

Harvest Customs and Labourers' Perquisites in Southern England, 1150-1350: the Hay Harvest

By ANDREW JONES

IN an article which appeared in the last issue of the *REVIEW*, I drew attention to some of the customs of the corn harvest in southern England, and tried to show that, odd as some of the customs may appear to us now, some, if not many, were put into practice. In this article I shall take the examination of harvest customs a step further by drawing together material relating to customs during the hay harvest.¹ As with the customs and perquisites of the corn harvest, the main sources are the customals of large ecclesiastical estates, and the discussion is confined to those people whose conditions of tenure involved work on the demesne. We shall discuss the similarities between the perquisites of the hay and corn harvests, examine the "sporting chance" as applied to the sheep given to the haymakers, and, finally, draw together some conclusions about the body of harvest customs as a whole.²

I

The bundles of grass and hay which manorial tenants took home from the demesne meadows during the hay harvest have attracted more attention than sheaves in autumn. Coulton,³ who drew attention to the sources containing a conditional clause, called the circumstances surrounding the perquisite the "sporting chance." The tenant claimed his bundle when he lifted it clear of the ground without breaking the scythe-handle which he used as a lever. However, in southern England this custom was no more common than the provision of sheaves in autumn (which showed no signs of the "sporting chance"); and examples of the "sporting

chance" may be balanced by those which do not mention the tests of nerve and strength. While we cannot argue from silence, or particularly from a few short entries in the sources, it would be wrong to read into all hay-harvest customs one meaning, especially when other tasks were usually rewarded according to the amount of time and work involved.

In fact, there were many similarities between the perquisites of grass and hay and the sheaves of corn. The tenant claimed his bundle at the end of the day's labour, which was perhaps half an acre's mowing, or a certain number of swathes.⁴ The perquisite was given for the range of tasks on the demesne: mowing, spreading, turning, tedding, and carting. The reeve, bailiff, or hayward were on hand to supervise the customary tenants. Special provision might be made for manorial servants in recognition of their service rather than for any one harvest task. Like sheaves, bundles were measured in a number of ways, though there was a basic pattern. The scythe was usually used as a lever. Beyond this, a distinction was made between those who mowed and those who then made the hay. The former received larger perquisites than the latter. Mowing was commonly the responsibility of the main group of tenants, with the smallholders assisting in the haymaking. However, one man might equally well mow and make hay, and so qualify for different perquisites.

II

The custom whereby the mower was rewarded with a bundle of grass which he lifted on the

¹ A. Jones, 'Harvest Customs and Labourers' Perquisites in Southern England, 1150-1350: the corn harvest', *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xxv, 1, 1977, pp. 14-22.

² I have also added a short appendix on the use of the handful as an agricultural measure.

³ C. G. Coulton, *The Medieval Village*, Cambridge, 1925, pp. 46-7.

⁴ Mowing a certain number of swathes was recorded at Moreton (Berks., 1334), Whichford (Warwicks., 1279), and Stoke-under-Hamdon (Som., 1251, 1287): P.R.O., SC 11/83; P.R.O., E 164(i)/15, fol. 108r; H. C. Maxwell-Lyte, ed., *Two Registers formerly belonging to the family of Beauchamp of Hatch*, Som. Rec. Soc., xxxv, 1920, pp. 3-4, 16 (hereafter cited as *Two Registers*).

haft of his scythe can be found on many manors in many different parts of the country.⁵ In the West Country the bundle was called the *haveroc* or *averoc*.⁶ As the handle, or *sned*, was relatively long, lifting a bundle of grass may have been awkward.⁷ The customal of Wrantage (Som., c. 1314), a manor of Wells Cathedral, appears to have made allowances for this. Here, a mower's perquisite was as much grass as he could lift on his scythe so that the wind could blow between the bundle and the ground. Presumably the resulting gap was as small as possible.⁸ Elsewhere there were other, possibly more complicated procedures. At Borley (Essex, 1308) and at Speen (Berks., 1340), for example, the bundle was raised on the point of the scythe. At Amberley and Ferring, manors of the bishop of Chichester, the bundle had to be raised on to the shoulder; at Knowle (Dorset, 1317) it had to be raised above the shoulder; while at Shilton (Berks.) the mower could take as much grass as he could lift on to his back with his scythe, provided the handle did not break.⁹ The bundle of grass was usually bound round once,¹⁰

⁵ To the well-known examples in the Ramsey Cartulary (W. H. Hart and P. A. Lyons, eds., *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, Rolls Ser., 1884-93, I, pp. 289, 301, 324, 336, 399, 462, and II, p. 39 (hereafter cited as *C.M.R.*)), may be added an equally good series in the Glastonbury Abbey surveys of 1235-52: C. J. Elton, ed., *Rentalia et Custumaria . . . monasterii beate Marie Glastonie*, Som. Rec. Soc., V, 1891, pp. 9, 12, 53, 59, 61, 65, 85, 98, 150, 160 (hereafter cited as *Rentalia*).

⁶ In addition to the Glastonbury examples in n. 5, the *haveroc* is mentioned in the customals of the manors of Wells Cathedral (*Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells*, H.M.C., 1907-14, I, pp. 337, 342, 347 (hereafter cited as *Wells*)), and at East Coker (Som., 1321): M. Nathan, *The Annals of West Coker*, ed. M. M. Postan, Cambridge, 1957, p. 470. The etymology of *haveroc* is obscure. *Rentalia*, p. 246, suggests a derivation "over-hook," but I have found no confirmation for this.

⁷ There is an illustration of a scythe and *sned*, about a man's height, in the Queen Mary Psalter: B.M.: Royal MS. 2. B. VII, fol. 76v.

⁸ Somerset R.O.: DD/CC/1319112/4/10, m. 1.

⁹ W. Cunningham, *The growth of English Industry and Commerce in the Early and Middle Ages*, 4th edn, 1905, p. 579 (Borley); P.R.O.: SC 11/67, m. 2 (Speen); W. D. Peckham, ed., *Thirteen Customals of the Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester*, Sussex Rec. Soc., XXXI, 1925, pp. 42, 72 (Amberley, Ferring); B.M.: Add. MS. 40886, fol. 16v (Knowle); Bodleian Library, MS. Barlow 49, fol. 66v (Shilton, a manor of Beaulieu Abbey).

¹⁰ E.g., *Two Registers*, pp. 3-4, 38-9; *Wells*, I, p. 342; *Rentalia*, p. 214; L. B. Larking, ed., *The Domesday Book of Kent*, 1869, appendix, p. 33.

sometimes twice,¹¹ and supervision by one of the manorial officers was meant, no doubt, to ensure fair play.¹² Some customals defined the mower's perquisite rather differently. At High Ham (Som.) the virgater took an *averoc* as large as he could hold in his arms and lift on to his back.¹³ At Wishford (Wilts., 1315) the mower could take away as much grass as he could grasp under one arm; while at Welton (Som., 1287) he took for the whole of his labour in the demesne meadows "three little trusses of grass such as he is able to lift with two hands without touching his body."¹⁴

For the most part the perquisites which did not involve the scythe fell to the haymakers for tasks which followed mowing. Many customals suggest that the bundles of hay given to the haymakers were smaller than those given to the mowers, and the fourteenth-century customal of Kingston Deverill (Wilts.) contains specific confirmation of this: "the mower ought to have two bundles and the tedders one, and two of the tedders' bundles are not to exceed the weight of one of the mowers'."¹⁵ This distinction was also observed on the estates of Glastonbury Abbey. At Sturminster Newton (Dorset), for example, the mower's *haveroc* was defined in the usual way, while the teddor's was called a *medkniche* ("knitch" = bundle), which was as much hay as the hayward could lift with his middle finger to his knee. The same double standard was used at East Pennard (Som.) and Marnhull (Dorset).¹⁶ At West Hatch (Som.) the *haveroc* for turning and lifting the hay was as much as the bailiff could lift with two fingers and one knee so that the wind could blow underneath; while at Alton Priors (Wilts.) each cottar received an unbound

¹¹ As at Longstock (Hants., 1340), a manor of Mottisfont Priory: Hants. R.O.: 13M63/3, fol. 28v.

¹² E.g., M. Chibnall, ed., *Select documents of the English lands of the Abbey of Bec*, Camden Soc., 3rd ser., LXI 1951, p. 54.

¹³ *Rentalia*, p. 160.

¹⁴ C. R. Straton, ed., *Survey of the lands of William first Earl of Pembroke*, Roxburghe Club, 1909, II, p. 548; *Two Registers*, p. 47.

¹⁵ "Et falcatores debent habere duos fasciculos et tedditores debent habere unum fasciculum ita ut duo fasciculi tedditorum non excedant pondus unius fasciculi quem habent falcatores": Wilts. R.O.: 492/30.

¹⁶ *Rentalia*, pp. 85, 98, 125.

armful of hay for tedding.¹⁷ Carting was rewarded with as much hay as a man could take in both arms; with a truss which the reeve could lift to his knees with two fingers; or with a truss as large as one man could lift with the aid of a companion.¹⁸ This last was an unusual custom for most perquisites had to be lifted unaided.¹⁹

The fork and rake, the tools used in haymaking, were sometimes used as levers in the same way that the mower used his scythe when lifting his perquisite. The implements served to emphasise the difference between the tasks and their rewards. At Bladon (Oxon.), for example, the mowers received their perquisite lifted on the scythe, whereas the cottars who teded the hay took as much as each could raise on a hay-rake (*rastella*).²⁰ The use of the scythe on the one hand, and the rake and fork on the other, can be traced in places as far apart as Suffolk and Somerset.²¹

III

As mowing and haymaking were very much group activities involving most, if not all, of the customary tenants, it was the custom on

some manors to reward the body of tenants as a whole. There were two ways in which this was done. On some manors the haymakers were given a haystack to divide between themselves; on others, they were allocated a small piece of meadow in common. Thus, at Halliford (Middx., 1214) the tenants received as an "ancient custom" one haystack (*mullonis*); and the customary gifts to the mowers at Bishops Cleeve (Worcs., 1299) and at Ham (near Hungerford, Wilts.) also included a haystack.²² Entries about gifts of haystacks and pieces of meadow occur in the thirteenth-century customal of Taunton, a multiple-manor of the bishop of Winchester. The tenants of Staple-grove shared a stack, while at Holway the main group of tenants responsible for mowing the demesne meadows received two stacks and an acre of meadow.²³ The gift to the mowers and haymakers in general, or to the mowers in particular, of a special piece of meadow was a common one, found, in addition to the Taunton example, in Warwickshire, the Fens, Essex, Dorset, Sussex, and Hampshire.²⁴

The customals of Eye Priory (Suffolk) provide us with a rare insight into the commutation of the customary perquisite. The mowers had been accustomed to receive the bundle of grass raised on the scythe, and those at Bedfield had received, in addition, a truss of hay on which they sat to eat their lunch—which conjures up a pleasant picture.²⁵ By the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the old arrangements were passing away, for the register of the priory records that the *customarii* at

¹⁷ Wells, I, p. 342 (cf. the mower's perquisite at Wantage, above, n. 8); K. A. Hanna, ed., 'An edition with introduction of the Winchester Cathedral Customal', M.A. thesis, Univ. of London, II, p. 493 (hereafter cited as *W.C.C.*). I am grateful to Mrs Hanna for permission to use her thesis. The custom which used the finger to lift a truss was not confined solely to the West Country; at Glemsford (Suffolk, 1251) threshing was rewarded with "as much straw as they can lift with the little finger": B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 259r.

¹⁸ W. Illingworth, ed., *Rotuli Hundredorum*, Record Comm., 1812-18, II, p. 774 (Mongewell, Oxon.) (hereafter cited as *R.H.*); *Two Registers*, pp. 36, 48 (Welton, Dundon Som.).

¹⁹ At Stogursey (Som., 1301) the mower received as much grass as he could raise with one companion, while the perquisite for tedding was raised unaided: P.R.O.: E 142/8, m. 7. Some customals contain instructions that the perquisite was to be raised unaided, e.g. at Siston (Glos., 1301), Stoke-under Hamdon (Som., 1251), East Coker (Som., 1321), and Piddington (Oxon., c. 1363): P.R.O.: E 142/8, m. 1; *Two registers*, pp. 3-4; Nathan, *op. cit.*, p. 470; S. R. Wigram, ed., *The Cartulary of the Monastery of St Frideswide at Oxford*, II, Oxford Hist. Soc., xxxi, 1896, p. 113.

²⁰ *R.H.*, II, p. 851.

²¹ B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 271v (Rattlesden, Suffolk); *Two registers*, pp. 35, 40 (Dundon, Som.); Wells, I, p. 347 (Biddisham, Som.).

²² *Curia Regis Rolls*, VII, p. 246; M. Hollings, ed., *The Red Book of Worcester*, Worcs. Hist. Soc., 1934-50, IV, p. 344; *W.C.C.*, I, p. 342.

²³ T. J. Hunt, ed., *The medieval customs of the manors of Taunton and Bradford-on-Tone*, Som. Rec. Soc., LXVI, 1962, pp. 4, 23.

²⁴ P.R.O.: E 164(i)/15, fol. 95v (Tysoe, Warwicks., 1279); *R.H.*, II, pp. 461, 677 (Stanton, Cambs., and Fen Stanton, Hunts., 1279); B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 168r-v (Rettendon, Essex, 1251); P.R.O.: C 133/51/9, m. 3 (Upway, Dorset, c. 1288); M. Clough, ed., *Two estate surveys of the Fitzalan earls of Arundel*, Sussex Rec. Soc., LXVII, 1969, p. 8 (North Stoke, Sussex); P.R.O.: DL 43/8/23, m. 2 (Longstock, Hants., 1334).

²⁵ "Percipiet cum sociis suis j fessiculam herbe super quam sedebunt prandere": B.M.: Egerton MS. 3140, fol. 35r.

Eye, Stoke, and Bedfield had exchanged the perquisites they received daily when mowing—a bundle of grass for each man and 4d in common—for a lump sum of 7½d.²⁶ On the estates of Glastonbury Abbey, commutation of the customary perquisite had set in by the early fourteenth century. At Street (Som.), in 1323, the reeve accounted for 208 “*auerocis herbe emptis de custumariis*”, each valued at a farthing. At Baltonsborough (Som.), 182 *averocs* were accounted for in the same way. Commutation took a different form at High Ham (Som.), where the customary tenants received an allowance in their works in place of their perquisites.²⁷ Although the information recorded on account rolls is bound to be very limited, commutation was probably widespread by about 1350, if not long before.²⁸

IV

The hay harvest, like the corn harvest, was an occasion when manorial servants received rewards. These were granted in recognition of work put in throughout the year, and were attached to the office rather than to any one task. The perquisites in question are chiefly interesting for the ways in which they were measured. One allowance which the reeve or beadle received on a number of manors was defined in the custumal of Kings Ripton (Hunts.) as “the foot of a hayrick to the depth which he can penetrate with a stab of an iron fork.”²⁹ This was probably identical to the *stathel* which the reeve was allowed at Welton (Som.): this was a portion taken from a stack, as much as one man could lift to his knee.³⁰ The

stathel which the shepherd at Benham (Berks.) took was a load from the best stack, standing as high as a cart axle.³¹

In eastern England, on the manors of the bishop of Ely, the beadle was commonly rewarded with some oddments of grass and hay at the end of the harvest. These were called the *recstapeles*, and were defined as “as much as remained behind in the meadows after the hay had been collected up.”³² The same custom can be traced elsewhere. At Brightwell (Berks.) the hayward could lay claim to the remains of the haystacks in the meadows, the remains of the stooks of corn, and the remains of the stooks of stubble left in the fields.³³ The reeve at Bedfield (Suffolk) received the rakings of grass and the remains of the haystacks.³⁴ Occasionally the manorial servant was given a larger perquisite. The reeves of the tithings of Taunton, for example, were given a hayrick each as a part of their perquisites and privileges; at Sonning (Berks.) the hayward and swineherd each received a rick in the meadow; while further west, at Winterborne Monkton (Wilts.), the reeve was entitled to two cartloads of hay from a certain meadow, each load as much as one horse could pull.³⁵

V

At the end of the hay harvest it was customary for the lord of the manor to present the hay

²⁶ *Ibid.*, fols. 21v–22r, 32r, 51r.

²⁷ Longleat House, MS. 10632, mm. 1d, 2d, 6d (“et custumarii habuerunt allocanciam in operibus eorum pro *auerocis suis hoc anno*”).

²⁸ At Minchinhampton (Glos.) by 1330 an allowance of 2s. was being made “pro herbagio de consuetudine falcatorem”: P.R.O.: SC 6/856/20.

²⁹ *C.M.R.*, I, p. 399. Similar amounts were provided for the beadle at Laughton and Willingdon (Sussex): A. E. Wilson, ed., *Custumals of the manors of Laughton, Willingdon, and Goring*, Sussex Rec. Soc., LX, 1961, pp. 20, 27.

³⁰ *Two registers*, p. 52; *stathel*=the bottom of a stack (*English Dialect Dictionary*).

³¹ “*Melioris mullonis feni in communi prato domini continentem altitudinem usque ad exam carecte*”: P.R.O.: SC 11/46, m. 2; at Sidling (Dorset, 1321) the *custos prati* was allowed to take a bundle of hay 7 feet long, 2 feet wide, and as high as his knees: B.M.: Add. MS. 40886, fol. 24r; at Buckland (Som.) the reeve took a stall of hay as high as a man’s loins: *Rentalia*, p. 106; while at Great Compton (Warwicks., 1279) the hayward’s *stathel* was undefined: P.R.O.: E 164(i)/15, fol. 115v.

³² B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fols. 130r, 138v, 141v, 249v, 254r, 261v, 267v, 274v, 283r, 299r. The word may be a form of “rickstaddle” (*Eng. Dial. Dict.*).

³³ B.M.: Egerton MS. 2418, fol. 38v.

³⁴ B.M.: Egerton MS. 3140, fol. 38r.

³⁵ Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12, 15, 19, 23. It was, of course, quite common for the reeve to be granted small parcels of meadow as a part of his perquisites: H. S. Bennett, *Life on the English manor*, Cambridge, 1937, p. 176; Bodleian Library, MS. Univ. Coll. 166, fol. 3v (Sonning); *Rentalia*, p. 64.

makers with food and drink for a celebration.³⁶ The food took the form of bread, cheese, salt, and, more munificently, a sheep for roasting. On some manors the haymakers were also given fuel to cook their food.³⁷ The provision of a sheep from the manorial fold was widespread throughout southern England, and can be traced in some of the earliest sources (twelfth-century surveys), and in the earliest surviving manorial account rolls. The feast was often called the *madschep* (with many variations in spelling) after its main feature.³⁸ The occurrence of this name in manorial records is a reminder of the remarkable uniformity of the main body of manorial custom; and it raises interesting questions about the origins of rural customs, and the disseminating and regularizing forces behind them.

The *madschep* has been compared with the other customary perquisite of the hay harvest, for both involved the "sporting chance."³⁹ If the tenants failed to catch the sheep let loose in the meadow, they lost their claim to it just as they lost their bundle of grass if the handle of the scythe broke. This comparison requires closer examination than it has had hitherto, if only because of the reeve's accountability for the manorial stock. The gift of a sheep from the

lord's fold should have been, and often was, accounted for in the stock section of the manorial account. In the same way the reeve should have accounted for any grain, cheese, or cash presented to the tenants.

The sort of customal entry which led to the idea of the "sporting chance" is exemplified by the customal of Barton (Beds., c. 1255), a manor of Ramsey Abbey. On the day when the virgaters mowed the lord's meadow they received a sheep (or 6d. in its place): the sheep was placed in the meadow with the tenants looking on; if they caught it they kept it, if not, they had to wait until the next year for better luck.⁴⁰ On the basis of this example and others the "sporting chance" developed. Two things should be noted: firstly, the Barton tenants may have received a cash allowance in place of the sheep; indeed, by 1319, the perquisite had definitely been commuted for a fixed cash render;⁴¹ and secondly, the clause which stated that the tenants lost the sheep if they failed to catch it occurs only occasionally in other customals.⁴² In fact many customals recorded the gift as a definite reward for mowing and hay-making, and the impression left by the majority of customals is strengthened by the testimony of account rolls in which gifts to mowers can be traced over a number of years.⁴³ A further blow to the supposed ubiquity of the "sporting chance" is provided by the other customals in the Ramsey Cartulary. The Barton entry is the only one of its kind, and, as has been seen, was itself commutable. When the other customals are taken into account it becomes clear that the Barton example was an isolated survival. On the estate as a whole the gift to the haymakers had hardened into a yearly cash payment. The details for eleven Ramsey manors are set out in Table 1. Only at Girton was the association of a sheep with the feast kept alive,

³⁶ A similar feast was often provided at the end of the corn harvest. It was called *le ripgos* (with variations in spelling). Examples can be found in many parts of the country, e.g. the east Midlands and the Fenland counties, the south Midlands, and southern England: N. Neilson, *Economic conditions on the manors of Ramsey Abbey*, Philadelphia, 1899, appendix, pp. 8, 15, 29; F. M. Page, ed., *Wellingborough Manorial Accounts*, Northants. Rec. Soc., VIII, 1936, pp. 8, 17, 20, 25, 34-5; F. M. Page, *The estates of Crowland Abbey*, Cambridge, 1934, pp. 229, 258; P. D. A. Harvey, *A medieval Oxfordshire village*, Oxford, 1965, p. 89; Chibnall, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 168.

³⁷ B.M.: Harley MS. 3977, fol. 53v (Groton, Suffolk, a manor of Bury St Edmunds); B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 258v (Glemsford, Suffolk).

³⁸ The etymology may well be "meed-sheep", "meed" meaning a recompense or reward (O.E.D.); it might possibly be "math-sheep", "math" meaning mowing (*ibid.*); at Lechlade (Glos.) the *customarii* received 6s. 6d. *pro mathram*: P.R.O.: C 145/103/17, m. 2d; at Islip (Oxon.) the custom was called *mathshup*: B. F. Harvey, ed., *Customal and bye-laws of the manor of Islip*, Oxfordshire Rec. Soc., 1959, pp. 84-5.

³⁹ Bennett, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-12; G. C. Homans, *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., 1941, pp. 269-71.

⁴⁰ C.M.R., I, p. 476.

⁴¹ "In solucione falcatorum prat' . . . ex consuetudine vjd": P.R.O.: SC 6/740/1.

⁴² The other known examples are Atherstone (Warwicks.), South Newton (Wilts.), and Glemsford (Suffolk): Chibnall, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Straton, *op. cit.*, II, p. 539; B.M.: Cotton Tiberius B. II, fols. 198v-99r (1222) and Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 258v (1251).

⁴³ See below, p. 104.

TABLE I
GIFTS TO HAYMAKERS ON SOME MANORS OF THE ABBEY OF RAMSEY

Manor	Date	Gift
Abbots Ripton, Hunts.	1252	12d. <i>ex consuetudine</i>
Barnwell, Northants.	c. 1275	12d. <i>ad potandam cervisiam</i>
Barton, Beds.	c. 1255	6d. <i>pro multone</i> , or a sheep
Brington, Hunts.	c. 1230	6d. <i>ex consuetudine</i>
Broughton, Hunts.	1525	18d. <i>ex consuetudine</i>
Girton, Cambs.	1239	16½d. <i>que vocantur wetherhale</i>
Kings Ripton, Hunts.	c. 1250	8d. <i>ad sythale</i> ⁴⁴
Shillington, Beds.	1255	12d. <i>de consuetudine</i>
Stukeley, Hunts.	c. 1250	12d. <i>ad sythale</i>
Warboys, Hunts.	1251	6d. <i>pro sythalis</i>
Weston, Hunts.	c. 1230	6d. <i>ex consuetudine</i>

Source: C.M.R., I-II

and then only in the name of the customary payment.⁴⁵ There is nothing in the other customals, save Barton's, to suggest that a sheep was presented to the tenants. The Ramsey Cartulary may be compared with the two thirteenth-century surveys of the manors of the bishop of Ely. The latter, like the former, contain only one example of the "sporting chance" (at Glemsford, Suffolk). Other entries show that the gift to the tenants was either a sheep or a sum of money; in the case of the former, the gift was not conditional upon the capture of the animal (with the one exception).⁴⁶ And this was so on many other estates where the customals recorded the gift of a sheep without the qualification of the "sporting chance."⁴⁷

VI

Within the general pattern of practice there was quite a lot of variation. Care was often taken to

specify the quality and quantity of the perquisite. On several manors the tenants chose the sheep themselves, provided their choice met the lord's requirements. At Badbury (Wilts.), for example, the virgaters received a ewe from the fold chosen by sight alone and not by touch.⁴⁸ Elsewhere the tenants were allowed the second-best sheep in the fold,⁴⁹ while at Kirby and Horlock (Essex) the *hidarii* took two of the best sheep save four, presumably the fifth and sixth best sheep in the fold.⁵⁰ At Wickham St Pauls (Essex) the tenants were given a "good" sheep (*multo bonus*), while on some manors they took the best (*melior*).⁵¹ Occasionally we come across manors where the tenants took two, even three sheep. Perhaps in these cases the amount of meadow was much greater than usual, the lord's generosity reflecting the work involved. On some manors, however, the perquisite was

⁴⁸ *Rentalia*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ E.g. Whepstead (Suffolk), Drayton (Middx.), Brightwell (Berks.), Newington (Oxon.), Brailles (Warwicks.): B.M.: Harley MS. 3977, fol. 90v; St Paul's Cathedral Library, WD 16, *Liber* 1, fol. 130v; B.M.: Egerton MS. 2418, fol. 58v; *R.H.*, II, p. 761; P.R.O.: E 164(i)/15, fol. 79v.

⁵⁰ *D.S.P.*, p. 47. This custom was recorded when the manor was surveyed a second time in 1297: St Paul's Cathedral Library, WD 16, *Liber* 1, fol. 93v.

⁵¹ *D.S.P.*, pp. 37-8; *Rentalia*, pp. 61-2; Wilts. R.O.: 492/30 (Kingston Deverill); W. D. Peckham, ed., *Thirteen Customals of Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester*, Sussex Rec. Soc., xxxi, 1925, pp. 23, 80 (Sidlesham, Preston).

⁴⁴ *Sythale* is discussed below, p. 105.

⁴⁵ *C.M.R.*, I, p. 493.

⁴⁶ Examples from sixteen manors, 1222 and 1251, in B.M.: Cotton Tiberius B. II, and Cotton Claudius C. xi. In each case the customals record the same perquisites on the one manor.

⁴⁷ E.g. St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester: W. H. Hart, ed., *Historia et cartularium monasterii sancti Petri Gloucestrie*, Rolls Ser., 1863-7, III, pp. 64-213; the abbey of Bec: Chibnall, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-94; and St Paul's Cathedral: W. H. Hale, ed., *The Domesday of St Paul's of the year MCCXXII*, Camden Soc., LXIX, 1858, pp. 37-103 (hereafter cited as *D.S.P.*).

rather less generous: half a sheep at Barston (Warwicks.), a sheep without a fleece at Tillingham (Essex).⁵² Then there were other local customs. At Glemsford (Suffolk), for example, the tenants had to give one of the shoulders of their sheep (if they caught it) to the bailiff.⁵³ In the early twelfth century at Compton Abbas (Dorset) the nuns of Shaftesbury and one of their tenants provided the sheep for the tenants in alternate years, the tenant's turn being a part of his rent. At Temple Cressing (Essex) in the thirteenth century the semi-virgaters mowed half the meadow for one work and mowed one rood extra every other year *ad madscap*.⁵⁴

VII

Although the customals show that the *madscap* was found throughout southern England, it is the account rolls which reveal the strength of the custom, for they show whether the perquisite was given from year to year, commuted for a cash payment, or, perhaps, abandoned. On the estate of the bishop of Winchester we get a comprehensive view of early practice from the two earliest surviving accounts, those of 1208-9 and 1210-11. The details of gifts on seventeen manors are summarized in Table II. The provision of cash and food in *consuetudine falcatorum*, in *consuetudine prati falcandi*, was common, as was the gift of a sheep to the tenants. The animal was sometimes described as "living" (*viva*).⁵⁵ In fact, the living tradition and commutation marched side by side. It appears, too, that custom might vary from year to year on the one manor, while remaining unaltered on another. Neither early account roll recorded the gift of a sheep to the bishop's tenants at

⁵² Two sheep: see above, n. 50, and S. R. Scargill-Bird, ed., *Customals of Battle Abbey*, Camden Soc., n.s., xli, 1887, p. 56; three sheep: B.M.: Egerton MS. 2418, fol. 32r (East Meon, Hants.); for Barston, B. A. Lees, ed., *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century*, British Academy, Records of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales, ix, 1935, pp. 36-7; for Tillingham, St Paul's Cathedral Library, WD 16, *Liber I*, fol. 87r.

⁵³ "Set ballivus manerii habebit unam de spaldis dicti multonis": B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 258v.

⁵⁴ B.M.: Harley MS. 61, fol. 50r; Lees, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁵⁵ Pipe roll, 1208-9, p. 76; Pipe roll, 1210-11, pp. 72, 77, 82, 87, 125 (full references given in Table 2).

TABLE II
GIFTS TO MOWERS ON THE ESTATE OF THE BISHOP
OF WINCHESTER

Manor	1208-9		1210-11	
	Sheep	Other *	Sheep	Other *
Adderbury (Oxon.)		x		x
Bishops Stoke (Hants.)		x		x
Brightwell (Berks.)	2†	x†	2	x
Cheriton (Hants.)				x†
Clere (Hants.)		x		x
Downton (Wilts.)		x		x
East Meon (Hants.)	3		3	
East Woodhay (Hants.)	2	x	3	
Farnham (Surrey)		x	1	
Harwell (Berks.)				x
Isle of Wight			1	
Knoyle (Wilts.)	1	x	1	x
Rimpton (Som.)		x	1	
Taunton (Som.)		x		x
Wargrave (Berks.)	3	x	3	x
Witney (Oxon.)		x†		x†
Wycombe (Bucks.)	2	x	2	x

* Cheese, corn, cash, not necessarily the same amount or in the same combination in 1210-11 as in 1208-9.

† A part or all in *consuetudine medsipe*.

Sources: H. Hall (ed.), *The pipe roll of the bishopric of Winchester . . . 1208-9*, 1903; N. R. Holt (ed.), *The pipe roll of the bishopric of Winchester, 1210-11*, Manchester, 1964.

Downton (Wilts.), yet in 1325 they were given a wether for their service.⁵⁶ However, at Kingston St Mary, a tithing of Taunton, in 1211 the mowers were given 8d. "in consuetudine prati falcandi loco multonis", the same payment was made in 1236, and the mid-thirteenth-century customal recorded the customary gift of 8d. *pro medeship*.⁵⁷ Similar variations in practice from manor to manor on the one estate occurred elsewhere. In 1282 on the Glastonbury estates cash payments to the mowers were recorded at Sturminster Newton (Dorset), and at Pilton, East Pennard, Butleigh, Street, Ashcot, Shapwick, and High Ham (Som.), while sheep were presented at Buckham (Som.) and

⁵⁶ J. Z. Titow, *English Rural Society 1200-1350*, 1969, p. 130.

⁵⁷ Pipe roll, 1210-11, p. 169; Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. xxxiii, 23.

Damerham (Wilts.).⁵⁸ In 1315 sheep were provided at Winterborne Monkton, Idmiston, and Damerham (Wilts.), whereas cash payments were made at Grittleton, Christian Malford, and Nettleton (Wilts.).⁵⁹ Once a particular custom was established it can often be traced over many years where the records have survived. At Gussage (Dorset), for example, a sheep was presented to the customary tenants throughout the period 1294-1377.⁶⁰ Occasionally we are fortunate enough to be able to pinpoint the date when custom changed: at Dovercourt (Essex), a regular entry in the account rolls between 1268-9 and 1293-4 recorded the gift of a sheep to the *nativi*; then, in 1295-6, the gift was commuted and the tenants received 12d. *pro j multone*.⁶¹

VIII

We have seen how it was customary on some manors of Ramsey Abbey to provide the mowers with a sum of money *ad sythale*.⁶² Similar payments were made to the customary tenants on other manors in the east Midlands and the Fens. The earliest surviving account rolls of Crowland Abbey (1256-8) recorded cash gifts *pro sigal* at Addington (Northants.), and Bowthorpe and Langtoft (Lincs.). At Wellingborough (Northants.) 12s. 3d. was spent in 1281 "in expensis autumpni cum sythale," and 2s. was spent on *sytheale* in the following year. Thereafter 2s. was dispensed each summer in customary payment for the ale bought for the bond tenants when they mowed the demesne meadows. At Oakington (Cambs.), another Crowland manor, 1 qu. 5 bu. of wheat was given to the homage in 1362 "pro eorum sithwether ex consuetudine"; this gift of wheat can be traced back to the earliest account rolls for Drayton and Cottenham as well as Oakington.⁶³ *Sythale* as a customary perquisite was also

recorded in the thirteenth-century surveys of Peterborough Abbey, particularly on those manors clustered around the monastery: Longthorpe, Eye, Castor, Walton, and Werrington. At Ailsworth, a hamlet of Castor, the virgaters received each year 2 acres of meadow called *sichacres*; while at Glinton the customary tenants (*tota communa villanorum*) were given 3s. *ad sichale*.⁶⁴ The *sythale* or *sythwether* was obviously akin to the *madschep*, a relationship which the customal of Connington (Hunts.) makes clear. Here, the *villani* mowed for one day *ad sichale*, receiving in return one sheep or 16d., bread, cheese, and 4d. for ale.⁶⁵ But it looks as if *sythale* may have been a distinctively regional name centred in the eastern counties.

IX

The customs discussed here and in the previous article had a long history. Many can be traced in the twelfth-century surveys, which themselves conformed to pre-Conquest precedent as set out in the *Rectitudines Singularum Personarum*.⁶⁶ No doubt the author of the *Rectitudines* looked back still further. Many customals may have been drawn up for lords anxious to exploit their resources in an age of "high farming", yet much of their content represented ancient tradition. The author of the *Rectitudines* was careful to stress the variety of regional customs,⁶⁷ and the post-Conquest sources confirm his testimony in the seemingly endless variety of customs they recorded, from manor to manor, let alone from estate to estate. In particular we have seen how customs found in many parts of

ful to Dr P. D. A. Harvey for drawing my attention to these references).

⁶⁴ Society of Antiquaries, MS. 60, fols. 182v, 184v, 185v, 187r, 188v, 190v, 194v. I am grateful to the Society for access to its library.

⁶⁵ *R.H.*, II, p. 653.

⁶⁶ Lees, *op. cit.*, p. cxxxi. It is difficult to trace what happened after 1350; no doubt many customs died out, yet some later sources kept them alive, if only as quaint survivals: E. Kerridge, *The Farmers of Old England*, 1973, p. 45. At Salford (Beds.) it was the custom in Henry VII's reign for the hayward to receive a sheaf of wheat and a sheaf of barley from each tenant in autumn: Bodleian Library, MS. All Souls' Coll., c. 164, roll 361, m. 15.

⁶⁷ D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, eds., *English Historical Documents*, II, 1042-1189, 1953, pp. 813-14.

⁵⁸ Longleat House, MS. 11273.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, MS. 10656.

⁶⁰ Bodleian Library: MSS. Queen's Coll., box 38, rolls 3-33.

⁶¹ P.R.O.: SC 6/840/1-8. ⁶² See Table 1.

⁶³ Page, *The estates of Crowland Abbey*, pp. 197, 204, 209; Page, *Wellingborough Manorial Accounts*, pp. 28, 32, 49-118; Page, *Estates*, pp. 175-256, 274 (I am very grate-

England appear to have received a peculiar elaboration in the West Country. But, interesting as this regional diversity may be, the most impressive feature of rural custom is its uniform framework: on widely scattered estates the same customs and the same perquisites were recorded. It seems inconceivable that local pressure produced everywhere the same response. The framework of custom and the way in which customary labour was organized bear the imprint of seignorial administration. Indeed, it has been suggested that some customs derived from *a priori* ideas of what was rightfully the lord's or the tenants'.⁶⁸ Once the basic framework of customary services and relationships had been established, individual customs no doubt became subject to the influence of the village community. Although the impact of folk tradition on the custom of the manor is largely a matter of speculation, it was probably responsible for some of the regional elaborations and variations. Perhaps this impact may be seen in the use of the handful as a measure of one particular perquisite;⁶⁹ and it would certainly seem to be behind those customs which sprang up around the reeve, hayward, and beadle. To these men were allocated the leftovers and rakings in much the same way that modern industry may tolerate a certain amount of wastage as "perks" of the job. In this connection it is interesting to note that the manorial ploughmen were on some manors allowed as a perquisite the refuse fodder (*orte*) which the oxen dropped in their stalls. This custom was usually limited to a specific period in winter and to a certain number of oxen; occasionally it was a perquisite given to the ploughmen after threshing.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the sheaves and grass which the ordinary tenants took were

more in the nature of a wage or a reciprocal. The perquisite was an incentive to perform labour extra to the normal demands of week-work, a reward for good work, and a recognition on the lord's part of the role played by customary labour alongside the hired, seasonal labour, a token of his dependence on the good will of his tenants.

APPENDIX

The handful as an agricultural measure in England in the Middle Ages.

This note draws attention to the use of the handful and fistful as a customary measure at harvest and at other times of the year in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Although the handful has not attracted the same attention as sheaves of corn or bundles of grass, its use as a measure of perquisites is attested by the earliest sources.⁷¹ It is particularly interesting to see how the measure was used in a range of tasks on the desmesne, and not solely at harvest.

As a measure, the handful was used in the ordinary course of reaping, the reaper grasping a handful of stalks in order to cut them.⁷² There is a clear suggestion in the twelfth-century sources that the handful (*manipulus*) and the sheaf (*garba*) were synonymous.⁷³ At Lawshall (Suffolk), for example, each virgater reaped 13 acres of corn in autumn and bound this *in manipulos*; and when he threshed, he threshed 100 "handfuls" (*manipuli ad seminandum*).⁷⁴ When the monks of Wardon Abbey (Beds.) reached an agreement over tithe with the chaplain of Great Paxton (Hunts.), they agreed to pay him 5s. a year "in place of the handfuls which he had been accustomed to have by their labours."⁷⁵ On the estates of the Templars and of Glastonbury Abbey, reapers and stackers were allowed "handfuls" of corn from among those they cut or stacked.⁷⁶ And at Lacock (Wilts.) the thirteenth-century custumal recorded the tradition that the virgater who com-

⁷¹ Douglas and Greenaway, *op. cit.*, p. 815.

⁷² There is a clear illustration of this in the Luttrell Psalter: B.M.: Add. MS. 42130, fol. 172v.

⁷³ This would suggest a very small sheaf, but perhaps *manipulus* here should be taken to mean a sheaf in the accepted sense.

⁷⁴ *C.M.R.*, III, p. 282. The place was identified by R. V. Lennard, 'An unidentified twelfth-century Custumal of Lawshall (Suffolk)', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, LI, 1936, pp. 104-7.

⁷⁵ "... in compensacione manipulorum quos de laboris eorum habere consueuerat": C. W. Foster, ed., *The Registrum Antiquissimum of the cathedral church of Lincoln*, III, Lincoln Rec. Soc., 29, 1935, p. 153, no. 803. I owe this reference to the kindness of Mr R. E. Latham.

⁷⁶ Lees, *op. cit.*, p. 22; J. E. Jackson, ed., *Liber Henrici de Soliaco*, Roxburghe Club, 1882, pp. 113-14.

⁶⁸ F. R. H. DuBoulay, *The Lordship of Canterbury*, 1966, p. 171.

⁶⁹ See appendix.

⁷⁰ Examples may be found in a number of counties: Bincombe, Dorset: *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, III, p. 382; Stoke-under-Hamdon, Som.: *Two registers*, p. 6; Bleadon, Som.: Homans, *op. cit.*, p. 47; Benham, Berks.: P.R.O.: SC 11/46, m. 2; Chippenham, Wilts.: P.R.O.: SC 12/16/52 dorse; Rattlesden and Hitcham, Suffolk: B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fols. 275r, 282v; Pulham, Norfolk: E. Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely*, Cambridge, 1951, p. 92, n. 3.

pleted a day's reaping on the demesne could take as much as he could lift in two gloved hands.⁷⁷

On some manors in the thirteenth century the fistful or handful (as opposed to the sheaf) was used as a measure of the amount a tenant could glean on the demesne. At Grittleton (Wilts.), for example, the tenant who reaped half an acre a day was followed by his wife, gleaning a fistful of ears (*una pugnata de spicis*).⁷⁸ A virgater at Longbridge Deverill (Wilts.) who reaped a similar amount could glean a fistful (*pugnata*) called a *lashanful*, after the sheaves had been gathered up.⁷⁹ At Chisenbury (Wilts.) the virgater took a handful of gleanings from those half-acres he reaped as a part of his normal week-work (*de consuetudine*).⁸⁰

On the demesne such tasks as sowing, ploughing, and collecting timber were also occasions when customary tenants could take "handfuls"—of seed or twigs—as perquisites. At Triplow (Cambs.), a manor of the bishop of Ely, the cottars responsible for the Lenten sowing received each evening of their work three fistfuls (*ponginate*) of the same seed as they sowed.⁸¹ At Bleadon (Som.) the man a virgate provided to plough in preparation for the sowing of beans (or to harrow and sow) was allowed as many beans as the reeve or hayward could take in his two hands three times, that is, three *yepsones*.⁸² On other manors handfuls of oats were provided after ploughing, the oats being intended for the plough horses brought by the customary tenants.⁸³ When men collected or carted timber, usually to make hurdles for the manorial sheepfold, they were sometimes allowed a handful of twigs (*virge*) for their pains,⁸⁴ or as much as they could grasp in both hands.⁸⁵

However, it was the task of harrowing which was most frequently rewarded with handfuls (of oats), the perquisite going to the horses as provender at

the end of the day.⁸⁶ This custom was observed throughout the southern half of the country, and traces of it can be found in the northern counties.⁸⁷ The practice was particularly well developed on the estates of Waltham Abbey in Essex. The manorial surveys (c. 1230) recorded little else in the way of customary perquisites. At Debden (in Loughton) the harrowers had a handful of oats each in the field which had to be fed to the horses there and then.⁸⁸ At Alderton (in Loughton) each horse was given a handful of oats plus a quantity of hay.⁸⁹ Sometimes the reeve was responsible for measuring the perquisite, as at Therfield (Herts.), a manor of Ramsey Abbey, where the tenant took on each day he harrowed "bis avenam quantum prepositus vel wardenarius bis continere in manibus suis."⁹⁰ On some manors, although no mention was made of handfuls, it is clear that the same custom operated. Thus we find a tenant received a ha'penny-worth of oats for his horse;⁹¹ or a group shared a peck of oats "ad prebendum affrorum suorum,"⁹² or a seedlip of oats *ad equos suos*.⁹³ Occasionally the custom can be traced in manorial account rolls, as at Gussage (Dorset), a manor of God's House, Southampton. Here, the reeve noted the allowance of some four bushels of oats to thirteen harrowers as a customary gift. Six men shared one bushel a day, and it would seem likely that the gift of handfuls lay behind this entry on the grange accounts.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ The horse was provided by the tenant: on an unidentified manor of Waltham Abbey the harrowers received their handfuls, all except Godfrey Kukku who harrowed "cum equo de curia": B.M.: Cotton Tiberius C. ix, fol. 212v.

⁸⁷ The custom can be found on the estates of Ramsey Abbey: C.M.R., I, p. 47; II, p. 38; the bishop of Ely: B.M.: Cotton Tiberius B. II, fol. 110r; St Paul's Cathedral: D.S.P., pp. 34, 86; Worcester Cathedral Priory: Hale, *Registrum . . . Wignoniensis*, p. 103b; the abbey of Bec: Chibnall, *op. cit.*, p. 46; Glastonbury Abbey: *Rentalia*, p. 165; Wells Cathedral: *Wells*, p. 349; and Winchester Cathedral Priory: W.C.C., II, pp. 460, 470; and at Pocklington, Yorks.: P.R.O.: SC 11/730, m. 8.

⁸⁸ "Debent habere in campo pugnatam auene quam si asportaverint erunt in misericordia domini": B.M.: Cotton Tiberius C. ix, fol. 205v. At Dunham (Cambs.) the oats were given to the horses in the field: B.M.: Cotton Claud. C. xi, fol. 36r.

⁸⁹ B.M.: Cotton Tiberius C. ix, fol. 203r.

⁹⁰ C.M.R., I, p. 47. At Lucknor (Oxon.) the tenant received "unam porcionem auene quantum potest comprehendere infra manus prepositi semel": R.H., II, p. 782. At Stogursey and Rodway (Som.) the tenant could take as much oats as he could lift in his outstretched hands twice: P.R.O.: E 142/8, mm. 7, 9.

⁹¹ As at Longstock (Hants.): see n. 85.

⁹² As at Ilmer (Bucks.): P.R.O.: SC 11/79.

⁹³ As at Dunham (Cambs.): see n. 88.

⁹⁴ "In consuetudine xiiij herciatorum herciendi per ij dies ad semen yemale iijj bus. j pek. et sic vi herciatores per diem j bus." Bodleian Library: MSS. Queen's Coll, box 38, rolls 5-16 (1297-8 to 1312-13).

⁷⁷ W. G. Clark-Maxwell, 'The Customs of Four Manors of the Abbey of Lacock', *Wilts. Arch. & Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 32, 1902, p. 331.

⁷⁸ *Rentalia*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁸⁰ Chibnall, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁸¹ B.M.: Cotton Tiberius B. II, fol. 220v.

⁸² E. Smirke, 'Notice of the custumal of Bleadon and of the agricultural tenures of the thirteenth century', *Memoirs . . . communicated to the . . . Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1851, p. 202. The *yepson* as the name of a handful also occurs in the custumal of Risby, Suffolk: B.M., Harley MS. 638, fol. 13r; and in that of Over Wichendon, Bucks.: Wigram, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁸³ E.g., Wolverley, Worcs., and Appledram, Sussex: W. H. Hale, ed., *Registrum . . . Prioratus Beate Marie Wigorniensis*, Camden Soc., xci, 1865, p. 95a; Scargill-Bird, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁸⁴ E.g., Monxton, Hants., Chisenbury, Wilts., and Bishopstone, Wilts.: Chibnall, *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 54; B.M.: Egerton MS. fol. 65v.

⁸⁵ "... tantas virgas quantas cum manibus suis potest complectere": P.R.O.: DL 43/8/23, m. 2 (Longstock, Hants.).