composition and kinship could also affect how land, property, and goods were devised, observing that brothers generally did better than their sisters. One interesting feature his analysis throws up is that, where partible inheritance was practised, families 'accumulated sufficient properties or land to ensure the legacies provided an economic livelihood for each male heir', and that often land was 'recently acquired or newly built' to secure each son a separate inheritance.¹²⁴

A number of studies of family and inheritance in rural society from 1200 to 1800 has been edited by Goody and others: the essays are mainly a compilation or reworking of articles that have appeared elsewhere.¹²⁵ For example, Ladurie analyses the complexities of inheritance and its effects on families in sixteenth century France where partible inheritance was practised;¹²⁶ Margaret Spufford re-examines the customs in her three Cambridgeshire communities, maintaining that they were based on primogeniture though it almost amounted to partible inheritance;¹²⁷ and Thirsk concentrates on the English upper classes, claiming that 'primogeniture was noticeably gaining ground among the gentry in the early sixteenth century'.¹²⁸

Thompson observes that 'intentions in inheritance systems, as in other matters, often eventuate in conclusions very different from those intended'.¹²⁹ He suggests that inheritance is not really 'property' or 'land' but the profit from them, so that it is tenure which is being transmitted. Concentrating mainly on changes in copyhold tenure in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he speculates that a farmer with a number of strips in different fields did not see himself as the owner, but the inheritor in a hierarchy of 'use-rights' which contain within themselves a 'grid of customs and controls'.¹³⁰ When the use-rights become divorced from reality, then tenements, even people, become merely a saleable commodity; if 'benefits are extinguished, the excess population may be reduced to a landless proletariat'.¹³¹

Partible inheritance and the development of secondary occupations

Although the theme of the interaction between topography, economy, and social structures continues to be used by local historians, the effect of inheritance customs and the subsequent development of secondary occupations are new factors in that interaction. In the writings of Spufford and Wrightson and Levine, for example, there seems to be an acceptance that the rich grew richer as the poor grew poorer, yet there appears to be no investigation as to how this occurred. If the larger farmer was able to purchase more land, then it had to be possible because there was land available and one explanation could be the effect of

inheritance customs. Spufford, and to a lesser extent Wrightson and Levine, discount them as having any effect on the disappearance of the 'middling sort of farmer', but the evidence would suggest the opposite. In *Contrasting Communities*, Spufford states that primogeniture was the custom in her Cambridgeshire villages, yet does not acknowledge there was, in effect, a form of partible inheritance practised.¹³² Admittedly, the eldest son inherited, but provision was made in wills for younger sons by the stipulation that they received either a portion of land, or would receive a sum of money at their coming of age, usually twenty-one. This placed a burden on the heir because he had to find these sums from the profits of the farm he had inherited. Spufford does not ask what happened to the younger sons, probably because it would be almost impossible to trace them.

The experience of primogeniture, with provision of land for younger sons, certainly affected yeomen in Nidderdale.¹³³ Turner observes that, until the seventeenth century, ownership of land had been the key to prosperity, but the size of holdings had diminished because provision had been made for younger sons in an area where primogeniture was the custom. This 'modified primogeniture' resulted in the development of secondary occupations in the dale since the holdings were too small to support a family by farming.

The theme of Wrightson and Levine and Spufford that the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries saw the demise of the middling landholder is continued and expanded by Thirsk in an article on the English rural community.¹³⁴ This article covers the familiar territory of harvest fluctuations enabling the large landholder to prosper at the expense of the middling farmer, but claims that it was not a universal or general trend; it was a 'regional phenomenon which linked grain farming for market and with cattle fattening'.¹³⁵ The reason she cites for the large farmer growing larger is population expansion after 1500, when 'more food was needed, food prices rose, and grain production became profitable'.¹³⁶ Such economic pressures in

the best grain-growing and best meat-producing country encouraged the growth of large farms, the decline of the middling husbandmen's farms and an increase in the number of small farms and landless labourers.

As a basic proposition, this needs a much closer examination, which is outside the remit of this study, but one factor that Thirsk neglects to explore more fully is the mechanism by which 'the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer', to put it in simple terms.

This article does, however, mark a development in the methodology of local history because it explores the links between inheritance customs and the development of secondary occupations, in other words, connections between a social factor and economic changes. In fact, Thirsk touches on a possible mechanism for the demise of the middling landholder elsewhere in this article, when she points out that partible inheritance plays an influential role in reducing the size of holdings 'so making [secondary] industries necessary'.¹³⁷

The idea of secondary occupations arising because of partible inheritance is explored speculatively by Thirsk in an earlier article,¹³⁸ when she concentrates on the growth of rural industries, limiting herself to 'those industries which were carried out in conjunction with farming', and which provided for a national market.¹³⁹ There are two elements which combine to provide the 'soil' for the growth of secondary occupations: topography and inheritance customs. Upland areas, 'wood-pasture', regions of poor soils with fast flowing streams, and raw materials for exploitation, which were notable for stock-rearing, with husbandry and dairying as offshoots, had spare employment capacity. If such areas also had partible inheritance and little manorial control, Thirsk postulates, there would be a proliferation of smallholders living as separate families, rather than extended families under one roof, who would have insufficient land to support themselves. There would be a growth in the numbers of workers in rural industries, with a decreasing proportion of householders retaining a stake in land. A surplus of births over deaths led to rural industrial wages being driven down, but the possibility of supporting a family on wages earned from such wages produced an increase in the numbers of people marrying earlier, which in turn led to greater

nuptiality and greater fertility. Weak manorial control and partible inheritance were 'known to have played a decisive role in the growth of large village communities', something explored by Whittle and Yates in their study of Norfolk and Berkshire.¹⁴⁰

Thirsk looks at the manor of Dent in the west Yorkshire dales where partible inheritance was practised which resulted in a large number of small tenements and an increase in the number of tenants. Because the holdings could not support families, there developed a secondary industry of knitting coarse stockings.¹⁴¹ In all, she explores industries in six areas of England, of which four had partible inheritance, each had secondary occupations, and half of them had natural resources for exploitation as well, for example, in the Weald, where farming concentrated on the breeding and fattening of cattle, and where clothiers also dealt in wool and cheese, timber was available for forestry, carpentry, and allied crafts.¹⁴²

After examining six regions of England, Thirsk tentatively proposes that the common factors present in a number of 'semi-farming, semi-industrialised communities' were a populous community of small farmers, often freeholders or customary tenants, who practised a pastoral economy, either dairying or breeding and rearing cattle. Such communities produced independent farmers, 'who recognised not the hamlet or village, but the family as the co-operative working unit.'¹⁴³ In saying this, Thirsk contradicts her earlier contention that the sheep and corn countries were the centres of agrarian capitalism and revolution in contrast to the 'cheese- and butter-countries' which had family farmers and self-employed persons.

The industries of the Weald and the growth of proto-industries were examined by Zell, who agreed partially with Thirsk's conclusion, but added his own observations based on a more detailed analysis.¹⁴⁴ Increased prosperity in the sixteenth century allowed the purchase of parcels of land because there was no real manorial control, but any consolidation of holdings was constantly reversed by partible inheritance.¹⁴⁵ As holdings were separate and enclosed, farmers could please themselves what they grew, and could combine their mainly pastoral agriculture with a craft or trade. Although Wealden industry flourished because the population was expanding, secondary occupations depended on demand, so that landless

people were dependent on part-time craft or trade work as there were no opportunities for employment on the small-scale farms. When the availability of work in the cloth industry fell because of a lack of demand, so there was a rising level of the poor in the proto-industrialised Wealden parishes at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁶ There was, however, a wide diversity of trades in rural parishes whose workers produced goods for markets far beyond the Weald, the most important was the woollen textile industry, with leather and the production of iron and metal wares also highly significant.¹⁴⁷

As with the areas covered by writers such as Spufford and Thirsk, the lesser yeomen in Nidderdale suffered through a rising population and a hereditary system which reduced the size of holdings. In the Knaresborough Forest, the size of medieval holdings had been forty acres, which were sufficient to support a family adequately, but by the seventeenth century, the average size of holdings had decreased to twelve acres, and the largest farms of eighty acres had disappeared altogether.¹⁴⁸ Thus the effect of Nidderdale inheritance customs was similar to that experienced in areas where partible inheritance was practised. Because of this the linen industry in Nidderdale was able to expand because the labour was available. Though the weaving of both wool and linen was originally practised in Nidderdale, specialisation had been established by the 1720s. The number of looms increased between 1580 and 1680, which would have demanded greater amounts of spun yarn, which may initially have been done by the weaver himself or his family. Unlike woollen weavers who performed all the processing of the raw materials under one roof, by the 1720s specialisation in linen processing and weaving had been established, with the already spun yarn being purchased by Nidderdale weavers from Knaresborough. As Turner comments:

Long before the Industrial revolution, therefore, Nidderdale had a thriving manufacture of textiles, fostered by farmer-weavers, and done by hand in the home, with the exception of the water-powered fulling of cloth.¹⁴⁹

Turner's study of Nidderdale shows clearly the link between population growth, a form of partible inheritance, and the growth of a secondary occupation, which grew into a specialised industry.

Sources and methodology

The main sources for studies of local communities used by authors mentioned above include parish registers, probate records, and deeds. Selected parish registers were used by Wrigley and Schofield for their monumental study of England's population, but many other registers are deficient with large gaps in the records. The availability of deeds to show transfer of land, for example, is very much hit-or-miss, and, in the case of Axholme, sparse for the period under study.

Probate records also have varying degrees of availability, but there have been some individual parish or area studies, such as, Telford,¹⁵⁰ Oxfordshire,¹⁵¹ and Clee, South Humberside.¹⁵² Concentration on specific occupational groups or on domestic items may be found in Johnston's articles on Lincoln and Lincolnshire and in Garrard's item on Suffolk.¹⁵³

Arising from the examination of inventories, in particular, the topic of rural debt has been explored by several writers, including Margaret Spufford in the study of her three Cambridgeshire parishes, where borrowing and lending was an integral part of everyday life.¹⁵⁴ A general pattern to debt has been discerned by several writers: Holderness detected three kinds of loan - the promissory note, the bond, and the mortgage - with outsiders providing loans for particular services, such as mortgages or credit against future profits in commercialised agriculture and rural manufacture, with widows capitalising on their inheritances by providing loans.¹⁵⁵ Peter Spufford, investigating debt in eastern Kent, found that reasons for indebtedness were only cited in inventories infrequently though he concluded that they were associated with particular periods in a man's life, such as in early manhood for setting himself up; to pay for increases in the scale of farming through the purchase or leasing of land; to pay for daughters' dowries; and payments for younger children where there was

one main heir.¹⁵⁶ A similar conclusion was arrived at by Zell, who discovered that money was 'unhesitatingly offered. . .at an interest rate of not more than ten per cent. . .whether the borrower was a relative, business associate, or a neighbour'. Children's portions were often loaned out at interest, while manufacturers increased their liquidity by effectively borrowing from their workers by paying them in arrears.¹⁵⁷ A full study of probate documents, often containing re-issues of earlier articles, has been edited by Arkell and others.¹⁵⁸

Because there has been a need to compare what was happening in the Isle of Axholme with other parts of England, and because documents may be sparse or incomplete, two methods have been adopted, the 'macro' and the 'micro' approaches. The macro follows the traditional lines used by local historians and others of analysing data in large amounts, while the micro approach concentrates on the minute details of what a particular document may reveal of a larger picture of a society or its economy. The microhistory method was advocated by Levi, and is consonant with Rogers's recent views.¹⁵⁹

Summary

The study of local history has developed from studies of selected topics which were linked with national events to encompass the interconnection of topography, population change, and the local agricultural economy, a methodology that has served a generation of scholars. About forty years ago, in studying a local community, writers were concerned with how a particular aspect of it, such as population or farming economy, compared with another of a similar type and how this fitted into what was happening on a national scale. Overton has categorised the distinctions between the different approaches as the 'Leicester School', often labelled 'cows and ploughs', and the studies of social and institutional change whose pedigree 'dates back to Marx'.¹⁶⁰

Thirsk introduced a new model for examining local societies by examining the interaction between topography, population changes, and the economy, and moved away from the link between national and local events. Though this model has served scholars well, it is

somehow simplistic because it works on the assumption that, if there is a certain type of topography, such as fenland, then the economy is going to be of a similar kind wherever it occurs. Whilst this may be true as a generalisation, it does not allow for changes from one type of agriculture to another, as happened in Myddle, where arable was replaced by pastoral. The same criterion can be applied to the Isle of Axholme, where a largely pastoral economy was replaced by an arable one through enforced drainage. Admittedly, the land drained was as suitable for arable cultivation as pastoral, but economic considerations held sway because there was a growing market for arable crops.

A return to the national-local link was explored by Wrightson and Levine and Spufford when they linked the demise of the middling landholder in Essex and Cambridgeshire with similar events throughout England. Thirsk refined the concept of the rich growing richer at the expense of the middling man by confining this phenomenon to areas where corn was grown for market. In so doing, she gives the impression that the markets were necessarily large; this was true of Grantham, Lincolnshire, which had no common land and had to 'import' corn and vegetables from the surrounding countryside. Yet Turner, in his study of Nidderdale, gives the lie to this by stating that the farmer who had sufficient land grew for local markets; indeed, though he does not say so, such markets might have been so local as to feed their own communities.¹⁶¹

Although Spufford dismissed inheritance customs as playing a part in the process of the rich further enriching themselves, Thirsk comments in several places how they had adversely affected the size of holdings, but does not pursue the effect on the local population in terms of causing migration or sales and purchases of land. She does maintain, however, that local customs, particularly partible inheritance, produced secondary occupations as well as stable, and large, communities. Evidence for the development of secondary occupations is given in Thirsk's consideration of Dentdale and other communities, as does Turner's study of Nidderdale. Whether partible inheritance gives rise to large and stable communities, as Thirsk avers, demands a closer investigation. Certainly this was not true of Wrangle and

Wyberton in Lincolnshire where it was the custom, as an examination of the population figures show.

Another fairly recent development has been the study of migration, something which, on the surface, could be the result of inheritance customs.¹⁶² Unfortunately, one such study by Mitson of 'dynastic families' in an area of south-west Nottinghamshire in the seventeenth century has resulted in what appears to be a statement of the obvious, namely that some families stay put, others move a short distance, while others move much further away.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, the inter-relationship between population growth, inheritance customs, and migration needs a closer analysis together with the effect the combination of these factors had on local community structures and economies.

Since Thirsk wrote about the change of Axholme's agriculture from arable to pastoral over forty years ago,¹⁶⁴ there have been developments in the topics historians have studied and the methods they have adopted. What has been revealed, in particular, is the complexity of the interactions between different aspects of communities, and how a change in one will produce a wide range of changes elsewhere. In this present study, these topics, such as, population change, migration, inheritance customs, and the growth of secondary occupations, are explored to present an up-dated picture of the economy and society of a remote part of north-west Lincolnshire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

¹ I am grateful for the comments made by C. Phythian-Adams, *Rethinking English Local History* (1987), pp. 1-9, for providing the structure for this overview.

² H. P. R. Finberg, 'Local History', in H. P. R. Finberg and V. H. T. Skipp, *Local History: Objective and Pursuit* (1967), p 9.

³ Phythian-Adams, *Rethinking English Local History*, p 4.

⁴ W. G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: the Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* (1957).

⁵ For example, M. A. Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories in Oxfordshire*, (Historical Manuscripts Commission, HMSO, 1965), and B. A. Trinder and J. Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, (1980)

- ⁶ J. Thirsk, 'English rural communities: structures, regularities, and change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in B. Short (ed), *The English Rural Community*, (Cambridge, 1992), p.45.
- ⁷ J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming* (1953).
- ⁸ J. Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming: the Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times* (1957).
- ⁹ J. Thirsk, *England's Agricultural Regions and Agrarian History, 1500-1750* (1987), hereafter Thirsk, *England's Agricultural Regions*.
- ¹⁰ J. Thirsk (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales IV*, (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 1-112.
- ¹¹ D G Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts* (1974). Hereafter Hey, *Myddle*. See below for a fuller treatment of this.
- ¹² M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp.50-51.
- ¹³ Overton, p. 53 -5.
- ¹⁴ Overton, p. 47.
- ¹⁵ E. L. Jones, 'Agricultural origins of industry', in *Past and Present* 40 (July, 1968), p. 61.
- ¹⁶ Thirsk, 'English rural communities', p. 45.
- ¹⁷ R. C. Allen, *Enclosure and the Yeoman*, (Oxford, 1992), pp. 47, 54, and 76.
- ¹⁸ J. M. Neeson, 'Opponents of enclosure in eighteenth century Northamptonshire', *Past and Present* 105 (1984), pp.115-139.
- ¹⁹ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1990), p. 5
- ²⁰ Dyer, pp. 140-2.
- ²¹ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 208-211.
- ²² P. Bowden, 'Agricultural prices, farm profits, and rents', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500-1640* Vol. IV, (Cambridge, 1967), pp.593 and 606.
- ²³ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling* and M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (1987).
- ²⁴ Bowden, p.601.
- ²⁵ A. Everitt, 'Farm labourers', in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1500-1640* Vol IV, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 435.
- ²⁶ W. G. Hoskins, 'Harvest fluctuations and English economic history', in W. E. Minchington, *Essays in Agrarian History* Vol I (Newton Abbot, 1968), pp. 95-115.
- ²⁷ Bowden, p.625.
- ²⁸ The view, in broad terms, that 'the rich grew richer while the poor grew poorer' has been advocated by M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* and by K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling*.
- ²⁹ M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*, (Cambridge, 1998), pp.20-21.
- ³⁰ J. Thirsk, 'English rural communities: structures, regularities, and change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in B. Short, *The English Rural Community* (1992), p 50, hereafter Thirsk, 'English rural communities'.
- ³¹ Thirsk, 'English rural communities'.
- ³² J. Goody, J. Thirsk, and E. P. Thompson, *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, (Cambridge, 1976).
- ³³ Goody *et al*, p. 328.
- ³⁴ The studies of local communities include the works already cited by Hey, Wrightson and Levine, Spufford, and also J. Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming* (1957), J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century* (1963), M. Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset Levels* (1970), J. R. Ravendale, *Liable to Floods: Village Landscape at the Edge of the Fens* (1974), and J. Thirsk, 'The Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', *Agricultural History Review*(1953), pp 16-29, hereafter Thirsk, 'Axholme'. Not all studies contain information on the four interrelated elements.
- ³⁵ See footnote 21 above.
- ³⁶ T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, *The Brenner Debate*, (Cambridge, 1987).
- ³⁷ R. Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe', *iPast and Present* 70 (1976), p. 31.
- ³⁸ *The Brenner Debate*, p. 7.
- ³⁹ P. Bowden, 'Agricultural prices, farm profits, and rents', in J. Thirsk (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales IV, 1500-1640*, (Cambridge, 1967), p.675.
- ⁴⁰ Z. Razi, 'The myth of the immutable English family', *Past and Present* 140 (1990), pp. .3-44.
- ⁴¹ Razi, p.10.
- ⁴² Razi, pp. 23-4.

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- ⁴³ Razi, pp. 31-6.
- ⁴⁴ Hey, *Myddle*, p 199.
- ⁴⁵ Hey, *Myddle*, p 200.
- ⁴⁶ N. Alcock, *People at Home: Stoneleigh, 1500-1800* (1993) p 7, hereafter, Alcock, *Stoneleigh*.
- ⁴⁷ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 172.
- ⁴⁸ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 22.
- ⁴⁹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 22-23.
- ⁵⁰ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 25-26.
- ⁵¹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 18.
- ⁵² Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 20.
- ⁵³ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 21.
- ⁵⁴ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* p22.
- ⁵⁵ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p.61fn.
- ⁵⁶ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p. 62.
- ⁵⁷ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 45 contains a multiple linear graph showing baptisms, burials, and marriages, but it is difficult to read because it is small and only in black and white.
- ⁵⁸ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 45.
- ⁵⁹ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 47.
- ⁶⁰ J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century* (1953), hereafter Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*.
- ⁶¹ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, p 12.
- ⁶² Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, p 13.
- ⁶³ The information for both Wyberton and Wrangle is derived from the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure. It is also available on a CD-ROM by R Schofield, *Parish Register Aggregate Analysis: the Population History of England Database and Introductory Guide* (1998).
- ⁶⁴ This information is to be found in G. A. J. Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire* (1975), p 192-3.
- ⁶⁵ Hey, *Myddle*, p 5.
- ⁶⁶ Hey, *Myddle*, p 55.
- ⁶⁷ Hey, *Myddle*, p 55.
- ⁶⁸ I am grateful to Professor J V Beckett for this observation.
- ⁶⁹ Hey, *Myddle*, p 55.
- ⁷⁰ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*.
- ⁷¹ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 184.
- ⁷² Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 187.
- ⁷³ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, pp187 - 191.
- ⁷⁴ Wrightson, and Levine, *Terling*, p 1.
- ⁷⁵ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling* p 2.
- ⁷⁶ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, pp 23-4.
- ⁷⁷ Comparisons can be made with Dyer's analysis of peasant living standards in C Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1990), p.113.
- ⁷⁸ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 25, quoting Professor Bowden, *Agricultural Prices, Farm Profits, and Rents*, pp 657-663.
- ⁷⁹ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 30.
- ⁸⁰ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p xx.
- ⁸¹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 100-101.
- ⁸² Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 166.
- ⁸³ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 63-4.
- ⁸⁴ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 91, quoting Professor Goubert, 'The French Peasantry of the Seventeenth Century', pp 163.
- ⁸⁵ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 121.
- ⁸⁶ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 131-132.
- ⁸⁷ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 137.
- ⁸⁸ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p 137.
- ⁸⁹ M Williams, *The Draining of the Somerset levels* (1970), p 25, hereafter Williams, *Somerset Levels*.
- ⁹⁰ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p 27.
- ⁹¹ Williams, *Somerset Levels*, p 170, quoting Warner, *A Walk Through Some western Counties of England*, p 50.

- ⁹² H E Hallam, *Settlement and Society: a Study of the Agrarian History of South Lincolnshire* (1965).
- ⁹³ J R Ravendale, *Liable to Floods: Village Landscape at the Edge of the Fens* (1974), pp 46, 57-8.
- ⁹⁴ Ravendale, *Liable to Floods*, p 61.
- ⁹⁵ See footnote 56.
- ⁹⁶ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, pp 4-5 and 25-7.
- ⁹⁷ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, p 29.
- ⁹⁸ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, pp 32-38.
- ⁹⁹ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, pp 39-40.
- ¹⁰⁰ J Whittle and M Yates, 'Pays réel or pays légal? Contrasting patterns of land tenure and social structure in eastern Norfolk and western Berkshire, 1450-1600', in *Agricultural History Review* 48, part I (2000), pp.1-26.
- ¹⁰¹ Whittle and Yates, pp.8-10.
- ¹⁰² A virgate varied between 15 and 60 acres, depending on the quality of the land.
- ¹⁰³ Whittle and Yates, p.24.
- ¹⁰⁴ Whittle and Yates, p.19.
- ¹⁰⁵ Whittle and Yates, p.2.
- ¹⁰⁶ Hey, *Myddle*, p 7.
- ¹⁰⁷ Hey, *Myddle*, pp 59 - 61.
- ¹⁰⁸ Hey, *Myddle*, pp 200 - 208.
- ¹⁰⁹ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 179. Alcock does not differentiate between the different categories of farm worker in the two different topographical areas.
- ¹¹⁰ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, pp 179 - 181.
- ¹¹¹ Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 181.
- ¹¹² Alcock, *Stoneleigh*, p 182.
- ¹¹³ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 49 and 46.
- ¹¹⁴ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 38 - 9.
- ¹¹⁵ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 18.
- ¹¹⁶ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 22.
- ¹¹⁷ Wrightson and Levine, *Terling*, p 23.
- ¹¹⁸ Thirsk, *Fenland Farming*, pp 42-4.
- ¹¹⁹ G C Homans, 'Partible inheritance of villagers' holdings', *Economic History Review* 8 (1938), pp.48-54.
- ¹²⁰ A R H Baker, 'Open fields and partible inheritance on a Kent manor', *Economic History Review* 2nd Series, Vol XVII, No 1, (1964), pp 1-23, hereafter Baker, 'Open fields and partible inheritance'.
- ¹²¹ Baker, 'Open fields and partible inheritance'.
- ¹²² B Stapleton, 'Family strategies: patterns of inheritance in Odiham, Hampshire, 1525-1850', *Continuity and Change* 14 (3), (1999), pp. 386 and 389.
- ¹²³ Stapleton, pp.390 and 392.
- ¹²⁴ Stapleton, p. 398.
- ¹²⁵ J. Goody, J. Thirsk, and E. P. Thompson (eds.), *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, (Cambridge, 1976).
- ¹²⁶ E. le Roy Ladurie, 'Family structures and inheritance customs in sixteenth century France', in Goody *et al.*, pp.37-70
- ¹²⁷ M. Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance customs and land distribution in Cambridgeshire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries', in Goody *et al.*, p.183.
- ¹²⁸ J. Thirsk, 'The European debate on customs of inheritance, 1500-1700, in Goody *et al.* P. 328.
- ¹²⁹ E. P. Thompson, 'The grid of inheritance', in Goody *et al.*, p.328.
- ¹³⁰ E. P. Thompson, 'The grid of inheritance', in Goody *et al.*, p.337.
- ¹³¹ E. P. Thompson, 'The grid of inheritance', in Goody *et al.*, pp. 341-2.
- ¹³² Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp 85-7, 104-111, and 159-161.
- ¹³³ M Turner (ed), *Kith and Kin: Nidderdale Families, 1570-1750* (1995), p 51, hereafter Turner, *Kith and Kin*.
- ¹³⁴ J Thirsk, 'English rural communities: structures, regularities, and change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in B Short (ed), *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (1992), pp 44-61, hereafter Thirsk, 'English rural community'.
- ¹³⁵ Thirsk, 'English rural community', p 50.
- ¹³⁶ Thirsk, 'English rural community', p 51.
- ¹³⁷ Thirsk, 'English rural community', p 48.

- ¹³⁸ J Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', in F J Fisher (ed), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (1961), pp 70-84, hereafter Thirsk, 'Industries'.
- ¹³⁹ Thirsk, 'Industries', p 72.
- ¹⁴⁰ See *fn.* 100 above.
- ¹⁴¹ Thirsk, 'Industries', p 70.
- ¹⁴² Thirsk, 'Industries', p 80.
- ¹⁴³ Thirsk, 'Industries', p 86.
- ¹⁴⁴ M. Zell, *Industries in the Countryside: Wealden Society in the Sixteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1994).
- ¹⁴⁵ Zell, p. 10.
- ¹⁴⁶ Zell, pp. 109-111.
- ¹⁴⁷ Zell, pp. 118-122.
- ¹⁴⁸ Turner, *Kith and Kin*, p 51.
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- ¹⁵⁰ B. A. Trinder and J. Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, (Phillimore, Chichester, 1980).
- ¹⁵¹ M. A. Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories in Oxfordshire, 1550-1590*, (Historical Manuscripts Commission, HMSO, 1965).
- ¹⁵² R. W. Ambler and B. & L. Watkinson, *Farmers and Fishermen: the Probate Inventories of the Ancient Parish of Clee, South Humberside, 1536-1742*, (Hull, 1987).
- ¹⁵³ J. A. Johnston (ed.), *Probate Inventories of Lincoln Citizens, 1661-1714*, (Lincoln Record Society 80 (1991)), J. A. Johnston, 'Furniture and furnishing in Lincoln and Lincolnshire, 1567-1600', in *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 33 (1998), pp. 20-29, and R. P. Garrard, 'English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior, 1570-1700', in A. Van der Woude and A. Schuurman (eds.), *Probate Inventories*, (Utrecht, 1980), pp.55-303.
- ¹⁵⁴ M. Spufford, 'Peasant inheritance customs and land distribution in Cambridgeshire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries', in Goody *et al.*, *Family and Inheritance*, (Cambridge, 1976), pp.156-176.
- ¹⁵⁵ B A Holderness, 'Credit in English rural society before the nineteenth century with special reference to the period 1650-1720', *Agricultural History Review* 24 (1976), pp.99-101.
- ¹⁵⁶ P Spufford, 'Les liens du crédit au village dans l'Angleterre du XVII siècle', in *Annales Histoire Sciences Sociales* 49 (1994), No. 6, pp.1359-73 (in translation).
- ¹⁵⁷ M Zell, 'Credit in the English pre-industrial woollen industry', *Economic History Review* XLIX (1996), pp. 669, 674, and 680.
- ¹⁵⁸ T Arkell, N Evans, and N Goose (eds), *When Death Do Us Part*, (University of Hertfordshire, 2000).
- ¹⁵⁹ G Levi, 'On microhistory', in P Burke (ed), *New Perspectives in Historical Writing*, (Cambridge, 1991), pp.93-113. Professor Alan Rogers has commented on the change from the sociological and statistical approach to local history of the 1970s and 1980s to a more detailed analysis in a lecture at the University of Nottingham, 27 October 2001.
- ¹⁶⁰ M Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*, (Cambridge, 1998), p.9.
- ¹⁶¹ M Turner, *Kith and Kin: Nidderdale Families, 1500-1750*, p.50.
- ¹⁶² C Phythian-Adams (ed), *Societies, Cultures, and Kinship* (1993).
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- ¹⁶⁴ J Thirsk, 'The Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', *Agricultural History Review* 1 (1953), pp.16-28.

Chapter 3 Population changes

One of the factors cited as influencing the disappearance of the middling farmer was the growth of population,¹ which produced both pressure on land, in the sense that the land divisions, created either by primogeniture or partible inheritance, ended up too small to support a family, and also created an increased demand for food, not only in the immediate vicinity of a settlement, but also in the towns which were growing in size. Changes in the population of a community can have repercussions on its social structure and economy: in a mainly agricultural country such as England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a reduction would leave houses empty, and possibly result in a loss of important services, while an increase would produce pressures for additional housing, on land, for food, and would affect the social structure of the community.

This chapter sets out to study the population changes in the constituent parishes of Axholme between 1540 and 1640 to determine what pressures they produced, by using the evidence of parish registers and census returns. In doing so, it will consider such topics as birth and death rates, seasonality of baptisms, marriages, and burials, mortality crises, and illegitimacy, as well as making studies of individual parishes to examine more closely the demographic events that shaped each community. The purpose of such studies will be to estimate the magnitude of events and their likely effects on their communities both socially and economically. The use of parish registers and censuses to arrive at changes in population does, however, present two major obstacles, the accuracy of the records, and the completeness of the data. A method of dealing with these problems will be outlined though it has to be emphasised that the totals arrived at are no more than estimates; complete accuracy is not possible.

General

Before the inception of national censuses, it was impossible for demographers to arrive at an accurate picture of the population totals or changes in England; all that could be

proposed was a number of estimates. For the period under study, the Anglican Church undertook a number of censuses - in 1545-6, 1603, 1642, and, outside the period but useful for comparison purposes, 1676, the Compton Census. Baptisms, marriages, and burials were ordered to be recorded by ministers from 1539 onwards though, in Axholme, none began then. The data derived from these censuses and registers are often incomplete, inaccurate, or missing, but there is a general consensus that the population of England rose from approximately 3.721 million between 1569 and 1571 to 5.131 million between 1629 and 1631, though there are disagreements regarding the accuracy of the estimates.² Wrigley and Schofield, commenting on the accuracy of the 1603 Ecclesiastical Census, which surveyed communicants, non-communicants, and recusants, state that it missed between one quarter and one fifth of the adult population, while the 1676 Census covered only 77 per cent of the population.³ From the foregoing remarks it is clear that any consideration of population changes is based on estimates which may be quite inaccurate.

The Axholme Censuses

By using the ecclesiastical censuses of 1548 and 1602, and the Protestation Returns of 1642, it is possible to arrive at tentative sizes of the communities. The censuses were based on the number of communicants counted by the minister, and this number has to be subjected to a multiplier to arrive at a tentative total population. The 1548 census returns are incomplete while those for 1603 are suspiciously rounded, rather as though they are estimates. To help illustrate the changes, the Compton Ecclesiastical Survey of 1676 is also included, even though it is outside the period of study. The differences between these estimates and those derived from the parish registers will be considered later. Table 3.1 gives the estimated populations after using the multipliers.

Table 3.1 Population estimates based on census surveys.⁴

Place	1548	Est.	1603	Est.	1642	Est.	1676	Est.
		x 1.66		x 1.66		x 3.33		x 1.66
Alt.	241	400	300	498	251	836	389	646
Bel.	640	1062	700	1162	452	1505	750	1245
Cro.	-	-	740	1228	210	699	679	1127
Epw.	800	1328	500	830	318	1058	604	1002
Hax.	520	863	700	1162	462	1538	867	1439
Lud.*	-	-	373	619	161	536	279	463
Ows.	500	830	438	727	207	689	598	993
Wro.	-	-	52	86	76	253	104	173

* Luddington with Garthorpe

If the estimates for the parishes of Althorpe, Belton, Epworth, Haxey, and Owston are considered because there is there a continuity in the evidence, however inaccurate, their population rose from a total of 4,483 to 5,626, an increase of 1,143 over nearly one hundred years though neither Epworth or Owston apparently experienced an increase. Epworth, which lies between Haxey and Belton, and was the acknowledged centre of the Isle for administration, where the manor court was held, and was a market centre, presents a problem because its population appears to have fallen by 498 in the period 1548 to 1603, (a decrease of 37.5 per cent). All three parishes enjoyed a similar topography, with a rich soil on the central ridge with fen and marsh on the lower ground, and had similar acreages - Belton with 8,530, Epworth with 8,140, and Haxey with 8,113.⁵ It has been suggested that the return of 800 for 1548 represents an estimate of the total population, and that whoever made the return misunderstood the instructions.⁶ As will be seen below when looking at the population figures for Epworth in greater detail, the total population of 800 accords with an estimated 703 for 1541 and 810 for 1551 based on parish records. Owston's parish records begin in 1599

and peter out in the 1620s, and are based on Bishops' Transcripts. Though the censuses show a decline in population, the estimate for 1603 is 793 and 836 in 1623.

Crowle was situated on the river Don until 1626 when Vernuyden started his drainage scheme so may have suffered through a loss of river trade. Luddington, the northernmost parish in the Isle, with Garthorpe, is the most remote of all the settlements in the Axholme, but the information on it is incomplete so it is difficult to discern whether its population had been falling before 1603. Owston, which was on the river Trent, would have been unaffected by the 1626 drainage in that none of its lands were involved, and river traffic should have helped maintain its population. Althorpe, which was also on the Trent, increased its population, a fact that makes Owston's decrease the more difficult to understand.

The increases for Belton and Haxey are consistent with a steady rise in population though, as will be explored later in this chapter, migration has to be taken into account. Wroot's increase may have resulted from the effects of the drainage scheme, which straightened meandering rivers, and which resulted in more arable land, and thus increased the opportunities for agricultural labourers as well as opening up more land suitable for agriculture that was not earmarked by those who had invested in the drainage scheme.

The parish registers - the quality of the data^{7, 8}

There were originally nine parishes within the Isle of Axholme, but by the time that registers were initiated, Garthorpe had become amalgamated with Luddington. As has so often happened elsewhere, the registers are incomplete or not available, so it is, therefore, important to evaluate what contribution they can offer for the period under consideration. All the registers contain gaps, whenever they start, and some have so many gaps that it is only possibly realistically to state that there was a natural increase in population based on the data available.⁹ Table 3.2 provides a summary of the main features of the registers whose contents will be considered in greater detail.

Table 3.2 Summary of the periods covered by Axholme parish registers, 1540-1640.

Parish	Register (Originals)	Bishop's Transcripts
Althorpe	Not available	Not available
Belton	1541-1640	1599 onwards
Epworth	1551-1640 (many gaps)	1599 onwards (many gaps)
Crowle	1562-1626 (many gaps)	1599 onwards
Haxey	1559-1636	1599 onwards
Luddington-c-Garthorpe	Not available	1599 onwards (many gaps)
Owston	Not available	1599-1622
Wroot	1573-1640 (many gaps)	1599 onwards

'Not available' indicates that registers began after 1640 or were lost.

The registers fall into four groups, based on their level of completeness: Althorpe registers do not begin until 1676, and there are no Bishop's Transcripts available to cover the period; Belton and Haxey have gaps; Crowle, Epworth, and Wroot begin relatively early, but all three have considerable gaps; Luddington-with-Garthorpe and Owston begin in 1599, as Bishop's Transcripts, but peter out in the 1620s.

The registers for Belton contain generally full records, with relatively few gaps. There appears to have been under-recording of baptisms and burials in 1542, with gaps between January 1555 and November 1557, with further intermittent breaks from February 1562 to March 1564, with additional discontinuities from June to October of that year. There was a gap in 1568 between May and October. The marriage registers show similar breaks to the baptismal and burial records. By 1569 and in subsequent years registration seems to have been complete, judging by the consistency of the data on a year-by-year basis.

There is, however, a problem connected with the actual wording of the Belton baptismal records, which has not been solved in spite of consultation with several persons familiar with early parish registers, and which could have a bearing on the actual population changes. Between November 1542, when the register begins, and October 1554 the entries

appear to be in the same handwriting,¹⁰ after which there is a gap until March 1557 when there appears to be both a change in the handwriting and the manner of entries. As far as records are available, there were two rectors of Belton from 1538 and 1583, John Pope and Thomas Cleisby. The problem centres round the use of three Latin words - *natus* (born), *baptizatus* (baptised), and *renatus* (reborn), with feminine endings for females, which seem to refer to baptisms. From November 1542 to October 1543, the word *renatus* (-a) is used with one occurrence of *baptizatus*, after which *natus* (-a) is used almost exclusively, though in September 1547 there is one *renatus*, three *natus*, and in the following month one *baptizatus* and six *natus*.

The Regional Organiser for English Catholic Ancestors,¹¹ Mrs G. Tugendhat, after consultation with a colleague, suggested that one explanation for the variations, namely that in the days of absentee priests and pluralism it was the custom to appoint clerks to look after the church records especially in small and remote places. These men were barely literate, hence the curious entries.

Another interpretation was offered by Dr Dennis Mills,¹² who suggested that a possible explanation lies in the nature of the topography of the Isle, which, until the 1630s, after Vermuyden's drainage was in fact a series of islands with the surrounding water reaching a depth of three feet or more particularly in winter. It was possible, therefore, that parents baptised their children at home rather than take the risk of taking a newly-born infant by boat to church for an 'official' ceremony, hence the *natus* entry, while the *renatus* could indicate the baptism in church. There is some ground for adopting this view, for the chantry certificate returns of 1548 for West Butterwick and Amcotts contain petitions that the chantries be retained because the parish church was some miles distant and the inhabitants could not attend church in winter because the way was under water.¹³ Checks through the registers do not show names duplicated as would be the case if the birth (*natus*) in a remote location were reported to the local incumbent, who subsequently performed a baptism in church. There is also no evidence for burials of the children soon after their birth (*natus*); baptism *in extremis*

is permitted by lay-people, which might account for the term *renatus*, but there is no evidence for this.

The problem received no further elucidation when it was submitted to Professor P.E.H. Hair at the University of Liverpool,¹⁴ who doubted Dr Mills's explanation, but suggested that the three terms were interchangeable to signify baptism. This was a view adopted by the Roman Catholic Diocesan Archivist for Nottingham.¹⁵ Without further enlightenment, it seems appropriate to accept all three terms as indications of baptism, and, in which case they indicate an increase in the population. If this course is taken, this produces birth-rates which accord with the general pattern of between 23 and 33 births/baptisms per year. The increase in population suggested by the ecclesiastical censuses of 1548 and 1603 accords with the difference between baptisms and burials recorded between 1541 and 1600, bearing in mind that their figures are suspiciously rounded.

The registers for Haxey present no problems of interpretation though they begin later than Belton's. The burial register begins in 1561, preceding the baptism register by five years; marriage records were not begun until 1572. Both burial and baptism records are incomplete for the first decade of their existence, but after that there are no significant gaps.

Crowle's baptismal register begins in 1561 with the burial register beginning in 1562; marriages do not start to be recorded until 1579. There are gaps in the baptismal records for the months between September and December 1563 to 1565, with another gap from January to September 1566. The year 1572 is possibly also under-recorded. The years between January 1576 and March 1580 have but one record, a single baptism in September 1579. Breaks similar to those in the baptismal records are found in those for burials between 1563 and 1565, with an additional gap between 1566 and 1569, when there are no data. There are intermittent discontinuities between 1570 and October 1574, after which there is a major break until October 1580. Further gaps occur in 1581, 1582, and 1583, with a complete absence of records from January 1587 to October 1590. In the marriage records there appear to be gaps

from 1581 to 1590 as 52 were registered in that decade compared with the decade 1591 to 1600 when there were 90.

Epworth's registers present a problem in that there are major gaps caused by their destruction or damage in a fire at the Rectory in 1709. Baptism registers begin in 1539 and extend to 1609, but there are gaps in 1555, and from January 1562 to June 1563, and all of 1597 and 1598. The Bishop's Transcripts begin in 1599, but even they are missing from 1627 to 1642. The burial registers commence in 1538, but no records exist either in the registers or the Transcripts for the years 1593 to 1599. In addition, the years 1555, 1562 to 1565, and 1575 to 1576 are also missing. This presents problems in trying to calculate the changes in the population. The marriage registers were destroyed in the fire, and the Bishop's Transcripts are incomplete, with the following years missing: 1593-8; 1623-5; and 1627-42.

Because Wroot is such a small parish, it is difficult to be certain that breaks in the records are under-recordings or merely years when there were no baptisms, burials, or marriages. All three types of record begin in 1573, and though there is only one year when there are no baptisms (1616), there are twelve years between 1575 and 1595 with no burials,¹⁶ and there were no burials recorded from 1598 to 1612.

Luddington's registers only began in 1700, so data has to be taken from the Bishop's Transcripts, which begin in April 1599, but which are missing from 1622 to 1626, and from 1628 to 1646. Some of the Transcripts are in a poor condition with parts missing or illegible. In spite of the drawback of being unable to reconstruct the population changes for about one-fifth of the period, there are compensations in that occupations of fathers are generally given in the baptismal records, and it has been possible to use all the records to derive a partial reconstruction, using the data from a small sample.

Epworth's registers, like those for Owston were destroyed by fire, this time in the home of the parish clerk, Lionel Newton, on 11 August 1659.¹⁷ Because of this, recourse has had to be made to the Bishop's Transcripts, which cover the years from April 1599 to January

1623, after which there are no records for the period. Unlike the Luddington records, no personal details are given.

Population changes

Before considering individual parish registers, it is necessary to deal with the problem of having to calculate population and population changes when there are gaps in the registers. One method to calculate the population is to use the method advocated by Wallwork in his calculations of Nottingham's population for the period 1570 to 1801.¹⁸ This method uses the average birth and burial rates and the estimated population, such as that given by the 1603 Ecclesiastical Census.¹⁹ Having arrived at an estimated population for a given year, the succeeding annual natural increases are added to this. (In some years when there were mortality crises, for example, there would be decreases to be deducted.)

The problem of gaps in the registers, unless they are enormous, may be dealt with by counting the number of vital events actually recorded over a decade to produce an average which may be used to provide an estimate for the whole decade.²⁰

In Belton, using the raw data, which include gaps, there were 3,877 baptisms recorded between 1541 and 1640, and 3,254 burials between 1541 and 1641. Table 3.3 summarises the baptisms, burial, and differences for the period 1541 to 1640 on a decadal basis, using the methods outlined above.

Table 3.3 Belton - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences.

	1541	1551	1561	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621	1631
Baps	358	362	422	434	361	455	519	490	470	560
Burs	303	302	327	328	359	483	429	473	416	523
Diff	+55	+60	+95	+106	+2	-28	+90	+17	+54	+37

The total difference between the number of baptisms and burials, for the whole of the period is 488, representing an annual average increase of 4.88; for the interval 1571 to 1641, the difference is 278, an annual average increase of 3.97.

Haxey's parish registers show that there were 3457 baptisms for the period 1561 to 1640 though those for the decade 1561 to 1571 contain gaps. The burial records began in 1551 but are incomplete for the ten years following; a total of 2715 burials was registered. Table 3.4 shows the baptisms, burials, and differences for the period 1551 to 1640 on a decadal basis, using the calculation of population and averaging methods.

Table 3.4 Haxey - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences .

	1551	1561	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621	1631
Baps	-	418	395	408	450	595	499	550	586
Burs	(11)	307	312	440	335	349	464	366	471
Diff	-	+111	+ 83	- 32	+115	+246	+ 35	+184	+115

Over the period from 1561 to 1640 there was a natural increase of 857, giving an average increase in population of 10.7 per annum.

The baptism records for Crowle begin in November 1561, and the burials start a year later. As indicated above, there are large gaps from 1575-6 in both registers, with another gap in the burial records from mid-1565 to late 1569. If breaks are disregarded, there were 2276 baptisms and 1717 burials from 1561 to 1640, giving a difference of 559. As the records give an impression of completeness from 1601 to 1640, the 1379 baptisms and 1153 burials, with an excess of 226 baptisms over burials, may give a more accurate picture of the changes in population. However, by using the method of averaging, a different picture is obtained. Table 3.5 shows the numbers of baptisms and burials with the differences for Crowle on a decadal basis.

Table 3.5 Crowle - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences.

	1561	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621	1631
Baps	347	289	358	361	332	366	295	386
Burials	395	277	360	421	280	336	353	369
Diff	- 48	+ 12	- 2	- 60	+ 52	+ 30	- 58	+ 17

Unlike Belton and Haxey, which showed considerable natural increases, Crowle's population showed a decrease of 57 over the period 1561 to 1631, which is consonant with the ecclesiastical surveys of 1603 and 1642.

A similar problem to calculating the natural change in Crowle's population occurs with Epworth whose parish registers, besides having numerous gaps, effectively cease from 1622 to 1640. Baptismal records from 1539 to 1640 number 2915, while burials for the same period are 2047, which would indicate a natural increase of 868, which is completely out of line with increases elsewhere in Axholme's parishes. Table 3.6 shows the numbers of baptisms and burials from 1538 to 1630 by decades, using the averaging method, but it must be made clear that, because of the size of some of the gaps, the data may be wildly inaccurate.

Table 3.6 Epworth - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences

	1541	1551	1561	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621
Baps	340	398	447	398	378	376	460	440	409
Burs	231	412	274	321	352	499	372	389	265
Diff	+109	- 14	+173	+ 77	+ 26	-123	+ 88	+ 53	+144

Over the period from 1541 to 1630 the natural increase was 533, which is greater than Belton's but less than Haxey's increases.

The parish registers of the tiny parish of Wroot, which is remote not only from the remainder of the Isle of Axholme but from anywhere else, have numbers of gaps, as indicated above, but with 285 baptisms between 1571 and 1640, and 155 burials for the same period,

the natural increase was 130, which is the calculated increase between the 1603 Ecclesiastical Census and the 1542 Protestation Returns. It is, however, highly unlikely that there were no burials in the period 1598 to 1612, but because the gaps are so large, it is not practicable to employ the averaging method, and Table 3.7 summarises the number of baptisms and burials actually recorded with their differences on a decadal basis.

Table 3.7 Wroot - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences.

	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621	1631
Baps	32	24	26	50	43	42	68
Burs	34	17	14	0	19	30	41
Diff	- 1	+7	+12	+50	+24	+12	+27

The natural increase is 131 over the period indicated.

Incompleteness also affected Luddington's records, which begin in 1599 and effectively end in 1621. In that interval there were recorded 550 baptisms and 441 burials, giving an increase of 109. If the few entries for the decade beginning 1621 are included, then the increase is 121. A comparison between the estimated populations of 1603 and 1642, however, shows a decline in Luddington's population of 137,²¹ and by using the averaging method the results are shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Luddington - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences.

	(1591)*	1601	1611	(1621)*
Baptisms	(39)	272	316	(68)
Burials	(25)	282	305	(51)
Difference	(+14)	- 10	+ 11	(+17)

* Too many gaps to use averages.

Thus, there was effectively a natural increase of only one in a period of twenty years.

Owston's records, like Luddington's, begin in 1599 and peter out after 1622. In that time, there were recorded 807 baptisms and 735 burials, producing an increase of 72. Table

3.9 illustrates the number of baptisms and burials, with differences, for the period, with gaps filled using averages.

Table 3.9 Owston - numbers of baptisms and burials per decade, with differences.

	(1591)*	1601	1611	(1621)*
Baptisms	(52)	374	370	(62)
Burials	(59)	310	396	(6)
Difference	(- 7)	+ 64	- 26	(+56)

*Too many gaps to use averages.

Thus, over a twenty year period, there was a natural increase of 38.

Table 3.10 compares the estimated populations using the censuses and the averaged data from the parish registers.

Table 3.10 Comparison between estimated populations using censuses and averaged data.

	1545 Census	1603 Census	1642 Census	Diff. 1603- 1642	1541 Est.	1600 Est.	1640 Est.	Diff. 1600- 1640
Belton	1062	1162	1505	+343	1024	1314	1512	+198
Crowle	-	1228	699	-529	1296*	1154	1178	+ 24
Epwth	800#	830	1058	+228	703	923	[1204]	+281
Haxey	863	1162	1538	+376	999	1042	1708	+666
Lud'ton	-	619	536	- 83	-	617	(618)	+ 1
Owston	-	727	689	- 38	-	796	(834)	+ 38
Wroot	-	86	253	+167	-	52	186	+134
Totals	-	5814	6278	+464	-	5898	7240	+1342

corrected figure (see text) : * by back projection : () = to 1620 : [] = to 1630

As has been explained earlier, the ecclesiastical censuses and registers are not available for all the parishes of Axholme, so comparisons of data are not easy, but it is possible to look at the estimates derived from the 1603 and 1642 Censuses and the calculated

populations using registers for all parishes, except Althorpe, to compare the differences. It must be borne in mind that all calculations have been subjected to multipliers, which in themselves can produce quite significant differences.²² There is, however, a difference of 878 between the Census data and that of the registers for the listed parishes, and this discrepancy can be accounted for by migration.

Migration

In her study of south-west Nottinghamshire in the seventeenth century, Mitson concluded that there were three categories of families: those who remained within the confines of their own village for a lengthy period, whom she denotes as 'dynastic'; those that moved to nearby villages; and those who moved some distance away. The dynastic families 'were considered stable and respectable, factors which could prove important in periods of crisis. To a significant extent they were a group with whom their peers could identify'.²³ Though Mitson deals with the movement of families away from their communities without adducing reasons for this, there was, however, movement inwards, though this was outside the remit of her study.

From a scrutiny of parish records, it is evident that, like Mitson's Nottinghamshire families, there was considerable movement into and out of the Isle. Two methods of analysing this have been adopted though the basis is similar, namely the appearance of a name in the baptism registers and the subsequent appearance or non-appearance in the burial or marriage registers. The method does not allow for under-registration, but this cannot be avoided. The first method looks at the broad picture of migration in the five parishes which show relative continuity of records throughout all or most of the period. Because there are so many entries, it was decided to concentrate on those surnames which have ten or more entries from the inception of the baptism records to 1640, and thereby draw up a 'time-line' for each surname to mark its appearance and disappearance. Where a name 'disappears' searches have been made to ascertain whether there are burial or marriage records. From the results of these

searches, three categories of surname may be discerned: the dominant families who are there from the beginning of the registers and remain until 1640, or beyond; the 'new' families, that is, those that appear later but remain to the end of the period; and the 'transients', which persist for some time then disappear. The results of this survey are shown in Table 3.11.

Table 3.11 Surname persistence in Axholme, 1540-1640.

Parish	Dominant	New	Transient	Total
Belton	26 (35.1%)	24 (32.4%)	24 (32.4)	74
Crowle	18 (27.7%)	21 (32.3%)	26 (40%)	65
Epworth	23 (33.8%)	24 (35.3%)	21 (30.9%)	68
Haxey	24 (38.1%)	21 (33.3%)	18 (28.6%)	63

This table shows that there was a near-threefold division of family types - those who were dominant, those who moved into the Isle, and those who stayed then left, the last not appearing in any other Axholme parish register.

The second method of looking at migration concentrated on the persons baptised in Haxey, which has the most complete set of registers, for the decade 1571-80, and traced their lives to determine whether they are recorded in the burial or marriage registers for Haxey and surrounding parishes in the Isle.²⁴ There were 342 baptisms between 1571 and 1580, and of those baptisms 77 burials could be identified. With 265 persons remaining to consider, 127 marriages were traced, which indicates that 47.9 per cent of those baptised in Haxey over that decade were married in their own parish - 70 males and 57 females. There is no firm evidence for the remaining 52.1 per cent remaining in Axholme, which indicates that just over half the population baptised in 1571-80 moved away.²⁵

A brief consideration of three other localities illustrates that migration was commonplace, which belies the popular conception of a static population. In Retford, Nottinghamshire, the population in 1576 was estimated to be 1,400, which declined to 1,150

in 1603, and further decreased to 850 in the late 1620s; by 1636, the population had risen to 1,500. As Marcombe comments:

A short period of recovery and relative stability in the early years of the seventeenth century was followed by a further dramatic collapse between 1616 and 1630, which cannot be ascribed either to mortality or natural disaster. The only explanation is that people were moving away from Retford, or not marrying and raising families there.

A later recovery in size of population was ascribed to inward migration, and 'the town was able to replenish its population by attracting new migrants as economic prospects improved'.²⁶

A few miles from Retford lies the village of Clayworth whose parishioners were surveyed by their rector in 1676 and in 1688, and, if the difference between baptisms and burials were relied on solely, the indications would be that the population was slowly declining. Laslett observes:

If, moreover, we had been content to suppose that a fairly constant total of inhabitants was accompanied by a static composition, by a small turnover of persons during the twelve years, we should have made an error of considerable proportions. No less than 244 of the 401 persons in Clayworth in 1676 had disappeared by 1688, that is 61 per cent, and 254 of the 412 who were there in 1688 were newcomers since 1676, that is 62 per cent.²⁷

Turner, in his study of Nidderdale, demonstrated that the turnover of surnames before and after the Civil War in Ripley showed 40 surviving names and 51 new ones, while the parishes of Hampsthwaite, Pateley, and Fewston retained larger percentages of surviving names, but had larger numbers of new ones.²⁸

It has been pointed out earlier that Axholme lies at the boundary of three counties - Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, and Yorkshire, and because of this it has been difficult to trace the destinations of the migrants, though with regard to the origins of the immigrants, it has been suggested that movement into the Isle occurred from the eastern side of the river Trent because arable land was converted to pasture resulting in unemployment.

Much of the increase [in population in the seventeenth century] came from an influx from areas of population stagnation, many of them dispossessed from east of the Trent as a result of failing villages or forced desertions by landowner converting to pasture, as, for example, in the Ancholme valley. A main attraction of Axholme was its common rights.²⁹

In their study of Humberside's population and land use, D. and S. Neave observe:

In south Humberside the most populous area was the Isle of Axholme. The southern Isle, both before and after the drainage in the mid-seventeenth century, had been an area which attracted immigrants because of its plentiful common land. In the forty years between 1590 and 1630, a hundred additional cottages were built in the manor of Epworth, and in 1675 it was noted that 'The liberty of the common people have of gravening in the common is that which drawes multitudes of the poorer sorts from all the counties adjacent to come and inhabit in this Isle'.³⁰

By using the Protestation Returns for Nottinghamshire and concentrating on the less common surnames, it has been possible to make a tentative suggestion that families from the southern part of Axholme moved into north Nottinghamshire, into the parishes of Beckingham, Misterton, Saundby, and Sturton le Steeple, which are within an approximate twelve mile radius from Belton. There are indications of movement over greater distances, to Retford, for example, but the evidence is tenuous. It has not been possible to trace movements from the Isle north of Belton though Doncaster may have absorbed the migrants. The Returns for Gainsborough surprisingly show no evidence for transients though some Axholme surnames appear in the list, such as Coulson, Man, Popplewell, and Theaker.³¹

Birth and death rates

Strictly speaking, it is not possible to refer to either birth or death rates, since the parish registers record baptisms and burials. It is known that sometimes more than one child was baptised at one time, giving the appearance of multiple births, but, in the absence of other

information, baptisms have to be equated with births, and so reference will be made to 'birth rates'. It is more logical to accept that burials refer to deaths, and almost certainly deaths in the same parish. The only year when all the parishes had their communicants enumerated, and when all parishes, with the exception of Wroot, have evidence for both baptisms and burials, either in registers or Bishop's Transcripts, is 1603, and this has been taken as the basis for calculating crude birth and death rates. For the purpose of this analysis, a calendar year has been taken beginning in January and unrevised figures used. As has been indicated earlier, there may have been under-recording or misunderstanding of the enumeration instructions because the quality of the clergy was remarkably low, possibly because of the general difficulty of recruiting suitably qualified persons into the ministry, and also because of the low stipends that were offered. As Emmison records:

The pathetically poor qualities of the clergy in 1560 were acknowledged by Archbishop Parker when writing to Grindal, Bishop of London: 'Occasioned by the great want of ministers, we and you both, for tolerable supply thereof, have heretofore admitted into the ministry sundry artificers and others, not trained and brought up in learning, and, as it happened, some that were of base occupations'.³²

With regard to Lincolnshire clergy, Clive Holmes remarks: 'At the end of Elizabeth's reign it was suggested that a stipend of £30 - £50 per annum would provide a barely adequate maintenance for a cleric; scarcely a third of the livings in the five deaneries for which a valuation survives exceeded the £30 cut-off, and 40 per cent of them were worth less than £15'.³³ As an illustration of the poverty of the clergy, a curate of Asgarby (not in Axholme) who had been a grocer's apprentice, received a stipend of £4 a year. He became clerk of Partney market, and ran an alehouse. When questioned by justices, he remarked 'that he got more by his ale than the alter'.³⁴ A similar situation existed in Essex, where, even a decade after Elizabeth I's death, the benefice of Broomfield was worth only £35 a year, and a curate was receiving only £5 6s. 8d. and his diet.³⁵

In Table 3.12 the 1603 populations, calculated from the returns in the Ecclesiastical Census, are given, and from these figures the crude baptism and burial rates have been calculated, which, in the absence of any other data, are taken as the birth and death rates.

Table 3.12 Crude birth and death rates (per thousand) in Axholme.³⁶

	1603 Popn.	Baptisms	Birth rate	Burials	Death rate
Belton	1162	51	43.9	28	24.1
Crowle	1128	25	20.3	22	17.9
Epworth	830	58	69.9	39	33.6
Haxey	1162	59	50.8	44	37.9
Luddington	619	21	33.9	23	37.1
Owston	727	38	52.3	33	45.4
Wroot	86	2	23.2	-	-
Average	-	-	42.0	-	32.7

As can be seen, there is a wide variation in the birth and death rates, some of which may be accounted for by under-recording. It is worthwhile bearing in mind the observation that

'Basically, rural areas never reached crude death rates below 15 per thousand. . . The birth rate, on the other hand, was very rarely below 30 per thousand. . . Unless the community is monastic or has a very unbalanced sex structure ('Klondyke' population) a death rate of under 20 should be accompanied by a birth rate of well over 30. Therefore, if the combined number of births and deaths is fewer than 50, there is some presumption in favour of omission.'³⁷

The birth rate for Crowle is low as is that for Wroot though the latter may be accounted for by the small size of the settlement. Epworth's birth rate is exceptionally high compared with its death rate. Even so, all parishes should have seen a natural increase in population, with the exception of Luddington, where the death rate exceeded the birth rate between 1541 and 1603,

and 1603 and 1642. The Ecclesiastical Census of 1603 and the 1642 Protestation Returns do, however, show a diminution in the populations of several parishes, notably Crowle, whose population appears to have fallen by 529 in a period of forty years, and Luddington with a reduction of 83, and Owston, where the population was smaller by 38 over the same period. The increase in the population Epworth and Haxey fits in with Thirsk's comments that between 1590 and 1630 a hundred extra cottages were built in Epworth manor, which included both parishes, and would indicate an approximate increase of 450 persons.³⁸

It has been claimed that birth rates 'do not exhibit very considerable variations at any rate before 1800'.³⁹ This is not borne when an average of the baptisms and burials for the five year period 1601 to 1605 for all the parishes, except Wroot, is taken using the same calculation used for 1603 because a wide variation is found. For example, Epworth's birth rate increases to 72.8 averaged over the five year period while Belton's decreases to 40.2. Thus the birth and death rates can only realistically give a picture of what was happening to the population at a given period of time.

Seasonality

If the numbers of baptisms for each month are graphed⁴⁰ for all the parishes, including Luddington and Owston where the records do not begin until 1599 and end in the early 1620s, then two maxima occur, namely in March-April and September-October, with the one minimum occurring in mid-year. Using raw data, and without recourse to constructing monthly indexes of baptisms, the year was divided into three equal parts as Wrigley and Schofield have commented.⁴¹ (It should be noted that the vertical scales of the graphs are different - what is important is the overall pattern of vital events that the graphs record.) This, of course, assumes that children were baptised shortly after birth, and though 'there is little evidence for the age at baptism in the sixteenth century. . . what there is points to a nearly universal custom of baptising shortly after birth'.⁴² Evidence from the Axholme registers suggest that baptism did take place shortly after birth because in the Belton registers, between

December 1609 and November 1639, 79 sons and 24 daughters are recorded as '*sepultus non baptizatus*' ('buried not baptised') - with the correct *-a* ending for females. This emphasis on burial without baptism suggests two features: that there was a theological significance concerning the soul of the infant, and that the early baptism of the new-born was common. It is, therefore, probable that the pattern of baptisms accurately reflects the distribution of births, though there are many instances of two or more children from the same family being baptised together. They could, of course, be twins, or even, in one instance in Luddington, of quadruplets who were the children of Paul Stevenson, a fisherman, who were baptised in August, 1613. Alternatively, there is the possibility that a number of offspring of differing ages had their baptisms 'saved up'.

The seasonality in baptism, and to a large extent, conception, minimised the number of births during summer crop-gathering when women's labour was in great demand, though it did mean that the majority of births happened in the winter months when conditions were cold, and there was danger of infections of the lungs.⁴³ Seasonality of baptisms implies seasonality of conceptions: for the March-April period conception must have taken place in the summer months, and November-December for August-September peak, assuming a normal length of gestation. There were fewer conceptions between August and November, which may have been linked not only with the season for crop-gathering, and may also be linked with an economic aspect, where the crop-yield may have played a part.⁴⁴

As burials were likely to occur within a very short time of death, the pattern of burials must reflect fairly accurately the pattern of deaths. Just as the baptisms show a seasonality, so do the burials, which shadow the pattern of baptisms, with one maximum in the first three months of the year, with the totals decreasing to a minimum in June-July, after which the figures start to increase towards the end of the year, with a smaller peak in September, a feature remarked on by Wrigley and Schofield.⁴⁵ The exception to the general pattern is that of Luddington which exhibits two large peaks, a smaller one in April-May and a larger one in September-October. Even if the data for the period after 1620 are ignored because there are

so many gaps, and only the period 1599 to 1620 is considered, the pattern remains. There is no obvious explanation for this difference from other parishes except the short run of data. Luddington, which incorporated Garthorpe, is the most northerly parish in Axholme, situated on a small rise above an area subject to flooding not far from the banks of the river Trent, yet other villages, such as Crowle and Owston have a similar low-lying topography. The larger peak in September is puzzling as this is often one of the warmest months.

Like other parts of England, the parishes in the Isle of Axholme experienced a number of mortality crises. As Wrigley and Schofield explain, 'any discussion of crisis mortality entails an arbitrary decision on what constitutes a crisis'.⁴⁶ Because so many of the burial records are defective, it is not possible to use 'the percentage deviation of the crude death rate from a centred 25-year moving average' as advocated by Wrigley and Schofield.⁴⁷ Table 3.13 summarises the average number of burials per month where data are available. The most problematic parish was Wroot, which was so small as to have relatively few burials per decade.

Table 3.13 Average number of burials per year.

Parish	Period covered	Average burials per month
Belton	1571-1640	3.25
Crowle	1591-1640	2.42
Epworth	1541-1620	2.96*
Haxey	1571-1640	3.23
Luddington	1601-1620	1.73
Owston	1601-1620	2.58

* Large number of gaps in the registers

By comparing the annual totals of burials with the appropriate average from the chart above, it is possible to identify the crisis months. Though Wrigley and Schofield, using their centred 25-year moving average, defined a crisis year as one when the death rate was at

least 10 per cent above the moving average,⁴⁸ for the purposes of this study any annual figure ten per cent or more above the average is arbitrarily taken as a crisis year because it is not possible to define the death rate as the population is not known except for the benchmark of 1603. Appendix 2 (p.300) identifies the years when all the parishes, except Wroot, had mortality crises, and Table 3.14 gives the percentage over the decadal average for years when two or more parishes experienced crises, calculated by the difference between the number of burials and the decadal average, which is divided by that average and multiplied by 100.

Table 3.14 Mortality crisis years in two or more parishes, showing percentage above the annual average. ^

Year	Belton	Crowle	Epworth	Haxey	Luddington	Owston
1590	15.4	-	12.6	169.8	-	-
1591	82.1	165.1	184.3	137.3	-	-
1603	53.8	-	-	13.5	10.8	-
1608	53.8	44.6	-	28.9	20.4	-
1610	15.4	10.2	-	39.3	-	-
1614	100.0	37.7	-	78.0	70.4	- *
1616	43.6	178.9	97.1	124.4	116.8	51.8
1620	-	-	12.6	67.7	-	-
1638	-	44.6	-	65.1	-	-

^ (above 10 per cent)

* 84.1% in 1613

There is an overlap between the Axholme crisis years and those quoted by Schofield and Wrigley though not all parishes were equally affected as Appendix 2 indicates.⁴⁹ The incidence of plague in the sixteenth and, to a lesser extent in the seventeenth century, was an important factor in causing mortality crises especially in urban areas, but there were other outbreaks of fevers and other diseases which could reduce a village's population especially if it were weakened by the concurrence of poor harvest years,⁵⁰ and it has proved difficult to interpret which plague or infection had occurred.⁵¹ It is not possible to establish a simple and

clear correlation between harvest qualities as defined by Hoskins for mortality crises.⁵² The year 1591 was a bad one throughout the Isle, yet Hoskins categorises the harvest as 'good'; likewise, the year 1609-10 was 'average', but Haxey saw a mortality over 39.3 per cent. Only in 1613-14 was the harvest 'deficient' when many of the parishes experienced above average burials. Hoskins does not mention 1616, another bad year for all parishes, especially Belton, Crowle, Haxey, Luddington, and Owston.

The Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure has provided data on epidemics recorded for Haxey, which are summarised in Table 3.15.

Table 3.15 Epidemics in Haxey

Start	Finish	Maximum month	Duration (months)
May 1562	Jun 1562	May 1562	2
Aug 1590	Apr 1591	Aug 1590	9
Mar 1602	Mar 1602	Mar 1602	1
Oct 1608	Feb 1609	Nov 1609	5
Apr 1614	Jun 1614	May 1614	3
Aug 1616	Nov 1616	Sep 1616	4
Jan 1620	Feb 1620	Feb 1620	1
Aug 1623	Sep 1623	Sep 1623	2
Jan 1633	Apr 1633	Feb 1633	4
Aug 1636	Oct 1636	Sep 1636	3
Jul 1638	Sep 1638	Jul 1638	3

The epidemic of January to April 1633 was counted as having the greatest severity.⁵³ There were no baptismal records for 1562, but the number of burials was above the average for the decade, which was 30.7 per annum, compared with 53 for 1562.

Marriages

The pattern of marriages for all parishes for which data are available is given in Table 3.16

Table 3.16 Isle of Axholme - marriages

	1541	1551	1561	1571	1581	1591	1601	1611	1621	1631	Tot.
Bel	66	69	61	111	111	137	116	115	116	151	1053
Cro	-	-	-	11	52	90	77	81	189	201	701
Epw	6	-	138	192	227	92	178	204	42	-	1079
Hax	-	-	-	90	152	173	160	154	150	133	1012
Lud	-	-	-	-	-	11	80	69	8	-	168
Ows	-	-	-	-	-	16	100	100	16	-	232
Wro	-	-	-	8	10	17	7	9	12	13	76

The table indicates a gradual increase in the number of marriages, perhaps reflecting the increases in population, but the data are so defective for Epworth, Luddington, and Owston, that it is not really possible to come to a general conclusion about the overall pattern. Of greater interest is the annual patterns of marriages. (See Appendix 3 - p.324)

As with baptisms and burials, marriages showed a seasonality, but the pattern was both completely different and also more marked, 'with peaks in the early summer and autumn separated by a late summer trough and a chasm in March'.⁵⁴ The Catholic Church forbade marriage in Advent, early December, and in Lent, February to April, depending on the date of Easter. Even after the Reformation, when this law did not officially obtain in England, this pattern continued as old habits died hard.⁵⁵

The few marriages in the summer months coincided with the crop-gathering season while the two peaks marked the end of the 'crop-gathering' period,⁵⁶ that in May-July when farm animals had produced their young, and in October-November when the grain and other

crops, such as hemp and peas, had been harvested. It is probable that the peaks reflect economic conditions, when people knew by early summer how many animals their flocks and herd had produced, and when the quality of the harvest in the autumn was known. The patterns may also reflect the incidence of hiring fairs, which were held on May Day, Michaelmas (29 September), and Martinmas (11 November), and were thus times for making a fresh start, and 'to cast off the old status of dependency and assume the social responsibilities and rewards of marriage'.⁵⁷

Wrigley and Schofield comment on the geographical distribution of parishes with a peak either in autumn or early summer, suggesting that they represent the predominance of either arable (autumn marriages) or pastoral (summer marriages) farming.⁵⁸ Thirsk argued that pastoral farming predominated in Axholme, to be replaced by arable farming when Vermuyden introduced his drainage scheme,⁵⁹ yet Kussmaul categorised Haxey's agricultural economy as predominantly arable.⁶⁰ Kussmaul comments that arable farming was the most seasonal, whose busiest period was the grain harvest, which could begin as early as late July in the southern counties. Ploughing in the spring and autumn were also busy times.⁶¹ Her 'A-types', that is, mainly arable farmers, married in the autumn; 'mixed' areas (the term used by Thirsk to mean grain-growing whatever else the parish did) were not spring-marrying. 'Wood pasture' and 'open pasture' type contained more than twice the expected number of spring-marrying 'A-types'.⁶²

Because of this conflict of view, and to compare Axholme patterns of baptisms and marriages with other parts of England - the baptisms were included in case there were variations in peak period between the different types of parishes - it was decided to examine the baptismal and marriage patterns in a number of parishes across the whole of England, by selecting parishes designated as 'arable' or 'pastoral' by Kussmaul and comparing the categorisations in *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*.⁶³ Kussmaul has three classifications - arable, pastoral, and rural industrial, while there are three types in *The Population History of England* - open pasture, woodland pasture, and mixed farming; there is

no 'arable' category.⁶⁴ It must be explained that these descriptions of the parishes are based on Thirsk's, 'The farming regions of England and Wales'.⁶⁵

Forty-five parishes were examined for their parish characteristics, and data for their baptisms and marriages, on a monthly basis for the period 1540-1640 were logged and graphs produced.⁶⁶ Baptisms were included to establish if there were any variations in patterns between the different categories. It became clear that Kussmaul's classifications were often at variance with those from *The Population History of England*, so that her 'arable' was 'mixed' or even 'pastoral', and 'pastoral' were 'arable'. A few examples will illustrate this: Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, she classifies as 'arable', but Wrigley and Schofield state that it is 'mixed'; Ledbury, Herefordshire, she categorises as 'arable', whereas they see it as 'open pasture, with rearing and fattening of stock'; and Tatenhill in Staffordshire is seen by Kussmaul as 'arable', but *The Population History of England* sees it as 'mixed - corn and stock'⁶⁷.

Though the 45 parishes' data may not be fully representative of the type of agriculture assigned to it by Kussmaul or by Wrigley and Schofield, certain patterns emerge when graphs are drawn for the marriages and baptisms. First, the month of March had the least number of marriages, closely followed by December for all groups, indicating that the old regulations forbidding them in Lent and Advent were still closely adhered to. Open pasture parishes tended to have the maximum number of marriages between May and July, with another, smaller, peak in November; woodland pasture parishes had similar value maxima in both the summer months of May and June and in November; the maximum period for mixed parishes was November, with a smaller peak in March and June. The pattern of baptisms for all categories of agricultural type was similar, with the major peak in spring, March and April, and with another, lesser, peak between September and November.

Bearing this in mind, it is relevant to ask first what sort of pattern obtained in the Isle of Axholme for the period 1540-1640, and secondly how these results compare with Kussmaul's and Thirsk's conclusions. The graphs of the marriage data for four of the parishes are contained in Appendix 3 (see p. 301); it must be explained that the Y-axis shows

the number of marriages. The significant feature of all the graphs is that the maximum number of marriages occurs in November, with a secondary peak between May and July. The number of marriages is at a minimum in May and December, illustrating that the 'forbidden' period was observed, and there was another trough between August and September, a period when the grain was harvested. From these patterns it may be concluded that the agriculture in Axholme was mixed, a fact that is borne out by information from both inventories and wills.

Because few parish registers indicate the status of individuals who married, it has been possible to try to identify second marriages only in Epworth, Haxey, Luddington, and Owston. The last named had only one second marriage, in 1609; Epworth had five, centred round the period 1565 to 1574; Haxey had eighteen between 1574 and 1612, with a large cluster (11) in the period 1601 to 1609; and Luddington had ten between 1606 and 1616. Of those who remarried all except one were widows. This would seem to indicate the need for women to have male support from a financial view and providing some stability. As will be seen in a later chapter, a widow was, at least theoretically, entitled to one-third of her husband's estate, and the terms of wills bears this out. The problem arose when there was insufficient land or goods to live on. Evidence regarding the gap between bereavement and remarriage has been possible with only six widows, and even here the information has to be regarded with care because of the prevalence of certain surnames, which makes it difficult to identify persons with any degree of certainty. The shortest period appears to be two months between Elizabeth Pointer being widowed at the beginning of February 1601/2 and remarrying on 24 April 1602, and the same applies to Marie Johnson, whose husband Thomas was buried on Christmas Eve 1609, who celebrated her second marriage on 9 February 1609/10. The other intervals between widowhood and remarriage varied from seven months to three years and nine months.

A total of 3899 marriages was recorded in the seven parishes though there were almost certainly more when the gaps in the registers are considered. Most of the couples, it is assumed from lack of any other evidence, married someone from his or her own parish;

where a marriage was solemnised with a person from outside the parish it was recorded though the usual caveat has to be given regarding the under-recording of information. From all the registers only 66 men came from outside their brides' parishes, and only 26 women came from outside their husbands' parishes. Marriage horizons outside the 'home' parish were mainly limited to either the next parish or one nearby. The furthest distances were between Epworth and Lincoln, about 27 miles in a direct line, and Luddington and Hull, a distance of twenty miles. Table 3.17 summarises the distances of marriage horizons for both men and women - all distances have been calculated in straight lines.

Table 3.17 Marriage horizons.

Miles	Men	Women
1 - 5	38	16
6 - 10	21	8
11 - 15	3	1
16 - 20	2	0
21 - 25	1	0
26 - 30	2	1
Total	67	26

It can be seen that the majority of marriages outside the 'home' parish was limited to a cent for women. The pattern of marriage horizons in the Isle of Axholme compares well with those investigated by Mary Carter in her study of St Ives in Huntingdonshire though she deals with an later period as well as an urban environment in that marriages were limited to the immediate or nearby parish, with few seeking spouses from greater distances.⁶⁷ It is possible that some of the Axholme marriages were between servants and apprentices, thus accounting for the movement between parishes, but the registers generally lack such information.

Illegitimacy

Illegitimate children, here defined as children born out of wedlock even if the parents subsequently married, were recorded in the baptismal and burial records in a variety of ways: *spurius (-ia)*, bastard child/son/daughter, base born, supposed son/daughter, and illegitimate. Illegitimacy was not a major problem in the Isle as Table 3.18 demonstrates.

Table 3.18 Illegitimacy

Parish	Period of register	Total baptisms	Number	Percentage
Belton	1541-1640	3877	67	1.73
Crowle	1561-1640	2766	31	1.12
Epworth	1540-1627	2803	21	0.75
Haxey	1560-1640	3604	36	1.00
Luddington	1599-1628	618	21	3.40
Owston	1599-1623	4	4	0.50
Wroot	1573-1640	285	1	0.35
Total	-	14770	160	1.10 (av)

Though life expectancy for children born in wedlock may have been no better nor worse - and it is outside the scope of this study - particularly in what would have been a very damp environment during the winter months, especially in low lying parishes such as Crowle, Owston, and Luddington, it was considered worthwhile to examine the burial records for life expectancy for illegitimate children. Only 61 burials of these children could be traced, and Table 3.19 (below) provides the analysis. Contrary to what might be expected, few children, only 6.5 per cent, died on their first day, but just over a third (34.4 per cent) died between their first week and first month. The highest proportion (27.9 per cent) died in their first five months, followed by a further 16.4 per cent who died within their first year. It is difficult to understand why some children died after surviving for a month though it is possible that such children were weak when born. An analysis for any pattern of months when children died

within their first month of life reveals that there was no month outstanding, though March had four and August three deaths; the only month when there were no deaths was July. Table 3.19 summarises the life expectancy of illegitimate children.

Table 3.19 Life expectancy of illegitimate children.

Period	Number of deaths
1 day	4
2-7 days	8
8-20 days	8
21-30 days	3
1-5 months	17
6-12 months	10
1-3 years	6
4-10 years	3
Over 10 years	2

It has been possible to trace only one couple, Elizabeth Brickenhall and Robert Goldsmith, both from Belton, who had two children out of wedlock in 1625 and 1627/8, who subsequently married. Others are recorded as having illegitimate children, sometimes with more than one partner. Robert Foster of Belton sired two children with different mothers, who are not named, and a female surnamed Whittingin gave birth to William by Thomas Huld and Francisca by Christopher Thwaite. Elizabeth North from Haxey gave birth to two children, Elizabeth and William in 1620 and 1626 respectively, but the father was not named. More examples can be drawn from the other parishes.

Luddington's marriage register makes a distinction between 'base born' and 'supposed son/daughter', suggesting that those 'base born' were born out of wedlock, but no later marriages between the couples have been found; it is possible that they moved away from the parish. The 'supposed' category provides an insight into marital infidelities though it is

usually impossible to trace the erring partner as the term is applied to the married couple. There were eight couples in Luddington who bore children where the fatherhood was in doubt, and this almost certainly was true in other parishes though the registers give no indication.

The stain of illegitimacy was not easily forgotten for burial records mention it even after considerable periods of time. Thomas Chadwick of Belton, whose mother was Anne and father Thomas Bernard, died when he was five years and seven months old, but his illegitimacy was recorded in the register. Similar fates befell Isabel Milnes from Haxey and Elizabeth Searsby, who both died in their fourth year. The most amazing record was that of Thomas Jackson of Belton, whose father was recorded at baptism as William Storie, and who when he was buried was referred to as 'alias Storie' thirty-five years later.

Occasionally, glimpses of the attitude towards an illegitimate birth peep out from the bleak records of *spurius*, 'bastard child of. . .', and so on. On 3 April 1631, the parish priest of Belton, having baptised Elizabeth Tomson, noted she was the 'daughter of Dorothy, wife of William Tomson, third day [of April]. The mother of this child in time of her labour would not confess to the midwife and other women present that she was with child, and after the birth she said that Thomas Ashwell was the father of it'. The same register in August 1639, on the baptism of Timothy Emerson, records he is 'the son of Margaret. The mother at the birth thereof would not grant [crossed through and illegible] the name of the father [illegible] register the father'. One can only speculate at the domestic storms that arose on the revelations that an expected child was illegitimate.

Yet not everyone adopted a solemn attitude towards illegitimate offspring. Robert Caister, a yeoman from Belton, who died in 1600, left a will in which his illegitimate offspring were left bequests. From the tone of the will, Robert must have been something of a 'character', for he left to 'Hugh Caister, alias Davie, reputedly the son of Robert Caister £20 at the age of 21 years', and the money was 'to be put to use', that is, invested, possibly as a loan. To Robert Caister, alias Dickenson, 'reputed son of Robert Caister [the testator] £30 at the age of 21 years', and the money was to be 'put to use'. Robert Caister also left three

pounds to the poor people of Belton, and fifteen shillings to the young men of Belton 'to be merry withall', and William Sandall was to supervise. To John Farr, gentleman and steward of Epworth Court, he left 'one pecke of peares called Bishopsballacks everye yeare duringe his naturall life'.⁶⁸

Studies of individual parishes

Because a full reconstruction for only a single parish in Axholme, such as Haxey, which had 3604 baptisms, 3033 burials, and 1012 marriages between 1560 and 1640, would have involved an inordinate amount of work, which would not have related closely to the subject of this study - and reconstructions of seven parishes would have presented an insuperable task for one person - sampling has been used to illustrate different aspects of population changes in four parishes: Haxey, Wroot, Luddington, and Belton. The parishes were chosen for a number of reasons, but particularly because the data for their chosen sample periods were as full as might reasonably be expected.

HAXEY

The baptisms for the period 1571-1580 were noted, and subsequent vital events were traced to analyse subjects such as age at marriage, age at death, and possible migration. The period was chosen because it had no obvious gaps in the baptismal records, that is, the number of baptisms per month for each year was fairly consistent, and was sufficiently early for possible marriages and deaths to be traced. It is necessary, however, to make the caveat that the information so derived is tentative because of the difficulty of distinguishing between persons with the same name when marriages or deaths are recorded: for example, there were three Johis Barrow(e) and three Agneta Jaques. Some certainty is possible with burial records if the person concerned dies at an early age as the records usually contain the information 'son/daughter of. . .'

There were 335 baptisms recorded for the period 1571-1580, and of those 74 marriages and 67 burials have been traced with reasonable certainty. The balance between the

sexes was 175 males and 160 females. Because there was always the possibility of marriages occurring outside Haxey, the database, which contains details of marriages for all parishes except Luddington, was searched,⁶⁹ and the index of burials only for Haxey was used on the grounds that searching all indexes would consume valuable time. The marriage database gave an indication of those who had remained in Axholme as well as their age at marriage. Table 3.20 shows the age at marriage for men and women.

Table 3.20 Age at marriage - Haxey.

Age at marriage (years)	Men	Women	Total
16 - 20	1	10	11
21 - 25	12	17	29
26 - 30	10	8	18
31 - 35	3	7	10
36 - 40	3	2	5
41 - 45	1	1	2
Total	30	45	75

From Table 3.20 it is clear that the majority of marriages for both men and women were solemnised between the ages of 21 and 30 years, when men would be fairly certain about their likely form of employment, and when women were still at an age to be both fertile for the safe conception and for birth of a child.

It might be thought that marriage at an early age was through necessity, but this was not so. The youngest woman to marry was Isabella Kelsey, who married Ralph Harrison at the age of 19 years 4 months, on 15 January 1591/2, yet no baptism was recorded until 13 September 1598 though it is possible that the records are defective or the baptism was performed elsewhere. Jane Marr married Richard Rowsley at the age of 18 years 9 months on 12 May 1598, but there is no record of a baptism in Haxey until 10 April 1603. The

youngest male to marry was John Travis at the age of 20 years 10 months on 9 February 1590/1, but there are no further traces of him.

At the other end of the age range Daniel Tompson was married at the age of 45 years 5 months to Anna Childe on 17 January 1618/9. There is a record of a baptism of Anna Childe in Haxey on 6 April 1597, which would have made her about twenty when she married. A child, Elizabeth was born on 15 October 1620 with the father named as Daniel Tompson, but there are no further records of baptisms. The oldest woman to have married late in life was Susanna Kelsey, at the age of 41 years 8 months. She married Richard Sampson on 25 November 1616, and a child was baptised with Richard named as father on 14 September 1617.

As indicated above, 67 burials from the 1571-1580 cohort have been traced, and Table 3.19 provides a somewhat compressed analysis of age at death, in that the age ranges for the first years of life have been compressed. Infant mortality was quite high, with one-quarter (9) of male children dying within the first month, and one-fifth (6) of female children dying in the same period. Over two-fifths (44 per cent) of male children died within their first year, while 24 per cent of female children died within the same period. In spite of all the above information concerning the 75 marriages and 67 burials of this cohort of Haxey inhabitants, it must be remembered that this represents information available on under two-fifths (39.4 per cent) of them, which means that over sixty per cent 'disappear' from the registers. It is assumed that this percentage of the population migrated out of the parish, either with their parents, or moved to find work. If this proportion of people from one ten-year period migrated, then there must have been an inward migration to produce the population increase between 1548 and 1603. Table 3.21 summarises the age at burial in Haxey.

Table 3.21 Age at burial - Haxey.

Age at burial	Males	Females
1 day - 1 year	16	7
1 - 5 years	3	7

6 - 10 years	2	2
11 - 20 years	1	3
21 - 30 years	3	3
31 - 40 years	1	5
41 - 50 years	4	4
51 - 60 years	5	0
61 and over	1	0

WROOT

Wroot was the smallest of the Axholme parishes, with a population estimated at 86 in 1603,⁷⁰ and 253 in the 1642 Protestation Returns.⁷¹ This would indicate an increase in the population of nearly 170. Between 1603 and 1640, there were recorded 214 baptisms and 90 burials, though the burial register has very large gaps, especially from 1598 to 1612, which means that it is impossible to calculate the natural increase. For the years 1571 to 1600, there were 82 baptisms and 65 burials, giving a natural increase of 17 - the 1548 Ecclesiastical Census did not mention Wroot so it is not possible to make any correlation between the population then and in 1603. For the whole of the period 1571 to 1640, there were 285 recorded baptisms and 155 burials.

The parish was chosen for a partial reconstitution because of its small size though the gaps in the burial registers are a particular problem. In the study of this parish, the concentration was on marriages, of which there were 75 celebrated between 1571 and 1640. Wroot presents a similar problem to that of Haxey in that of the 75 marriages there is further information in the baptismal records for only 25 couples; thus only one-third can be accounted for, which suggests that, either there was major under-recording of baptisms, or there was not only emigration on a large scale, but also migration inwards since the 25 marriages produced only 52 children compared with the 285 baptisms quoted above.

The intervals between a marriage and the baptism of the first and subsequent children is given in Table 3.22.

Table 3.22 Intervals between marriage and first and subsequent children in Wroot.

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Child 4	Child 5
Minimum	4 months	10 months	1yr. 5 months	1 yr. 5months	1yr. 3 months
Maximum	3 yr. 1 month	6yr. 7 months	5yr. 7 months	3yr. 5 months	3yr. 6 months

Apart from the one instance when a marriage was followed four months later with a baptism, the majority of married couples waited several months before conceiving a child - nine out of twenty-one - and many waited much longer. Most couples waited at least two years before the conception of a second child, and the same applies to third and fourth children. It has been possible to trace with any certainty only five children from the 52 alluded to who subsequently married in Wroot, suggesting that the majority of children moved away from the parish.

LUDDINGTON

As has been indicated earlier, there are no parish records extant for the period, and even the Bishop's Transcripts, which extend from 1599 to 1621 and 1625 to 1627, are often in a poor condition. The records are almost certainly incomplete, possibly because of flooding during the winter months, making access to the church impossible - a John Simson was buried on 21 March 1605/6, having drowned in the river Don,⁷² and the difficulty of keeping them in damp conditions..

Luddington was a medium-sized parish by Axholme standards, with an estimated population of 587 in 1603, and 537 in 1642.⁷³ Though the records cover only a relatively short period, they have the advantage of offering a snapshot of a fairly remote community not only because they give baptisms, burials, and marriages, but also because they record occupations of fathers. The number of occupations, especially tailors - there were fourteen - raises the question of how such a size of community could support so many. The presence of

gentry is indicated and also the presence of a glover, which suggest that Luddington may have served a wider hinterland, perhaps because of its position, on the Trent and not far removed from the confluence of the river Don and the Humber. There was no market chartered, so it is difficult to reconcile the number of 'luxury' occupations with what was, and is, an unwelcoming hinterland.

Not all the fathers' occupations are given - in fact, 89 per cent have been named - but where they do it is possible to analyse the number of children for social groups, baptism intervals, the balance between the sexes, and the date-ranges for entries, indicating the possible transience of families. The records present certain difficulties in that some entries show persons with the same name as having a different social status, particularly in the agricultural workers' group, for example, the name Rychard Johnson is entered as a yeoman in April, 1615, when his wife appears to have given birth to twins because the baptisms are entered on the same day, yet a Richard Johnson is described as a husbandman in September, 1617. As it is possible that such homonymic entries refer to different persons, especially when there are variants in spelling, they have been considered separately. The craftsmen present fewer difficulties, the more intractable being Steven Good, who is described as a ploughwright, and a 'cordiner' (shoemaker). In this instance, he is categorised as a ploughwright even though he may have had a dual occupation.

Five occupational groups have been identified from the baptismal records: gentlemen; clerks; agricultural (labourers, husbandmen, and yeomen); craftsmen (blacksmith, carpenter, ploughwright, tanner, weaver, and wheelwright); and tradesmen (baker, butcher, fishermen, glover, millers, shoemakers, tailors, and a vitler). Luddington appears to have had a number of gentry connections as a number of weddings was solemnised between their members and local women between 1603 and 1612: Edward, the son of Lord Willoughby, married Prudence Burrell in 1603; Robert Evington, gent, married Bridgett Editon in 1611; and Francis Williamson, gent, married Anne Ranald in 1612. No baptisms resulting from these marriages are recorded in the Luddington transcripts. Two burials of gentry are also given,

that of Mr Gates in 1614 and that of William Plumpton, gent, in 1621, and there are several burials of gentry outside the period, who are most likely to have been living there before 1640.

Table 3.23 summarises the numbers of people in each occupational group.

Table 3.23 Occupations in Luddington.

Category	Occupation	Number	Sub-Total
Agriculture	Labourers	64	-
	Husbandmen	19	-
	Yeomen	48	131
Craftsmen	Blacksmith	1	-
	Carpenters	3	-
	Ploughwrights	3	-
	Tanners	5	-
	Weavers	15	-
	Wheelwrights	3	30
Trades/Services	Bakers	2	-
	Butcher	1	-
	Fishers	3	-
	Glover	1	-
	Millers	2	-
	Shoemakers	3	-
	Tailors	16	-
	Vitler	1	29
Clerks/Professional	Clerks	3	3
Gentry	Gents	3	3

The balance between the agricultural workers is interesting in that the number of yeomen suggests that there was a high proportion of men who either were freeholders or had

rights as copyholders. The lower number of husbandmen might indicate that there was a greater emphasis on arable farming which the soils of Luddington would support, being of fertile silt carried down by flood waters from the river Trent.

An analysis of the baptism records show an overall balance between the sexes of children, and Table 3.24 gives the details according to occupational category.

Table 3.24 Balance between the sexes according to occupational group (Luddington).

Category	Males	Females
Agricultural	121	135
Craftsmen	29	22
Trades/Services	38	38
Professional	7	1
Gentry	1	1
Total	196	197

The total number of persons in all categories was 161, which yields an average number of children of 2.4.

In all occupational groups there was a tendency for the number of children after the third to diminish though one yeoman's family, Symon Gylliott's, had seven - five boys and two girls. A fisher's family had ten. Paul Stevenson's first child was born in May 1611, and what appear to be quads followed in 1613. There were two single births at intervals of one year two months and three years six months, after which it appears that twins were born one year three months after this. The tenth birth followed two years five months later. Though averages are not especially significant with such a small sample (161), especially where there is only one example of a particular frequency, for example, only one clerk had two children, the other had six, the intervals between the birth of the second and subsequent children are of interest. The average interval between first and second child for all occupational groups was 2.7 years, and the intervals for subsequent children upto the sixth centre round 2.8 years, after

which the period rises to 4.7 years for the seventh child, then drops to 1.8 years for subsequent children.

Within the relatively short span of the Luddington records fourteen remarriages have been detected. What is interesting with the three women whose spouses' burials are recorded there is that the gap between burial and remarriage was between two and four months. Of the three, the most interesting is that of Margaret Hollyday whose first husband, John, was buried on 18 March 1604/5. She married John Stephenson on 15 July 1605, but the marriage was doomed to last less than two years, for John died on 21 June 1607; John's burial record states that he was a widower and his wife's name is still given as widow Margaret Hollyday. After this, Margaret married Thomas Hutchinson on 12 October 1608 though there is no subsequent information on the couple. The short intervals between Margaret's marriages would perhaps indicate the need for widows without children to support them to find another partner as soon as possible. There are no children mentioned of the three unions.

BELTON

Belton is the largest parish in the Isle, extending over 8530 acres, and like the other Axholme parishes always had a low population density from 1548 to 1642 hovering around 0.14 persons per acre. It consists of a central settlement surrounded by a number of 'townships'. Like Haxey and Epworth, both of whose centres lie on the central spine of the Isle, it is a long, straggling parish, whose east-west axis is longer than its north-south, so that it incorporates both fertile arable soil and fenny, marshy land on its western edge.

For the purpose of studying Belton in some detail, the baptisms between 1591 and 1600 and subsequent rites of passage have been examined: in this way it should be possible to trace not only the fathers of those baptised in the decade, but also family connections to look at kinship links later in this study. In addition, the ages at marriage and burial of this group may also be considered. Such are the expectation, but, as with studies of other parishes, the sources of information dry up, leaving great gaps in any attempt to reconstruct the local community.

Between 1591 and 1600, 162 baptisms were recorded of whom information on only 83 is available in the form of marriage and burial data; thus 79 persons (48.8 per cent) 'disappear' from view. In this context it is worth explaining that the marriage database for all the parishes, with the exception of Luddington, has been scanned to ascertain whether those who 'disappeared' were married in a nearby parish, but no evidence for this has been forthcoming. Because of time constraints, the burial registers have not been examined. The proportion of 'missing' persons is lower than for Wroot (66.6 per cent) and Haxey (60 per cent), but it again raises the question of why such numbers of people should apparently be baptised in a parish never to appear again. Under-recording is one possible answer as is migration: Belton's registers appear to have been kept well - there is a consistency in the numbers of baptisms, marriages, and burials, which leaves migration as a possible answer. If it is, and it will be considered in greater detail in a later chapter, there must have been a compensating migration inwards.

Of the 161 children baptised, twenty died within a year of their birth, with fifteen of them failing to survive for a month; a further fifteen did not live to the age of five years. A total of 54 burials for the whole cohort has been found, and Table 3.25 gives the analysis.

Table 3.25 Age at burial for children baptised between 1591 and 1600 (Belton).

Upto	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Total
1 year	years							
No.	20	15	3	3	6	4	0	54

The above table helps to emphasise that a high proportion of those born in the parish were not buried there; it also highlights the fact that only about one-third of baptised children ostensibly were born and buried in Belton - 'ostensibly' because there is no evidence that they moved from their home parish and returned in time to be buried there.

Out of the 161 children baptised, the registers give evidence for only 33 persons in the group marrying in Belton. Table 3.26 provides the details of ages at marriage for both men and women.

Table 3.26 Ages at marriage in Belton.

	20 years or less	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	41-45 years	46 or over	Total
Men	0	3	3	5	2	0	1	14
Women	3	7	4	1	2	1	1	19

As with other parishes, more women than men married before the age of thirty, 73.6 per cent against 42.8 per cent. Women were, therefore, marrying at their most fertile time of life while men were probably establishing themselves in a secure occupation, thus delaying marriage until later. The seven persons who married over the age of 35 provide an interesting group though it has not been possible to trace whether any of them were remarriages - the registers give no indication of 'widow(er)'. Of them, however, three marriages contain sad details: Edward Aldus married Elizabeth Holmes on 25 May 1638, but Elizabeth had died in just over three years, being buried on 16 September 1641; Frances Caister who married Matthew Cawquell on 30 November 1636, was buried on 2 May 1645, and Matthew married again, to Elizabeth Maw, on 30 June 1645, which raises speculation at the speed of the remarriage so soon after his wife's death; and, finally, Anna Foster married John Beck on 25 May 1639, and her marriage lasted only until 22 May 1643.

Summary

The examination of parish registers and ecclesiastical surveys in Axholme has revealed that the natural increase in the population grew in a similar fashion to that in the rest of England though it was not uniform throughout the parishes. A high level of migration, both inwards and outwards, as demonstrated in Haxey, meant that the difference between

1603 and 1642 was +464, if the census returns are considered generally accurate, compared with a natural increase of +1,342 (see Table 3.10). The seasonality of baptisms was typical of a mixed agricultural economy, as were the marriages, which also adhered to the ecclesiastical prohibitions extant in Advent and Lent. Marriage for men tended to be in their mid-twenties while women married earlier, but not because of pregnancy. Often there was a gap of more than a year before the birth of a first child, and subsequent children usually spaced at two or three year intervals. Mortality crises occurred at similar times to the rest of England though Axholme experienced others, some of which must have been devastating on a relatively small community, such as occurred in Haxey in between January 1591 and December 1592 when 197 burials were recorded, representing over 20 per cent of the estimated population.

Three factors had important effects on the size and composition of the local communities. First, the changes in population brought about by natural increase and by inward migration produced demands on land and for housing; Thirsk's observations on the increase in the number of houses in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have already been noted. Belton, Epworth, and Haxey, all on the central spine of the Isle, experienced large natural increases (1,145) between 1600 and 1640, with the 1603 and 1642 census returns showing an increase of 947. Epworth sandwiched between Belton and Haxey had relatively little room for expansion to provide more arable land, while the others, though similarly situated, enjoyed intercommoning, Haxey with Misterton, Belton with Crowle; there were, however, disputes about encroachment *inter alia*. It is probable that in Haxey attempts were made to improve the drainage of the carr land in the reign of Elizabeth I, as the Snow Sewer had a new channel called the Queen's New Sewer. Other parishes, such as Crowle, Luddington, and Owston, encountered declines in their populations which would indicate that houses were left vacant.

Secondly, though there was a nucleus of dominant families in all parishes, there was a constant turnover of population through migration. Outward migration, whether for subsistence or for betterment, loosened community bonds,⁷⁴ while inward migration

introduced more landless families from across the Trent who had lost their livings because of changes in agriculture or through failure of a settlement; such people were hungry for land, and Axholme was noted for the richness of its soils as well as being able to offer supplementary subsistence because of its terrain, which offered building materials, fishing, and fowling. These changes would in turn alter the structure of the local society and its economy.

Finally, the mortality crises occurring through plague or fever, possibly exacerbated by a run of harvest failures, produced stresses on both society and economy because recovery could take a long time. Although there is no direct evidence, it is possible that such crises made land available, either for expansion by current landholders or for inward migrants.

While changes in population produced pressures on land, and thereby on local communities and their economies, there were other tensions at work, namely inheritance practices. These will be considered in the following chapter.

¹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* and Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village* are two studies that pursue this theme.

² E.A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, (Cambridge, 1989), p.575, hereafter P.H.E.

³ P.H.E., pp. 569-70.

⁴ Sources: C.W. Foster and A.H. Thompson (eds), 'The chantry certificates for Lincoln and Lincolnshire. . . 1548', *LAASR XXVI*, part ii, C.W. Foster (ed), *The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, (Lincoln Record Society, 1926), and W.F. Webster (ed), *Protestation Returns 1641-2: Lincolnshire*, (Nottingham, 1984). I am most grateful to Dr. Stephen Wallwork of Nottingham for his guidance on multipliers and for his considerable help in explaining how to deal with gaps in parish registers.

⁵ These statistics are derived from White's *Directory of Lincolnshire*, (1857), various pages.

⁶ Dr. S. Wallwork of Nottingham in a personal communication. I am very grateful for his comments and advice for dealing with population calculations.

⁷ The term includes baptismal, marriage, and burial records.

⁸ The sources of information are microfiches of the original parish registers and Bishop's Transcripts, where available, supplemented by an excellent set of parish register indexes, and a CD-ROM of marriages produced by members of the Isle of Axholme Family History Society to whom I am deeply grateful. Fuller references are given in the Bibliography.

⁹ I am grateful to Professor J.V. Beckett for drawing my attention to his method of calculating the natural increase in population in Laxton and the effects of migration.

¹⁰ The registers for all parishes are on microfiches which have been supplied by Lincolnshire Archives Office.

¹¹ In a personal communication.

¹² In a personal communication.

¹³ C W Foster and A H Thompson (eds), 'The chantry certificates for Lincoln and Lincolnshire returned in 1548 under an Act of Parliament of 1 Edward VI', *The Architectural and Archaeological Society of the County of Lincoln XXXVI* (1922), Pt II, pp. 256-7.

¹⁴ Personal communication.

¹⁵ Personal communication from Fr A P Dolan.

¹⁶ The years are: 1575, 1578, 1580, 1581-2, 1586-1589, 1592, and 1594-5 (all inclusive).

- ¹⁷ I am grateful for these details obtained from an index of the registers compiled by members of the Isle of Axholme Family History Society.
- ¹⁸ S. Wallwork, 'Population estimates before the Census: Nottingham, 1570-1801', *East Midland Historian* 9 (1999), pp. 35-42.
- ¹⁹ The information needed is the estimated population for a given year and the average number of baptisms and burials over a period of years from which are derived two multipliers. An example will illustrate the method. Belton - estimated population in 1603 = 1,162. Average number of baptisms per annum 1591-1610 is 48.7. The multiplier is derived by dividing 1,162 by 48.7, which gives 23.9. A similar method is used for burials. The estimated population in 1541 is arrived at by multiplying the average number of baptisms 1541-50 by the multiplier, thus, 35.8 x 23.9 = 856. By using the burial multiplier and the average number of burials for the same period, i.e. 30.7 x 25.5 = 782, and calculating the midpoint the estimated population is arrived at, namely 819. Dr. S. Wallwork in a personal communication.
- ²⁰ Information needed - the total number of events, baptisms and burials, and the number of months with records over a decade. For example, the number of baptisms = 500, number of months = 100, giving an average of 5 per month. Over a decade = 5 x 120 = 600, the estimated number of baptisms.
- ²¹ Taken from the Ecclesiastical Census and Protestation Returns respectively. Dr. S. Wallwork in a personal communication.
- ²² A common multiplier such as $1\frac{1}{3}$ can be converted to 1.3 or 1.33. An estimate of 810, for example, can thus be 1053 or 1077 when the multiplier is used, a 4.2 percent difference.
- ²³ A. Mitson, 'The significance of kinship networks in the seventeenth century: south-west Nottinghamshire', in C. Phythian-Adams (ed.), *Societies, Cultures, and Kinship, 1580-1850* (Leicester, 1993), p. 51.
- ²⁴ The CD-ROM produced by the Isle of Axholme Family History Society was invaluable for helping in the checks.
- ²⁵ The difference between this figure and the one for transients in Table 3.10 is accounted for by the eclectic method of selecting surnames in the broad survey.
- ²⁶ D. Marcombe, *English Small Town Life: Retford, 1520-1642*, (Nottingham, 1993), pp.26-7.
- ²⁷ P. Laslett, 'The study of social structure from the listings of inhabitants', in E. A. Wrigley (ed), *An Introduction to English Historical Demography*, (1966), p. 165.
- ²⁸ M. Turner, *Kith and Kin: Nidderdale Families, 1500-1750*, (Summerbridge Tutorial Group, 1995), p.83.
- ²⁹ R. Head *et al*, 'Sites and finds from Axholme', in R. Van de Noort and S. Ellis (eds), *Wetland Heritage of the Ancholme and Lower Trent Valleys*, (Humber Wetlands Project, University of Hull, 1998), p. 282.
- ³⁰ D. and S. Neeve, 'Rural population and land use in Humberside from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century', in S. Ellis and D. R. Crowther, *Humber Perspectives* (Hull, 1990), p. 381, with a quotation from the John Ryland's Library, Manchester University, Ryland Charters 2550a.
- ³¹ W. F. Webster, *Protestation Returns 1641-2: Lincolnshire and Protestation Returns 1641-2: Nottinghamshire* (Mapperley, Nottinghamshire, 1984), various pages. It has not been possible to obtain any information for Yorkshire.
- ³² F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Morals and the Church Courts*, (Essex Record Office, 63, 1973), pp.216-7.
- ³³ C. Holmes, *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire*, (1980), p. .54.
- ³⁴ C. Holmes, *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire*, (1980), p. .54.
- ³⁵ Emmison, p. 217.
- ³⁶ The calculations have been made by dividing the number of baptisms (or burials) by the estimated population then multiplying by one thousand.
- ³⁷ D. E. C. Eversley, 'Exploitation of Anglican parish registers by aggregative analysis', in E. A. Wrigley (ed), *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (1966), pp.54-5.
- ³⁸ J. Thirsk, 'The Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* 1 (1953), p.24. Unfortunately, Dr Thirsk does not give the source of this information. Hereafter Thirsk, 'Axholme'.
- ³⁹ D. E. C. Eversley in E. A. Wrigley (ed), *An Introduction to English Historical Demography* (1966), p.264.
- ⁴⁰ Graphs showing baptisms together with burials for all parishes are in Appendix 1, pp. 315-321.
- ⁴¹ *PHE*, p.286.
- ⁴² *PHE*, p.289.
- ⁴³ *PHE*, p.291.

⁴⁴ PHE, pp.291-2.

⁴⁵ PHE, pp.293-5.

⁴⁶ PHE, p.332.

⁴⁷ PHE, p.332.

⁴⁸ PHE, p.332.

⁴⁹ PHE, p. 333.

⁵⁰ The devastating effects of influenza after World War I, which produced a very high mortality, may be recalled here.

⁵¹ PHE, p. 668.

⁵² W. G. Hoskins, 'Harvest fluctuations and English economic history, 1480-1619' in W. E. Marchinton (ed), *Essays in Agrarian History* Vol. I (1968), pp.93-116. C. J. Harrison offered a different approach from Hoskins's statistics, but, on consideration, his categorisations of harvest qualities differ only occasionally in degree from those of Hoskins, see C. J. Harrison, 'Grain price analysis and harvest qualities, 1465-1634', *Agric. Hist. Rev.* 19 (1971), pp.135-155.

⁵³ 'Severity ratio: factor by which an observed monthly frequency (corrected for seasonality) exceeds the value forecast on the basis of recent (non-crisis) mortality' - the definition given by CAMPOPS.

⁵⁴ PHE, p.298.

⁵⁵ This writer is aware of an Anglican church where these Advent and Lent prohibitions were still in force until a few years ago.

⁵⁶ PHE, p.303 where the term is used.

⁵⁷ PHE, p.303.

⁵⁸ PHE, p.303.

⁵⁹ Thirsk, 'Axholme', p.17.

⁶⁰ Kussmaul, *A General View of the Rural Economy of England, 1538-1840*, p.188. Hereafter Kussmaul, *Rural Economy*.

⁶¹ Kussmaul, *Rural Economy*, p.15.

⁶² Kussmaul, *Rural Economy*, p.68.

⁶³ The Local Population Studies Society has issued a CD-ROM (1998), which contains the baptismal, burial and marriage data from the 404 parishes originally surveyed, and this has been used in making the comparisons between 27 parishes. The information contained in this CD includes the categorisation of the farming-type using Thirsk's for the period 1540-1640 (see fn. 41), and the complete listing of all baptismal, burial and marriage data.

⁶⁴ This statement is made having scanned the details of the parish characteristics for most of the parishes on the CD-ROM.

⁶⁵ In J. Thirsk (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* IV, (1967), pp.1-112.

⁶⁶ Using the CD-ROM mentioned in footnote 39.

⁶⁷ Kussmaul, *Rural Economy*: Aylesbury, p. 183, Ledbury, p. 186, Tattenhill, p. 191. The CD-Rom is not paginated.

⁶⁸ M. Carter, 'Town or urban society? St Ives in Huntingdonshire, 1630-1740', in C. Phythian-Adams (ed), *Societies, Cultures, and Kinship, 1580-1850* (1993), pp.84-6.

⁶⁹ LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 111 Robert Caister, yeoman, Belton.

⁷⁰ See footnote 4 above.

⁷¹ C. W. Foster, *The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*,

⁷² W. F. Webster, *Protestation Returns 1641-2: Lincolnshire*, p. 84-5.

⁷³ The present writer visited the present day church where he met a churchwarden, who not only informed him that burials took place in the north side of the churchyard because the other parts were subject to flooding, but also that a field adjacent to the church, lying between it and the river Trent was called Churchfield, but it was often flooded in winter when a combination of high tides in the Trent and an excess of water coming down the river resulted in flooding.

⁷⁴ W F Webster, *Protestation Returns 1641-2: Lincolnshire*, p.80.

⁷⁵ M. Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England*, (Cambridge, 1998), p. 45.

Chapter 4 Inheritance customs and practice

Inheritance customs are one of the major determinants of a community's economy, and, therefore, of its social structure. By using the evidence from wills, inventories, deeds, parish registers, and Calendars, this chapter will investigate how land and other items were bequeathed, showing how such dispositions affected families and thus the economy and society of the communities concerned. This chapter will also concern itself with the findings of other writers on inheritance customs elsewhere in England and in northern France.

In Axholme, in broad terms, a man's estate was divided amongst his wife and children, or, in their absence, amongst near kin. The subdivisions of land led ultimately to areas too small to support a family so that secondary occupations developed to help supplement the family income. Such small portions of land were likely to be bought up by the larger landowners, who were able to raise money to purchase such portions so that their holdings increased in size and profitability, and who subsequently subdivided their holdings when drawing up their wills. To determine how fair the divisions of land and goods were to heirs, comparisons will be made of their relative values, and consideration will be given to the burdens placed on the major inheritor when he was obliged to provide for his siblings when they reached the age of majority.

Studies of inheritance customs

Although there were different customs throughout England, ¹ the main types were primogeniture and partible inheritance, and the following looks at some of the studies. In its 'purest' form, primogeniture benefited only the eldest son though, in practice, testators often made provision for other children through gifts of small parcels of land or money. Where primogeniture existed, there was a tendency for those who had not inherited to move away, hence weakening family and community links: Where money had been provided for the 'secondary' heirs, this removed sources of finance from the local economy. By contrast, partible inheritance tended to benefit all the members of a family, or their kin, but it resulted in

landholdings diminishing in size, until ultimately they were too small to support a family. Initially, partible inheritance produced large, cohesive communities, but ultimately they could evolve into groups of impoverished peasants, though another consequence, especially in pastoral areas, where there was a surplus of labour, was that secondary occupations could develop to provide additional financial support for families. Although the differences between primogeniture and partible inheritance may have shaded into indistinguishable realities, perhaps Wrightson put his finger on the choices faced by testators as exemplified by his Durham examples:

Testators leaving behind them several young children not infrequently laid down instructions of extraordinary complexity for their executors, specifying the legacy which was to go to each child at a stated age, and laying down alternatives to be followed in the event of premature death of any of the children. Here was no rigid adherence to traditional inheritance customs, but rather the flexible adoption of whatever strategy seemed the best means of advantaging each child when it came to make its transition into the adult world.²

Wrightson continues that, where land was involved, there was a clear bias towards primogeniture in inheritance throughout England. This was not borne out in Axholme as will be illustrated later in the chapter.

Previous writers have tended to concentrate solely on the testamentary dispositions of land to heirs, because of their need for a legal right to title, and they have also concerned themselves with the effects of different customs on the community, but the scope of analyses has been widened to show both that daughters as well as sons inherited land, and also that moveables, such as furniture and even animals, were divided amongst children.³ By widening the scope of such analyses, the provision for widows and daughters has come into focus, revealing the thinking and intentions of testators in the provision of security for a bereaved wife and of her function in bringing up her children, and in the securing of daughters through the provision of dowries.

Thirsk and Spufford have concentrated on the disposition of land to sons;⁴ Thirsk saw primogeniture predominating in England from the sixteenth century onwards, but this was amongst the landed gentry;⁵ she conceded that partible inheritance was gaining ground in the sixteenth century when younger sons were also provided for: 'Local studies show that partible inheritance was a more widespread manorial custom than the nineteenth century writers on gavelkind believed'.⁶

In the Cambridgeshire villages studied by Spufford, the custom was primogeniture though often provision was made for younger sons by giving them small parcels of land from the estate; curiously, she discounts this division of land as having any effect on the disappearance of the middling landholder, but noted that in, Chippenham, 'the granting of a portion of land, which was not in itself adequate for support, to a younger son merely weakened the main [land]holding and made the engrosser's task easier'.⁷ In Orwell, primogeniture was the custom, 'but as much as possible seems to have been done for the other children',⁸ while, in Willingham, the main holdings were kept intact though well-to-do farmers tried to provide for other children.⁹

In her consideration of Kibworth Harcourt's inheritance customs, Howell noted that monogeniture was the custom in the early modern period, but it changed over the years. Like Wrightson's Durham testators, men felt obliged to provide for younger sons and also daughters at various stages of their lives. 'When a man died leaving minors he usually stipulated that his children should receive their portions when they were sixteen, eighteen, twenty-one, or when they married.' Thus, burdens were placed on the estate for years ahead. The subdivision of land eventually resulted in a minimally viable unit, which would make it 'economically suicidal to subdivide', so the land was inherited by one heir, but moveables, livestock and gear, were divided amongst the remaining children.¹⁰

Ladurie, in his analyses of the complex inheritance customs in northern France in the sixteenth century, has shown that the subdivisions of land resulted in holdings becoming too

small to be economical so that peasants took on additional work.¹¹ This picture applies to Axholme where secondary occupations, particularly in the production of cloth, developed.

The sources of evidence

The main source for exploring the inheritance patterns in Axholme is wills, with inventories, rentals, and deeds supplementing their information. In using wills for evidence of inheritance and family relationships, it is important to enter a caveat regarding how representative they are of the society as a whole, and how they are an accurate representation of what were the customs and practices, as well as considering the restrictions placed upon persons making wills.

Generally speaking, it was agreed by canon and common law that women were not allowed to make wills because their goods and chattels were passed to their husbands on marriage, and, apart from some dispensations, married women were not allowed to make wills as they, effectively, owned nothing. Widows and unmarried women, of course could, and did make wills.

Wills could not be made by men who had not achieved the age of majority, namely twenty-one years, but evidence from Axholme wills shows that some legatees were not to enter their inheritance until reaching the age of twenty-four: Thomas, the son of John Foster, a yeoman from Belton, whose will was proved in 1586-7, was to inherit a third of his mother's land and premises at twenty-four, having been left four acres and one rood of arable land, and one acre three roods of meadow while his widow, Alice, inherited two-thirds of all his premises until Thomas reached twenty-four.¹² There were, however, variants in the age of inheritance, one of which was fourteen years. John, the son of William Turner, a labourer from Haxey, who died in 1625, was to receive his father's freehold land at the age of fourteen, and he was to give his sister, Elizabeth, five pounds at the same age.¹³ Jethmell, the son of John Drewrye, a yeoman from Epworth who died in 1605, had two sisters, Alice and Jane, who were baptised in 1602 and 1604, respectively though there is no record for Jethmell, but it

may be assumed that he was born in, say, 1598. He was to inherit a house, croft, and meadow at the age of fourteen (1614), but receive land left to his sisters in 1623 and 1625. This would have complicated his ability to benefit financially from farming the land either by himself or by renting it out.¹⁴

To examine how representative wills were of a local society, it is worthwhile to look at two examples from Belton, where the parish priest entered a person's status or occupation from the year 1611 onwards at his or her burial. In 1614, there was a total of 76 burials for both sexes and all ages: males under twenty-one accounted for eleven; under-age females accounted for seventeen, and wives for fifteen. There were 42 burials in 1620, with ten under-age males, eight females, and ten wives. Table 4.1 provides information on the remainder.

Table 4.1 Representativeness of wills

Status	1614		1620	
	No. buried	No. wills	No. buried	No. wills
Widows	8	1	0	0
Labourers	10	1	4	0
Husbandmen	3	1	3	1
Yeomen	4	4	1	0
Craftsmen	4	1	3	1
Others	4	0	0	0
Total	33	8	13	2

From the information in the tables, it is clear that, apart from wives, only about one-quarter in 1614 and one-seventh in 1620 of the adult population made wills. Thus the information is incomplete, but this has to be accepted. A further complication is that the distribution of wills between the eight constituent parishes is extremely uneven. In the case of labourers' wills 96 per cent came from only three parishes, Belton (25 per cent), Crowle (17

per cent), and Haxey (54 per cent). The pattern for husbandmen showed that Belton, Epworth, and Haxey predominated with 73.9 per cent between them, whilst Owston produced 10.5 per cent, and the remainder 15.5 per cent. By contrast, the pattern for yeomen's wills was surprising in that there are relatively few for Epworth, 7.2 per cent, while Belton had 33.6 per cent, Haxey had 19.2 per cent, Crowle 13.6 per cent, Owston 12.0 per cent, and the remainder 12.6.

Inventories also were not representative of society:¹⁵ out of fifty labourers' wills only eight inventories have been found, with the same parishes providing the bulk of them - Belton (3), Crowle (2), and Haxey (1). There are 33 husbandmen's inventories, with Belton, Epworth, and Haxey accounting for 26 of them; there are eighteen yeomen's inventories of which twelve are accounted for by the same villages. Wherever possible, wills and inventories have been linked so that information in one document can supplement what is found in the other.

What is significant is that, if wills are taken by themselves as indicators of wealth, a grossly distorted picture would be obtained. A brief example will illustrate this: in 1588, Peter Beckwith, a labourer, who appears to have had no children, left William Turton his best doublet but one; James Casey received his best pair of hose but one; Robert Chambers was given a femble (hemp) sheet; and Robert Atkinson was to have Peter's worst pair of stockings but one. No mention is made of any other possessions, and one might assume that this was a family living in relative poverty - 'best' need not imply top quality. His inventory provides a different insight. Peter Beckwith's livestock were valued at £1 10s. 0d., his crops at £3 4s. 0d., his furniture at £1 8s. 0d, and amongst what may be termed 'luxury' items were two pewter candlesticks, two salts, pewter dishes, and painted cloths - the poor man's tapestry. The total value of his inventory was £19 16s. 2d. of which 17s. 6d. were owing to him in debts, and which was above the average value of labourers' of £14 7s. 6d.¹⁶

Deeds provide information on the sale and purchase of land, but like so much other evidence, they provide an incomplete picture as do Calendars, such as the Patent Rolls; as

ever, this paucity of evidence has to be accepted. Having examined the types of inheritance customs and their effects on several societies, and the sources of evidence, the way in which land, property, goods, and moveable to different members of the family group will now be explored, encompassing, at the same time, how dispositions were affected by family size and composition.

Provision for widows

As indicated earlier, a wife's property passed into her husband's possession on marriage, and, apart from some dispensations from this, wives did not make wills. At the death of her husband, therefore, a widow was theoretically left without any means of support or a place to live. The ecclesiastical law of the province of York, Wales, the city of London, and 'other great cities' protected the family of a deceased person who had not made a will: the widow was entitled to one-third of the moveables, the children likewise were entitled to one-third, so the head of a household could only bequeath the remaining third, known as 'the dead part'. 'This law of 'reasonable parts' had disappeared by 1500 in the province of Canterbury, where a man had the complete freedom to disinherit even his children and leave his wife penniless.'¹⁷ The Isle of Axholme was in the Lincoln diocese, which was part of the province of Canterbury, so there was no obligation on men to provide for their wives; in fact, they were rarely neglected though when they are named as residuary legatees their actual benefits are not clear.

In the wills of six yeomen, twelve husbandmen, and twenty labourers the widows were appointed as residuary legatees and executrices without any other bequests being specified, as happened for example, to Anne, the wife of Robert Popplewell, a yeoman from Belton.¹⁸ In this will, Robert's three sons were left nominal amounts of money, while his daughter, Elizabeth, was left a cottage 'in the tenure of Emmett Ashmall, a widow'.

In only nine out of 124 wills (7.25 per cent) were wives specifically left a third of their husbands' goods, lands, and chattels: Elizabeth, the wife of Richard Well, a husbandman

from East Lound, Haxey, who died in 1558, bequeathed 'unto Elizabeth my wife one house with the croft lying and being of the North Field of the highway of the aforesaid town of East Lound in the name of her thirds'.¹⁹ A higher proportion (22.6 per cent) were given a more generous bequest by being left 'all houses, lands, tenements, appurtenances, meadows, and pastures for the rest of her life natural', the last phrase a common form of wording in Axholme wills. The wife of John Parish, a yeoman from Belton (d.1591), left his wife Margaret two-thirds of all his freehold ground and half his leases during her life,²⁰ and John Foster, also a yeoman from Belton (d.1586-7), gave his wife two-thirds of his premises until his son Thomas was twenty-one, after which she received one-third for the remainder of her life.²¹ Another common form of bequest to a wife was the grant of a house with its land for a fixed period, usually until her children reached the age of twenty-one, for example, Dorothy, the wife of Robert Foster, a yeoman from Belton (d.1613), was to have the profits from his land and houses until his sons reached twenty-one.²² Sometimes the period is specified as a number of years, from which it is possible to estimate the age of the eldest child at the time the will was made, as with William Tailor, a husbandman from Belton (d. 1591), who left his wife, Anne, all his freehold lands, meadows, with a house and croft in Beltoft for fourteen years, after which it was to revert to his son, John. His wife was also, curiously, enjoined not to waste his wood!²³

About one-tenth of the wives were not left land or property, but household goods, animals, or money. Robert Barrow, a yeoman of Haxey (d.1598), left his wife, Isabel, a cart and a horse, together with the crop (unspecified as to type or area) of his land.²⁴ Hugh Moody, a husbandman of Haxey (d.1597), gave Gennett two cows, three horses, and all his household goods.²⁵ Alexander Caister, a yeoman from Belton, in 1605 bequeathed to his wife, Katherine, a bed and twenty shillings, while his eldest son was to give £10 per annum to his mother, no doubt encroaching on any profits he may have made from the farm. Another Moody, Christopher, a labourer of Haxey (d.1598-9), allowed his wife the use of his household goods for the remainder of her life.²⁶

The dissolution of the marriage bond at death, with the probability that the widow would remarry, is reflected in the return of 'goods brought to the marriage', and has already been referred to. The nature of these items is rarely specified though we gain occasional glimpses of the things a bride-to-be brought with her to the marriage. Elizabeth, the wife of Robert Pettinger, a labourer of Haxey (d.1582-3), had returned to her 'the best brass pot she brought to the marriage',²⁷ and the wife of Thomas Newburn, also a labourer from Haxey (d.1608), had returned 'all the goods which she brought to me within my house. Item one quy calf which is now at the stable, and ij stone of hemp, and one eke [meaning unknown] of turves next to the garthgate and ij metts of corn and the xx shillings which was given to her by the last will and testament of Henry Goldsmith her brother'.²⁸ As far as it has been possible to ascertain, Thomas Newburn's widow did not remarry.

Several testators made provisos in their wills for the remarriage of their spouses to ensure the integrity of their property, and to protect the interests of their children until they reached the age of majority. In 1605, James Popplewell, a yeoman from Belton, gave his wife all his lands and tenements, but if she were to remarry she had to 'lay in a good and sufficient bond by herself and other sufficient sureties for the true performance of this my Testament and last will, and for the educating and bringing up of every one of my said children during their several minorities'; this had to be done before she actually remarried.²⁹ A similar stipulation was laid upon Agnes, the wife of Robert Swindall, a husbandman of Belton (d.1591), who gave her the use of his land to bring up his children. If she remarried, her new husband was to find sufficient bonds for bringing up his children, and she would receive no benefit from his (Robert's) house and land.³⁰

Robert Caister, a yeoman from Belton (d.1599), left a very complicated will, the meaning of which is not absolutely clear.³¹ His wife, Frances, was left a house, a croft, and an orchard for twenty-one years on condition that she paid two shillings to his heirs, who were unspecified,³² together with a close of meadow of six acres for twenty-one years. If, however, she were to marry, she would retain only three acres of meadow, still paying two

shillings to his heirs. She was also given one-third of all his goods and chattels. The will then continues with the following:

upon this condition following, that is to say that she the said Frances shall not make any claim or pretend any title of dowry or thirds to any of my lands, tenements, or hereditaments either freehold or copyhold but make my heirs *the good release of all her rights and titles therein if the same be required* [italics mine] so that my heirs do confirm the grant of twenty-one years to be good. And if my wife refuse to make the said release in manner and form aforesaid then I will that she lose the whole benefit of all and singular the bequests and benefits and legacies before given to her.

This seems to suggest that what had been given by him could be taken away from her by his heirs, a particularly strange set of circumstances, especially as the remainder of his will is so generous to others outside his family, including £50 to his three illegitimate children, the money to be 'put to use', three pounds for the poor of Belton, nephews and nieces three pounds, amounting to a total of £66.

Some husbands wished to control their wives from beyond the grave, and signs of domestic acrimony show through the terms laid upon them. Thomas Maw, a yeoman of Epworth (d.1615), gave his wife a generous bequest of 'the messuage where she lives with all the buildings and the croft adjoining, and a close of meadow containing five acres' for the remainder of her life, on condition that 'she never troubles my three younger sons for no part or parcel of their several nine acres being both freehold and copyhold at any time for third or dower'.³³ William Taylor, a husbandman of Belton (d.1591), gave his wife all his freehold lands and meadows with a house and a croft for fourteen years and she was strongly adjured not to waste his woods.³⁴ Anne, the wife of another William Taylor, a husbandman of Epworth (d.1591), inherited all his freehold land and meadows with a house and croft for fourteen years, and similarly was enjoined to make no voluntary waste of wood.³⁵ Generally, wives were treated well, either being provided with their own accommodation and with food,

or being given part of a house left to a son. There was an acceptance that widows would remarry, and testators made provision to safeguard the rights of their own children.

Inheritance patterns in Axholme: effects of family size and composition

As has already been pointed out, earlier writers concentrated on how land was bequeathed to sons, but Erickson has drawn attention to a wider picture of how land and moveables were transmitted to daughters as well as sons,³⁶ and this section will address this wider picture in relation to Axholme.

It is clear from the wills that, a widow having been provided for, the pattern of inheritance was partible if land and moveables are considered though the division was not necessarily equal in real or valuation terms. This pattern persisted throughout the period, 1530-1640. The contents of wills are not easy to divide into distinct compartments, such as money or household goods, as there are often overlaps, but it was decided to create five categories of disposition:³⁷ land; land and money; money only; household goods and moveables (though it is difficult to separate out land and money when they are included in a will); and animals. It is clear that the penultimate category is a 'catch-all', but how a man's whole estate was divided up needed consideration. At the same time some cognisance has been made of the size and composition of families to investigate whether these had any influence on how land and moveables were bequeathed.

Disposal of land

Although there were relatively few wills (10) in which land was the sole item for bequeathing to members of the family, the general pattern was to keep it within the family; where no sons or daughters existed, then land tended to be divided among near family. It appears that partible inheritance was the practice though division was not necessarily equal. The effects of this was to enable children to be 'set up' to support themselves or to provide a dowry for daughters. It is evident that small parcels of land were bought up, enlarging the

estate, but only to be divided when the will was drawn up so that all children benefited in some way. Some divisions resulted in relatively large farmholds being divided up into small parcels of land and meadow, which were too small to support a family, and there came a point at which further subdivision was impractical so that different provision had to be made for heirs other than the main one.

Where families consisted solely of daughters, the pattern of disposition was, generally, to divide the land into approximately equal parts. John Cook of Owston (d.1598) benefited not only his daughters but their husbands in disposing of his land: his eldest daughter and her husband were given an unspecified area of meadow, five acres of arable, pasture, and meadow [the three types of land are often not distinguished from each other in wills], one acre of hemplands, and another one acre one rood of land; her sister and husband inherited two hemplands and one-third of his meadows; and the third daughter and husband were left one acre of meadow, one toft, and one oxgang of meadow and land.³⁸ In leaving land specifically to his daughters and their husbands, John Cook effectively made his daughters landless, and relied on the goodwill of their husbands to provide for their wives in their wills.³⁹ The brother of William Moody of Haxey (d.1620) was instructed to sell three roods of land the proceeds of which were to be invested for his (William's) two daughters, who both received five shillings; a godson was left one shilling.⁴⁰ William Shaw, from Owston, who died in 1595, made provision of a toft and five acres of land for an unborn child though it is impossible to check whether the child survived to enjoy his or her inheritance because the parish registers do not begin until 1599.⁴¹

With only sons to provide for the division of land tended to be equal: John Foster from Belton (d.1586-7) divided his land so that his wife, Alice, held two-thirds of all his land and premises until his younger son, Thomas, was twenty-four years old when he would receive one third of Alice's holding together with four acres one rood of arable land and one acre three roods of meadow. His elder son, William, was to inherit the other third of his land from Alice at twenty-four. John Foster's brother-in-law, Richard Grant was given the interest and

title of one messuage, which was occupied by a widow, Katherine Broughton, and Robert Tait. This was a joint holding with James Popplewell, a yeoman from Belton, who undertook a large number of purchases of small parcels of land.⁴²

The pattern for bequeathing land becomes more complex especially when the family was large and mixed, but both sons and daughters could be left land though not necessarily in equal amounts. For example, the elder son of Francis Thornton of Belton (d.1557) was given his leases, a close, and one acre of land; his younger son was made residuary legatee and executor; his daughter was left a messuage and two closes; and one of his brothers was given a cottage, a close, three acres of land, and five acres of meadow, with his other brother receiving two cows and a lamb.⁴³ There is no explanation in the will for the favouring of a brother with land over two sons. Even more surprising was the division of land that Thomas Maw, a yeoman of Belton (d.1615), made amongst his five sons and two daughters for they all received some land in a sort of 'pecking order', with the eldest son and elder daughter being given more land than the others. In this way a total of fifteen acres one rood of arable land and five acres of meadow were divided into small parcels of land, none of which was large enough to support a family.⁴⁴

Where the area of land was small daughters in mixed families tended to fare badly because it was too small to support more than one family: Richard Maw from Crowle (d.1599) left his son, George, half-an-acre to be inherited on his mother's death, part of a messuage, two swathes of meadow, and a piece of the moor, which was partially drained marshland round Crowle. His only daughter was left nothing.⁴⁵

It is interesting to observe that many of the testators mentioned above had accumulated land during their lifetimes, only to sub-divide when they came to make their wills as the following examples will illustrate. John Cook, whose daughters and their husbands were left land, had purchased five acres of meadow from William Jaques, a gentleman, fifteen acres from Lord Sheffield and William Brownley, and lands and meadow from Gregory Johnson and Thomas Peacock. Cook's will specifically mentions the origins of these parcels

of land in his will. Francis Thornton, who gave land to one son, a daughter, and a brother, and who made a second son his residuary legatee and executor, had purchased large areas of land from Robert Monson, a gentleman, and Thomas Garland, and had paid £2 13s. 4d. for it.⁴⁶

Disposal of land and money

Where land and money were bequeathed in wills, family composition had some effect, and the pattern becomes more complex as families increase in size. As with the disposition of land, money was kept within the family, and, if children were under-age, as was common, it was 'let out', that is, invested until majority was reached. This is similar to Zell's findings in the Weald where children's portions were often loaned out at interest at not more than 10 per cent interest.⁴⁷ With larger families, sons were given land and the daughters money. There is evidence that land was purchased to provide for younger sons.

William Harrison, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1610) had no children, and his land and money were left to relatives. John, his brother, was given one acre of land, one niece, Elizabeth, all his closes, a further six acres of land, while another niece, Isabel, received a toftstead, and all his land, meadows, and pastures in Wroot. William's sister's five children were left 6s. 8d. which was to be invested.⁴⁸

With only sons to provide for division of land or letting it out were common. Vincent Tankersley, a yeoman from Haxey (d. 1558)⁴⁹, had two sons to whom he left vast amounts of land. His son, Anthony was left a messuage, a cottage, lands, tenements, meadows, closes, pastures, waters, fishings in Misson, rented arable land, crofts, meadows, pastures, and steadings in Craiselound, a township within Haxey parish, a windmill and adjoining land in Misterton, a village about two miles south of Haxey in Nottinghamshire. His other son, Robert was left the whole estate, interest, and title on two chantry lands. Vincent's servants were left 3s. 4d. and 6d. respectively, and three others, whose links with the Tankersley family cannot be traced, were left collectively £15 16s. 8d. By contrast, the sole labourer with only

a son, Richard Meggott (d.1620) bequeathed him two selions and one acre of land, which was to be let out until he reached twenty-one at the rate of two shillings in the pound, that is, ten per cent, a much higher rate of interest than that found elsewhere in Lincolnshire, where it was six per cent.⁵⁰ Richard's two nieces were given one shilling each, and his wife was named as executrix and residuary legatee.

The pattern with mixed families was for land to be given to sons and money to daughters, especially when the families were large, though the burden on the estate could be considerable in later years: William Tonge, a yeoman of Epworth (d.1616) left his only son one acre of land and gardens together with buildings in York, and his only daughter £50 at her marriage. This would have imposed an enormous burden on the son, particularly as his inheritance consisted of an acre and gardens, though the buildings, unspecified, might have provided rents from leases.⁵¹ John Pettinger, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1614), had three sons and three daughters; two sons received a farm, houses, lands and, meadows, and the third son was given a croft on his mother's death together with £2 from each of his brothers. One daughter was to be given a dowry from the sale of land, while the remaining two daughters were residuary legatees and executrices.⁵²

The division of land and money was not always equal with large families: John Foster, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1610), had four sons and divided his lands amongst them unequally, the first being left a toft and croft, over eighteen acres of arable land, meadow, and pasture; the second was bequeathed a toft and croft together with nearly ten acres of arable land and meadow, and £10; and the third was left nearly four acres of arable land and £10; the fourth son was left a colt and a quy. The provision for one daughter amounted to three roods of arable land and £80 at marriage or on reaching twenty-one; her sister was left a mere twenty shillings. All these bequests were to become active when the heirs reached twenty-one.⁵³

This unequal division of land is also found in the will of John Byffield, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1596-7), who left his wife land which was to be released to her two sons at

their majority; William, the elder, inherited a house and croft at Craiselound (a township in Haxey), one acre of land, and the lease of two acres of meadow; and Anthony, the younger, was left one acre one stong [about one rood] and £20. John's daughter, Anne, was to be given £13 6s. 8d. at twenty-one. His land had been purchased in small parcels and the lease of the meadow was from Lord Sheffield, who in turn leased the land from the Crown.⁵⁴

Disposition of money

Few wills disbursed only money, but, like land, they kept it within the family, invested it if the children were under-age, and, as already remarked, imposed burdens on the main heir later in life. Spufford comments on this burden the heirs had to bear:

The burdens placed on holdings which were negligible by Midlands standards, by such provisions, and which in any case can only have made a marginal yearly profit must have been immense. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the anxiety shown by fathers to provide for all their sons, whether they actually practised primogeniture or not, must have been one more factor which put the smaller holdings at risk in crisis years.⁵⁵

John Wells, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1603), mentioned no children in his will, but disbursed a total of £61 mainly to his near family. His wife, Joan, who was made residuary legatee and executrix, inherited his croft on condition that she paid Mr William Sheffield, the son of Sir Edmund Sheffield, the sum of £10 at the feast of St Michael and £10 each to her brother's children. All his six nieces or nephews - the manuscript has been damaged so that names are not always clear - all received £1 immediately and a further £5 at twenty-one years. A servant was given 6s. 8d. 'if she stay with her dame for twelve months; another £9 were given to Margaret Sampson, a friend, it is assumed; the poor were left £1 13s. 4d.; and £3 13s. 4. was given for the building of a 'loft' with seats in Haxey church. The supervisors of his will were given five shillings and a halberd. From the division of his money, which would have to come out of future profits from his estate, it is clear the bulk of it was to remain within

the near family. Regrettably, no inventory is available to determine whether his estate could bear successive demands of five pounds when nephews and nieces came of age.⁵⁶

With only daughters to provide for, the division of money, which was to be invested, was a feature of these wills. John Draper, a labourer of Haxey (d.1620), left his only daughter £5, which was to be invested.⁵⁷ John Meggott, a labourer also from Haxey (d.1616), left two of his daughters £3 each, which was to be invested, while his third daughter was to be given nothing unless one of her sisters were to die. No inventory is available to check on his financial standing.⁵⁸ With such provisions it is clear that resources were stretched, and testators were trying to provide for as many as possible.

Where there was a mixed family to cater for, the division of money between all the children, even when they were married, was the main feature of the wills, for example, William Harrison, a labourer of Haxey (d.1602) gave both his son and daughter £3 6s. 8d. each,⁵⁹ while William Barkwith, a labourer, also of Haxey (d.1621), gave his two daughters 30 shillings each, which was to be invested until they married or reached twenty-one years, and his son was to be given twenty shillings at twenty-one.⁶⁰

The absence of any mention of land in these wills provokes the question of where the money was to come from; a partial answer might be 'from secondary occupations', and though there are few inventories linked to the wills, they do provide evidence for these. William Watkinson appears to have had brewing and cloth-making to supplement his income because he had a brewing vessel and brewing lead, spun linen yarn, hemp, flax, and hempseed included in his appraisal.⁶¹ Although there is no inventory for William Barkwith extant, that of his widow is, and it lists hemp valued at 24 s., two stones of sackcloth valued at 32 s., and four pounds of linen yarn and three sieves valued at 4 s, which indicates clothmaking.⁶²

Disposition of goods

This is the 'catch-all' category in that, while it analyses the inheritance mainly of household items, such as sheets, pots, and pans, money and land are also included, simply because the categorisation of wills almost invariably has a number of overlaps.

The general pattern for the division of goods and chattels, apart from families without children, was to keep items within the immediate family, that is children and affines, with benefits to nephews, nieces, and grandchildren. Though it is difficult, if not impossible to prove, there does seem to have been a conscious effort to keep household goods, such as bed, sheets, candlesticks, and pans, within the orbit of the family, and where there, perhaps, were insufficient items to go round to provide money in lieu of goods. Generally, sons and daughters were given equal consideration.

Where there were no children mentioned, it appears from the single yeoman's will and the six labourers' wills that items went outside the immediate family. John Travis, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1609), left to Isabel Kitchen the sum of £40, a cauldron, thirteen pieces of pewter, a latten chafing dish, and a further £10 at twenty-one. As far as can be ascertained, there was no familial link between the two persons.⁶³ Nicholas Forte, a labourer of Haxey (d.1602-3), who was apparently childless, left one person a feather bed, another a hemp heck, and a third a bed.⁶⁴

The families consisting only of daughters or sons left their possessions to them and also to near family, for example, Robert Pullen, a labourer from Crowle (d.1614) gave his only daughter three shillings, a stand, and a bedstead, and his two nieces received one shilling each, and his two grandchildren were treated likewise.⁶⁵ The only son of Jarman Berrier, a yeoman of Crowle (d.1622-3), inherited furniture in the house, hall, and kitchen together with carts, a plough, and stable gear; he was also left £10 'received of the Butcher for his use, in consideration of a hard bargain, as he pretendeth'. Two granddaughters were given twenty shillings; an unspecified number of grandsons received five shillings each; a number of great-nephews were given 3s. 4d. each; and some unidentified persons were left 11s. 8d; and all his

'poor godchildren' had a shilling each. The approximate total of this disbursement amounted to £18 11s 0d. No inventory is available to establish the wealth of his estate.⁶⁶

A labourer, Thomas Newborne of Haxey (d.1608), left three of his four sons a cow each; the eldest also took possession of brassware, bedware, a quarter of hemp, and a flich of bacon. The second son was left a cow and similar household and other items as his elder brother, but was to be given twelve shillings by his elder brother and the next younger brother, who inherited a cow, bedware, a candlestick, a quarter of fuel, and a quarter of hemp. The fourth son was left one half of a rood of land with the seed for it. It seems here that there was only one small parcel of land available, and it was impracticable for it to be further divided so one son inherited, but provision was made for the other three.⁶⁷

If families were small, there was an approximately equal division of goods and chattels, but where the family was large, the process becomes more complex, and the division of goods was approximately equal, or money near to the value of the goods was given where the children consisted of upto five persons. In smaller families provision was often made for a brother to be given clothing or shoes, for example, William Watkinson of Haxey (d.1606-7) who divided his household goods between his two sons and a daughter, and also left his brother a coat, hose, and shoes, his godchildren fourpence each, and two unidentified persons five shillings and two stone of hemp each. His servant, a person unexpectedly found in a labourer's will, was left two shillings.⁶⁸ With three sons and a daughter, William Gylliott, a labourer from Crowle (d.1642), gave each of his sons £3, and his daughter was left a cupboard and a cradle.⁶⁹

The will of Henry Pettinger, a husbandman from Haxey, who died in 1591, indicates that he was supplementing his livelihood from the seven acres he divided amongst his son and two daughters by brewing on a larger scale than for mere home consumption. His son was left four acres of land, brewing equipment, and horses, while his two sisters each were given one-and-a-half acres of freehold land a cow, and brass and pewterware.⁷⁰

A yeoman with a large number of children was John Mawe of Owston, a member of a dominant Axholme family, who died in 1540. He had three sons and five daughters, four of whom were to receive ten pounds when they reached twenty-one; the other daughter was left one horse and two pigs. The eldest son was to inherit the croft at twenty-one, and was to be put to a trade, as was his youngest brother, who also received ten shillings. The middle son was given furniture, windows - an interesting insight into the importance and value of glass - three horses, a cart, and farm equipment.⁷¹ From the information that one son was to inherit the croft, but to be put to a trade suggests that even by 1540 the size of holdings in the Isle were too small to support a family and that a trade was a necessary adjunct to providing sufficient money to live adequately.

Disposition of animals

In a mixed agricultural economy, with an emphasis on pastoral farming, animals were important features in inventories and wills though few contain references only to animals. Thirsk, in her study of the Lincolnshire Fens, an area similar to Axholme, observed that the number of stock held by the average farmer did not increase between 1540 and 1600 though the numbers were smaller than in Leicestershire.⁷² In the 1590s in the Fens, three persons owned between 51-80 cattle; in Axholme over the period 1540-1640, 37 cows was the maximum held by one person. Four persons in the Fens had between 21 and 30 horses, and in the Isle it was thirteen. Only one Fenland person had between 21 and 30 pigs compared with a maximum of twenty in Axholme, while only one farmer had more than 150 sheep compared with the Axholme figure of 100. Thus the scale of animal husbandry in the Isle was smaller overall than in the Fens. Table 4.2 illustrates the maximum numbers of animals owned by yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers - the figures in parenthesis indicate the number in each group. The information has been derived from inventories.

Table 4.2 The maximum number of animals owned by yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers in Axholme, 1540-1640, according to inventories.

Maximum number of animals	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers
Cattle	37	24	6
Horses	13	10	3
Sheep	100	42	14
Pigs	16	20	8

With one or two exceptions, the number of cattle and other animals bequeathed rarely exceeded six or seven cows, ten sheep, and seven pigs;⁷³ no geese or hens were left though they are recorded in inventories. In the four instances where inventories have been available, it has been possible to compare the numbers of animals listed in both inventory and will. Family size and composition, together with the level of wealth, affected the disposition of animals, land, and moveables.

The nephews and nieces of John Coggan of Epworth (d.1596), the only yeomen who had no children, were the main beneficiaries of his will, which is delightful in its details. A niece, Anne Coggan was to receive 40 shillings when she married or reached twenty-one, her brother, Alan, was given a sheep called a 'gimmer',⁷⁴ another nephew and niece were given a lamb apiece, Maude Teal, a servant, inherited a 'brown cow having only three paps', another group of nephews and nieces were given a brown cow 'having a star in its forehead and a tagged tail', and sundry other nephews and nieces inherited lambs. At least a dozen lambs were given to his brothers' and sisters' children, but not including 'all my sheep except those as shall be killed at my funeral'. Besides sheep and cows being left to relatives, measures of bread corn were left to a number of people on an annual basis, and fencing, gates, kitchenware, and painted cloths were also left to them.⁷⁵ Thus, John Coggan's possessions remained mainly within the family orbit rather than going outside it.

By contrast, the four childless husbandmen generally left their possessions outside the immediate family. John Gentleman from Crowle (d.1597-8) left his wife a cow called 'Whitelapp', a person called Janet Metcalfe was given a cow called 'Motherlike', the hypocorisms suggesting gentle affection for these animals, almost as though they were family pets, and John Taylor was left a two-year old quy. Other persons benefiting from John's will were Richard Yates who was given a boat, a cloak, and a pair of boots, and Alice Yates two acres and a stong of land in Crowle Fields together with a length of grey cloth.⁷⁶

The five children of John Portington, a husbandman from Amcotts (d.1580), two sons and three daughters, had nine horses divided unequally amongst them, the eldest son being left four horses as well as a plough and a cart.⁷⁷ His inventory shows that he had eighteen cows, 42 sheep, but only four horses.⁷⁸ Another husbandman, William Newton from Belton, who died in 1596, had three sons and four daughters, and it was the eldest, Francis, who inherited most in terms of land, and was left the 'plaster on the ground'; this may refer to the seams of gypsum which outcrop in Belton, and elsewhere in the Isle, or to the treated rock which had been heated to provide the raw material for covering the outsides and insides of the walls of houses. William's second son, also William, was left three roods of land, one ewe, and one lamb, and the third was given the remainder of his father's land as well as a ewe, a lamb, and a cow. One daughter, Jennet, was to be given a ewe and a lamb when she reached twenty-one and two quys; it is not clear why there was an age restriction on the inheritance of the ewe and lamb. A second, married daughter, Isabel Peacock, was left a ewe, while the two remaining daughters were to divide all the rest of the cattle, corn, and hemp between them.⁷⁹ Although the division of land and animals is unequal, it is clear that there were attempts to provide for all of them.

The one labourer with a mixed sex family, Edward Gylliott from Crowle, who died in 1591, left a calf to each of his two sons, though his inventory contains six cows,⁸⁰ and made his three daughters residuary legatees and executrices, probably reflecting a level of poverty

that was not really common in Axholme where the average value of labourers' inventories was £14 7s. 6d. and the median value was £20 8s. 4d.⁸¹

From the foregoing it is clear that testators generally tried to keep land, money, goods, and animals within the orbit of the family; land was subdivided amongst both sons and daughters, being 'put to use' to provide money to support them until they reached the age of majority; money also was invested. As families increased in size, sons were preferred above daughters if land was available, and testators bought up parcels of land to enable sons to set themselves up. Invariably, if there were children, the land was subdivided until the area was too small for further partition. When families were very large, the division became more complex, preference, again, being given to sons, but with the intention of equal provision for daughters. Such provision could, however, put a demand on a major inheritor in future years when money had to be found for siblings especially sisters at their marriage or on attaining the age of twenty-one.

In his study of Odiham, Hampshire, Stapleton maintains that families consciously planned and pursued 'a strategy for future generations' through appropriate marriages and ensuring that the process of inheritance kept the family's major source of income intact. He states that partible inheritance reduced families to poverty, and that family composition and kinship could affect testamentary dispositions; brothers did better than sisters.⁸² The wills of Axholme inhabitants do not reveal any 'strategy' such as that envisaged by Stapleton though this may have featured in the thoughts of the landed gentry, nor are his observations on the effects of family composition borne out. The testators of the Isle seemed to be concerned with fairness all round.

Values of inheritances: comparisons

Comparisons of the values of dispositions between children are straightforward when only land or money are involved, but it becomes more complicated when land, money, and goods, including animals, are listed because it can be difficult to arrive at valuations for

individual items. It is possible, however, to arrive at approximate evaluations using selective assessments in inventories and from rentals and surveys by extrapolation.

Inventories present problems in evaluation, including the age or condition of the item valued, the accuracy of the appraisers - an inventory which contains the words 'and the remainder of the hustlements' may indicate a superficial approach, and the clumping together of different items under one assessment. Bearing in mind these constraints, it is possible to arrive at assessments by isolating single items when listed, or by simple division of the appraisal of a multiple of similar items, for example, if three pewter dishes are valued at 15d., then it may be assumed that one would cost 5d.

As Erickson has pointed out, the value of land to-day far exceeds that of moveables, and the cash values for land are rarely stated.⁸³ The cost of house building in the late seventeenth century in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire for a husbandman's or labourer's two-storey four roomed cottage cost £12 to £15;⁸⁴ this does not indicate the cost of buying a house. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the annual rent of a leased cottage was £2 per annum in Hereford, with a purchase price in the region of £10 to £20. Henry Best, in his *Farming and Memorandum Books* considered a rent of ten shillings 'extortionate'.⁸⁵ Erickson notes that a daughter's cash portion might buy a modest house or even £10 might purchase a cottage. She does not comment, as does Spufford, on the potential drain on the estate of the main heir of a brother or daughter receiving money at the age of majority, but comments that this type of provision had the advantage of preserving a landed estate intact.⁸⁶

In Axholme, three sets of documents help in determining the price of land and the cost of rents - a survey of 1649, a rental of Haxey, and surveys of Crowle, Garthorpe, and Luddington. Though the survey is some years outside the period, it can provide a guide. These documents illustrate that values depended on location and the quality of the land. The lord of Epworth manor had 440 acres valued at £238 8s. 6d., which is just over ten shillings an acre; another area, of twenty acres, was valued at five shillings an acre; in Belton 132 1/2 acres were valued at £64 13s. 2d., which is slightly less than ten shillings an acre. In the same

survey, land in Haxey was valued at ten shillings an acre, while land in Coneygarth,⁸⁷ a sandy area as the name suggests, was five shillings an acre, and in Owston 60 acres were priced at £25 16s. 6d., about eight shillings an acre.⁸⁸ For the purposes of comparison a value of 10s. per acre will be assumed.

The rental for Haxey covers the period from 1594 to 1625, but it gives no details of their areas until 1602.⁸⁹ In 1602, the rent for four acres of land was ten shillings, and for one acre of meadow it was three shillings. In 1624, Widow Well had to pay ten shillings to rent her house for a year. Apart from an apparent large increase in the rents, starting in 1601 compared with earlier years, the rents remain stable from 1602 to 1625. For example, Robert Brown paid sixteen pence for his land between 1594 and 1601, but in 1602 he paid 6s. 9d. for two acres one rood; this assumes he was paying for the same area of land.

The survey of Crowle, taken in 1629, shows that the areas rented were larger than those in Haxey and that the rents were lower, for example, Henry Spence was able to rent a toft with a building on it and eight acres of land for 5s. 2d, and George Sanderson rented two acres for 1s. 1d.⁹⁰ In a survey of Garthorpe made in 1629, William Headen held five acres of arable land and a tenement by copyhold for six shillings per annum, and in the 1644 Luddington copyhold records, for example, Thomas Heron held one cottage for one shilling. Thus the cost of renting land, whether arable, meadow, or pasture, or of renting a house could vary from village to village.

It is difficult to summarise how equally children were treated in financial terms because there are so many variables to consider - the status of the testator, whether he had much to leave, the size and composition of the family, the main characteristic of the will, for example, whether only land was involved, or whether there was land and money, so it is possible to give no more than an overview of the general picture.

As far as the disposition of land was concerned, daughters of yeomen and husbandmen received endowments of land though invariably the areas were less than their brothers'. Even with a family of seven, five sons and two daughters, Thomas Maw, a yeoman

from Belton (d.1615), left all of them areas of land, though in diminishing areas, so that a total of fifteen acres one rood of arable land and five acres of meadow were divided up, leaving no area of land as a viable entity.⁹¹ Yet the disposition of land could extend beyond a man's immediate family to encompass his brothers even though he had his own children to consider: Francis Thornton, a yeoman from Belton (d.1557), who had two sons and a daughter left land to one of his sons and his daughter, though the exact areas are not given, but his brother was also left a cottage, a close, six acres of land, and five acres of meadow.⁹²

When money was the predominant feature to be bequeathed, daughters appear to have been treated unequally, but they may have already received dowries. The two sons of John Singleton, a yeoman, received £5 each and his married daughter was given two shillings with two shillings to be given to her children.⁹³ The two daughters of William Newton, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1556) were given twenty shillings compared with the thirty shillings given to each of their three brothers.⁹⁴ By contrast the two daughters of William Barkwith, a labourer from Haxey (d.1621), fared better than their brothers by being left 30 shillings compared with the twenty shillings left to their brother.⁹⁵

Though there is no will that covers all the combinations of disposition as well as the ability to link inventory valuations, it is profitable to examine some that cover the general patterns of bequests, remembering pre-testamentary settlements may have been made. When land and money were involved, daughters tended to be given money or moveables rather than land by, and generally were better off financially. Although the value of land might not be equivalent in value to moveables or animals, it must be realised that it was similar to a piece of modern, industrial machinery in that it had the potential to produce profits for the lifetime of the beneficiary and beyond. The two sons of Robert Meggott, a husbandman of Belton (d.1596-7), inherited land, one receiving one-and-a-half acres in total, probably worth 15 shillings, and the other four acres altogether, worth £2. Robert's five daughters were all to receive £20 at marriage, a burden on the main heir, especially if no other land had been given to him before his father's decease.⁹⁶ Another example is provided by Thomas Caister, a

yeoman from Belton (d.1614), who had two sons and four daughters: one son was left £1 for eleven years, and the other was given 19 acres of land; the four daughters were to receive £40 at marriage or on attaining maturity.⁹⁷ If the land were valued at ten shillings per acre, then the second son was given the equivalent of £9 10s. so the daughters were initially better provided for in this instance. Another yeoman, John Foster of Epworth (d.1610), had four sons and two daughters: the eldest son was left a croft and a toft, eighteen acres of arable land, and £10 at twenty-one; the next son was given a toft and a croft, nine-and-a-half acres, and £10 at twenty-one; the third son received three acres and £10 at twenty-one, while the fourth was left a colt and a quy. One daughter inherited three acres of land and was to be paid £80 at marriage, though her younger sister was left only £1. In this example, there is clearly inequity, with a 'pecking order' apparent with both sons and daughters. The colt and quy were probably worth 13s. 4d. and £2 respectively, and with the land worth about ten shillings an acre, the eldest received '£9 10s.-worth' of land as well as a toft and a croft. Likewise his brothers were left land valued at £4 15s. 0d. and £1 10s. 0d. respectively. The outstanding feature of this will is the bequeathing of £80 to one daughter.⁹⁸

The only labourer who had a will containing items that can be valued for comparison purposes was John Townsend, who died in 1574, and who had one son and two daughters. The son was left a house and a loom, and the two daughters were given 6s. 8d. each. If Erickson's valuation for the building of a house is accepted then that cost between £12 and £15 to build, and may have been worth more; it has been impossible to provide a value for a loom.⁹⁹

It has been difficult to find wills listing moveables to provide comparisons, but that of George Todd, a labourer from Belton (d.1630), who had one son and daughter, is a good example. His son was left a bed, sheets, a table, and a Flanders' chest, and his daughter also had a bed, sheets, bed linen, a cupboard, and a chest. Here, the daughter benefited more than her brother, for the value of his items amounted to about £1 4s. 10d. compared with his sister's at about £2 3s. 8d.¹⁰⁰ Another daughter, Christopher Moody's, a labourer from

Haxey (d. 1600), benefited more than her three brothers, for her inheritance of a pot, a charger, and a cupboard were approximately worth £1 4s. 2d. compared with her eldest brother's 19s. 4d. for a fishing boat with nets (13s. 4d.) and bed ware (6s. 0d), and her next youngest brother who was left bed ware, and her youngest who received £1 only.¹⁰¹

When animals were left in wills, along with land and moveables, daughters were often financially better off than their brothers. Anthony Tankersley, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1623), had four sons and three daughters: The eldest son and two daughters shared the rent of a house, valued at 6s. 8d. each, but both daughters shared the rent of another house, valued at 10s. 0d., plus two cows, four lambs, and four pieces of pewter, so that the total valuations for these daughters was £7 and £6 respectively. The eldest son was obliged to pay for the education of the second daughter for sixteen years. Here the values of the animals - £2 for a cow and five shillings for a sheep - helped boost the inheritances of the daughters, as they did for the third son whose bequests of three cows, a mare (£1), a foal (6s. 8d.), and two lambs (5s. 0d.) gave him an inheritance of £7 11s. 8d. The second son was given a silver spoon, worth about £1, and the fourth son was to executor. The remaining daughter was left a silver spoon, bed ware, and barley, possibly a bushel, valued at 4s. 0d.¹⁰²

The two daughters of Robert Pettinger, who was a husbandman from Haxey (d.1591), had an unequal inheritance compared with their brother, for he inherited four acres of land, furniture, brewing equipment, and several horses compared with his sisters who inherited one-and-a-half acres of land each, a cow each, some brassware, and pewter. Their inheritance amounted to £4 1s. 8d. compared with their brother's which was worth £7 12s. 0d.¹⁰³ It is interesting to note, however, that both daughters' inheritance of land and a cow provided them with a useful dowry for a future marriage.

The pattern of bequests of household items and animals has been considered above in some detail, and no clear generalisation can be made when the comparative value of moveables and animals is made, though animals were usually worth more than areas of land,

but not houses. Where land was left to males and daughters were left moveables or animals, then the latter usually benefited more than their brothers; the reason for this is not clear.

Disposition of land and its effects

Though the disposition of land has already been looked at in the context of inheritance customs and the effects of family composition, it is worthwhile to examine the size of areas bequeathed and to address the following questions:

1. Did the size of the parcels of land provide a market for land?
2. Who were the buyers and sellers?
3. What were the effects on the local economy?

Not all wills give precise details of the areas and type of land bequeathed, more often than not using formulae similar to 'I give my son all my lands in . . .' Where the information is precise, it has been possible to reveal the areas of land and their type from more than one hundred wills. Table 4.3 shows how land was bequeathed using three categories, arable, meadow, and land - the last being the term most frequently used in wills to include arable, meadow, and pasture; no pasture is specifically mentioned in wills where areas are identified. Chart 4.1, which provides the same information in graphical form as Table 4.3, is included because the visual impact is more effective than a simple list of figures (see p. 166). It will be seen that 85 per cent of all arable, meadow, and land bequeathed were for areas less than five acres. If the categories are separated, then 95 per cent of arable, 90 per cent of meadow, and 82 per cent of land were parcels of less than five acres.

Table 4.3 Recorded bequests of land

Area	Arable	Meadow	Land
<1 acre	7	3	28
1 acre	6	5	26
2-4 acres	6	10	24
5-10 acres	1	2	9

11-15 acres	0	0	5
16-20 acres	0	0	2
21-25 acres	0	0	0
>25 acres	0	0	1
Total	20	20	95

A few extracts from wills will illustrate the size of the parcels of land heirs inherited. Edward Byrd, a husbandman from Epworth (d.1616), left one son a half-acre of land and his other son three roods.¹⁰⁴ One son of John Byffield, a husbandman from Haxey (d. 1597), was to inherit a house and one acre of land from his mother at 21 years, while his brother was to receive one acre one stong (~ one rood).¹⁰⁵ Thomas Rowsley, who was a labourer from Haxey (d. 1615), left his son three roods of land and a half-acre to a godson.¹⁰⁶

Although it is difficult to correlate particular sales/purchases of land with items listed in wills, it is clear that there was a flourishing market for land judging by the specificity of bequests in wills; deeds showing land transactions also illustrate the readiness to buy and sell. Most of the areas for sale were small, and the pattern compares well with that of bequests in wills. Unlike the categories of land in wills, those for sales include, mainly small, areas of pasture, which accounted for 6.3 per cent of the total. As with the information on the specifics of wills, a chart (Chart 4.2 on p. 167) is included as well as a table of data (Table 4.4 on following page). Although the information on both charts does not necessarily overlap, that is, the land listed in wills and the land sold/bought is not the same, the pattern is remarkably similar, suggesting an active market in small parcels of land.

When details of areas and types of land are given, they sometimes show that some testators had purchased land which was given to heirs as 'named' pieces. Robert Otter, a yeoman from Owston (d. 1598), left his son, Alexander 2 acres purchased from William Brownley and his other son, William, 2 acres bought from Lord Sheffield,¹⁰⁷ and John Cook, a

yeoman also from Owston (d. 1598), left a daughter and her husband land 'purchased from Gregory Johnson and 1 acre bought of Thomas Peacock'.¹⁰⁸

Table 4.4 Sales of land

Area	Arable	Meadow	Pasture	Land
<1 acre	5	3	0	26
1 acre	1	8	1	22
2-4 acres	2	11	5	20
5-10 acres	3	5	1	5
11-15 acres	0	0	0	6
16-20 acres	0	1	1	1
21-25 acres	0	0	0	0
>25 acres	1	0	0	1
Total	12	28	8	81

Inspection of such details reveals that many farmers, especially yeomen, were multi-purchasers of several plots of land most of which were less than five acres, the average area being 2 acres 1 rood. John Laughton, a yeoman from Owston (d. 1591), for example, as well as buying two houses, purchased a total of 3 acres 3 roods of arable land from four different people,¹⁰⁹ and Charles Sampson, a husbandman from Haxey (d. 1587), bought 7 acres of meadow and a little close from four people, as well as 3 roods of arable land from John Townsend, a labourer from Haxey (d. 1594) - the only transaction that can be definitely identified in the wills.¹¹⁰ There is only one indication of the price paid for land: Francis Thornton, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1557), paid 53s. 4d. for 3 acres of land and 5 acres of meadow¹¹¹ though deeds give details of the bonds entered into by purchasers.

For some smallholders it was better in providing for a family, possibly for years ahead, by selling land and investing the proceeds or, alternatively, leasing it to produce an income. The brother of William Moody, a labourer from Haxey (d. 1620), was instructed to

sell 3 roods of land and invest the money for the testator's daughters¹¹² and Richard Meggott, a labourer from Crowle, instructed his cousin William Coggan to lease 1 acre of meadow leased to provide an income for his son, Richard, until he reached the age of twenty-one.¹¹³

Spufford commented on the burdens that testators placed on their main heirs, and Axholme wills reveal similar encumbrances: Gregory Turre, a yeoman from Haxey (d. 1615), wanted £100 to be paid to each of his daughters within two years of his death,¹¹⁴ and John Farre, a yeoman from Epworth (d. 1617), wanted Ezekias Ducker to pay his daughter £5 at the age of 21 with another £60 within one year of her marriage. The same Ezekias was to be paid £8 per annum to bring up John's son, also John, to be paid out of the rents of his lands, a William Tonge being given authority to let out the lands and to put the profits into bonds to bring up John.¹¹⁵ The son of Alexander Caister, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1607), was instructed to pay his mother £10 a year for the remainder of her life; the hardship this incurred is not clear as there is no record of the mother's burial.¹¹⁶ The wife of John Pettinger, a yeoman from Haxey (d. 1613), had to sell some of his land to provide a dowry for their daughter, Cassandra.¹¹⁷

Summary

Although areas of England may have had primogeniture as their custom it has been shown that, in practice, this approximated more towards partible inheritance in that small parcels of land were provided for younger sons, or they and their sisters were promised money at the age of maturity, or, in the case of daughters, at marriage. Such arrangements put burdens on the main heir, and led to the weakening of their financial position. Division of holdings led ultimately to pieces of land that were unable to sustain a family, which may have led to their being sold to a wealthier farmer, who either had sufficient capital or was in a position to borrow money. When this occurred, the seller may have migrated or had a secondary occupation.¹¹⁸ The development of secondary occupations will be dealt with in a later chapter, but the weaving frame of the husbandman, Edward Newborne of Haxey,¹¹⁹ and

the brewing lead and malt querns of John Farre, a yeoman from Epworth, may be mentioned here.¹²⁰ The pattern in Axholme, as shown briefly in the previous chapter, showed a large number of people who disappeared from the parish records though there was also a movement inwards - something to be explored in a later chapter - since a small parcel of land may have enabled an enterprising person to establish himself.

The concentration of earlier writers when looking at inheritance has been on the major, male heir to the neglect of other members of the family. This chapter has tried to correct this by investigating how daughters were treated, and also by considering the possible effect of family size and composition. In Axholme, partible inheritance predominated, and in families with no children the concern of testators was to keep land, property, money, moveable goods, and animals within the circle of the immediate family, such as brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and even godchildren. Occasionally what are assumed to have been friends were beneficiaries under wills. In families with either daughters only or sons only the tendency was to divide everything up between them though not necessarily equally. In families with children of both sexes it was usual to leave land to the sons with money or moveables being left to the daughters. Here, equality of provision was always equal although daughters often benefited more than their brothers in financial terms when they were left money or animals to be inherited at marriage or on attaining the age of majority.

The practice of partible inheritance, whether of land, money, or moveables, or in any combination of these, inevitably led to the dispersal of what had been previously inherited or acquired during a working life. Yet it seems a natural way to treat offspring even though it led, as it did in sixteenth and seventeenth century Axholme, to the ultimate impoverishment of an estate. On the positive side, however, it could enable a man to set up by himself or a woman to have something to offer as a wedding dowry.

¹ An example is Borough English, which was found in some ancient boroughs where the youngest son inherited his father's copyhold rather than the eldest. There was also unigeniture, as distinct from primogeniture, where only one person inherited, and gavelkind where property was inherited equally by all the sons, the widow getting one-half instead of one-third.

² K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680*, (1982), p. 111.

³ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property* (1995), pp.61-78.

- ⁴ J. Thirsk, 'The European debate on customs of inheritance, 1500-1700', in Goody, Thirsk, and Thompson (eds), *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800* (1976), pp. 179 and 183-188.
- ⁵ J. Thirsk, 'The debate on inheritance', in J. Goody *et al*, *Family and Inheritance*, (Cambridge, 1976), p.183.
- ⁶ J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', in F. J. Fisher, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, (Cambridge, 1961), p.78. Thirsk also expressed the same opinion in 'the European debate', in Goody *et al*, *Family and Inheritance*, p. 183.
- ⁷ M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (1987), p.85
- ⁸ *Contrasting Communities*, p.106.
- ⁹ *Contrasting Communities*, p.160.
- ¹⁰ C. Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition: Kibworth Harcourt, 1280-1700*, (Cambridge, 1983), p.261.
- ¹¹ E. Le Roy Ladurie, 'Family structures and inheritance customs in sixteenth century France,' in Goody, Thirsk, and Thompson, (eds), *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, (1976), pp.37-70.
- ¹² LAO Stow Wills 1587-90, 19.
- ¹³ LAO Stow Wills 1624-5, 190.
- ¹⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 235. This is a complex will. Alice, was baptised on 28 March 1602, and another sister, Jane, was baptised on 19 August 1604. Jathmell was to inherit a house, croft, and meadow at the age of fourteen, and Alice was to receive several pieces of land, amounting to about three acres of arable and a close of meadow, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, after which it was to revert to Jathmell. Alice inherited two parcels of land amounting to one acre from the age of fourteen for the remainder of her life. Jane's inheritance was similar to Alice's in that she inherited the residue of her father's freehold land and meadow from fourteen to twenty-one, after which it reverted to Jathmell. Under this arrangement, therefore, Jathmell inherited the house, croft, and meadow in 1614, then had to wait until 1623 to receive Alice's lands, and had a further wait of two years until Jane's lands came into his possession.
- ¹⁵ The relative paucity of inventories compared with wills may be accounted for in that at some point in time they have become separated from the wills to which they should have been attached.
- ¹⁶ LAO Lincoln Wills 1588, 1, 4 and LAO Inventories Inv. 76/54.
- ¹⁷ Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, (1995), p. 28.
- ¹⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1624, 6.
- ¹⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1558, 2, 38.
- ²⁰ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 209.
- ²¹ LAO Stow Wills 1587-90, 90.
- ²² LAO Stow Wills 1614, 123.
- ²³ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 120.
- ²⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 222.
- ²⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 191.
- ²⁶ LAO Stow Wills, 1599-1602, 19.
- ²⁷ LAO Stow Wills 1582-6, 39.
- ²⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1608, 56.
- ²⁹ LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 174.
- ³⁰ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 27.
- ³¹ LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 111. Dr Mary Lucas of Lincoln has examined this will, and concluded that its intention was confused (pers. comm.)
- ³² He sired a number of illegitimate children.
- ³³ LAO Stow Wills 1615, 87.
- ³⁴ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 121.
- ³⁵ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 120.
- ³⁶ Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (1995), p.p.61-78.
- ³⁷ The categories used here are based on a modification of a classification used by Cicely Howell, 'Peasant inheritance customs in the Midlands, 1280-1700', in Goody *et al* (ed), *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200-1800*, (1976), p.140.
- ³⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 201.
- ³⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 114,1, 2.

- 40 LAO Stow Wills 1620, 83.
- 41 LAO Lincoln Wills 1594, 2, 166.
- 42 LAO Stow Wills 1587-90, 90.
- 43 LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 4, 336.
- 44 LAO Stow Wills 1615, 87.
- 45 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 47.
- 46 LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 4, 336.
- 47 M. Zell, 'Credit in the English pre-industrial woollen industry', *Economic History Review* XLIX (1996), pp. 669 and 674.
- 48 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 47.
- 49 LAO Stow Wills 1591-3, 284.
- 50 LAO Stow Wills, 1620, 71.
- 51 LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 234.
- 52 LAO Stow Wills 1614, 87. John Pettinger from Haxey died in 1614.
- 53 LAO Stow Wills 1591-3, 213.
- 54 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 141.
- 55 Spufford, *Contrasting Communities* (1987), p. 108.
- 56 LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 67.
- 57 LAO Stow Wills 1620, 79.
- 58 LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 73.
- 59 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 244.
- 60 LAO Stow Wills 1621-2, 40.
- 61 LAO Inventory 103, 16B.
- 62 LAO Inventory 129, 138.
- 63 LAO Stow Wills 1609, 64.
- 64 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 148.
- 65 LAO Lincoln Wills 1614, 1, 2.
- 66 LAO Stow Wills 1621-3, 25.
- 67 LAO Stow Wills 1608, 56.
- 68 LAO Stow Wills 1607, 36.
- 69 LAO Stow Wills 1627-9, 23. This will was drawn up in 1642 but has been catalogued as shown. Though it is marginally outside the period, it has been used to illustrate the effect of the size of family.
- 70 LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 302.
- 71 LAO Stow Wills 1530-52, 67.
- 72 J Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century* (1953), p.32.
- 73 Included in the term cattle are cows, bulls, steers, and all the other local words for cattle, and the same applies to sheep, horses, and pigs.
- 74 Defined as a young ewe in Chambers's *Twentieth Century Dictionary* (1964), p.446.
- 75 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 96.
- 76 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 185.
- 77 LAO Lincoln Wills 1580, 2, 109.
- 78 LAO Inventory 64, 88.
- 79 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 109.
- 80 LAO Inventory 80, 348.
- 81 LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 16.
- 82 B. Stapleton, 'Family strategies: patterns of inheritance in Odiham, Hampshire, 1525-1850', *Continuity and Change*, 14(3), (1999), pp. 386, 392, and 395.
- 83 Erickson, *Women and Property*, p.64.
- 84 Erickson, *Women and Property*, p.64.
- 85 Erickson, *Women and Property* p.64. The reference to Henry Best's *Memorandum* is included in Erickson's reference.
- 86 Erickson, *Women and Property*, pp. 66 and 69.
- 87 It is clear from the geological map that Coneygarth is on sand, and the name itself probably indicates the commercial breeding of rabbits for food and skins.
- 88 T C Fletcher (ed), *Read's History of the Isle of Axholme*, p. 128. This information is, admittedly, dated, but is the only source that has been traced.
- 89 LAO Haxey Par 23/58.

⁹⁰ Crowle Manor Survey, 1629, held in the Manvers Collection, University of Nottingham. This includes surveys of freehold and copyhold land in Garthorpe and Luddington. I am grateful to Dr D Johnson for drawing my attention to this survey.

⁹¹ LAO Stow Wills 1615, 87.

⁹² LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 4, 336.

⁹³ LAO Lincoln Wills 1628, 1, 65. John Singleton was from Belton and died in 1628.

⁹⁴ LAO Lincoln Wills 1556-7, 145.

⁹⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1621-2, 40.

⁹⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 150.

⁹⁷ LAO Stow Wills 1614, 29.

⁹⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1610, 108.

⁹⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1574, 1, 309.

¹⁰⁰ LAO Stow Wills 1630-1, 220. The approximate valuations are as follows: a bed = 6s. 8d; sheets = 9s 0d; a table = 2s. 6d., and a Flanders' chest = 6s. 8d; bed linen = 6s. 0d.; a cupboard = £1; and a chest = 2s. 0d. The valuations for beds varied depending on their quality, with a feather bed 'with fillings' ranging from 16s 0d. to £1, and a stand bed valued at 9s. 0d.

¹⁰¹ LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 19. Christopher Moody, a labourer of Haxey, died in 1598-9.

¹⁰² LAO Stow Wills 1623, 122.

¹⁰³ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591,2, 302.

¹⁰⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 175.

¹⁰⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 141.

¹⁰⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1615, 204.

¹⁰⁷ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 218.

¹⁰⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 201.

¹⁰⁹ LAO Inventory 80, 346. There is no will listed, but the inventory is so detailed that the dispositions to his children and others are quite clear.

¹¹⁰ LAO Lincoln Wills 1588, 1, 178 (Sampson) and Lincoln wills 1574, 1, 309.

¹¹¹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 4, 336.

¹¹² LAO Stow wills 1620, 83.

¹¹³ LAO Stow Wills 1620, 72.

¹¹⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1615, 121.

¹¹⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 123.

¹¹⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1607, 6.

¹¹⁷ LAO Stow Wills 1614, 87.

¹¹⁸ This happened in Nidderdale, Yorkshire, where partible inheritance resulted in a 'thriving manufacture of textiles, fostered by farmer-weavers'. See M. Turner, *Kith and Kin: Nidderdale Families, 1500-1750* (Summerbridge Tutorial Group, 1995), chapter VII and p. 70. A similar development was noted in Dentdale, J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', in F. J. Fisher (ed), *Essays in the Social and Economic History of Tudor and Stuart England*, (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 70-88.

¹¹⁹ LAO Stow Wills 1624-6, 208.

¹²⁰ LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 123.

Chart 4.1 Recorded bequests of land

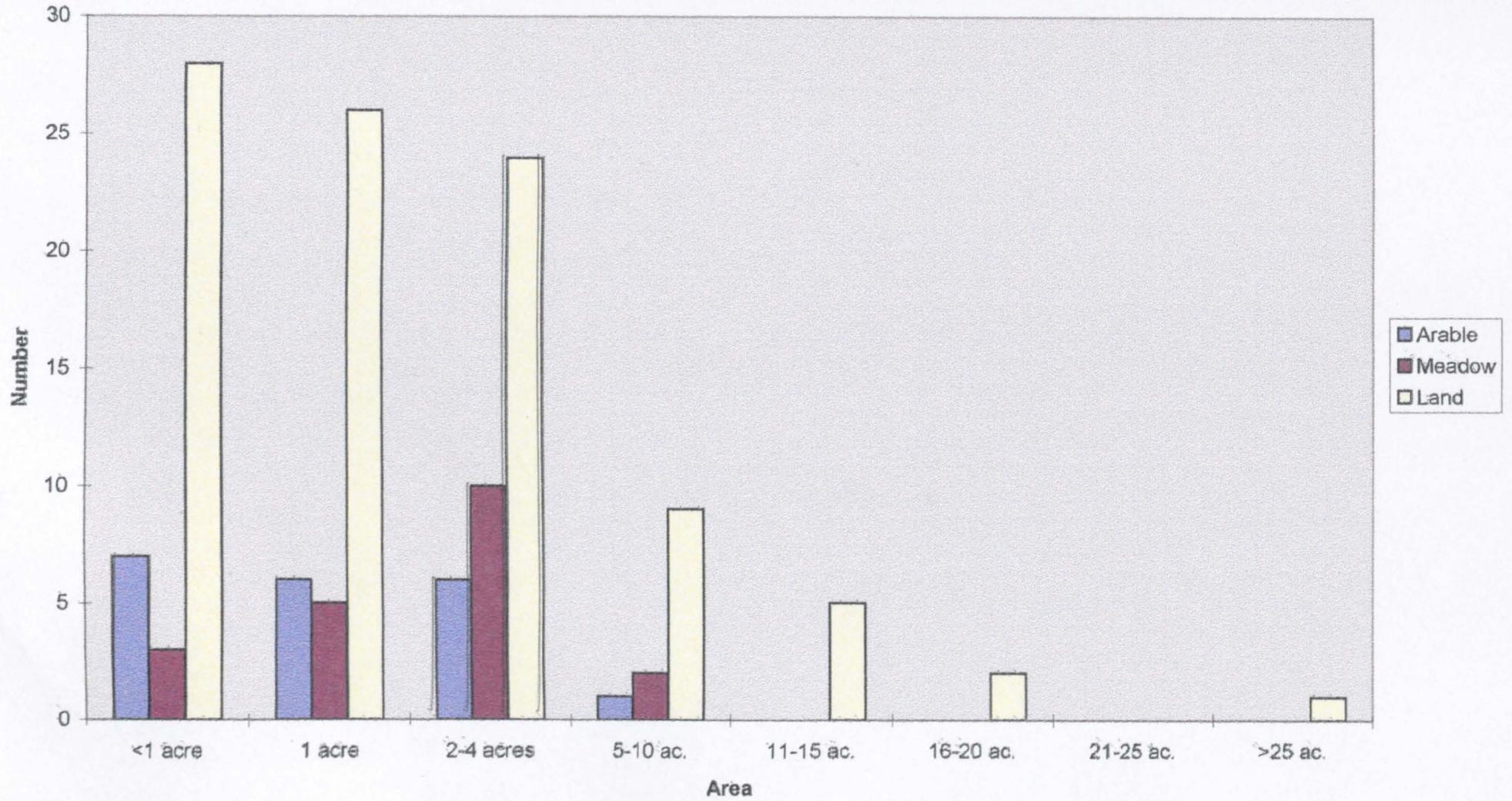
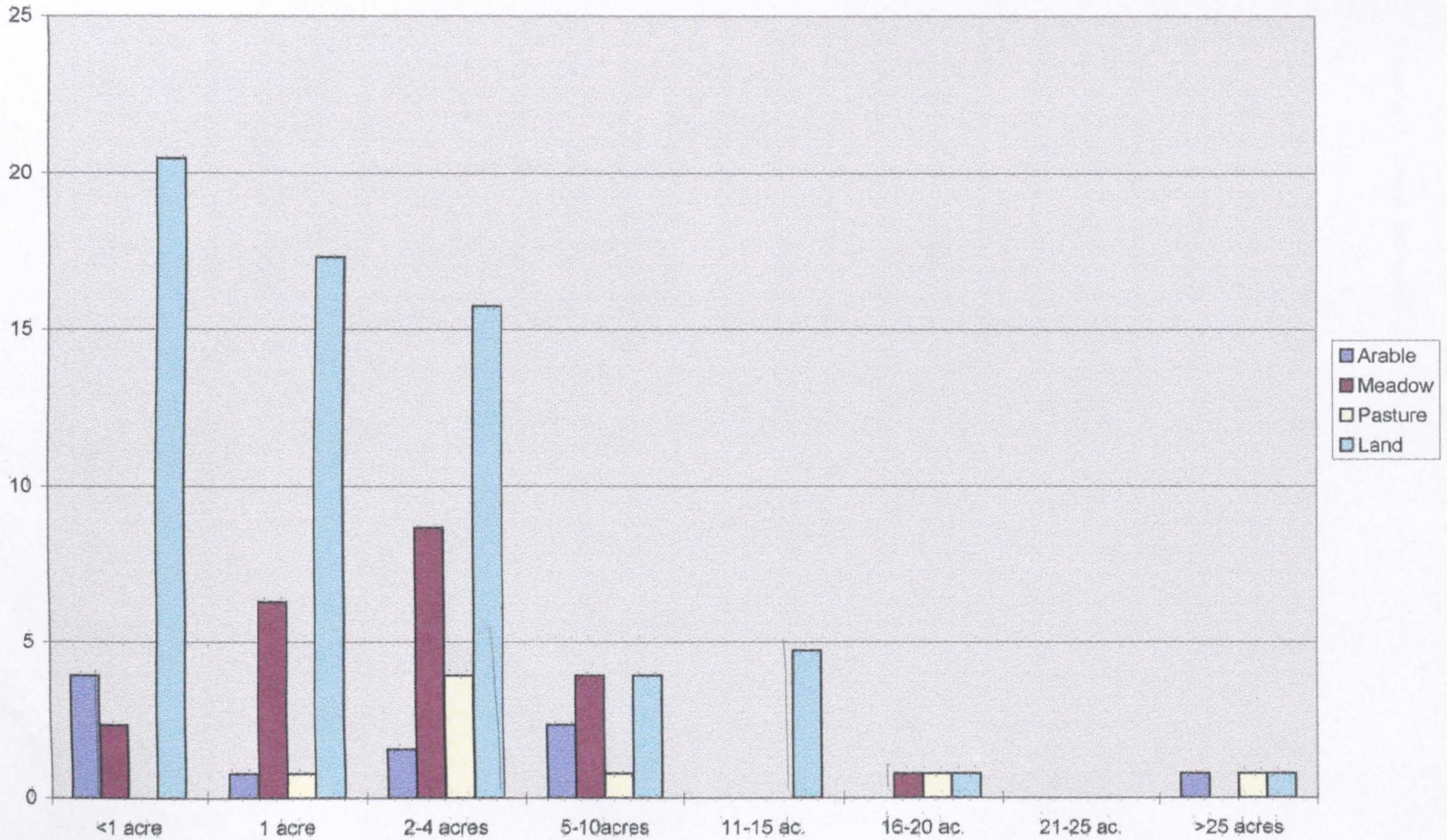


Chart 4.2 Sales of land (percentages)



Chapter 5 Social and economic structures

Unless a person in a village has kept a record of the events and lives of its inhabitants, as in *History of Myddle*,¹ sources of information on a community's social and economic structures are fairly limited. This chapter seeks to investigate the social and economic structure of the Isle's communities by examining their social structure, looking for evidence of secondary occupations, comparative wealth, in money terms, of the different social groups, the types of landholding and areas held, and the level of debt. By social structure is meant the occupations and status of the males in the communities because adult women do not appear amongst the will makers except as widows, or, in rare instances, spinsters. The word 'status' is used here to indicate anyone who referred to himself as a gent or who prefaced his name with the title of 'Mr.' or appended 'Esq.' after his name. Laslett, in his explanation of rank and status, states that, in descending order, the grades below the peerage in Tudor and Stuart times were knight, esquire, and Mr., with the title 'Mr.' used to preface the last two titles.²

There are three main sources for information on the social and economic structures of the Axholme villages: wills, inventories, and parish registers. There are two Calendars of Wills for the Isle, namely those proved in the Archdeaconry of Stow and those in the Lincoln Consistory Court. The lists in the Lincoln Consistory Court Calendars do not give the rank or occupation of testators though the wills themselves occasionally provide this information. The lists in the Stow Archdeaconry Calendars do give the information if it is stated in the will. Inventories occasionally provide information on the rank or social status of testators, and may even be used to identify them if the will does not contain this information, but generally the inventories give no indication. With the exception of two parish registers, there is no evidence of rank or status of the fathers in the baptism records, nor of the grooms in marriage records, nor of the deceased in burial registers. The two exceptions are Belton and Luddington. From 1609 until the end of the period (1640), the parish priest of Belton recorded the occupations or status of all those who were buried; in Luddington, whose

registers begin in 1599 and tail off in 1623, the occupations of fathers were recorded in the baptism registers and occasionally in the burial registers.

Bearing in mind the numbers of wills for Axholme in both Calendars that do not record the occupation of the deceased, and the information that can be derived from the Stow Archdeaconry Calendars is relatively sparse for the villages of Belton, Crowle, Epworth, Haxey, Luddington, and Owston, it does provide a glimpse into those societies; the parishes of Althorpe and Wroot have no entries, and Garthorpe had been incorporated into Luddington parish. It must be remembered, as has been pointed out in an earlier chapter, that wills are not fully representative of all levels of a community. Another point to bear in mind is that people sometimes suffered from self-aggrandisement so that husbandmen may have elevated themselves into yeomen, and yeomen into gentlemen in wills but not inventories. The valuations of the inventories are no guide to actual status because there is such a wide variation in the assessments.

Prior to looking at the sparse evidence from the Stow Calendar, it is pertinent to ask what sort of supporting infrastructure a mainly agricultural community might need. Though the list of wills, and, indeed, the parish registers, indicate a very high percentage of agricultural workers - yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and even a shepherd - there was also a secondary set of occupations connected with the growing, processing, weaving, and marketing of hemp and flax. Thus, an agricultural society would require the services of a wheelwright, cartwright, ploughwright, a carpenter, a miller, a butcher, in the sense of one who killed and possibly sold the cows and sheep, rather than in the modern restricted sense of someone who merely sells meat, while the flax/hemp-growing element would require the services of processors of the crops, particularly weavers. Although weavers are represented in the lists of wills,³ and their numbers may reflect the amount of hemp or flax grown in the parish, there is evidence from the inventories that many houses had spinning wheels and looms, though the two are rarely found in the same household. Weavers are also referred to as websters, but it is not clear whether there was any differentiation in their roles. In addition to the occupations

already referred to there might also be a call for a brewster, a baker, and a shoemaker. The Stow Calendar indicates that all these occupations were represented in the Axholme villages. Priests and clerks are represented in the lists.

In addition, tailors are in evidence in the Stow Calendar in Crowle (1) and Haxey (1); Epworth had two glovers. Haxey also had a wool draper and a mercer; Owston had a cook and an aleman as well as a fisherman, the latter suggesting a commercial enterprise. The appearance of tailors and glovers paints a picture of a society with an element of sophistication and money to purchase 'luxury' items. The wool draper and mercer both indicate trading, though whether this was confined to the locality or to a wider market is not clear.

Information from the calendar of wills is expanded by the information from two parish registers. From 1609, the parish priest of Belton recorded the occupation or status of everyone he buried, which information can be added to that from the Stow Calendar, and so there is a picture of the structure of the society for a thirty year period. Although Luddington's parish records span from only 1599 to the early 1620s, the status of the father is given in the baptismal registers, and is often given in the burial records. The summary of Luddington's occupations thus contains information from the Calendar and from the baptismal and burial records. The list of occupations or status is contained in Table 5.1 for a comparison to be made of the two parishes, with the percentages representing those of the total number of entries.

Table 5.1 Occupations in Belton and Luddington - a comparison

	Belton		Luddington	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yeoman	52	16	48	23
Husb/man	79	25	19	9
Labourer	88	28	64	31
Shepherd	-	-	1	0.5
Blacksmith	1	0.3	1	0.5

Carpenter	9	3	3	1
Ploughwrt	-	-	3	1
Wheelwrt	3	1	3	1
Baker	-	-	2	1
Butcher	1	0.3	1	0.5
Cooper	3	1	-	-
Fisherman	-	-	3	1
Miller	4	1	2	1
Roper	-	-	1	0.5
Shoemaker	5	2	3	1
Tanner	-	-	5	2
Turner	1	0.3	-	-
Weaver	19	6	15	7
Bricklayer	1	0.3	-	-
Glazier	3	1	-	-
Joiner	1	0.3	-	-
Mason	2	1	-	-
Clockmaker	2	1	-	-
Locksmith	1	0.3	-	-
Glover	-	-	1	0.5
Tailor	10	3	16	8
Knight	1	0.3	-	-
Gentleman	16	5	3	1.5
Esq. / Mr	1	0.3	3	1.5
Clerk	1	0.3	3	1.5
Servant	-	-	3	1.5
Total	305	96.7	206	95.5

An inspection of Table 5.1 reveals both similarities and differences between the two villages. Before considering these, it is appropriate to consider the relative size of their male populations of working age who would be given a status so that the comparative representation of the social groups and occupations may be made. Belton's population rose from 1,120 in 1603 to 1,304 in 1640, and Luddington's population from the 1642 Protestation Returns, the only reliable source of information, was 537. On the assumption that the average size of a household was 4.5, this would mean that there were 280 households in Belton in 1610 and 290 in 1640, and 119 in Luddington in 1642.

In considering Table 5.1, it is clear that Belton had more gentry per head of male population than Luddington: Michael Correlis - *armiger* was buried in June 1637 in Belton, the parish priest differentiating between him and sixteen other 'gentlemen', and one 'esquire', Robert Evers, whose will was proved in 1559.⁴ By contrast, Luddington had three gentlemen and three designated by either esquire or Mr. There is no obvious reason for the greater representation of gentry in Belton compared with Luddington, except that the monastic and chantry land available after the Dissolution of the monasteries in Belton was more scattered, and the manor of Crowle, which was part of the estates of Selby abbey, was sold off as an entity to Edward Fynes, Lord Clinton and Saye, who, in turn, leased parts of it to William Pynder, a yeoman, and his son, Robert, for a rent of £10 3s. 4d. per annum.⁵ That all the gentlemen were resident in both parishes, rather than being absentee landlords, seems evident because they were buried there. The inventory of Thomas Haise, a gentleman of Beltoft, a part of Belton parish, taken on 14 June 1617, gives evidence of a large house, with a parlour, a chamber over the parlour, another chamber, a buttery, a little parlour, a kiln house, and a laith (barn). All his goods and chattels were valued at £80 15s. 6d., but he had debts amounting to £14 13s. 0d.

The occupations in both parishes can be sub-divided into categories - agricultural, service, trades, secondary industries, development trades, and luxury trades. The agricultural category is self-evident, including yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and shepherds; the

'service' group is that on which the agricultural workers would depend, that is, blacksmith, cartwright, ploughwright. Coopers, millers, vintners, fishermen, drapers, mercers, bakers, butchers, shoemaker, and tanners would be included in the 'trades' category. Weavers, tailors, and ropemakers would be included in the 'secondary industries' group though tailors might be better included in the 'luxury' trades - the categories are not exclusive. 'Development trades' is intended to indicate those which are not encountered until the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century and which provide evidence of the 'great re-building' - trades such as glaziers, house carpenters, bricklayers, joiners, masons, locksmiths, and turners. Finally, the 'luxury' trades include clockmakers, glovers, and tailors.

Although the evidence is not great, the occupations suggest different agricultural practices between Belton and Luddington, which, in turn, may reflect the different topography. Belton is in the central spine, which provided land for arable farming, and had a large area to the west, in the fenny lands, which could be used for the grazing of sheep and cattle. By contrast, Luddington, situated on a small island, is surrounded with sedimentary deposits from the flooding of the Trent and high tides from the Humber which provided land suitable mainly for arable farming with a small area for pastoral farming. Leaving aside the agricultural, service, and 'trade' occupations, which are similar for both parishes, the number of weavers and tailors is particularly notable. That the weavers produced linen cloth is evident from the inventories: John Stephenson, a yeoman from Garthorpe (d.1607), had 60 yards of cloth in his house,⁶ and John Kyppas, a yeoman from Owston (d.1594), had linen seed sown, 40 yards of fumble, 60 yards of harden, hemp sack cloth, and sack yarn.⁷ The number of tailors, even considering that the records cover twenty to thirty years, is remarkably high for the estimated populations of both parishes. Assuming 'static' populations, the percentage for Belton is 3.57 per cent and 13.45 per cent of households, which suggests that in Luddington tailoring may have been a commercial enterprise with outlets beyond the immediate hinterland though where these outlets were is open to speculation. A town like Doncaster would have had its own tailors for the size of its population, which was estimated as having about one thousand

taxpayers in 1450, and this was the largest settlement nearest to the Isle.⁸ It is possible that the tailors took their goods to Doncaster market. Occupations found in Belton, but not in Luddington, suggest a re-building and enlargement of houses, for there were glaziers, joiners, a bricklayer, a mason, carpenters, one of whom was designated as a house carpenter, and a stone mason, so stone may have been imported. There is no stone suitable for house building in the Isle. The presence of a clockmaker and a locksmith in Belton, and a glover in Luddington suggest a demand for luxury goods.

Secondary occupations

The development of secondary occupations is considered by Thirsk to have arisen because partible inheritance resulted in inheritors received such small portions of land that they were forced to take up another occupation to supplement their incomes. She quotes from a seventeenth century witness, Edward Lande, an octogenarian of Dentedale in Yorkshire, who stated that any man who died intestate had his tenement divided equally amongst his sons. He observed further that because of this division 'the tenements become so small in quantity that many of them are not above three or four acres apiece. . .so that they [tenants] could not maintain their families were it not by their industry in knitting coarse stockings'.⁹ Though her theme is that secondary industries did not necessarily develop in areas which produced their raw materials, she observes that in four out of the six areas examined by her partible inheritance was a common feature.

Partible inheritance, as has been demonstrated elsewhere in this study, was common in Axholme, which demonstrably had at least one common secondary occupation, namely cloth making and its allied occupations. The main source of information on secondary occupations is from inventories though wills occasionally give brief insights into them. It might be thought that secondary occupations would be more likely found amongst husbandmen and labourers who had insufficient land to support themselves, and who needed another source of income, yet this is not necessarily true. If one accepts that at least a half-yardland

(approximately eighteen acres) of arable land was needed to support a family, and a fenland farmer with that amount of land was well-off, then some Axholme farmers had more than this, even if they did divide it up in their wills.¹⁰ Francis Thornton, a yeoman from Belton (d.1557), had leases, messuages, three closes amounting to five acres of arable, six acres of meadow, other land and meadow, the area of which is not specified, and three acres of closes. He had retting pools for soaking hemp and flax in the primary stage of processing them.¹¹ Stephen Pinder, a yeoman from Crowle (d.1608), had twenty acres of arable land, three acres three roods of meadow, and ten acres of hemp,¹² and John Kyppas, a yeoman from Owston (d. 1618), left his heirs lands, meadows, tenements, seedings, pastures, closes, a toft, arable land, and meadow, and although the areas are not given, are likely to have amounted to more than twenty acres.¹³

The evidence for cloth making in the Isle comes from archaeological, historical, and documentary sources, including title deeds and inventories. 'The importance of flax-growing is demonstrated not only by hempyards, hemp crofts, or hemplands near to houses, but by selions 'for hemp' lying out in the open field.'¹⁴ William Brownlow of Melwood, for example, sold to Robert Hodgson of Kelfield a cottage with a selion for hemp in Owston, occupied by Widow Standing, three selions for hemp in Ferry Crofts, and one selion for hemp in Ferry Croft.¹⁵ Retting pits have been discovered east of Haxey,¹⁶ and aerial photographs of the land surrounding Haxey reveal the former presence of such pits.¹⁷ Historically, the Isle has a record of sack-making: 'On a farm, in addition to skeps, need would arise for containers such as sacks and the Isle of Axholme was noted for the weaving of sackcloth. The hemp fibres. . . were also used in the making of ropes. . . This work (weaving) was a by-employment for the farmers of fenland.'¹⁸ In 1636, 'the inhabitants of Axholme won an award of £400 for a stock to employ the poor in the making of sackcloth to compensate them for the loss of fishing and fowling rights due to Vermuyden's drainage'.¹⁹ John Wesley described Epworth as a little town of about 900 people with three or four workshops for spinning. Hemp was grown for the weaving of rope, and in the early

eighteenth century, occupations included weavers, sackcloth weavers, flax dressers, and ropers. Unlike Retford, the Isle's inhabitants do not appear to have suffered financially from the implementation of the Cockayne Project almost certainly because their mainstay was sack-making rather than the production of 'white cloth' though there is some evidence for the growing of flax for linen-making.²⁰

All the processes for the production of cloth, whether linen or coarser cloth, such as fumble or harden, from seed to weaving and tailoring, are to be found in sixteenth and seventeenth century Axholme. The process of converting hemp or flax into cloth involved a number of stages: once harvested, the cut sheaves were 'retted' by soaking in pits containing water for about six weeks; it was a particularly smelly stage, and pits were, accordingly, sited well away from the village. Once dried, after several weeks, the hemp or flax was 'scutched', that is, beaten to loosen waste from the fibres; a device called a 'break' was also used to do this. An iron comb, called a 'heckle', was used to straighten the fibres, after which they were ready to be spun by hand.

Hemp seed, hemp breaks, and seven stones of broken hemp are mentioned in the inventory of William Taylor, a husbandman from Belton (d.1591).²¹ Charles Sampson, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1587), had in his house, when the appraisers went round it, hemp seed, hemp, sackcloth, yarn, and harden, fumble and linen cloth, suggesting he was employed in a number of the processes, perhaps even acting as a merchant for cloth.²² Another husbandman from Haxey, Robert Pettinger (d.1591), had hemp seed, three stones of hemp, and a loom amongst the items in his house.²³

Evidence of land sown for hemp and linen is found in wills and inventories: two sons of Gregory Drewry, a yeoman from Crowle (d.1598), were left hemplands²⁴, and Stephen Pinder, a yeoman from Crowle (d.1608), had an estimated ten acres sown with hemp and linen. He appears to have diversified for he had five hemp breaks and four pairs of linen breaks, a weighing beam and weights for hemp, which may indicate a commercial set-up. In addition, Stephen had a boat, four great nets with some other small nets, and 'fishing

instruments'. He may also have been involved in brewing for he had a 'kiln hair', a horsehair cloth to hold malt in a kiln, a pair of malt querns, two old horse mills, and malt, barley, and rye 'in the chamber'.²⁵ One labourer, Edward Vessey from Belton (d.1605), appears to have traded in hemp, for in his will he directed that John Leggott and Nicholas Wray were to have equal parts of the hemp bought from Percival Newton, Henry Glew, and Robert Bernard, and were expected to pay the market price for it. John was also to have half of three roods of hemp, paying the market price, and he, together with Thomas Sealand and Nicholas Vessey were to have equal parts of five roods of hemp which had been bought from Widow Rye.²⁶

Rating, or retting, pools have already been referred to, but it is interesting to note from the will of Wilfra Rayner, a labourer from Haxey (d.1621), that his son, John, was to be given 'the rate pool that lieth by the wayside that leadeth to Craiselound', as this is possibly the one of a pair that have been discovered by the Humberside Archaeology Unit, and which has been mentioned above. Wilfra's other son, also Wilfra, was left a rate pool 'that lieth on the neather side of the Rates'.²⁷

Breaking and heckling of hemp and linen was carried out within the house. John Foster, a yeoman from Belton (d.1587), had hemp breaks, cloth and yarn recorded in his inventory;²⁸ John Hutchinson, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1616), had both a linen and a hemp heck as well as 'wool wheel' (that is, a spinning wheel). John Hutchinson also had 'unbraked' hemp, twenty yards of unbleached linen, twelve pounds of 'hecked' (dressed) linen, and quantities of wool and braked hemp.²⁹

Spinning linen and hemp yarns was done on wheels though there appears to have been a difference between linen and hemp spinning wheels. William Harrison, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1611), had a wool wheel and weighing scales,³⁰ and John Armitage, a labourer from Belton (d.1614), a great wheel and a little wheel with three yards of harden and six pounds of hemp yarn. Not only did John Armitage's family have a secondary occupation to support them, but he had a boat and fowling gear no doubt to supplement his diet with fish and marsh birds. Although designated a labourer, he had a house with three rooms - a hall, a chamber,

and a parlour, and there were eleven pairs of pewter pots, a salt, two candlesticks, and painted cloths, so he was not living at subsistence level. The value of his inventory was £19 14s. 8d., and he owed £2 4s. 9d.³¹

Apart from those persons described as weavers in wills or in parish registers, weaving was another home industry for looms are found in houses of yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers. John Parish, a yeoman from Belton (d.1592), had a loom with linen and wool cloth,³² and Robert Wells, a labourer from Belton (d.1605), left his son, John, weaving equipment.³³ Nathaniel Kelsey, a labourer of Haxey (d.1620), left his grandson, Gregory Kelsey, a loom.³⁴ John Townsend, a labourer from Haxey (d.1574), left his son, Richard, a house for which he had to pay his sisters 6s. 8d. each on inheriting, and a loom with the equipment that went with it including bartrees, a wooden frame on which the warp was wound,³⁵ and Peter Theaker, another labourer from Belton (d.1637), left his son, John, a loom, 'white work gears', a warping fat, and carding equipment. It is not clear what the white work gears were, though they suggest linen weaving, and a warping fat was a vessel to size the warp before putting on the loom.³⁶

The end products were found in the houses, perhaps awaiting being taken to market or to be converted into clothes by the numerous tailors. John Stephenson, a yeoman from Garthorpe (d.1607), had sixty yards of cloth recorded in his inventory,³⁷ while John Kyppas, a yeoman from Owston (d.1594), had linen seed sown, forty yards of linen, twenty yards of fumble, sixty yards of harden, hemp sackcloth, and sack yarn in his house.³⁸

From the information above, it is clear that there was an active clothmaking industry throughout the Isle, engaged in all aspects of production from the sowing and harvesting of the raw materials, its processing to produce yarns of differing qualities for different purposes - harden, for example, was used for bed sheets, and the coarser fibres of hemp were used for sacking or rope-making - there was a roper at Luddington. It is also clear that some persons engaged in a number of processes though, from the inventories, spinning and weaving were not activities found in the same house. While hemp and linen growing and processing were

the main activities, wool also was spun and woven, the raw materials derived from the numbers of sheep recorded in inventories, a topic to be considered in a later chapter.

Cloth-making was not the only secondary occupation revealed by the wills and inventories as the following examples will illustrate. William Tonge, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1616), had relatively few animals - five horses, five cows, and eight 'young beasts' - and appears to have diversified into cloth preparation, with two hemp breaks, but also had a steepfat with a kilnhair and a brewing lead which was in the kiln house.³⁹ The number of animals suggests that he was not making sufficient to support a family from pastoral farming, and had expanded into clothmaking and brewing. He left his son, William, household goods and furniture, his daughter £50 at twenty-one or marriage, and his wife one acre of land in Burnham Fields together with 'all grounds and buildings in Over Denby in the parish of Penistone', Yorkshire. The Yorkshire connection is not clear as the Tonge family is represented in the Epworth baptismal records from their inception (1539) until 1640.⁴⁰ The value of William Tonge's inventory was £118 6s. 8d. Like William Tonge, John Turr, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1617), had few animals - the only reference is to 'swine young and old' - and he had a wool wheel, a hemp heck, and a cheese heck, which may indicate cloth processing and cheesemaking. He also had a brewing lead 'with all other brewing vessels'.⁴¹ The combination of cloth processing and brewing is to be found in a labourer's inventory, William Watkinson from Haxey (d.1606), who had hempseed in his chamber, spun linen yarn in the main house, an unspecified amount of hemp and flax, and a brewing lead and brewing vessels.⁴²

William Clarke, a husbandman from Belton (d.1588), had the lease of a windmill as well as a total of six acres of barley and two acres of wheat and rye; he had a hemp break as well amongst his household goods.⁴³ Stephen Pinder of Crowle, who has already been mentioned, and who seems to have had a finger in a number of pies, had 'two old horse mylnes with the furniture thereto belonging'. He had a large number of animals, including fourteen young cattle, four 'drawing' steers, sixteen cows, 23 swine, 21 sheep, seven lambs,

seven calves, and a total of fifteen horses of varying ages. Unfortunately, his inventory is incomplete, but what there is was valued at £179 4s. 0d., which is a high valuation for the Isle of Axholme.⁴⁴ It must be remembered that the Pinder family took the lease of what had been the manor of Selby abbey (see footnote 7), and they must have had a large amount of wealth in the 1540s.

There were three other secondary occupations which require a mention: cheesemaking, shoemaking, and fishing. A cheese heck and milk bowls were amongst John Harrison's household items though he had spinning wheels as well.⁴⁵ Shoemakers were listed amongst the lists of wills and in the parish registers, but Robert Watson, a husbandman from Belton (d.1614), appears to have had two occupations, for he had six cows, three horses, three pigs, one acre one rood of peas, and one acre three roods of barley together with corn in a barn and in his chamber. His inventory refers also to the 'goods in his shop', and lists three pairs of new shoes, a cutting knife, 'and other things belonging to his occupation'. His house consisted of two rooms, a parlour and a house as well as his shop. His goods and chattels were valued at £27 18s. 0d., an average amount for a husbandman.⁴⁶ Although Robert Sampson was described as a husbandman, he left 'all his fishings after the custom of the manor of Epworth' to his son, Robert.⁴⁷ Christopher Moody, a labourer from Haxey (d.1598), left his son, Robert, a boat and nets and the lease of his fishing in the river Idle.⁴⁸ Whether the 'fishings' were part of a commercial enterprise is not clear, but the presence of a lease gives it some status, rather than a mere mention of a boat or nets.

It may be open to question whether land and property leasing may be considered as secondary occupations though they brought in a source of income. Over a dozen yeomen and husbandmen have been identified as leasing land or property, and there are probably more. There is very little freehold land mentioned in wills, and much of the land was leased from a major landholder, either the Crown or from the Sheffield family, for example. It is likely, therefore, that the leases identified in wills are actually sub-leases. John Foster, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1610), leased two acres of arable land to John Halifax, four acres three roods

of meadow to Robert Foster, and a toft with a croft to James Clarke. These leasings are identifiable in the wills by the words 'in the tenure of. . .' John Foster's landholding amounted to eleven acres one rood of arable land, eleven acres three roods of meadow, and twelve acres of meadow and pasture.⁴⁹ Thomas Foster, who was probably the son of John Foster, and who died in Epworth in February 1623-4, leased three roods of land to Richard Aldus. His landholding amounted to nineteen acres two roods of arable land.⁵⁰ A toft and a croft were leased to Widow Forte by Thomas Sampson, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1602),⁵¹ and William Devins, a husbandman of Haxey (d.1587), left his daughter, Susan, 'all his farmhold at Westwood Overthorpe whereon John Davies dwells, with all the buildings and edifices built upon it', on condition that John Davies paid an annual rent of nine shillings.⁵² Unfortunately, the area of land on the farmhold is not specified.

The picture that emerges of life is one where one or more secondary occupations were practised by many of them, whether yeomen, husbandmen, or labourers, and where, generally, there was little land. The area lent itself to the production of cloth because of the low-lying, wet nature of the terrain so that flax and hemp could be processed easily to give the raw materials, fibres suitable for spinning and weaving. Spinning and weaving needed no large amount of space as they had not reached 'industrial' status, and were suitable tasks for women to perform at home. Dairying and cheesemaking were obvious occupations because the economy was largely pastoral. The parish registers of Luddington record a fisherman, Paul Stevenson, who was notable for having sired ten children, four of whom may have been quadruplets, but evidence from two of the inventories suggest that fishing was a secondary occupation. Two of the remaining occupations, shoemaking and brewing, were possible within the confines of the house, and by leasing a mill, then grinding corn could be a secondary occupation.

Land and property holding

It is generally accepted that wills do not contain the full information about the disposition of a person's property, and that land may have already been given to set up sons at

marriage or to daughters as a dowry. Thus, the areas of land left in wills may represent a mere fraction of what was originally held. In addition, even where areas are given, there are references in other Axholme wills to land or property with no details, for example, 'Also I will that that all my freehold land, meadow, and pastures with the buildings and the appurtenances shall remain to John Kitchen my son, his heirs, and assigns for ever'.⁵³

Often it is not clear whether the land is freehold or leasehold though both types are found in the Isle. After the Dissolution, Epworth manor reverted to the Crown as did the land held by Selby abbey together with chantry lands belonging to the parish churches. The land belonging to Melwood (Axholme) priory, Carthusian, was assigned to John Candyshe of West Butterwick, in Owston parish, by a grant in fee for £348 8s. 4d. 'of the house and site of the late priory; the church thereof; and divers fields in Owston which belonged to Michael Mekens, the late prior', together with several other pieces of land and woods in Haxey and Owston.⁵⁴ The chantries were found in Althorpe, Belton, Epworth, and Haxey churches. Althorpe's lands, which were in the tenure of eight persons, were granted to Ambrose Gilbarde and Richard Allynton, gentlemen of Lincoln's Inn, London.⁵⁵ The chantry lands belonging to Belton, Epworth, and Haxey were granted to Lord Clynton and Saye.⁵⁶ Parts of the monastic land were, generally speaking, leased to numerous persons from outside the Isle, who, in turn, sub-let the land, and the changes in sub-tenants were often swift so that it is difficult, if not impossible, to chart the numerous 'new' sub-tenants for every piece of land. What is clear is that these sub-tenants were able to transfer their leases to their progeny, and even to sub-let again to obtain rents for themselves. An example of transfers of land may help to illustrate the problems: in 1545-6, Edward Stanley, earl of Derby gave his manor of Epworth to the Crown.⁵⁷ In 1551, Lord Clynton and Saye was given the lease of both Epworth and Crowle manors by Edward VI, paying £38 per annum for Epworth and £30 9s. 3^d. for Crowle.⁵⁸ By 1554, the same Lord Clynton and Saye had obtained a licence, for 67s. 10d, to grant the capital messuage of Eastoft manor and a vast area of the former lands of Selby abbey

to William Pynder, a yeoman, and his son, Robert, who were already his tenants, for a fee of £10 3s. 4d.⁵⁹

What is clear from the wills is that areas of land that were bequeathed in wills were already small before being further sub-divided. Table 5.2 shows the areas of land actually left in wills before sub-division. (See also Chart 4.1 - p. 167)

Table 5.2 Areas of land in Axholme left in wills.

	Arable*			Meadow		
	Yeomen	Husbandmnn	Labourers	Yeomen	Husbandmnn	Labourers
Upto 2A**	4	9	6	3	1	1
2 - 5A	6	8	3	4	6	-
6 - 10A	5	6	-	2	2	-
11 - 15A	2	3	-	1	-	-
16 - 20A	2	-	-	-	-	-
21 - 30A	-	-	-	-	-	-
31 - 35A	1	-	-	1	-	-

*Includes 'land and meadow'. ** A indicates acres.

Even where a person had a large landholding, for example, John Foster, a yeoman of Epworth (d.1610), who had 32 acres 2 roods of arable and two acres of meadow, the land was divided amongst his children, so that his wife, Anne, was left the meadow, Thomas his son, received a toft and croft together with 18 acres 3 roods of arable, pasture, and meadow, John, another son, was given 9 acres 2 roods of arable, Francis, a third son, was bequeathed a toft and croft, and 3 acres 2 roods of arable land, and one of the daughters, Elizabeth, was left three roods of arable land. Another 1 acre 2 roods of land were left to a Daniel Hill. The areas of land were not consolidated, but spread around the fields of Epworth and also Belton. Some of the tofts and crofts were in the tenure of others, and the meadow had been purchased from Roger Aldus.⁶⁰ In fact, John Foster had purchased a messuage, a garden, 12 acres 1 rood of arable land, six acres of meadow, and four acres of pasture in Epworth from Roger

and Frances Aldus in 1596.⁶¹ Thomas Foster, one of John's sons, purchased a half-acre and three roods from William Pettinger, as was recorded in Thomas's will.⁶²

An examination of details of land transactions in wills and deeds shows that overall the areas that were bought and sold were small, often not exceeding a couple of acres, yet there were some larger sales of land. Many of the larger sellers were involved in more than one transaction, such as Roger Aldus and his wife who sold a messuage, a garden, twelve acres one rood of arable land, six acres of meadow, and four acres of pasture to Elizabeth Pilsworth in 1596;⁶³ he also sold two acres of arable land to John Foster, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1610).⁶⁴ Lord Sheffield, in 1598, sold fifteen acres to John Cook, a yeoman from Owston (d.1598),⁶⁵ and a further two acres of arable land were sold to Robert Otter, a yeoman from Owston (d.1594).⁶⁶ By far the largest sale of lands found in the deeds was by Lord Monson,⁶⁷ who sold three messuages, a cottage, a dovecote, four gardens, four orchards, 37 acres of arable land, ten acres of meadow, eighteen acres of pasture, two acres of wood, and two hundred acres of heath in Belton to John Ferne and John Lockwood in 1576.⁶⁸ Heirs of John Ferne subsequently sold off parts of the land: William Ferne sold an unspecified area of land to Alexander Chesman in 1612;⁶⁹ three acres of meadow and a cottage and land to Thomas Caister, a yeoman from Belton (d.1614),⁷⁰ and a close of meadow/pasture containing sixteen acres and a strip of land of three roods in Belton in 1615.⁷¹

Often land changed hands quickly: in February 1589-90, for example, the Crown granted Henry Noel, Esq., a warren of coneys in Haxey, and the profits of them, together with a windmill there, which were part of the Queen's manor of Epworth, and part of the possessions of the late Lord Clynton and Sayle, and which were exchanged for a yearly rent of 63s. 4d. Henry Noel assigned these to Matthew Palmer, who further assigned them to Miles Sandys.⁷² In July 1597, Robert Maw, a yeoman from Epworth sold to his son-in-law, John Whitelam, a close of meadow containing two acres in the Ellers, a field in Epworth, for a consideration of £8 and a yearly rent to the Crown of 6d.⁷³ John's son, William Whitelam, a

millwright from Epworth, granted the same close to Isabella, a daughter of John Aldus, for a consideration of £10, on 6 January 1600-1.⁷⁴

There appears to be evidence, though it is scant, of the consolidation of landholdings: in 1601, Robert Medley, a gentleman from Haxey, sold a cottage and croft in East Lound to Richard Harris, a miller, for a consideration of £30.⁷⁵ The same land was sold to Thomas Pettinger for a consideration of £30 on 4 July 1614.⁷⁶ Thomas Pettinger bought a selion of arable land in East Lound from John Harris and Vincent Tankersley on 7 November 1625.⁷⁷

It is impracticable to go into full details of the large number of land sales and purchases that are revealed in wills, Patent Rolls, and deeds, but suffice it to reiterate that most transactions involved small areas of land. What is interesting is that land was bought in small parcels during the life of a person, only to be dispersed through partible inheritance. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this: James Popplewell, a yeoman from Belton (d.1605), had accumulated a total of 34 acres 2 roods of arable land and two acres of meadow, a messuage and a croft from eleven people. Fourteen acres of arable had been purchased from Robert Broughton and 11 acres 1 rood from the Monson family; the remainder were all small parcels of land, ranging from two roods to four acres. He left his son, John, 33 acres 2 roods, Thomas, another son, 5 acres, and William, his youngest the remainder of his lands, area unspecified, giving an area of more than 38 acres 2 roods. Thus, Thomas and possibly William were left insufficient land to support themselves.⁷⁸

Another yeoman, John Laughton from Owston (d.1591) bought an acre of land and a house and buildings from William Fish, who may have been a husbandman from Owston. He also bought four acres from a William Tomson of East Lound, Haxey, a house and a croft from John Barnard, three selions of arable land from Thomas Snow, and two acres and a croft from Mr Jaques. John Laughton had leased land from Lord Sheffield, which he passed on to his son John. The house and croft 'on Owston Green bought of John Barnard, and the land from Thomas Snow, together with the two acres and a croft from Mr Jaques were left to his son William. His third son, Edward, inherited the land bought from William Fish and from

William Tomson. John's four daughters were left household items, some of which had been bought from others, such as a pan, left to his daughter Helen, which had been purchased from William Dolphin, and a great ark, left to Isabel, which had been bought from Nicholas Bacon. The latter is probably the Nicholas Bacon who was lord of the manor in Gainsborough.⁷⁹

It is small wonder that secondary occupations flourished when such small parcels of land were involved, and it is relevant to ask who were the sellers and who the buyers. If land transactions mentioned in wills are considered, there were 75 purchases mentioned amongst twenty-one yeomen, seven husbandmen, and two labourers, but, unless the will gives the status or occupation of the sellers, it is difficult to identify them. Two groups of sellers of land stand out: the gentry and the family. By 'gentry' is meant here those with 'sir', 'gent', 'esquire', and 'Mr.' appended to their names. A few examples will illustrate the point: Lord Sheffield is mentioned in the wills of Robert Otter, a yeoman from Owston (d.1598), having sold him two acres of arable land,⁸⁰ and John Cook, also a yeoman from Owston (d.1598), who bought fifteen acres of arable land from him.⁸¹ Sir Peter Eure sold two acres of meadow to James Popplewell,⁸² and six roods of arable to Robert Meggott, a husbandman from Belton (d.1596-7).⁸³ Robert Monson, gent, sold 11 acres 1 rood to James Popplewell, already mentioned, and Mr. Jaques sold two acres and a croft to John Laughton, a yeoman from Owston (d.1590-1), as has been mentioned above.⁸⁴

Relatively few transactions occurred between members of the family, whether with blood ties or through marriage.⁸⁵ James Popplewell, that indefatigable purchaser of parcels of land, bought one acre three roods from Richard Bernard, who appears to have been related by marriage, as his sister, Elizabeth, married a John Bernard in 1577. He also bought three roods from a Robert Popplewell, who may have been his brother.⁸⁶ William Shaw, a yeoman from Owston (d.1594), purchased a messuage, lands, meadows, and pastures from his brother Thomas.⁸⁷ Charles Sampson, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1588), bought three acres of meadow from William Pettinger; a Thomas Sampson married a Margaret Pettinger in 1573.⁸⁸

As has been seen, the major landholders sold their cottages, houses, and parts of their land, sometimes to minor gentry, such as the Fernes, who in turn usually leased smaller parcels to others, mainly yeomen and husbandmen. If the freehold had not been sold, then the leases could be bequeathed to heirs. Less frequently, on the evidence available, members of the family, either related through blood ties or through marriage, bought land from each other. As has been pointed out, land was bought in small parcels by yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers, which increased their holdings, and which were subsequently split up again on the death of the holder. Identifiable pieces of land were, therefore, purchased, held for a number of years, then bequeathed to an heir. In the wills there is no mention of the prices for which land was sold, but it is evident that there was a need for borrowing and lending to finance not just land transactions, but also as a support after years of poor harvests, or to finance house building.

Rural debt

In the absence of a banking system, borrowing and credit formed a major part of the fabric of rural society, and was essential as a sort of 'lubrication' to enable a community to function smoothly. Spufford maintained that 'borrowing and credit appear to have underpinned the whole of rural society', and 'when men retired from active farming and took up residence with their sons or daughters, they often put their savings into bills or bonds'.⁸⁹

For a tenant without a freehold which was suitable for a mortgage, there were three ways of raising money: a formal bond, which was available for small or large sums of money, but over a long period of time; a loan without specialty, where the interest was based on the principal, and usually at a higher rate, but generally for a short period of time; and bills for unpaid debts, in other words, a form of credit.⁹⁰ Bonds were debts for which the deceased had been formally bound by a written obligation, but were 'almost invariably without property as collateral';⁹¹ where the bond was drawn up under seal, it was called a specialty.⁹² Under the Usury Act of 1571, the maximum rate of interest was set at 10 per cent, but the rate of interest varied according to the level of risk: in London in the seventeenth century it was five

per cent and in Lincolnshire it was four-and-a-half per cent,⁹³ while in Kent it was six per cent.⁹⁴ In the Isle of Axholme the rate of interest was ten per cent as the evidence from an inventory and a will provides: the inventory of Robert Watson, a husbandman from Belton (d.1614), states under debts the testator owed at his death: 'To Robert Lambe which was due upon May Day last as his bond doth appear = £3. Owing to the said Robert Lambe for the use of it for one [w]hole year = 6s.'⁹⁵ The will of Richard Meggott, a labourer from Crowle (d.1620), referring to a rent states that it is 'to be paid ev[er]ie yeare to the hands of me Cosen Will[ia]m Coggan and to bee put forth for two shillings [in] the pound to goe forwards for the best p[ro]ffit of my foresaid sonne Richard until he accomplish the age of one and twentie yeares'.⁹⁶

Some reasons for borrowing money have been suggested above, and Peter Spufford has further proposed that life-cycle was important: in early manhood, when a person was setting himself up, he would need money, and there might be further borrowing later in life to allow for increases in farming so that additional land could be purchased or leased. Later in life, there would perhaps be the provision of dowries for daughters, and perhaps obligations for the eldest son to provide for younger siblings.⁹⁷

The inventories, and occasionally the wills, of persons in Axholme sometimes contain details of the debts which the deceased owed to others and the debts that others owed to him, but the information on the incidence and level of debt is fragmentary. It is possible to compare the level of indebtedness with the total value of the inventory though this is difficult when debts are in kind, such as, 'a sack' of peas'. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information to make an evaluation.

The debts recorded in the inventories, and in wills where possible, have been divided chronologically, and subsequently into 'social' groups. The time-span is from 1531 to 1625, after which no debts have been found in the material under consideration, and this has been divided into two unequal periods, namely 1531 to 1600 and 1601 to 1625. There is no hidden reason for such an arbitrary division other than it seemed more appropriate to use the turn of

the century rather than 1578, which is the mid-point. A total of 88 people have been identified as debtors or debtees, with 143 persons known as owing money to the deceased, and 290 having money owing to them by the deceased.

If debts are considered as a proportion of the total valuations of inventories, the levels of indebtedness rose between 1601 and 1625 compared with the earlier period: the amounts owed by testators increased from nearly 10 per cent (upto 1600) to nearly 33 per cent from 1601 to 1625, while the proportion of money owed to testators rose from nearly 20 per cent to 28 per cent in the corresponding periods. It is difficult to state categorically the reasons for the increases, but three reasons present themselves - first the rise in inflation because of the greater demand for wheat during a period of poor harvests thus adding to the overall poverty of the middling and lower groups; secondly, a determination, especially amongst aspiring yeomen, to improve their property, which necessitated their borrowing; and thirdly, the need to finance the purchase of the small parcels of land available in increasing numbers because of partible inheritance.

The increases in indebtedness given above can also be demonstrated by analysing the average levels of debt amongst the different social groups.⁹⁸ The groups listed below represent broadly the hierarchical structure of Axholme society with 'others' included as directly unidentifiable in terms of status or occupation, but as persons who owed debts or had debts owing to them. The one person described as 'gent' was not notably richer than a number of yeomen or husbandmen, but as he is the only gent out of three identified in the records as having debts, he has been included. Table 5.3 shows the average levels of debt owed by testators for both period.

Table 5.3 Average levels of debt 1531 - 1625

	1531-1600			1601 - 1625			1531 - 1600			1601 - 1625		
	Owed by him			Owed by him			Owed to him			Owed to him		
	£	s.	d.									
Yeomen		3	4	20	8	4	4	11	8	26	11	3

Husbandmen	4	5	2	9	1	2	9	7	4	5	2	7
Labourers	1	12	7	2	17	2	1	12	5	1	9	6
Widows	7	18	8	-	-	-	8	3	6		11	6
Craftsmen		18	7		9	7	1	5	5	4	14	1
Others		2	10	41	2	11	8	13	9	8	2	3

Note: Gentry have been omitted as only one had debts of £1 0s. 0d. owing to him and £14 13s 0d. owed to him.

As may be seen from Table 5.3, there was a marked increase in personal debt amongst yeomen, husbandmen, and others (as a group), with labourers and craftsmen remaining at about the same levels in the later period; the differences between widows in the two period is accounted for by the lack of evidence in the later period. In the later period, there appears to have a greater likelihood of yeomen lending money; husbandmen were less likely, and all others, except widows, remained at about the same level.

An examination of debts at an individual level shows that two-thirds of debts were for sums of £1 (one pound) or less, with some amounts as small as 5d., and a further 28 per cent were for debts between £2 and £5. (see Chart 5.1 - p.205) In the period 1530-1600, the overall amount of debt did not exceed £40, that is, there were no major debtors or debtees. In the period 1601-25, there were two debts which exceeded £140: William Draper of Crowle, in 1616, had £206 14s. 10d. owing to him in sealed bonds,⁹⁹ and Alexander Kitchen, a yeoman from Belton (d.1614), owed £144 2s. 0d. mainly in bonds.¹⁰⁰ Only half the debtees were owed less than £5, and only half the deceased owed less than £5. The levels of debt can be put into perspective by considering the wages a labourer could earn. Dyer calculated that a labourer could work a maximum of 243 days a year, which would amount to a total of £3 - this for an earlier period admittedly,¹⁰¹ but the situation was no much improved when Henry Best's payments to his workers are considered: 'John Bonwicke oweth me 6s. he left unpaid

when I received his rent and money for his Calfe-gate. . .paid [him] for last quarter's wages 15s'.¹⁰²

What, then, were the reasons for borrowing and for lending? Unless the nature of the debt is stated, such as a bond or a 'child's portion', it is impossible, when dealing with debts in inventories to give reasons for everyone though it is possible to speculate on the basis of the sums involved. An examination of the debts of less than £5 owed by testators shows that there were five categories where the nature of the debt is defined: bonds, a child's portion, debts to other members of the family or in-laws, money owing for goods and rents, and money set aside for a mortuary or funeral. A similar pattern exists for debts between £6 and £20.

Amongst those with debts of less than £10 only one inventory specifically refers to bonds: Robert Watson, a husbandman from Belton (d.1614) owed £6 to Robert Lambe 'which was due upon May Day last year last as his bond doth appear'.¹⁰³ The rounded amount of the bond (£6) compared with other recorded debts in other inventories suggests that it is possible to identify speculatively other bonds which are not specified as such, for example, Thomas Tankersley (d.1591) owed £4 to John Pettinger, a husbandman from Haxey.¹⁰⁴ As so often happens, the wills and inventories of debtees do not exist, so it is impossible to cross-check to see if the debts, and their type, are listed.

Debts between members of families were a fairly common feature amongst the group with less than £5 of debts though it was more common for the deceased to owe money rather than the other way round. Christopher Mawe, a husbandman from Epworth (d.1574), owed his brother Thomas 6s. 8d, and his sister, Elizabeth, three shillings.¹⁰⁵ Robert Pettinger, a husbandman from Haxey (d.1590), owed his daughter, Jennett, and his son, Thomas, one pound each.¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Layne, a widow of Haxey (d. 1591), owed her son, John Sanderson, a total of £1 13s. 9d., the difference in surnames being accounted for by re-marriage: Elizabeth had been married three times - her first marriage to a Sanderson cannot be traced, but

on 2 October 1575 she married Robert Robinson, who died on 16 November 1581; she married Richard Layne on 13 October 1583, but it has not been possible to trace his burial.¹⁰⁷

As might be expected, people died owing money for goods they had purchased, or had money owing to them for goods supplied. Thomas Cleisby, the vicar of Belton (d.1583), owed William Dauber ten shillings for a hat and for 27 pounds, in weight, of iron; the reason for his requiring iron is not clear. He also owed 'about ten shillings' to Henry Scott and a person identified solely as Garratt for cloth. The minister was owed £4 for a quarter's wages by Mr Major, which sheds an interesting light on the stipend of a country parson in Lincolnshire at the end of the sixteenth century, and which, no doubt, accounts for his borrowings.¹⁰⁸ Edward Johnson, a webster from Haxey (d.1587), owed fourpence for two pecks of hempseed - probably a total weight of twenty pounds.¹⁰⁹ This valuation can be compared with prices for wheat, barley, and oats, which are dealt with in the next chapter. Margaret Kempley, a widow from Craiselound, Haxey (d.1577), owed a total of £2 13s. 4d. to several persons for more than 140 yards of sackcloth,¹¹⁰ and a labourer from Haxey, John Townsend (d.1574) owed an unnamed person £1 10s. 0d. for sackcloth.¹¹¹

Two persons owed money for rent and reparations: William Gudson from Belton (d.1551) owed nine shillings,¹¹² and Thomas Wilkinson (d.1556), also from Belton, owed £1 1s. 2d.¹¹³ The inventories do not state what the rents were for though it is likely that they were for land. If the rents were for land, it is possible to calculate the approximate area of land by using the Haxey Rental.¹¹⁴ The rental covers the years 1594 to 1624 with a few gaps. From 1594 to 1601 only the rents are recorded, and thereafter the areas of land and the rent are stated. In 1601, for no reason stated, the rents were approximately trebled; in 1602, the rent for one acre was 2s. 5d. though, curiously, four acres of land levied a rent of ten shillings. Prior to 1601, therefore, the rent for one acre would be about tenpence. Disregarding inflation between the mid-sixteenth century and 1600, and assuming that rents in Haxey and Belton were similar, then William Gudson may have rented about ten acres, and Thomas Wilkinson about 25 acres.

The money set aside for funeral expenses varied widely with no reason for this. Few expenses are referred to in either wills or inventories, but the following illustrate the range:

1577	Richard Howghe, Wroot	40s. 0d.*
1577	Jane Peacock, spinster, Haxey	10s. 0d.
1593	Agnes Houghton, widow, Crowle	5s. 4d.
1597	Thomas Singleton, labourer, Belton	10s. 0d.
1599	Edward Scatcher, carpenter, Haxey	3s. 0d.
1601	Thomas Kelsey, webster, Haxey	11s. 6d.
1607	Thomas Hourd, webster, Haxey	3s. 4d.*
1614	John Armitage, labourer, Belton	10s. 0d.

*for mortuary, burial, and funeral

* for mortuary

Eight people had debts between £21 and £100, and, as with other groups, debt amongst members of the family was common. William Harrison, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1611), whose debtees owed him a total of £77 15s. 6d., was owed money by his brothers, John and Robert Harrison amongst others:

John Thornhill and John Turre, signatories by bill	£ 3 0s. 0d.
Peter Clarke, by bill	£11 0s. 0d.
Thomas Pointer and Thomas Taylor, by bill	£10 0s. 0d.
John Harrison, brother, by bill	£15 1s. 0d.
Robert Harrison, brother, by bill	£17 15s. 0d.
John Turre of Newbigge, by bill	<u>£ 3 0s. 0d.</u>
Total	<u>£59 16s. 0d.</u>

William Harrison was also owed £10 1s. 0d. for cattle he had sold, and £3 8s. 0d. for corn. His inventory was valued at £13 18s. 0d., and gives the impression of a man living in 'decayed' circumstances as the word 'old' is used frequently of his furniture and his furnishings. It is assumed that his wife was dead as she is not mentioned in the will: two

nieces, Elizabeth and Isabel, inherited almost all his land, while a total of £11 13s. 8d. was left, benefiting mainly his brothers and their children. It would appear, however, that William had been living of his land, and was, at the same time, lending money.¹¹⁵

Filial portions were included in the debts of some of the inventories, but the most unusual was that in John Clarke's, a yeoman from Luddington (d.1603), who left £16 to Jane and Isabel, the daughters of Robert Jefferson of Thorne for their filial portions; the link between the two families is not clear - Thorne is about ten miles distant from Luddington, and is in Yorkshire, but a Thomas and William Jefferson were witnesses to his will, and John's wife was called Isabel, so it is possible that the two girls were nieces.¹¹⁶

Most of the other debts documented in the inventories were bonds, which are identifiable as such, or are assumed to be so by the rounded sums recorded. From the evidence of deeds, which will be considered below, it is probable that the bonds were undertaken in the purchase of land. Alexander Kitchen, a yeoman from Belton (d.1614), owed Robert Kirk of Gainsborough £42, George Lathom £40, and Thomas Meggott £40, all in bonds, with the possibility that some of his other debts were also bonds: he owed Thomas Smith of Messingham £8 and John Clarke of Haldenby £6. He was owed £5 by Thomas Meggott, the same person, one assumes, as his bond provider. John Thornton of Woodhouse, a hamlet in Belton parish, owed him £3 6s. 0d., which looks like a debt of £3 and interest for one year (6s.) at ten per cent. Alexander was owed a total of £11 9s. 4d. and owed £145 2s. 0d. His goods and chattels were valued at £106 19s. 6d. before his debts were taken into consideration.¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that his eldest son was left half of his father's house and land on condition that he paid his three brothers and two sisters £10 each when they reached the age of twenty-one, thus putting a financial burden on him for years to come. One of the persons to whom Alexander owed money, George Lathom, was left two half-acres and five selions of land, which may have been his way of paying off some of his debt, though it would reduce the land available to his eldest son. It is unlikely that the areas of land left to George Lathom would pay off much of the debt. As Erickson observes, 'a cottage could be

bought for the equivalent purchase price of five to ten beds or five to ten cows'.¹¹⁸ Erickson also cites a Sussex farmer who required his wife to deliver to his son a deed of release of her dower land; if she refused to do so, then she would forfeit a right to a featherbed.¹¹⁹

The most outstanding amount of debt was the £206 14s. 0d. owed to William Draper of Crowle (d.1616) in bonds of specialty; details of his occupation are not given, neither are details of his debtors. His goods and chattels were valued at £37 19s. 7d. His house consisted of a hall, a parlour, chamber, a buttery, and a kitchen though the inventory gives the impression of clutter in the parlour and chamber, the former having a feather bed, bed linen, three chests and a trunk, with the latter having three different sorts of beds, while the other rooms seemed relatively empty. He had six kine and one sow, and, apart from a boat appraised at thirty shillings, and a musket, a fowling piece, and a birding piece valued at a total of £2 5s. 0d., the bulk of the valuation is for three score loads of turf, valued at thirty shillings, and crops whose total value was £11 17s. 0d. From these details, it is assumed he lived simply while acting as a money lender by using his savings.¹²⁰ A similar situation is described by Spufford in Cambridgeshire in the seventeenth century.¹²¹

Another source of information on the financial transactions occurring in the Isle is to be found in deeds in which the purchase or sale of land were involved. The deeds contain two types of obligation, a 'consideration' and a bond.¹²² The consideration was 'often the actual sum of money or entry fine paid for a lease, especially if the rent was a token one',¹²³ for example, Robert Mawe, a yeoman from Epworth, leased two acres of meadow to John Whitelam in 1597 for a consideration of £8 and annual rent of sixpence.¹²⁴ This is the only example to be found giving the rent though there are other instances of considerations. Bonds were often associated with mortgages: William Ferne Esq. conveyed an area of arable land to Alexander Chesman, a husbandman of Belton, in 1612, for a bond of £18,¹²⁵ and Robert Medley, a gentleman, conveyed a cottage with a croft in East Lound, in 1601, to Robert Harris a miller, for a bond of £60.

While one might expect those who could profit from leasing land, such as yeomen and husbandmen, and widows who may have inherited money or profitable land leases from their husbands, to lend money, labourers also did this. Amongst three labourers who did this, William Turner from Haxey (d.1625) was the most outstanding for he was owed a total of £9 1s. 4d.; he also owed £3 13s. 4d. The debts owed to William Turner included one of £3 6s. 0d. which looks as though this was the sum of £3, possibly for a bond, with an annual rate of ten per cent.¹²⁶

Though the sample of indebtedness is small, it was considered worthwhile to see if there were any correlation between years of bad harvests and levels of debt because people whose crops had failed, and they needed to borrow money to subsist. With both Hoskins's and Harrison's analyses of bad harvests to consider, it was decided to examine those years where one or both of them recorded a bad harvest or a dearth. Eight years were identified as bad or dearth harvest years,¹²⁷ and allowing for a 'knock on' effect, when families could cope with the actual years of bad harvests, they would need some sort of a boost to tide them over in later years. Only five persons in the wills and inventories studied had debts of more than £5 in the years corresponding or immediately subsequent to years of bad harvests. Of the five, four were identified as husbandmen, three of whom were from Haxey, and the status of the fifth was unknown. The sums involved ranged from £5 7s. 8d. to £37 15s. 2d. An examination of their wills and inventories reveal that all four husbandmen were not dependent on grain crops for their livelihood: Richard Travis (d.1558) held leases of meadows from William Coggan, a gentleman, and left his sons and daughters cows. His two sons were to receive their inheritance on paying his debts - totalling £19 6s. 8d. - no doubt an unpleasant surprise for them.¹²⁸ Robert Maw from Crowle (d.1594) had three kine, one bull, six bullocks, and three calves, and five acres of corn on the ground, the last valued at £3 6s. 8d. His debts amounted to £6 with his inventory valued at £30 6s. 8d.¹²⁹ John Coggan from Haxey (d.1594) left twelve acres of meadow amongst his wife and children, had fifteen cattle, 35 lambs, six pigs, eight acres of barley, three acres of wheat and rye, four acres of peas, and

three acres of hemp, all valued at £18. He owed £20 to Robert Medley, a gentleman, which may have been a bond, as Robert was selling parcels of land and buildings at this time. His inventory was appraised at £78 2s. 0d.¹³⁰ John Post (d.1598) had four sheep, six cattle, and three pigs though there is no reference to landholding. His inventory was valued at £78 2s. 0d., and his debts totalled £5 7s. 8d.

As indicated earlier, the reasons for indebtedness is rarely stated though, where bonds are mentioned in wills, it may be assumed that these were in connection with the purchase of land. Though not all debts were for land purchase, with the number of occasions when land was bought or sold it is reasonable to infer that the two were connected.

The lives of the poor

It is difficult to build up a picture of the social and economic lives of the poor because they left few, if any records, and few records are left of them. It is possible to provide some sort of a picture by looking at the documents left by labourers, and to adduce other information from Quarter Sessions, Churchwardens' Records, and perhaps rentals and surveys.

The effects of population growth, poor harvests, and the increase in the price of grain during the latter half of the sixteenth century were contributory factors in the rise in the number of the poor. Growing population put pressure on jobs so that there was underemployment; agriculture was the major source of employment, but work was seasonal so labour was cheap. Because the poor were presenting an increasing problem, the Poor Laws were designed to help the 'deserving' poor and provide punishment for idle vagrants through the establishment of overseers of the poor and a poor rate funded by the inhabitants of the community. No records are extant for Axholme though the Protestation Returns of 1642 show that overseers were present in Belton, Epworth, Luddington, and Owston.¹³¹

The presence and condition of the poor in the parish were recognised, but not always, in wills when testators made provision for them. The earlier wills made during the reign of Philip and Mary usually make no mention of the poor, with small sums left to the providing of

candles in the parish church or 'Our Lady's Work in Lincoln' [cathedral], and later ones occasionally refer to 'the poor man's box', even in 1615, for example, when Gregory Turre, a yeoman from Haxey, left it five shillings.¹³² Amounts of money varied, either according to ability to pay or perhaps conscience, from fourpence left by a yeoman, John Hessyl, in 1566,¹³³ to a maximum of £3 left by Robert Caister, a yeoman of Belton (d. 1599), who also left fifteen shillings 'for the young to be merry withal'.¹³⁴ Another Caister, Alexander, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1605), divided his largesse by giving 20 shillings to the poor of Belton and 10 shillings to those in Epworth,¹³⁵ as did John Gentleman, a husbandmen from Crowle (d. 1598), who benefited the poor of Crowle and Eastoft to the tune of 6s. 8d. each.¹³⁶ There appears to be no link between social status and amounts disbursed as yeomen could be parsimonious while labourers or widow were generous - Thomas Rowsley, a labourer from Haxey (d. 1615) donated ten shillings,¹³⁷ while Elizabeth Turton, a widow from Belton, left 20 shillings to the Belton poor and the same amount to those in Epworth in 1588.¹³⁸ Thomas Coggan, an Epworth yeoman (d. 1609), left a quarter of corn to the poor, possibly because of a poor harvest in 1608, perhaps a more practicable way of showing concern than a sum of money.¹³⁹

'Being a weak old man, and grieved with a sore on his lip, which sore did continue unto the XVth day of January 1622 [1623], which was the day of his burial.'¹⁴⁰ Such is the beginning of the non-cupative will of Henry Skinner, a labourer from Belton, which may provide a glimpse into the lives of the poor, who almost certainly lived in single-room houses, possibly built of turf with a thatched roof as the Mowbray Charter allowed for the cutting of turves and reeds.¹⁴¹ Laslett remarked on the seasonal employment offered to the poor who supplemented their earnings from 'industrial' occupations, particularly spinning yarn.¹⁴² How the Axholme poor supplemented their income may be indicated by the inventory of a Haxey labourer, John Townsend (d. 1574), who had a loom with a pair of bartrees [the wooden frames on which the warp was placed], valued at ten shillings, a boat with a net (13s. 4d.), and two fishing nets and a wool-wheel, valued at about five shillings. He also had a

hemp heck. The total value of the inventory was £5 19s. 6d., less £1 15s. 2d. in debts owed by him.¹⁴³

As happened in nearby seventeenth century Retford, the poor could appear in front of the magistrates as victims of maladministration or through the misbehaviour of others.¹⁴⁴ Richard Coggan appealed for help from the local justices, 'having hired for a year . . . one dwelling house of the churchwardens in Haxey, being then in the occupation of William Wyatt, and having brought to this house part of his winter fuel and his poor lame wife, had his poor wife thrust out of the house by William Wyatt, who would not suffer her to be there'.¹⁴⁵ There is no record of what happened though the Haxey Rental shows Wyatt paying 3s. 4d. 'for Church House' while the entry for Coggan is put in as an addendum after the rental had been totalled.¹⁴⁶ In 1630, the justices heard from the father of Anne Stainton, Robert, that she had been taken into service by Gregory Moody, whose son, William, had impregnated her and promised to marry her, had put her out of the house, 'and forced her poor father, who already had six children, to support her although William confessed he was the father of the child'.¹⁴⁷ Sadly, there is no record of the judgement.

The Quarter Sessions records illustrate the anti-social behaviour of the poor though the yeomen and husbandmen also frequently are cited for grievous bodily harm, theft, and the killing of ducks and pigeons with hand guns. John Morfin of Epworth was indicted for being a member of a riotous crowd, which was 'armed with swords and sticks and knives', and which entered 'on the close of Robert Trowte, taking away two threshing carts belonging to him' on 24 November 1624.¹⁴⁸ In January 1630-1, Francis Foster from Luddington appeared before the justices to explain 'where he came by a certain mutton found in his house' on 24 December by the constable. He claimed he had bought the hind quarter of a mutton from a butcher at Burton [on-Stather, across the Trent], 'but does not know his name'; nor did he know about the shoulder of mutton found by the constable.¹⁴⁹

As with Retford, there was a proliferation of ale-houses in the Isle with the keepers appearing in court for allowing excessive 'tippling and drinking' especially on Sunday

evenings 'to the dishonour of God and an evil example to others, and contrary to the statute'. Ale-housekeepers from Haxey, Epworth, and Owston all put in court appearances, most notably Francis Swindall of Haxey and John Whittaker of Epworth.¹⁵⁰ Like the Retford houses, the ones in Axholme kept the sellers above the poverty line.¹⁵¹

In 1634, a number of servants of Israel Meggott in Haxey appeared at the Quarter Sessions accused of theft and handling of corn at the instigation of Thomas Meggott and his wife, Margaret. The relationship between master and servants is not clear. The circumstances of the theft of a peck of wheat by Bridget Green and John Duxon are not fully clear, except that they received twopence from Thomas Meggott and were told they 'would dine out' on the remaining eight pennyworth. At about the same time, another theft of four pecks of wheat was committed by Frances Goldsmith, who claimed that she had paid someone three shillings for the wheat, believing it was 'task' wheat. All those involved confessed their crimes, but the only one who appears to have suffered was John Duxon, who was sent to the house of correction to 'be kept in safe custody, to be given reasonable correction, and set to work'.¹⁵²

Summary

The evidence from parish registers demonstrates the wide range of occupations in two parishes, and it is possible to assume that a similar social structure obtained in the others, with a predominance of men occupied in agriculture. The size of the parcels of land in sales or purchases indicate that partible inheritance was creating a situation where they were unable to support a family and it was practicable to sell or lease them to others. What is interesting is the way in which yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers built up sizeable holdings, in proportion to their status, yet dispersed them amongst their children or relatives at their death. The practice of partible inheritance seems to have had a strong hold on local custom. Arising from this state of affairs, it is clear that secondary occupations, based mainly on the natural resources of suitable land and plentiful supplies of water, assisted in sustaining family incomes. The main sellers of land were the gentry with all social groups (yeomen,

husbandmen, and labourers) all being purchasers to a greater or lesser extent. As with other communities, debt was an accepted feature of life whereby immediate crises could be averted or where money was needed to buy land or property, or perhaps to improve property to suit a rising status, say, for a yeoman. The gentry acted as lenders, but there is evidence that some agricultural workers, having reached retirement age, and accrued some capital, were able and willing to lend it at a high rate of interest. Apart from the actual references in wills or inventories to debts, there are many, many statements that money left to children should be invested until they reached the age of majority, or that land similarly bequeathed should be let out to accrue a profit. In this way, inheritors benefited from the accumulated interest on invested money, and from accumulated sums of money and the land when they reached twenty-one. The picture that emerges from these studies is one of a dynamic society engaged not only in agriculture but also in a range of secondary occupations, and with evidence that in the second part of the period there was the need for 'luxury' items necessitating tailors, a glover, and a draper; the presence of trades connected with building, such as carpenters and masons, indicates both house improvement and building. There was an active land market arising from the division of landholdings by partible inheritance, with provision for unformalised borrowing and lending either from family or friends, or in a more formal, legal system of bonds and 'considerations'. The material possessions of this hierarchical society will be the subject of the next chapter.

¹ See D Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts*.

² P. Laslett, *The World We Have Lost*, (1983), p. 38.

³ The numbers recorded in the Stow calendar are: Belton - 5; Crowle - 1; Haxey - 15; Luddington -

3. Epworth and Owston had none.

⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1559-66, 209.

⁵ *Calendar of Patent Rolls* Edward VI, Volume IV, pp. 210-211.

⁶ LAO Inventory 103, 30.

⁷ LAO Inventory 122, 38. Fembles was a coarse cloth, and harden was a coarse linen cloth used for sheets.

⁸ G Sheeran, *Medieval Yorkshire Towns*, p.25. It has been impossible to gain a later estimate of population.

⁹ J Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', in F J Fisher, *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, p.70. Hereafter Thirsk, 'Industries'.

¹⁰ M Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, p.165: 'The tenant of a half-yardland of fifteen acres of meadow and marsh, was, in Willingham, a wealthy yeoman'.

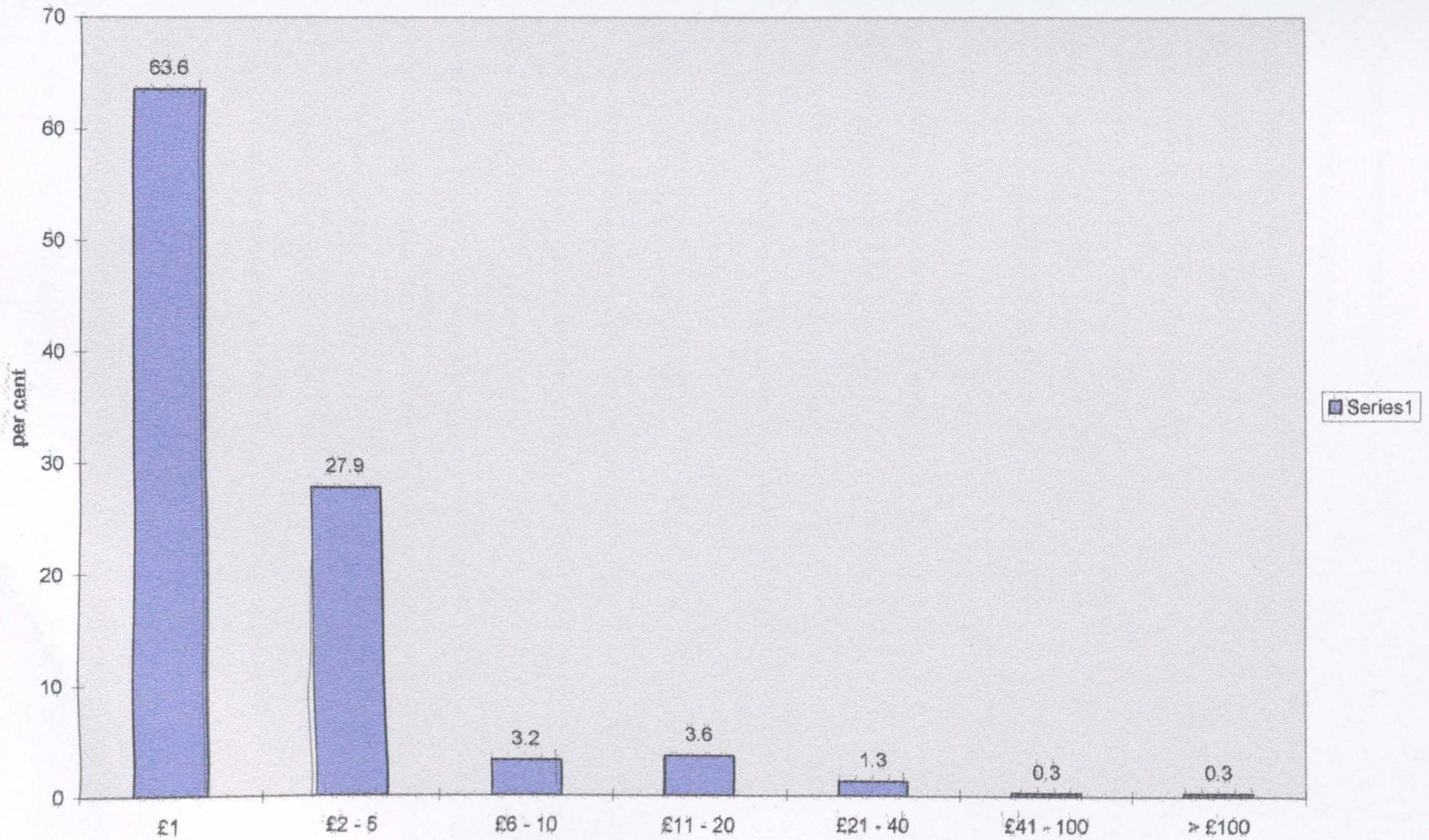
¹¹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 4, 336.

- 12 LAO Inventory 107a, 123.
- 13 LAO Lincoln Wills 1618, 1, 129.
- 14 LAO Archivists' Report 8, pp. 53-4
- 15 LAO Tonge Deposit 4/1.
- 16 Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 First Series Sheet 112/ 782 990.
- 17 K. Leahy, Director of North Lincolnshire Museum, personal communication.
- 18 G. A. J. Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, pp. 79-80.
- 19 R. Head *et al*, 'Sites and finds from the Isle of Axholme', in R. van de Noort and S. Ellis, *Wetland Heritage of the Ancholme and Lower Trent Valleys*, (Hull, 1998), p. 287.
- 20 D. Marcombe, *English Small Town Life: Retford, 1520-1642*, (Nottingham, 1993), pp. 112-3.
- 21 LAO Inventory 80, 355.
- 22 LAO Inventory 76, 72.
- 23 LAO Inventory 80, 5.
- 24 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 206.
- 25 LAO Inventory 107A, 123.
- 26 LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 158.
- 27 LAO Stow Wills 1621-2, 87.
- 28 LAO D and C DJ 38/2/37 (this is an inventory).
- 29 LAO Inventory 221A, 65.
- 30 LAO Lincoln Wills 1611, 2, 238.
- 31 LAO Inventory 114, 179.
- 32 LAO Inventory 80, 61.
- 33 LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 183.
- 34 LAO Stow Wills 1620, 64.
- 35 LAO Lincoln Wills 1574, 1, 309.
- 36 LAO Stow Wills 1636-8, 85.
- 37 LAO Inventory 103, 30.
- 38 LAO Inventory 122, 38.
- 39 LAO Inventory 221A, 10.
- 40 LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 234.
- 41 LAO Inventory 121, 400.
- 42 LAO Inventory 103, 16A.
- 43 LAO Inventory 76, 308.
- 44 LAO Inventory 107A, 123.
- 45 LAO Inventory 80, 75. John Harrison was from Crowle and died in 1614.
- 46 LAO Inventory 114, 180.
- 47 LAO Lincoln Wills 1557, 2, 12. Robert Sampson came from Belton and died in 1557.
- 48 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 19.
- 49 LAO Stow Wills 1610, 108.
- 50 LAO Stow Wills 1623, 85.
- 51 LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 254.
- 52 LAO Lincoln Wills 1588, 1, 176.
- 53 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 103.
- 54 *Letters and Papers Henry VIII*, Vol. 14, Part 1, May 1540, p. 345.
- 55 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Philip and Mary*, 1554-6, p. 26.
- 56 *Calendar of patent Rolls Edward VI*, Volume IV, p. 203.
- 57 Exchequer Augmentation Office, *Calendar of Ancillary Deeds*, Part III, No. 12915, *List and Index Society* Volume 113.
- 58 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Edward VI* Vol. IV, pp.210-211.
- 59 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Philip and Mary*, 1554-5, p. 215.
- 60 LAO Stow Wills 1610, 108.
- 61 LAO Tonge Deeds 3/ 5.
- 62 LAO Stow Wills 1623, 85.
- 63 LAO Tonge Deeds 3, 5
- 64 LAO Stow Wills 1610, 108.
- 65 LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 201.
- 66 LAO Stow Wills 1594, 218.
- 67 The Monson family were, and still are, major landowners in Lincolnshire.

- ⁶⁸ LAO Tonge Deeds 3, 4.
- ⁶⁹ LAO Foster Library Deeds 941.
- ⁷⁰ LAO Stow Wills 1614, 29.
- ⁷¹ LAO Miscellaneous Doncaster Deeds 403/4/13/2.
- ⁷² LAO Cragg Deeds 5/1/ 96.
- ⁷³ LAO Tonge Deeds 3/ 6.
- ⁷⁴ LAO Tonge Deeds 3/ 8.
- ⁷⁵ LAO Tonge Deeds 4/ 3.
- ⁷⁶ LAO Tonge Deeds 4/ 5.
- ⁷⁷ LAO Tonge Deeds 4/ 6.
- ⁷⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 174.
- ⁷⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, ii, 44.
- ⁸⁰ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 218.
- ⁸¹ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 201.
- ⁸² LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 174.
- ⁸³ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 150.
- ⁸⁴ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, ii, 44.
- ⁸⁵ This information has been ascertained through the use of the marriage database and the parish register indexes published by the Isle of Axholme Family History Society. By scanning the database, it is possible to see if there are any family connections.
- ⁸⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 174.
- ⁸⁷ LAO Lincoln Wills 1594, 2, 166.
- ⁸⁸ LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 254.
- ⁸⁹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp.80 and 212-3.
- ⁹⁰ B. A. Holderness, 'Credit in a rural community, 1660-1800,' *Midland History* 3 (1975-6), p.96. Hereafter Holderness, 'Credit'.
- ⁹¹ Holderness, 'Credit', p. 100.
- ⁹² P. Spufford, 'Credit in rural England in the seventeenth century'(trans.), *Annales Histoire Sciences Sociales*, 1994, Vol. 49, No. 6, p. 11. Hereafter P. Spufford, 'Credit'. I am indebted to Dr Anne Tarver for providing me with a copy of the translation of this article, which was originally in French. The pagination is from her translation.
- ⁹³ Holderness, 'Credit', p.97.
- ⁹⁴ P. Spufford, 'Credit', p. 15.
- ⁹⁵ LAO Inventory 114, 180.
- ⁹⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1620, 72.
- ⁹⁷ P. Spufford, 'Credit', pp. 21f.
- ⁹⁸ Holderness, 'Credit', p. 102, pointed out ' the significant social differences apparent in the functioning of the internal mechanism of credit'.
- ⁹⁹ LAO Inventory 114, 19.
- ¹⁰⁰ LAO Inventory 114, 190.
- ¹⁰¹ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 226.
- ¹⁰² D. Woodward (ed), *The Farming and Memorandum Book of Henry Best of Elmswell, 1642*, (1984), pp. 163 -5.
- ¹⁰³ LAO Inventory 114, 180.
- ¹⁰⁴ LAO Inventory 80, 39.
- ¹⁰⁵ LAO Inventory 56, 218.
- ¹⁰⁶ LAO Inventory 80, 5.
- ¹⁰⁷ Haxey Parish Registers and the Isle of Axholme Family History Society marriage database.
- ¹⁰⁸ LAO Inventory 74, 60.
- ¹⁰⁹ LAO Inventory 61, 197.
- ¹¹⁰ LAO Inventory 61, 197.
- ¹¹¹ LAO Inventory 56, 221.
- ¹¹² LAO Inventory 26, 82.
- ¹¹³ LAO Inventory 28, 234.
- ¹¹⁴ LAO Haxey Parish 23/58.
- ¹¹⁵ LAO Lincoln Wills 1611, 2, 238 and Inventory 110, 179.
- ¹¹⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1603-6, 120.
- ¹¹⁷ LAO Lincoln Wills 1614, 2, 238 and Inventory 114, 190.

- ¹¹⁸ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, p. 65. Hereafter Erickson, *Women and Property*.
- ¹¹⁹ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 65.
- ¹²⁰ LAO Inventory 221A, 5.
- ¹²¹ Spufford, *Contrasting Communities*, pp. 212-13.
- ¹²² The word 'bond' could have one of two connotations: first, a deed by which a person bound himself to pay a certain sum of money; secondly, a deed in two parts, whereby one person was bound to pay a certain sum to the other party in the first part, and in the second, it began, 'the condition of this obligation' is that if a certain action is performed, then the first part will be void. 'This could be simply the payment of a stated sum of money at a sated time, as in the case of a straightforward debt. By convention, the bond was for a penal sum, twice the actual amount due'. (N. W. Alcock, *Old Title Deeds*, p. 48.) The deeds considered here are in the first category.
- ¹²³ N. W. Alcock, *Old Title Deeds*, p. 40.
- ¹²⁴ LAO Tonge Deeds 3, 6.
- ¹²⁵ LAO Foster Library Deeds 941.
- ¹²⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1624-5, 90.
- ¹²⁷ These were: 1550, 1551, 1555, 1556, 1594, 1595, 1596, and 1597.
- ¹²⁸ LAO Lincoln Wills 1558, 2, 44.
- ¹²⁹ LAO Inventory 85, 238.
- ¹³⁰ LAO Inventory 86, 282.
- ¹³¹ W. F. Webster, *Protestation Returns 1641-2: Lincolnshire*, (Mapperley, Nottinghamshire), pp. 70-84. The Overseers of the Poor are named as follows: Belton - Robert Metcalfe and George Picocke; Epworth - Thomas Coggan and Thomas Greathead; Luddington with Garthorpe - William Marshall and John Harrison; and Owston - William Slingsby.
- ¹³² LAO Stow Wills 1615, 121.
- ¹³³ LAO Lincoln Wills 1563-6, 178.
- ¹³⁴ LAO Stow Wills 1599-1602, 111.
- ¹³⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1607, 6.
- ¹³⁶ LAO Stow Wills 1594-8, 185.
- ¹³⁷ LAO Stow Wills 1615, 204.
- ¹³⁸ LAO Lincoln Wills 1588, 1, 59.
- ¹³⁹ LAO Stow Wills 1609, 80.
- ¹⁴⁰ Stow Wills 1621-2, 50.
- ¹⁴¹ The Mowbray Charter of 1360, which remained in force even when the manor passed to Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby, in the reign of Henry VII. See V. Cory, *Hatfield and Axholme* (Providence Press, Cambridge, 1985), pp. 30-2.
- ¹⁴² Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (1983), p. 15.
- ¹⁴³ LAO Inventory 56, 221.
- ¹⁴⁴ Marcombe, *Retford*, pp. 94-119.
- ¹⁴⁵ LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1625, 35 (undated).
- ¹⁴⁶ LAO Haxey Rental, Haxey Parish 23/58.
- ¹⁴⁷ LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1630, 1.
- ¹⁴⁸ LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1625, 138.
- ¹⁴⁹ LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1630-1, 13.
- ¹⁵⁰ LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1625, 153-155.
- ¹⁵¹ Marcombe, *Retford*, p. 96.
- ¹⁵² LAO Lindsey Quarter Sessions 1634, 32 and 34.

Chart 5.1 Levels of individual debts as percentage of inventory total



Chapter 6 Material possessions, wealth, and social status

In using wills and inventories to examine the economic and social life of communities, one is dealing with incomplete sources, incomplete because not everyone made a will nor had an inventory, because inventories did not include landholding, and because both documents may conceal the fact that items, including land, may have already been bequeathed. Nevertheless, wills and inventories supplement and complement each other to provide a picture of a person's wealth, daily life, and economic activity.

After examining some of the deficiencies and drawbacks of the documentation, this chapter will analyse the contents of inventories under several categories to reveal the variations in the levels of material possessions, standards of living, and economic activity of Axholme different social groups, using wills when necessary to present as full a picture as possible. As part of this remit, the size of houses and the extent of credit will also be considered. A number of case studies will be used to illustrate the themes of this chapter

Wills and inventories - some limitations

In the Middle Ages, the church courts were responsible for overseeing the disposal of a person's moveables but not his real estate: real estate was disposed in a last will and moveables in an earlier testament, but by the sixteenth century the two documents had been merged into one. Inventories were needed because the executors were responsible for paying funeral and administrative costs, including debts, and possibly the upbringing of young children from the proceeds of a deceased person's estate.¹ Overton has a more cynical view on the purposes of an inventory, claiming that it was to prevent fraud by the executors before the goods were dispersed to the beneficiaries according to the terms of the will.²

Studies of will-makers by Coppel in Grantham in the sixteenth century have revealed that it was the 'middling sort' who made wills though by 1600 will-making had moved down the social scale; in Kent for a similar period, Zell's sample was dominated by 'householders', and the poor were 'clearly unrepresented'.³ By contrast, Spufford maintained that family

responsibilities, rather than wealth, increased the likelihood of will-making: men with under-age children or no obvious heir occur most frequently in the Archdeaconry of Sudbury, and suggest the need to clarify inheritance. The proportion of males leaving wills varied enormously between one-tenth and one-quarter.⁴

The wills and inventories for the Isle of Axholme held in the Lincolnshire Archives Office have become separated so that it is often impossible to link up the two documents.

Table 6.1 illustrates this.

Table 6.1 Wills and linked inventories for social and occupational groups in the Isle of Axholme, 1540-1640.

Group	Wills	Linked inventories
Gentry	4	4
Yeomen	80	21
Husbandmen	104	42
Labourers	51	8
Craftsmen	19	17
Widows	13	19
Others	10	23
Total	281	134

The dichotomy between the numbers of wills and the numbers of inventories is large, particularly so for labourers where the proportion of the latter is only 15.7 per cent, while yeomen do not fare much better with a proportion of 26.2 per cent. It will be realised, however, that only the better-off labourers would make wills and have inventories. There is a category of wills and inventories which give no indication of the status or occupation of the deceased, hereafter denoted by 'others', who, from the internal evidence, are likely to have been involved in agriculture.

As already indicated, wills and inventories provide complementary and supplementary information about a person's apparent wealth and social status, but there are pitfalls for the unwary. For example, 'Those leaving goods worth less than £5 were not obliged by law to have an inventory of their possessions made, so it is immediately apparent that inventories are biased towards the richer members of society'.⁵ Even the total valuation in an inventory can be misleading: 'Not only is the sum at the foot of the inventory no guide to the individual's wealth, but it is no guide at all even to his relative financial standing within the same occupational or social group'.⁶ The reasons for this are multiple: copyhold and freehold land are not included, nor are bequests made in a will. In addition, the widow's property is excluded, and items may be excluded for legal reasons, for example, corn was to be included while grass was to be excluded, a legal nicety that may have evaded some of the appraisers.

Those appointed as appraisers were charged with costing items to their second-hand values or selling prices.⁷ Overton states that appraisers of an inventory were bound by law to value items according to the price they would fetch at auction. The question is whether they followed this or recorded notional or widely erratic valuations; Overton concludes that, generally, they did⁸, though some inventories from Axholme give a different impression of no more than a cursory evaluation or count. Finally, the numbers of animals listed could vary depending on the time of year when the inventory was made, for there would be fewer cattle, for example, in the latter part of the year, when they had been sold off after fattening or killed for winter food.⁹ In spite of these limitations, 'one has to accept for use the available documentary evidence, despite inadequacies and difficulties involved'.¹⁰

In considering any link between wealth and social status, the inventories have a further limitation because the claimed status of the deceased may have been at variance with the perceptions of his neighbours, or his scribe's opinion.¹¹ There is often an overlap in both valuations and status groups, for example, Alexander Briggs, a yeoman from Belton (d.1616), had his inventory valued at £20, while William Watkinson's, a labourer from Haxey (d.1606) was appraised at £22 4s. 0d.¹² The problem of status seems to belong especially to yeomen,

which Garrard considered to be 'the most commonly used title in agrarian society'.¹³ Quoting Campbell, Garrard stated that one view of a yeoman was of a person leading an unpretentious yet increasingly comfortable life style, with growing wealth which was invested in his farm.¹⁴ An alternative view, Garrard's, was that there were yeomen with pretensions towards a genteel style of life, possessing goods of a high value together with a house whose contents resembled those of a gentleman.¹⁵ The contrast between these two views may not be all that great, hinging more on the concept of 'pretensions' than on being able to distinguish which household items included in an inventory produced a comfortable life style and which a gentlemanly one. No doubt there were yeomen who aspired to being regarded as gentlemen, but the inventories are silent on aspirations.

There seems to be an underlying assumption amongst writers using inventories for their researches that there is a correlation between wealth and social status. The stumbling block all encounter is how to define wealth. Schuurman saw inventories being used to research three issues: wealth, daily life, and economic activity. Although he had reservations about defining wealth purely in terms of moveables and credits, he failed to offer any definition of his own.¹⁶ Faber offered a wider definition of wealth as personal property (consumer goods and producer goods), real estate, securities, money, claims, and debts.¹⁷ In a different view, Thirsk averred that 'the clues to a man's place in the economic scale was the number of his cattle', but she made no distinction between social groups.¹⁸ By contrast, Alcock advanced the view that 'an individual's position in the village economy was accurately indicated by the size of his landholding, and to a lesser extent this correlated with his social position'.¹⁹

Compared with Thirsk's definition of the indicator of a man's economic status, Garrard produced four pointers: first, the proportion of known wealth in cattle; secondary occupations; room use - 'the differentiation of spaces within the home for different purposes';²⁰ and the actual furniture or equipment, and whether it consisted of basic or luxury items. Basic items included beds and seating though she admitted difficulties in drawing up

her lists. She also found 'luxury' items difficult to define on the grounds that what a person, such as a labourer would deem a luxury, a yeoman or gentleman might see 'as a necessary adjunct to his social standing', and consonant with his status.²¹ The major difficulty in addressing Garrard's thesis, that the possession of wealth is, in effect, a determinant of social status, is that she has produced a formula with four variables, yet omitted others, such as the amount of land which is not known because it is not recorded in an inventory.

While the correlation between wealth and social status is not clear, there is general agreement that 'the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed significant improvements in the living standards of the 'middling sort' of English countrymen'.²² Wrightson and Levine observed that William Harrison, writing in the 1570s, commented that farmers and artificers - that is, yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and craftsmen - 'do yet find the means to obtain and achieve such furniture as heretofore has been impossible'.²³ Johnston observed that Harrison was writing about changes in the southern part of the country, and examined to what extent Lincoln and its county had been affected. He concluded that the city compared well with Essex, where Harrison lived, but that the 'country' areas, especially the Fens did not.²⁴ Though it is unlikely that the furnishings of houses in the Isle of Axholme would match those in Essex or even Lincoln because it was remote from centres of fashion, it is possible to detect the differences in the possessions and their quality between the gentry, yeomen, husbandmen, labourers and craftsmen.

Notwithstanding the drawbacks of Garrard's categories, the ones used here are similar to hers, but will include some that are not. The list includes the amounts of ready money, furnishings, livestock, farming equipment, houses and house size, including room use, furnishings, luxury items.

Total valuations of inventories

The levels of debt and reasons for it were dealt with in the previous chapter, but if they are disregarded, and no allowance for inflation is made, the following minima, maxima, median, and average values over the period 1540-1640 for the total goods and chattels are given in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Minimum, maximum, average, and median values of inventories 1540-1640.

Status	Minimum			Maximum			Average			Median		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Yeomen	9	8	0	214	2	8	96	11	8	92	17	4
Husbandmen	8	18	2	151	12	0	45	15	9	45	18	0
Labourers	3	7	0	21	2	0	14	7	6	16	8	0
Widows		10	0	51	10	4	17	19	10	12	12	4
Craftsmen	4	13	8	47	6	8	18	13	6	15	5	4
Others	3	4	8	51	2	8	26	18	0	24	2	4

There were only four inventories traceable to gentry in Axholme, and in comparison with many members of the other groups, they were relatively wealthy but not as much as yeomen; their wealth was probably to be found in the amount of land they held though it has not been possible to trace this. Edmund Coggan from Haxey (d.1616) had his possessions valued at £54 12s. 0d,²⁵ while William Brown, also from Haxey (d.1574) had his moveables assessed at £110 19s. 6d.²⁶ Though housing and other indicators of material wealth will be discussed in a later chapter, it is interesting to note that Edmund Coggan's house consisted of two rooms, a hall and a parlour, and William Brown had two houses, one at Beltoft with two rooms, and another at Westwood with a hall, parlour, a chamber, a kitchen chamber, a buttery, and a brewhouse.

Totals can be misleading because moveables may have been bequeathed already, or a person may have sold off possessions to be in a position to lend money at interest. William

Harrison, a yeoman from Haxey (d.1611), who will be looked at in greater detail *infra*, had his goods valued at £13 18s. 0d., but it appears that he acted as a local money-lender - he had debts owing to him of £77 16s. 6d.²⁷ By contrast, John Farre, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1616), had his moveables appraised at £234 17s. 10d., with a debt of £75 15s. 8d. owing to him.²⁸

Some individuals may have invested what money they had in animals, crops, or in materials for secondary occupations rather than a high level of furnishing. Nicholas Halifax, a husbandman from Epworth (d.1616) had relatively few personal possessions - two cows, hemp and corn valued at 50s., sheets but no bed, two old carts, and an old chair. They were valued at £8 18s. 2d., and he had debts owing to him of £8 17s. 0d. The main items that were given high valuations were 'the crop in his barn' (£16), 'all his horses and beasts (£30), and 'harden, fumble, and linen cloth, cut and uncut' (£27). He owed £5 and was owed a total of £5 14s. 4d.²⁹ Of the labourers, Thomas Coult of Haxey (d.1618), like Nicholas Halifax, had no bed mentioned in his appraisal; his furniture consisted of bed stocks, a table, a form, two chairs, a stool, and a cupboard, suggesting a low standard of living. By comparison, Peter Beckwith from Belton (d.1588) had two cows, three horses, one 'an old mare', four sheep, a sow and seven pigs, geese, hens, and ducks. It is not clear whether his house had more than one room, but, if not, it must have been so crowded as to have been impossible to move with two mattresses, large quantities of bed 'linen', three tables, a vast array of pots, pans, and dishes, together with pieces of cloth.³⁰

The number of widows' inventories is relatively small (=20), and are mainly limited to the period before 1600. Widows' possessions are, on average, worth more than labourers', and it is probable that their husbands were yeomen or gentry, such as, Elizabeth Coggan of Epworth (d.1616), whose husband, Thomas had been a yeoman, and whose inventory was valued at £41 19s. 8d.,³¹ and Margaret Newland of Haxey (d.1593), who was the widow of the vicar of Haxey, and whose inventory was appraised at £17 1s. 4d.³² At least one widow had been the wife of a labourer, namely Marie Barkwith, who was the widow of William Barkwith

of Haxey (d.1621). The inventory for William is not available, but his widow's inventory was valued in 1624-5 at £24 19s. 6d.³³

It is difficult to make comparisons of the average material wealth of craftsmen because of the wide range of their occupations - brewster, carpenter, cooper, miller, roper, tailor, webster, wheelwright, and woollen draper. One of the carpenter's appraisals was one of the lowest: Edward Scatcher from Belton (d.1598) had his moveables valued at £4 17s. 4d.,³⁴ yet, by contrast, another carpenter, John Berwick of Epworth (d.1615-16) had his goods and chattels appraised at £27 14s. 8d.³⁵ Likewise, a glazier, Robert Mann of Belton (d.1614) had his belongings valued at £4 13s. 8d.³⁶ At the other end of the scale, a woollen draper, Thomas Barnbye of Haxey (d.1616), had moveables appraised at £47 6s. 4d.,³⁷ and Edward Johnson of Haxey (d.1587), a webster, had moveables valued at £37 14s. 2d.³⁸ Even so, the craftsmen were not among the better-off in material possessions for their wills show that only a few leased land, such as Robert Samson, a roper from Haxey (d.1591), whose inventory mentions one-and-a-half acres of wheat and one acre of rye 'on the ground'.³⁹ None of the craftsmen appeared in a rental which covered the period 1595 to 1625.⁴⁰

There are 22 wills and inventories that have been examined which give no indication of the status or occupation of the deceased though it is possible to make tentative proposals based on the contents of the inventories. Robert Turre from Owston (d.1615), who has been provisionally identified as a labourer, had goods worth only £3 10s. 0d., and his inventory is a reminder of how difficult life must have been for many people in the Isle. His one cow was valued at 13s. 4d., a feather bed with furnishings was appraised at 30s., and his purse and apparel were estimated to be worth £1 6s. 8d.⁴¹ At the other end of the scale, John Oylson of Crowle (d.1569), who possibly was a yeoman had an inventory valued at £60 15s. 4d. He had farming equipment, horses, cattle, and fishing equipment. His house had a hall, a parlour, a chamber, and a kitchen.⁴²

The differing levels of wealth between yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers raises the question of how people were categorised. The period was one where hierarchy was

important, and where social boundaries to gentry level could be difficult to cross. Garrard asserted that there were three assumptions necessary to carry out research using inventories: first, that late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century England was a deeply status conscious society; secondly, that life style is a reflection of social status; and thirdly, that the documentary sources had to be accepted despite their inadequacies.⁴³ Campbell talks of 'a yeoman ethic. . . involving an unpretentious, if increasingly comfortable life style, with growing wealth reinvested in the farm'.⁴⁴ Yet the yeoman may have aspired to a higher status through an altered life style.⁴⁵ Sir Edward Coke maintained that a man had to hold freehold land worth forty shillings annually to be considered a yeoman, yet by 1618 there was no need to have freehold land.⁴⁶ Thomas Gainsford, writing in that year in *The Glory of England*, stated that the yeoman was neither 'freeholder or copyholder'.⁴⁷ In the absence of any clear definition by contemporaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Campbell suggests that the term 'yeoman' was to be considered as descriptive.⁴⁸ Thus the categories of yeoman, husbandman, and labourer may be considered as having a dual purpose, namely, indicating social status and as a description of the role performed in society, the two being interlinked in the eyes of contemporary society. The yeoman with his sights on raising himself to a higher social status may be considered 'an aspirant yeoman'.⁴⁹

Livestock

Livestock formed an important part of the domestic and general economy for most people, whether engaged in agriculture or in a craft or trade though not everyone surveyed owned any animals. Cattle and sheep were predominant, with horses and pigs also listed in inventories; all four categories will be analysed. It is interesting to note that there are also references to hens, ducks, and geese as well as, occasionally, bees, thus providing an insight not only into ways individuals supplemented their diets, but also into the sort of living conditions to be found on their tofts. It will become apparent that the ownership of animals broadly reflected social status, with yeomen having the highest numbers and labourers the

fewest though there is an overlap between social groups. The reason for these differences can lie in terms of available money and the ability to borrow when necessary. The estimated values of animals will be considered later in this chapter. Table 6.3 shows the distribution of cattle amongst the different social and occupational groups.

Table 6.3 Distribution of cattle amongst the social and occupational groups.

	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers	Craftsmen	Others
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	41	24	6	5	17
Average	9	6	2	2	6
Median	7	4.5	2	2	4

All yeomen had at least one cow, but it is interesting to note the numbers and percentages from the other groups who had no cattle at all as a common impression is that everyone, including the peasantry, had one cow to provide milk for the family. As might be expected, more labourers than husbandmen were in this position, 14 per cent against 7 per cent while nearly one-fifth of the craftsmen surveyed had none. The reasons for the differences are several with the cost of purchase probably predominant; it might also be thought that the absence of cattle is related to the time of year, that is, that in the early part of the year people have not yet bought a cow to fatten it, or sold it or killed it in the latter part, but there is no pattern discernible; alternatively, animals may have already been bequeathed to heirs. An equal percentage of labourers and husbandmen had upto ten cows, but they and craftsmen generally were not possessors of more. Nearly three-quarters of yeomen had more cattle than any other group in the range from eleven to fifty animals. The differences in numbers reflect the overall pattern of yeomen being both richer and of such status that they could, if necessary, raise money for the purchase of animals.

At an individual level, the individual with the largest number of cattle was Stephen Pinder of Crowle, a yeoman, (d.1608), who had 41 animals,⁵⁰ who was closely followed by

Alexander Caister of Belton (d.1607), who had 37 cattle.⁵¹ The husbandman with the largest number of cattle was Richard Barnard of Belton (d.1591) who had 24 cows.⁵² Where such large numbers are concerned, it seems highly likely that such persons were either breeding cattle or keeping them for fattening for sale at market, while labourers and craftsmen kept their animals for domestic purposes, that is, for milk and cheese. The highest number of cows owned by a labourer, Edward Gylliott of Crowle (d.1591), was six,⁵³ which compares with the maximum belonging to a craftsman, Thomas Barnby, a wool draper from Haxey (d.1616), who had five.⁵⁴

The presence of 'wool wheels' in appraisals suggests that wool was of some importance, but not approaching that of hemp, or to a lesser extent flax, yet only 63 out of 94 inventories surveyed mention sheep. The probable reasons for this are the unsuitability of the land for grazing sheep, with any grazing land likely to be under water for nearly a quarter of the year, and at the time when lambing occurs, and the need to use available land for arable purposes. Overall, the figures show that yeomen tended to concentrate on cattle rearing rather than sheep. The shortage of grazing land necessitated intercommoning between Haxey and Misterton, an adjacent village in Nottinghamshire, and between Belton and Crowle, both areas subject to flooding during the winter months and especially wet periods. Table 6.3 (on following page) shows the distribution of sheep amongst the different social groups.

The Pinder family, which had purchased the manor of Eastoft, which comprised a vast area near Crowle, from Lord Clynton and Saye under Philip and Mary in 1554,⁵⁵ and added to their estates in 1589 by claiming right to the title of a messuage and lands 'lately belonging to Thomas Estofofte',⁵⁶ were farmers on a commercial basis. Not only did they have the largest number of cattle (already referred to), but had 28 sheep, 14 horses, and 23 pigs, and their livestock were valued at a total of £102, representing over 60 per cent of the value of the inventory.

Table 6.4 Distribution of sheep amongst the social and occupational groups.

	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers	Craftsmen	Others
Minimum	1	1	1	8	7
Maximum	100	42	14	38	24
Average	12	11	3	21	4
Median	4	22	6	16	7

Pigs were kept by all groups, with yeomen owning the larger herds, yet nearly one-third of the total surveyed kept none. This is surprising because it could be considered as a major source of food which required no special grazing needs. In his study of standards of living in the later middle ages, Dyer comments that 'a pig and a quarter of ox would give an allowance on meat days of about half-a-pound'.⁵⁷ The possession of a pig or two would have provided food for all groups though labourers' ownership of pigs may have been dictated by the low cost of purchasing and feeding them compared with cattle or sheep. Table 6.5 illustrates the numbers of pigs owned by the different groups.

Table 6.5 Distribution of pigs amongst the social and occupational groups.

	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers	Craftsmen	Others
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	16	20	8	9	11
Average	8	7	2	2	2
Median	10	2	2	2.5	3

It is unsurprising to learn that the largest number of pigs was held by Stephen Pinder; of the husbandmen, two had eleven pigs, John Portington of Amcotts (d.1580)⁵⁸ and Nicholas Halifax of Epworth (d.1616);⁵⁹ and Peter Beckwith of Belton, a labourer (d.1588) had eight pigs.⁶⁰ It seems likely that the breeding of pigs for sale or for food was widespread with yeomen and husbandmen accounting for nearly half of the owners of more than 11 animals.

The pattern of yeomen being the largest owners of livestock is found with respect to horses. Stephen Pinder, already referred to as the owner of the highest number of cattle and pigs, also owned sixteen horses, the maximum number amongst yeomen, suggesting that he bred them. Amongst the husbandmen, John Pettinger from Haxey (d.1591), also a possible breeder, had ten,⁶¹ and Peter Beckwith, also referred to as the labourer with the largest number of pigs, had three horses, the largest number owned by labourers though his were most likely to have been used for draught purposes rather than breeding as his inventory shows little other wealth.⁶²

It is of interest to compare the numbers of livestock in other parts of England during this period. Thirsk gave data on the ownership of cattle, pigs, sheep, and horses in the Lincolnshire Fens in 1590, and though the Axholme data cover the period 1530-1640, rather than a specific year, it is worthwhile to make the comparison. Table 6.6 gives the percentages of livestock in the two areas.⁶³

Table 6.6 A comparison between owners of livestock in the Lincolnshire Fens and the Isle of Axholme. (All data are percentages.)

	Cattle		Sheep		Pigs		Horses	
	Ax	Fens	Ax	Fens	Ax	Fens	Ax	Fens
0	6.6	0	70.0	43.4	36.7	30.0	34.4	1.3
1 - 10	72.2	49.9	15.6	17.0	49.9	53.8	56.6	65.5
11 - 20	16.7	23.6	6.7	6.5	10.0	6.6	5.5	14.4
21 - 80	4.4	21.0	6.6	22.2	1.1	1.3	0	5.2
> 81	0	0	1.1	7.8	0	0	0	5.2
N/S	1.1	0	1.1	1.3	2.2	7.8	2.2	1.3

*N/S = Not stated, that is, the appraisers refer simply to 'cows', 'pigs', etc.

Though Thirsk's data for Axholme differ slightly from that under survey, Fendwellers owned more animals in all categories, with three exceptions: more persons in

Axholme owned between one and ten cattle than in the Fens, and the percentage of Fenlanders with between 11 and 20 sheep and pigs were marginally lower. The overall picture, however, is one of greater wealth in terms of animal ownership in the fens, particularly at the upper end of the scale for cattle and sheep.

Thirsk's numbers of owners of cattle for the period 1530-90 show an increase at both ends of the scale, which may reflect the widening gap between the larger farmer and the middling and smaller farmers. There was an increase in persons owning no cattle of 2.4 per cent. By contrast, while the number of persons who owned no horses increased by more 4.7 per cent over the period, the owners of horses in the middle scales increased by small percentages while both ends of the scale declined by a total amount of 11.2 per cent. Changes such as these may reflect a changes in the profitability of breeding horses against breeding sheep.

This is reinforced when the changes in the ownership of sheep in the Fens are examined: there was a sharp increase in the numbers of those who owned few or none, amounting to nearly one-third, perhaps reflecting the gradual decline of the woollen industry in the sixteenth century. The reduction may also indicate the buying out of smaller farmers by the larger ones because of an increase in the numbers of owners in the middle and upper ranges. Similar changes occurred with the ownership of pigs, with an overall reduction in those with five or fewer pigs by nearly one-third.

Comparisons between the two areas reveal that there was a preponderance of small cattle farmers in Axholme with five or fewer animals, with comparable figures for the 6-10 range. Fenland farmers exceeded their Axholme counterparts in the 11-20 range, and just over one-fifth of the former owned between 21 and 80 cattle, compared with one-twentieth of Axholme farmers. Both areas had about one-third of their farmers owning from one to five horses. The overall picture is one of greater wealth in terms of animal ownership in the Fens particularly at the upper end of the scales for cattle and sheep. As stated earlier, wool was less important than growing hemp in the Isle of Axholme.

A brief comparison may be made with two other areas of England, Warwickshire and Oxfordshire. Alcock made a study of Stoneleigh in Warwickshire between 1500 and 1800, and provided evidence from a number of inventories.⁶⁴ Humphrey Hylles, a husbandman who died in 1556, had four steers, six kine, and two calves valued at £11 6s. 8d., four mares with a colt, valued at £1 13s. 4d., ten sheep appraised at £1 0s. 0d., and ten pigs (of which six were for fattening) worth £1 6s. 8d.⁶⁵ His twelve cattle are twice the average for husbandmen in Axholme, and his ten pigs are slightly greater than the average of seven. The ten sheep are near the Axholme average as are his horses. In 1616, Humphrey Hoo, the elder, a yeoman had eleven cattle, thus approaching the Axholme average, but his 69 sheep was over five times the average. He had half the average number of horses for yeomen, and half the average number of pigs.⁶⁶

In his analysis of Oxfordshire inventories, Havinden does not distinguish between the numbers of livestock owned by people in different social groups though the inventories listed generally do so.⁶⁷ As with Axholme, not everyone owned animals, with about one-tenth having no cattle, one-fifth no sheep, and one-third with no pigs. The ownership of cattle had a similar pattern to that in Axholme, but sheep-farming predominated with the average three times that found in the Isle. This may have reflected the better, drier physical conditions in that part of the Midlands, but there is evidence of sheep-depopulation 'of the Midland type', which suggests the earlier importance of wool in the English economy.⁶⁸ Pig-breeding ranked next to sheep-farming with a pattern similar to that of Axholme. The proportion of those who had no horses, one-third, may mirror the fact that farming was mainly pastoral. Few labourers' inventories were found, but that of Robert Holland (d.1568) was valued at £3 19s. 4d. with but one cow and one sheep.⁶⁹ Almost half the craftsmen, for example, butchers, carpenters, chandlers, and shoemakers, had no animals listed in their inventories, a picture similar to that in Axholme.

Values of animals

As was pointed out earlier, the role of appraisers was governed by law, but a scrutiny of the valuations of livestock reveals the wide variations that they made because of the ages, condition, and types of animal they looked at. The values reflect the sorts of prices the livestock would fetch if they were to be sold or auctioned, but do not give an indication of the cost of purchasing an animal. That age and condition were factors in valuing livestock are obvious from the comments recorded in inventories, such as 'six young beasts and two calves - £5' . . . eight older swine and four yearlings - 40s'.⁷⁰

From an examination of the values ascribed to livestock, it is possible to gain an insight into the relative wealth, in cash terms, of the members of the different social groups, and a comparison can be made with valuations from other areas of the country. The category or type of animal also appears to have been a consideration when valuing it.

It is difficult to arrive at an individual value for an animal because the appraisers more often than not lumped together different categories of them, or valued similar animals as a group. Thus the inventory of Alexander Caister, for example, a yeoman from Belton (d.1614),⁷¹ has:

7 horses and mares and one foal	£16 0s. 0d.
7 kye	£14 0s. 0d.
8 young beasts and two little calves	£ 7 5s. 0d.

It is impossible, therefore, to arrive at approximate values for the horses, mares, foal, young beasts, and little calves, except by making an assumption of an individual value by simple mathematical division where this is possible. Thus, one kye (cow) would be valued at £2 0s. 0d. If this assumption is accepted, because there is often no other single valuation available, it is possible to arrive at an approximate evaluation for one item of different types of livestock.

The purpose behind calculating values for single animals it to illustrate the possible outlay a person might be expected to make in purchasing stock and the likely financial burdens

on the poorer families. Although Henry Best's accounts for wages for different types of labouring are slightly out of the period, they provide an illustration of what might be earned, remembering that some work would be seasonal and not every day would provide paid labour. Threshers on Best's farm earned 6d. a day at harvest time, but between 4d. and 5d. for the remainder of the year; spreaders of muck, usually women or children, earned 3d., 'and the lesser sort 2d. a day'; harrowers were paid 3d. per day.⁷²

Amongst cattle there were fifteen different categories, some of which may have been coterminous,⁷³ Other animals have fewer distinctive connotations: sheep are also referred to as ewe, and geld ewe. Apart from the differentiation between 'horses' and 'mares', they were also referred to as nags, or 'nades', colts, foals, 'stoned colts',⁷⁴ fillies, 'gressile nags' (grizzled horses), and ambling mares. Pigs were divided into shot (young weaned pig), sow, swine, and yearling.

Before considering the range of values for different types of livestock, it is worthwhile addressing the question of whether there were marked differences of valuations between the social groups. Though the evidence is fairly scant, it is clear that a labourer's livestock was given a similar valuation as a yeoman's. In the years 1587-8, a yeoman's cow was valued at £1 5s. 0d., a husbandman's at 16s. 8d., and a labourer's at £1 13s. 4d. The discrepancy for the husbandman's may be accounted for by the age or condition of the respective animals.

The range of appraisals between 1555 and 1637 showed an increase in the values assigned to cows and horses though 'incremental drift' may be a more accurate description. In 1588, the minimum for a cow was 16s. 8d. and £3 16s. 8d in 1616. The valuations for pigs fluctuated from 1s. 2d. in 1588 to a maximum of £2 in 1616. Appraisals for sheep showed an increase from 1s. 2d. in 1588 to £2 in 1616, but they appear to have slowly decreased in value over the rest of the period.⁷⁵

Comparisons of values for individual animals may be derived from inventories from Oxfordshire and Warwickshire illustrating the differences over three areas. In 1571, in the inventory of John Battene, a husbandman from Marsh Baldon in Oxfordshire, four kine were

appraised at £4 0s. 0d., giving an approximate valuation of £1 0s. 0d. per animal, and his hogs were valued at approximately three shillings each.⁷⁶ Sheep in Oxfordshire were valued at between two and three shillings - the inventory of Robert Holland, a labourer from Hampton Pole, in 1568, valued one sheep at three shillings.⁷⁷ Horses varied in value from £1 0s. 0d. to £1 10s. 0d.⁷⁸

In Warwickshire, cows belonging to John Wright, a fuller (d.1612), were appraised at £2 10s. 0d. each,⁷⁹ and a sucking calf was appraised at 6s. 8d. in the inventory of David Draper, a yeoman (d.1627/8).⁸⁰ Sheep were worth three shillings each in the inventory of Humphrey Partridge of Hurst (d. 1569).⁸¹ Four mares were valued at £9 5s. 0d. in the inventory of Thomas Hill, a yeoman (d. 1631), making them worth £2 6s. 4d. each.⁸² A yoke of oxen, that is, a pair, were valued at £3 10s. 0d. each in the inventory of Humphrey Hoo, a yeoman (d. 1616).⁸³ Finally, the average value of a cow in Telford in the period 1660-9 was £2 7s. 1d.⁸⁴ The valuations for the four categories of animals in Axholme and Oxfordshire were broadly similar, but cattle, pigs and horses in Warwickshire were higher, with only sheep on a par.

Though English society of this period was hierarchical, status did not necessarily imply wealth as the above details illustrate, bearing in mind the drawbacks of the inventory as a source of evidence. Nevertheless, the gradations of wealth between yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and craftsmen are visible. The valuations of individual animals in Axholme compare favourably with those of other counties of England though variations may be explicable in terms of the age and condition of livestock.

Farming equipment

Basic farming equipment consisted of ploughs, harrows, and carts, with horses to pull them. Although not every yeomen or husbandmen owned these types of equipment, it is likely that equipment was shared between members of the community which is suggested by the fact that some individuals had several items. The general pattern of yeomen being better

off than others applies to the ownership of farming equipment. Yeomen who owned no ploughs were Alexander Caister from Belton (d.1607),⁸⁵ and Edmund Maw, of Epworth (d.1637);⁸⁶ John Stephenson, from Garthorpe (d.1607) had no farming equipment at all, possibly having bequeathed it to his heirs before his death.⁸⁷ In contrast, John Laughton,, of Owston (d.1591), had three or more ploughs, harrows, and carts as well as nine horses.⁸⁸ Thomas Mawe, a yeoman from Epworth (d.1617), had five harrows - two wooden ones, and three iron 'todd' harrows - it has been suggested that 'todd' represents the misspelling of 'toed', that is, the active parts of the harrow were sheathed in iron.⁸⁹

Only two husbandmen had no ploughs, and two had as many some yeomen, namely Henry Child, of Amcotts (d.1580),⁹⁰ and Edward Byrd, from Epworth (d.1616).⁹¹ The latter also had a horse mill as well as three harrows, as did John Portington, from Amcotts (d.1580).⁹² Few husbandmen had harrows though John Hutchinson, from Haxey (d.1616), had an iron harrow with six pair of horse harnesses to go with his six horses.⁹³ The mention of an iron harrow suggests that its construction was out of the ordinary, and that ploughs and harrows were normally of a wooden construction. All the husbandmen had at least two horses, with a range between two and ten animals. Oxen appear briefly in two inventories, that of Elizabeth Belfield, a widow from Belton (d.1632), who had two,⁹⁴ and Richard Howghe, occupation or status unknown from Wroot (d.1577), who had five oxen and two ploughs; it is possible that the heavier land in Wroot required oxen, but there are very few inventories available for this parish.⁹⁵

The labourers appear quite impoverished in comparison with the yeomen and husbandmen for there was only one cart recorded amongst them, with no ploughs, harrows, or horses mentioned in the appraisals. The craftsmen were similar to the labourers with only five out of the twenty having ploughs and harrows, and seven had carts; they did own 23 horses amongst them. The 'others', that is, those whose occupation or status is unknown were similar to the craftsmen in their possession of farming equipment, eight out of the eighteen

having ploughs and harrows, seven having carts, but only twelve horses amongst them. Table 6.7 summarises this information. (see also Chart 6.1 - p. 249)

Table 6.7 Farming equipment and numbers of horses owned by different social groups.

Equipment	Yeomen	Husbandmen	Labourers	Craftsmen	Others
Numbers	16	28	8	20	18
Ploughs	23	33	-	5	8
Harrows	18	25	-	5	8
Carts	28	35	1	7	7
Horses	105	150	-	23	12

It is worthwhile to consider the values attributed to livestock and farming equipment as proportions of the total values of inventories for yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers; craftsmen have been omitted, as have the 'others', because they had so little livestock and equipment between them. Labourers, in spite of their lack of animals and equipment, are included because they form part of the agricultural workforce, and comparison between them and yeomen and husbandmen is important. This sort of analysis is, effectively, another way of looking at the evidence that has already been presented, and shows the gradations in minimum and maximum values in terms of percentages of the total valuations of the inventories. Table 6.8 (on p. 226) presents the comparisons between the values of livestock, here including cattle, pigs, sheep, and horses, and the total valuations of inventories.

Table 6.8 Comparisons between values of livestock (animals) and farming equipment and total values of inventories (in percentages and excluding debts).

Status	Minimum/ maximum	Livestock	Farming equipment	Total value of inventory
Yeomen	minimum	8.3	1.5	£ 19 5s. 0d.
	maximum	61.1	4.6	£212 6s. 0d.
Husbandmen	minimum	12.1	1.5	£ 8 4s. 0d.
	maximum	62.8	27.0	£149 10s. 4d.
Labourers	minimum	10.0	2.5	£ 3 4s. 0d.
	maximum	45.7	2.5	£ 19 6s. 2d.

An examination of Table 6.8 shows that the proportion of the minimum valuations of livestock for yeomen, husbandmen, and labourers is broadly similar, and for the maximum valuation, yeomen and husbandmen are similar, with labourers not too far behind. In terms of equipment, the yeomen and husbandmen appear to have less than labourers in minimum valuations, while in the maximum valuations yeomen fare less well than husbandmen. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the yeomen had disposed of their equipment to their heirs before their death, and perhaps were in the position of being able to 'retire' or even become one of the many money lenders found in the lists of those to whom money was owed.

Houses and their contents

This section will show that Axholme experienced a 'rebuilding' in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when houses had additional rooms added or were rebuilt, just as happened elsewhere in England. It will demonstrate the probable order of room development together with the use to which rooms were put. It will also show that the size of houses and the quality and quantity of their contents can be indicators of social status by an examination of their furnishings, the amount of linen-ware, and by the number of 'luxury'

items. This section will compare the houses of the gentry, yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and craftsmen in the Isle, and will compare developments in other parts of England. Garrard saw houses as a means of 'measurement of social status with regard to the domestic interior: the physical home with its contents, and the way it was used'⁹⁶. Garrard observed that additional rooms would indicate the ability to pay for their construction or the materials for them, but for the lower groups, multi-functional living was the norm as the house was not functioning as a living space, but only as an eating place or shelter.⁹⁷

The method of construction of houses in this and other fenland parts of Lincolnshire was mud and stud. Evidence for this type of construction is to be found in the Mowbray Charter, dated 1 May 1360, which allowed tenants to dig turf for house walls and make tiles for roofs.⁹⁸ In his study on the English country cottage, Brown says that the building of a mud and stud cottage was usually carried out by the cottager himself, with the only implements required being a dung fork and a shallow shovel known as a 'cob parer'. Such a cottage had structural limitations, as the building materials consisted of loamy earth, containing sufficient lime to enable it to set, mixed with water and a little chopped straw - a process known as 'tempering' - to act as a reinforcement. The process was a lengthy one with material placed in position, trampled down, and allowed to set before the next layer was added. The construction of a two-storey cottage could take two years. The walls were between two and three feet thick, and after being allowed to dry out, they were smoothed, plastered, or lime-washed.⁹⁹ The roof was made of straw or thatch with wide eaves to allow water to drip well away from the walls. There are deposits of gypsum in Axholme which could have been used for coating the walls after it has been processed. A mud and stud cottage from Withern-with-Stain, with an eighteenth century dating, was dismantled and reconstructed in the Church Farm Museum at Skegness. The internal dimensions of the rooms are approximately fifteen feet by twelve feet, a fact which should be taken into consideration when single-room cottages are referred to.¹⁰⁰ It is not known how much a two-storey house would cost to build, but the will of Thomas Foster, a husbandman from

Epworth (d.1616), gave his son, also Thomas, two houses worth £4 though it is not clear how big the houses were nor whether the value was for one or two houses.¹⁰¹

In his study of Tudor Lincolnshire, Hodgett comments that 'in the Isle of Axholme, turf walls continued well into the Tudor era', and that partible inheritance caused wealth to be more widely dispersed, and therefore the standard of housing was of greater simplicity.¹⁰² An examination of twenty Axholme inventories for the year 1557-8 showed that only two of them mentioned details of more than one room though not all of them were poor people; few had ovens, and 'they obviously took food to the bakers to be cooked',¹⁰³ yet there is no mention of any baker in parish records for any community in the Isle. It is probable that the poorer labourers and craftsmen occupied single-roomed houses.

By comparison, a slightly different state of affairs existed in Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, in the early part of the sixteenth century. According to Alcock, between 1532 and 1600, houses had three rooms, for living, sleeping, and cooking, and status made no difference to size of house though this uniformity did not apply to the contents where wealth was closely related to the quality of the household goods.¹⁰⁴ Alcock doubts whether there were any single-room houses in Stoneleigh although the evidence for this or his asseveration that all houses were three-roomed is inconclusive, yet he contradicts himself when he claims that two- to four-roomed houses were the homes of labourers and the poorest craftsmen by 1600. He does point out that 'at this level the chances of an inventory being taken are relatively small'.¹⁰⁵ In his survey of Oxfordshire inventories, Havinden states that in only 38 out of the 259 inventories did the testator live in a house with more than five rooms. By far the largest group (nearly one half) lived in houses for which no rooms were specified, and which probably had only one-room although in some instances there may have been rooms which the appraisers neglected to specify.¹⁰⁶

The problem of the size of houses in Axholme is difficult to settle because the appraisers did not list the separate rooms, either because there was only one room, or they forgot, or they did not think it important. A perusal of inventories from Haxey and Epworth

gives the impression that some assessments were quite cursory though it is hard to pin down this in actual details. Of the inventories examined for all groups only 40 per cent refer to rooms, yet, in viewing the actual contents listed, it is improbable that all the items could fit into a single room. An examination of the inventory of William Brocke, a husbandman from Belton (d. 1591) bears out this point. Apart from a cupboard, a round table, six chairs, a long table with two forms and two tressles, together with a large amount of bed linen, his inventory lists three feather beds, one truss bed, one trundle bed, and four pairs of bed stocks.¹⁰⁷ It is almost certain that William Brocke's house had at least two rooms, a hall and a parlour, with the possibility of another room. A method of calculating the approximate number of rooms based on the number of beds is given in the footnote.¹⁰⁸ Few inventories listing the rooms in the houses of all social or occupational groups exist before 1600, but the earliest, dated 1569, for John Oylson of Crowle, lists a house, parlour, chamber, and a kitchen.¹⁰⁹ Two years later, the inventory of Robert Hornsby of Crowle gives evidence of a two-roomed house, consisting of a house and parlour.¹¹⁰ Neither person's occupation or status is known.

Alcock saw great changes in standards of living from the beginning of the seventeenth century in Stoneleigh, observing that it was 'no longer suitable for prosperous yeomen to live in three or four rooms indistinguishable from their humbler fellows'. By 1600, no self-respecting yeoman had fewer than seven rooms, and they were joined by the more prosperous craftsmen, such as millers, tanners, and fullers.¹¹¹ He concluded that the reasons for rebuilding were not clear-cut, and that, allowing for inflation, there was no increase in real wealth from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries even though agricultural prices were rising. Surplus income was the stimulus to the improvement in the structure of the house and the quality of household possessions.¹¹²

The concept of a 'Great Rebuilding' to which Alcock refers is dismissed by Machin, who questions whether it really occurred as earlier historians such as Hoskins, in his *Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640*, suggested.¹¹³ By using dated houses, he discerns two spurts of activity, 1570-89 and 1620-39, but argues that the prosperity required to build

depended on profits derived from the rise in grain prices.¹¹⁴ Machin points out that a house took one or two years to build, but it would 'cost the sum of his average profits for up to five seasons'. The person would have to save money, or borrow, or both, to finance the building, and 'the cash to pay the builder was available only in years when the principal local agricultural products could be sold at a premium'.¹¹⁵ The investment in houses could only come through tenurial security and profit inflation: agricultural prices in general rose by a factor of six, grain by a factor of eight, and prices for animals by four-and-a-half. Yet the profit inflation did not benefit all: it was advantageous to arable farmers but disadvantageous to pastoral farmers. People would only invest in property if they were assured of continuing profits and security of tenure: freeholders were not affected, but copyholders, if they were holders for years for life, were because they could have tenure for only 21 years, since a life was calculated as seven years. The introduction of leasehold in the seventeenth century allowed for the substitution of long leases instead of 'lives'.¹¹⁶ Machin comes to no firm conclusion about the causes of the rebuilding, except to propose a theory that investment in building depended on the levels of net profits and tenurial security. The level of profits was itself dependent on farm size, types of products, and the prices obtainable for them.¹¹⁷ The two factors appear to be essential elements in explaining the investment in building that occurred in the period.

Machin's proposals have relevance to Axholme because the main type of agriculture was mixed, with pastoral farming predominating since there was little possibility of expanding the area available for arable considering the nature of the topography unless drainage was carried out for which there is little evidence. Yet, because of partible inheritance, there were opportunities for the large farmer to increase the size of his arable holdings through the purchase of small parcels of land, the result of inheritance customs. Thus there was a period when houses were rebuilt or had extensions to them - the presence of a 'house carpenter' and masons in burial records has been commented on in an earlier chapter. The masons are of

particular interest because there is no suitable building stone in Axholme, which suggests that it was brought in, probably by boat, from outside the area.

The size of a person's house does not necessarily correlate with his social status. Amongst the gentry, William Brown of Haxey (d. 1574) had two houses, a two-roomed house, consisting of a hall and a chamber, and a seven-roomed house, with a hall, a parlour, a chamber over the hall, a kitchen chamber, a buttery, a kitchen, and a brew-house; his inventory was appraised at £110 19s. 6d.¹¹⁸ By contrast, John Singleton, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1628), had a two-room house, consisting of a hall and a parlour; his inventory was appraised at £19 15s. 0d., while Alexander Caister, a yeoman of Belton (d. 1607), had eleven rooms: the new parlour, a chamber over the new parlour, 'another parlour', a new hall/kitchen, the old parlour, the great chamber, the hall, the milk house, the kitchen, the servants' bed house, and the 'white house'; the inventory was valued at £212 6s. 0d.¹¹⁹

The houses of husbandmen contained between two and nine rooms: John Coggan from Haxey (d. 1595) had a hall and a chamber, but his moveables were evaluated at £64 7s. 0d.,¹²⁰ while at the other end of the scale Edward Byrd of Epworth (d. 1616) had nine rooms: a chamber, a parlour, the old parlour, the 'near' parlour, a buttery, a chamber, an upper chamber, one 'other' chamber, a kitchen, and, in addition, he had old and new barns and a horse mill. His inventory was valued at £130 8s. 4d.¹²¹ Edward Byrd's house and the value of his moveables, on the sizes of both, would put him amongst the yeomen, but he was considered a husbandman, thus illustrating that wealth alone was not the prerequisite of social status. Even a labourer, John Armitage of Belton (d. 1614), had a dwelling with four rooms: a hall, a chamber, a parlour, and a buttery with his moveables valued at £17 9s. 11d.¹²²

Amongst the craftsmen, houses had between two and six rooms: Edward Scatcher, a carpenter from Belton (d. 1598), had just a hall and a parlour, with an inventory valued at £4 17s. 4d.,¹²³ but Thomas Barnby, a woollen draper of Haxey (d. 1616), had six rooms: a hall, a hall parlour, one 'other' parlour, a chamber, a brew-house, and a kitchen, and an inventory appraised at £47 6s. 4d.¹²⁴ A wider range of rooms is found amongst those whose

occupation, or status, is unknown: Robert Hornsby of Crowle (d. 1571) had an inventory worth £9 9s. 8d., and a two-roomed house with a house and a parlour, while Roger Smith, from Belton (d. 1618), had nine rooms: a hall, a parlour, another parlour, a chamber, 'another chamber', a little buttery, one other buttery, a kitchen, and a brewing house: his inventory was worth £28 3s. 2d.¹²⁵ Table 6.9 summarises information on social status and the number of rooms.

Table 6.9 Social status and the number of rooms.

Soc	Numbers of rooms											Tot
	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Stat												
Gent	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	5
Yeo	12	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	17
Hus	16	2	5	3	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	29
Lab	5	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8
Craf	10	2	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	16
Oth	13	4	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	21
Tot	56	12	7	8	3	4	3	-	2	-	1	96

*Indicates inventories in which room numbers are not stated, but may include single-room houses.

From the information given above, there appears to have been, not necessarily a 'great rebuilding', but a development of houses beyond the simple, single-roomed house referred to by Hodgett in the mid-sixteenth century to multi-roomed houses with two storeys, and even cellars, for the inventory of Alexander Kitchen, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1614), refers to a hall chamber, a gallery chamber, the under-room next the hall, a cellar, a little buttery, a brew house and a kitchen chamber.¹²⁶ Dyer sees the 'Great Rebuilding' as a 'further stage in a continuing process' of house development, observing that excavation of a site at West Whelpington, which had been occupied from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, was

revealed 'not as a revolutionary innovation, but the gradual adaptation of late medieval structures to the needs of a new age'.¹²⁷

As mentioned above, Alcock observed the development of houses in Stoneleigh by 1600, for the husbandmen and craftsmen had houses containing between five and seven rooms - growing from ones containing a hall, one ground floor and one upper chamber (*circa* 1608) to ones with additional rooms in the form of an upper chamber over the hall, a buttery, a kitchen, and a 'nether-house' for odd farm implements (*circa* 1624). A typical middling house had a characteristic layout, so that a five-room house had a hall, two chambers, and two service rooms, in a four-unit plan with one chamber upstairs and one down.¹²⁸ The homes of the poor in Stoneleigh, the labourers and the poorest craftsmen, contained between two and four rooms with just a croft and a few acres.¹²⁹ In Oxfordshire, Havinden noted that there were 23 single-roomed houses amongst his inventories, but there was doubt whether five of them had one or more room. As with Axholme, the number of houses with more than five or six rooms tails off markedly though there is one house with nine rooms and one with fifteen; Havinden does not give any indication of the status of the owners of the different-sized houses.¹³⁰

The period of building additional rooms appears from the inventories to have begun in the mid-sixteenth century in Axholme though the evidence is slight, and continues to the 1630s. It is possible to show, albeit tentatively, the process of development from a single room to a larger building though it is not particularly feasible to consider houses of more than six rooms. From the single room, described variously as 'the house', the 'hall', or 'the hall house', the next stage was the addition of a parlour, or alternatively, a chamber. A three-roomed house consisted of a hall, a parlour, and a chamber; or a hall, a chamber, and a kitchen. A four-roomed house had a hall, a parlour, a chamber, and a kitchen. To the four-roomed house was added a buttery, or a milk-house, or a dairy to make a five-roomed house, while a second parlour was added to make a six-roomed house. Though these various rooms were generally all at ground-level because of the nature of the subsoil, there are references to

upper chambers in some three-room houses with one other chamber referred to as the next room appraised. This suggests that the two-storey houses in Axholme were similar in plan to those in Stoneleigh, that is, a four unit structure, with two rooms below and two above, with other rooms at ground level, and similar to other four-roomed houses built in Lincolnshire in the mud and stud tradition.

With modern houses with several rooms there is a tendency for them to be devoted to specialised purposes, such as dining, living, or sleeping, yet, unlike Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, where 'most families had two or three rooms in the house used as bedrooms',¹³¹ the houses in Axholme did not follow this pattern. A scrutiny of the uses to which the extra rooms were put reveals no difference between any of the social or occupational groups. Generally, the hall contained the seating, tables, and cupboards, often with the room being used for cooking. Parlours usually contained a number of beds: John Singleton, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1628), had two stand beds in his parlour,¹³² while Thomas Maw, a yeoman from Epworth (d. 1617), had two frame beds and two feather beds in one parlour, and a bedstead in the second.¹³³ Husbandmen and labourers likewise used their parlours for beds: Richard Barnard, a husbandman from Belton (d. 1591), had four bedsteads and a feather bed in his,¹³⁴ and John Armitage, a labourer also from Belton (d. 1614), had two stand beds in his parlour.¹³⁵ The chambers were used for beds but also for storing other household items: Alexander Kitchen, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1614), used an upper room for storing axes and (agricultural) forks, and one of his two chambers was used to keep implements.¹³⁶ John Harrison, a husbandman of Crowle (d. 1614), had four feather beds, a trundle bed, and a servant's bed in his front chamber, while his back chamber contained wool and cheese;¹³⁷ William Watkinson, a labourer of Haxey (d. 1606), kept corn in his chamber, but his bedsteads and linen in his hall.¹³⁸

Furnishings

Having looked at the differences between house size and room use, it is necessary to investigate whether there were differences in the quality, and even quantity, of the furnishings

in the houses of the yeomen, husbandmen, and others in Axholme. 'Beds were frequently the most highly valued item of furniture in an inventory. They had for every social group no matter how humble the same importance as a symbol of status that they possessed in the houses of the great. It was a widely held aspiration to own an impressive and commanding bed.'¹³⁹ Whilst this may be true, there were differences between the numbers and types of bed found at various social levels. The feather bed was the most impressive and important type, and, at the other end of the scale, there was the trundle bed, which had wheels, and which could be rolled under a larger bed or other piece of furniture. In between the two extremes were the frame bed, which had strings threaded through holes in the frame, on which was placed the mattress. This was intended to be easily dismantled, while the stand bed was of more robust construction while still having the threaded strings. Other beds included ones using pairs of trestles with a board laid between them, and bed frames, called 'bed stocks'. All of these types of bed are found in the inventories. What is noticeable, however, is that there were families without beds, who had only mattresses, which were placed on the floor at night. Table 6.10 shows the numbers of the different types of bed. (See also Chart 6.3 - p.251)

Table 6.10 Types of beds and their frequency.

Type	mattress	frame	trundle	trestle	stand	stocks	bed	feather
Number	26	6	17	13	35	45	45	75

The contrast between those who had only mattresses and those who had feather beds, if possession is to be considered a symbol of status, is clearly marked. Peter Beckwith, a labourer from Belton (d. 1588), had just two mattresses,¹⁴⁰ while a husbandman, Thomas Thornton, also from Belton (d. 1555), had seven;¹⁴¹ a glazier, Robert Man of Belton (d. 1614), had three mattresses. By contrast, John Atkinson, a brewster from Crowle (d. 1616), had four feather beds,¹⁴² as did John Harrison, a husbandman of Crowle (d. 1614).¹⁴³ Yet yeomen and husbandmen were not the only social groups to own feather beds, for two

labourers had one each, namely, John Armitage of Belton (d. 1614) who also owned two stand beds and another bed, type unspecified,¹⁴⁴ and Thomas Singleton from Belton (d. 1597), who also had one other bed.¹⁴⁵ The overall picture, however, is for the yeomen to be the main group with this luxury, and the other social and occupational groups to have some, but by and large to have the other types of bed.

The differences between the groups in the amounts of furniture to be found in their houses were not great though there were some differences in quality. Of importance to the householders were the different types of chests to store clothing and food, from the ordinary plank chest to the more expensive 'joined' chest, and the expensive imported chests known as Flanders or Dansk chests. The ownership of joined chests, which required skilled joinery, in the same way that chairs did, was not confined to yeomen, for Robert Watson, a husbandman from Belton (d. 1614), had one as well as a Flanders chest, as did John Armitage, a labourer of Belton (d. 1614), and John Atkinson, a brewer from Crowle (d. 1616), amongst others.¹⁴⁶ Chairs were common items to be found in almost all the inventories, but they stand alongside the benches and forms. An association with meal times is to be found in the references to buffet stools, which were jointed stools, for use round the table though they were not all that common, with only just over 30 specific references to them amongst the inventories studied. Johnston states that buffet stools were first mentioned in a Lincoln inventory in 1569, 'and there described as a "joined stoole called a buffet stoole" as if the appraiser was identifying a piece of furniture new to him'.¹⁴⁷

The inventories give evidence for 'arks', which were small coffers with steepened tops used for the storage of valuables, and which had holes made in either side so that ropes could be threaded through them. The arks were then hoisted up to the beams, away from rats and mice.¹⁴⁸ John Foster, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1587), had a great ark,¹⁴⁹ as did Robert Brown, a husbandman of Haxey (d. 1607),¹⁵⁰ but there are few mentioned, and no labourer, craftsman, or 'other' person has an ark recorded in the inventory.

Painted cloths, also known as the poor man's tapestry, were found amongst all the groups though they were not all that common, giving the impression that the walls of the houses were bare, probably rendered with gypsum. There are references to window cloths for three husbandmen and one miller, which are probably curtains. There was a glazier in Belton, Thomas Mann (d. 1614), and the minister for Belton, Thomas Cleisby had the glass for his window appraised at 26s. 8d.¹⁵¹ The inventory of William Tonge, a yeoman from Epworth (d. 1616), has 'all the window glass, planchers [planks], locks, doors, gates, pales and rails about the house yard - £4 0s. 0d.'¹⁵² As a proportion of the total value of inventory for painted cloths and other 'luxury' items, the values for yeomen ranged from 0.5 per cent to 39.5 per cent, the husbandmen from 0.6 per cent to 17.8 per cent, and the labourers from 2.7 per cent to 39 per cent, which compares well with Johnston's findings that the furniture and fittings as a percentage of the total value of the inventory was 37.8 per cent in Lincoln, 23.7 per cent in the Fen edge, and 18.9 per cent in the six parishes which lie along the road between Lincoln and Newark.¹⁵³

Although feather beds were status symbols, another form of status was the amount of bed linen and 'napery ware', household linen, especially table linen. As with other items, the inventories of yeomen had a greater percentage expended on them. Johnston says that 'linen was capable of double ostentation, once at exceptional meals, and a second time after laundering on adjacent hedges, fences, and open ground'. A large number of sheets added to the comfort of sleeping, he states, but queries why so much money was spent on it, 'where it generally amounted to a fifth of the total expended in furnishing'.¹⁵⁴ The Axholme inventories do not reveal such a generosity in furnishing, presenting instead a wide range of amounts spent on bed and other linen. Generally speaking, the yeomen spent more, on linen than husbandmen, who, in turn, had spent more than labourers, as illustrated by the following details. (See also Chart 6.2 - p. 250)

John Parish, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1592), had bed coverlets, curtains, linen, harden, and femble sheets, towels, butter napkins, table cloths, quilts, and pillowcases

appraised at £32 3s. 8d. representing 27.1 per cent of the value of his inventory.¹⁵⁵ John Post, a husbandman from Haxey (d. 1598), had seven pairs of linen sheets, pillowcases, six pairs of harden and femble sheets, bolsters and cods (pillows), bed coverings, quilts, and cushions, which represented 18.9 per cent of the total value of his inventory.¹⁵⁶ Robert Pullen, a labourer of Crowle (d. 1614), had two pairs of linen sheets, two pairs of harden and hemp sheets, towels, pillowcases, a board cloth, table napkins, three pillows, two quilts and two coverlets, and a pair of harden sheets, with a total valuation of £3 6s. 4d., which represented 22.2 per cent of the valuation of his inventory.¹⁵⁷ It is interesting to observe that linen sheets, which were of the highest quality were found in the houses of all three groups.

Not everyone, however, spent such high proportions of their money on linen, for at the other end of the scale, John Farre, a yeoman from Epworth (d. 1591), had linen, femble, and harden sheets, bolsters, pillows, pillowcase, and napkins worth £2, which was only 2.3 per cent of his inventory's valuation.¹⁵⁸ Robert Watson's linen goods came to only 8s. 8d. and consisted of two pairs of linen and two pairs of harden sheets, three table napkins, and two towels,¹⁵⁹ which for a husbandman, was less even than the valuation of the labourer's, John Armitage of Belton (d. 1614), who had three linen sheets, two harden sheets, three cods, a tablecloth, and three napkins.¹⁶⁰ Robert Watson's outlay on linen was 1.4 per cent his inventory's value, and John Armitage's was 4.1 per cent.

Just as the size of a house, its quality of beds, and the amount of linen-ware helped to indicate status, so the number of what have been called 'luxury' items was also an indicator. In her article on probate inventories and their use in studying the domestic interiors of houses, Garrard queries the use of the word 'luxury', stating that it needs qualification, for 'one man's luxury is another man's necessity'.¹⁶¹ She observes that a labourer sleeping in a down bed might be a luxury, while for 'a nobleman *it was essential to be known to be sleeping in this sort of style (italics mine)*'.¹⁶²

'Luxury items'

Garrard gives the lie to her concept of 'luxury' as a necessity, for the preoccupation of the gentry and yeomen, if not others, was to emphasise status. Pewter had greater status than brass or wood, but silver had an even higher status. In his study of Lincolnshire inventories, Johnston observed that 'the valuation of brass, pewter, and linen usually made up half the cost of most inventories. In the poorer households, brass, because its use was more functional and directly related to cooking, was worth more than pewter'.¹⁶³

Silver was not a common item in the inventories: only two of the four gentry had silver spoons - William Shaw from Belton (d. 1611) had two, and William Brown of Haxey (d. 1574) had four. William Shaw's were valued at eight shillings each.¹⁶⁴ Five yeomen had silver spoons, but four had between only two and four spoons: John Farre of Epworth (d. 1591) had two spoons appraised at 3s. 4d. each, a huge difference in value from the gentry's.¹⁶⁵ Alexander Caister from Belton (d. 1607) had 30 spoons, but they were valued with other items.¹⁶⁶ Only one husbandman, Edward Byrd from Epworth (d. 1616) had silver - six spoons, but no labourer, craftsmen, or 'other' person had any silver.¹⁶⁷

Pewter-ware was common amongst all groups, sometimes with many pieces. It is not clear exactly what is referred to when a number of pieces of pewter is recorded because it had little monetary value though they were almost certainly plates: Robert Watson, a husbandman from Belton (d. 1614), had twelve pieces of pewter, one salt, three candlesticks, a chafing dish, appraised at ten shillings,¹⁶⁸ and Edward Gylliott, a labourer of Crowle (d. 1591), had eighteen pieces of pewter, three candlesticks, and two salts valued at twelve shillings.¹⁶⁹ Amongst the larger owners of pewter were John Laughton, a yeoman from Crowle (d. 1591), who had 44 pieces, William Brocke, a husbandman of Belton, with 27 pieces, Thomas Cleisby, a minister from Belton (d. 1583), who had 20 pieces of pewter and eight pewter spoons,¹⁷⁰ but there were others from all the groups who had pewter, which may have been put on display as a sign of wealth, for Edward Byrd's inventory mentions an 'old cupboard with brass and pewter thereupon'.

Like pewter, brassware was common amongst all the groups, having the advantage that it could be used for cooking vessels, for there are references to brass pots, as well as mortars and pestles, candlesticks, and chafing dishes. There is a single reference to twelve tin spoons amongst the items of William Draper's inventory, which included ten pewter dishes, nine saucers, two porringers, three candlesticks, two salts, a chamber pot, two brass pots, three pans, and a frying pan.¹⁷¹ (See Chart 6.4 - p. 252)

Kitchenware

From the details of the inventories it is evident that the houses, even of some of the lowliest persons, were well equipped in terms of cooking and kitchen equipment, tableware, and lighting, for candlesticks are evident everywhere - John Portington, a yeoman from Amcotts (d. 1569) had thirteen,¹⁷² yet wooden trenchers were also still in use for Thomas Haise, a gentleman, had four dozen, and William Ashton, a husbandman, had them mentioned in his inventory.¹⁷³ Chart 6.3 illustrates the valuations of silver, pewter, and brassware as percentages of the total values of the inventories, from which it will be seen that, while yeomen had the highest proportion, the craftsmen invested a large amount of money in such items.

The impressions gained of the lives and living conditions for all whose inventories have been studied are that many of the houses were filled to overflowing with beds, chests, linen, pewter, brass, and iron-ware if one bears in mind the size of the rooms. Garrard makes the point that 'for many people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the house was not functioning as a home (that is, a living place) as we now understand it, but only as an eating place and shelter'.¹⁷⁴ Yet others present a pitiful picture of poverty, such as, Thomas Coult, a labourer from Haxey (d. 1618), whose inventory was valued at £3 4s. 0d, and whose furniture consisted of a table, a form, two pair of bed stocks, two chairs, one stool, and one cupboard,¹⁷⁵ or Peter Sayles, a tailor from Haxey (d. 1606), whose inventory was appraised at £4 19s. 0d., who had 'one old bedstead, one chest, one brass pot, with his apparel and other implements valued at five shillings, while the remainder was the rent for certain areas of

land.¹⁷⁶ As has been shown, yeomen, or even gentry, were not necessarily the possessors of more goods and chattels than some husbandmen, and the lines of demarcation in terms of inventory value were far from clear.

Purse and apparel and sources of income

The valuation of a man's purse and apparel was usually the first item in an inventory though occasionally it is placed last. In her study of Clayworth, Nottinghamshire, Perkins states that the amount of cash to hand could vary according to the time of year, so that at harvest time, for example, there would be more available. She concludes that it is not an indicator of wealth or social standing, but that there is a wide variation in the occupational and social groups.¹⁷⁷

In Axholme, there was, in fact, very little real variation throughout the year, and some would affect only those with crops or livestock to sell. Some percentages are abnormally high, such as that for Edward Johnson, a webster from Haxey (d. 1587), whose purse and apparel were valued at £30 3s. 4d. against a total appraisal of £43 3s. 2d.¹⁷⁸ Table 6.11 summarises the minimum, maximum, and average values of purse and apparel as a percentage of the total valuations of inventories. It will be seen that yeomen had a higher average percentage than husbandmen or labourers, but that craftsmen's percentages were almost double. The main point to make here is that yeomen, apart from craftsmen, were more likely to have more ready cash than others, with the craftsmen probably having to have money to hand to purchase materials, or having received payments from customers.

Table 6.11 Purse and apparel - comparative percentages.

Number	Status	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)	Average (%)
4	Gentry	2.4	7.8	5.7
17	Yeomen	1.8	47.9	6.9
30	Husbandmen	0.4	19.0	3.8
8	Labourers	0.8	8.9	4.2

15	Craftsmen	1.0	80.0	12.3
17	Others	0.01	37.1	7.0

Items in inventories, such as chests, tables, and even animals are often referred to as 'old'. Disregarding livestock, it is clear that most people inherited furniture, linen, cooking equipment, and other moveables, and, indeed, the wills themselves attest to this, so it is not to be supposed that income earned through labour or through the sale of livestock, crops, or cloth had to be used to purchase household items. Bearing in mind, however, the prices of livestock, farming equipment, furniture, and 'luxury' items, as explored *supra* it is useful to try to ascertain the levels of income for each group wherever possible to enable comparisons to be made. Dyer claimed that the maximum number of working days per year in the later middle ages was 286, after subtracting Sundays and other festivals.¹⁷⁹ By using Henry Best's *Farming and Memorandum Book* as a guide (referred to *supra*) it may be seen that annual wages ranged from about £2 8s. 0d. to about £7 4s. 0d. for the thatchers, threshers, muck spreaders, and harrowers, and £2 12s. 0d. for swine-keepers.

Values of crops

Although there is no direct comparison between a labourer's wages and a yeoman's income from his crops, it is instructive to compare valuations of crops where the inventories give a clear statement of acreage and value. In August 1617, a year of a bad harvest, Thomas Maw, a yeoman from Epworth, had 2 acres 2 roods of wheat valued at £18 6s. 8d., giving a value of £7 6s. 8d. for one acre,¹⁸⁰ and in July 1618, an average harvest year, John Kyppas, a yeoman from Owston, had his 4 acres 3 rood appraised at £7 10s. 0d., making it worth £2 0s. 0d. per acre.¹⁸¹ The price of barley varied from 13s. 4d. per acre for three acres in July 1588 (a good harvest year) according to William Clarke's inventory,¹⁸² to £1 13s. 4d. per acre for six acres in August 1617 (a bad harvest year) according to Thomas Maw's inventory.¹⁸³ For other crops, peas varied from 13s. 4d. an acre in March 1591 to £1 0s. 0d. an acre in June 1616, the lower value possibly because the appraisal was made earlier in the year before

the crop had had time to develop.¹⁸⁴ Finally, Jeffrey Medley's two acres of hemp was valued at £2 0s. 0d. an acre in 1616. The valuations of crops do not, of course, include deductions for tithes nor for keeping grain or seed for future sowing, nor do they take into account the day-to-day expenses yeomen and husbandmen would incur, but as sources of income for comparison they are useful. There is only one professional person for whom there is information on pay, and that is the vicar of Belton, Thomas Cleisby, who, in 1583, was owed £4 0s. 0d. for a quarter's wages, so it may be assumed his stipend was £16 0s. 0d. per annum, which was relatively high for Lincolnshire ministers.¹⁸⁵ No mention is made of his tithes, for which forgetful parishioners often made recompense in their wills, so his income may have been higher. His salary is given here to put the wages of others such as labourers into some sort of perspective. From the foregoing it is possible to conclude that in a good harvest year, a yeoman or husbandman with several acres to be sown with wheat, barley, peas, or hemp could expect a higher standard of living than labourers or craftsmen.

Summary

This chapter has examined the material possessions of the social and occupational groups in the Isle of Axholme, but not including the ownership of land, and comparisons have been made with the situation in some other parts of England in this period where practicable. From the evidence found in the inventories it is possible to conclude that wealth and status do not inevitably correlate, that is, that gentry are not necessarily wealthier, in inventory terms, than yeomen, who, in turn, do not have more than husbandmen or even labourers. If wealth and status are not automatically linked, there must be other, added factors to enable the distinctions to be made. In the previous chapter it was observed that the term 'yeoman', over-used yet vague in describing a person's position in society, was exactly that, a description of status, in the same way that 'gentleman' was, whereas 'husbandman', 'labourer', 'miller' (and other craftsmen) refer to a function within the social structure as well as implying a position

within that structure. The following chapter will examine the differences in life-style within and between members of different social groups.

- ¹ T. Arkell, 'The probate process', in T. Arkell, N. Evans, and N. Goose (eds), *When Death Do Us Part*, (University of Hertfordshire, 2000), p. 7.
- ² M. Overton, 'English probate inventories and the measure of agricultural change', in A. van der Woude and A. Schuurman (eds), *Probate Inventories*, (Utrecht, 1980), p. 205.
- ³ N. Goose and N. Evans, 'Wills as an historical source', in T. Arkell, N. Evans, and N. Goose (eds), *When Death Do Us Part*, (University of Hertfordshire, 2000), p. 44.
- ⁴ *When Death Do Us Part*, p.45.
- ⁵ M. Overton, 'English probate inventories and the measurement of agricultural change', in A. Van der Woude and A. Schuurman (eds), *Probate Inventories*, (Utrecht, 1980), p. 209.
- ⁶ M. Spufford, 'Limitations of the probate inventory', in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds), *English Rural Society, 1500-1800*, (Cambridge, 1990), p.173.
- ⁷ T. Arkell, 'The probate process', in *When Death Do Us Part*, p. 8.
- ⁸ M. Overton, 'Prices from probate inventories', in *When Death Do Us Part*, pp. 124-6.
- ⁹ M. Spufford, 'Limitations', pp. 142-146.
- ¹⁰ R. P. Garrard, 'English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior, 1570-1700', in Van der Woude and Schuurman, *Probate Inventories*, p.60.
- ¹¹ Spufford, 'Limitations', p.144.
- ¹² Alexander Briggs LAO Inventory 221A, 108, and William Watkinson LAO Inventory 103, 16A-B.
- ¹³ Garrard, 'English probate inventories', pp. 56-7.
- ¹⁴ M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts*, (1983), p.379.
- ¹⁵ Garrard, 'English probate inventories', pp. 57-60.
- ¹⁶ A. Schuurman, 'Probate inventories', in Van der Woude and Schuurman, *Probate Inventories*, pp.21-2.
- ¹⁷ J. A. Faber, 'Inhabitants of Amsterdam and their possessions, 1710-49', in Van der Woude and Schuurman, *Probate Inventories*, p. 22.
- ¹⁸ J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century*, (Leicester, 1953), p.29.
- ¹⁹ N. W. Alcock, *People at Home: Living in a Warwickshire Village, 1500-1800*, (Chichester, 1993), p. 184.
- ²⁰ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p. 57.
- ²¹ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p. 57.
- ²² K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525-1700*, (1979), p. 36.
- ²³ Quoted in Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, p.36.
- ²⁴ J. A. Johnston, 'Furniture and furnishing in Lincoln and Lincolnshire, 1567-1600', *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 33 (1998), pp. 20-24.
- ²⁵ LAO Inventory 221A, 105.
- ²⁶ LAO Inventory 56, 348.
- ²⁷ LAO Inventory 110, 179 and Lincoln Wills 1611, 2, 238.
- ²⁸ LAO Inventory 221A, 77.
- ²⁹ LAO Inventory 221A, 76.
- ³⁰ LAO Inventory 76, 54.
- ³¹ LAO Inventory 221A, 21.
- ³² LAO Inventory LCC ADM 1592, 347.
- ³³ LAO Stow Wills 1621-2, 40 for William Barkwith, and LAO Lincoln Wills 1624-5, 411 and Inventory 129, 138 for Marie Barkwith.
- ³⁴ LAO Inventory 90, 269.
- ³⁵ LAO Inventory 221A, 41.
- ³⁶ LAO Inventory 114, 185.G
- ³⁷ LAO Inventory 221A, 117.
- ³⁸ LAO Inventory 74, 640.
- ³⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 171 and Inventory 80, 6.
- ⁴⁰ LAO Haxey Parish 23, 58.
- ⁴¹ LAO LCC Admon 1615, 402.

- ⁴² LAO Inventory 48, 142.
- ⁴³ R. P. Garrard, 'English probate inventories and their use in studying the significance of the domestic interior, 1570-1700', in van der Woude and Schuurman, *Probate Inventories*, p.60.
- ⁴⁴ M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts*, p.379.
- ⁴⁵ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p.57.
- ⁴⁶ Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634) an English jurist who became Attorney General in 1594, and was an authority on Common Law. His works include six volumes of *Reports*, 1600-1615, and *Institutes* in four volumes, 1628-34.
- ⁴⁷ Both Coke and Gainsford are quoted in Campbell, *The English Yeoman*, pp.22-3 and 25.
- ⁴⁸ Campbell, *The English Yeoman*, p. 26.
- ⁴⁹ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p.57.
- ⁵⁰ LAO Inventory 107A, 203.
- ⁵¹ LAO Inventory 105, 2.
- ⁵² LAO Inventory 80, 75.
- ⁵³ LAO Inventory 80, 342.
- ⁵⁴ LAO Inventory 221A, 117.
- ⁵⁵ *Calendar of Patent Rolls Philip and Mary 1554-5*, p. 215.
- ⁵⁶ Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, *38th Annual Report (1877)*, Depositions by Commission Calendar, p. 263: 31 Eliz 1589, 7 April 1589.
- ⁵⁷ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 154.
- ⁵⁸ LAO Inventory 64, 88.
- ⁵⁹ LAO Inventory 221A, 76.
- ⁶⁰ LAO Inventory 76, 54.
- ⁶¹ LAO Inventory 80, 39.
- ⁶² LAO Inventory 76, 54.
- ⁶³ J. Thirsk, *Fenland Farming in the Sixteenth Century*, (Leicester, 1953), pp. 29-33. The format of her tables has been modified slightly - 'no stock' has been moved to a place above 1-5, and only percentages have been included for all sets of data.
- ⁶⁴ N. W. Alcock, *People at Home: Living in a Warwickshire Village, 1500-1800*, (Chichester, 1993).
- ⁶⁵ Alcock, *People at Home*, pp. 23-4.
- ⁶⁶ Alcock, *People at Home*, pp. 58-9.
- ⁶⁷ M. A. Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories in Oxfordshire, 1500-1800*, (Chichester, 1965).
- ⁶⁸ M. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England*, (Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1987), p. 379. The depopulation because of wool in Oxfordshire is also detailed by R. Muir, *The Lost Villages of Britain* (1984), pp.131, 140, and 244. There were 84 cases of depopulating enclosure brought before the courts for the county after 1518.
- ⁶⁹ Havinden, p. 54.
- ⁷⁰ LAO Inventory D & C/DJ/38/2/37 for John Foster, yeoman, Belton (d.1587),
- ⁷¹ LAO Inventory 114, 190.
- ⁷² D. Woodward (ed), *The Farming and Memorandum Book of Henry Best of Elmswell, 1642*, (1984), p.146.
- ⁷³ These categories are: bull, bullock, calf, drawing steer, kine, kye, ox, quy (of x years old), spanning calf (weaning), steer (bull or ox), stott, wayning calf, whie, yearling, young beast. The term 'quy', pronounced 'ky', seems to be a phonetic version of 'kye' as may be 'whie'.
- ⁷⁴ A stoned colt was an uncastrated horse.
- ⁷⁵ The derived valuations for single animals is as follows:

Category	Minimum	Date	Maximum	Date
Calf	4s. 0d.	1594	10s. 0d.	1637
Kye	£2 0s. 0d.	1614	-	-
Young beast	11s. 2d.	1580	£1 1s. 0d.	1588

Wayning calf	5s. 0d.	1591	-	-
Yearling calf	6s. 0d.	1591	16s.	1592
Bull	11s. 6d.	1594	11s. 8d.	1594
Ox	£1 5s. 0d.	1591	£2 2s. 6d.	1614
Stott*	£1 0s.	1607	-	-
Foal	6s. 0d.	1579	£1 0s. 0d.	1580
Old mare	£1 0s. 0d.	1588	-	-
Nag	£1 0s. 0d.	1555	-	-
Grey colt	13s. 4d.	1580	-	-
Ambling colt	£1 0d. 0d.	1580	-	-
Shot^	1s. 0d.	1588	-	-
Sheep	2s. 6d.	1587	£2 0d. 0d.	1616

* Stott - a castrated ox ^ shot - a weaned pig

⁷⁶ Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories*, p. 57.

⁷⁷ Havinden, *Household and farm Inventories*, p. 54.

⁷⁸ Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories*, p. 45, the inventory of James Boulster of Nether Worten where seven horses were appraised at £10 0s. 0d., producing an approximate value of £1 8s. 6d.

⁷⁹ Alcock, *People at Home*, p.97.

⁸⁰ Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 95.

⁸¹ Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 77.

⁸² Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 70.

⁸³ Alcock, *People at Home*, p.59.

⁸⁴ Trinder and Cox, *Yeomen and Colliers in Telford*, p. 75.

⁸⁵ LAO Inventory 105, 2.

⁸⁶ LAO Inventory 145, 17.

⁸⁷ LAO Inventory 103, 30.

⁸⁸ LAO Inventory 80, 346.

⁸⁹ I am grateful to Dr. Stephen Hollowell of Northamptonshire for this suggestion, based on his knowledge of past farming implements.

⁹⁰ LAO Inventory 64, 206.

⁹¹ LAO Inventory 221A, 13.

⁹² LAO Inventory 64, 88.

⁹³ LAO Inventory 221A, 65.

⁹⁴ LAO Inventory 139, 333.

⁹⁵ LAO Inventory 61, 141.

⁹⁶ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p. 55.

⁹⁷ Garrard, 'Probate inventories', pp. 57-8.

⁹⁸ Mentioned in W. B. Stonehouse, *The History and Topography of the Isle of Axholme*, (1839), p. 20, and mentioned in C. Ella, *Historic Epworth: the Heart of the Isle of Axholme*, (Rural Publications, Stedhampton, Oxford, 1997), p. 24.

⁹⁹ R. J. Brown, *The English Country Cottage*, (1979), p.150.

¹⁰⁰ N. Field, 'A mud cottage from Withern with Stain', in N. Field and A. White, *A Prospect of Lincolnshire*, (Lincoln, 1984), pp.92-95, and R. Cousins, *Lincolnshire Buildings in the Mud and Stud Tradition*, (Heritage Lincolnshire, Heckington, Sleaford, 2000), pp. 5 -9 and 24-6.

- 101 LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 240.
- 102 G. A. J. Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, (Lincoln, 1975), p. 160.
- 103 G. A. J. Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, pp. 160f.
- 104 Alcock, *People at Home*, pp. 23-25.
- 105 Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 121.
- 106 Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories*, p. 16.
- 107 LAO Inventory 80, 87.
- 108 Although beds as part of the furniture of a house will be dealt with later, one possible way of working out the approximate numbers of rooms, when there is no list in the inventory, is to use inventories where they are, and, using a simple calculation, estimate the numbers of rooms in those inventories without room lists. It is noticeable that, where a house had more than two rooms, it was common for the hall (or 'house) to be free of beds, suggesting that this was the family meeting and eating place. Working rooms, such as kitchens and butteries, did not usually contain beds. As an illustration, William Chapman, whose occupation is unknown, of Crowle (d.1588), had a little parlour with three feather beds, a chamber with two beds, and a parlour with a bed, totalling six beds; his hall had none, and he also had a kitchen. If the hall is disregarded, there were three rooms and six beds, giving two beds per room. A simple formula, therefore, would be to count beds, excluding trundles, which would be pushed under other beds during the daytime, and divide by two, and add one to give an approximate number of rooms in a house, excluding working spaces. The method is imperfect, but provides an approximation. The reference for the inventory of William Chapman is LAO Inventory 23, 24.
- 109 LAO Inventory 48, 142.
- 110 LAO Inventory 51, 216.
- 111 Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 54.
- 112 Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 54.
- 113 R. Machin, 'Great Rebuilding: a reassessment', *Past and Present* 77 (1977), p. 33.
- 114 Machin, 'Great Rebuilding', pp. 37 and 46.
- 115 Machin, 'Great Rebuilding', p. 48.
- 116 Machin, 'Great Rebuilding', p. 49.
- 117 Machin, 'Great Rebuilding', p. 54.
- 118 LAO Inventory 56, 348.
- 119 LAO Inventory 105, 2.
- 120 LAO Inventory 86, 282.
- 121 LAO Inventory 221A, 13.
- 122 LAO Inventory 114, 179.
- 123 LAO Inventory 90, 269.
- 124 LAO Inventory 221A, 117.
- 125 LAO Inventory 221A, 95.
- 126 LAO Inventory 114, 190.
- 127 C. Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*, (1994), p. 163.
- 128 Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 94.
- 129 Alcock, *People at Home*, p. 121.
- 130 Havinden, *Household and Farm Inventories*, p.16.
- 131 E. R. Perkins, *Village Life from Wills and Inventories: Clayworth Parish, 1670-1710*, (Nottingham University Record Series 1, 1979), p. 9.
- 132 LAO Inventory 133, 65.
- 133 LAO Inventory 121, 408.
- 134 LAO Inventory 80, 75.
- 135 LAO Inventory 114, 179.
- 136 LAO Inventory 114, 190.
- 137 LAO Inventory 114, 118.
- 138 LAO Inventory 103, 16A-B.
- 139 J. A. Johnston (ed), *Probate Inventories of Lincoln Citizens, 1661-1714*, (Lincoln Record Society, Lincoln, 1991), p. lxi.
- 140 LAO Inventory 76, 54.
- 141 LAO Inventory 28, 271.
- 142 LAO Inventory 221A, 8.
- 143 LAO Inventory 114, 118.

- 144 LAO Inventory 114, 179.
- 145 LAO Inventory 1597-8, 340.
- 146 LAO Inventories 114, 180 for Robert Watson, 114, 179 for John Armitage, and 221A, 8 for John Atkinson.
- 147 Johnston 'Furniture and furnishing', p. 22.
- 148 J. Toller, *Country Furniture*, (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 76.
- 149 LAO Inventory D. and C. DJ 38/2/37.
- 150 LAO Inventory 103, 5.
- 151 LAO Inventory 69A, 34.
- 152 LAO Inventory 221A, 10.
- 153 The villages are: Bassingham, Doddington Pigott, Eagle, North Scarle, North Disney, and Swinderby.
- 154 Johnston, 'Furniture and furnishing', p. 22.
- 155 LAO Inventory 80, 61.
- 156 LAO Inventory 90, 273.
- 157 LAO Inventory 114, 175.
- 158 LAO Inventory 81, 461.
- 159 LAO Inventory 114, 180.
- 160 LAO Inventory 114, 179.
- 161 Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p. 59.
- 162 Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p. 59.
- 163 Johnston, 'Furniture and furnishing', p. 25.
- 164 LAO Inventories 85, 371 for William Shaw, and 56, 348 for William Brown.
- 165 LAO Inventory 81, 481.
- 166 LAO Inventory 105, 2.
- 167 LAO Inventory 221A, 13.
- 168 LAO Inventory 114, 180.
- 169 LAO Inventory 80, 348.
- 170 LAO Inventories 80, 346 for John Laughton, 80, 57 for William Brocke, and 69A, 34 for Thomas Cleisby.
- 171 LAO Inventory of William Draper of Crowle (d. 1616), 221A, 5.
- 172 LAO Inventory 64, 88.
- 173 LAO Inventories 120, 84 for Thomas Haise of Belton, and 114, 178 for Robert Ashton of Crowle.
- 174 Garrard, 'Probate inventories', p.57.
- 175 LAO LCC Admon 1618: 229.
- 176 LAO Inventory 103, 19.
- 177 Perkins, *Village Life*, p. 7.
- 178 LAO Inventory 74, 60.
- 179 Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, p.226. This is for a mason.
- 180 LAO Inventory 121, 408.
- 181 LAO Inventory 122, 38.
- 182 LAO Inventory 76, 308. William Clarke was a husbandman from Belton.
- 183 LAO Inventory 121, 408. Thomas Maw was a yeoman from Epworth.
- 184 LAO Inventory 80, 39 for John Pettinger a husbandman from Haxey, and Inventory 221A, 2 for Jeffrey Medley a yeoman from Haxey.
- 185 Hodgett, *Tudor Lincolnshire*, pp. 187-8. £15 0s. 0d. was a common stipend.

Chart 6.1 Livestock and farming equipment as percentage of total inventory value

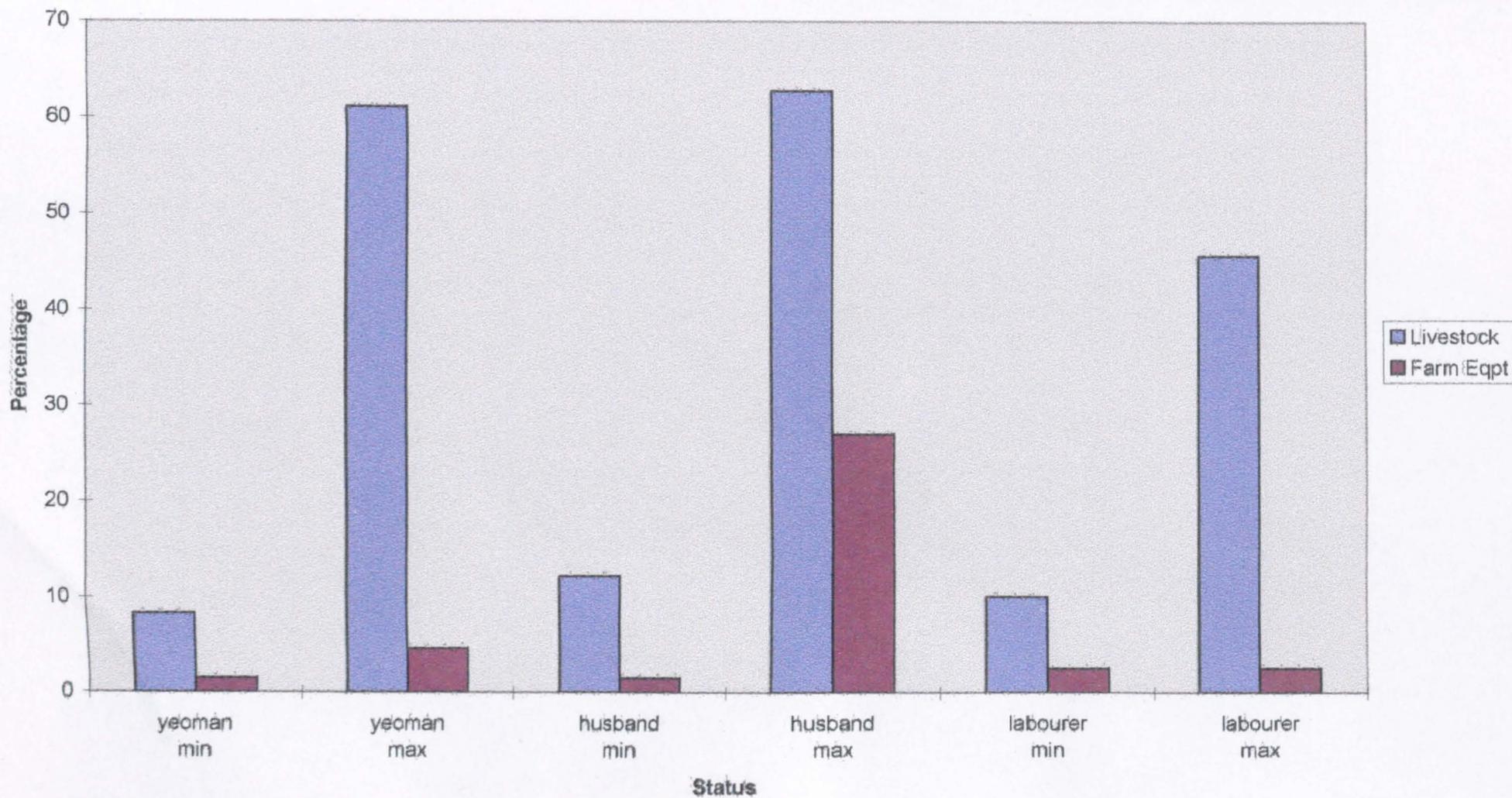


Chart 6.2 Kitchenware, linen, and furniture as percentage of total inventory value

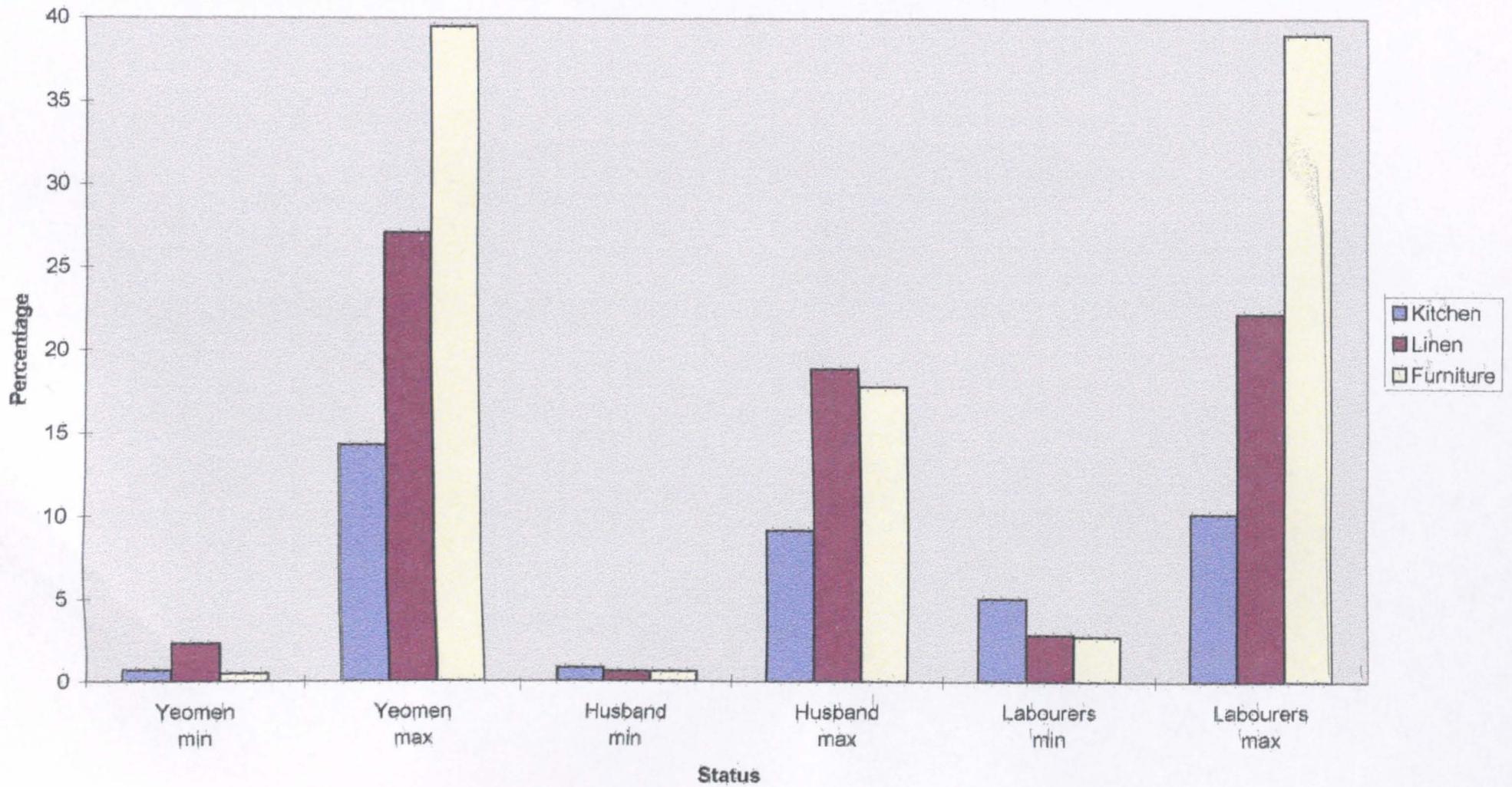


Chart 6.3 Inventories - types of beds

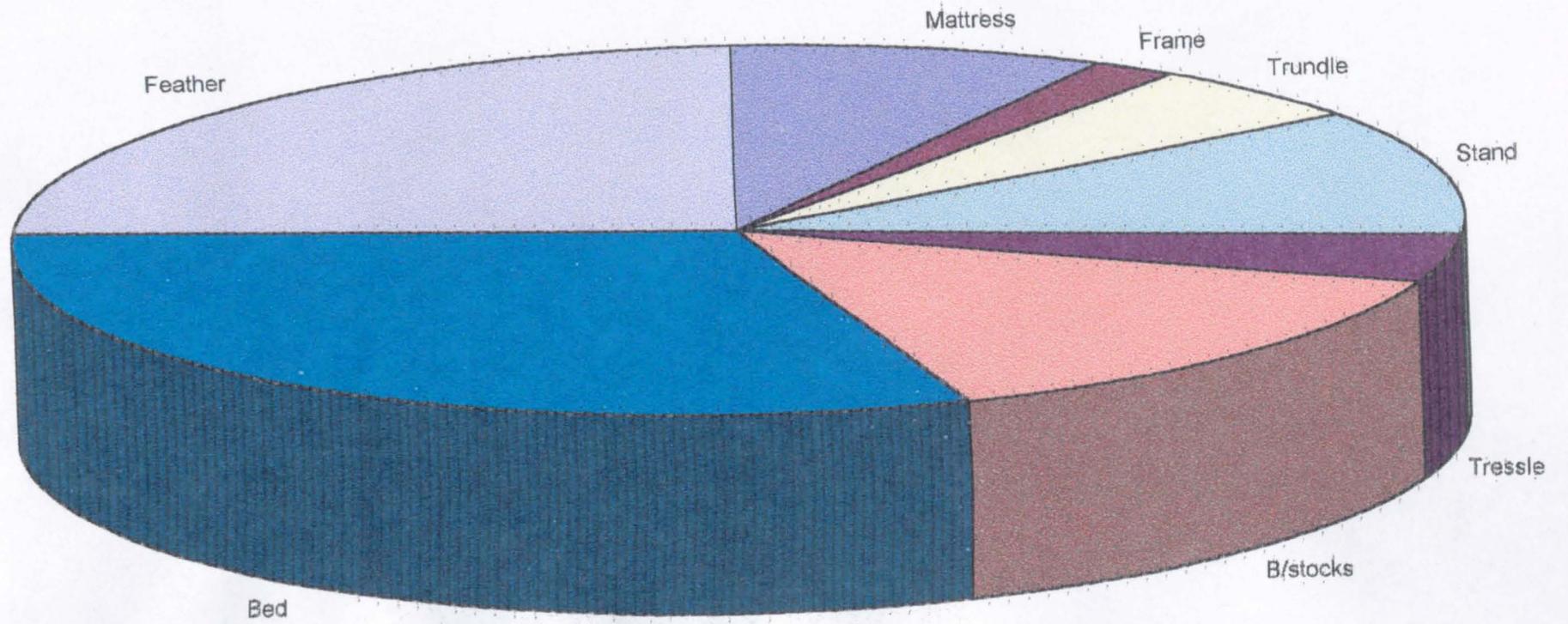
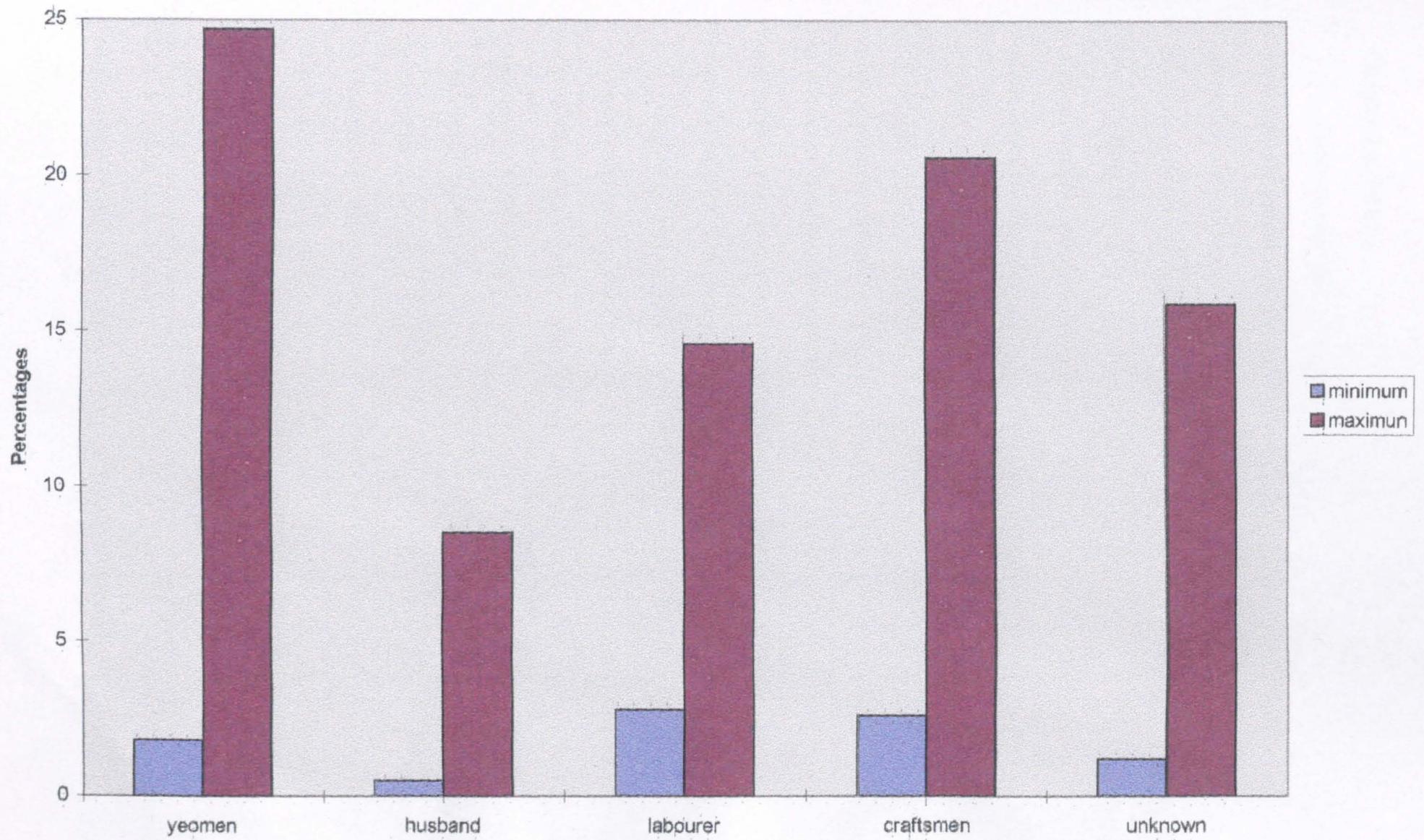


Chart 6.4 Silver, pewter, and brass items as percentage of total inventory value.



Chapter 7 Brief lives

Earlier chapters have examined the social structure and wealth of the social groups in the constituent parishes of the Isle, looking at both the broader picture and also giving individual details in support of general statements. This chapter considers individuals across the social spectrum, using wills, inventories, parish registers, and any other relevant documents to establish not only what peoples' lives were like, but also to illustrate the findings of earlier chapters regarding partible inheritance and its effects, secondary occupations, comparative wealth, migration, land purchase, and debt as well as other relevant matters across the several social groups. To enable comparisons to be made of the varying patterns of ownership of material possessions by the persons whose lives are studied here, a number of charts showing the proportions of the moveable goods for each person is to be found at the end of the chapter (p. 266 onwards) under ten categories, including such items as purse and apparel, the value of their animals, and the level of furnishing. All the charts show the proportions as percentages of the total value of the inventory, excluding debts.

Alexander Kytchen , a yeoman from Belton, was baptised in November 1568, and was buried in March 1613-14, aged 45 years. He married, first, Alicia Wray on 10 July 1587 at Belton and was thus under twenty years of age. There is no trace of a baptism for Alicia, and the name Wray is uncommon in Axholme. She was buried 5 August 1590, and Alexander subsequently married a Dorothy, about whom no information has been obtainable; it is clear, however, that the second marriage followed on closely from the decease of Alicia judging by the subsequent baptismal records. There were six children from this second marriage: Thomas (bap. March 1591); Prudence (bap. May 1595); William (Bap. December, 1598); Ann (bap. April 1602); Alexander (bap. December 1608); and John (bap. September 1610). Of these six children, Alexander was buried in March 1608, and Prudence and John vanish from the records, suggesting that they migrated from the Isle, Thomas married Margaret Dalbie in May 1621, and Ann probably married Edmund Maw in 1629.¹

The most remarkable feature of Alexander Kytchen's inventory, a yeoman from Belton (d. 1614), was the level of debt which far exceeded the valuation of his moveables, £144 2s. 0d. against an appraisal of £109 1s. 10d.² Much of his debt lay in bonds, some of which appear to have been to purchase property, land, and livestock; this last item formed almost half the valuation of the inventory, and his will refers to a house and land bought from Robert Broughton. His borrowings were from his son, Thomas, from other lenders within the Isle, and from people living across the River Trent in Messingham and Gainsborough. His inventory indicates a person who wanted to show his status for his house had eleven rooms, including cellars - an unusual feature in Axholme houses - a 'gallery chamber', which sounds imposing, and a display of wealth in 'a cupboard with all the pewter and brass on it', valued at £1 14s. 0d. In spite of the size of the house, there was comparatively little furniture in it, accounting for less than one-tenth of the inventory's value. Alexander showed some awareness of his levels of debt for he left one of his creditors, Mr George Lathom, an acre and five selions of land (two and a half acres), probably to offset the £40 he had in bonds from him. References in his inventory to quantities of cloth and 'raw linen and six yards of other coarse cloth', together with spinning wheels suggest a secondary occupation of cloth processing alongside a large mixed farm with seven horses, 17 cows, and 12 pigs, as well as an area devoted to arable farming. His eldest son, Thomas, was encumbered with providing for his two sisters and three brothers to the tune of £10 each at age 21 or marriage, when he inherited the remainder of his lands and property after his mother's death.

William Harrison, a yeoman from Haxey (d. 1611), contrast in many ways with Alexander Kytchen, for there is no trace of a baptism, and there is doubt whether he married or not as there are five persons of the same name whose marriage dates fit in with the time framework, that is before 1611. It is possible that he married Elizabeth Kelsey on August 1603, but she died on 2 December 1605, and no children are recorded. His will and inventory provide an example where reliance on only one of these documents would produce a misleading picture.³

His will illustrates the fact that land was divided and also that childless persons left their property to their kin. His two main beneficiaries were two nieces, Elizabeth and Isabel, daughters of his brother Ralph, who had died in November 1609. Elizabeth was to receive all his closes, three-and-a-half acres of arable, and five acres of meadow. Isabel was to receive some land from her sister when she was twenty-one as well as a toft-stead in Wroot, together with all his land, meadows, pastures and fishings there. Both nieces were to benefit by sharing the debts outstanding to their uncle. There is evidence from William's will that he had bought an acre of land from Mr Brown as well as the equivalent of five acres from Thomas Tankersley. William's lands stretched over three parishes, Haxey, Owston, and Wroot. Elizabeth and Isabel would, therefore, be much sought after as marriage partners: Elizabeth (bap. January 1593) married John Starkie in November 1613 at the age of twenty, and Isabel (bap. September 1598) married William Post in May 1627 at the age of 28. Isabel's mother died shortly after giving birth to her.

Another brother, John, was given four selions which were to pass to his son, and all his children were to be given five shillings while his sister's children were to benefit from 6s. 8d. each at the age of twenty-one. All sums of money were 'to be put to use', illustrating William Harrison's propensity for making money.

The value of the inventory was only £13 18s. 0d., and gives the impression of a poorly furnished house, much of whose furniture was old - 'two old chairs, two old cods, an old coverlet'. Not a single animal is mentioned and it is possible they had been given to his kin or sold. The impression of a poverty-stricken man is banished, however, when the level of debts owing to him is revealed, for they amounted to £87 3s. 6d., of which £60 was in the form of bills. He had lent £32 16s. 8d. to his brothers, and he was owed money for barley, corn, rye, and corn by several people. Two persons between them owed over £10 for cattle he had sold them. William was evidently one of those persons who had cashed in much of his property or amassed savings during his life so that he could act as a 'banker' for his local community and beyond - Robert Turre, a butcher from Morton, near Gainsborough, owed him

£2 13s. 4d. William referred to himself as a yeoman, which seems to refer to his status as his inventory does not indicate a man actively involved in farming.

Another person with what appear to be extensive lands was John Moody, a husbandman from Owston (d. 1597). The parish registers do not begin until 1599 so it is not possible to trace his baptism or marriage, but it is apparent from his will that his wife had died.⁴ Two of his daughters had already married: Katherine to Solomon Slater, Dorothy to a Hauxworth, a surname found in the West Riding of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.⁵ Neither of the marriages has been traced, but from the wording of the wills the daughters had already been given part of their inheritance, and bequests 'have been given them as their last parts of their child's portions'. Katherine was left a cow, a pewter doubler, and £1 while her sister had a cow and £1. The elder son, Henry may also have had part of his inheritance as he was left 'another house at the far end of Gunthorpe', a part of Owston parish. Henry and his brother, John, were left large amounts of land between them, a common form of partible inheritance: Henry received a messuage, tenement and house in Gunthorpe, together with 'all barns, stables, orchards, gardens, lands, meadows, pasture, fishings, and commons', and John was left two acres of meadow in Gunthorpe and all the freehold land in Haxey, though this area is not specified.

Along with the will, the inventory, which totalled £45 18s. 0d., reveals a well-to-do farmer with his own farming equipment - cart, plough, harrows - who was self-sufficient and not in debt, with over half his valuation in the form of animals and crops. The mention of orchards and gardens (note the plurals), as well as oats and barley, illustrates the variety of agriculture practised in this river-bank area south of Owston, while the 'fishings' may refer to a commercial enterprise connected to the prevalence of eels in the Isle of Axholme; it will be recalled that Domesday Book listed 31 fisheries.⁶ The gardens and orchards may merely be evidence of production for home consumption, though the fact that there were more than one suggests a commercial undertaking, and the fishings reveal a major secondary occupation

along with cloth production as there are mentions in the inventory of hecks, breaks, and hempseed.

With so much land between them, it is surprising that neither Henry nor John appear in the parish records again - there are no traces of marriages or burials - nor are they listed in the 1642 Protestation Returns for Lincolnshire, including Gainsborough, or Nottinghamshire. Searches of deeds have also failed to produce any evidence of land sold. Their disappearance is a mystery.

A husbandman with a more modest life-style was David Swindall from Belton, who died in January 1591. The son of Robert, he was baptised in April 1551, and thus lived for 39 years. There is no trace of his marriage to Agnes nor of the baptisms of their three children, David, Jennett, and Dorothy. In his will he provided that his land should be used to bring up his children, and provisions were stipulated that if his widow remarried, her husband should 'find sufficient bonds for the bringing up of the children', and neither should 'benefit from his house or land'.⁷ In fact, Agnes was remarried six months after Robert's death George Maw at Belton. There are no traces of marriages for either Jennett or Dorothy, but David married Anne White in January 1625-6 though this may have been a second marriage because the records show the burial of a Maria Swindall, wife of David, in August 1617. A David Swindall is listed in the 1642 Protestation Returns for Belton so it appears that he remained in the parish.

The inventory indicates that Robert had some land - four acres are referred to with crops of wheat and rye, peas and hemp, and linen, which made up nearly half of the total valuation (46 per cent) of £27 13s. 6d. Over one-third (38 per cent) of his inventory was accounted for by animals - cows, horses, and pigs. The references to a cart, plough, harrows, and horses show that Robert was relatively well off in terms of farming equipment. The impression gained from the inventory, which gives no indication of the number of rooms, is of a sparsely furnished house with little furniture other than beds, nor of much cooking equipment. There was, however, some 'luxury' in the house in the form of painted cloths as

well as four pieces of pewter, a candlestick, and a salt. Debts owed by the testator came to £2 0s. 11d. in small amounts to six people, and two persons owed him £1 6s. 8d. between them. There is an evidence of a secondary occupation with the references to hemp and flax growing though there is no sign of equipment for processing the crops. The inventory gives the impression of being made cursorily as the final evaluation states: 'other implements and necessaries about the house not specified before'.

The will follows the pattern where there is little land available of the son inheriting all the land at the age of twenty-one together with the horses and farming equipment while the daughters were to be provided with money, £3 6s. 8d., at marriage or the age of maturity. Kin also were remembered as his sister, Mary Tebbe, was left a calf and her son one shilling.

Moving down the social scale, yet to someone who was relatively well-off, the inventory and will of Edward Gylliott, a labourer from Crowle (d.1591), illustrate the variety of means used to raise income and make a living.⁸

The parish registers reveal little about his marriage to Alice nor about his children, Richard, Robert, Mary, and Bridgett. Richard was baptised in January 1572-3, which argues for Edward's marriage sometime in 1572. If Edward were in his mid-twenties then, he would have been in his mid-forties at death. Though Robert and Bridgett disappear from the records, Richard married Isabel Glew at Crowle in June 1603, at about the age of twenty, and appear to have had eight children, two of whom failed to survive beyond childhood. Richard Gylliott is listed in the 1642 Protestation Returns. Mary married William Pygas in November 1603, but there is no evidence of any children. A William Pygouse is recorded in the 1642 Protestation Returns for Crowle, and may be the husband of Mary.

Edward Gylliott's inventory, which was valued at £18 12s. 0d., and which is close to the median, reveals that he was an arable and pastoral farmer: his crops were appraised at nearly one-fifth of the total, and his animals - a mare, five cows, three pigs, twelve geese, and hens and cockerel - represent almost one-third of the total. Such details provide a good insight into his way of life. Although there is no mention of equipment for processing yarn or

cloth, he had considerable quantities of it in his house - twenty yards of linen, nine yards of harden, five pounds of fembly yarn, and twenty pounds of harden yarn. Food is rarely mentioned in the Axholme inventories under consideration, yet there were ten cheeses listed in the inventory, and the pans and skimmers suggest cheese-making as another occupation, probably undertaken by his wife.

Though no rooms are referred to, it seems probable that there were two, if not three: painted cloths are mentioned in 'the house'. Further confirmation of this is the amount of furniture listed - a cupboard with a counter, three chairs, two tables, four chests, two beds 'with their furniture', and large amounts of bed-linen. A surprising feature of the inventory was the number of 'luxury' items: eighteen pieces of pewter, three candlesticks, and two salts, though some of them may have been inherited.

In his will, his two sons were left a quy calf each and his wife and daughters were residual legatees and executors. His debts totalled £1 9s. 4d., consisting of relatively small amounts to several persons though there is no indication of their nature. Edward Gylliott appears to have been one of the more prosperous labourers who derived his income from a number of sources.

Although Edward Gylliott had no more than his toft, as far as can be made out, Thomas Singleton, another labourer, from Belton, did have some land. He was born around 1560, on the assumption of a marriage in the mid-twenties to Joanna Mylade in February 1585-6. He was about forty at his death in March 1597-8 though his father was still alive because he is referred to in the list of debtors in the inventory.⁹ There were two children from the marriage, Anne (bap. 20 January 1586-7) and John (bap. 25 December 1589). John may have married Margaret Richardson in May 1615 when he would have been twenty-five, and Anne possibly married Henry Thornton in April 1629 though this would make her old for a first marriage.¹⁰

The inventory totalled £13 17s. 4d., which put it below the median. Almost half (47 per cent) was accounted for by animals - four cows, six sheep, two pigs, and a few geese and

hens, but there is no mention of crops. His house, which may have belonged to his father, was two-storeyed as there is a reference to a chamber which would have been over the 'house'. The whole house was quite well -furnished, including two beds, one of which was a feather-bed, a cupboard, a couple of tables, and chairs, accounting for over one-third of the appraisal. There were nine pieces of pewter, a chafing dish, three candlesticks, and two salts listed as 'luxury' items. There is no hint of a secondary occupation.

It is clear from his will that he had inherited a close of arable land and meadow from his father, by deed, and he also had three roods of land elsewhere in Belton, in South Parkfield, all of which he left to his son, an indication that the sub-division of land could go no further; his wife and daughter were residuary legatees and executors. He was owed £6 10s. 4d. by his father of which 30 shillings were for sacks of corn, an illustration of lending between members of the same family. Ten shillings were allocated to cover his funeral expenses. There is no record of a John Singleton in the 1642 Protestation Returns so it appears that he moved out of the area, a surmise strengthened by the fact that a person with the same name sold half an acre of land to John Popplewell, who was a multi-purchaser of small parcels of land, in 1630. Although there are relatively few Singletons in the registers, it is difficult to distinguish them as most of the males bear the Christian name of John. Nevertheless, it seems likely that in spite of inheriting a house, animals, and a small area of land, John found it too difficult to make a living and migrated from the area.

Although John Atkinson (d. 1616) is described as a brewster, it is clear that he included other commercial activities to supplement his income. He was probably born about 1555 in Crowle though no parish records are available before 1561, and he married Ann Webster there in late November 1579 at a period of the year when marriages were not usually performed. He died when he was about 62, a relatively old age. There were three children from his marriage, a son, who was unnamed in his will and who was married, a daughter, Susan married to John Aldus, and another daughter, Anne, who may have married John

Slingsby in July 1624. There are few traces of Atkinsons in the parish registers, and they appear to be one of the transitory families - there are none in the 1642 Protestation Returns.

In his will, John left his wife a cow called 'White Cap', his son's wife some furniture, his daughter Susan's children 6s. 8d. each, which they were to receive at the age of twenty-one, while his daughter, Anne was made residual legatee and executrix.¹¹ From reading the will the impression is gained that his son was not resident in the area, which may account for the disappearance of the family from the records.

The inventory, which was appraised at £18 14s. 6d., shows that the house consisted of a hall, parlour, chamber, and kitchen. The hall, which was well-furnished with a cupboard, table, chairs, stools, and a Flanders chest, was also the place for the display of wealth for it had fourteen pieces of pewter, two candlesticks, salts, and brass pots. The parlour had three chests, a featherbed and a truckle bed with bed linen. The walls were covered with pieces of tapestry ('halling'). The chamber had five beds in it, including three featherbeds, a cheese-heck, spinning wheels, and a hopper - a bucket for grain. The kitchen was equipped for brewing as well as having lengths of cloth stored there. Outside in the yard, were a cart, plough, and their ancillary equipment together with eight pigs, two cows, and a mare. The toft was used for growing hemp as a rood and a half were set aside for this. He was owed £5 10s. 8d. though the nature of the debts is not given. The house furnishings and animals amount to nearly two-thirds of the valuation. Not only was he a brewer, but he was involved in arable and pastoral farming, growing hemp, and processing it, witness the spinning wheels in the chamber.

Another person who may have moved into the Isle was Edward Johnson, a webster from Haxey, who died in 1587. As there is no record of his marriage it is not possible to estimate his age at death. His wife had pre-deceased him, leaving three children from the marriage: Maude, who was baptised in August 1581, and who was buried in October 1587, shortly after the death of her father; a son, Thomas for whom there is no record of his having married; and another daughter, Marion, for whom there are no records at all. It is possible

that Edward moved into the Isle, where weaving work was available, before the death of his wife, and his son Thomas may have migrated.¹²

His will shows the typical division of moveables and money between his children and his kin, for Thomas was left a table, a brewing lead, a brass pot, and two pounds (£2), and his sister, Maude, a cupboard and two pounds. Strangely, Marion is not included with her siblings in the children to receive bequests, but is mentioned only in connection with the money Edward almost seems to have forgotten about, which appears at the end of his main bequests (see below). One of Edward's sisters, Agnes Kirkby, was left a yard of linen cloth, and a third sister, Agnes Park, was given his best kerchief. His brother was the recipient of a pair of boots, his children were bequeathed sixpence each, and his sister-in-law was given 'the red petticoat that belonged to my wife'. Servants are mentioned occasionally in Axholme wills, and there was a maid in this family who was given a black gown, a fumble sheet, and 'as much money as will bind her', presumably to persuade her to remain with the family. An interesting feature of the will, and listed in the inventory also were two reals of gold, worth fifteen shillings each at the time this will was drawn up, and thirty shillings in 'Edward' money.¹³ This money was to be divided equally amongst his three children, the only occasion Marion is referred to.

The most notable feature of the inventory is the amount of money included in his purse and apparel - £30 3s. 4d. out of a total of £65 17s. 6d. As might be expected, he had a large amount of cloth - 14 yards of linen, 23 yards of fumble, 18 yards of harden and canvas, 440 sacks, material for sack-making, and quantities of linen, harden, and wool. He processed cloth through its many stages as he had three spinning wheels, a loom, a warping-fat for sizing the warp before weaving, hecks and breaks for hemp and linen although the value of all this equipment was relatively small £1 2s. 0d. Besides weaving he also farmed as cattle, sheep, pigs, geese, and bees are listed in his inventory as well as nets, indicating he supplemented his diet with fish or eels. A curious item listed in the inventory is a sword, the only one encountered in the present study. Debts were small, amounting to a total of £1 11s. 8d.,

owed to him, including fourpence 'for two pecks of hempseed', while his debts totalled £1 1s. 4d.

The lack of evidence from the parish registers as outlined above suggests strongly that this was a transitory family, with the father moving into the Isle to find work, but with the remaining brother and sister possibly marrying outwith Axholme.

Another person who had a surprisingly large amount of money in her purse and apparel was Agnes Clarke, a widow from Luddington (d. 1583). Out of a total valuation of £43 8s. 8d., she had £20, as well as debts owing to her of £8 4s. 4d., including one of £3 6s. 8d. Because the Luddington parish registers do not commence until 1599, it is impossible to calculate her age or learn much about her family.

Her will does not mention any children of her own, and, as with the general pattern found in the Isle, kin are the main beneficiaries: two nieces, Alice Walkwood and Jane Walkwood were to receive £6 13s. 4d. each at marriage as was another niece, Elizabeth Young; in all instances the money was to be invested.¹⁴ Alice further benefited by being left a trundle bed, a featherbed, and bed linen.

Besides the money in her purse, Agnes had crops 'in the ground' worth £3 6s. 8d. and corn in store valued at £12, and she had money due to her from leases. Beds and bed linen are listed in the inventory, but no furniture, for example, tables, stools, cupboards, is mentioned. Apart from the debts already referred to, the remainder were relatively small, and the impression given in the inventory is of a fairly wealthy widow who had sufficient money to be able to lend it to others, and who intended to use it to benefit her brothers and their children, for having made her main depositions, she concludes by stating that they will have 'the use. . . of all my leases and debts due unto me by the will of the last will of Thomas Clarke my husband deceased'.

It is unusual to be able to link wills or inventories from members of the same family, but it is possible with the will of William Barkwith, a labourer from Haxey (d. 1621) and the inventory and will of his widow, Mary (d. 1625).¹⁵ There is no trace of their marriage, but

they had five children: William (bap. August 1605); Elizabeth (bap. April 1610); Richard (bap. October 1613); another Elizabeth (bap. March 1615); and Mary (bap. 1618). It is likely that the first Elizabeth died because only one is referred to in the will, and it is also probable that Richard also died as he is not mentioned either. There are no records of marriages or burials for any of the children, which indicates this was another transitory family.

William's will left his son William twenty shillings, his daughter Elizabeth £1 10s., which was to be invested until she was twenty-one or married, and the same was given to Mary under the same conditions. His kinsman, Thomas Barkwith, was left £6, and Elizabeth, his sister was given one shilling. Under Mary Barkwith's will William was to have £3 at twenty-one, Elizabeth £5 10s. at eighteen, and Mary also was to be given £5 10s. and a black cow at eighteen. Mary's inventory amounted to £24 8s. 10d. with her purse, apparel, and furniture accounting for almost half the valuation; a single cow was appraised at £3. The house, which was well-furnished with tables, a cupboard, four chests, a featherbed, bed linen, and other items, and which some brass and pewterware, had two rooms. The inventory provides evidence for clothmaking because hemp, sackcloth, yarn, and a linen-break are included.

The picture to be derived from the inventory is of a widow in reasonable financial circumstances - her inventory is above the median for labourers - in a comfortably furnished, small house with its own toft where a cow could graze, and where peas and barley could be grown. Her main occupation was processing hemp and linen and weaving sackcloth - she had two stones of tow, the shorter fibres of hemp or flax, worth sixteen shillings amongst other materials. No loom is listed, but the inventory seems somewhat cursory in its 'one table, a cupboard, a linen break, and certain other implements'. In addition, she lent money because £6 of 'bills and bonds' are mentioned. Although Mary was well-off compared with other labourers and other widows, the family was yet another transitory one as no Barkwiths are to be found in the Protestation Returns for Axholme, Gainsborough, nor north Nottinghamshire.¹⁶

Summary

Earlier chapters have concentrated on providing a broad picture of a number of topics, such as the effects of partible inheritance on landholding, secondary occupations, movement of population, age at marriage and burial, intervals between childbirth, occupations, relative wealth, and the proportions of inventories represented by a range of items, such as furnishings, animals, and crops. In examining the wills and inventories and other records of people from across the whole social range at what may be termed a 'micro' level, it has been possible to reconstruct their lives in some detail, and thus flesh out bare facts. The hardships that the inhabitants of Axholme experienced, as shown by their short life-spans, the early deaths of their children, the effects on their families of inheritance patterns, resulting in the growth of secondary occupations, and the transitory nature of their stays in the Isle, and the general difficulty of their lives, surrounded by water for four or five months of the year, and not just in winter time, are best brought out in this attention to detail.

¹ There is another marriage of an Ann Kytchen in September 1630, but there is no burial record of an Edmund Maw to suggest a second marriage.

² LAO Lincoln Wills 1614,1, 97 and Inventory 114/190.

³ LAO Lincoln Wills 1611,2, 238 and Inventory 110/179.

⁴ LAO Lincoln Wills 1597-8, 163.

⁵ P. H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of English Surnames*, (revised by R. M. Wilson, Oxford, 1997), p. 221 under 'Hawksworth'.

⁶ Owston had three fisheries listed. P. Morgan and C. Thom (eds), *Domesday Book: Lincolnshire*, Part 2, (Phillimore, Chichester, 1986), p. 369b.

⁷ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 27 and Inventory 80/340.

⁸ LAO Lincoln Wills 1591, 2, 16 and Inventory 80/348.

⁹ LAO Lincoln Wills 1597-8, 340 and Inventory 90/268.

¹⁰ No other marriages of an Anne Singleton have been traced in the constituent parishes of Axholme though, of course, the records may be deficient.

¹¹ LAO Stow Wills 1616-18, 100 and Inventory 221A/8.

¹² There is a Thomas Johnson listed in the 1642 Protestation Returns, but the identification as the son of Edward is uncertain; there is no burial record for a Thomas Johnson in the Haxey registers.

¹³ LAO Stow Wills 1587-90, 71 and Inventory 74/ 740.

¹⁴ LAO Lincoln Wills 1583, 2, 43 and Inventory 68/75.

¹⁵ LAO Stow Wills 1621-2, 40 (William Barkwith) and Lincoln Wills 1624-5, 411 and Inventory 129, 138 (Mary Barkwith).

¹⁶ It has not been possible to trace a Return for the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Chart 7.1 Possessions of Alexander Kytchin, yeoman

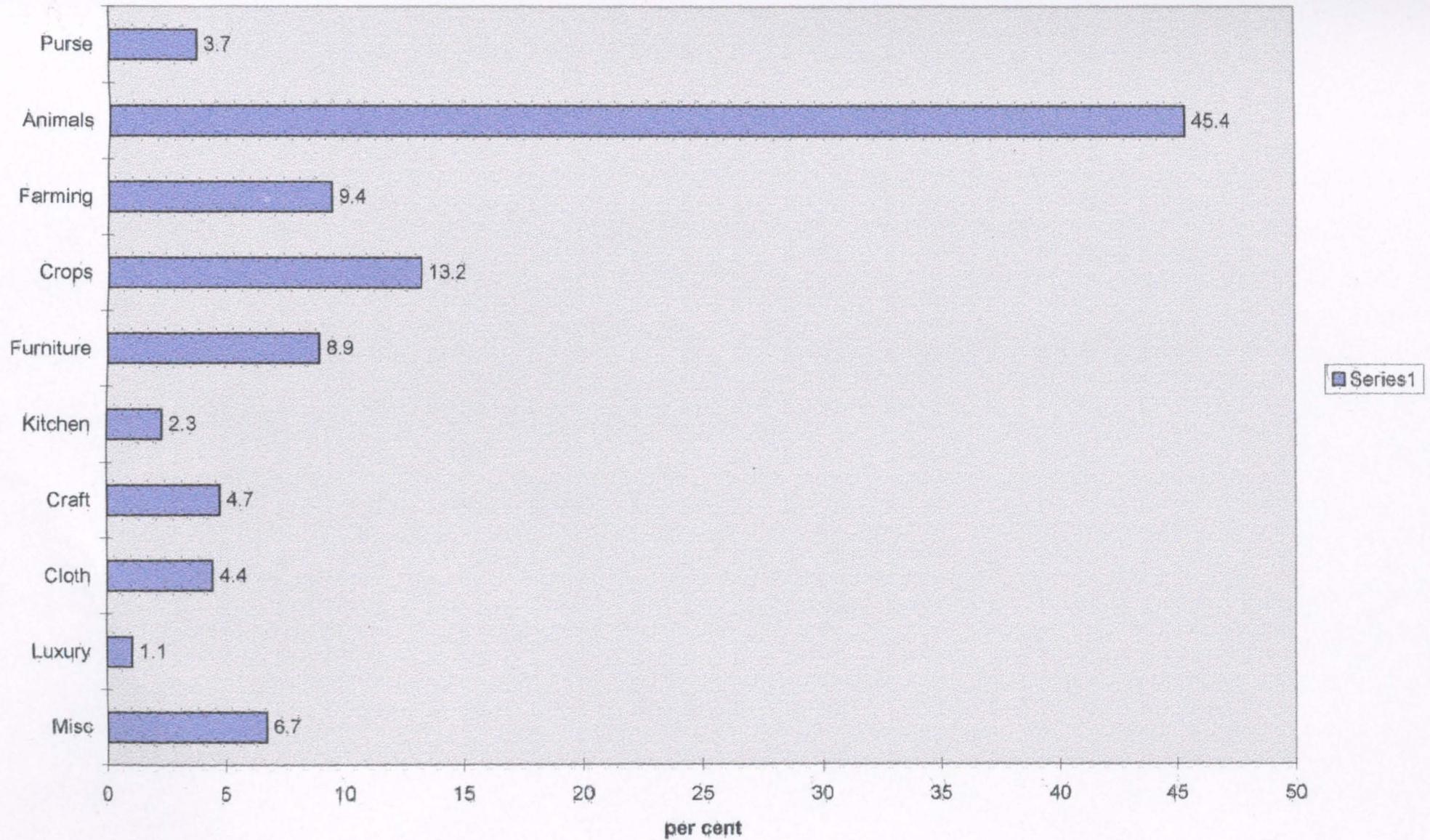


Chart 7.2 Possessions of William Harrison, yeoman

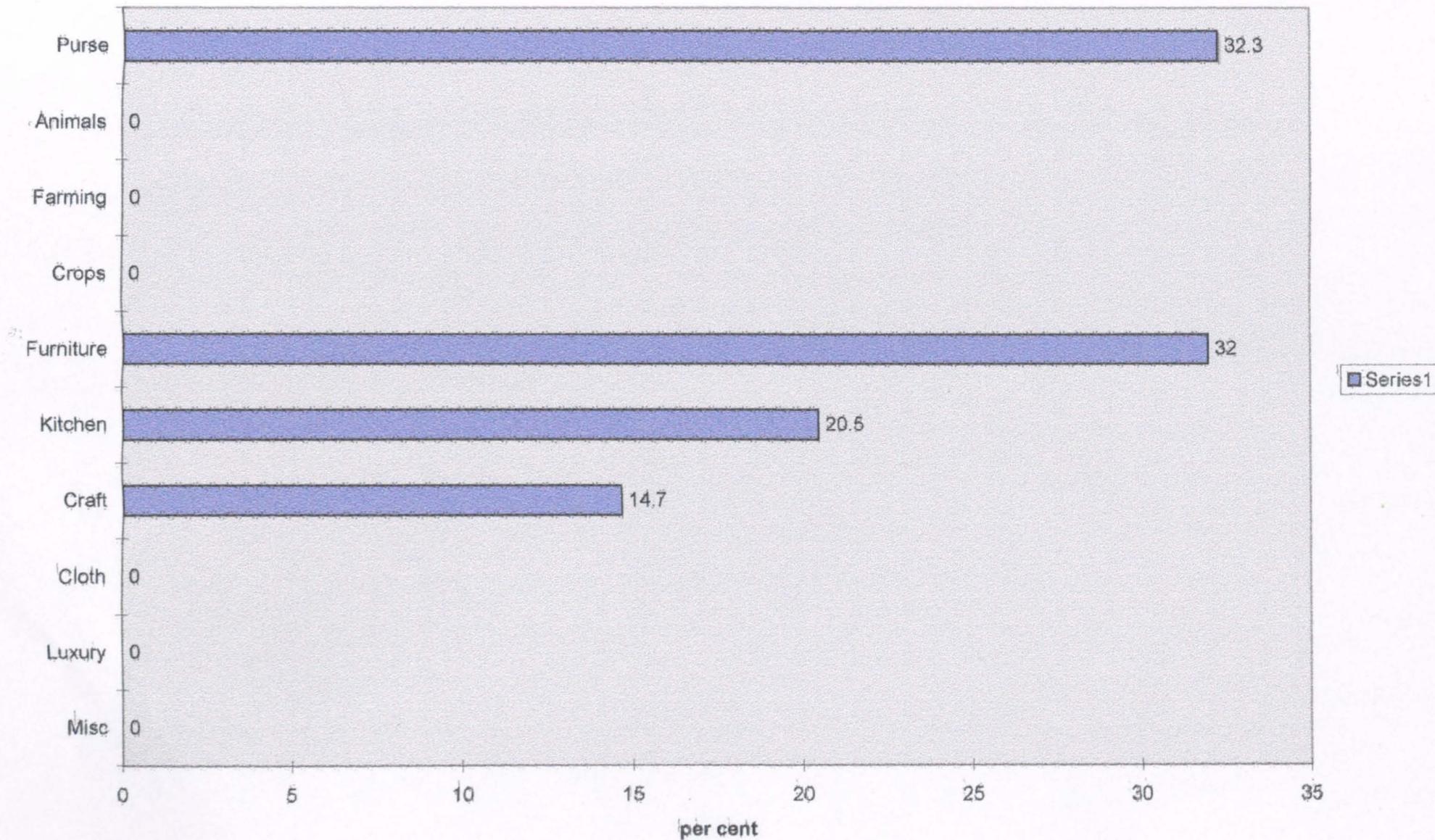


Chart 7.3 Possessions of John Moody, husbandman

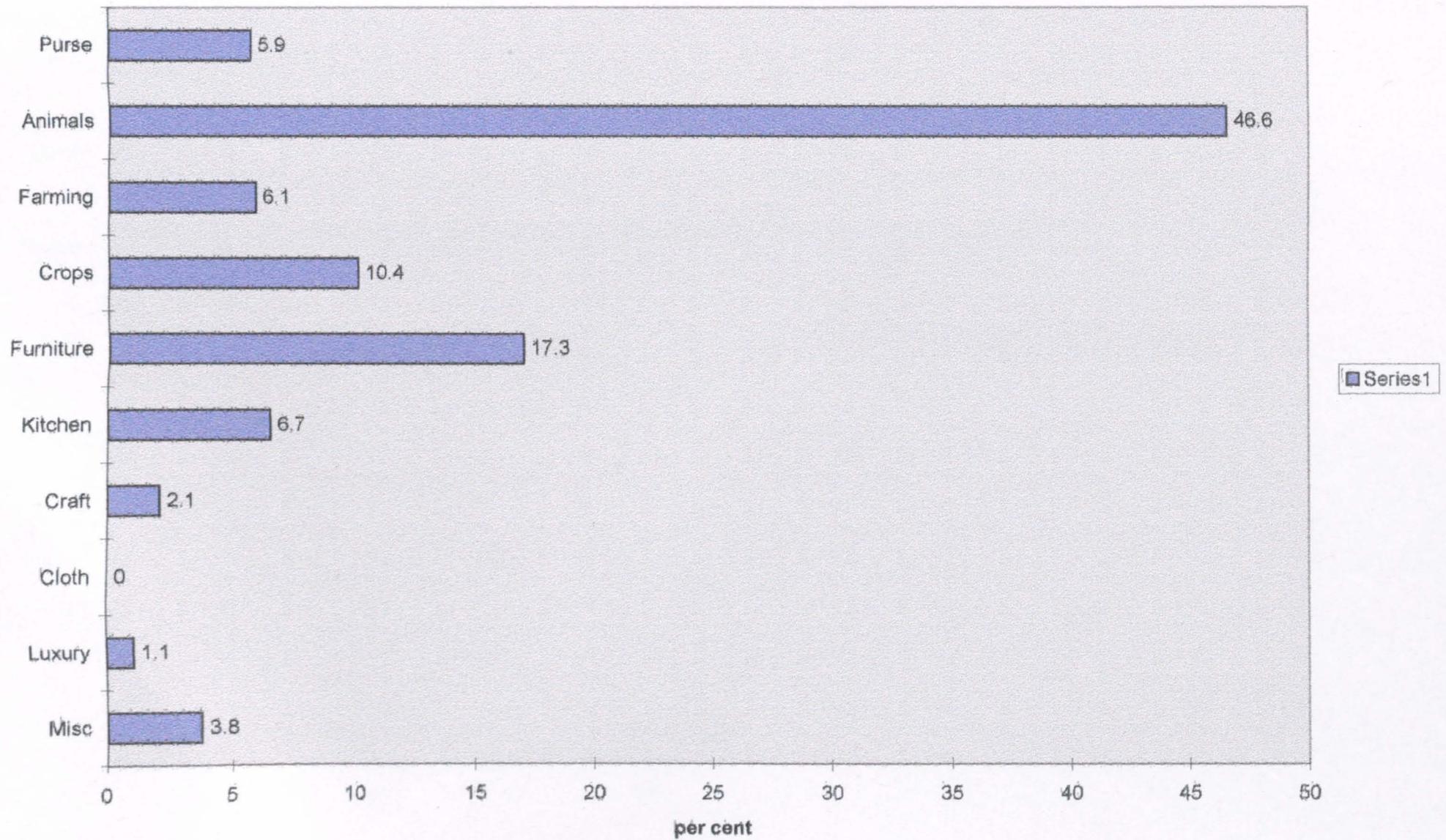


Chart 7.4 Possessions of Robert Swindall, husbandman

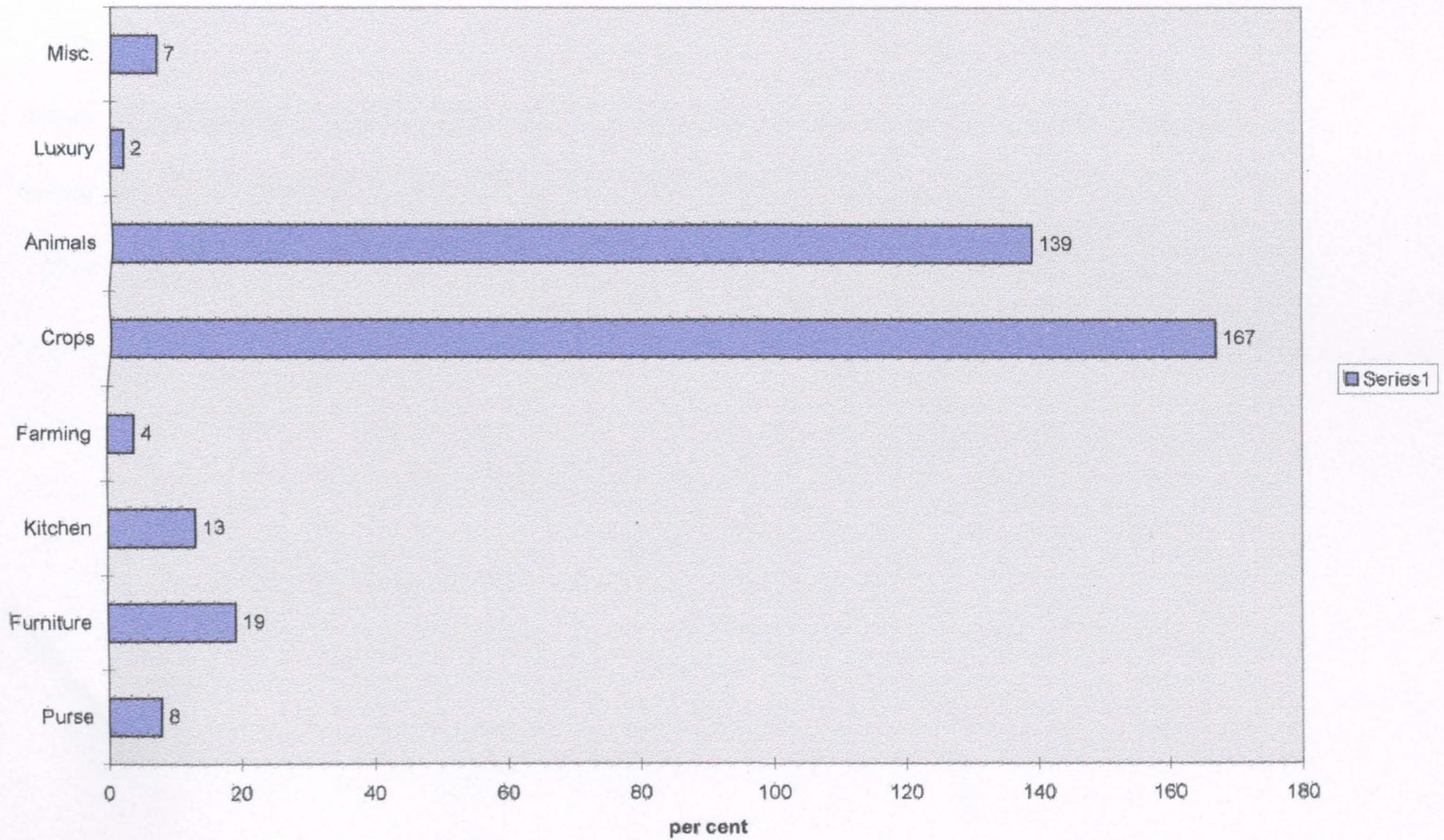


Chart 7.5 Possessions of Edward Gylliott, labourer

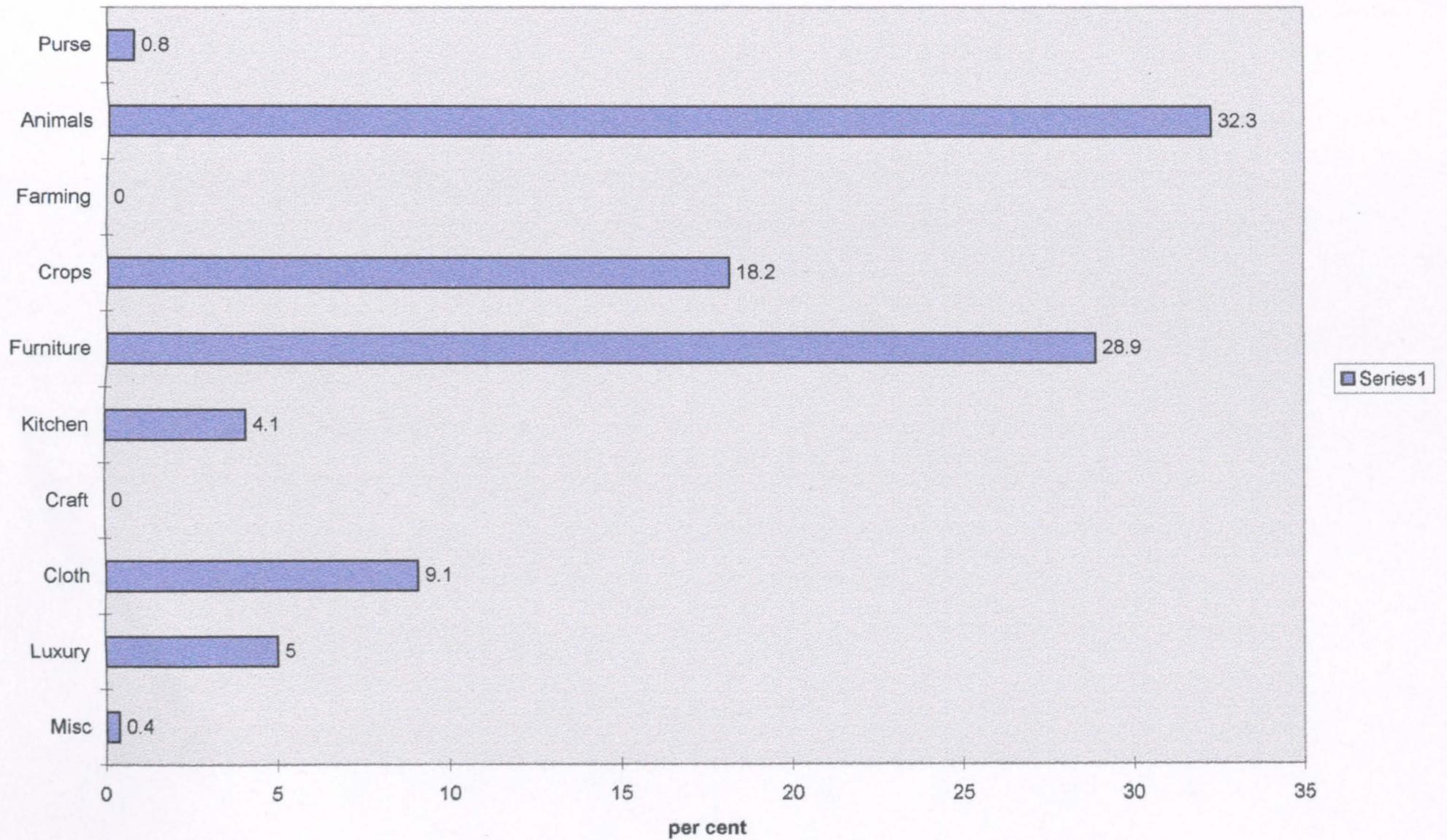


Chart 7.6 Possessions of Thomas Singleton, labourer

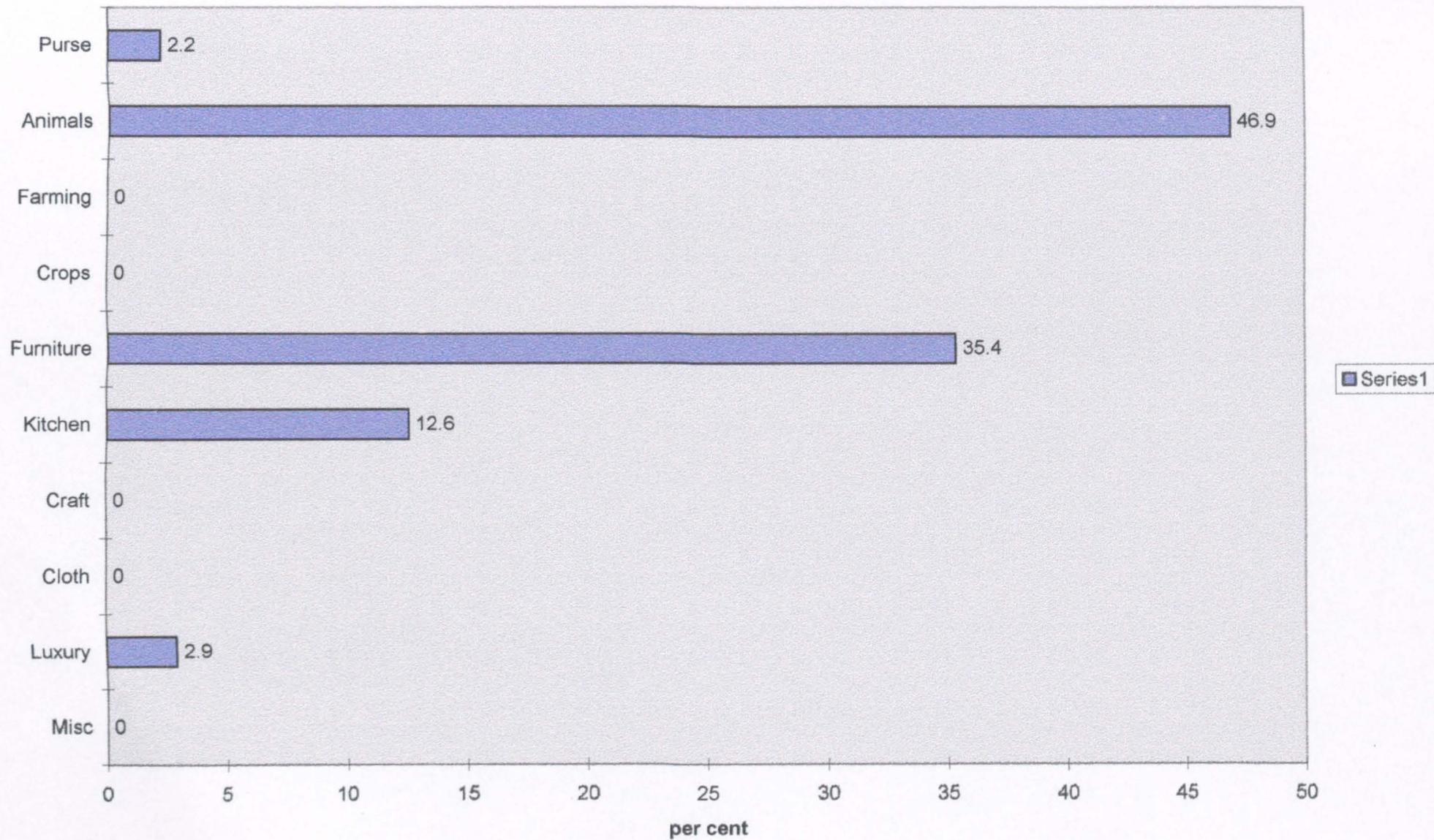


Chart 7.7 Possessions of John Atkinson, brewster

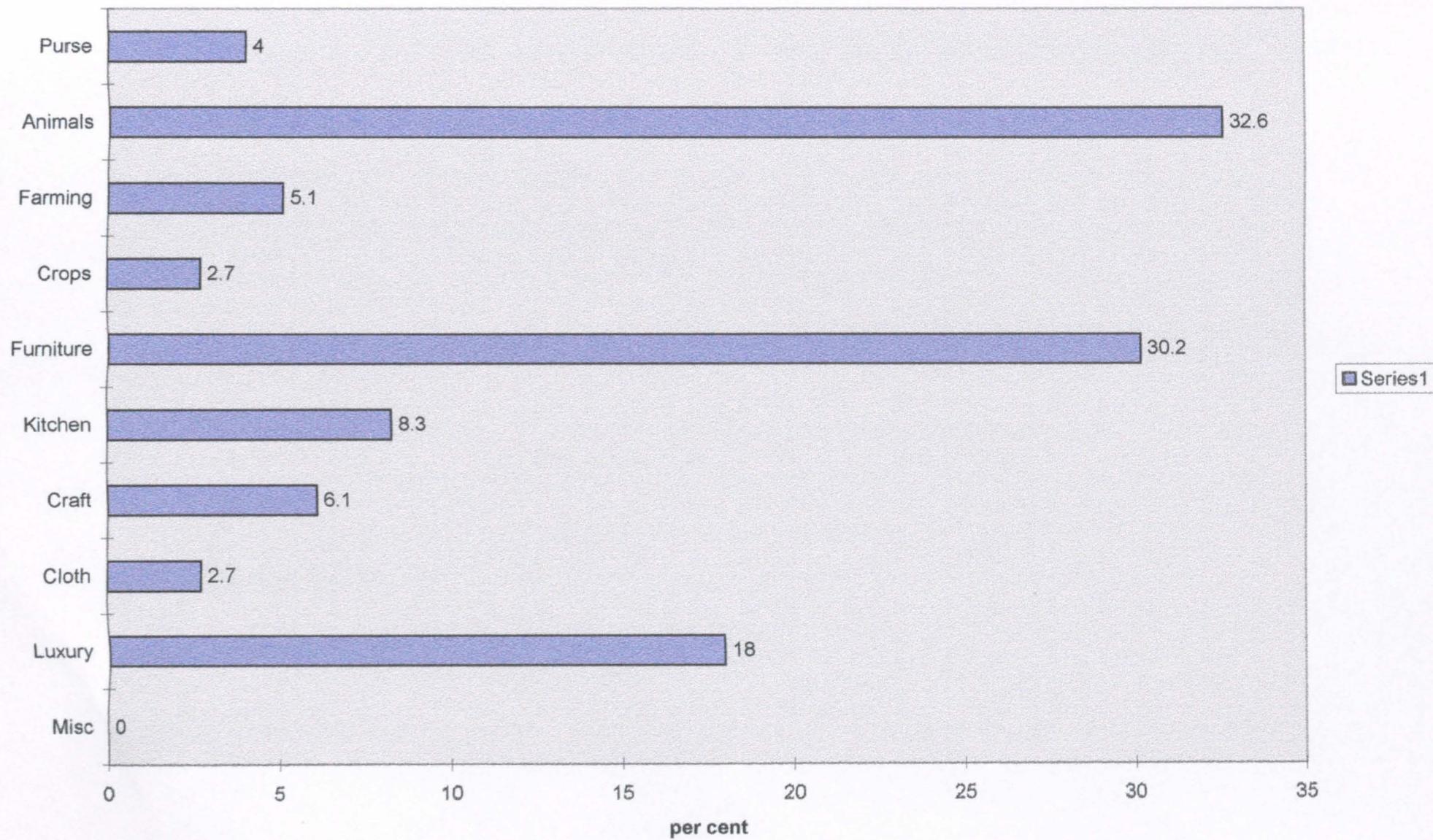


Chart 7.8 Possessions of Edward Johnson, webster

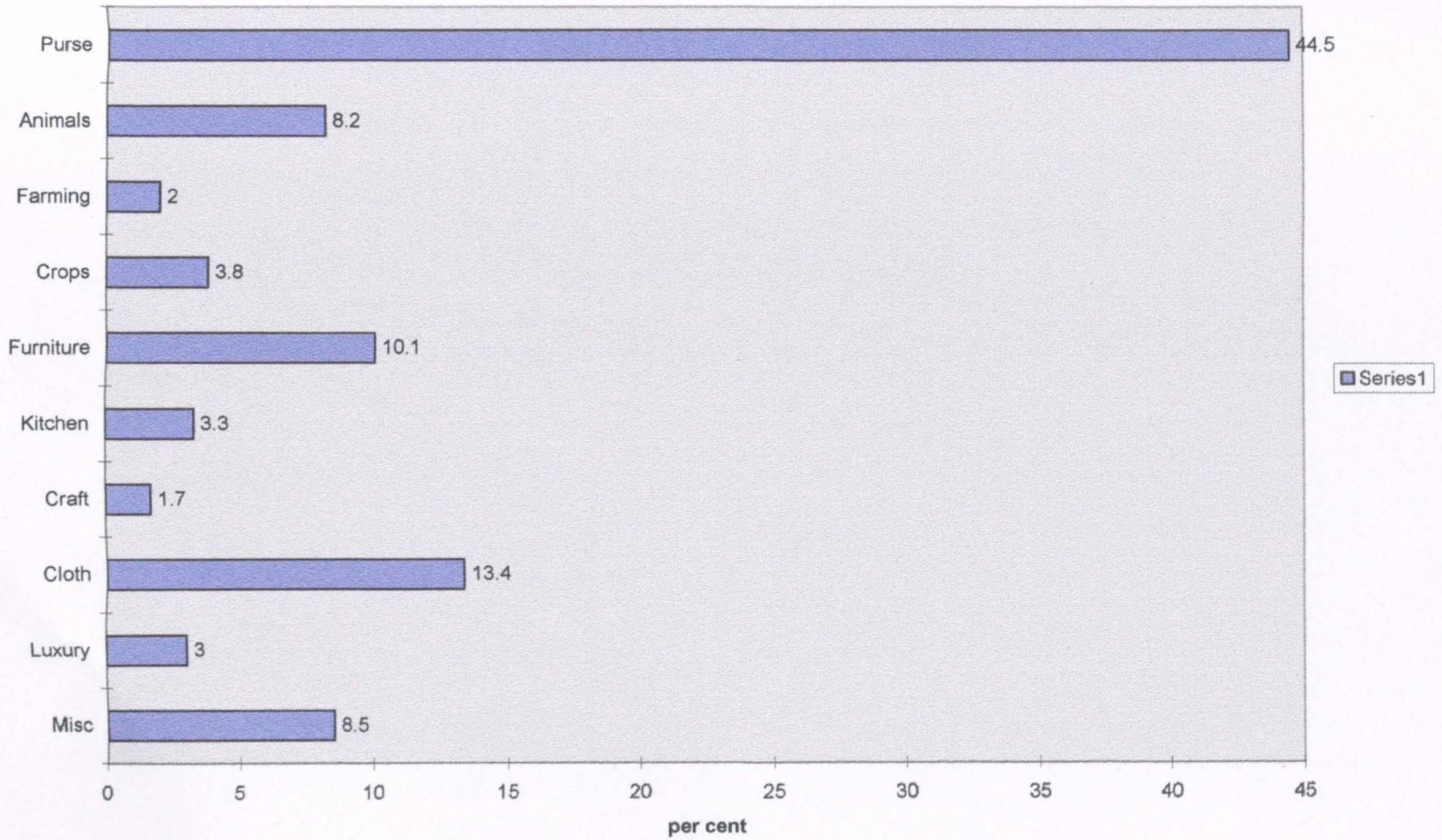


Chart 7.9 Possessions of Agnes Clarke, widow

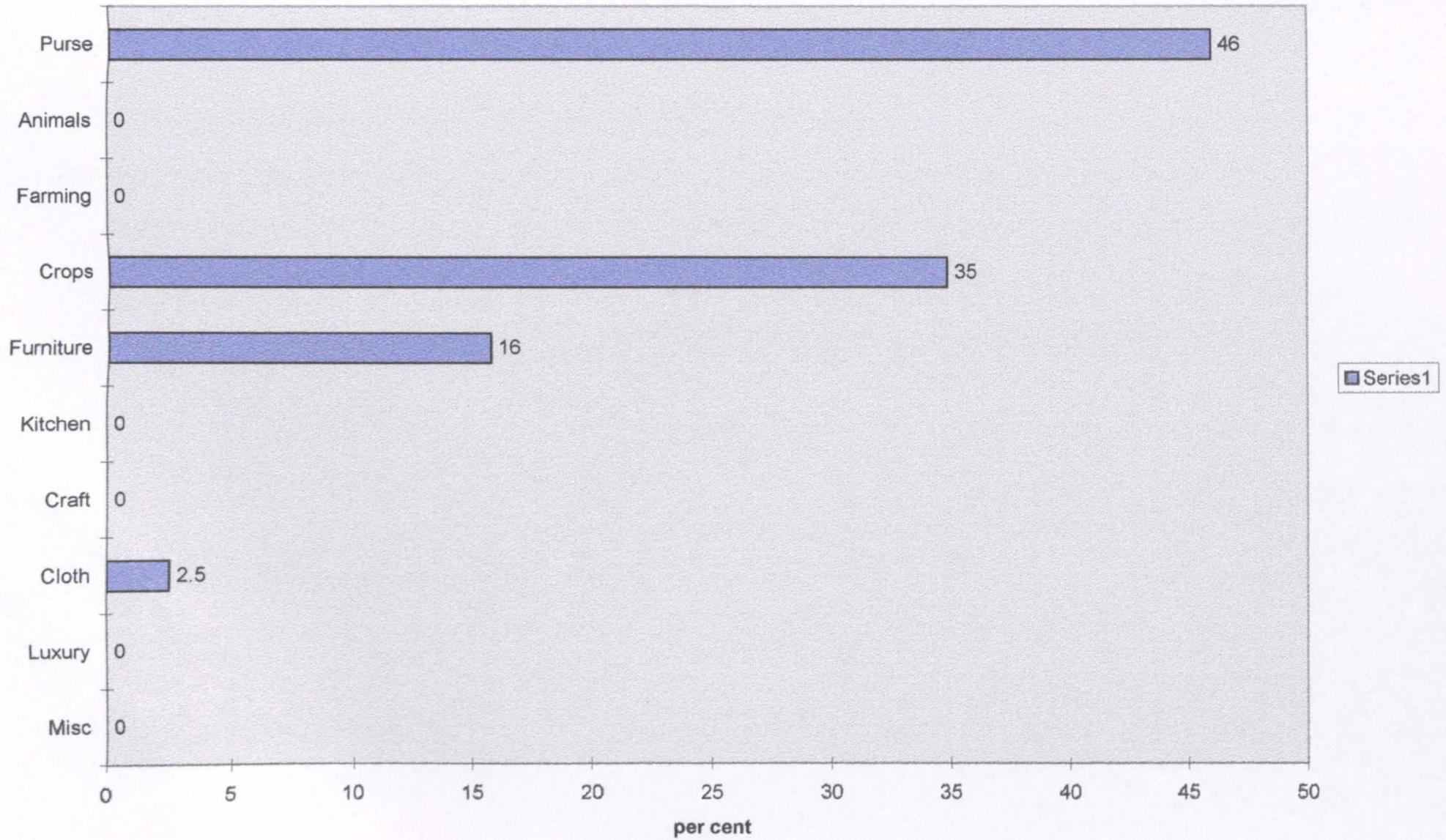
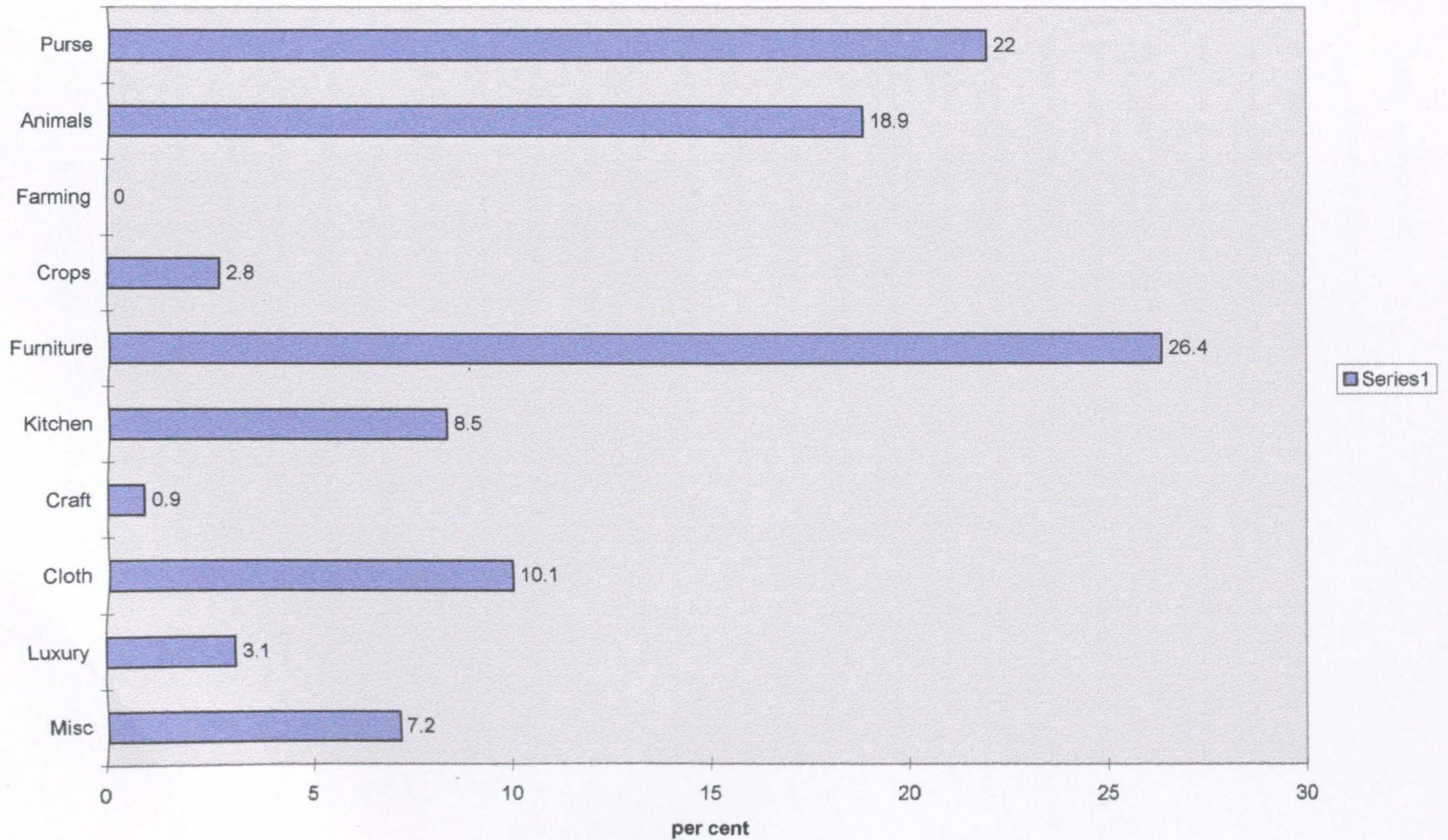


Chart 7.10 Possessions of Mary Barkwith, widow



Chapter 8 Summary

It is nearly fifty years since Thirsk published her article on the Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden's drainage. At the time that it was written, one of the pre-occupations of local historians was the link between a region's topography and its type of agriculture and the resultant social-economic system. The whole of England and Wales was divided into farming regions to enable comparisons to be made of similarities and differences. Since then, local and regional historians have focused on different aspects of communities to demonstrate that there is an interrelationship between the various elements, and that changes in one element results in often unpredictable changes elsewhere in those communities. Using an analogy, in simple mathematical terms one is looking at a complex equation with a large number of variables: change one variable, and the outcome changes. This chapter seeks to tie together some of those interrelationships, and show, in particular, that the role of partible inheritance, discarded as unimportant by writers such as Thirsk and Margaret Spufford, was a major 'mechanism' for economic, and therefore social change which had considerable significance. It enabled the wealthier farmers to increase their wealth, resulted in migration, both inwards and outwards, and was a contributory factor in the growth of secondary occupations. The chapter will show that developments in thinking about and approaches to local history enable us to widen the picture of Axholme that Thirsk presented nearly half a century ago to reveal the complexities of a number of communities encompassed within a small, isolated geographical area.

As has been indicated earlier, Thirsk remarked that changing one feature of a structure, such as the conversion of arable to pasture farming, can have significant effects on other parts of the structure of the economy and hence the society:¹ in the case of Axholme, in Thirsk's view, Vermuyden's drainage scheme changed the type of farming from pastoral to arable. It has to be pointed out, however, that the Isle had a mixed farming economy with the arable concentrated on the central ridge, producing sufficient wheat to allow commercial activity: it grew enough to be able to supply Selby abbey in the pre-Reformation period.²

The preponderance of labourers amongst the population prior to the drainage illustrates the importance of the Isle's arable farming. The surrounding carrs, wetlands, and fens allowed the widespread pasturing, mainly of cattle, for upto eight months of the year, but the winter period saw animals brought to shelter on the higher ground.

Thirsk touches on population increase in Westwood manor, the centre-point of her study which encompassed about one-quarter of the Isle, in the later sixteenth century, referring to the fact that 100 houses were built in a period of 40 years to house it, yet a closer examination shows that this represents an increase of approximately only fifteen people on average a year. Her article alludes to the large population of small peasants, with one-quarter of the tenants with holdings of an acre or less, and with 54 per cent having five acres or less. The existence of partible inheritance and the processing of hemp and flax as secondary occupations are also mentioned. Her observations on population change, the size of holdings, partible inheritance, and secondary occupations, while true, do not reveal the complexity of what was happening in Axholme in a highly interactive system.

Wrigley and Schofield, in their monumental reconstruction,³ showed that the population of England increased enormously in the latter half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the analysis of a large number of parish registers. Changes in Axholme's population were discussed in chapter 3, which showed that by reconstructing the parish records it was possible to chart increases or decreases in individual communities in terms of the differences between the number of baptisms and burials. Apart from Luddington, the parishes for which totals could be adduced showed an overall increase, with Haxey having the largest expansion between 1600 and 1640 (=666) though from 1541 to 1599 the estimated population rose by only 43. As this is the main parish within Westwood manor, some doubt must be expressed about Thirsk's statement that there was an increase of 100 houses in the same period.⁴ A closer scrutiny of the parish registers showed, however, that simple differences between baptisms and burials concealed a more complex picture because there was a considerable turnover of families over the whole period through

migration, and by sampling it was revealed that there was a near threefold division of family types: those who were dominant, those who moved into the Isle, and those who stayed then left. More detailed sampling of the Haxey registers for 1571-80 showed that over half those baptised then moved away. By making comparisons of the incidence of surnames throughout the period, it is clear that, while certain families remained dominant, such as the Fosters and Glews in Belton, the Maws and Coggans in Epworth, and the Barrows and Kelseys in Haxey, newer incoming families were becoming dominant - that is, having greater representation - for, example, the Moodys and Taylors in Haxey, and the Burtons and Robinsons in Owston by the time of the Protestation Returns in 1642.

This change in the major families was not confined to Axholme, but had been observed by Mitson in her analysis of kinship networks in south-west Nottinghamshire.⁵ Mitson had not been concerned with inheritance practices, but Razi, looking at Halesowen in the late Middle Ages, demonstrated the effects of inheritance customs, and showed that impartible inheritance in the pre-Plague period, when there was a shortage of land, resulted paradoxically in both a centripetal and centrifugal effect: there was a strong bond between families and land because the bulk of the tenants' land was transmitted through inheritance so that some children preferred to live in the village, but some landless children were forced to emigrate. In years of bad harvests, the smallholders and cottagers had to sell their land with the result that substantial tenants could enlarge their holdings and increase their market production. In the post-Plague period, a sharp decrease in population meant that land was available so that young villagers emigrated, and when their parents died, there was no one from the family to succeed them. The outcome of this was a population influx of newcomers related to the tenants, who inherited holdings or acquired them through marriage.⁶

Although Razi concentrated on the effects of impartible inheritance in the pre-Modern period, partible inheritance had a similar effect in Axholme in that some families remained while others moved. An earlier chapter (chapter 4) has shown that land, money, and moveables were all subdivided amongst the sons and daughters, or if there were none,

inheritance was mainly confined to benefiting near-kin, for example, nephews and nieces. This pattern obtained for all the social groups. It was shown that family composition and size had an effect on how a man's inheritance was divided up though apportionment was not necessarily equal between siblings. In mixed families, daughters often benefited more than brothers through inheriting money, animals, or moveables when their brothers received land, but in the long term it is possible that the profits from land could outweigh such valuations. As has been observed, the dispersal of what had been inherited or purchased during a testator's life, while it enabled children to set themselves up, led ultimately to the impoverishment of his estate and none more so than the sub-division of landholdings which may be considered a fixed asset. Yet subdivisions of land had to stop at some point because further partition would result in an area unviable in supporting a family. Sub-division may also have been limited because of the existence of the strip-system which prevented the breaking up of a unit of land. Through a close examination of wills and deeds, it became apparent that many of the wealthier yeomen and husbandmen tried to provide for their heirs by purchasing small plots of land that had become available through the very mechanism that they perpetuated in their wills - partible inheritance.

The availability of small parcels of land had a number of effects one of which was to allow a man to set himself up as a small farmer with the opportunity of enlarging his holdings as his wealth increased. The different categories of the population in the Isle has already been remarked upon; suffice it to say that it encouraged people to migrate inwards from surrounding areas where there was a land shortage, especially from east of the Trent where there were failing villages or forced desertions by conversion to pasture.⁷ By the same token, the availability of land enabled the better-off farmer to extend his holdings, even though he ultimately divided it amongst his heirs.

Debt, or credit was a major feature in Axholme, as elsewhere: both Holderness and Spufford dwell on debt as an essential part of communal life, providing a way of dealing with the changing stages in a man's life when extra money is needed, such as the purchase of more

land or the provision of a dowry for a daughter;⁸ it provided a form of 'lubrication' without which society would find it difficult to function effectively. It has been shown that levels of debt ranged from small amounts borrowed from relatives or friends to meet sudden contingencies to considerable sums with legal obligations in the form of bonds or other written assurances. It is clear, that, in the absence of any formal banking system, there were people from all social levels who had amassed sufficient money to lend it out and to charge interest upon it. Apart from the ability to sell corn at a commercial level, the larger farmer had the advantage of being able to borrow often considerable amounts of money, for the simple reason that he already had a readily saleable commodity, his land, as security should he fall behind in his repayments. The sale or bequeathing of land in wills to pay off debts has been mentioned earlier, for example, Alexander Kitchen, a yeoman from Belton, who died in 1614, left behind a vast amount in debt, part of which he discharged by leaving five acres and one rood to George Latham, gent, to help pay off his debt of £40.⁹

Although the status of yeomen, husbandmen, labourers, and craftsmen in the social hierarchy seems fairly well-defined, there was not necessarily a sharp distinction between them in levels of wealth or material possessions: the analyses in previous chapters have demonstrated the overlaps. All that can be said with any degree of confidence is that there were distinctions and that overall yeomen were generally better-off than husbandmen, who in turn were better-off than labourers. From the evidence of the inventories there is a vast difference between the richest yeoman and the poorest labourer; the former lived in luxury in a many-roomed house, while the latter existed in a one-roomed turf building.¹⁰

Partible inheritance brought about changes in social status, from self-sufficient landowner to wage earner, and this, in turn, encouraged the development of secondary occupations to supplement a person's income. The watery nature of the Isle with its many pools and meandering streams together with its marginal land subject to flooding allowed both the growth of hemp and flax and its processing, which was a major cottage industry. The inventories and wills are full of references to hemplands, retting pits, and the equipment to

process the fibres - from scutching and breaking to heckling, spinning, and weaving.¹¹ So central was this whole industry to the Isle's economy that £400 were awarded by the Parliamentary Commissioners to settle disputes arising after Vermuyden's drainage scheme as compensation to the poor people of Haxey, Epworth, Owston, and Belton for their loss in fishing and fowling, and to enable a stock of hemp to be bought to make sacking and cloth.¹² Rope-making was also connected with the processing of hemp though it seems to have been concentrated in the north of the Isle, round Luddington. A sign of the growing importance of cloth-making was the appearance of people who referred to themselves as mercers.

With a large pastoral economy, dairying and cheesemaking were established mainly as cottage industries, but more specialised crafts, including butchery, tanning, shoemaking, and glove-making, were represented. Although shoemakers' wills occur from the beginning of the period, glovers were late arrivals, as were tailors, and reflect the increasing wealth of yeomen and some husbandmen, who began to enjoy a more luxurious standard of living, which attracted new trades to Axholme. Indications of this are to be found in the increased size of their houses, which needed bricklayers, glaziers, joiners, stone-masons, and locksmiths, trades which only begin to appear in the early seventeenth century. Perhaps the growth in the number of brewsters, coopers, and vitlers is further evidence of a desire for a more luxurious style of living.

Almost half a century ago, under the thought modes that characterised approaches to studies of local communities, Thirsk aimed to demonstrate the link between a topography, its farming type, and the resultant social and economic system, and to show that an artificial change in the type of topography had wide-reaching effects. Historians of localities have subsequently illustrated other aspects of communities, and revealed the complex interactions that exist between the parts of the socio-economic system. This study has explored the major interacting elements of the economy and society of the Isle of Axholme to show that partible inheritance was a major contributor to economic and social change.

Partible inheritance enabled the entrepreneur to benefit by enlarging his holding through the purchase of small areas of land that became available, and thus set up his sons to be self-sufficient. On occasions, daughters also benefited from bequests of land, making them attractive as marriage prospects. Not everyone profited from the inheritance system which had two effects: centrifugal and centripetal. Those whose land could not be further sub-divided could, and did, sell-up and move out of the area to seek employment elsewhere. On the other hand, they could remain as labourers, supplementing their incomes by casual work and by engaging in a secondary occupation. The pursuit of secondary occupations to supplement income, in cloth-processing, dairy products, or allied trades connected with leather, was not, however, confined to the lower social groups as inventories for yeomen and husbandmen have illustrated. Society divided into three distinct groups: those who stayed; those who were transitory, staying for a short time then departing; and those who came into the Isle and established themselves. Of the families that stayed, some became dominant, as did some that moved in. The differences in wealth between the yeoman class and the labourers and craftsmen could be great, often reflected in the size of their houses, the furnishings, and the proportion of their belongings in land and animals. The opportunities for those bold enough to borrow and invest in land helped to emphasise the growing differences between the social groups in terms of wealth and status. Partible inheritance was the 'mechanism' for these changes; it needs recognising and explored in a wider context.

¹ J. Thirsk, 'Structures, regularities, and change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', in B. Short (ed), *The English Rural Community*, (Cambridge, 1992), p.45.

² J. H. Tillotson (ed), *Monastery and Society in the Late Middle Ages: Selected Account Rolls from Selby Abbey, 1398-1537*, (Boydell Press, 1988), p. 142.

³ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871*, (Cambridge, 1989).

⁴ Thirsk, 'The Isle of Axholme before Vermuyden', p.34. She remarks on a similar increase in Misterton, Nottinghamshire in the same period.

⁵ A. Mitson, 'The significance of kinship networks in the seventeenth century: south-west Nottinghamshire', in C. Phythian-Adams (ed), *Societies, Cultures, and Kinship, 1580-1850*, (Leicester, 1993), pp.24-76.

⁶ Z. Razi, 'The myth of the immutable English family', *Past and Present* 140, (1990), pp. 7-24.

⁷ R. Head *et al*, 'Sites and finds from the Isle of Axholme', in R. van der Noort and S. Ellis, *Wetland Heritage of the Ancholme and Lower Trent Valleys*, (Hull, 1998), p. 282.

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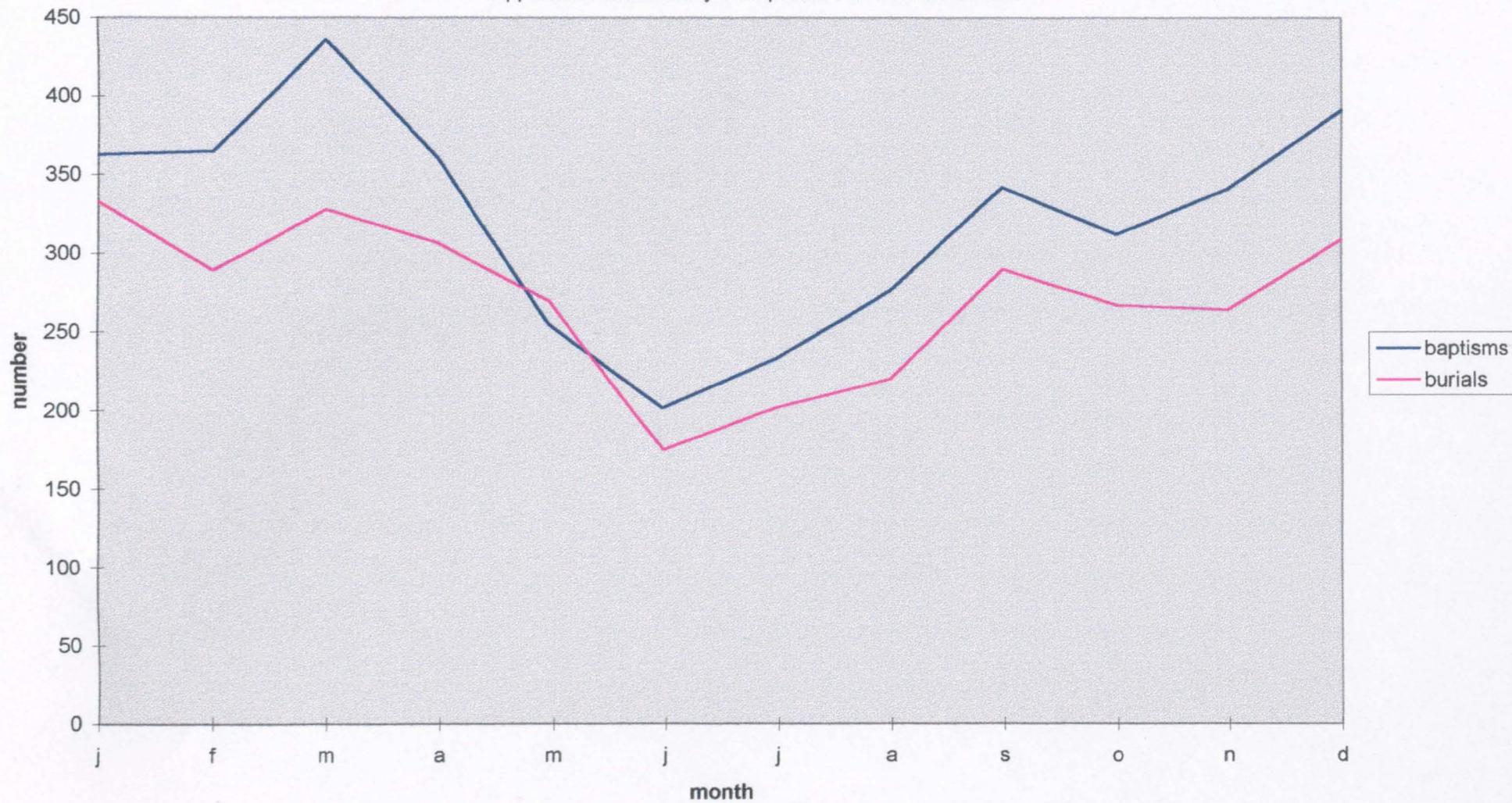
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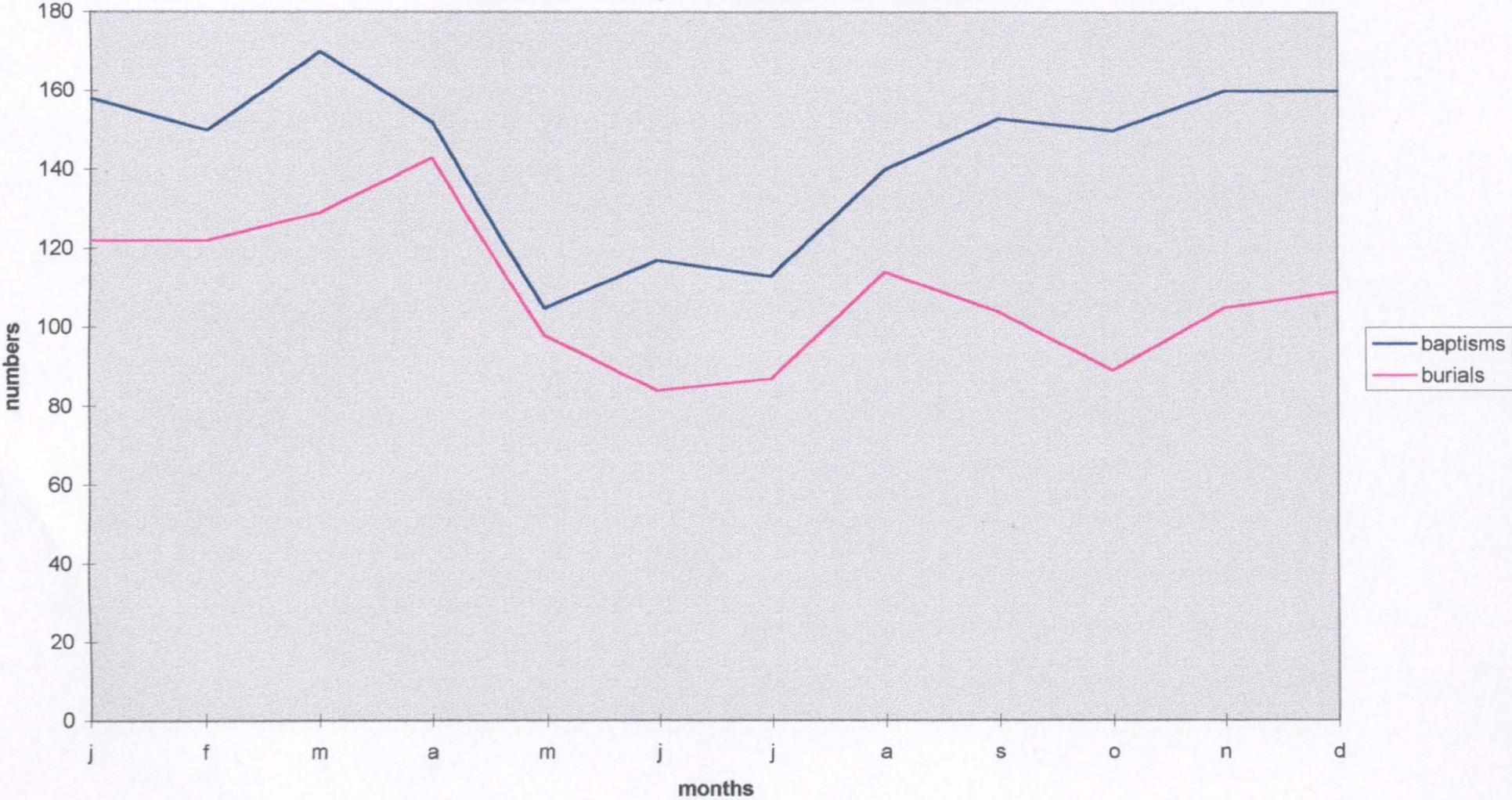
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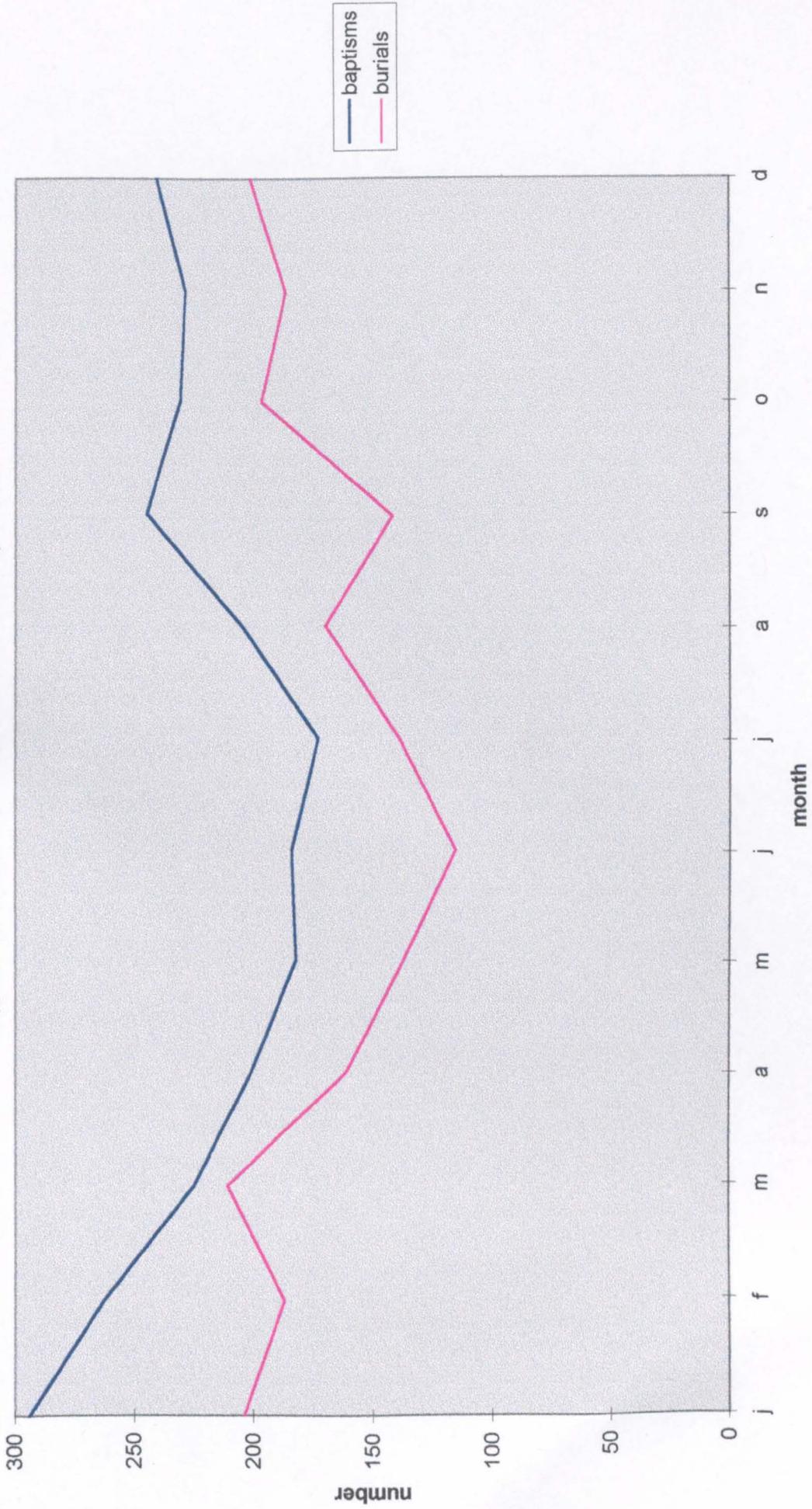
Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Belton



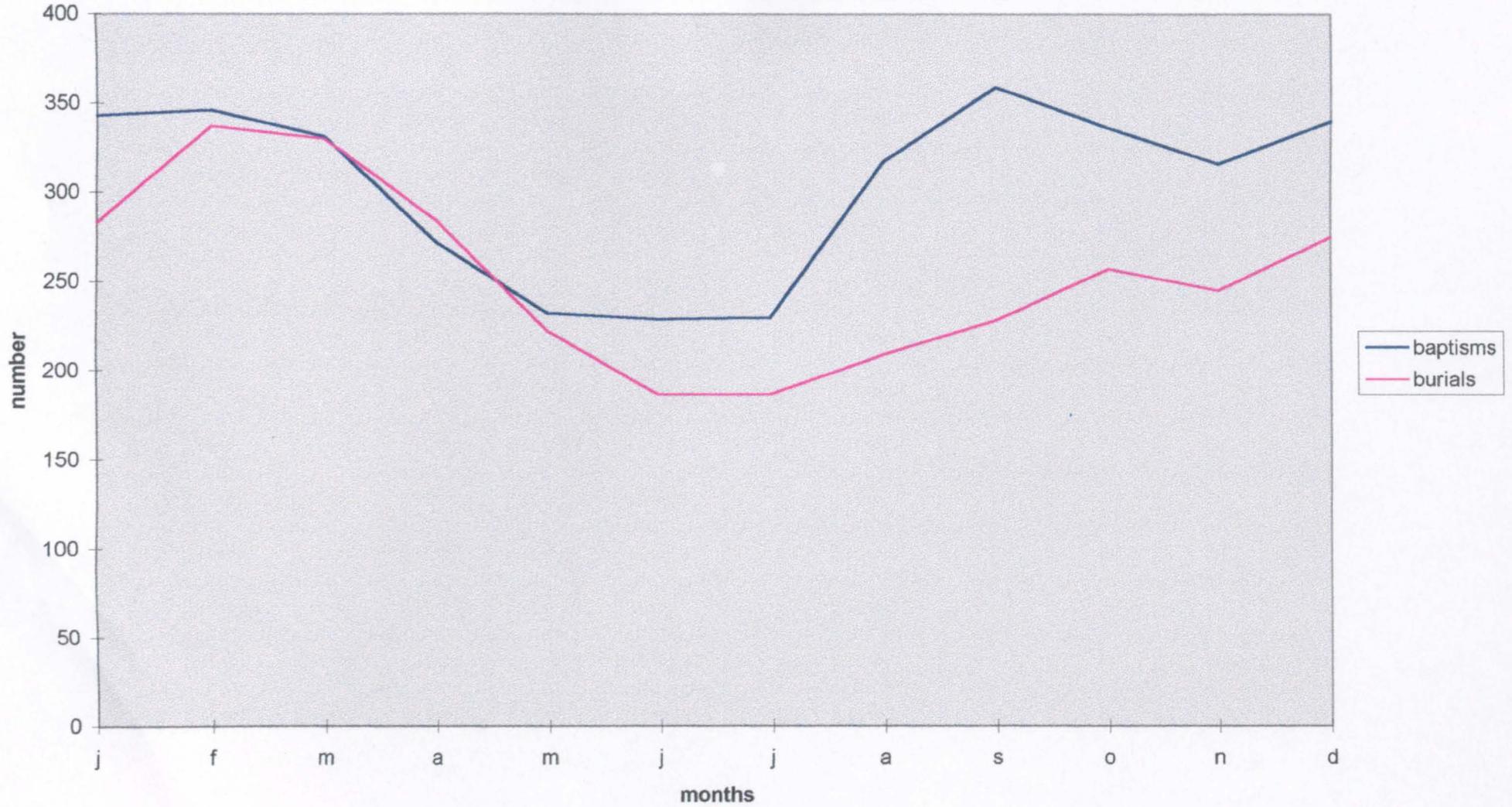
Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Crowle



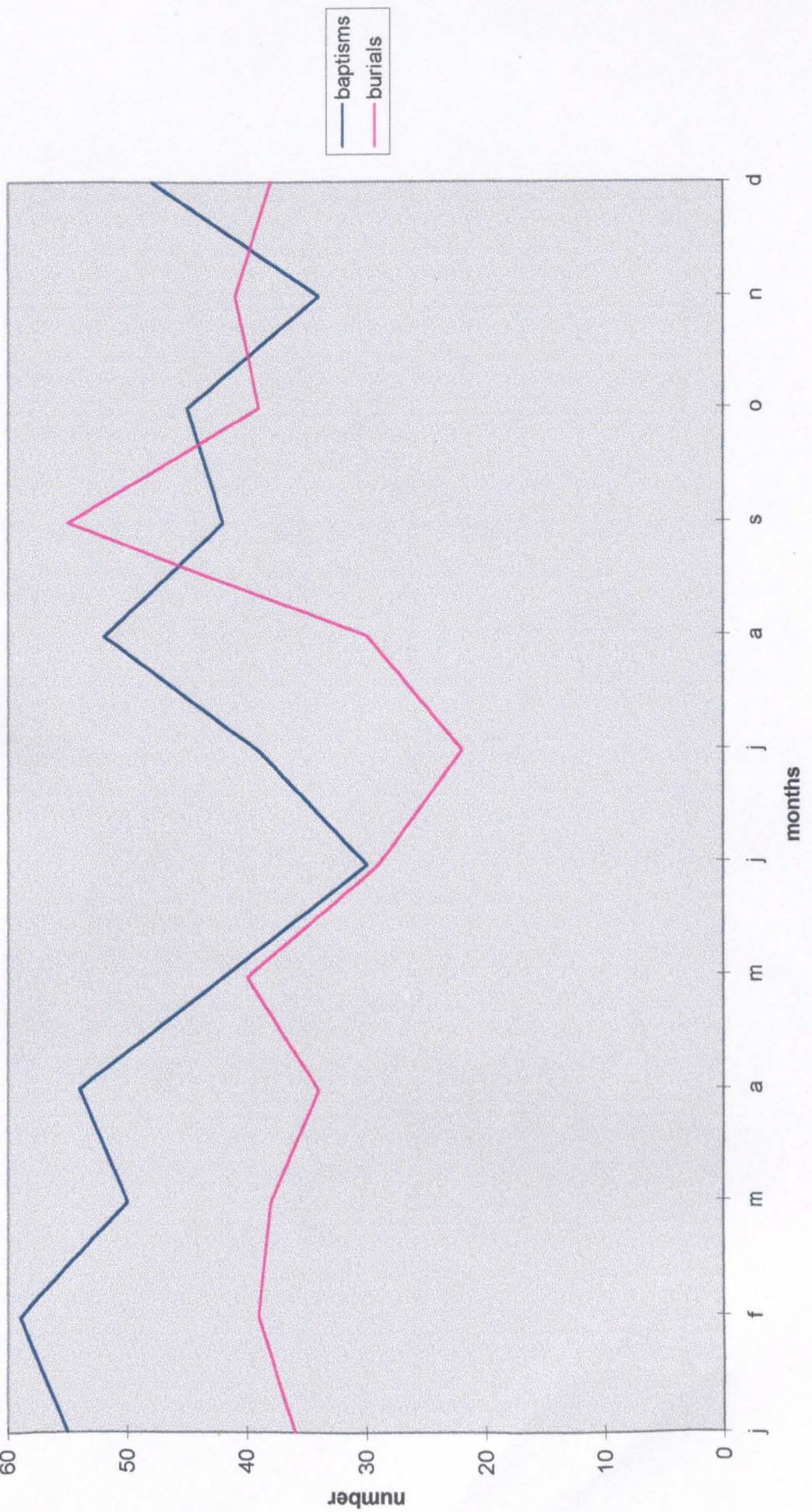
Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Epworth



Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Haxey

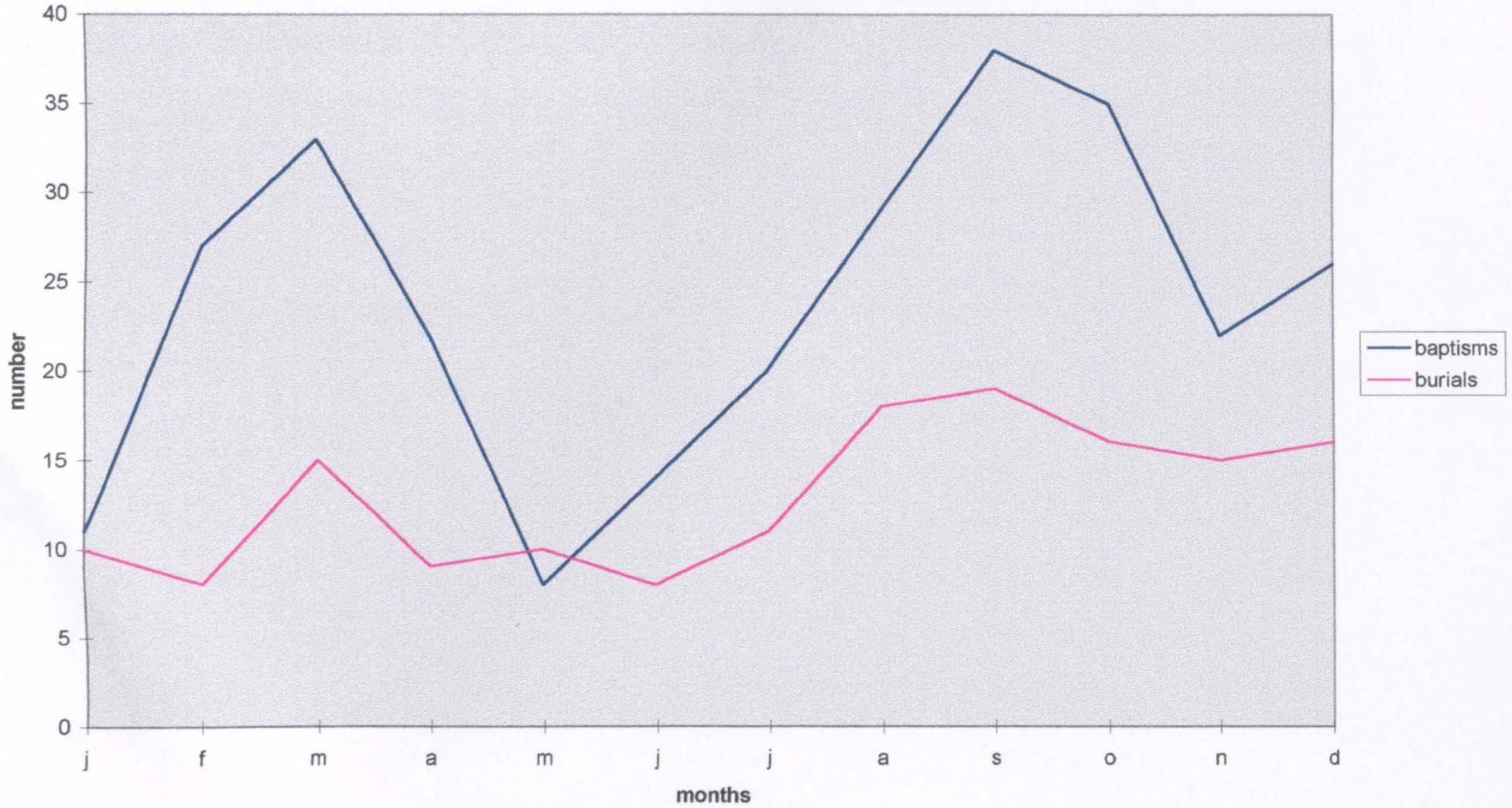


Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Luddington



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Appendix 1 Seasonality of baptisms and burials - Wroot



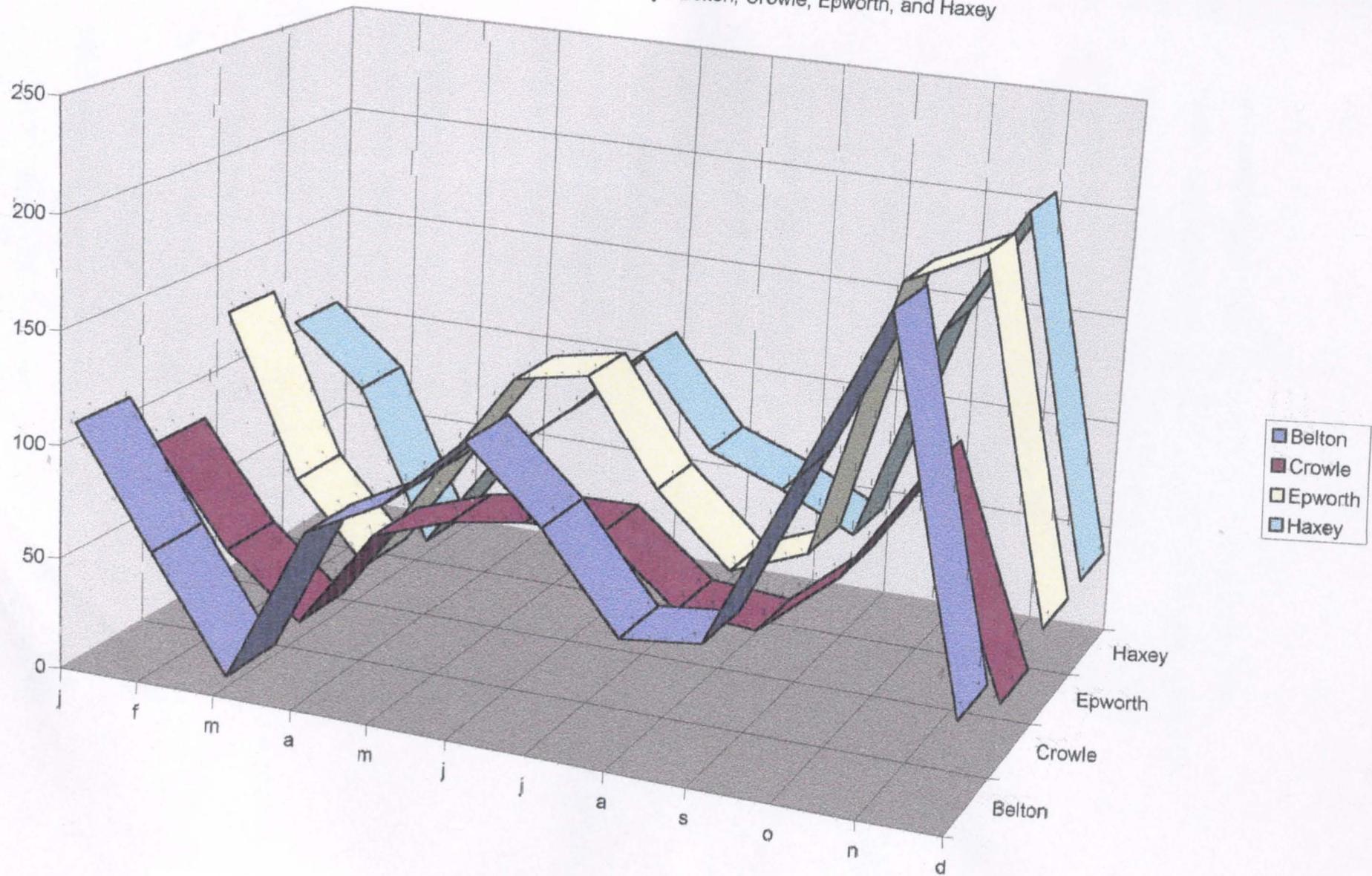
Appendix 2 Mortality crises

Year	Bel	Cro	Epw	Hax	Lud	Ows
1541			*			
1542						
1543						
1544						
1545	*		*			
1546	*					
1547						
1548						
1549						
1550						
1551						
1552						
1553						
1554						
1555						
1556						
1557			*			
1558			*			
1559			*			
1560						
1561						
1562						
1563						
1564						
1565	*					
1566	*					
1567			*			
1568						
1569						
1570	*			*		
1571						
1572				*		
1573			*			
1574			*	*		
1575				*		
1576						
1577	*					
1578						
1579						
1580	*					
1581						
1582						
1583						
1584						
1585				*		
1586						
1587	*			*		
1588	*			*		
1589				*		
1590	*		*	*		

Appendix 2 Mortality crises

Year	Bel	Cro	Epw	Hax	Lud	Ows
1591	*	*	*	*		
1592	*					
1593						
1594						
1595						
1596						
1597	*	*				
1598						
1599						
1600						*
1601		*				*
1602	*		*		*	*
1603			*	*	*	
1604						*
1605		*				
1606			*	*		
1607						
1608	*			*	*	*
1609				*	*	
1610	*	*	*	*		*
1611						
1612						
1613	*					
1614	*	*		*	*	
1615	*		*			*
1616	*	*	*	*	*	*
1617				*		
1618						*
1619			*	*		
1620	*		*	*		
1621						
1622						
1623	*	*		*		
1624						
1625	*	*		*		
1626	*					
1627						
1628		*				
1629						
1630						
1631						
1632				*		
1633						
1634						
1635	*			*		
1636		*		*		
1637				*		
1638	*	*		*		

Appendix 3 Marriage seasonality - Belton, Crowle, Epworth, and Haxey



Glossary¹

Ark - a large wooden chest for storing dry food, such as flour or corn.

Baulks - a loft or store-place between the cross-beams of the stable and the roof.

Brake (break) - an implement for crushing hemp or flax.

Bushel - in north Lincolnshire it was 7 pounds in weight of corn.

Drawing steer - beast used to pull ploughs or carts.

Flanders (chest) - carved and ornamented after the manner of the Flemings though not necessarily made in Flanders.

Hair cloth - a coarse fabric made from horse hair for holding malt in a kiln. Also known as a 'kiln hair.

Hall (house) - the living room of a house.

Harden - a coarse fabric made from hards, the coarser parts of flax or hemp.

Heck/ heckle - implement for combing flax or hemp.

Hog - a castrated male pig. Also used of a sheep not yet shorn.

Horse mylne - a mill driven by a horse or horses walking in a circle.

Hustlements - miscellaneous household items not worth individual valuation.

Kye - cattle.

Laird - a larder. Laird in the baulks - food stored in a loft.

Latten (latyn) - a mixed metal similar to brass.

Maslin - mixed corn, usually wheat and rye.

Oxgang - one-eighth part of a carucate, usually between 10 and 20 acres but with wide variations.

Painted cloth - a cloth or canvas painted with religious scenes, patterns of flowers, etc. A cheap substitute for a tapestry.

Parlour - a ground-floor room. Also refers to the main sleeping room.

Quy - a heifer of any age upto three years.

Rate pit - pit for rotting hemp or flax by soaking it in water to loosen the fibres.

Retting - the preparation of hemp or flax by soaking in water.

Salt - salt cellar.

Scutch - to dress flax or hemp by beating.

Shot - weaned pig.

Stagg - a young horse.

Stock (of bees) - a swarm.

Stone(d) colt - uncastrated colt.

Stott - a young castrated ox.

Unbraked (hemp) - uncombed.

Wayning calf - calf still being weaned.

Weather - a castrated male sheep.

Whie - see 'quy'.

Wool wheel - a wheel for spinning wool.

¹ This glossary is not intended to be exhaustive. More detailed lists are available, for example, see J. Bristow, *The Local Historian's Glossary and Vade-mecum* (Nottingham, 1994).

