

The Miner and the Agricultural Community in Late Medieval England

By IAN BLANCHARD

THE role of craft or other industrial activities in the economic and social life of the rural community has received surprisingly little attention from the historians of medieval or Tudor England. Apart from the pioneering study of Dr Thirsk on industries in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century countryside, most writers have contented themselves with merely chronicling the existence of weavers, tanners, charcoal burners, and a multitude of other workers in a rural setting without elucidating the position that they held in that environment.¹ One notable exception to this has been the studies of the medieval extractive industries, in which it has been assumed that the miner or quarryman lived an alienated existence from the rural society in which he resided, earning his living predominantly from his work with a shovel or pick and being dependent for his sustenance upon purchases of grain.² Such a view has gained added support by analogy from accounts of mining communities in subsequent eras and historians of the medieval industry have not passed uninfluenced by descriptions of the Derbyshire mining community in the 1620's, when, impelled by agrarian change and demographic pressure, a large proportion of the population lived such a segregated existence.³ Yet in such a process of analogy there is a considerable danger of ignoring the specific circumstances of the description and thereby creating an economic archetype of 'the medieval miner' to add to the legal one which has emerged out of the corpus of mining law. Certainly under conditions of acute demographic pressure, such as existed in late thirteenth-century England, one might well find mining communities in which each member, with only a small plot of land and perhaps a cow, was dependent upon his ore sales for a livelihood and in such instances archetype and reality might bear a close resemblance. An inadequate holding was not, however, solely the prerogative of the miner at this time, for throughout late thirteenth-century England examples can be found of peasants with

¹ J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside' in F. J. Fisher (ed.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England*, Cambridge, 1961.

² See e.g. G. R. Lewis, *The Stannaries: A Study of the English Tin Miner*, 1908; L. F. Salzman, *Medieval English Industries*, Oxford, 1923, ch. 1-5; D. Knoop and G. P. Jones, 'The English Medieval Quarry', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, ix, 1, 1938. The view has most recently been expressed in J. Hatcher, 'A Diversified Economy: Later Medieval Cornwall', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xxii, 2, 1969.

³ This description in Thirsk, *loc. cit.*, p. 73, is based upon a report of the justices (SP14/113, No. 17), and is referred to in Hatcher, *loc. cit.*, 224

pitifully small holdings, living on the edge of starvation, and eking out an existence in whatever way they could.¹ One might legitimately ask whether the late thirteenth-century lead miner or tinner, with an average annual income from his work in the 'groves' of considerably less than two pounds a year,² had a small holding by choice or circumstance. The critical test as to whether the status of the miner in the thirteenth century was that of an impoverished peasant or specialist worker can only be applied when the exogenous influence of overpopulation is removed. It is thus the purpose of this essay to investigate the relationship of mining and agricultural activity under conditions of falling population and a slack land market, and further to examine some of the social implications inherent in this link.

I

Unfortunately within the historiography of the medieval mining industries the individual miner has become lost amongst the host of archetypes created of him.³ The reason has largely been the nature of the documentation, for, as the image of the medieval serf emerged in the early twentieth century out of the customals and surveys of the great Benedictine estates of eastern England, so the picture of his free mining counterpart has evolved out of the corpus of documents relating to mining law. Other traces of his activity in mining or any other pursuit are singularly lacking. Records of the courts of mining liberties are few in number and those that survive relate to barmotes held at widely differing times and in a variety of places. Documents listing miners by name are similarly scarce. There is certainly every indication that the collectors of seigneurial revenues from those engaged in mining kept detailed accounts of the amounts rendered by each individual from whom it was due, but few again have survived and fewer still are helpful in the pursuit of the elusive miner.

The best known of such particular accounts are the magnificent series of coinage rolls from the stannaries, but even these are not very helpful in providing information about individual tanners.⁴ These rolls record the collection of a due levied on each thousand weight of tin produced and detail the names

¹ For a general synopsis of the work on overpopulation in late thirteenth-century England, see M. M. Postan, 'Medieval Agrarian Society in its Prime: England', *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Cambridge, 1966, I, pp. 552-6; for specific examples of acute overpopulation, again in areas with considerable opportunities for activities other than tillage, see H. E. Hallam, 'Population Density in Medieval England', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., XIV, 1961, and J. Z. Titow, 'Some Evidence of Thirteenth Century Population Increase', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., XIV, 1961.

² See for instance the workforce and production statistics in Hatcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11.

³ This is particularly noticeable in the works which have made passing mention of individual miners, e.g. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 187-8. The one exception to this is in the collective work of the Pateley Bridge Local History Tutorial Class.—B. Jennings (ed.), *A History of Nidderdale*, Huddersfield, 1967, pp. 72-3.

⁴ On the coinage rolls cf. Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-56.

of those presenting tin for stamping, the number of pieces, their weight, and the amount of duty paid. That the owner, or the person who presented the tin is not synonymous with the miner of the ore is obvious from the rolls. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries names like John, Earl of Cornwall, or Philip, the Prior of Tywardrath, recur at not infrequent intervals, often in conjunction with very large amounts of tin. Moreover, many of the lesser men of local origin may have been smelters rather than miners.¹

In the English and Welsh lead-fields similar records were obviously kept. In Derbyshire, for instance, within the king's field of High Peak, the engrossed record of the collection of the dues of 'lot and cope'² for 1439-40 relates "... of lead ore, by oath of the 'berghmaister' as recorded by the bill which was shown and examined at this account."³ Similarly at Halkyn and Vaynol in Flint, during the late fourteenth century a twice annual 'mete' was held to gather in the ore and lead due to the Black Prince, at which time a written record was made in the presence of the Chamberlain and his entourage.⁴ Yet from only one area have documents of this type been preserved, namely from the mining jurisdictions on Mendip.⁵ Within this mining 'camp' were liberties pertaining to the hundred of Chewton and the lordship of Ubley in which each miner had to render to the lord of the liberty one-tenth of the lead produced from his ore, the cost of washing and smelting falling entirely on the miner.⁶ Fortunately, lists of those paying this tithe have survived from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, engrossed on the rolls of the hundred of Chewton and of the hallmote of Ubley, which detail the amount of lead smelted from ore raised within the liberty by each individual miner. These together with a miscellaneous collection of other documents, predominantly of legal origin, allow the identification of individuals engaged in mining who can thereafter be traced in other sources of manorial provenance, the tools of trade of the historian of the social and economic life of rural England.

II

The picture of the miner that emerges from these documents cannot lay claim to any completeness but it is a very different one from that presented by the stereotypes. Thus on Mendip one finds a society in the second quarter of the sixteenth century showing all the first symptoms of overpopulation,⁷ yet

¹ The relationship between miner and smelter within the stannaries warrants very much more attention than it has so far been given.

² On the nature of the dues of 'lot' and 'cope', see J. H. Lander and C. H. Vellacott, 'Lead Mining', *V.C.H. Derbyshire*, 1907, II, pp. 325-7.

³ P.R.O., DL29/22/387.

⁴ P.R.O., SC6/771/21-3, 772/1-2.

⁵ Somerset C.R.O., C/924, DD/WG and S/HY.

⁶ J. W. Gough, 'Mendip Mining Laws and Forest Bounds', *Somerset Record Soc.*, 45, 1930, p. 4.

⁷ P.R.O., E315/385, fols. 30-46v.

even at this late date still possessing certain basic characteristics found elsewhere in mining communities which may perhaps best be illustrated by a study of individual miners within the Marquis of Dorset's liberty. John Philips, jun., for instance, a not atypical miner, whose labours in the 'meers' overlooking Wells normally in the early 1540's seem to have yielded him slightly over a hundredweight of ore annually,¹ enjoyed a much more varied existence than might be supposed. He and indeed his father and brothers with him worked the mineral veins, as did his uncles who lived in Wells, but the real centre of his life lay not on the windswept moorlands but in the sheltered valley wherein lay the village of Chewton. There he was a member of one of the three main village families, the Hippersleys, the Radways, and the Philips, and in his own right he possessed a substantial holding, inherited from his mother, of 35 arable acres lying mainly in the common fields of the village together with 24 acres of several pasture on which he kept considerable flocks.² Thus John Philips, jun., emerges as a peasant farmer of some substance who, even as a young man before acquiring his mother's holding, still stood out in wealth amongst the middle ranks of village society being even then richer than some half of his fellow villagers.³ He was throughout his life a man of widely diversified interests of which one, and a very unimportant one at that, was mining. He might enjoy many privileges in his capacity as a miner but how he exercised them would be partly conditioned by the social and economic pressures to which he was subjected in the many hours of his life spent outside the mining liberty, for his activities as a miner seem in no way to have segregated him politically, economically, or socially from the rural world in which he lived.

Nor in this respect was he in any way different from his contemporaries who owed suit at the minery court or for that matter from other miners in other fields during the later Middle Ages. Indeed as one passes back through time into an age of more abundant land supplies the peasant characteristics of the miner become even more noticeable. Thomas de Waterhouse mined the Low Peak lead-fields in the opening years of the fifteenth century and is recorded as selling small quantities of ore to a group of Cromford smelters.⁴ Yet like his Mendip counterpart he was no solitary miner eking out an existence from his ore finds,

¹ Somerset C.R.O., C924, DD/WG (Waldgrave MSS.), Courts of Chewton minery 1540-7. John Philips, jun. is a typical member of the Chewton mining community of the 1540's which numbered slightly over sixty members, all of whom save two have been studied. Also, though slightly poorer from his agricultural activity and richer from mining, he resembles the members of the forty-four-strong Ubley community of the 1430's which has also been studied. For other examples, see below.

² P.R.O., E315/385, fols. 35, 35v, 37v; Somerset C.R.O., Waldgrave MSS., Courts of Manor of Chewton, 4 July 1542; 1 Sept. 1540; 9 May 1553.

³ P.R.O., E179/169/143.

⁴ P.R.O., DL30/47/546, m. 3, view of frankpledge held 10 May 1400.

in this case, on the hills dividing the small township of Wirksworth from the woodlands of the Duffield Frith, but a fully committed participant in the agricultural life of the arable villages which those hills overlooked. Almost contemporaneously with the record of his mining activity the court rolls of the neighbouring manors reveal his selling off some arable lands and buying others,¹ rounding off a holding which in 1412 comprised a compact farming unit of just over 50 arable acres in the northern part of the manor of Duffield, together with small amounts of meadow and pasture held in severalty.² These latter properties provide a further insight into his activities for he was also engaged in stockbreeding. In 1408 he acquired a lease of a several pasture called 'Farley' in Holbrook and the agistment rolls of a neighbouring park reveal him as owning a not inconsiderable head of stock.³ Overall, therefore, he seems to have been fully integrated into the farming patterns of the surrounding countryside and a similar picture emerges in relation to the varied tenurial patterns of the villages therein. His lead workings together with 15 acres and one and a half messuages were held freehold, two acres of demesne land were held leasehold, whilst by far the largest part of his land, concentrated in the fields of Shortland, Flaxholm, and "les eghes in punchardonland" was held in servile tenure. Some of this latter land was held in partnership with Nicholas Abbot, another substantial farmer of the township; much had been acquired by inheritance from his father; whilst half of the freehold had come to him by way of his marriage. Thus again his holding linked him, not only by contractual ties but by those of kin also, to the life of the village in which he lived.⁴ As to his personal status the documents are silent but socially he seems to have been a man of sufficient importance within village society to have headed the list of jurors summoned to the manorial court at the time of the remaking of the rental.⁵ From the limited amount of information that is available, therefore, Thomas de Waterhouse emerges as being very similar to his Mendip counterpart. He was somewhat richer but still a peasant farmer, living a full and varied existence in the village in which he resided. To these two examples many others could be given from amongst the tenants of Robert de Veteripont who worked

¹ P.R.O., DL30/34/333, m. 3, court held 4 January, 1410; *ibid.*, m. 5, court held 17 March 1410; DL30/34/339, m. 1, view of frankpledge held 17 April 1425; DL30/47/546, m. 6, court held 23 March 1400; DL/47/556, m. 8, court held 22 April 1410; DL30/33/317, court held 8 October 1382; *ibid.*, court held 29 October 1382 (coal mine); *ibid.*, court held 11 Dec. 1382; DL30/33/320, court held 18 January 1386; DL30/33/322, court held 23 Jan. 1388; DL30/33/325, court held 28 September 1390.

² P.R.O., DL42/3, fols. 1v, 5, 5v, 8, 9, 10, 10v, 12v, 13, 13v, 14v, 15, 17, 24v, and for the topographical location of the properties making up the holding, cf. Derbys. C.R.O., Duffield Enclosure Award 1791, and Derby Borough Library, Tithe Award, 1839.

³ P.R.O., DL30/34/332, m. 8, view of frankpledge at Holbrook held 24 October 1408; P.R.O. DL43/1/34.

⁴ See note 1 above.

⁵ P.R.O., DL42/4, fol. 1.

the deposits of Alston Moor,¹ or from the stannaries,² but perhaps one will suffice to show that de Waterhouse was in no way exceptional amongst his contemporaries. A neighbour of Thomas de Waterhouse, and a fellow suitor at the barmote hall of Wirksworth, was John Helot who, after a somewhat mis-spent youth, seems to have settled into a similar existence to his compatriot. He held a considerable arable holding of over 35 acres, in a similarly bewildering variety of tenures, in the village of Alderwasley, together with a messuage and a few acres close to the lead workings.³ He kept a few stock and seems again to have been fully integrated into the life of his village; cultivating part of his holding in partnership with a fellow miner and farmer John Nall; lending money and trading in agricultural produce probably from his holding which yielded enough grain to warrant a tithe payment in excess of a mark.⁴ These examples, therefore, all point to the myth of the 'medieval miner', a myth conjured out of the law books which required a peg upon which to hang certain privileges.

Few in the later Middle Ages would, save in matters concerning their privileges, have called themselves miners in drawing attention to their status. Thus in that unique occupational census of the later Middle Ages—the poll tax of 1379—an examination of the entries in mining districts reveals no one categorized as *miniator* or *plumbarius*.⁵ Men known to have been engaged in the industry preferred the title *cultor*, for that was what they were, farmers, to whom mining was an insignificant sideline, and this perhaps explains how the two activities, industrial and rural, were so easily married together.⁶

III

The amount of time devoted to, and output originating from, the individual miner's activity was very small. Output per man rarely exceeded one or two tons of ore annually. In 1444 at Ubley on Mendip, for instance, there were five

¹ On the miners of late fourteenth-century Alston, cf. P.R.O., Adm. 75/64 A1-4, and C.C.R., pp. 1416-22; *C. Inq. Misc.*, III, p. 222; C.C.R., pp. 1354-60.

² E.g. P.R.O., E306/2/3; SC2/156/27-8; E101/263/19 for the career of John Simon of Tewington.

³ P.R.O., DL42/4, fols. 72, 73v (Wirksworth), 62v, 63, 63v, 66v, 67, 69.

⁴ On Helot's mining activities, see P.R.O., DL30/47/551, Wapentake held 24 August 1405; on other pursuits P.R.O., DL30/525, m. 3; court held 18 December 1381; DL30/45/529, m. 4, court held 13 April 1383; *ibid.*, m. 5, 15 June 1383; DL30/46/533, m. 6, Wapentake held 28 October 1387; DL30/46/541, m. 2, court held 29 March 1395; DL30/34/326, view of frankpledge held 19 October 1391; DL30/34/328, woodmote held 21 July 1395; DL30/34/333, m. 4, court held 25 February 1412. John's brother Hugh seems also to have been engaged in the lead industry, cf. P.R.O., DL30/34/326, court held 9 November 1391.

⁵ See e.g. E179/242/10.

⁶ The one notable exception to this general pattern throughout the English and Welsh mining fields was provided by the royal silver mines—the twelfth-century 'mines of Carlisle' and thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Devon mines. In these two cases, for technico-economic reasons which will be dealt with in my forthcoming book on the lead and silver-lead industries during the later Middle Ages, a permanent workforce was brought into existence.

miners whose production varied from five to ten hundreds of lead, the product of about one to two tons of ore, and these figures were in no way atypical of other years in the century.¹ Three hundred miles away in Weardale, Co. Durham, at about the same time, in the bishop's mine at "Westersedlyng" the 'groves' were worked by Robert de Ashton, Thomas Wadmons, and William Nateras, who between them produced three to four tons of ore, again an average of *circa* one ton *per capita* per annum.² One hundred and fifty years earlier, in Wales, the situation was exactly the same. At Llanbardarn, Glamorgan, in 1301, the four workmen in the mine raised only about two tons of ore each during a year and this was said to be a "good" mine.³ Other examples could be given, but it is finally worth noting that even in the stannaries the average output per worker was less than three hundredweights of tin, the product again of about two tons of ore.⁴ This was hardly the production of a fully employed labourer but the reward of one or two months toil,⁵ seemingly normally concentrated in the period from late April to late June. At the Priddy mines of the bishops of Bath and Wells production was distributed between the quarter days in the following manner in 1457-8:⁶

29 Sept.-2 Feb.	half a ton of lead
3 Feb.-3 April	half a ton of lead
4 April-24 June	three tons of lead
25 June-28 Sept.	one and a half tons of lead

and this picture is confirmed from most of the other fields. The whole social, economic, and legal life of the mines was concentrated at this time when most of the ore was raised, save for those few loads mined, when weather permitted, during the winter 'dead' season.

The whole focus of this activity came at the 'mete', when the product of the season's work was gathered together, measured, and the seigneurial dues collected, and this was normally held at or near the end of the period of maximum activity. On Mendip this was usually the last week of June or the first week of July;⁷ in Derbyshire it was the first week in July,⁸ whilst in Flint it

¹ Somerset C.R.O., DD/S/HY7, m. 1.

² Durham University, Dept. of Palaeography, Bishopric of Durham, Mine Accounts 190013.

³ M. Rhys (ed.), *Ministers' Accounts for West Wales, 1277-1306*: pt 1, 1936, p. 391.

⁴ Based on figures in Hatcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-12.

⁵ To provide a standard of comparison it may be noted that a nineteenth-century navy could shift three or four tons of earth per day.

⁶ MSS. of the Dean and Chapter of Wells, unnumbered account roll of the manor of Wells.

⁷ Formal 'metes' were rarely held on Mendip, but the court or halmote primarily concerned with mining was usually held at Ubley in July (e.g. Somerset C.R.O., DD/S/HY7, m. 1); whilst at Priddy or Chewton it was normally the court held on the Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June). See e.g. MSS. of Dean and Chapter, unnumbered account rolls of manor of Wells; Somerset C.R.O., C924 DD/WG, court held 19 July 1535.

⁸ Belvoir Castle, MSS. of his Grace the Duke of Rutland [henceforth *Rutland MSS.*], 1017.

varied between mid-May and early August, although 'metes' held at the former date were normally supplementary to, rather than in place of, those held at the latter.¹ The 'mete' could be a very formal affair with the measurement taking place in the presence of such high estate officials as the receiver, or in the case of the Black Prince's Welsh estates, the Chamberlain, but thereafter it seems to have relaxed into a more festive occasion. The hard work over, the miners set to feasting and carousing, sometimes with ale and victuals provided, at least in part, by the lord of the field.² Thus the mining year closed on a note of festivity analogous to the post-harvesting and shearing feasts and in late July they returned to their farms.

The pattern of work of the husbandman-cum-miner may perhaps therefore be reconstructed. At some time, having acquired the 'arts' of mining from his father or someone willing to teach him, and having acquired a 'mere' either by purchase or prospecting,³ he had entered upon the life of the miner. Thereafter each year, with spring ploughing and lambing past, he would pick up his basket of tools, don his leather 'bradder',⁴ and set off each day from about the middle of April to the hills overlooking his farm to grub for ore. There he would toil in the shallow trenches which represented the workings until July or August when the call of the harvest would return him to full-time work on his farm. At the end of a season, if he was lucky, he might have accumulated a couple of tons of ore, which after the payment of tithes and 'lot and cope' might yield him a cash income of from 15s. to £2, according to the state of the market. Mining, therefore, whilst absorbing little of his working time and dovetailing easily into his agricultural activity, did provide the peasant-cum-miner with a significant cash income.

IV

This cash in his pocket, moreover, perhaps highlights yet another strand in the web which bound the miner into the general framework of rural feudal society. In his capacity as miner his relationships to the lord of the mining field were regulated either by custom or contract, the lord receiving a finite due for the miner's right to exploit the mineral veins. In fields where custom did not reign, such as those of Yorkshire or Durham, the amount of rent that the lord took was formally set out in a chirograph or indenture like that drawn up at Durham between the bishop's master forester, William de Fulthorp, and Robert de Water, whereby the latter had usufruct of the Weardale mines for

¹ P.R.O., SC6/771/21-2; 772/1-2. ² E.g. *Rutland MSS.*, 1013, 1016.

³ For the rather pathetic story of Nicholas Dyke who, wishing to enter the industry, bought a 'grove' in 1377 and then, to be initiated in the 'rights' of mining, apprenticed himself to one William Were all to no avail, see P.R.O., DL30/45/522, m. 3d, 4, 4d.

⁴ An illustration of the appearance of a fifteenth-century Derbyshire lead-miner will be foundacing p. 16 in N. Kirkham, *Derbyshire Lead Mining through the Centuries*, Truro, 1968.

twelve years on payment of four fothers of lead annually for the first half of the term, and five thereafter.¹ Elsewhere the mining rent normally took the form of a render in kind of a proportion of the total product plus a fixed monetary payment on the residual output. Both these payments, normally referred to as 'lot' and 'cope', whilst they might vary between fields, were fixed by mining custom within each field. Thus whilst he acted as a miner only the lord of the lead-field had the right to levy a rent on his production and this in strictly defined terms, but in his own person he was very much more than just a miner and in his role as a farmer he was inextricably linked into the normal tenurial structure of feudal society. Nor does it seem likely that the two aspects of his character were ever completely separated. Certainly his feudal superior in his capacity *qua* farmer had no legal claims upon the ore that he raised *qua* miner but it seems unlikely that the cash he received from the ore's sale did not attract the former's covetous eye. His relationship with his master was both personal and tenurial, yet the franchises the peasant-cum-miner enjoyed in his latter capacity excluded direct interference in that aspect of his life. Any assault, therefore, upon the wealth he acquired in extractive work was most likely to have come through the tenurial link and this immediately focuses attention upon the correlation found between arable rent changes in mining districts and ore production therein.² This has been interpreted as being caused by the effects of the changing demands of a mining community of fluctuating size in stimulating commercialized arable production in the vicinity of the mines.³ Yet in the context of the nature of mining activity outlined above such an explanation seems unlikely and where information may be gleaned about the volume of commercial activity in mining districts it shows that such a cash nexus does not exist. This may be illustrated in the case of one of the major mining districts of the lead industry, the Low Peak district of Derbyshire, during the opening years of the fifteenth century.⁴

Ore production in this area was concentrated at this time within the vicinity

¹ Durham Cursitor's Roll No. 31, m. 12d., quoted in A. Raistrick and B. Jennings, *A History of Lead Mining in the Pennines*, 1965, p. 53.

² Such correlations will be found in many mining districts, the High and Low Peaks of Derbyshire (P.R.O., DL29, bundles 22-4, 183-9, 197, 402-8, 728-33); Flint (P.R.O., SC6, bundles 771-5); Mendip (Somerset C.R.O., Court rolls and accounts of Ubley, MSS.DD/S/HY) and the Stannaries (Hatcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 214 ff.)

³ Hatcher, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁴ A correlation may be established between production (variable *a*) and arable rentals (*b*) over very much longer periods than used here, and in many other fields yet the mere establishment of a correlation between *a* and *b* may imply no causation but a common link to a third variable *c* (in this case population change in the area concerned, by migration or natural increase). Thus as population grows there may be more miners and higher production. Also there may be more farmers demanding land and higher rents, no link thereby existing between the two. The period 1416-50 has therefore been chosen when some control may be independently established over each of the variables.

of the township of Wirksworth¹ where, following the recovery in agriculture and mining after the plague, both plummeted downward from *circa* 1400 as on many other manors in the area.² However, whereas after 1410 on other manors there was a stabilization and then continued fall in arable rentals, the course of development was quite different at Wirksworth.³ From 1409-10 there was a slight recovery, followed by a catastrophic fall in rents during the first half of the 1410's *but* then, instead of continuing to fall, from *circa* 1417 the rental of the arable lands within the manor was augmented to a much higher level than in 1410, continuing at a slightly lower plateau until the mid-'thirties, and thereafter stabilizing until mid-century. Moreover, these changes in arable rentals follow very closely similar fluctuations in lead ore production, thereby further illustrating the correlation which may be observed in the Stannaries of Cornwall, or the lead-mining districts of Somerset or Flint.⁴ How is this to be explained? Certainly the answer does not seem to lie in the migration of people into the manor in response to profitable opportunities for the production of lead, thereby acquiring land and thus extending the acreage of rentable land under tillage.⁵ A disaggregation of the manorial arable rental shows that the amount of land in use continued to fall steadily down to the 1430's recovering somewhat thereafter and then continuing its fall, as on other manors in the area.⁶ Nor does the change in rental seem to have been stimulated by market forces for if an alienated body of miners, living within the manor but not owning land, were stimulating the commercial production of grain by their purchases and causing rents to rise *à la Ricardo*, then this grain does not seem to have passed through normal commercial channels. Wirksworth was well endowed with commercial institutions, possessing a weekly market and an annual fair since 1307 at which a toll was levied on grain, eggs, cheese, and other victuals,⁷ yet during the period under review the toll steadily dwindled in size,⁸ suggestive at least of dwindling commercial activity within the manor. What seems, therefore, to have been happening is that, as elsewhere, from 1400 to 1440 the population of the manor seems to have declined and arable land fell out of use, but that from 1417 to 1432 the inhabitants paid on average a higher rent per acre for their holdings. At the same time, from 1417 to 1432, there was

¹ See FIG. I. In the fourteenth and subsequently in the sixteenth century mining within Wirksworth Wapentake, which engrossed most of the Low Peak, also occurred within the lordship of Hartington but in the fifteenth century mining within this part of the area was extinct.

² See my *Economic Change in Derbyshire during the later Middle Ages*, unpublished London Ph.D. thesis, 1967.

³ See FIG. I. As a not untypical example of other manors in the Low Peak, Brassington has been used, for comparison with Wirksworth.

⁴ See FIG. IV and for other correlations references in n. 2, p. 101.

⁵ There were certainly reserves of vacant land available in the manor to allow such a process to take place.

⁶ See FIG. II.

⁷ R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, 1953 pp. 1, 20, note 3.

⁸ See FIG. III.

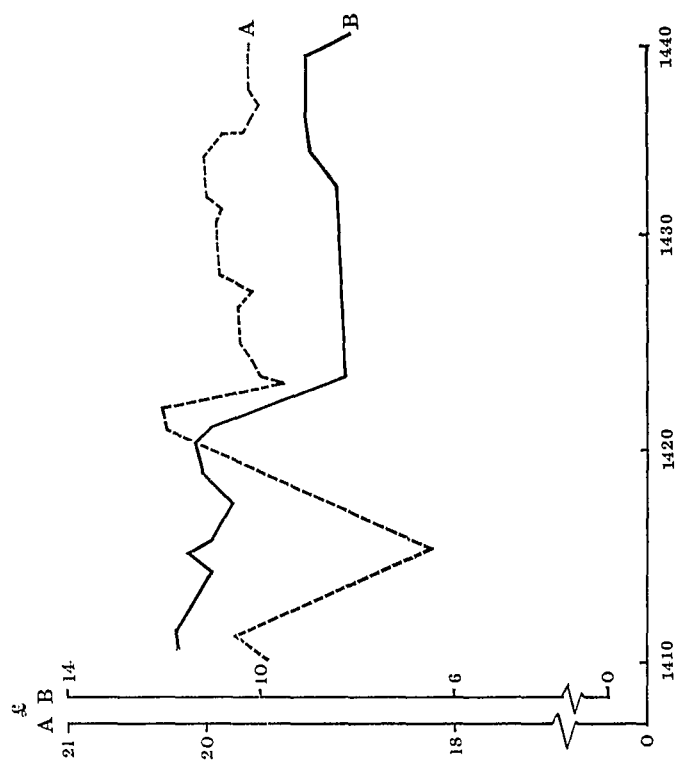


FIG. I.
ARABLE RENTALS
A. Wirksworth B. Brassington

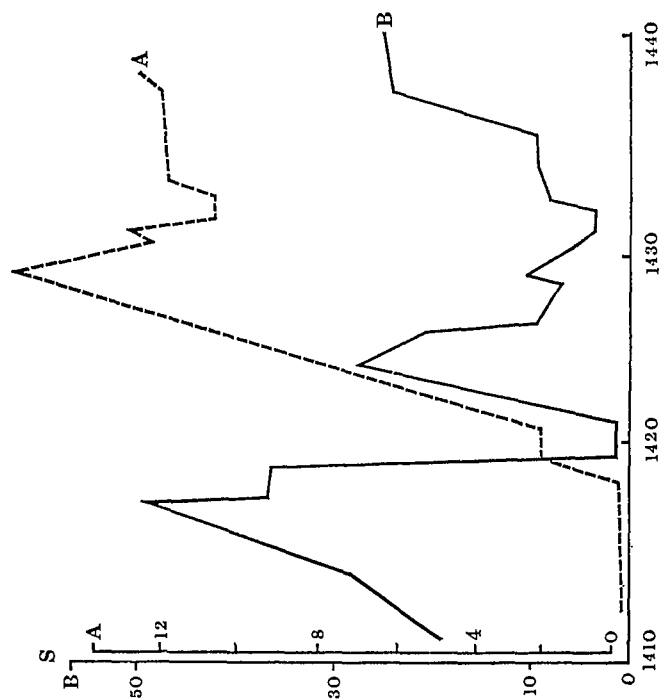


FIG. II.
WIRKSWORTH
Arable Rent Abatements from 1412-16 'charge'
A. Value of unutilized land B. Rent rebated

a marked upswing in the price of lead, which stimulated those engaged in the industry to produce an extra hundredweight or so of ore each¹ (a not inconceivable task in the framework of mining activity outlined above). Thereby the peasant-cum-miner living within the manor enjoyed an increased income both from higher prices for his ore and from increased output. Again, correlation cannot positively establish causation, but it seems possible that the increased *per capita* rent burden borne by tenants may represent an unofficial lordly 'tax' being levied on their increased wealth derived from mining, the income remaining in the hands of the individual peasant-miner after this exaction presumably being saved or spent on a variety of objects of a 'luxury' character.² Thus again the peasant-miner emerges as linked inextricably into the rural environment of which he formed part.

V

The picture of the medieval miner that has thus emerged fully confirms Maitland's belief that in the study of medieval society one is not discovering the simple from out of a subsequently imposed welter of subtleties and technicalities, rather that "simplicity is the outcome of technical subtlety, it is the goal not the starting point. As we go backwards the familiar outlines become blurred, the ideas become fluid and instead of the simple we find the indefinite."³ A marked degree of occupational specialization should not be expected in the Middle Ages. It is the product of a society where international trade and a high level of agricultural productivity have allowed many men to stand aside from the need of directly providing their own food. In an age when a man could expect little more than seven bushels of small grain from each of his arable acres, few could be spared from the toil of tillage to spend their entire working life in government, prayer, or manufactory. Thus when a burgess of a small rural township, like Henry Stringer, described himself in a court case as yeoman, baker, and tanner, this was not merely to conform to the Statute of Additions for he was all these things, as well as being a substantial property owner.⁴ Nor was such variety confined to manufactory; the justice who could in spring be seen behind the plough, or the village priest who tilled his glebe and sometimes lent money usuriously on the side were probably not uncommon sights in fifteenth and early sixteenth-century England.⁵ Mining was but

¹ For price movements, see Beveridge Price History MSS. at the London School of Economics, boxes P7, F1, F7, D3, and for the production, FIG. III.

² I.e. other than basic food grains which would be provided by his holding. Such purchases would therefore not affect the toll.

³ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, 1960 edn, p. 31.

⁴ P.R.O., CP40/1051 fol. 229; CP40/1045 fol. 324; C1/286/1.

⁵ F. R. H. DuBoulay, *An Age of Ambition*, 1970, p. 55; G. G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village*, Cambridge, 1925, p. 284.

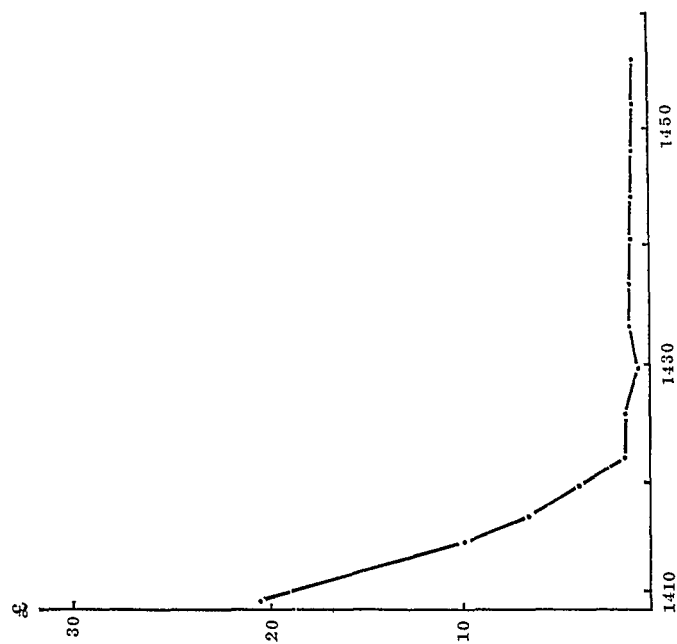


FIG. III.
WIRKSWORTH
Toll of market and fair

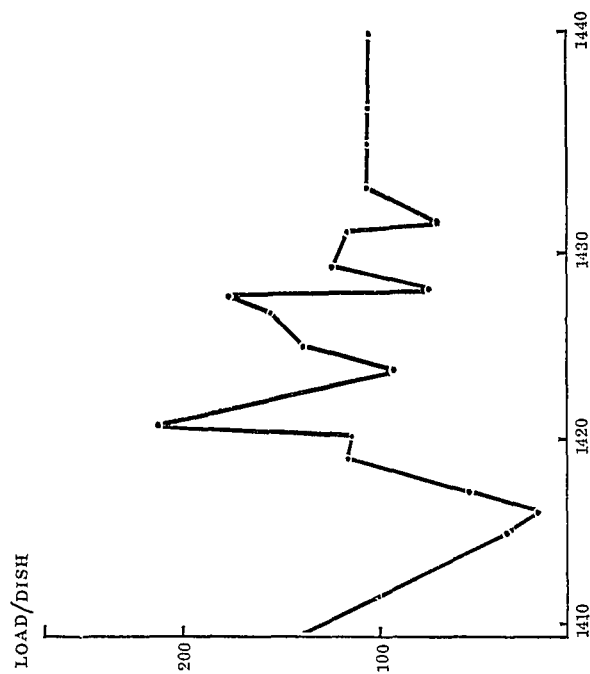


FIG. IV.
WIRKSWORTH WAPENTAKE
Lead production

one activity in which the peasant engaged. Many others, clothmaking, tanning, and a wide variety of other activities await investigation, which when examined will add yet other fragments to the slowly emerging picture of the late medieval English countryman as a political, social, and economic being which will replace the current legal stereotype.¹

¹ I am grateful to the Carnegie Trust for its financial support of my research on the British Lead Industry in the Later Middle Ages, a larger inquiry from which the evidence in this article has been drawn.

Notes and Comments

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

SPRING 1973

The annual conference will be held from Monday, 9 April to Wednesday, 11 April 1973 in the north midlands, and will concentrate on the history of agriculture and the landscape in the Derbyshire dales. There will also be an excursion in the vicinity, as well as some more general papers. Full details and application forms will be distributed in the next issue.

THE 1972 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference was held at Wye College, near Ashford, Kent, from Monday, 10 April to Wednesday, 12 April 1972. It was heartening that the recent trend towards larger conferences was confirmed and fifty-five members attended. Possibly the decision to expand the programme to include six papers was a factor in the larger attendance. Unfortunately Professor E. Leroy Ladurie was prevented by illness from delivering his paper on Inheritance Customs in France, and Professor G. E. Mingay came to the rescue at short notice with a paper rehabilitating the reputation of Arthur Young as a practical farmer and successful innovator. This was followed by Miss Norah Carlin (Christ Church, Canterbury: the income and policies of a rentier landlord in the Middle Ages); Professor A. M. Everitt (Kentish farming families in the nineteenth century); Misses Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby (The hay harvest in the Yorkshire dales); Mr Dennis Baker (Early Georgian enterprise: the Canter-

bury hop grounds and gentlemen planters); and Miss Margaret Tyler (Land holding in east Kent in the mid-nineteenth century).

On the afternoon of 11 April Professor Everitt led an excursion to visit early Kentish settlements along the Greenway to the south of the Downs, including Eastwell Park, Charing, and Lenham. Also included was Wye College's agricultural museum located in a fine fourteenth-century aisled barn at Brook.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's twentieth AGM was held at Wye College, near Ashford, Kent, on 11 April 1972, with Mr George Ordish in the Chair. Professor W. G. Hoskins, Mr C. A. Jewell, and Mr M. A. Havinden were re-elected President, Treasurer, and Secretary respectively. The meeting heard with regret that Dr Joan Thirsk had resigned the editorship of the REVIEW owing to the pressure of other work, and welcomed Professor G. E. Mingay as her successor. A vote of thanks to Dr Thirsk was passed expressing the Society's gratitude for all the hard work she had put into sustaining the high standard of the REVIEW during the past ten years.

A fourth vacancy occurred on the Executive Committee as a result of Professor Mingay becoming an ex-officio member and the places were filled by the re-election of Dr W. H. Chaloner and Professor F. M. L. Thompson, and the election of Dr Joan Thirsk and Dr D. G. Hey.

(Continued on page 125)