

Cattle Grazing in the Forest of Arden in the Later Middle Ages*

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Abstract

This paper studies the influence and scale of pastoral farming in the economy of the Forest of Arden in the Later Middle Ages. It seeks to determine the numbers and types of animals kept and demonstrate how the profits of pastoral farming benefited a number of social groups in the region. Many demesnes were retained by their resident lords to graze cattle to feed their households while the fattening of beef animals for the market afforded scope for social and economic advancement by peasant families. This emphasis on animal husbandry encouraged the cultivation of hay and fodder crops in turn helping to bolster the arable economy in the area.

THE tradition and emphasis in the study of later medieval English agriculture has been firmly focused on the large cereal-dominated ecclesiastical or noble estates of lowland England. Although studies have been made of wool growing, pastoral farming has very much been relegated to a secondary position, most historians preferring to stress, as did Postan, livestock's supporting role in cereal production.¹ This is regrettable as in many areas, mainly northern England, the north Midlands, and also in the south-west, the raising and fattening of livestock both for subsistence and for sale had far greater importance than grain production.² The following study examines how this generally neglected type of medieval agrarian economy adapted to the new circumstances of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The plague and the following epidemics had profound effects on many aspects of the economy, one of which was to help redress the balance between livestock and

cereals. The area under the plough shrank, most notably in the fifteenth century, and the most obvious way to utilize the lapsed arable was to convert it to pasture. Although in upland England and forest areas animal husbandry had probably always vied with cereals for importance this was not true of lowland England, where the plagues helped a shift to a more mixed agricultural economy. Animals had a strong appeal for producers. Apart from their meat their by-products of wool and hides could be extremely valuable, and where cereal cultivation required large seasonal workforces animals only needed a few specialized stock keepers throughout the year. Increasingly after the mid-fourteenth century landlords turned to animals in a bid to shore up their demesne economies.³

The move in emphasis from arable to pastoral in Warwickshire is well documented. Although the area of pasture in the Forest of Arden did increase in the later middle ages it was most dramatically pronounced in the old settled Feldon of the south of the county where, in the century and a half following 1350, arable land was lapsing to pasture on a much greater scale than in the Arden. This movement was noted and emphasized by two

* I am greatly indebted to Christopher Dyer, Rodney Hilton, and Jean Birrell for their kind and constructive help in the preparation of this article.

¹ E Power, *Medieval English Wool Trade*, Oxford, 1944; M M Postan, *Essays on Medieval Agriculture and General Problems of the Medieval Economy*, Cambridge, 1973, ch 11. Two notable exceptions to the southern English cereal bias are R Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700*, 1957, and I Kershaw, *Bolton Priory*, Oxford, 1973.

² H P R Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, Cambridge, 1951; N W Alcock, 'An East Devon Manor in the Later Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, CII, 1970, pp 141-88.

³ For a recent example see M Mate, 'Agrarian Economy after the Black Death: The Manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 1348-91', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXVII, 1984, pp 341-54.

contemporary writers. John Rous, writing in the late fifteenth century, has perpetuated the image of the Feldon of flocks of sheep grazing amid the dilapidated, decayed ruins of a village, while less dramatically in the 1530s John Leland described it as an area of corn-growing champion villages interspersed with pasture land.⁴

Although a forest in the sense that it supported much woodland the Forest of Arden in north Warwickshire was never a forest by strict legal definition, as, unlike Feckenham in Worcestershire or Rockingham in Northamptonshire, it had not come under Forest Law. Although there had been much clearance of woods by the mid-fourteenth century a forest economy still functioned in the Arden in the later middle ages. Common field land was limited in area, there was an abundance of closes in severalty and many inhabitants pursued industrial by-occupations.⁵ This in turn was only part of a much larger woodland area, stretching south-west into the royal Forest of Feckenham while northwards it merged into Cannock Chase and Needwood, which in turn became part of upland England.

Within Warwickshire the animal landscape was split along the geographical divide with sheep dominating the Feldon, while cattle, animals often associated with forests, were numerically superior in the Arden. This was a trend going back well before the fifteenth century and is well illustrated by surviving grange accounts for the Feldon and Avon Valley. In 1379–80 at Sutton-under-Brailes it was recorded that the demesne kept 200 sheep but only nine oxen. The Earl of Warwick's manor of Lighthorne possessed twenty-six

oxen and fourteen other bovine animals, and a flock of 308 ewes and 214 lambs in 1389–90. Similarly at Birdingbury in 1397–8 the grange account lists 243 sheep but only sixteen bullocks, while at Snitterfield in 1430–1 a flock of 1671 sheep is recorded, with twenty-seven oxen, twenty cows, seventeen steers, and thirteen calves also being maintained on the same demesne. Conversely, they were hardly ever recorded on the Arden estates at Chilvers Coton, Grendon and Astley. The relative importance of sheep on a north Warwickshire manor is well illustrated at Middleton in 1355 where in an inventory of the goods and chattels of Baldwin Freville it was recorded that he had owned cattle worth £38 14s but sheep only to the value of 8s 3d.⁶

Although calves were reared in the Arden, Wales undoubtedly provided the major source of beef cattle. Droving routes from North Wales to the south-east of England passed through the area. Birmingham and Coventry possessed large cattle markets and two of the most important routes of the early modern drovers passed through the Arden market towns of Coleshill, Atherstone and Nuneaton, probably reflecting medieval routeways.⁷ Some men in these towns were actively engaged in the trade, such as John le Deyster, a drover, who was resident in Coleshill in 1383 and by 1409 had developed his trade to its logical conclusion and was living in London.⁸ Accounts from the Beauchamp manor of Wedgnok Park show that some

⁴ C Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming, 1349–c.1520*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, XXVII, 1981, pp 9–12; J Rous *Historia Regum Angliae*, T Hearne (ed), 1745, pp 119–26; *Leland's Itinerary*, L Toulmin Smith (ed), 1908, V, pp 40, 47, 50.

⁵ This will hopefully be comprehensively covered in my forthcoming PhD thesis 'Society and Economy in the Forest of Arden, 1350–1540'.

⁶ Sutton-under-Brailes: Gloucestershire Record Office, D 1099/M31/44; Lighthorne: Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust Record Office (hereafter SBT), DR 98/672a; Birdingbury: Devon Record Office, 248 M/MG; Snitterfield: British Library (hereafter BL), Egerton Roll 8624; Chilvers Coton: PRO, SC 6/1038/20; Grendon: Staffordshire Record Office (hereafter SRO), D(W) 1744/19; Astley: Warwick County Record Office (hereafter WCRO), CR 136/c, 150–2; Middleton: Nottingham University Library (hereafter NUL), Mil 40.

⁷ R A Holt, *The Early History of the Town of Birmingham 1166 to 1600*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, XXX, 1985, pp 10–11, C Skeel, 'The Cattle trade Between Wales and England from the Fifteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century', *Trans Royal Hist Soc*, 4th ser, IX, 1910, p 148.

⁸ Birmingham Reference Library (hereafter BRL), A 368, A 454.



FIGURE 1
 Late Medieval Warwickshire, indicating places mentioned in the text

transactions were made directly with Welsh drovers. Other demesne managers looked further afield. The Beauchamps bought what again must have been Welsh cattle from Bromyard and Worcester, while others bought in North Midland cattle from Lichfield and Tamworth, or some such as the Catesbys, who held a cluster of manors outside the Arden on the Warwickshire-Northamptonshire border, made occasional forays to the market of Chesterfield.⁹

The attractions of cattle for landlords were considerable. Clearly they were not prey to variations in wool prices and neither did they require specialized feed. They cost little to maintain other than in winter fodder and investment in the upkeep of enclosures and some form of byre or shelter. Medieval cowhouses, where recorded, seem quite large: the horns meant that considerable room would be required for each animal. At the Leicester Abbey grange of Berwood in Curdworth a *vaccaria* of six bays was recorded.¹⁰ Neither were labour costs very great as only one or two stockmen would be needed throughout the year, rather than the large seasonal workforces demanded during cereal production or by sheep during shearing. More labour intensive was dairying, a task usually undertaken by women both in processing and retailing

I

The most detailed evidence of livestock keeping in the Arden are the accounts for the demesne of the middle-ranking peer lord Astley at Astley which survive for the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.¹¹ There the demesne was cultivated directly as late as 1432 although as with

many other estates in the area this was for household consumption rather than for the market. Cattle accounted for a significant proportion of the livestock kept, which also included pigs, poultry and horses. In this period often there were about forty to forty-five cattle of which about fifteen to twenty were usually cows with calves.¹² The remainder were heifers and bullocks being fattened, many of which had been originally calves of the dairy herd. The stock was mainly self-replacing with both a bull and a boar kept. Animals also came into the herd as strays and heriots. Another herd of cattle was evidently maintained on the Astley manor of Weddington, near Nuneaton, as beasts were often driven from there to Astley.

The hunting park surrounding Astley Castle seems to have comfortably accommodated their grazing requirements as in 1400 it was recorded that 'Greysacre' in the park had been reserved for the depasturing of the stock for the household. Crops were cultivated on the demesne to provide fodder and peas and beans, barley, and oats harvested there were often fed to the cattle, as well as pigs and poultry, presumably during winter.

The Duke of Buckingham's demesne at Maxstoke castle was also involved in grazing to maintain sufficient animals on the hoof for the consumption of the large household which by the mid-1450s probably numbered just over one hundred.¹³ The demesne had been converted to pasture and meadow and was organized to provide grazing for the household's livestock, mainly consisting of cows, sheep,

⁹ Dyer, *op cit*, p 20; WCRO, CR 895/8/18; CR 895/8/19; PRO, SC 6/1043/10.

¹⁰ L. Mitchell, *A History of the Manor of Berwood*, Birmingham, 1926, p 18.

¹¹ WCRO, CR 136/c150 (1395-6), CR 136/c151 (1400-01), CR 136/c152 (1401-2), CR 136/c154 (1432-3).

¹² In 1395-6 twenty-five bullocks and eight cows with eight calves were recorded. In 1400-1 two bulls, twenty-one bullocks, a heifer, eleven cows, and eight calves are listed. In 1401-2 a bull, twenty-three bullocks, ten cows, and twelve calves appear in the extent.

¹³ Details of the demesne at Maxstoke Castle are contained in the dispersed Duke of Buckingham's Receiver-General's Accounts: SRO, D641/1/2/269 - D641/1/2/276; BRL, DV 2 168236; PRO, SC6/1040/15; Maxstoke Castle, Fetherston-Dilke MSS (I am indebted to Captain C B Fetherston-Dilke for kindly allowing me to make use of his archive); C Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham 1394-1521*, Cambridge, 1978, pp 69-70.

and riding horses. The park was also used for pigs, cows, and sheep in addition to the deer. The demesne was occasionally leased out to farmers usually only for one year at a time so it could be retrieved easily when the Duke and his entourage were in residence. Most of the stock was purchased locally on the hoof, although occasionally it was bought ready slaughtered as in 1452-3 when £21 16s was spent on 183 beef carcasses.¹⁴ Purchases of animals were usually made in fairly large numbers such as £14 14s 2d paid also in 1452-3 to the local peasant producers Thomas Colet and Thomas Underwood, while considerable numbers were bought from Coventry.¹⁵

The nearby Maxstoke Priory also maintained quite large numbers of animals with cattle again predominating. In the 1440s and 1450s it frequently had mixed dairy and beef herds numbering between forty and fifty with a herd of seventy-two recorded in 1442-3.¹⁶ Most of its stock was either raised through the dairy herd, acquired as heriots or strays, or bought directly from peasants living in adjacent villages.¹⁷ The east Arden Abbey at Merevale similarly owned beef cattle, most purchased from local villages or the nearby town of Atherstone, while there is fleeting evidence to suggest that Stoneleigh Abbey was also keeping cattle herds. Maxstoke and Merevale both slaughtered cattle for their own table but some of the former's dairy produce was retailed in local markets, such as Coleshill.¹⁸

Below the level of the nobility and the religious houses the evidence of pastoral activity is less plentiful. The important role of gentry in commercial livestock husbandry in the North Midlands, where they

raised animals for their own consumption and the market is well known. Within the Forest of Arden John Brome of Baddesley Clinton lucratively indulged in buying beef cattle from Coventry and Birmingham, fattening them on his demesne, and then selling to butchers for considerable profits.¹⁹ In the absence of equally detailed evidence for the rest of the Arden it is difficult to assess how typical Brome was of the gentry of the area. However, cattle grazing must have been an obvious and practical venture with the proximity of the Birmingham and Coventry cattle markets, Welsh droving routes and the potentially large nearby urban markets. Coventry was the unofficial regional capital of the Midlands, the third largest provincial centre in England in the 1377 Poll Tax and even in 1525 when undergoing a slump in fortunes it was still among the top rank of English provincial towns. Neither Birmingham nor Warwick were as populous or wealthy as Coventry but both by the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries appear to have supported populations well in excess of a thousand inhabitants.²⁰

The demesne stock presents a problem in determining to what extent animals were kept for sale, as distinct from meeting the needs of the household. In the case of Sir Ralph Shirley, who held a north Warwickshire estate at Newton Regis, the division is fairly obvious. On his death in 1516 he left livestock to the value of £82 6s 8d including ninety-four cattle of various types and 160 young sheep.²¹ Quite clearly

¹⁴ SRO, D641/1/3/4.

¹⁵ SRO, D641/1/3/4.

¹⁶ Bodleian Library (hereafter Bod Lib), MS Trinity 84, pp 118, 123, 129, 130, 132, 134. In 1442-3 the Priory had a mixed herd composed of forty-two bullocks, eighteen cows, twelve calves, and a bull, MS Trinity 84, p 132.

¹⁷ Bod Lib, MS Trinity 84, pp 123, 129, 150, 151.

¹⁸ PRO, E 315/283, fols 19, 27, Bod Lib, MS Trinity 84, p 129, SBT, DR 18/30/14/11.

¹⁹ J R Birrell, 'The Forest Economy of the Honour of Tutbury in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *Birm Hist Jnl*, VIII, 1961, pp 119-21; M J Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, Cambridge, 1983, p 71; S M Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, VIII, Matlock, 1983, pp 19-21; C Dyer, 'A Small Landowner in the Fifteenth Century', *Mid Hist*, I, 1971-2, pp 1-14.

²⁰ C Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, Cambridge, 1979, pp 11-16, 33-35; Holt *op cit*, *passim*; R A Holt, 'The Economic Development of Birmingham before 1553', Unpublished Univ of Birmingham MA thesis, chapter 6; *VCH Warwickshire*, VIII, p 480.

²¹ Leicestershire Record Office, 26 D53/1949. Although Shirley did own Newton Regis his livestock was almost certainly on his North Midland estates.

with this number of animals Shirley was producing for the market but for others the proportion is less clear.

The consumption of meat in an upper gentry household is well illustrated by Sir William Mountford of Coleshill's receiver general's account of 1434. In the 1436 income tax he was assessed at £258, the richest knight in Warwickshire, and in the account of 1434 had an income of £274 16s 1½d. Therefore his household's eating habits may be more extravagant than those of other gentry in the area, but gives an idea of the likely consumption levels of other small households.²² Meat was eaten throughout the year apart from during Lent and on Fridays and Saturdays. The Mountfords evidently kept a small herd of mixed animals, buying twenty-three steers at Coventry for £7 5s 8d, twenty sheep for 35s and six pigs for 12s 2d. In the course of the year thirty steers, fifty-six calves, sixty-one ewes, and thirty-six pigs, taken both from the demesne stock and from outside purchases made from local peasants, were consumed. Therefore if a gentry household was only supplying its own needs the number of animals involved could be quite large. Apart from the Mountfords other gentry families were maintaining similar herds after they had leased out their demesne arable. The Bracebridges at Kingsbury, for example, in 1390 were grazing a cattle herd, while the Frevilles repossessed parkland and pasture at Middleton in the fifteenth century to depasture their own animals. Incidental references suggest that other families such as the Ardens, Bingham, Bracebridges, Clintons and Harewells may also have kept animals on their demesnes during the fifteenth century.²³

Fragmented as this information is it would seem that many resident landlords were involved in subsistence grazing, often using their parklands as a sort of larder. However there were groups within Arden society that were able to exploit the conditions and advance economically and socially through cattle grazing and it is to these that our attention now turns.

II

Studies throughout the country have shown the ability of elements within rural society to take advantage of the landlords' withdrawal from a market-orientated productive economy by taking up demesne leases. As elsewhere the wide social range of lessees, including clergy, gentry, merchants, and peasants is apparent in Warwickshire.²⁴ In the Forest of Arden quite a number of demesnes were retained by lords to graze their domestic livestock. On other Arden estates, usually lacking a resident lord, butcher graziers were prominent lessees. Pastureland of St Mary's, Warwick, near to Warwick was nearly always leased by butchers, while demesnes and parkland at Tanworth-in-Arden, Berkswell, Lea Marston, Wedgnok, and Middleton were also leased by them.²⁵ They also leased pastures at Coleshill, Brinklow, and Leek Wootton.²⁶ Most of these butchers came from the large population centres: Benedict Lee, Thomas and Edmund Wattes, and

²² SBT, DR 37/73; H L Gray, 'Incomes from Land in England in 1436', *Eng Hist Rev*, II, 1934, p 639.

²³ NUL, MiM 162, 164, 166; *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, XV, 1884, p 140; NUL 5/167/101; *Rolls of the Warwickshire and Coventry Sessions of the Peace*, E G Kimball ed, Dugdale Society, XVI, 1939, p 20; NUL, MiL5; W Cooper, *Wootton Wawen: Its History and Records*, Leeds, 1936, p 14.

²⁴ For example: F R H Du Boulay, 'Who were Farming the English Demesnes at the End of the Middle Ages?', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd series, XVII, 1965, pp 443-55; B F Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1977, pp 151-2; J A Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey*, Toronto, 1957, pp 290-1; U Rees, 'The Leases of Haughmond Abbey, Shropshire', *Mid Hist*, VIII, 1983, pp 13-29; J W Hare, 'The Demesne Lessees of Fifteenth Century Wiltshire', *Ag Hist Rev*, 29, 1981, pp 1-15. For Warwickshire see Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, pp 4-5.

²⁵ *Minister's Accounts of the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick*, 1432-85, D Styles (ed), Dugdale Society, XXVI, 1969, pp 4, 18, 43, 134, 134; SBT, DR37/108/33, DR 37/108/51-5; *Minister's Accounts of the Warwickshire Estates of the Duke of Clarence, 1479-80*, R H Hilton (ed), Dugdale Society, XXI, 1952, p 62; BRL, Norton MSS 87, 89, 101, Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, p 18; NUL, 5/167/101, MiL 4437.

²⁶ BRL, A555, A568, SBT, DR 10/98, DR 10/2243, DR 18/30/26/16, DR 18/30/26/4.

John Savage of Warwick; John Lichfield, Morrys Bocher, and John Deyster of Coventry; and Henry Ball of Tamworth who leased Middleton Park in 1379.

On the other Arden demesnes for which documentation survives at Atherstone, Kingsbury, Maxstoke, Middleton, Old Fillongley, and Sutton Coldfield a more common arrangement was piecemeal leasing to local inhabitants.²⁷ This meant that few large-scale peasant holdings incorporated an entire demesne. However through a gradual accumulation of pasture and meadow land a number of peasant families in the Tame Valley were able to pursue pastoralism profitably.

The most spectacular example of such a family were the Deys of Drakenage who amassed and consolidated a large estate based on cattle grazing which ultimately led to gentry status. Their origins are obscure with no one of that name appearing in either the 1327 or 1332 Lay Subsidies in Kingsbury or any adjacent parishes. John Dey became the first member of the family prominent in surviving records. In the absence of detailed rentals it is difficult to determine the extent of his holding but it seems to have included land in the manors of Kingsbury, Middleton, and Lea Marston.²⁸ In the twenty years following 1440 he steadily accumulated more land. In 1444 he took on the holding of William Lyndon in Marston; sometime later in 1459 and 1460 he obtained the holdings of William Barber and William Bodymoor in Lea Marston; while in 1464 he acquired a toft in the same village. In 1447 he had leased for life nine butts in Kingsbury.²⁹ Probably he also farmed the Hastings manor of

Drakenage as Dey was styled 'of Drakenage' from 1444 onwards, the year that the previous fifty-year lease of the manor expired.³⁰ When John Dey enfeoffed several of the local gentry in 1472 his lands lay in Lea Marston, Marston, Coten, Cliff, Wilnecote, Tanworth-in-Arden, Arley, Tamworth and Halloughton, and in the enfeoffment he is styled a 'grazier'.³¹

His activities are quite well recorded. At Kingsbury in the late 1440s he was frequently fined for depasturing his beasts in demesne pastures and for overstocking the commons. He may well have engaged in some form of cereal production to support his livestock as he was selling straw to the Buckingham household in 1453. He was also involved in other enterprises as in 1447 he was farming a fishpond at Lea Marston and may have been the John Dey leasing the Middleton mills in 1435.³² The Enclosure Commissioners of 1517 recorded that Richard Hastings had evicted twelve peasants from Drakenage in 1497 and enclosed 200 acres. The present site of Drakenage includes a reasonably large moated site, where in 1394 there were recorded a grange and chamber.³³ Field walking has identified what appears to be a complex of small enclosures to the east of the moat, probably animal pens, and these may have been contemporary with Dey's occupation of the manor.³⁴

By 1472 John Dey had built up a considerable estate in the Tame Valley. The Deys' power and status is well attested by

²⁷ Atherstone: SRO, D 641/1/2/269; Kingsbury, NUL, MiDa 90; Maxstoke: SRO, D 641/1/269 - D 641/1/2/276; BRL, DV2 168236; Middleton: NUL, MiM 163, 175, 206; Old Fillongley: Coventry Record Office, Bond's Hospital Miscellany, E 10 Sutton Coldfield: SBT, BRT/1/3/180.

²⁸ NUL, MiM 169, MiL 5, BRL, Norton MSS 64. Obviously the surname 'Dey' with its usual association of the humble, wage-earning dairy-maid, may be relevant in the context of the family's origins.

²⁹ NUL, MiD 4234; SRO, D641/2/272; BRL DV 506 418919, DV 506 418923; NUL, MiD 4237, NUL, MiL 5.

³⁰ NUL, MiD 4234; *Report on the Hastings Manuscripts*, Hist Ms Com, 1928, I, p 149.

³¹ NUL, MiD 4238.

³² NUL, MiL 5; SRO, D 641/1/3/4; BRL, Norton MSS 68a; NUL, MiM 131/36a, MiM 169.

³³ *The Domesday of Enclosures*, I S Leadam, (ed), Royal Historical Society, II, 1897, p 442; *Hastings Manuscripts*, p 149.

³⁴ C J Bond, 'Deserted Medieval Villages in Warwickshire: A Review of the Field Evidence', *Trans Birmingham and Warwickshire Arch Soc*, LXXVI, 1974, p 94. I am most grateful to Mr Bourne Wathes, the present resident of Drakenage Farm, for kindly allowing access to the site, and also to Christopher Dyer and Simon Penn for accompanying me and giving the benefit of their expertise. I am also grateful to the members of the Kingsbury Historical Society for sharing their knowledge and resources on Drakenage's later development.

their frequent appearances as witnesses in gentry deeds and by the equal frequency of gentry acting as witnesses for them.³⁵ It is from 1472 that John Dey styled himself a gentleman, a title borne by his son Thomas, who seems to have continued his father's activities.³⁶ After the 1480s the main branch of the family apparently left the area, although certain relatives lingered at Lea Marston well into the following century, and a succession of new farmers, who were also graziers, came to Drakenage. Without sensationalizing or overdramatizing, Drakenage, the centre of this grazing activity, is one of the few deserted villages of the Forest of Arden, possibly although not probably, a parallel with some of the Feldon villages such as Kingston, depopulated because of the profitability of animal grazing.³⁷

The Baillys of Middleton were another peasant family who were able to acquire considerable lands and wealth through cattle grazing. The founder of the dynasty was Robert Aston, bailiff of Middleton, who in 1362 was the recipient of a seignorial grant of a messuage, croft, two acres, and six selions of land.³⁸ Later deeds make it clear that the family soon became known as Bailly and occasionally as Bailiff, reflecting their original role as manorial officials. Robert's son, Philip, increased the size of their holding between 1391 and 1400. In 1391 he leased the Courthouse and attached land in Middleton. Six years later he took on the holding of John Gresbrook in the same manor. By 1400 he was styling himself as 'of Tamworth' a move perhaps reflecting his increasing wealth.³⁹ He possessed assets from which he frequently advanced loans of money, although, unfortunately, no sums are given

in the court rolls. A chance reference makes clear his likely source of revenue as in 1407 he was recorded as having sixty cattle.⁴⁰

In 1411, probably after his death, his son Thomas had his father's lands in Middleton confirmed to him. These included two messuages, two crofts, one toft, thirteen acres of arable, meadow land, and 40s worth of pasture.⁴¹ Thomas added to this by taking a toft and croft in 1415, and in 1417 another croft and lands, while by 1420 he was leasing considerable parts of the demesne.⁴² In a rental of 1420 his own holding was given as a messuage, a rood and a garden, a croft and meadow, and a cottage with a curtilage worth 11s, but he was leasing demesne meadow and pasture worth £3 8s 4d a year.⁴³ Philip and Thomas Bailly both joined the gild at Lichfield and also witnessed gentry deeds.⁴⁴ In contrast to the Deys their lands were centred in one manor, but like the Deys they abruptly disappeared from the area. Although by 1450 there were at least five men with the surname of Bailly in Middleton, a 1524 tithe account, listing all the households in the parish, records not one.⁴⁵

Before the detailed probate inventories starting in the sixteenth century it is extremely difficult to draw any precise conclusions about the livestock keeping of 'ordinary' peasants. Although the evidence is limited, it has been generally accepted that in the post-plague period livestock ownership became more widespread and disseminated throughout peasant society.⁴⁶ In the north Arden cattle were the type of animal most commonly owned by the peasantry. A comparison of strays in court rolls for the area between 1350 and 1500 suggests a ratio of about three cattle to

³⁵ NUL MiD 4238, MiD 4239, MiD 4241.

³⁶ NUL, MiD 4241; BRL, Norton MSS 92.

³⁷ M W Beresford, 'The Deserted Villages of Warwickshire', *Trans Birm Arch Soc*, LXVI, 1945-6, pp 49-107; R H Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1975, pp 169-73.

³⁸ NUL, MiD 4427.

³⁹ NUL, MiM 131/31, MiD 4446, MiD 4447.

⁴⁰ NUL, MiM 131/29 - MiM 131/33, *passim*, MiM 131/34.

⁴¹ NUL, MiD 4454.

⁴² NUL, MiDa 87, MiD 4455, MiM 175, MiM 214.

⁴³ NUL, MiM 175, MiM, 214.

⁴⁴ Lichfield Joint Record Office, D 77/1, fo 70; NUL, MiD 4445; SBT, DR 10/518.

⁴⁵ NUL, MiDa 91.

⁴⁶ C Dyer *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society*, Cambridge, 1980, pp 323-4.

every sheep, which is unlikely to be a true reflection as sheep were notoriously prone to stray.⁴⁷ Late fifteenth-century tithe accounts for Mancetter suggest widespread cattle ownership with 87 per cent of holdings paying for them at Hartshill, 75 per cent at Oldbury, and 67 per cent at Mancetter. Similarly, tithe accounts for Middleton in 1524 show that out of forty-three households only two did not pay tithes for cows or calves.⁴⁸ Incidental references, mainly recording trespasses, show that some peasant cattle herds were reasonably large, and comparable in size with many found on demesnes. In 1350 a herd of thirty was recorded at Hampton-in-Arden, twenty-six oxen at Tanworth-in-Arden in 1380, herds of twenty-three, twenty, and sixteen cattle at Erdington in 1350 and 1379, and smaller herds of sixteen in 1360, and fifteen, and thirteen in 1375 at Wroxall.⁴⁹ Small herds of between ten and twenty approximating to the averages suggested by Skipp for the Arden in the mid-sixteenth century would therefore seem to have been common in the previous century and a half.⁵⁰ The tithe accounts also show the presence of at least one and often two milch-cows on most holdings even in the town of Atherstone. Much of this dairy produce would have been for subsistence but the Mountford and Willoughby household accounts record a thriving trade in milk, butter, and cheese, with peasant producers supplying gentry households either directly or through local markets.⁵¹ By the time of Defoe, Warwickshire was renowned as one of England's foremost cheese counties, with Atherstone especially prominent. As with many early modern

developments the origins of this seem firmly rooted in the later Middle Ages.⁵²

III

The importance of animals within the Forest of Arden meant a considerable acreage was devoted to hay and fodder crops. Accounts indicate most seignorial households keeping livestock had more animals than they were able to feed from their own resources. Obviously all animals required winter feeding but the most specialized requiring oats were horses and oxen, the latter infrequently mentioned in the Arden. Cattle were mainly fed hay, which although cheaper could still cause problems depending on how much meadow was available, and often extra hay was bought in. Sheep, pigs, and poultry also needed winter forage and along with cattle and dog packs were frequently given peas and beans, while substitutes such as browse wood, twigs, holly, acorns, and nettles could be given to cattle.⁵³

The Duke of Buckingham's household in the 1450s had to buy in considerable quantities of fodder and bedding to maintain the ducal string of horses, beasts of the chase, and their domestic animals. Well over one hundred carts of hay were received in a year, with an outlay of £14 to £18 not being uncommon.⁵⁴ In 1454-5 the household purchased 300 cartloads of hay, thirty-two cartloads of straw, 140 quarters, and two bushels of oats worth £18 7s 11d, and even in a comparatively slack year, 1453-4, paid twenty-seven local peasants £9 19s 5½d for oats, barley, and straw.⁵⁵ Some were able to make consider-

⁴⁷ For sources see Table 3. The court rolls list 316 stray bovine animals but only 99 sheep and lambs.

⁴⁸ PRO, E 101 519/31; NUL, MiDa 91.

⁴⁹ PRO, SC 2/207/31; Bod Lib, MS Top Warwickshire c 1, fo 68; BRL, DV 327 247853, DV 327 347856; PRO, SC 2/207/94, SC 2/207/95.

⁵⁰ V H T Skipp, *Crisis and Development*, Cambridge, 1978, pp 89-90.

⁵¹ SBT DR 37/73, NUL 5/167/101, MiA 9, MiA 14, MiA 15, MiA 20.

⁵² A Dyer, 'Warwickshire Towns Under the Tudors and Stuarts', *Warwickshire History*, III, 1976-7, pp 122-34.

⁵³ WCRO, CR 136/c150, CR 136/c152, CR 136/c154; NUL, 5/167/101; Trow-Smith, *op cit*, pp 117-8; J Radley, 'Holly as Winter Feed', *Ag Hist Rev*, 9, 1961, pp 89-92; M Spray, 'Holly as Fodder in England', *ibid*, 29, 1981, pp 97-9.

⁵⁴ SRO, D 641/1/2/271 records in 1444-5 £14 paid for 120 cartloads of hay for the lord's cattle and SRO, D 641/1/2/275 records in 1475-6, 198 carts of hay.

⁵⁵ SRO, D 641/1/2/272, D 641/1/3/4.

TABLE 1
Land use recorded in the Forest of Arden in Final Concords

	Arable	Meadow	(in acres) Pasture	Woodland	Miscellaneous	Total
1345-65	1584 (79%)	138 (7%)	58 (3%)	227 (11%)	—	2007 (100%)
1390-1410	1160 (81%)	113 (8%)	38 (3%)	73 (5%)	40 (3%)	1424 (100%)
1440-60	382 (46%)	66 (8%)	369 (45%)	3 (0.6%)	2 (0.4%)	822 (100%)
1490-1509	1723 (40%)	276 (6%)	2027 (48%)	254 (6%)	—	4280 (100%)

Source: *Warwickshire Feet of Fines*, Volume III, 1345-1509. L Drucker (ed), Dugdale Society, XVIII, 1943.

able amounts of money, such as William Harries of Coton, who was paid 20s for oats or Henry Porter of Maxstoke who received 17s for hay. Similarly the livestock keeping of other members of the gentry and nobility stimulated the cereal and hay cultivation of local peasants. The Mountfords, Bingham, Astleys, and Frevilles all bought in extra grains, hay and straw for their herds.⁵⁶ This must have stimulated other cereal growing sectors within local rural society, while the demand for fodder and bedding must have extended downwards from the gentry through the ranks of the butcher-graziers to the peasants within the villages and hamlets.

The emphasis on animal husbandry therefore encouraged a particular type of cereal production. This in turn helped to keep land in arable cultivation. Obviously there had been changes in land use in the Arden during the period. The best indication of this is given by the type and amount of land recorded in concords. These are an imperfect source as they do not represent a reflective sample of all land in the area but they do broadly indicate the underlying trend. Table 1 suggests that the decisive movement towards pasture in the Arden came in the period 1410-30.

However this shift may have come earlier as demesnes at Middleton, Lea Marston, and Tanworth-in-Arden consisted entirely of pasture by the early fifteenth century.⁵⁷ Although there was a shrinkage of arable acreage it showed a degree of stability in the latter two-thirds of the century, and such movement away from arable was not nearly so pronounced or so progressive as in the Feldon. As the number of animals kept in the area was rising throughout the fifteenth century, as is witnessed in the frequent complaints of overstocking, trespasses, and stints, the demand for fodder must have correspondingly increased, both in arable cultivation and in the nurturing and mowing of meadows for hay.⁵⁸

The predominance of animals in the Arden may even have influenced the types of crops grown. Grange extents provide the best source of any comparison between the Arden and Feldon. Table 2 compares the types of crop recorded as harvested on nine Feldon and Avon Valley demesnes and eight Arden manors between 1353 and 1431. There are clear differences in the types of cereal, with pulse, maslin, and dredge being more significant on the Feldon demesnes but the major difference

⁵⁷ NUL, MiM 167, MiM 175, MiD 4227; BRL, Norton MSS 53; SBT, DR 37/107/1.

⁵⁸ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, p 31; WCRO, MR 1, NUL, MiL 5; WCRO, MR 13/35; NUL, MiM 133/11; BRL, DY 327 347863; Norton MSS 52; NUL, 5/169b/17; WCRO, CR 1886/298; SBT DR 3/791.

⁵⁶ SBT, DR 37/73; NUL 5/167/101; WCRO, CR 136/c150, CR 136/c151, CR 136/c153, CR 136/c154; NUL, MiM 165.

TABLE 2
Types of Crops Harvested in Warwickshire
Grange Extents 1353-1431

<i>Feldon and Avon Valley</i>	<i>Quarters</i>	<i>%</i>
Wheat	851	29
Rye	60	2
Barley	499	17
Maslin	22	1
Pulse	108	4
Dredge	660	22
Oats	316	10
Peas and Beans	445	15
	2961	100

<i>Arden</i>	<i>Quarters</i>	<i>%</i>
Wheat	704	36
Rye	107	5.5
Barley	128	7
Pulse	10	0.5
Dredge	169	9
Oats	258	13
Peas and Beans	562	29
	1938	100

Note: Quantities of grains have been rounded up or down to the nearest quarter. Similarly, where practical, percentages have been rounded up or down.

Sources: *Feldon and Avon Valley*, 32 extents: Oversley, SBT, DR 5/2254; Lighthorne, SBT, DR 98 672 a-d, 674 & a, 685; Snitterfield, BL, Eg. Roll 8624 (I am indebted to Christopher Dyer for allowing me to make use of his transcriptions of the above documents); Sutton-under-Brailes, GCRO, D1099/M31/44-54; Great Chesterton, SBT, DR 98/393b; Budbroke, WCRO, CR 895/11-16, 18-29; Brandon, PRO, SC 6/1038/9; Birdingbury, Devon Record Office, 248/M6 (I am indebted to Dick Holt for drawing my attention to this document); Radbourne, 'The Status Maneriorum of John Catesby', pp 23-8. *Arden*: 18 extents: Astley, WCRO, CR 136/c 150-2; Middleton, NUL, MiM 165; Maxstoke, Bod Lib Trinity MS 84, SBT, DR 37/114, PRO, SC 6/1040/9-11; Fillongley, PRO, SC 6/1040/8; Shustoke, PRO, SC 6/1040/19; Knowle, PRO, SC 6/1040/1-2; Nuneaton, BL, Add Roll 49753; Baddesley Clinton, SBT, DR 3/802, 805.

between the two is the greater importance of peas and beans in the Arden. The demesnes at Astley and Middleton often had 45-50 per cent of their total harvest in legumes, and a greater part of this was consumed within the manor by servants, pigs, poultry, and cattle.⁵⁹

Sparse and terse as the records for demesne production are they are positively eloquent when compared to the paucity of information on Arden peasant cereal cultivation. Only a few details survive, much for that being destroyed by trespassing. Table 3 shows the references to peasant crops destroyed by the actions of fellow peasants and their animals in the court rolls of thirteen Arden manors, and while this obviously is very imprecise it gives a reasonable impression of the crops grown. The goods of two Middleton men give a similar indication of the range of grains sown. In 1407 Laurence Scott was arrested and in his barn there were found peas and beans, oats, dredge, and hay, as well as two harrows, and other agricultural implements worth £2, while in 1423 John Gammel had the misfortune to have his wheat, barley, oats, peas, and beans destroyed by trespassing animals.⁶⁰ Interestingly, Hilton noticed an increase in the amounts of peas and beans grown both on demesnes and peasant holdings in champion parts of neighbouring Leicestershire during the fifteenth century, which in part he attributed to the need for livestock fodder.⁶¹

Others may have concentrated more on particular crops such as wheat for sale or barley for brewing. The Buckingham accounts suggest that oats were cultivated on a considerable scale by peasant producers, while other accounts show that oats were an important commodity in the

⁵⁹ WCRO, CR 135/c150-2; NUL, MiM 165.

⁶⁰ NUL, MiM 131/34, MiM 131/38b.

⁶¹ R H Hilton, *The Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Oxford, 1947, pp 64-6.

TABLE 3

Instances of Peasants' Crops Damaged by Trespass in the Forest of Arden 1350-1500

Crop:	Wheat	Barley	Rye	Oats	Dredge	Peas & Beans
References	33	11	8	17	8	26

Sources: Atherstone, WRCO, MR 13/1-35; Baddesley Clinton, SBT, DR 3/78-97; Erdington, BRL, DV 327 347853-347867; Kingsbury, NUL, MIL5, MiM 130/1-2; Lea Marston; BRL, Norton MSS 51-116; Middleton, NUL, MiM 131/25-49; Moxhull, WCRO, MR1; Nuneaton, BL Add Rolls 49530-49555; Stoncleigh, SBT, DR 18/30/24/8-44; Sutton Coldfield, NUL, MiM 134/1-18; Tanworth-in-Arden, Bod Lib, MS Top Warwickshire C1, SBT, DR 37/109; Temple Balsall, WCRO, CR 112/Ba 518-21, 363; Wishaw, WCRO, MR 2; Wroxall, PRO, SC2/107/94-97.

markets at Birmingham, Coleshill, Atherstone, Tamworth, and Solihull.⁶² Wheat, barley, and legumes feature prominently in debt litigation in the towns of Atherstone and Nuneaton suggesting a considerable volume of traffic in these.⁶³ Hay must have been one of the major crops of the Arden and on many holdings a high percentage of acres must have been under grass.

With the abundance of small crofts and closes in the Arden and the relative minority of the open field land the nature of cereal production differed markedly from the Feldon. As legumes have a considerable replenishing value to soil, adding nitrogen, the large numbers of livestock, and their manure, should in theory have helped the fertility of the land. Campbell has suggested that in fourteenth-century Norfolk the best ratio of yields was given on small holdings, where labour input was both high and intensive. It was also an area where legumes were grown in quantity

and manuring and marling were common.⁶⁴ The later medieval Arden would seem to have some similarities with fourteenth century Norfolk having small units of production, mutually beneficial crops and widespread manuring.

The yield of only one peasant holding in the Arden is known, that of John Kent of Stivichall in 1481, which has been comprehensively described by Christopher Dyer.⁶⁵ This is difficult to process because of the unknown yields of the crops and the problem of ascertaining how much of the holding was under the plough. Kent grew dredge, rye, and barley, but paradoxically no legumes, slightly under half his crop was oats, easily the worst yielding grain. When these are taken into account it would seem that his yield was somewhere between eleven and twenty bushels an acre, with the latter probably being a truer reflection of his harvest. Even though this is poor compared to modern expectations it is far better than the miserable yields recorded on demesnes and present holdings elsewhere in Warwickshire, which may support Campbell's view that under certain conditions peasant yields could be superior to those of the demesnes.⁶⁶

IV

There are now encouraging signs that after a period of serious neglect, interest is being renewed in medieval pastoralism, and this will undoubtedly help to provide a more complete picture of the English economy in the later middle ages.⁶⁷ The nature of cattle grazing in the Forest of Arden was different from other areas already studied.

⁶² B M S Campbell, 'Agricultural Progress in Medieval England: Some Evidence from East Norfolk', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXVI, 1983, pp 27-34.

⁶³ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming*, pp 29-30, note 92.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, p 14; Hilton, *The English Peasantry*, pp 201-2.

⁶⁵ M Mate, 'Pastoral farming in South-east England in the Fifteenth Century', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XL, 1987, pp 523-36; I Blanchard, 'The Continental European Cattle Trades, 1400-1600', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXIX, 1986, pp 427-60.

⁶² SRO, D 641/1/3/4; NUL, MiM 165; SBT, DR 37/73; WCRO, MR 13/2; MR 13/3, MR 13/14; PRO J1 1/977.

⁶³ WCRO, MR 13/2, MR 13/3, MR 13/14, MR 13/25, MR 13/30; BL Add Roll 49530, 49530, 49551, 49578.

The landscape contrasted with the upland slopes of Northern England and in the Arden grazing was not based on rough moorland pasture suitable for little else. Obviously summer and winter pasturing found on the de Lacy vaccaries in Rossendale or in Wales with the system of *hafod* and *hendre* was not necessary in Warwickshire. Instead Arden grazing was on comparatively good quality pastureland, often which had lapsed from arable use, in compartments within seignorial parks and in enclosed fields. The size of herds also contrasted with some of those recorded in the North, where vast herds, such as the de Lacy's 2423 head of cattle pastured in Rossendale in 1296, were often maintained.⁶⁸ In the Arden grazing was on a much smaller scale and more diversified socially, practised by powerful peers, such as Buckingham, by members of the gentry and by peasant families such as the Deys and Baillys. The numbers of animals involved were also comparatively small with herds of even a hundred rare in the Arden.

The continuous nature of the records of the Duchy of Lancaster's Derbyshire estates enabled Blanchard to suggest that although the general trend was for an increase in pastoral activity in the fifteenth century, there were considerable fluctuations with booms and slumps at twenty-year intervals.⁶⁹ The lack of a continuous series of records for any of the Arden estates makes it difficult to establish a chronology of the development of cattle grazing in the area. The records which do survive giving exact animal numbers are concentrated in the late fourteenth and

early fifteenth centuries, and similarly most references to peasant herds occur in the late fourteenth century. However, the evidence of the final concords and the crescendo of material relating to stints and overstocking in court rolls suggests the major expansion of cattle grazing in the Arden began in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, a growth that continued at a variable pace into the next century. The Derbyshire material also suggests that pastoral farming could be localized. Blanchard identified the years 1448–56 as witnessing a slump in pastoral activity in Derbyshire, yet this was the period in which John Brome was most active in cattle fattening in the Arden. Similarly Blanchard saw stagnation in Derbyshire between 1465–75, whereas during this time in the Arden the Deys rose to the height of their grazing activities.⁷⁰

The cattle raising in the Forest of Arden represents only an intermediate stage of a more extensive network. The majority of animals coming into the area had Welsh origin and presumably after fattening many were moved on. Londoners buying fatstock from the Earl of Warwick's demesne at Wedgnok Park in 1431 and from John Brome in 1446, the aforementioned John le Deyster and London merchants active in smaller centres, such as Atherstone and Nuneaton, show that some Arden beef animals had London as their ultimate destination.⁷¹ It would be extremely profitable to trace the animals in either direction, and would no doubt greatly add to our appreciation of medieval road traffic and long distance networks of trade.

The interpretation of the later medieval English economy has long been a source of difference among historians, with some seeing it as a period of decline, of stagnation, or of economic difficulties, while

⁶⁸ Trow-Smith, *op cit*, p 94; Kershaw, *op cit*, pp 97–105; R A Donkin, 'Cattle on the Estates of the Medieval Cistercian Monasteries in England and Wales', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XV, 1962–3, pp 31–53; L M Cantor (ed), *The English Medieval Landscape*, 1982, p 65; Birrell, *op cit*, pp 118–23; Bennett, *op cit*, p 71; Wright, *op cit*, pp 19–21; J R Birrell, 'Medieval Agriculture', in *VCH Staffordshire*, VI, pp 10–11; G H Tupling, *The Economic History of Rossendale*, Manchester, 1927, pp 11–26.

⁶⁹ *The Duchy of Lancaster's Estates in Derbyshire 1485–1540*, I S W Blanchard (ed), Derbyshire Arch Soc Record Series, III, 1967, pp 1–15.

⁷⁰ *ibid* p 11, SBT, DR 3/801, DR 3/803.

⁷¹ WCRO, CR 1886/488; SBT, DR 3/801; *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1422–29, p 238; *Calendar of Patent Rolls* 1467–77, p 440.

others have seen it as a time of unrivalled opportunities for growth. Many agree that forest areas were generally more buoyant economically in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries than the champion countryside where decay, abandonment, and engrossing were more widespread.⁷² Woodland landscapes were also less affected by the profound changes in rural society during this period and in many instances provided a refuge for those flee-

ing from Feldon areas. In contrast to large scale sheep farming which on many occasions was destructive of the established rural economy, such as in south Warwickshire, cattle raising, particularly in the Forest of Arden, strengthened the rural economy in a period of agrarian difficulty and change. More detailed studies are now required of other areas where benign pastoral economies existed. These, if not leading to a reappraisal of the fifteenth century economy, would at the very least greatly enhance our knowledge of one of the most seriously neglected, yet most important, parts of later medieval agrarian history.

⁷² J. Thirsk (ed), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500-1640*, Cambridge, 1967, pp 409-11, 422-8, 431-51; Skipp, *op cit*, pp 7-8, Phythian-Adams, *op cit*, pp 24-5.

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