

Material inequalities in England, c. 1290 - c. 1340

by Chris Briggs

L'Inghilterra del Trecento era una società fortemente diseguale: tuttavia, valutarne con precisione la distribuzione della ricchezza, del reddito e i livelli di povertà non è affatto semplice. Le famiglie si guadagnavano da vivere combinando diverse fonti di reddito spesso difficili da identificare, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la massa dei piccoli proprietari terrieri e dei senza terra. Il saggio esamina i recenti tentativi di stimare la disuguaglianza in questo periodo. Si sostiene che tali studi forniscano un'utile guida generale alla distribuzione della ricchezza e del reddito, ma che a livello micro possa essere fuorviante concentrarsi sulla terra o sui beni mobili in modo isolato. Il saggio fornisce alcune evidenze originali, tratte dall'archivio reale e dagli archivi dei *manors*, riguardanti le condizioni materiali di individui e famiglie. Questi frammenti di informazioni permettono di sfumare parte del pessimismo sulla percentuale di famiglie al di sotto della soglia di povertà alla fine del XIII secolo.

England c. 1300 was clearly an unequal society, yet assessing its distribution of wealth and income and levels of poverty with precision is not straightforward. Households earned their living by combining different sources of income that are hard to identify, especially for the mass of smallholders and landless. This article reviews recent attempts to estimate inequality in this period. It argues that such exercises provide a helpful general guide to the distribution of wealth and income, but at the micro-level it can be misleading to focus on either land or movable goods in isolation. The article provides some new evidence drawn from the royal archive and manorial sources concerning the material circumstances of individuals and households. These fragments help to qualify some of the pessimism concerning the share of households living at or below the 'poverty line' at the end of the thirteenth century.

Medioevo, secoli XIII-XIV, Inghilterra, famiglie, diseguaglianze materiali.

Middle Ages, 13th-14th centuries, England, households, material inequality.

Chris Briggs, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, cdb23@cam.ac.uk, 0009-0003-3640-7750

Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Chris Briggs, *Material inequalities in England, c. 1290 - c. 1340*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0705-8.04, in Davide Cristoferi (edited by), *Socio-Economic Inequalities during the Conjunction of the Fourteenth Century. Sources and Methods, Dynamics and Representations (Italy and Europe, c. 1270-c. 1350)*, pp. 43-69, 2025, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0705-8, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0705-8

1. Introduction

That England around the year 1300 was a deeply unequal society in terms of its wealth, income and material well-being perhaps hardly needs stating. Recent publications by historians interested in the relationship between economic growth and inequality have advanced our quantitative understanding of wealth and income differences among households in this period, as well as their variation over space. This work has also given us a better sense of where pre-plague England fits in when overall inequality is viewed in a long-term perspective. These studies have only served to underline more starkly what one would expect based on previous scholarship: that England's social structure before the plague was markedly polarized, and, crucially, extremely 'bottom-heavy'. It was dominated by a mass of rural smallholders, cottagers, labourers and paupers, a significant proportion of whom were living on or below the 'poverty line'. Collectively, it is argued, this population of struggling households had grown over the preceding two centuries, only to be dramatically reduced following the Black Death of 1348-9. According to these recent studies, England c. 1300 may not have been quite as unequal as it was to become in the early modern period. Yet this was only because it was so poor; GDP at this date remained too low to provide much scope for the redistribution of wealth from the least to the most prosperous.¹

One might wonder whether there is much that any discussion of economic inequality in English society before the Black Death can usefully add to this current general picture of the distribution of resources. The latter certainly represents a compelling story about inequality that finds support in previous local studies. The purpose of this study is not to attempt to revise or offer alternatives to the global estimates presented in the works just cited. Instead, the objective is first to explore the evidential basis of the two main macro-estimates of inequality, one of which is based mainly on land as a source of income, and the other on taxable wealth. This exploration is an essential step towards showing that at the micro level, focusing exclusively or primarily on either landholding size or taxation contribution can provide a misleading impression of a household's position. The final step is to draw on a wider range of source material which yields fragments of direct evidence about income, production and consumption among the poorer rural households, a group that is generally quite sparsely documented. Partly because of the rather narrow period under consideration, and the challenges of dating archaeological sites and artefacts with sufficient precision, attention is confined to written evidence.²

¹ Campbell, *Great Transition*, 261-6; Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, chapter 8; Bekar, Reed, "Land Markets;" Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

² Dyer, "Crisis of the Early Fourteenth Century."

When combined, these fragments can provide a more rounded picture of the material livelihoods of households. This approach necessarily involves the exploration of individual case studies, rather than the production of broad estimates applying to the whole of society. Nonetheless, its implications are that prevailing views concerning the circumstances of some groups towards the bottom of the income and wealth and distributions may be too pessimistic.

2. Estimates of inequality c. 1300

This section focuses on two key recent contributions. The first is an attempt to reconstruct income inequality in the form of a social table for England c. 1290. The table is presented with related discussion as a chapter Appendix in Campbell's *The Great Transition* and, in virtually identical form, in *British Economic Growth* by Broadberry, Campbell and co-authors.³ This version of the social table represents a revision of one first published by Campbell in 2008.⁴ In *British Economic Growth*, the social table of c. 1290 is discussed in relation to equivalents from 1381, 1688 and later. The second key recent study, by Alfani and García Montero, uses taxation records to reconstruct wealth inequality, focusing on a comparison of the lay subsidies (royal taxes on movable lay wealth) of 1327-32 with the Tudor subsidies of 1524-5. The present section offers a consideration of the sources and methods underlying these two contributions, the aim being to establish some general points of relevance to the sections which follow.⁵

Campbell's social table approach divides groups of English households into eight separate categories and assigns an estimated annual income to each. These estimates are consistent with up-to-date figures on England's national income, population and total arable area. A key feature of the revised social table of c. 1290 is the inclusion of a 'poverty line', which represents the minimum income required for a family to afford Robert C. Allen's "respectability basket" of consumables. The social table places 41% of households below this 'poverty line'. A Gini coefficient based on the c. 1290 table allows comparison with later dates.⁶

The reconstructed social table of c. 1290 is a stimulating aid to analysis, but it raises questions. It is surprising, for instance, that some contrasting social groups are aggregated together. For instance, one category includes both "merchants" and "urban labourers". These are groups whose experiences and incomes must usually have diverged quite markedly. It is also worth noting that the underlying source, at least for the portion of the social table that concerns groups other than landlords, is another table entitled "An

³ See above the footnote 1.

⁴ Campbell, "Benchmarking," 940, table 17.

⁵ Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

⁶ Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, 329, Table 8.07.

outline of English society c. 1300”, published by Mayhew in 1995. Mayhew’s table was in turn based on case studies and modelling exercises contained in Dyer’s *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (1989). In offering his estimates, Mayhew noted wryly that “Dyer’s balanced historical judgements have been looted and pillaged in the most cavalier fashion to provide data for this table, which can only offer at best a massive over-simplification”.⁷ It is worth bearing this remark in mind when considering subsequent exercises based on Mayhew’s work.

The most important point for present purposes, however, is that the social table of c. 1290 is based firmly on access to land. For understandable reasons the quantity of land held is seen as crucial to incomes, and it is the proliferation of smallholders and landless groups which explains the ‘bottom-heavy’ character of the social structure. Campbell argues that in addition to the cottagers and other largely landless households lying below the ‘poverty line’ (41% of the total), a proportion of the 300,000 or so “smallholder” households possessing 3 to 6 hectares (7 to 14 acres) of land were also at risk of slipping below that line in difficult years. The existence of this vulnerable smallholder group “increased the proportion of rural households living on or below the poverty line to maybe two-thirds of the total”, Campbell suggests.⁸ Other studies explicitly equate ‘inequality’ with ‘land inequality’.⁹ The decades around 1300 are of course familiar as an era of proliferating smallholdings, and it is this feature above all that underpins the assumption that very large sections of the rural population must have struggled routinely to make ends meet at this time.

There are well-known grounds for moderating this assumption, however, all of them given impetus by recent research. The first is the question of subletting. Put simply, peasant holding sizes derived ultimately from manorial surveys and rentals do not consider any land taken on lease from other households. The second issue concerns the contribution of wages, including those earned by women and children, and of non-agrarian activities, to the household incomes of smallholders.¹⁰ These are of course extremely hard to estimate; no figures for the potential income contributions of a wife and children feature in the household income estimates underlying the c. 1290 social table, for instance. In any case opportunities for employment may have been diminishing in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries when they were most needed.¹¹ Third, a view of income distribution driven by landholding size assumes a primacy of arable agriculture that makes sense for some regions but not others. A focus on arable acreage can mislead because such small peasant holdings tended to have relatively large numbers of livestock

⁷ Mayhew, “Modelling Medieval Monetisation,” 59; Dyer, *Standards*.

⁸ Campbell, *Great Transition*, 265-6; see also: Slavin, *Experiencing Famine*, 244-7.

⁹ Bekar, Reed, “Land markets.”

¹⁰ Page, “Smallholders;” Dyer, *Peasants Making History*, 284-8.

¹¹ Langdon, “Minimum wages.”

per sown acre, good access to manure, and consequent high crop yields.¹² Finally, a growing body of evidence points to the conclusion that, contrary to what is traditionally assumed, arable productivity on peasant smallholdings before the Black Death was higher than on the much better documented large manorial demesnes that underpin estimates of output.¹³

In the other key recent quantitative contribution to the discussion of inequality, Alfani and García Montero take a different approach, using fiscal records to reconstruct the wealth distribution.¹⁴ For the early fourteenth century their source materials are the lay subsidies. Historians are very familiar with these levies, in which the household's goods were assessed and valued by local men following a parliamentary grant of taxation, and a fraction of this assessment (e.g. a fifteenth or twentieth) was paid as a tax charge. Beginning in the early thirteenth century, this system prevailed until 1334, when assessments of individual households were replaced by tax quotas at the community or *vill* level. Alfani and García Montero concentrate on records produced in connection with the lay subsidies of 1327 and 1332, which were the last to be granted before the introduction of the quota system. Like other researchers before them, the authors focus on those levies mainly because surviving 'county rolls' listing taxpayers' names, tax charges and (sometimes) overall assessments are abundant for these years, allowing coverage of a substantial portion of the kingdom. Most subsidy grants, including these two, featured a formal wealth threshold below which households were exempt. This meant that many – probably most – households did not pay tax, and do not appear in the records. To reconstruct the missing portion of the distribution, Alfani and García Montero therefore employ a statistical technique based on the principle that the available data fits a lognormal distribution with left-censoring. The degree of inequality they detect in the reconstructed data (as measured by a Gini index) is of a similar order to that found for other pre-modern European societies. The authors' county-by-county analysis also found a correlation between average household wealth and inequality. A slight increase in inequality by the time of the next usable tax data – in 1524-5 – was detected.¹⁵

Alfani and García Montero are acutely aware of a large literature extending back over a century, much of it highly sceptical, which has debated the value of the later thirteenth – and early fourteenth-century lay subsidy records as evidence for the level of wealth and its social and geographical distribution. This literature has focused on such problems as the size and characteristics of the untaxed population, the range of movables on which the taxes were assessed, and the existence of manipulated and formulaic returns, especially in

¹² Slavin, "Peasant Livestock Husbandry;" La Poutré, "Fertilization by Manure;" Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk*, 61; Drendel, "Les paysans."

¹³ Hatcher, "Peasant Productivity."

¹⁴ Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth Inequality."

¹⁵ Alfani, García Montero.

connection with the subsidies of 1327 and 1332.¹⁶ Alfani and García Montero fully acknowledge such concerns in their article, but ultimately they argue that they are not significant enough to undermine the estimation of inequality, and that taxed wealth can in general be taken as a good proxy for overall wealth. The authors' position is that even if the tax assessments were only approximate, and ignored some elements of movable property, handled appropriately they show the relative distribution of the whole.

At the aggregate level the lay subsidies may well provide a guide to the broad shape of early fourteenth-century wealth distribution, and indeed they represent the only available source realistically capable of doing so. Yet a couple of examples drawn from the published 'county rolls' for the 1327 subsidy demonstrate the difficulty of using the returns to obtain a nuanced sense of material inequalities within the vill. First, at Marchington (Staffordshire), 23 taxpayers paid charges totalling £ 4 (4 pounds) exactly (no assessment figures appear). Four paid 2 s. (2 shillings), two paid 2 s. 6 d. (2 shillings and 6 pence, or 30 d.), seven paid 3 s., four paid 4 s., and six paid 5 s. Aside from the artificial bunching of charges at just five levels, there are further odd features here. One is the suspicious round sum for the total tax charge. Another is the fact that there were no taxpayers charged below 2 s., which is surprising given that the lowest potential charge was just 6 d. (with the threshold of liability set at movables worth 10 s.).¹⁷ At Dronfield (Derbyshire), we see a different pattern. Here twenty-eight taxpayers were assessed at £ 30 exactly, giving an overall tax charge for the vill of 30 s. Twelve paid 6 d., six paid 12 d., five paid 18 d., four paid 2 s., and one, 2 s. 6 d.¹⁸ Again, we observe the implausibly rounded total charge, the absence of fractions of a penny, and the positioning of multiple taxpayers at a small number of convenient sums, though here, in contrast to Marchington, the minimum possible tax charge is the most common. It is certainly not the case that all villis in the Staffordshire and Derbyshire 1327 subsidies show such signs of artificiality in the assessment. Many do, however, and in these cases, there must be serious doubts surrounding the relationship between the figures in the returns and the actual distribution of wealth among taxpayers, and about the reliability of those figures for understanding the characteristics of those who do not appear on the tax lists at all.

Such evidence is sufficiently common to raise the suspicion that proper assessments of movables undertaken in accordance with the official instructions had been abandoned in many locations by 1327. A further insight into the assessment process can be gained from the rarer 'local' rolls which, unlike the 'county' rolls, list the taxpayers' assessed goods and their values, as opposed to just their total assessments. One notable point of contention in the literature on the lay subsidies concerns the movables taxed, and the degree

¹⁶ E.g. Hadwin, "Medieval Lay Subsidies;" Rigby, "Urban Society;" Briggs, "Taxation."

¹⁷ Wrottesley, "Exchequer Subsidy Roll," 223.

¹⁸ Cox, "Derbyshire in 1327-8," 86.

and character of exemptions. Scholars have disagreed on whether the local taxers followed official instructions or informal custom when deciding what and what not to tax. What is clear is that the tax lists cannot be treated as a faithful reflection of the contents of peasant houses and farm buildings. One feature noted by many commentators is that local lists from the countryside tend to be almost completely dominated by livestock, grain, and other basic agricultural items. Even where household utensils and other non-agricultural goods were theoretically liable to taxation, they rarely appear in the local tax rolls.¹⁹ Dividing possessions into essentials and non-essentials (or 'luxuries'), Britnell argued on the basis of such taxation evidence that peasant movables c. 1300 consisted mainly of livestock and agricultural produce, plus the utilitarian farming equipment and household articles necessary for their livelihoods.²⁰ The suggestion that even the taxpaying peasantry possessed little surplus income to spend on non-essentials of course fits well with the view that a significant share of English households sat on or below the 'poverty line' at this time. However, given the problematic nature of the lay subsidy materials, it seems questionable to assume that the rarity of household goods, including non-essentials, is convincing proof of their actual low incidence in households. We may posit that non-agricultural goods escaped the taxers because they were of low monetary value and low 'visibility', but this does not in itself mean that they played an insignificant role in the material lives of their owners. A further significant question is whether we can assume that the profile of movable goods among taxed households was basically the same among the untaxed.

3. Inconsistent hierarchies of landholding and movable wealth

One way of evaluating the utility of landholding size and the possession of movable possessions as markers of inequality is to ask whether the two measures tell similar stories for specific communities. To do this, one must compare sources which indicate the distribution of landholdings – such as manorial surveys, extents, or rentals – with lay subsidy documents. In this section, this is done by focusing on places for which we have both a survey-type source, and a lay subsidy return that lists taxpayers and their individual assessments and/or charges. The aim is to see whether the two sources offer a consistent picture; while a list of landholding tenants and a list of taxpayers are highly unlikely to be identical, it is instructive to ask how far we see the same households appearing in roughly the same distribution in the two sources. Ideally, the survey-type source and the lay subsidy return must be very close together in date, and the community must be one in which there existed just one man-

¹⁹ *Taxation of 1297*, XVII; Hadwin, "Evidence," 148.

²⁰ Britnell, "Movable goods."

or, or one dominant manor, which is represented by the survey-type source. This maximizes the comparability of the two sources. However, it is difficult to identify locations that satisfy these criteria. Just three rural communities – or villas – are considered here. Table 1 indicates for each the number of taxpayers, the number of recorded landholding tenants, and the overlap between the two groups.

Table 1. *Numbers of individual taxpayers and landholding tenants in three communities*

	A. number of individual taxpayers	B. Number of individual tenants	Individuals in both A and B
Landbeach (A. 1315 subsidy; B. 1316 extent)	47	30	15
Great Horwood (A. 1327 subsidy; B. 1320 extent)	42	46	21
Bockleton (A. 1327 subsidy; B. 1327 fealty list)	17	81	5

Sources: *Landbeach*: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Archives, CCCC 09/35/145; TNA, E 179/81/7, m. 5. *Great Horwood*: Oxford, New College Archives, 3912-15 and 4503; TNA, E 179/242/86. *Bockleton*: Stafford Record Office, D(W)1788/P39.B10; TNA, E 179/200/1, m. 8d.

For the first example – Landbeach, in Cambridgeshire – we pair a manorial extent dated 1316 with a lay subsidy list relating to the twentieth of 1315.²¹ There were two manors in this vill, of roughly equal size, and the thirty tenants listed on the extent relate to just one of the two manors (Brays). The actual number of tenant households in 1316 was around 60. Clearly the degree of overlap in names between the tax list and the extent will be imperfect because some of the taxpayers were tenants of the second manor (Chamberlains), for which we do not have a contemporary survey-type source. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that only half of the Brays tenants of 1316 appear among the taxpayers of the preceding year. Overall, though, the Landbeach case supports the idea of a rough correlation between holding size and the propensity to contribute to the lay subsidy. Nine of the twelve villein (serf) tenants of 10-acre holdings appear on the tax list, paying tax charges in the top half of the distribution, whereas the manorial tenants who did not pay tax are generally those listed in the extent as holding plots of just an acre or less.

The next case, from Great Horwood (Buckinghamshire), gives a different picture. For this vill we have a manorial extent dated 1320 listing tenants and holdings; a ‘local’ roll listing assessed movables relating to the 1327 lay subsidy; and a series of detailed and continuous manorial court rolls.²² The gap

²¹ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Archives, CCCC 09/35/145; The National Archives (TNA), E 179/81/7, m. 5; Ravensdale, *Liabte*, 153-6.

²² Oxford, New College Archives, 3912-3915 (court rolls), and 4503 (extent); TNA, E 179/242/86.

of seven years between extent and lay subsidy return is not ideal, but to some degree the excellent court rolls compensate for this, as they allow one to investigate any 1320 tenant who does not appear on the tax list. The extent covers both free and servile tenants and is organized around standard holdings of virgates (30 acres/12 ha.), half-virgates (15 acres/6 ha.), and cottages. The 1327 tax list is somewhat stereotyped, though perhaps less so than the examples considered in the previous section. For instance, eleven of the forty-two Horwood taxpayers had goods assessed at £ 1 exactly, corresponding to a tax charge of 12 d. Seven others paid 16 d. Of the thirty-seven taxpayers said to have possessed wheat, twenty-six had exactly one quarter (2,8 hectoliters), eight had two quarters, and three had three quarters, a somewhat improbable distribution. The goods assessed consist entirely of livestock and agricultural produce, the only exception being brass pots listed for 10 taxpayers.

One would hardly expect a very close match between the names on the manorial extent and those on the tax list, not least because some of the tenants of 1320 had died or otherwise ceased to be taxable household heads by 1327. We must also contend with the fact that the vill of Great Horwood (the taxation unit) did not correspond exactly with the manor of Great Horwood that is represented by the court rolls and extent. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that only twenty-one names appear on both lists; this figure represents 50% of the taxpayers. In the upper half of the taxpaying distribution (twenty-one taxpayers, charges from 16 d. to 48 d.), there are twelve individuals traceable on the 1320 extent, while in the bottom half (twenty-one taxpayers, charges ranging from 10-5 d.) there are nine. The bigger landholders – the virgaters – are not wholly concentrated at the top of the taxpaying distribution. Among the eleven paying 24 d. or more, there are five known tenants, of whom four held at least a virgate; the equivalent figures among those paying 12 d. and below (fourteen taxpayers) are five tenants, of whom three held at least one virgate. It is also useful to focus on those who are not on the tax list but are known from court roll evidence to have held land in 1327. A good example is John Frankeleyne, a prominent free tenant (as his name suggests) who held a messuage and virgate in 1320 and died in 1349 during the Black Death but was omitted from the 1327 lay subsidy.²³ Five women paid the subsidy, but there is no neat correspondence between these taxpayers' names and those of the female tenants of 1320. Indeed, at least three female tenants of 1320 known still to be holding land in 1327 were not assessed for the tax. These were Alice Durant, Alice Sare, and Matilda de Boykott, all half-virgaters. In Horwood's case, the correspondence between tax list and manorial extent is thus quite rough.

The final comparison of a community's landholding and taxation sources concerns Bockleton (Worcestershire). Here we have, first, a manorial rental of 1326-7, which lists tenant names and rent charges. Second, the record of a

²³ A "franklin" was an elite freeholder.

manor court session dated September 1326, clearly linked to the rental, gives details on the landholdings of tenants who swore fealty (homage) to the lord at this session. This document supplements the information in the rental, as many of the individuals who swore fealty also appear in the rental. Confusingly, some of the tenants who swore fealty do not appear on the rental, for reasons that are unclear. The rental and fealty list must therefore be treated as alternative yet complementary guides to peasant landholding in Bockleton in 1326-7. Finally, the entry for Bockleton in the 1327 Worcestershire 'county roll' lists a total of 17 taxpayers' names and charges.²⁴

In Bockleton's case, the tax list and the sources on landholding in the manor bear little resemblance to one another, despite all being virtually contemporary. For a start, there were over four times as many rent-paying tenants in 1326-7 as there were taxpayers. Only eight of the names on the fealty list can be found on the tax list; for the rental, the total is just five. The fealty list and rental combined yield plenty of examples of substantial peasant landholders who were not assessed for the tax. A good example is John Ragon, a villein who swore fealty in 1326 as the holder of one messuage, one virgate and four acres of land for rent of 5 s. 6 d. He also owed labour services which are detailed in the court roll. There are also, of course, several people who paid tax but to judge by the manorial evidence, did not hold land in Bockleton. The first name on the taxpayer list, John de Bockleton, is a special case, as this was the manorial lord, who would hardly be expected to appear as tenant in the rental and court. Yet the landholding status of nine further taxpayers remains a mystery.

It might seem a reasonable assumption that in the rural world of the early fourteenth century, those households with the most land tended to have the most valuable collections of movable goods, while those with little or no land similarly had fewest movables. Yet it can be surprisingly hard to establish a strong correlation of this nature using the records of individual communities. Sometimes households that do not appear to have held land were deemed wealthy enough to pay tax. Similarly, in the communities studied we find households whose acreages would place them in the peasant landholding elite, but who did not pay tax. At the level of the community, therefore, it can be misleading to think about material inequality using either landholding size or taxable wealth in isolation.

4. Alternative perspectives on material inequalities c. 1300

This section considers some fresh evidence which sheds light on households in the poorer portions – though not the very poorest – of the rural so-

²⁴ Stafford Record Office, D(W)1788/P39.B10 (rental and court rolls); *Lay Subsidy Roll*, 54-5, checked against TNA, E 179/200/1, m. 8d.

cial structure.²⁵ These include households on or just below the ‘poverty line’, as drawn by Campbell. Here the first aim is to explore, as far as possible, the full range of household material wealth, including that which was omitted from taxation but ought to be considered in discussions of inequality. The second and more important aim is to suggest that the wealth and income levels of some households possessing relatively small landholdings were as not low as one might imagine by focusing on acreages alone. The evidence discussed in this section concerns land and movable property forfeited to the crown or a landlord, and it comes from manorial records and from material in the royal archives, sometimes used in combination. Its use necessitates reliance on a tiny number of examples of uncertain representativeness. Yet the advantage is the more rounded picture such evidence provides of individual pre-plague households lying at significant points in the wealth and income distributions.

4.1 *Forfeited property*

Table 2 and the Appendix contain evidence on the forfeited property of eight rural individuals, each of whom was apparently the head of a household. There were three basic reasons why a landlord might claim the property of a manorial tenant as forfeit: flight from the manor; intestacy; and crime.²⁶ Typically, the manorial court rolls make only passing reference to such seized property or its value. Occasionally, however, the records provide a fuller listing of the forfeited land and goods and their values, plus useful explanatory detail. Six such manorial forfeitures from the relevant period are analysed here. They include illustrations of all three main reasons for forfeiture to manorial lord: Walter Rogier fled his manor; Richard Peper and Robert Osebern were criminals, or accused of crime (Osebern committed suicide, which was a felony, a type of serious crime); and Robert Syger and (probably) John Welleman and Nicholas le Bedell’ were intestates.

Table 2. *Stocking densities per 100 sown acres on eight peasant holdings, c. 1297-1331*

Date	Name	Arable land (acres)	Horses	Cattle (adult)	Cattle (immature)	Sheep	Swine	Total units	Stocking density
c. 1300	Reyner de Burton	8 sown ac.	2	0	1,6	0,3	0	3,9	48,8
c. 1300	John de Burton	2 sown ac.	0	1,2	1,6	0,5	0	3,3	165,0
1305	John Welleman	0,8125 ac. total	0	0	0	0,3	0,1	0,4	49,2

²⁵ On identifying the poor, see Schofield, “Searching for the poor.”

²⁶ Briggs, “Manorial Court Roll Inventories.”

1298	Robert Syger	0,44 sown ac.	0	2,4	0	0,2	0	2,6	590,9
c. 1297	Robert Osebern	11 sown ac.	1	2,4	1,6	0,1	0,4	5,5	50,0
1328	Nicholas le Bedell'	10 sown ac.(estimate)	4	1.2	0	3	0,4	8,6	86,0
1311	Walter Rogier	20 sown ac. (estimate)	0	2,4	0,8	14	0	17,2	86,0
1331	Richard Peper	4,125 ac. total	3	2,4	0,8	0,8	0	7	169,7

Note: to calculate densities, stated or estimated sown acreages have been used, except for Welleman and Peper.

Sources: *Reyner and John Burton:* TNA, JUST 2/107; *Welleman:* Cambridge, King's College Archives, COL/368; *Syger:* Norfolk Record Office, DCN 60/32/4; *Osebern:* *Luffield Priory Charters*, 356-7; *Bedell':* Stafford Record Office, D(W)1734/2/1/598; *Rogier:* Oxford, New College Archives, 3913; *Peper:* Cambridge University Library, Buxton MSS 68/7, Norfolk Record Office, WLS XXIV/1.

The crown also claimed the right to forfeitures of real and movable property resulting from crime, giving rise to another potential body of source material for the material life of poor households. Throughout the Middle Ages and beyond, the English crown exercised rights to 'felony forfeiture'; that is, an entitlement to seize the goods of felons (those convicted of a serious crime, including suicides), fugitives from justice, and outlaws. To some extent the crown competed with manorial landlords in asserting rights to felony forfeiture. Records of forfeited goods connected with this prerogative and preserved in the royal archives offer insights into the material circumstances of some of society's poorest.

The evidence on felony forfeiture is especially rich for the period from c. 1370, after which date the escheator – one of several royal officials responsible at various times for the administration of felony forfeiture – began to keep more detailed records. This evidence has been used in a recent project investigating rural living standards and material culture in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁷ For the pre-plague era, however, the escheators' records are fewer and less detailed. For this earlier period, the evidence on the forfeited goods and chattels (movable possessions) of felons instead comes mainly from the archive of another royal official, the coroner, who held inquests into

²⁷ Briggs, Forward, Jervis, "Living Standards;" Forward *et al.*, *Living standards and material culture in English rural households 1300-1600*.

all unnatural and sudden deaths, as well as from the rolls produced by certain other royal law courts.²⁸ Unfortunately this pre-plague information is scantier than that contained in the later escheators' accounts and files.

The generally low recorded valuations of felons' chattels in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, and the presence of many felons whose chattels were said to be worth nothing at all, have been debated by historians. Some see this as confirmatory evidence of widespread impoverishment extending beyond the famine years, while others doubt the veracity of the valuations.²⁹ To explore the issue further using coroners' rolls is difficult, since surviving examples in good condition, and of appropriate date, are scarce. Also, while the available rolls do sometimes give details on the types and values of chattels forfeited by suicides and those suspected of homicide, information about landholding is recorded inconsistently. This latter point is important, because just as landholding data on its own cannot tell the full story about a household's circumstances, equally it is essential to possess some information about landholding (or its absence) if one is to make sense of the other markers of wealth and income.

These limitations of coroners' rolls are evident in an otherwise promising example for the county of Northamptonshire which covers the period c. 1291-c. 1316.³⁰ This roll contains only two usable forfeitures with details on land: those of John de Burton and Reyner de Burton, discussed further below.³¹ Other forfeitures in the roll clearly concern people who almost certainly held land which was not recorded, presumably because not deemed to be forfeit.³²

No listing of household property connected with forfeiture, whether from manorial or royal archives, can be treated as 'complete', even if in theory the entirety of a forfeiting individual's real and movable property was supposed to be seized. Like their counterparts who assessed property for royal taxation (lay subsidies), those local people who provided details on forfeited property to a manorial lord or royal official tended to overlook low value items, and may have omitted particular goods for customary reasons. Furthermore, the goods of a felon or fugitive were liable to removal by the forfeiting individual or his family prior to appraisal. Forfeitures of the possessions of a household head leave us wondering how far items belonging to other members of the household were excluded from appraisal and seizure. Crucial areas of material life, such as housing, clothing, and holdings of cash are only illuminated indirectly, if at all.

²⁸ Given, *Society and Homicide*; Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*.

²⁹ Amor, *Keeping the Peace*, 28-30; Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict*, 129-30, 307.

³⁰ TNA, JUST 2/107, at <http://aalt.law.uh.edu/AALT7/JUST2/JUST2no107/>.

³¹ It may be significant that these details appear on a detached slip of parchment, not in the main roll.

³² See the long chattels lists of wealthy rural felons John le Blound and Simon son of Richard Blound, which barely mention land; TNA, JUST 2/107, m. 4A.

Interestingly, the Northamptonshire coroners' roll is perhaps most valuable for the qualitative evidence it provides on several apparently young people, not themselves householders, who forfeited personal goods.³³ For instance, early in 1307, Matilda, daughter of John le Swon of Wansford, fell while crossing the bridge at Wansford and drowned. Her body was found by fishermen who placed it in a pit, after despoiling it of a belt with purse valued at 1 d., a hood (2 d.), a brooch (1 d.) and a weed-hook (1/4 d.). In the previous year, Thomas Harding, servant of a tanner called Simon Harding (perhaps a relative), drowned himself in the River Nene below Northampton. His chattels were a *colobium* (probably a gown) and old tunic (20 d.), a hood (2 d.), a knife (1 d.), shoes and hose (4 d.). Such evidence is hard to interpret; Thomas's shoes and hose are perhaps evidence against barebones poverty, and Matilda's purse and brooch speak of a modest capacity for personal adornment. As both died away from their homes, one could make the case that they may have possessed further goods unidentified by the coroner. Equally the brevity of these lists as they stand gives a strong impression of limited material wealth.

4.2 *Stocking densities*

Stocking densities are a key consideration in the evaluation of peasant landed resources. Using the well-known, unusually detailed local rolls for the 1283 lay subsidy relating to Blackbourne Hundred (Suffolk), Slavin found a heavy focus among peasant smallholders on livestock husbandry. As he was using a lay subsidy return which records details on taxpayers' grain and livestock but not their lands, Slavin was required to estimate tenant acreages. He calculated a stocking density in livestock units per 100 sown acres of 103,2, a figure 2,2 times the average for lordly demesnes.³⁴ In commenting on the heavy peasant focus on livestock in this region of smallholdings, Slavin remarked that "it is tempting to conclude that the high stocking densities in Blackbourne villages imply a non-Malthusian reality".³⁵ It seems worth asking what the forfeiture evidence reveals about stocking densities, given the possibility that smallholding peasants in this era with access to sufficient grazing and labour with which to apply manure to the arable may have been able to achieve higher outputs, and therefore potentially incomes, than is usually indicated in studies which use demesne yields as a proxy for peasant yields.³⁶

Table 2 contains details on the forfeited livestock of peasants who possessed recorded arable landholdings of various sizes. Some of these landholdings are expressed in total acreages, and others as sown acreages. The total acreages ranged from under 1 acre/0,4 ha. (Welleman) to the half-virgates of

³³ TNA, JUST 2/107.

³⁴ Slavin, "Peasant livestock husbandry," 13-4.

³⁵ Slavin, 23.

³⁶ La Poutré, "Fertilization by manure;" Hatcher, "Peasant productivity."

approximately 15 acres/6 ha. of le Bedell' and Osebern. Rogier is the only one for whom a landed holding is not recorded, but we know he was a villein tenant, and that the villein holdings on his home manor of Great Horwood were mostly grouped into standard sizes (see above). It has been assumed therefore that Rogier held one virgate of 30 acres (12 ha.).

Following the method and weightings used by Slavin, we arrive at a range of stocking densities in livestock units per 100 sown acres for the eight forfeiting tenants. In three cases, the figures are just above the average of 47,8 calculated using manorial accounts for much larger demesne farms. In the remaining cases, the stocking densities are significantly higher. It is noteworthy that the three highest figures relate to three of the four smallest holdings. This provides broad support for Slavin's finding of an inverse correlation between stocking densities and acreages.

4.3 Movable property: case studies

The eight lists of possessions offer further insights into the material worlds of households at a range of landholding sizes. Most of the eight can be associated roughly with the groupings immediately above and below Campbell's 'poverty line': the "smallholders", with an assumed mean arable acreage per household of 5,0 ha.; and the "cottagers and agricultural labourers", with an average 0,8 ha. Walter Rogier is an exception if our assumption that he held a 30-acre virgate is correct. This would place him above the "smallholders", and within the next group up: the "yardlanders" (prosperous peasants, equivalent to virgates), with an average of 12,5 ha. Efforts have been made to locate the eight men in lay subsidy records, in cases where the dates fit, and records survive.

The lists of forfeited possessions of Reyner de Burton and John de Burton, who were evidently suspected of the death of a man called Richard, are dateable to c. 1300. The vill of Ufford (Northamptonshire) is said to be "answerable" for their chattels. A search of taxpayers' names in the return to the lay subsidy of 1301 for Ufford failed to locate these men. The coroner's inquest states that in addition to his eight sown acres, Reyner had only his cart, livestock, grain and hay, plus (possibly) one jug valued at 4 d. John, however, who had just 2 sown acres, had a somewhat more extensive collection of household goods. These comprised a supertunic valued at 2 s., a lead (a brewing vessel, 3 d.), and "lesser things in his chest, price 2 s. 6 d.". We can only guess at the identity of these "lesser things", which were assigned a value equal to his one acre of wheat. However, they are almost certainly items that would have been overlooked by the assessors of the royal subsidy, if indeed John was ever taxed at all towards the subsidy.

The lists of John Welleman and Robert Syger take us into the world of the Norfolk smallholder of c. 1300.³⁷ The court roll entries recording Syger's for-

³⁷ See Campbell, "Agrarian problem."

feiture provide little information about him, other than the details of his land and animals, and the fact he left behind a widow and a son. John Welleman had very little arable land, but his messuage (enclosed plot) and two houses suggest he was relatively well endowed with buildings. His chattels also included cloth worth 4 s., perhaps a sign of involvement in textile production. An indication of John's probable intestacy is the order that "all his creditors and debtors" should be present at the next session of the manor court. That a man with less than an acre of arable might be expected to have debtors as well as creditors is interesting.

Robert Osebern, Nicolas le Bedell' and (probably) Walter Rogier all possessed landholdings greater than the men just discussed. As one might expect, their quantities of livestock and other movables were correspondingly larger. Most of Osebern's movable wealth consisted of livestock and grain, but he also possessed craft equipment, household goods and furnishings of a far more diverse kind than one would typically see in a 'local' lay subsidy roll. Walter Rogier forfeited just livestock and grain, plus a brass pot. The quantities are substantial, however; his large flock of 120 sheep and 20 lambs is over twice the size of the largest individual flock mentioned in Great Horwood's 1327 lay subsidy (60 sheep). Nicolas le Bedell's list similarly underlines the fact that the material culture of rural households was often somewhat richer than the lay subsidy returns indicate. At his death, Nicholas owned an iron-bound cart worth 6 s. 8 d., a brass pot and jug worth 4 s., and, most interestingly, a (probable) basin and ewer for handwashing worth 2 s.³⁸ Although a landed peasant possessing movables well over £ 3 in value when he died after November 1327, it is striking to note that Nicholas does not appear at all in the 1327 lay subsidy return of his home vill of Longdon (Staffordshire).³⁹

Finally, attention is given to Richard Peper of Bunwell, another Norfolk smallholder who is the best documented of the eight householders. Peper forfeited in 1331 after being indicted for a felony and outlawed. Unfortunately, we do not know whether he was taxed for the 1327 lay subsidy as the relevant roll is faded and illegible.⁴⁰ However, the court records of Hadeston manor in Bunwell provide some remarkably detailed information about him.⁴¹ Richard's landed holdings seem initially to have been somewhat greater than they had become by 1331, as in the mid-1320s he had granted a cottage to Roger his son, and other small amounts of land to his brother Simon and to another man. In the late 1320s Richard was engaged in litigation over debt and trespass in the Hadeston manor court. In 1327, in the most notable of these cases, he successfully sued Simon Prati for the detention of one acton (a

³⁸ The word for the item accompanying the ewer is only partly legible but is probably *peluis* (basin).

³⁹ Wrottesley, "Exchequer subsidy roll," 231.

⁴⁰ TNA, E 179/149/7, m.56d.

⁴¹ Cambridge University Library (CUL), Buxton Papers Box 68/7-8; Norfolk Record Office (NRO), WLS XXIV/1.

padded jacket worn under armour), one *colrectum* (possibly a piece of armour for the neck), and one sword, worth altogether one mark (13 s. 4 d.).⁴² This was more than the combined value of the two cows he later forfeited in 1331. This court roll evidence of Richard's ownership of armour and a weapon gives an unusual perspective on the material world of an early fourteenth-century smallholder. Indeed, the wider body of evidence on interpersonal litigation contained in these court rolls reveals the frequent enforcement of petty contracts and rights in movable property in this locality. A good example is Alice Stalkesti's successful prosecution of Simon Sparwe for unjust detention of five ells (approximately five metres) of linen cloth, worth 10 d., plus damages of just 1,5 d.⁴³ Material resources were clearly stretched for those towards the lower end of the social scale in this part of early fourteenth-century Norfolk. Yet equally, institutions for the protection of property rights were readily available, and not restricted to the peasant elite.

5. Conclusion

Land was the most important source of income in England c. 1300. It also seems reasonable to assume that wealth was related to income, and that those with the most land will tend, other things being equal, to have had the greatest wealth, and vice-versa. Yet arable acreage is not a perfect guide to income or wealth per household, both because additional sources of household income were potentially available, and because some households may have been relatively well endowed with capital, meaning that they could have enjoyed higher incomes from land than other households with similar acreages. Landholding size is therefore only an approximate guide to the distribution of income. Furthermore, the lay subsidies are only an approximate guide to the distribution of wealth, primarily because households possessing taxable wealth above the threshold were demonstrably omitted from the assessments, and perhaps also because some forms of movable wealth were present but not taxed.

If "wealth inequality can be considered a decent proxy for income inequality" in preindustrial societies,⁴⁴ it is perhaps disconcerting that the two reconstructions discussed in Section 2 give rise to rather contrasting results: Broadberry *et al.* offer a Gini coefficient for income in 1290 of 0,33, while Alfani and García Montero estimate 'reconstructed' wealth inequality in 1327-32 at 0,723-0,755.⁴⁵ At the same time, the two reconstructions 'make sense' in that they agree on England's broad characteristics in terms of the distribution of resources c. 1300. No attempt is made here to suggest that the estimates

⁴² CUL, Buxton Papers Box 68/7, July 1327.

⁴³ NRO, WLS XXIV/1, October 1324.

⁴⁴ Alfani, "Economic inequality," 10.

⁴⁵ Broadberry *et al.*, *British Economic Growth*, 329, table 8.07; Alfani, García Montero, "Wealth inequality," 1337.

discussed in Section 2 do not provide useful general frameworks for the analysis of inequality.

Instead, this article tries to make two main arguments. The first is that in discussing inequality, it is helpful to take a broader view of the material circumstances of households and to examine the question at the level of the community and its members. To obtain a fuller sense of the movable and immovable possessions of rural households, it has been necessary to make use of rare but valuable lists of forfeited property that survive in records generated by manors and by the crown. Clearly this analysis has not revealed the presence of an unsuspected wealth of ‘non-essential’ goods among the possessions of poorer households. Yet it has shown that some such households accumulated some goods that were not noticed by the royal taxers, and that they often possessed high ratios of livestock to arable land. The second point is that, as Campbell argues, there were clearly substantial differences in experience separating the upper echelons of the peasantry from the “smallholders” and the “cottagers and agricultural labourers” – the two groups lying either side of the ‘poverty line’ in the c. 1290 social table. Equally, however, the two latter groups should not be lumped together. These two huge categories comprised almost half of English households, on Campbell’s estimate, and their material experiences covered a vast range. There is no doubt that the labouring poor and the landless often faced huge difficulties in simply obtaining the necessities of life, and that the prospects for young men and women from such backgrounds were increasingly grim at this time.⁴⁶ Yet equally it is easy to underestimate the capacity and creativity with which many households with small arable acreages sought to make a living despite the challenges of the era.⁴⁷ Hypothetical models of the smallholder economy of c. 1300 are useful, but they do not always match the evidence of the lived experiences of well-documented individuals and households.

⁴⁶ Bennett, “Wretched Girls, Wretched Boys.”

⁴⁷ Hatcher, “Peasant productivity.”

Appendix
Eight lists of forfeited property, c. 1297-1331

	Valuation	
Name & location	Reyner de Burton Ufford (Northamptonshire)	
Date	c. 1300	
Reason for inventory	Felony suspect	
Land held	8 sown acres	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 affer	5 s.
	1 colt [young horse] age 1 year	9 d.
	2 calves	2 s.
	3 sheep	2 s. 6 d.
	1 cock and 4 hens	5 d.
Grain & fodder	1 q. + 1 "strike" wheat	3 s. 6 d.
	Hay and forage	18 d.
	3,5 acres sown with wheat	2 s. per acre
	3 acres sown with drage	12 d. per acre
	1,5 acres sown with peas	18 d. per acre
Farming equipment	1 worn iron-bound cart	3 s.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 jug? [<i>urciolus</i> ?]	4 d.
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	John de Burton Ufford (Northamptonshire)	
Date	c. 1300	
Reason for inventory	Felony suspect	
Land held	2 sown acres	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 cow	5 s.
	2 calves	4 d.

Grain & fodder	4 sheep	4 s.
	1 lamb	6 d.
	1 cock and 2 hens	3 d.
	0,5 q. wheat	20 d.
	Hay and forage	8 d.
	1,5 “strikes” peas	3 d.
	1 acre sown with wheat	2 s. 6 d.
	1 acre sown with peas	18 d.
Farming equipment	1 ladder	1 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 lead [<i>plumbum</i>]	3 d.
(b) Furnishings	“lesser things in his chest” [<i>in minimis Rebus in cista sua</i>]	2 s. 6 d.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 supertunic	2 s.
Cash	-	
Name & location	John Welleman Coltishall (Norfolk)	
Date	January 1305	
Reason for inventory	Not stated, probably intestacy	
Land held	1 messuage with 2 houses, 3,25 rods of land, & 1 rod & 3 “abut-tals” of marsh	
Other indicator of status	-	
Animals	3 sheep 1 piglet	
Grain & fodder	2 q. 1,5 b. barley 1 b. peas 1 b. beans	
Farming equipment	-	
Craft equipment/materials	Cloths	4 s.
Household goods		

(a) food preparation	-	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 tunic	10 d.
Cash	-	
Name & location	Robert Syger Hindringham (Norfolk)	
Date	May 1298	
Reason for inventory	Died intestate	
Land held	1,5 acres and 0,5 rods, plus 2 acres separately mentioned	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 cow	4 s.
	1 cow	3 s.
	2 sheep	2 s.
Grain & fodder	3 q. barley	
	2 b. beans	
	1 rod sown with wheat	
	3 parts of 1 rod sown with rye	
Farming equipment		
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	-	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Robert Osebern Thornborough (Buckinghamshire)	
Date	c. 1297	
Reason for inventory	Robert hanged himself (felony)	
Land held	1279-80 1 virgate, 1289 ½ virgate	

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

Material inequalities in England, c. 1290 - c. 1340

(b) Furnishings	1 basin	1½ d.
	1 coffer	18 d.
	1 form [bench] and 1 table with 2 trestles	6 d.
	2 baskets	1½ d.
	Towel	1 d.
	1 feather mattress [<i>plumale</i> ; possibly a pillow]	8 d.
	2 sheets	6 d.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	1 cloak [<i>mantellum</i>]	18 d.
	1 supertunic	6 d.
	1 hood	6 d.
Cash	-	
Other	The barn 'in which he hanged himself'	3 s.
Unidentified	1 <i>varill'</i>	4 d.
Name & location	Nicholas le Bedell Longdon (Staffordshire)	
Date	February 1328	
Reason for inventory	Probably intestate	
Land held	1 messuage and one half-virgate, plus 1 cottage in bondage	
Other indicator of status		
Animals	1 ox [given as heriot]	6 s. 8 d.
	4 horses	24 s.
	4 piglets	4 s.
	30 goats	30 s.
Grain & fodder	-	
Farming equipment	1 iron-bound cart	6 s. 8 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot, 2,5 gallons & 1 jug [<i>urceolus</i>], 1 gallon	4 s.

(b) Furnishings	1 basin? and 1 ewer	2 s.
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Walter Rogier Great Horwood (Buckinghamshire)	
Date	February 1311	
Reason for inventory	Fled manor	
Land held	Unknown	
Other indicator of status	Servile status [<i>nativus domini</i>]	
Animals	2 cows 1 bullock 120 sheep 20 lambs	
Grain & fodder	2 q. wheat 8 q. drage 2 q. peas 2 q. oats 3 q. mixed grain	
Farming equipment		
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot	
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Name & location	Richard Peper Bunwell (Norfolk)	
Date	December 1331	

Reason for inventory	RP committed a felony and was outlawed	
Land held	1 messuage and 2,5 acres 0,5 rods of customary land; 1 acre of free land. Perhaps an additional 0,5 acre on lease.	
Other indicator of status	Hayward (a manorial official), 1331	
Animals	2 cows	5 s. 6 d. each
	1 steer	5 s.
	1 horse	4 s.
	8 sheep	18 d. each
	1 horse	3 s. (erased)
	1 colt [young horse]	2 s.
	2 geese	6 d.
Grain & fodder	2 q. barley	4 s. per q.
	Straw	2 s.
	Hay	8 d.
Farming equipment	1 coulter [front blade of a plough that made a vertical cut in the soil]	5 d.
Craft equipment/materials	-	
Household goods		
(a) food preparation	1 brass pot	18 d.
	1 brass pan	6 d.
	1 tripod	3 d.
(b) Furnishings	-	
Foodstuffs	-	
Clothes	-	
Cash	-	
Total value	51 s. 3 d.	

Sources: see Table 2.

Note: q.=quarter (2,8 hectolitres), b.=bushel (35,2 litres).

Works cited

- Alfani, Guido. "Economic Inequality in Preindustrial Times: Europe and Beyond." *Journal of Economic Literature* 59, no. 1 (2021): 3-44. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20191449>
- Alfani, Guido, and Hector García Montero. "Wealth Inequality in Pre-Industrial England: a Long-Term View (Late Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)." *Economic History Review* 75, no. 4 (2022): 1314-48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.13158>
- Amor, Nicholas R. *Keeping the Peace in Medieval Suffolk*. Stanningfield: Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 2021.
- Bailey, Mark. *Medieval Suffolk: An Economic and Social History, 1200-1500*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007.
- Bekar, Cliff T., and Clyde G. Reed. "Land Markets and Inequality: Evidence from Medieval England." *European Review of Economic History* 17, no. 3 (2013): 294-317. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ereh/het009>
- Bennett, Judith M. "Wretched Girls, Wretched Boys and the European Marriage Pattern in England (c. 1250-1350)." *Continuity and Change* 34, no. 3 (2019): 315-47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416019000328>
- Briggs, Chris. "Manorial Court Roll Inventories as Evidence of English Peasant Consumption and Living Standards, c. 1270-c. 1420." Unpublished paper, revised November 1, 2010. https://www.academia.edu/7393964/Chris_Briggs_Manorial_Court_Roll_Inventories_as_Evidence_of_English_Peasant_Consumption_and_Living_Standards_c_1270_c_1420_revised_1_Nov_2010_
- Briggs, Chris. "Taxation, Warfare, and the Early Fourteenth-Century 'Crisis' in the North: Cumberland Lay Subsidies, 1332-1348." *Economic History Review* 58, no. 4 (2005): 639-72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2005.00317.x>
- Briggs, Chris, Alice Forward, and Ben Jervis. "Living Standards and Material Culture in English Rural Households 1300-1600. Data Paper." *Internet Archaeology* 56 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.56.14>
- Britnell, Richard H. "Movable Goods Before the Industrial Revolution: England c. 1300." In *In but not of the Market: Movable Goods and the Late Medieval and Early Modern Economy, 28 March 2003*, ed. by Marc Boone, and Martha Howell, 71-80. Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten, 2007.
- Broadberry, Stephen, Bruce M.S. Campbell, Alexander Klein, Mark Overton, and Bas van Leeuwen. *British Economic Growth 1270-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107707603>
- Campbell, Bruce M.S. "The Agrarian Problem in the Early Fourteenth Century." *Past & Present* 188, no. 1 (2005): 3-70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gti017>
- Campbell, Bruce M.S. "Benchmarking Medieval Economic Development: England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, c. 1290." *Economic History Review* 61, no. 4 (2008): 896-945. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.2007.00407.x>
- Campbell, Bruce M.S. *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late Medieval World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139031110>
- Cox, J. Charles. "Derbyshire in 1327-8: Being a Lay Subsidy Roll." *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 30 (1908): 23-96.
- Drendel, John. "Les paysans sans terre sont-ils pauvres? Une perspective anglaise sur les campagnes provençales au XIV^e siècle." Dans *La Fabrique des sociétés médiévales méditerranéennes. Les Moyen Âge de François Menant*, éd. par Diane Chamboduc de Saint Pulgent, et Marie Dejoux, 299-308. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.40486>
- Dyer, Chris. "The Crisis of the Early Fourteenth Century: Some Material Evidence from Britain." Dans *Écritures de l'espace Social. Mélanges d'histoire médiévale offerts à Monique Bourin*, éd. par Didier Boisseuil, Pierre Chastang, Laurent Feller, et Joseph Morsel, 491-506. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.psorbonne.11237>
- Dyer, Chris. *Peasants Making History: Living in an English Region 1200-1540*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- Dyer, Chris. *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c. 1200-1520*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 (revised edition: 1998). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167697>

- Forward, Alice, Ben Jervis, Chris Briggs, Mathew Tompkins, and Tomasz Gromelski, ed. Living standards and material culture in English rural households 1300-1600: digital archive. York: Archaeology Data Service, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.5284/1085022>
- Given, James B. *Society and Homicide in Thirteenth-Century England*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1977.
- Hadwin, John F. "Evidence on the Possession of 'Treasure' from the Lay Subsidy Rolls." In *Edwardian Monetary Affairs (1279-1344): A Symposium held in Oxford August 1976*, ed. by Nicholas J. Mayhew, 147-65. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1977.
- Hadwin, John F. "The Medieval Lay Subsidies and Economic History." *Economic History Review* 36, no. 2 (1983): 200-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0289.1983.tb01229.x>
- Hanawalt, Barbara. *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Hatcher, John. "Peasant Productivity and Welfare in the Middle Ages and Beyond." *Past & Present* 262, no. 1 (2024): 281-314. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtad022>
- Langdon, John L. "Minimum Wages and Unemployment Rates in Medieval England: the Case of Old Woodstock, Oxfordshire, 1256-1357." In *Commercial Activity, Markets and Entrepreneurs in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of Richard Britnell*, ed. by Ben Dodds, and Christian D. Liddy, 25-44. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2011.
- La Poutre, Hugo J.P. "Fertilization by Manure: a Manor Model Comparing English Demesne and Peasant Land, c. 1300." *Agricultural History Review* 65, no. 1 (2017): 20-48. https://www.bahs.org.uk/AGHR/ARTICLES/65_1_LaPoutre.pdf
- Lay Subsidy Roll for the County of Worcester, 1 Edward I* [i.e. 1327], ed. by Francis John Eld. Oxford: Worcestershire Historical Society, 1895.
- Luffield Priory Charters Part II*, ed. by Gerald R. Elvey. Northampton: Buckinghamshire & Northamptonshire Record Society, 1975.
- Mayhew, Nicholas J. "Modelling medieval monetisation." In *A commercialising economy. England 1086 to c. 1300*, ed. by Richard H. Britnell, and Bruce M.S. Campbell, 55-77. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Page, Mark. "The Smallholders of Southampton Water: the Peasant Land Market on a Hampshire Manor Before the Black Death." In *Life in Medieval Landscapes: People and Places in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Sam Turner, and Bob Silvester, 181-97. Oxford: Windgather, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13gvg52.15>
- Ravensdale, John R. *Liable to Floods. Village Landscape on the Edge of the Fens, A.D. 450-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.
- Rigby, Stephen H. "Urban Society in Early Fourteenth-Century England: the Evidence of the Lay Subsidies." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 72, no. 3 (1990): 169-84. <https://doi.org/10.7227/BJRL.72.3.13>
- Schofield, Phillipp. "Searching for the Poor in the Medieval English and Welsh Countryside, 1290-1334." Dans *Les Fruits de la Terre. Études d'histoire médiévale offertes à Laurent Feller*, éd. par Marie Dejoux, Harmony Dewez, Emmanuel Huertas, et Cédric Quartier, 519-30. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2023.
- Slavin, Philip. *Experiencing Famine in Fourteenth-Century Britain*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019.
- Slavin, Philip. "Peasant Livestock Husbandry in Late Thirteenth-Century Suffolk: Economy, Environment, and Society." In *Peasants and Lords in the Medieval English Economy: Essays in Honour of Bruce M.S. Campbell*, ed. by Maryanne Kowaleski, John L. Langdon, and Philip R. Schofield, 3-26. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.TMC-EB.5.107686>
- The Taxation of 1297. A Translation of the Local Rolls of Assessment for Barford, Biggleswade and Flitt hundreds, and for Bedford, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Luton*, ed. by Alec T. Gaydon. Streatley: Bedfordshire Historical Records Society Volume 39, 1958. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2nv8mt5>
- Wrottesley, George. "The Exchequer Subsidy Roll of AD 1327 with an Introduction and Notes." *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* 7, no. 1 (1886): 195-255.

Chris Briggs
University of Cambridge
cdb23@cam.ac.uk
0009-0003-3640-7750