

Wheat and Malt Prices in Cambridge in the late Eighteenth Century

By DAVID H. KENNETT

ON 4 May 1748 the lease of the glebe parsonage of Great Barford, Bedfordshire, was renewed by the tenants, Luke Francklin of Great Barford and Edward Francklin of Rainham, Norfolk.¹ As rent, the owners of the glebe, Trinity College, Cambridge, were to be paid on each Michaelmas and Lady Day half of a yearly rent of "£16 6s. 10d., also 12 quarters of 2 bushels of good and merchantable wheat, sweet, clean, and well dressed, and 16 quarters 2 bushels and 3 pecks of good and merchantable malt of barley, well dried and clean dight, or for default of the delivery of said wheat and malt at the election of Edward Francklin and Luke Francklin . . . to pay . . . Trinity College so much in ready money after the manner and price as the best wheat and malt in the market of Cambridge shall be sold the next market day before the said rent of wheat and malt shall be due without fraud or cavin." In consequence, Luke Francklin recorded the prices which wheat and malt fetched on Cambridge market from 25 March 1757 to 29 September 1801.² This paper aims to present the prices which wheat and malt fetched per bushel at Cambridge market between these dates and to demonstrate the effect of the prices on the rent paid for the glebe parsonage of Great Barford, Bedfordshire, to Trinity College.

It is obvious from this index with two prices each year, for 25 March and 29 September, that some years show a wide discrepancy in prices,

especially wheat prices. For example, 1795 shows an increase of almost three shillings in the price of wheat but an increase of only three-pence in the price of malt. This is the most extreme case, except for 1799-1801 when special factors applied, but even peace years like 1768 show a wide variation. In 1768 the price of wheat fell by 1s. 9½d. Also this shows several marked differences from the index of wheat prices at Windsor, published by Ashton.³ The latter shows only prices on 29 September but, for example, in 1759 the price at Windsor for wheat was 4s. 8d.; at Cambridge it was only 3s. 10½d. Equally, in 1768 the price at Cambridge was 5s. 7½d.; at Windsor it was 6s. 11¾d. They are coincident on occasions, however, as in 1776, when the price of wheat was 6s. at both Windsor and Cambridge. This variation is seen even more clearly in an examination of the market prices of cereals recorded for the markets of Bedfordshire from 1770.⁴ To obtain the best price it was advisable to sell in Bedford, but to buy cheaply one had to visit a number of markets. Barley and oats were cheapest at Leighton Buzzard, but for cheap wheat Luton was the most probable source. Rye, sold only at Leighton and Potton, was cheaper at Leighton, but the cheapest price for beans was at Potton.⁵

The index of Cambridge wheat and malt prices published herein shows a steady upward trend throughout the late eighteenth century. This trend is even more dramatically docu-

¹ Beds. C.R.O., document FN1251 (*Barford Rectory*), pp. 207-13. This volume is one of twenty-three volumes of reprints containing many documents which have not survived in the original, including the lease quoted. A terrier of the glebe is FN1251, pp. 264-71.

² The wheat and malt prices are recorded FN1251, p. 262 and pp. 277-81.

³ T. S. Ashton, *Economic Fluctuations in England, 1700-1800*, 1959, p. 181, Table I. Ashton publishes malt prices on p. 182, Table II.

⁴ Beds. C.R.O., documents in the QSM ser. from 1770 and additionally in the QSR ser. from 1775. It is hoped to present a study of these 'Local variations in cereal prices in the late eighteenth century' in due course.

⁵ J. Godber, *History of Bedfordshire*, 1969, p. 358.

TABLE I
WHEAT AND MALT PRICES AT CAMBRIDGE, 1757-1801

Date	Wheat	Malt	Rent	Date	Wheat	Malt	Rent
	s. d.	s. d.	£ s. d.		s. d.	s. d.	£ s. d.
1757 M25	8 0	4 0	40 16 11	S29	4 6	3 3	29 18 10½
S29	6 6	4 0	37 3 5	1780 M25	4 2½	2 9	27 10 10½
1758 M25	5 6	4 3	35 10 9	S29	not recorded		30 15 2½
S29	5 9	4 0	35 6 8	1781 M25	7 1	2 11½	35 5 0½
1759 M25	3 10½	3 0	27 10 5½	S29	5 9½	2 11½	32 1 8½
S29	3 10½	3 9	26 13 0½	1782 M25	6 0	2 8½	31 15 7½
1760 M25	3 6	2 6	24 18 4½	S29	7 8½	3 5½	38 7 3
S29	3 9	2 6	25 13 1½	1783 M25	7 4½	4 8½	41 14 9
1761 M25	3 0	2 3	22 17 6	S29	8 0	4 8½	43 4 4
S29	3 4½	2 3	23 15 10½	1784 M25	6 9½	4 8½	40 5 5½
1762 M25	4 2½	2 6	26 14 6½	S29	7 6	4 5½	41 3 10
S29	4 4½	3 6	30 10 1½	1785 M25	6 0	3 8½	35 1 3½
1763 M25	3 8½	3 9	29 11 9	S29	6 9	4 2½	38 10 9
S29	4 8½	4 3	33 13 5½	1786 M25	5 0	3 8½	32 12 4
1764 M25	5 0	3 9	32 16 0½	S29	5 7½	3 8½	34 3 11½
S29	6 6	3 9	36 9 6½	1787 M25	5 0	3 8½	32 12 4
1765 M25	6 6	3 6	35 13 2½	S29	6 0	3 8½	35 1 4
S29	5 7½	3 6	33 10 4½	1788 M25	5 10½	3 5½	33 19 10
1766 M25	4 7	3 9	31 15 7½	S29	6 0	3 8½	35 1 4
S29	6 3	3 6	35 1 4½	1789 M25	6 6	3 5½	35 9 6
1767 M25	7 4½	4 0	39 9 9½	S29	7 9½	3 5½	38 12 1
S29	7 10	4 0	40 11 3	1790 M25	7 0	3 8½	37 10 4
1768 M25	7 4½	3 9	38 13 5½	S29	7 3	3 8½	38 2 7
S29	5 7½	3 6	33 10 4½	1791 M25	6 4½	3 8½	36 1 10
1769 M25	4 9½	2 9	29 0 5½	S29	6 0	3 8½	35 1 4
S29	4 9	2 9	28 18 5½	1792 M25	5 0	4 2½	34 5 0
1770 M25	4 3	2 9	27 13 11½	S29	7 3	4 5½	40 11 7
S29	5 6	3 0	31 11 6½	1793 M25	6 9	4 11½	40 19 10
1771 M25	6 0	3 9	35 5 0½	S29	6 6	4 11½	40 7 7
S29	6 9	4 0	37 18 2	1794 M25	6 6	5 5	44 18 6
1772 M25	7 0	3 9	37 14 0½	S29	7 5½	5 2	43 9 6
S29	7 3	4 0	39 2 8	1795 M25	8 6½	5 5	46 19 11
1773 M25	7 0	4 6	40 13 1½	S29	11 6	5 8½	55 1 9
S29	7 6	4 3	40 11 3	1796 M25	11 6	5 11½	55 18 1
1774 M25	7 1	4 6	40 7 2½	S29	8 10½	5 2	47 0 0
S29	8 1½	4 6	42 18 2½	1797 M25	6 0½	4 4½	37 8 4
1775 M25	7 7	4 3	40 15 2	S29	7 0	4 2½	40 12 0
S29	5 9	4 3	36 5 6	1798 M25	5 9½	4 2½	37 10 0
1776 M25	4 9½	3 9	32 5 10½	S29	6 0	4 2½	38 0 8
S29	6 0	3 9	35 5 0½	1799 M25	6 0	4 8½	39 8 4
1777 M25	5 9½	3 3	33 2 2	S29	12 0	5 5½	57 14 1
S29	5 9½	3 3	33 2 2	1800 M25	15 1	9 2½	78 8 11
1778 M25	not recorded		34 4 2	S29	18 0	10 8½	91 1 2
S29	5 6	3 3	32 7 10½	1801 M25	21 2½	10 8½	99 4 8
1779 M25	4 7	3 3	30 2 11½	S29	10 0	8 8½	63 14 0
				1802 M25	not recorded		

TABLE II
FRANCKLIN RENTS PAID TO TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Year	Fine	Bursar	Register	Writing	Total
	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.	£ s. d.
1741	190 0 0	1 18 0	1 11 0	1 12 0	195 1 0
1748	208 12 0	2 1 7	1 14 0½	1 12 0	213 19 7½
1755	242 0 0	2 8 0	2 0 4	1 12 0	248 0 4
1762	242 0 0	2 8 0	2 0 4	1 12 0	253 0 4
	[includes an alienation of £5 0 0]				
1769	242 0 0	2 8 0	2 0 4	1 12 0	248 0 4
1766	316 0 0	3 3 0	2 12 8	1 12 0	323 7 8
1783	315 0 0	3 3 0	2 12 6	1 19 6	323 15 0
1790	316 0 0	3 3 4	2 12 8	2 12 6	324 16 0
			stamp	2 6	
1797	545 0 0	5 8 6	4 10 8	3 13 6	558 16 10
			stamp	4 2	

mented in the rents paid by the Francklins at seven-year intervals to Trinity College, Cambridge.¹ These are known from 1741 to 1797. The total rent paid on each occasion is made up of four elements: the fine based on the fixed sum of £16 6s. 10d. and a variable dependent on wheat and malt prices at Cambridge market; a fee to the bursar of £1 per cent of the fine; a register fee of 2d. in the pound; and an item called 'writing', presumably a legal fee for the certificate of payment. In 1790 and 1797 stamp duty is also mentioned.

The fine for the next seven years is not recorded. For the four and a half years from Michaelmas 1797 to Michaelmas 1801 the fine would have been £545 13s. 10d., already more than the 1797 figure, and that lease had until Lady Day 1804 to run before the next rent was due. Clearly, for any farmers, such as the Francklins, a rent based on corn prices would show a sharp increase in the course of the eighteenth century, especially in the last decade.²

¹ Beds. C.R.O., document FN1251.

² For access to the documents used for this note, I wish to thank the Bedfordshire County Record Office.