

WAKEFIELD, WEST RIDING: THE ECONOMY  
OF A YORKSHIRE MANOR

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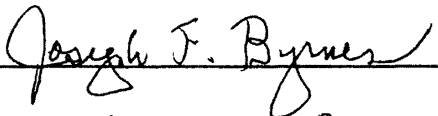
OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE FOUNDATIONS: 1100-1300 . . . . .	16
III. THE MANORIAL ECONOMY: LAND AND RESOURCES . . . . .	44
IV. THE MANORIAL ECONOMY: MARKET ACTIVITY . . . . .	63
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	86
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	91
APPENDIXES . . . . .	104
APPENDIX A - PLACE-NAME SURNAMES IN THE WAKEFIELD COURT ROLLS . . . . .	104
APPENDIX B - PERSONAL PLEDGING AND OFFICE- HOLDING AT WAKEFIELD . . . . .	111

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Yorkshire and its Ridings . . . . .	18
2. Wapentakes of the West Riding . . . . .	19
3. Townships of Morley and Agbrigg Wapentakes . . . . .	23
4. Extent of Wakefield Manor . . . . .	24
5. West Riding Regions . . . . .	27
6. West Riding Geology . . . . .	28
7. Wakefield Market Area . . . . .	65

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As the fundamental economic and social unit of medieval Europe, the manor has long remained a centerpiece of modern medieval studies. Early pioneers of English manorial history such as Frederick Seebohm, Paul Vinogradoff, and Frederick Maitland pursued the dual goal of determining the origins of the manor and feudalism, and outlining the manorial economic system of agricultural production and rents. In so doing, these men initiated the classic fusion of history and economics that ever since has played so prominent a role in medieval studies, a tradition continued in the more modern works of such noted historians as M.M. Postan, Eileen Power, A.R. Bridbury, and Joan Thirsk.

This study follows in the tradition of the main perspectives outlined above and takes as its focus an investigation into the economic vitality of Wakefield, a fourteenth-century English manor. The early fourteenth century was a period of widespread economic decline among English manors, brought on by a combination of unfavorable long-term trends and short-term disruptions. By an examination of the various revenues garnered by the manor and its diverse economic activities, coupled with a critical

analysis of certain economic indicators drawn from contemporary sources, a fairly accurate picture of the relative vitality of the manor emerges. Despite the steadily-worsening economic climate, the manor continued to enjoy an expanding economy throughout the period in question.

For a number of reasons, this study focuses on the manor of Wakefield in the West Riding of Yorkshire. A major determinant in this selection was the fact that Wakefield differed significantly from most manors that have hitherto been objects of similar studies. With few exceptions, historians have tended to concentrate their attentions on manors lying in the central and southern parts of England, and in most of these cases, to large ecclesiastical estates. Wakefield lay in the relatively neglected north of England and was held as a lay estate throughout most of its history, remaining in the possession of the Earls de Warenne during the time-span of this study. Also a determinant in the selection process was the sheer size of the manor. Wakefield encompassed a large portion of south-western Yorkshire, stretching westward from the junction of the Aire and Calder rivers to the Pennine uplands some twenty miles distant. It was the abundance and diversity of resources contained within these unusually broad extents that allowed Wakefield to enjoy a robust economy in a time of general economic contraction. A final consideration was the availability of sources; numerous published primary sources



exist for Yorkshire in general and Wakefield in particular. The Lay Subsidy Rolls of 1297, 1301, and 1334, the various government records held in the Public Record Office, and most importantly, a fairly complete series of manorial court rolls for the years 1272-1333 make Wakefield one of the better-documented manors of the period.

The availability of such material is due in large part to the rise of the antiquarian movement of the nineteenth century. Rooted in the Victorian fascination with the Romantic aspects of the medieval past, antiquarian works tended toward descriptive accounts of local monuments and relics rather than on historical analysis. Yet though their conclusions were often predicated upon erroneous assumptions, these works did generate an intense interest in local institutions--including the manor--and were at least partially responsible for the great volume of primary source material published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Contemporary annals, government records, parish registers, court rolls, and a host of other sources were widely translated and published by local history associations such as the Seldon Society, Thoresby Society, and Parish Register Society. These are especially important sources, providing much of the basic raw material with which historians have worked for over a century. For the purposes of this study several of these sources are essential; the court rolls of Wakefield manor, originally published as a series in the *Yorkshire Archaeological*

*Society Record Series* by W.P. Baildon, John Lister, and J.P. Walker in the years 1901-1945 are the foundation upon which this study is built.<sup>1</sup> Also important are a series of works by one of the most noteworthy of the early Yorkshire anti-quarians, William Brown. His translation and publication of the Lay Subsidy Rolls of 1297 and 1301 and his four-volume set of *Inquisitions Post Mortem* for the county of Yorkshire are valuable tools in a study of local economy, providing crucial information on demographic, economic, and social aspects of the peasant population.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the *Nomina Villarum*, published by R.H. Skaife in 1867, provides information on middle-range landholders and their estates.<sup>3</sup>

A second nineteenth-century development in historicism with important ramifications for this study was the rise of national histories--attempts to trace out a nation's "roots" through a study of its institutions, such as the manor and feudalism. In England, as on the Continent, these histories were colored by disputes concerning Roman *versus* Germanic origins of constitutional development, the foremost representatives of these schools being Frederick Seebohm and Sir Paul Vinogradoff, respectively. Despite their differences, the two men shared similar approaches in their work and greatly influenced the shape future manorial studies would take. Both sought to define the economy of medieval England, and saw as the centerpiece of that economy the agrarian production of the manor. Likewise, both men formed broad generalizations about the "typical" manor: a core

demesne, to which were attached other holdings of varying degrees of subjection and on which a largely servile population engaged in agrarian production. Each concluded that this model of manorial structure was universally standard throughout England, though they had confined their studies to large ecclesiastical estates lying in the south.<sup>4</sup> The restriction to manors with these particular characteristics was directly tied to the source material Seebohm and Vinogradoff utilized. Their innovative use of such primary documents as the Hundred Rolls, Lay Subsidy Rolls, and especially financial records of individual manors was better suited to large ecclesiastic estates, whose large size and continuity of ownership facilitated record-keeping. Though more recent studies have disproved many of their conclusions, the methodologies and parameters developed by the two men signalled a turning-point in the field of medieval history and continue to shape the direction of modern manorial studies.

Among the "second generation" of economic historians, M.M. Postan is widely regarded as the voice of orthodoxy concerning the manorial economy of the high middle ages. Postan argued that at the end of the twelfth century England entered into a period of sustained economic growth that was to continue for over a century. This economic expansion was not due to an influx of foreign bullion, as some historians claimed, but rather was the result of an as-yet-unexplained population explosion that brought in its wake a dramatic

increase in trade. The resulting population pressure forced a rise in prices and a decrease in wages as competition for resources intensified, further augmenting manorial revenues. Higher profit potential led landowners to reconstitute the demesne lands they had alienated in the previous century and to substitute money rents for traditional service dues. This increased need for hard currency stimulated an even greater peasant participation in market production and gave rise to a small class of capitalist peasant farmers on the larger (and therefore better-managed) estates.

For many years historians believed this process of population growth, land hunger, and expanding manorial economies had continued well into the fourteenth century, ending only in the massive mortality brought by the Black Death after 1349. The publication in 1950 of Postan's "Some Economic Evidence for Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages" and the apparent validation of his findings in subsequent works by other historians have rendered this assumption invalid.<sup>5</sup> Postan's discovery was that the economic cycle had already begun to reverse itself some years prior to the onset of the Black Death. A declining birthrate, political disruption, and unusually extreme vagaries of climate combined with other factors to create a near-Malthusian population decline in the early decades of the fourteenth century. Lands dropped out of production for lack of workers, the wage/price ratio once again began to shift, and manorial incomes contracted, creating a general

economic *malaise* that gripped the entire agrarian sector of the English economy.<sup>6</sup>

Yet this construct, though generally accepted, is not without its critics. Utilizing new techniques and interpretations, specialized case studies have produced evidence contradictory to Postan's theories. Both A.R. Bridbury and Edwin Miller deny Postan's contention that the economy of the thirteenth century differed significantly from that of the twelfth, asserting instead that both periods were times of steady economic expansion.<sup>7</sup> D.G. Watts analyzed commodity prices and land-use patterns on the Abbey of Tichfield's holdings to argue against a supposed population decline in the years prior to the Black Death, attributing Postan's findings to the latter's failure to compensate for the anomalies caused by the Great Famine of 1315-1322.<sup>8</sup> Postan's visualization of the peasant community as egalitarian was challenged early on by Marxist historians E.A. Kosminsky and Rodney Hilton, who argued that the peasant community was highly stratified, with peasant elites dominating local affairs. In recent works, Hilton and fellow Marxist Christopher Dyer have shifted their attentions from the social and legal aspects of feudalism to the medieval market system and peasant participation within that system.<sup>9</sup>

This shift of focus by Hilton and Dyer is only part of a recent general upsurge of interest in the medieval market system among historians. Old notions of the market as

simply a place of exchange for the local population have given way to the rather more complex central-place theories of modern research. An excellent treatment of this approach is provided in the opening chapters of James Masschaele's unpublished PhD. dissertation "A Regional Economy in Medieval England," in which the author deftly describes an interlocking network of local, regional, and provincial markets, arranged spatially, temporally, and hierarchically to create a fully-integrated "national" market system. In this same work and a subsequent article in the *English Historical Review*, Masschaele also discusses the legal privileges and responsibilities inherent in ownership of market rights.<sup>10</sup> Dyer expands on this approach in a recent article in the *Economic History Review*, in which he establishes a direct relationship between the urban and social hierarchy; that is, a market's ranking within the urban hierarchy largely determined the social status of the patrons who frequented it.<sup>11</sup> This study incorporates guidelines established in the works above with an analysis of court roll data to determine Wakefield's function within this market system.

While early historians such as Seebohm, Vinogradoff, and Kosminsky pioneered the use of contemporary records in their studies of manorial economy, modern social historians have innovated new methodologies to utilize those same sources in their studies of peasant life. This new social history was innovated in the early 1960's by J. Ambrose Raftis of the

Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto. He and his colleagues of the "Toronto School" greatly expanded the scope of peasant studies through systematic and quantitative analysis of court roll data, examining such areas as peasant demographics and mobility, family structure, conflict and cohesiveness among villagers, and socio-economic stratification within the peasant community. In "Social Structures in Five East Midland Villages," Raftis demonstrated that peasant society was highly stratified and that pledging and office-holding were largely determined by an individual's socio-economic status.<sup>12</sup> These methods and findings were duplicated in similar works by Edward Britton and Edwin DeWindt.<sup>13</sup>

Though the Toronto School has come under fire for certain methodological weaknesses<sup>14</sup>--most notably an injudicious use of surnames in its reconstructions of kinship networks--it continues to remain in the forefront of manorial studies, developing new techniques and perspectives. This study also makes cautious use of many of these techniques, examining such factors as peasant mobility, economic activity, and office-holding as indicators of the relative economic health of the manor.

Given the strong emphasis of this work on the role woodland resources and industrial activity played in maintaining a vigorous economy at Wakefield, mention must be made of several important works dealing specifically with these topics. Oliver Rackham, perhaps the foremost

authority on woodland and its uses in the medieval period, has produced a number of works detailing such diverse aspects as the types of trees common to English woodlands and the uses to which they were suited, methods of harvesting and managing woodland resources, and the networks of trade in various woodland products.<sup>15</sup> Various medieval industries such as iron smelting, charcoal burning, and glass manufacture were commonly located in or near woodlands to take advantage of the easily-accessible fuel they provided. Many of these industries are discussed in Jean Birrell's article "Peasant Craftsmen in the Medieval Forest," in which the author demonstrates that these pursuits were typically small-scale peasant enterprises undertaken to supplement household incomes.<sup>16</sup> Both Birrell's discussion of the forest economy of Tutbury and similar works by Francis Davenport and Herbert L. Edlin, though dealing with areas outside of Yorkshire, provide valuable insights into this sphere of the economy.<sup>17</sup>

Two industries in particular--wool and iron smelting--played an increasingly important part in maintaining the economic vitality of Wakefield manor after 1300, and are dealt with in some detail in this work. Louis Francis Salzman's classic study *English Industries of the Middle Ages*<sup>18</sup> is the logical starting-point for any investigation into medieval industry, though specialized works dealing with specific industries are necessary for a full treatment of the subject. The definitive works on the medieval wool



industry are Eileen Power's *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* and a subsequent, similar work by T.H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages*.<sup>19</sup> Both give a detailed overview of the English wool trade and its growth in the high middle ages. Especially valuable for this study was Herbert Heaton's *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, which provided much information on this subject specific to Wakefield.<sup>20</sup> Several good treatments of the medieval iron industry are extant; both John Nef's contribution in the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* and Henry de Beltgens Gibbins' *Industrial History of England* provide a basic understanding of mining techniques and history.<sup>21</sup> The four-volume *West Yorkshire: An Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500*, edited by Steven Moorhouse and Margaret M. Faull, is an excellent source of information on iron smelting at Wakefield and the surrounding area and discusses a number of other economic pursuits as well.<sup>22</sup> The most important source of information concerning these industries are, of course, the court rolls themselves, which in frequency of reference to these industries and the incomes they produced present an unmistakable picture of economic growth in the early decades of the fourteenth century. Indeed, the central place of the court rolls in almost every aspect of this study are apparent; though secondary sources such as those discussed above provide valuable insights, it is ultimately the information contained within the rolls themselves that confirms the

thesis of this work. Consistently the indicators contained within those rolls demonstrate that Wakefield manor enjoyed a vigorously robust and even expanding economy in a period of widespread economic contraction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield*, 5 vols., W.P. Baildon, John Lister, and J.P. Walker, eds., Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 29, 36, 57, 78, 109 (1901-1945).

<sup>2</sup>*Yorkshire Lay Subsidy, Being a Ninth, Collected in 25 Edward I, 1297*, ed. by William Brown. Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 18 (1894); Brown, *Yorkshire Lay Subsidy, Being a Fifteenth, Collected 30 Edward I (1301)*, Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series 21 (1897); Brown, *Yorkshire Inquisitions*, 4 vols., (1902-06).

<sup>3</sup>R.H. Skaife, "Knight's Fees in Yorkshire. 31st Edward I. The *Nomina Villarum* for Yorkshire. 9th Edward II," *Publications of the Surtees Society* (1867).

<sup>4</sup>Sir Frederick Seebohm, *The English Village Community Examined in its Relations to the Manorial and Tribal Systems and to the Common or Open Field System of Husbandry. An Essay in Economic History*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1883); Sir Paul Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor*, (London: S. Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., 1905).

<sup>5</sup>M.M. Postan, "Some Economic Evidence for Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 2 (1950), 221-46.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 221-46.

<sup>7</sup>A.R. Bridbury, "Before the Black Death," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 30 (1977), 393-410; Edward Miller, "England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: An Economic Contrast?" *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 26 (1971), 1-14.

<sup>8</sup>D.G. Watts, "A Model for the Early Fourteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 20 (1967), 543-47.

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Dyer, "The Consumer and the Market in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 42(1989), 305-27; Rodney Hilton, "Lords, Burgesses and Hucksters," *Past and Present* 97 (1982), 3-15.

<sup>10</sup>James Paul Masschaele, "A Regional Economy in Medieval England," PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1990; Masschaele, "Market Rights in Thirteenth-Century England," *English Historical Review*, 107 (1992), 78-89.

<sup>11</sup>Dyer, "The Consumer and the Market," 305-27.

<sup>12</sup>J. Ambrose Raftis, "Social Structure in Five East Midlands Villages: A Study of Possibilities in the Use of Court Roll Data," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser., 18 (1965), 83-100; see Raftis' other works, Raftis, "Geographical Mobility in Lay Subsidy Rolls," *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), 385-403; Raftis, *Tenure and Mobility. Studies in the Social History of the English Medieval Landscape*, Studies and Texts Series, no.8, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1964).

<sup>13</sup>Edward Britton, *The Community of the Vill: A Study in the History of the Family and Village Life in Fourteenth-Century England*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977); Edwin B. DeWindt, *Land and People in Holywell-cum-Needingworth*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1972).

<sup>14</sup>The best summation of these methodological weaknesses is in Zvi Razi, "The Toronto School's Reconstitution of Medieval Peasant Society: A Critical View," *Past and Present* 85 (1979), 141-57; Judith Bennet's perceptive article "Spouses, Sibling and Surnames: Reconstructing Families from Medieval Village Court Rolls," *Journal of British Studies* 23 (1983), 26-46 is also very helpful in recognizing problems inherent in this type of research, and offers useful insights as to avoiding some of these pitfalls.

<sup>15</sup>Oliver Rackham, *Ancient Woodland: Its History, Vegetation, and Uses in England*, (London: E. Arnold, 1980); Rackham, "The History and Effects of Coppicing as a Woodland Practice," in *The Biotic Effects of Public Pressures on the Woodland Environment*, The Nature Conservancy Staff Symposium (1967), 82-93; Rackham, "The Forest: Woodland and Woodpasture in Medieval England," in *Archaeological Approaches to Medieval Europe*, Kathleen Biddick, ed., (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 1984), 69-101.

<sup>16</sup>Jean Birrell, "Peasant Craftsmen in the Medieval Forest," *Agricultural History Review* 17 (1969), 91-107.

<sup>17</sup>Jean Birrell, "The Forest Economy of the Honor of Tutbury in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 8 (1962), 114-34; Frances G. Davenport, *The Economic Development of a Norfolk Manor (of Forncett) 1086-1565*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906); Herbert Leeson Edlin, *Woodland Crafts in Britain: An Account of the Traditional Uses of Trees and Timbers in the British Countryside*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1949).

<sup>18</sup>Louis Francis Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923).

<sup>19</sup>Eileen Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History*, (Oxford, 1941); Terence H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>20</sup>Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries from the Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution*, 2d ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

<sup>21</sup>John V. Nef, "Mining and Industry in Medieval Civilization," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, vol.2, M.M. Postan, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 430-93; Henry de Beltgens Gibbins, *The Industrial History of England*, 23rd ed., (London: Methuen, 1918).

<sup>22</sup>Steven A. Moorhouse and Margaret L. Faull, eds., *West Yorkshire: An Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500*, 4 vols., (Wakefield, England: West Yorkshire Metropolitan City Council, 1981); see pp.774-89.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FOUNDATIONS: 1100-1300

The early decades of the fourteenth century were disastrous ones for most of England. A cycle of exceptionally cool wet weather caused widespread crop failures in 1315 and 1316, and in this same period a devastating sheep murraine wreaked havoc on flocks throughout the country. The following year an unusually virulent epidemic--possibly typhus--swept through a population already weakened by famine, further exacerbating an already desperate situation. After a brief respite in 1318 the cycle began again, and the next three years were marked by yet another series of crop failures and famines. Simultaneously a cattle plague erupted that struck at the very heart of the agrarian-based economic system, the oxen used as draught animals.<sup>1</sup> In the north of England man-made disasters complemented those of natural origin, as Scottish incursions and the conflicts between Edward II and his barons subjected the region to the depredations of marauding armies.

Apart from these immediate disruptions, a number of long-term developments signalled a period of widespread economic contraction. Most important of these was the

decline in birthrate after 1300 that created a static and in many instances negative population growth. This decline in population reversed the thirteenth-century pattern of agrarian expansion, as the shrinking population brought a reduction in the amount of arable land under cultivation and a corresponding decline in production and manorial revenues. A number of other developments contributed to long-term economic disruption as well. Edward II's manipulation of the English monetary system in an attempt to increase royal revenues and finance his military adventures brought massive inflation and a period of economic instability to the realm. In addition, the population growth and agrarian expansion of the previous two centuries had resulted in an acute land hunger by the late thirteenth century, and crop yields declined thereafter as the overworked soil succumbed to soil exhaustion. This combination of unfavorable long-term trends and short-term disruptions created after 1300 a general economic decline in England that would reach its nadir with the onset of the Black Death in 1349.<sup>2</sup>

Yet some estates managed to avoid the worst of these effects, and a few even prospered during this period. Some suffered only slightly the disruptions of climate and war; a few, through more efficient managerial techniques or a fortuitous diversity of resources, weathered the general economic *malaise* with only minor ill-effects. One such was the manor of Wakefield in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Though the calamities of 1315-1322 struck harshly at its

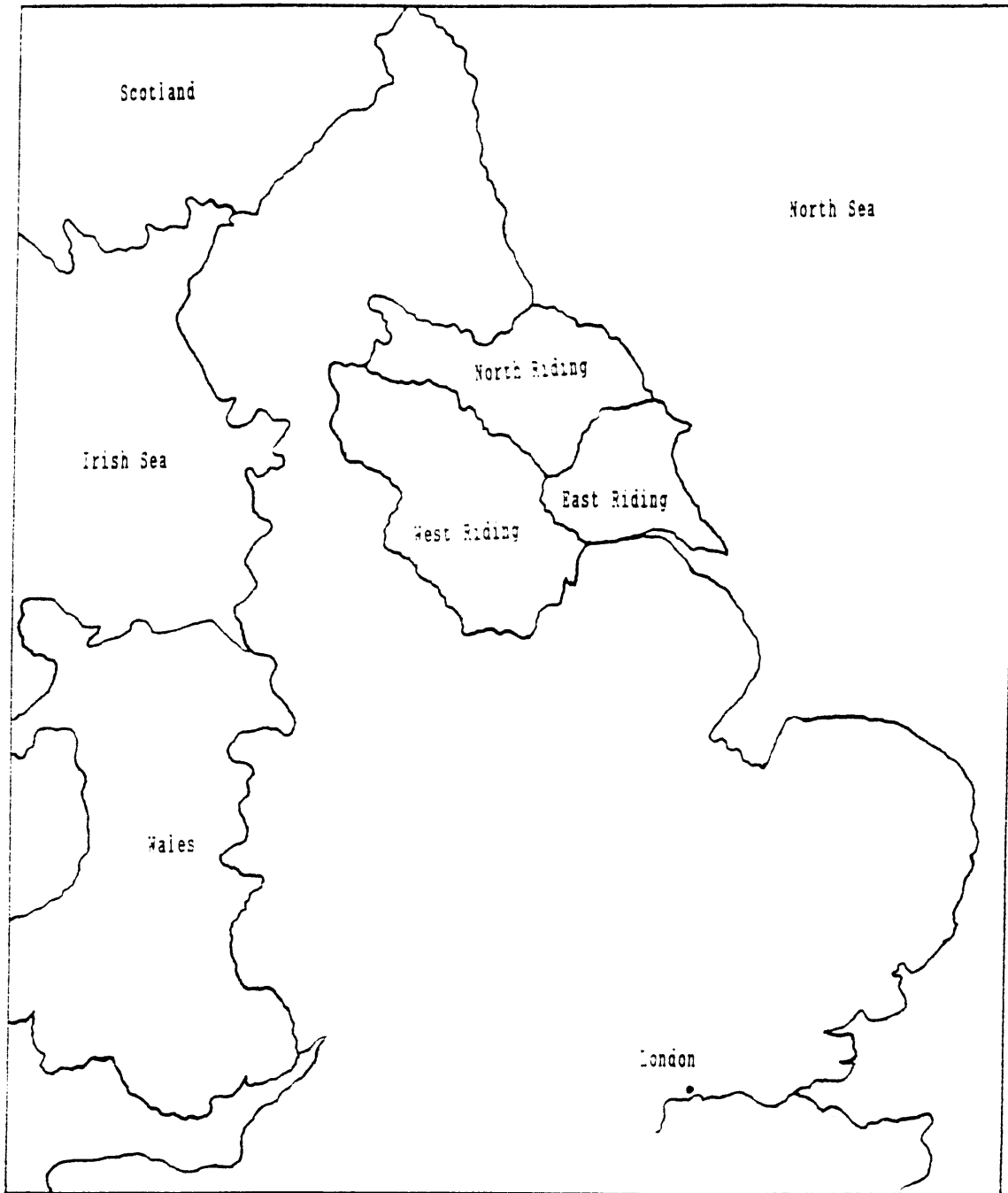


Fig.1: Yorkshire and its Ridings



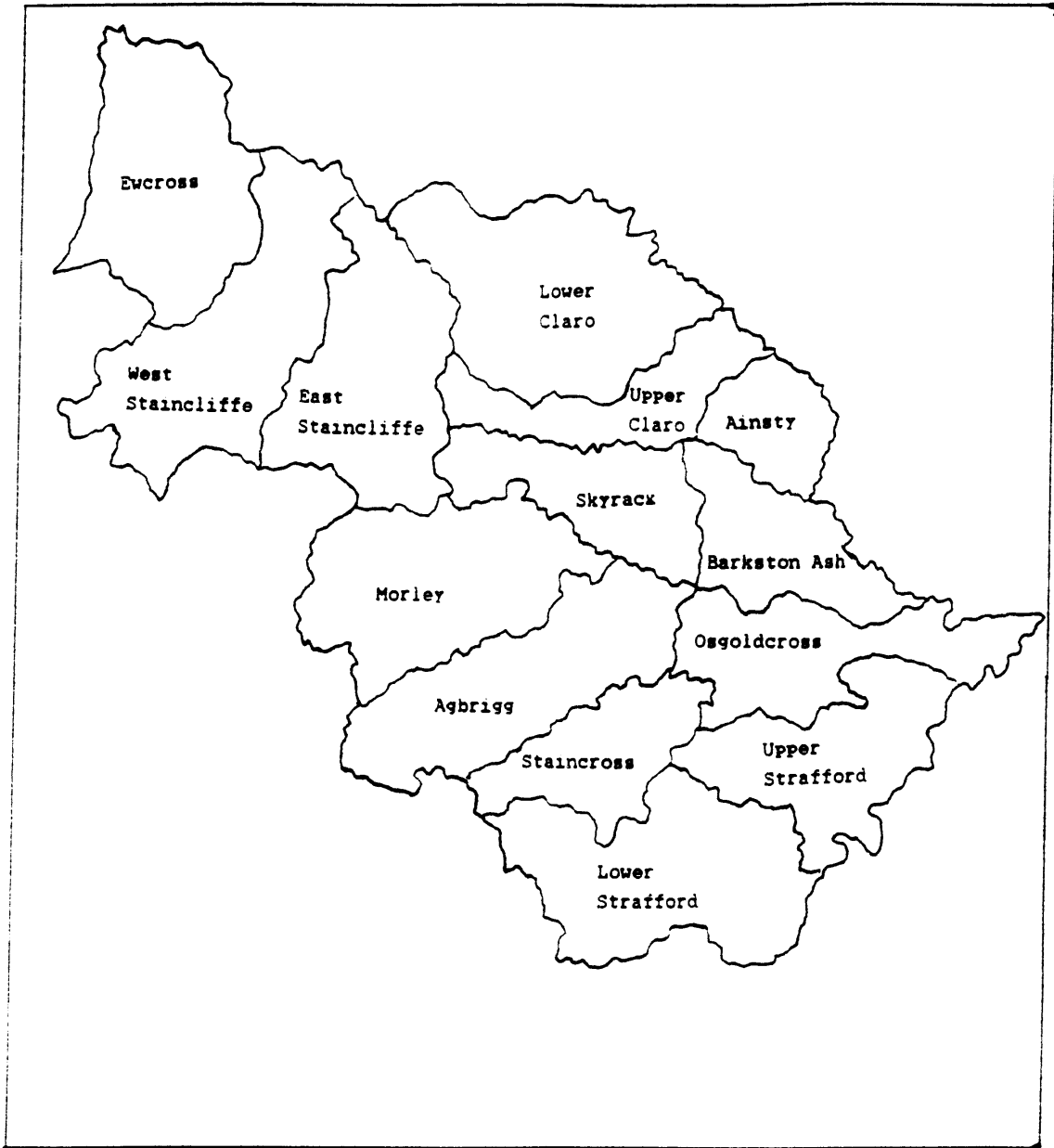


Fig.2: Wapentakes of the West Riding

peasant population, the general trend during the years 1300-1349 was one of continued demographic and agrarian expansion. This, coupled with a continuing availability of land to support that expansion and an abundance of natural resources, allowed Wakefield manor to experience a period of growth in the face of a generally unfavorable economic climate.

Throughout the period of this study, the manor belonged to the Warennes, Earls of Surrey. Though first mentioned in the Domesday inquest of 1086, Wakefield is known to have existed prior to the conquest as a royal estate of the Saxon kings. Around 1088 William Rufus granted the manor and all its appurtenances to William de Warenne, second Earl of Surrey, whose father had campaigned with William the Conqueror and died in the service of the Crown. For the next six generations--apart from a few brief interruptions--the manor remained in the hands of the Warenne family. When William, third Earl of Surrey died on crusade in 1148, the manor passed to his only child, a daughter named Isabel. Her first husband, William de Blois, died without issue in 1159, but three years later Isabel married Hamelin Plantagenet and bore him a son, William. Both Hamelin and his heir, the future fifth Earl of Surrey, assumed the Warenne name by right of their ties to Isabel. William's son John, sixth Earl of Surrey, lost possession of Wakefield during the Baron's War of 1264-65. Defeated with Prince Edward's royalist forces at the Battle of Lewes in May 1264, Warenne

forfeited his extensive holdings in England to the Earl of Gloucester and fled to France. The following year he returned to England and, after the final defeat of Simon de Montfort at the Battle of Evesham, regained possession of his former holdings.<sup>3</sup> The Warennes maintained undisturbed possession of the manor thereafter until 1319. In January of that year Thomas of Lancaster, lord of the neighboring honor of Pontefract, forced Warenne to cede to him possession of Wakefield manor as well as Warenne's extensive holdings in Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, and Wales. Lancaster was to hold these lands for life, paying to the Earl of Surrey a stipend of 1,000 marks yearly, drawn from the earnings of Lancaster's holdings in Somerset, Dorset, and Wiltshire.<sup>4</sup> This cession was the culmination of three years of open warfare, precipitated by Warenne's abduction of Lancaster's wife in 1316. Yet the loss of these lands proved to be only temporary after all. Lancaster's treasonous activities cost him his life in 1322, and the disputed holdings, including Wakefield, escheated to the Crown. Four years later Edward II re-enfeoffed the Earl of Surrey with his former possessions; but when Warenne died without legitimate heirs in 1347, the manor once again escheated to the Crown and remained under royal administration until the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of its first mention in the Domesday inquest of 1086 the manor already possessed most of the area it was to retain through the next six centuries, comprising

at that time the village itself with its fourteen pieces of sokeland, six attached villis, and eight berewicks--some of which lay up to twenty-five miles to the west.<sup>6</sup> The manor acquired a few small additions during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, such as Golcar and Dalton townships, but during the time-span of this study its boundaries remained essentially static. Second only to Pontefract in size among all the estates of the West Riding, Wakefield contained 53 of that Riding's 231 townships, as well as moieties of six other townships it shared with the honor of Pontefract.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the manor's unusually large size, its administrative structure differed somewhat from that of the "typical" manor. Wakefield extended over an area of nearly 6,000 hectares, of which approximately half was subinfeudated and the rest retained in the hands of the earl as demesne. Too unwieldy to be properly managed from a single location, the demesne lands were divided into subdivisions called graveships and grouped into four districts, or bailiwicks, each with its own administrative center. The main administrative body was the manorial court, which dealt with such issues as land transactions, enforcement of customary dues and service obligations, and various minor breaches of the peace. This court stood every third week at Wakefield, except during the periods of its twice-yearly circuits to the other bailiwick seats of Brighouse, Kirkburton, and Halifax.<sup>8</sup>

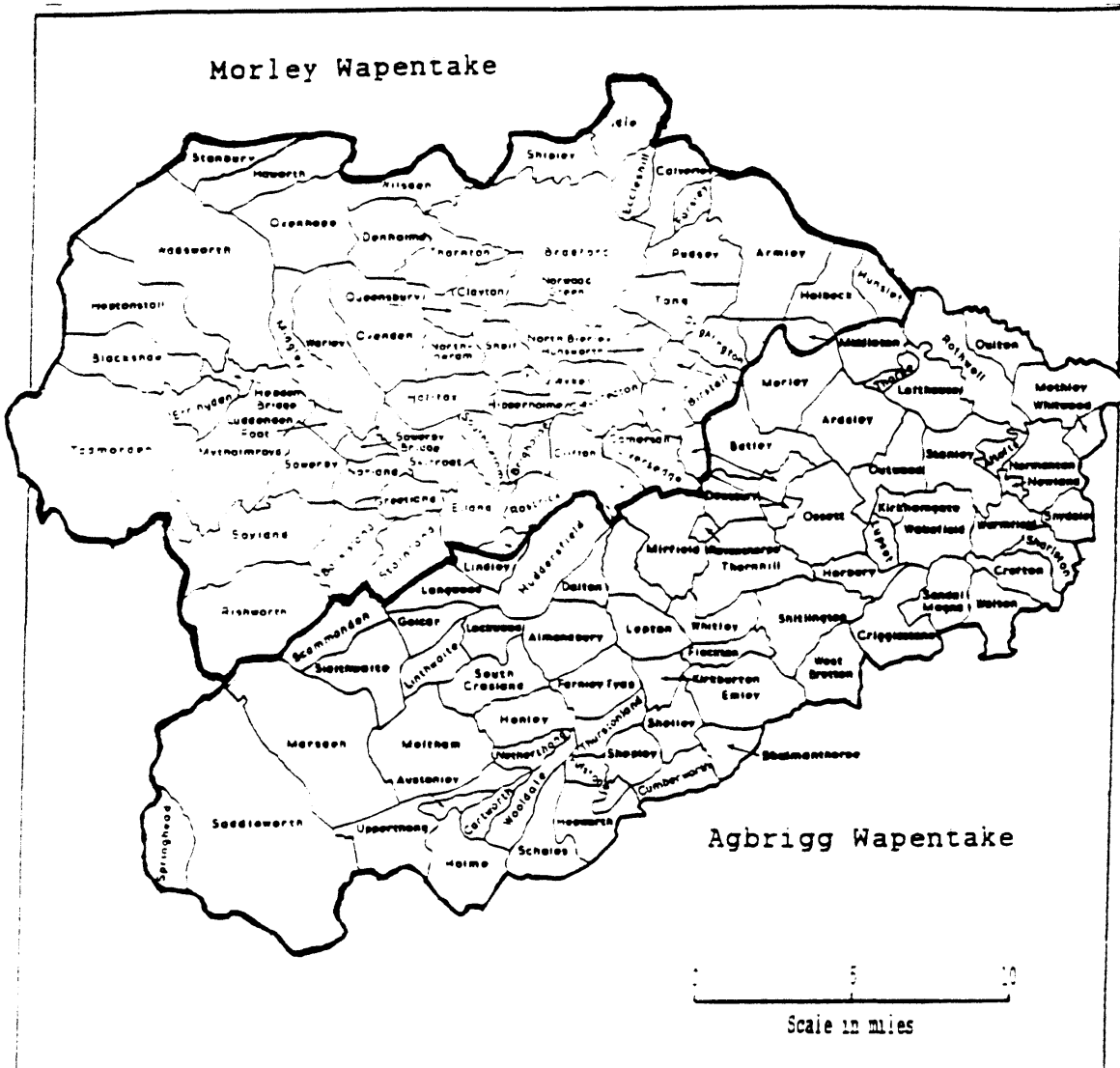


Fig.3: Townships of Morley and Agbrigg Wapentakes

Source: A.H. Smith, The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, English Place Name Society Publications, vols. 30-37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961-63).

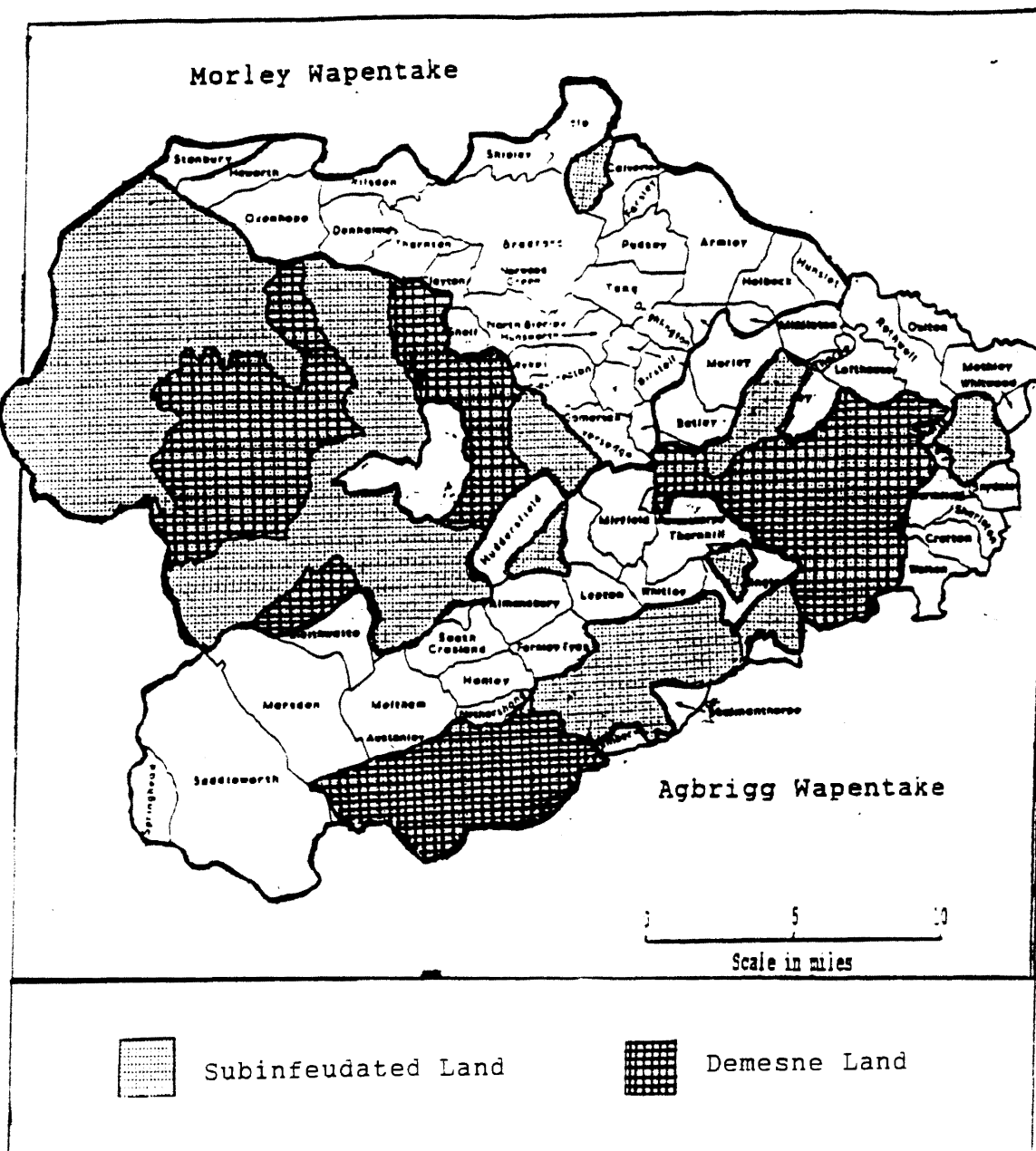


Fig.4: Extent of Wakefield Manor

Source: A.H. Smith, The Place-Names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, English Place Name Society Publications, vols. 30-37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961-63).

Though the Warennes maintained a castle at Sandal Magna, opposite Wakefield on the south bank of the Calder, they were often absent from the manor, engaged in service to the crown or visiting the extensive estates they held elsewhere in the country. Consequently, practical administration of Wakefield was left in the hands of the earl's stewards and other manorial officers. The steward was the direct representative of the lord, charged with overseeing nearly every aspect of the manor's economic activity. He kept accounts of manorial finances, enforced the performance of customary dues and services owed by the manor's servile tenants, supervised the duties of the other manorial officers, and, in the absence of the earl, presided over the manorial court.<sup>9</sup> Subordinate to the steward were the bailiffs, called graves in the demesne lands. These were officers selected from among the peasantry to function essentially as under-stewards, enforcing the orders of the court, overseeing plowing and harvesting, and managing the daily economic activities of that part of the manor in which they held jurisdiction. In addition to these were various and sundry other officers such as haywards, woodwards, and stockkeepers, all charged with managing particular aspects of the manor's economic activities, and all under the direct supervision of the steward.<sup>10</sup>

The economic vitality of Wakefield in the early decades of the fourteenth century was due less to managerial arrangements than to the sheer physical size of the manor.

Occupying much of Aggbrigg and Morley wapentakes,<sup>11</sup> Wakefield sprawled across the southwest corner of Yorkshire, encompassing an area of three broad geographic zones. The western reaches of the manor overlapped the hill country of the Pennines, rising to an elevation of approximately 1,200 feet above sea level. Running roughly north-south, this range forms the "backbone" of the northern counties, and in Wakefield was a sparsely-settled region of windswept moorlands that offered only poor soils and inclement weather to its few inhabitants. From here the landscape slopes downward across the Coal Measures of the foothills to the lowlands of the east, a drop in elevation of some nine hundred feet. The Coal Measures themselves constitute a rough broken country, lying at elevations of less than eight hundred feet, comprised of rolling hills and narrow, steep-sided valleys. The soils here were relatively poor as well, with the famous Pennine grits and sandstones underlying the hills, while the valleys yielded only heavy, badly drained clay soils.<sup>12</sup> It was only in the lowland region surrounding the village of Wakefield itself that good-quality arable land was found on the manor, and here it was of excellent quality. The lowland basins of the Calder, Aire, and Wharfe rivers near Wakefield constituted some of the best arable lands in all of Yorkshire.<sup>13</sup>

From their sources in the upper reaches of the Pennines, the aforementioned rivers flow generally eastward across the undulating terrain to intersect the Ouse estuary



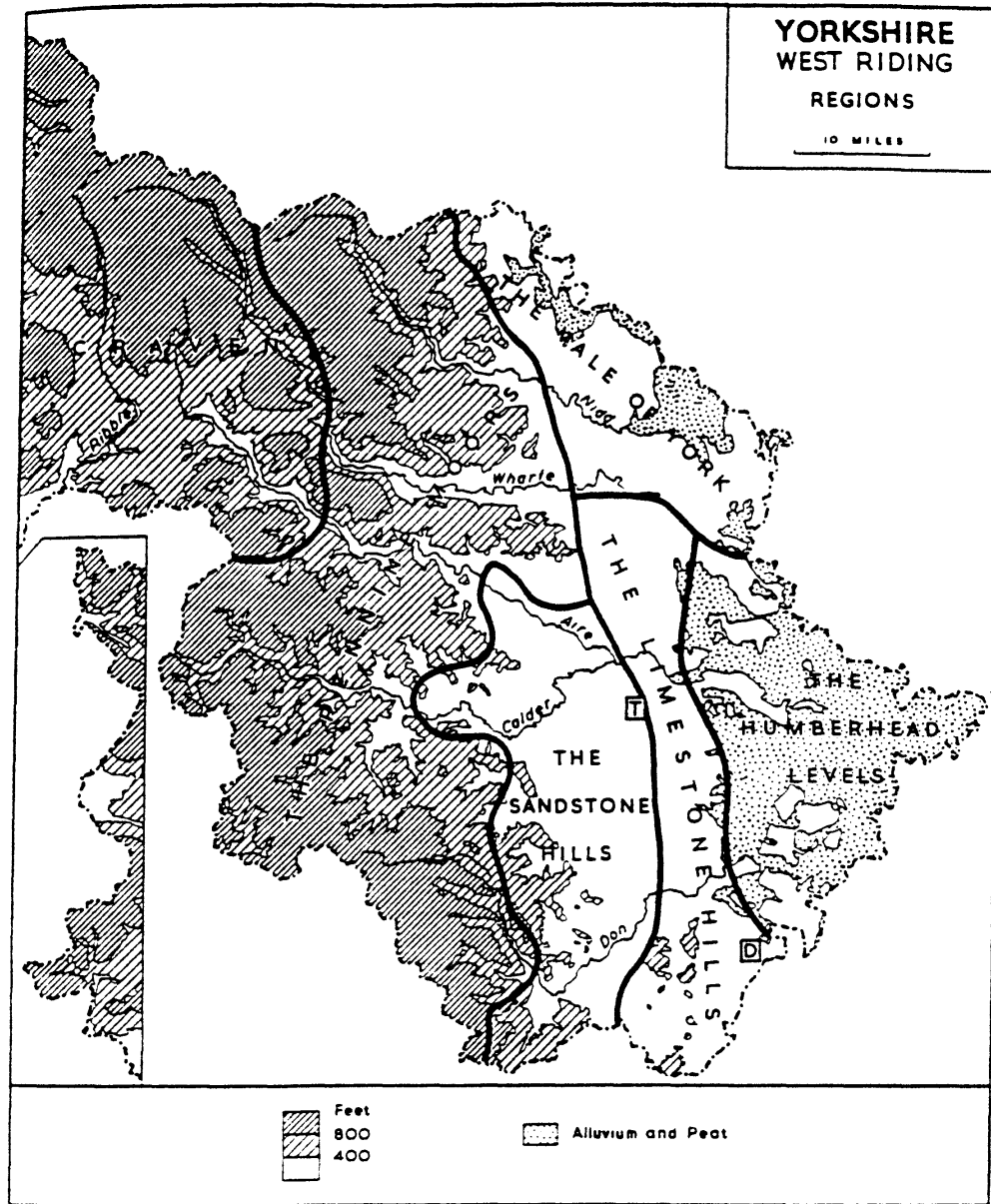


Fig.5: West Riding Regions

Source: H.C. Darby and I.S. Maxwell, eds., The Domesday Geography of Northern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 79.

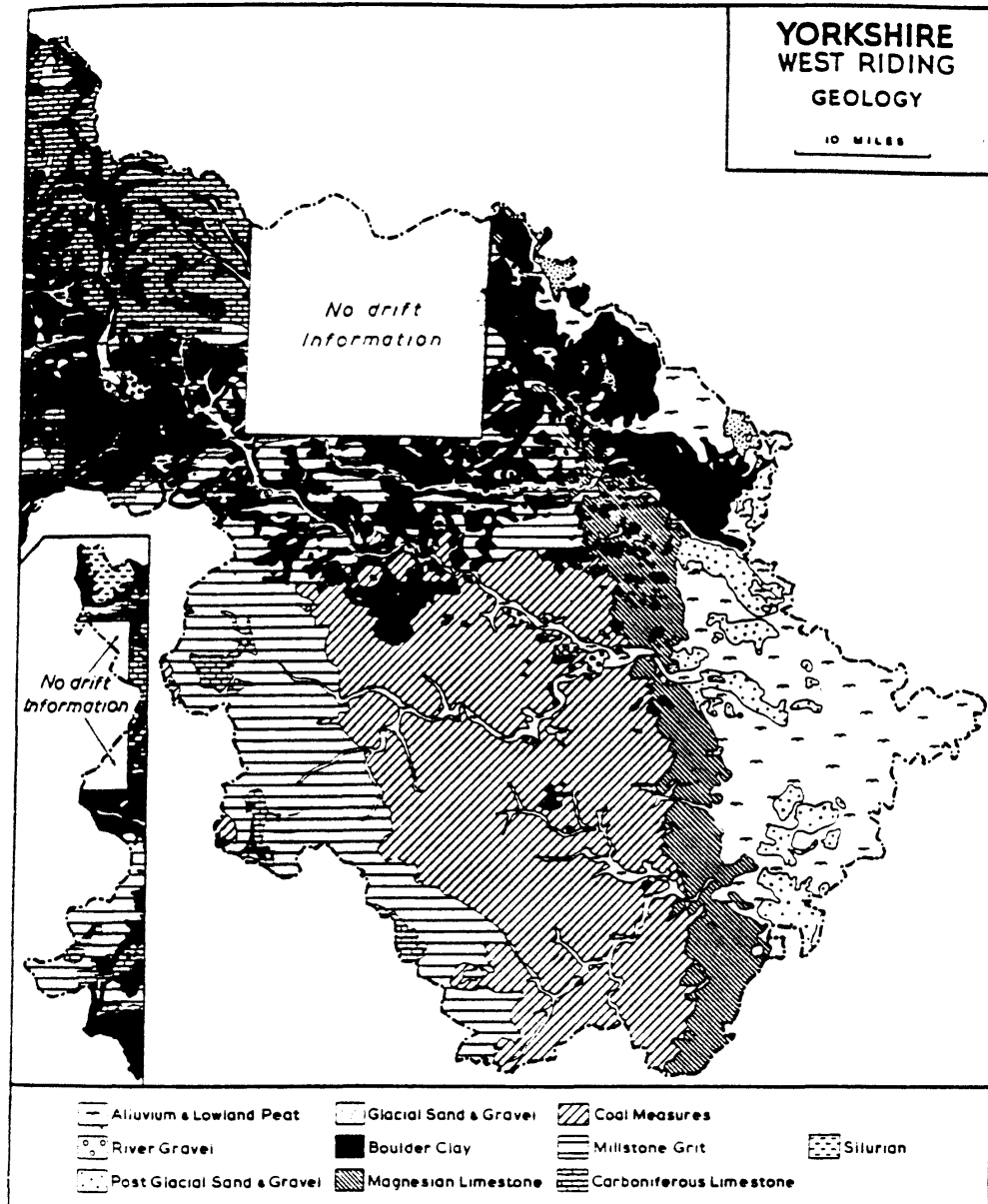


Fig.6: West Riding Geology

Source: H.C. Darby and I.S. Maxwell, eds., The Domesday Geography of Northern England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 13.

below York. It was the Calder River and its main tributary, the Holme, that formed the principal waterway of Wakefield manor. Arising in the highlands around Todmorden and Holmfirth, respectively, the two streams intersect near Mirfield. From there the Calder continues on its eastward course, looping around the southern edge of Wakefield town before flowing into the Aire River near Castleford, some twenty miles distant. The Calder remained the primary route of communication between the town and its western outliers, as the main east-west roadway known as the Wakefield Gate followed the course of the river from Wakefield through Halifax and on to Sowerby. The river itself provided a navigable route of transport at least as far upstream as Rastrick, for in 1275 the Granger of Bradley was excused from appearing at court because he was engaged in the earl's service, "carrying timber by water from Rastrick to Sandale [Magna]."<sup>14</sup> The Calder's waters abounded with fish, and its swift currents were well-suited to power the manor's mills.

Stretching as it did along the Calder and Holme Rivers, the manor assumed something of a giant teardrop shape, stretching westward nearly thirty miles from the focal point of Wakefield. Within these broad confines lay a rich diversity of resources, including large tracts of woodland. Though much of England was deforested by the early twelfth century, both Domesday and the manorial court rolls note an abundance of this valuable commodity, particularly in the hilly districts to the west. Extensive woodlands were noted

at Sowerby, Holme, and Hipperholme, while immediately adjacent to the town itself, the "Great Wood" at Stanley supplied the villagers' sundry needs, and supported thriving iron and tanning industries.<sup>15</sup> The Coal Measures were noted for their mineral resources, particularly iron and (of course) coal, both of which were actively exploited at an ever-increasing pace after the turn of the fourteenth century. The great variety in soil quality, natural resources, and geographic features stimulated a diversification of economic activity on the manor, ranging from arable to pastoral to industrial, and provided a broadly-based economic system that allowed Wakefield to weather the vagaries of the early fourteenth century in good order.

In each of the three main geographic zones of the manor, soil quality and terrain fostered patterns of settlement and agricultural production peculiar to that region. In the eastern lowlands, arable agriculture predominated, though the court rolls indicate that most farmsteads also kept small flocks of sheep and other livestock. Here the typical pattern was of numerous small villages surrounded by large common fields, in which each head of household held strips of land separated from that of his neighbors by baulks of earth. Though elsewhere in this lowland region of the West Riding wheat appears to have been the main winter crop,<sup>16</sup> the court rolls indicate that at Wakefield it was of only secondary importance. There are few references to the

grain, and these are restricted to the immediate vicinity of Wakefield and Rastrick. Rye appears to have been the winter grain of choice, though oats were clearly the main cereal produced on the manor.<sup>17</sup>

Along the Coal Measures lying between the eastern lowlands and the Pennines to the west, a mixture of both arable and pastoral agriculture emerged. In this broken country the valleys were narrow and steep-sided, leaving little room for settlement within their confines. Consequently, most of these villis were situated on the more gently-sloping valley crests or on spurs extending into the valleys. This allowed easy exploitation of both the arable lands in the valley bottoms and the pastures of the moors, and here a mixed economy utilizing both forms of agriculture predominated.<sup>18</sup>

On the highland moors pastoral agriculture remained the primary economic activity, and in the court roll entries for these upland regions references to sheep, cattle, and horses are ubiquitous. The lords Warenne and their tenants maintained numerous vaccaries and sheep-cotes there, and the hilly meadows were capable of supporting large numbers of livestock. A memorandum in the court session of December 1274 notes instructions for the disposition of some 94 head of the earl's cattle, most from a single herd pastured at Sowerby.<sup>19</sup> A consequence of this emphasis on pastoralism was a rather dispersed demographic pattern that allowed a better exploitation of the broad expanses of pasture-land.

Rather than the nucleated villages that typified the lowlands, here a few "street" type settlements accompanied by numbers of small scattered homesteads were the norm. The thin soils and cool damp climate of the Pennines were perfectly suited to the production of oats, and in these highland districts cereal production concentrated on this grain to the virtual exclusion of all others. The fields here tended to be small and enclosed, a heritage of the pattern of piecemeal addition to peasant holdings during the height of the assarting movement of the thirteenth century, and a testimony to the poor quality of the soils.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the economic potential such diversity offered, Wakefield, like much of Yorkshire, remained a relatively poor and underpopulated region at the time of Domesday. Certainly this was due at least in part to the ravages perpetrated on the countryside by William the Conqueror during his "harrying of the north" in 1069-70. Domesday entries for Wakefield note that the value of the manor had dropped from its 1066 assessment of £60 to a net worth of only £15 at the time of the inquest. The devastation and loss of life must have been horrific, for a full sixteen years after the passage of William's armies, the Domesday entries for Wakefield's outlying settlements uniformly describe a still-depopulated wasteland.<sup>21</sup> The population of the town itself stood at a mere two hundred souls, while the West Riding as a whole supported population and plough-team densities of only 0.3 people and 0.1 ploughs per square

mile, respectively--figures well below the norm for most of England. As lands fell vacant through the effects of mortality and emigration, many of the region's surviving inhabitants abandoned the marginal lands to the west and settled on the more productive lands of the Calder basin, creating a demographic "vacuum" that would persist in some areas for a century or more.<sup>22</sup>

Yet it was this very devastation of land and people that was a key element of Wakefield's future prosperity. For most of England the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were a period of rapid demographic growth, and in the West Riding this growth was spectacular, the population there increasing by as much as 260 per cent between 1086-1291. In fact, Yorkshire as a whole enjoyed an artificially high growth rate as increases through natural procreation were augmented by an influx of land-hungry settlers from the more densely-populated surrounding areas.<sup>23</sup> From Domesday to the onset of the Black Death, over 350 new settlements were established in Yorkshire, primarily along the eastern slopes of the Pennines and along the north Yorkshire moors.<sup>24</sup> Developments at Wakefield, though possibly not this dramatic, certainly followed the general trend. This entire period was one of aggressive colonization and resettlement of uncultivated lands fueled by a rapidly expanding population.

Yet because of its expansive size and low initial population, Wakefield did not suffer the increasingly acute

land shortages that by the late thirteenth century had begun to curb this expansion elsewhere in England. In fact, Wakefield's population continued to expand well into the fourteenth century, and it was this phenomenon that underlay the manor's continuing prosperity. A growing population brought agrarian expansion in its wake, and manorial revenues increased apace with this expansion of productive potential. In addition, such revenues as accrued through the administration of justice in the manorial court, monopolies of mills, timber, and other resources, and the various fees, fines, and reliefs tenants paid to acquire and keep their landholdings were intimately correlated to the size of the manorial population. In short, so long as resources were sufficient to support it, the larger its population, the greater the revenue base upon which the manor could draw.

Of these sources of revenue, land transactions constituted one of the most important, generating income in a number of different ways. Typically, tenants paid entry fees to take up uncultivated lands, whether they be reclaimed from the waste,<sup>25</sup> or assarts of virgin land. These fees were ostensibly to offset the loss of potential revenues the lord of the manor suffered through the alienation of this real estate. At Wakefield the cost of entering new lands remained relatively modest prior to 1300; about 1s. per acre for assarts, and as low as 1d. per acre for waste, though this varied according to the quality and



availability of the land. Once seised with these new possessions, assarters paid yearly rents thereafter, of about 4d.- 6d. per acre, though at Wakefield no such rents were collected for waste until after 1300.

Lands thus demised did not disappear as potential sources of revenue for the lord. The sale or transfer of landholdings among the manor's residents brought yet more profit to the Warennes. These transactions, by law, could only take place in the manorial court, where a nominal licensing fee was levied and the transaction recorded in the court rolls. To alienate property without first obtaining the license of the court was to risk a fine rather more substantial than the licensing fee itself, or even forfeiture of the land.<sup>26</sup> Nor did the death of a landholder end the land's pecuniary benefit to the lord. When a head of household died, his heirs paid a fee called a "heriot" to inherit their predecessor's lands and goods. Assessed according to the value of the property, these payments could be quite expensive; In 1297 the heirs of Thomas and Agnes Cook jointly paid a relief of 40s. 6d. to inherit their parents' tenement in Sandal Magna, only slightly less than the 44s. paid by William de Birton for a similar inheritance in 1316.<sup>27</sup> If the deceased had no heirs, his lands reverted back into the lord's possession to re-enter the expanding land market.

This expansion was actively encouraged by the Warennes, and for the two centuries following the Conquest assarting

and colonization of new lands proceeded at a rapid pace. To stimulate colonization of unused lands, the earls of Surrey granted extensive tracts of land to individual households. The new landholders in turn parceled out their freeholdings to other families, often kinsmen of the original grantees. As these settlements grew, additions were made to the holdings through assarts of the surrounding district.<sup>28</sup> Typically, this assarting was carried out by the middling and lower ranks of peasant society, particularly freemen, and followed one of two patterns: expansion on the part of a single individual or household, in which the assarted land was held in severalty and enclosed by a ditch and hedge; or by the collective efforts of a group of smallholders working in concert to add to their hamlet's common fields. In the latter case, individual shares within the assarts were apportioned according to each individual's traditional holdings in the village fields. This type of assart was relatively rare in the hill country, where arable lands were held in severalty rather than in common. Indeed, the smaller, individually-cleared assarts increasingly became the norm in both regions after the issuance of the *Statute of Merton* in 1235, which required new assarts to be well-fenced with sturdy hedges.<sup>29</sup>

Though assarting continued at Wakefield throughout this period, the late thirteenth century could not be described as a period of extensive clearance of new lands. The taking up of waste predominated, particularly in the western grave-

ship of Sowerby. The greater ease involved in reclaiming formerly cultivated lands over the clearing of new lands made the former more attractive to settlers, and the court rolls amply demonstrate this preference. These records do not constitute a complete record of this activity, for a number of reasons: there are several gaps in the records themselves, leaving no information for that period, and the fees and fines paid in court only account for those who either sought permission to take up lands or were caught doing so illegally. Certainly there were many who escaped the attentions of the court completely. Yet despite these limitations, the court rolls provide a fairly accurate picture of the land market in Wakefield prior to 1300.

For the years 1274-1297 the court rolls list forty instances of unused lands being taken up as either assarts or recultivations. Of these, fifteen were assarts, and the rest were recultivations of waste--seemingly a scenario in which an active acquisition of both types of land was underway. But in total acreages the two forms were widely divergent. The fifteen assarts brought only an additional 14-1/4 acres of land under cultivation, while 194 acres of waste were reclaimed in the twenty-five recultivations. The most active area of expansion in terms of numbers of acquisitions as well as total acreages taken up was the Sowerby district, particularly in the Soyland area. The court rolls note twenty new acquisitions at Sowerby, totalling over 177 acres--some eighty-five per cent of all

lands taken. The graveship of Holme accounted for another ten acres, and the remainder was split between the Coal Measure districts of Rastrick and Hipperholme and the Wakefield area.

A number of distinctions separated land actions in Sowerby from those in the other districts. Of the twenty encroachments undertaken at Sowerby, eighteen were reclamation. Only two assarts are noted, small ones of one acre each. This is diametrically opposed to the pattern of expansion elsewhere, in which assarts of new land constitute the majority of the actions. Only two instances of recultivation occur at the other upland graveship of Holme, and a third is noted at Osset, near Wakefield. Neither Rastrick nor Hipperholme record a single instance of recultivation in this period. Likewise, the sizes of the individual plots taken up were dramatically different between Sowerby and the other districts. Reclamations at Sowerby were generally much larger than take-ups of either category in the other districts, seldom comprising less than a bovat<sup>30</sup> of land in each instance. Among all take-ups of either type in the other four districts, only three exceeded one acre in area.<sup>31</sup> Clearly the upland regions of Wakefield were the scene of a continuing pattern of demographic and agrarian expansion throughout the latter half of the thirteenth century. Sowerby in particular supported a very active agenda of expansion in this period, and held ample reserves of unoccupied lands to satisfy that demand. Though

expansion took place in all the other western districts as well, it developed at a much slower pace than at Sowerby, and was often at the expense of virgin land.

A contributing factor to this availability of land in these districts was the nature of the arable agriculture practiced in the hill districts. The relatively poor soils fostered a system of intake-outtake farming, in which marginal lands were taken up or abandoned in response to fluctuations in the economic climate. In periods of land hunger or when high grain prices stimulated increased production for the market, new lands would be brought under cultivation. As demand on resources lessened or grain prices fell, these marginal lands would once again be abandoned to the waste.<sup>32</sup>

This pattern of expansion was rather less well-pronounced in the eastern districts of the manor for obvious reasons. The abandonment of the manor's outlying areas during the time of the Conqueror, as already noted, created a concentration of settlement around Wakefield very early on. This concentration was perpetuated by the profitability of the rich soils around Wakefield, the best arable in the manor. Consequently the waste and abandoned lands there were taken up earlier and at a much more rapid pace than in the hills to the west, whose sandy soils were less productive and therefore less attractive to settlers. Yet the demand for land in the vicinity of the town had not become so acute as to constitute an actual land shortage as was

occurring elsewhere in England. Assarting continued, though at an admittedly slow pace, and there are numerous references in the court rolls of lands in that district lying unoccupied for several years before being taken up. The standardized entry fees and rents, set at a relatively modest rate of 2s. per acre and 6d. per acre, respectively, also indicate a steady, though not crippling, demand for land.

As a whole then, the period 1086-1300 was one of economic vitality and growth for the manor of Wakefield. The rapid upsurge in assarting and recultivation of waste in the hill country and meager supplies of that commodity in the eastern districts suggest a still-expanding population and concomitant demand for land. This demographic expansion broadened the manor's economic base, and underlay a continuing process of increasing agricultural revenues as new lands were brought into production. Indeed this process of growth characterized most of England in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but population pressure and its ever-present companion land hunger, coupled with the disruptions of both natural and man-made disasters made the following century a time of economic contraction for most of the realm. Wakefield, through a happy circumstance of land, resources, and population, continued to enjoy economic growth in the face of these adverse developments.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Ian Kershaw, "The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322," *Past and Present* 59 (1973), 14-15. Contemporary chroniclers attest to the severity of the famine, asserting that in some areas people were reduced to eating dogs "and other unclean things." See, for example, "Vita Edwardii Secundi" by the Monk of Malmesbury in *English Historical Documents*, vol.3, ed. by Harry Rothwell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 283.

<sup>2</sup>This perception of the pre-Plague economy as already suffering from a near-Malthusian decline is accepted by most medieval historians; a good treatment is in M.M. Postan, "Some Economic Evidence for Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages," *Economic History Review* 2d ser., 2 (1950), 221-46.

<sup>3</sup>William Paley Baildon, ed., "Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield, 1272-1297," vol.1, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series* 29 (1901), vi-vii.

<sup>4</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward II, 1317-1321*, (London: H.M.S.O., 1894; reprint, Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Krause Reprint, 1971), 263-64.

<sup>5</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward II, 1324-1327*, (London: H.M.S.O., 1904; reprint, Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Krause Reprint, 1971), 270. For details of the conflict between Warenne and Lancaster, see Steven A. Moorhouse and Margaret L. Faull, eds., *West Yorkshire: An Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500*, vol.1, (Wakefield: West Yorkshire Metropolitan City Council, 1981), 249.

<sup>6</sup>*Domesday Book for the County of Yorkshire*, ed. by Margaret L. Faull and Marie Stinson (Chichester: Phillimore & Co., Ltd., 1986), 299D; 15-17.

<sup>7</sup>Moorhouse and Faull, *West Yorkshire*, vol.1, 13, 248-49.

<sup>8</sup>This administrative arrangement is well illustrated in the court rolls themselves, which not only utilize headings containing the date and location at which the court sat, but subheadings listing the townships from which the various suits of court are presented.

<sup>9</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, *passim*; these duties correspond roughly with those outlined for the office of seneschal in the *Seneschaucie*, in Elizabeth Lamond, ed., *Walter of Henley's "Husbandry," Together with an Anonymous "Husbandry," "Seneschaucie," and Robert Grosseteste's "Rules,"* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1890), 84-89.

<sup>10</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, *passim*. Again, for more detailed contemporary accounts of the various manorial officers and their duties, see Lamond, "*Seneschaucie*," 89-119.

<sup>11</sup>The county of York was divided into three Ridings-- North, East, and West. Each of these were subdivided into administrative units called wapentakes, which were themselves subdivided into townships.

<sup>12</sup>I.S. Maxwell, "Yorkshire: The West Riding," in *The Domesday Geography of Northern England*, ed. Henry C. Darby and I.S. Maxwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 80-81.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>14</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 122.

<sup>15</sup>The Wakefield court rolls contain numerous references to these industries, see for example Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 212, 301.

<sup>16</sup>Joan Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1042-1350*, vol.2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 406-407.

<sup>17</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 84.

<sup>18</sup>Moorhouse and Faull, *West Yorkshire*, vol.2, 585-87.

<sup>19</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 98.

<sup>20</sup>Steven A. Moorhouse and Margaret L. Faull, eds., *West Yorkshire: An Archaeological Survey to A.D. 1500*, vol.2, (Wakefield: West Yorkshire Metropolitan City Council, 1981), 585-87, 595; also Arthur A. Rastrick, *West Riding of Yorkshire*, vol.3, *The Making of the English Landscape Series*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1970), 52-53.

<sup>21</sup>*Domesday Book*, 299D, 15.

<sup>22</sup>Maxwell, "West Riding," 68, 80-81; the estimate of Wakefield's population at the time of Domesday comes from Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries: From the Earliest Times up to the Industrial Revolution*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 10.

<sup>23</sup>Peter S. McClure, "Patterns of Migration in the Late Middle Ages: The Evidence of English Place-Name Surnames," *Economic History Review* 2d. ser., 32 (1979), 182; the figures for the West Riding's demographic expansion are from H.E. Hallam, "Population Movements in England, 1086-1350," in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 2, ed. by



Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 533.

<sup>24</sup>Edward Miller, "New Settlement: Northern England," in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol.2, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1988), 247.

<sup>25</sup>Formerly cultivated lands which, because of abandonment, death of the owner, or escheat to the lord had fallen out of production. Also referred to as recultivation when taken up by a new owner.

<sup>26</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 189; John Lister, "Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield," vol.3, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series* 57 (1917), 92.

<sup>27</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 300, 302; John Lister, "Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield," vol.4, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series* 78 (1930), 48.

<sup>28</sup>T.A.M. Bishop, "Assarting and the Growth of the Open Fields," *Economic History Review* 6 (1935), 17, 27; this process is also noted in Sydney Pollard and David Crossley, *The Wealth of Britain 1085-1966* (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 19.

<sup>29</sup>H.C. Darby, "The Economic Geography of England, A.D. 1000-1250," in *An Historical Geography of England Before A.D. 1800*, 6th ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 187; the reference to the Statute of Merton comes from Edward Miller, "New Settlement," 252.

<sup>30</sup>A unit of land measurement that varied from region to region. Herein a "standard" bovate of twelve acres is used.

<sup>31</sup>This data was extracted from Baildon and Lister, "Court Rolls," vols.1-3, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup>This is perhaps best illustrated in an entry for 1314, in which Adam de Midelton was granted license to take possession of 1/2 acre of "stone waste land" in Sowerby. Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.3, 29; this system was not restricted to the western districts, for in February 1309 William Filche took up 3-1/4 acres at Sandal Magna, "lying waste on account of their poorness, for 30 years," Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 197.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MANORIAL ECONOMY: LAND AND RESOURCES

The economic growth that characterized most of England throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had spread the seeds of its own destruction by the end of that period. The rapid demographic and agrarian expansion brought acute land shortages, a declining birthrate, and a loss of revenue on estates throughout the country. Yet Wakefield continued its pattern of growth even in the midst of the disruptions of the early fourteenth century. Even in the face of the mortality and misery brought by the great famine, manorial revenues increased. More lands continued to be brought under cultivation, and the exploitation of manorial resources, stringent managerial strategies, and the increasing importance of industries to manorial revenues after 1300 all combined to bolster Wakefield's economy in the decades prior to the Black Death.

Though the court rolls provide a wealth of evidence illustrating this economic growth, the most precise is that coming from land transactions. The agrarian expansion into unoccupied lands that had characterized the late thirteenth century continued unabated at Wakefield, and as in the decades prior to 1300, by far the greatest degree of this

expansion occurred along the Coal Measures and highlands of the Pennine moors. From 1300-1315, the court rolls note a total of 312 cases of land acquisitions at Wakefield. Of these only twenty-four were in Wakefield district, half of which were simply additions to market booths or tofts within the town itself and cannot be considered as additions to arable. Of the remaining 288 cases, thirty-two were in the Coal Measure district around Rastrick and Hipperholme, totalling fifty-eight acres; Sowerby recorded 209 acres taken up in ninety-six actions, and an explosion of assarting in Holmfirth after 1300 brought 331 acres of new land under production from the remaining 160 acquisitions.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the pace of expansion had increased considerably in the first decade and a half of the fourteenth century, and had spread from Sowerby into other parts of the manor as well.

This growth began in 1307, and was only one of several new developments in the pattern of agrarian expansion that began in that year. From August 1307 through January 1308, new acquisitions were limited almost exclusively to the graveship of Holmfirth, centered around the two hamlets of Hepworth and Foulston. There the court rolls note sixty-eight appropriations of new land totalling 158 $\frac{1}{4}$  acres. In February this activity spread to the Hipperholme district, and over the next six months plots totalling twenty acres were taken up there as well. By August, this brief spate of expansion had halted in Hipperholme, and had once again

become centered in the two upland districts of Sowerby and Holmfirth.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, the nature of this expansion began to shift dramatically in 1308. Prior to this, new acquisitions had been almost exclusively of waste, but with the broadening of the geographic extent of expansion had come a shift toward the assarting of new lands. In Sowerby and Hipperholme, reclamations of waste, rather than new assarts, dominated the process of expansion in 1307. All forty-one actions in Sowerby that year, totalling  $94\frac{1}{2}$  acres, were of waste lands, without a single incidence of new assarts recorded. Similarly, the eight cases recorded for Hipperholme in that year, though totalling only eighteen acres, were also of waste rather than new assarts. Yet by February of 1308 both these graveships saw a shift away from the reclamation of abandoned lands to the assarting of new lands, the two types occurring fairly equally in the first five months of the year. By June 1308 this turnabout was complete, and thereafter land acquisitions in these two districts were almost exclusively assarts of virgin land. It is apparent from the number of reclamations carried out in the Sowerby and Hipperholme districts prior to 1300 that the area had, at some time prior to 1290, been rather more heavily populated; reclamations of formerly productive lands since abandoned outpaced new assarts at a rate of ten to one.<sup>3</sup>

In Holmfirth the emphasis was overwhelmingly on

assarting of new lands from the beginning. Only fourteen reclamations of abandoned lands are recorded among the 160 take-ups during the period 1300-1315, totalling a mere  $22\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Conversely, 309 acres of new land were brought under cultivation here in this same period. Though conclusive evidence is lacking, it appears this may be the result of Holmfirth having been less densely-populated in the years prior to 1300 than Sowerby or Hipperholme. Holmfirth is not mentioned as a settlement in any contemporary sources until 1274<sup>4</sup>, and the relative scarcity of reclamation there both prior and after 1300 seems to indicate that expansion here was indeed into a region of mostly virgin lands.

A third shift in this pattern of expansion also becomes apparent around 1307, that of the average area of the individual take-ups. From that time on, take-ups of land, especially of waste, were on average much smaller than those of 1274-1300. Of the forty-nine new acquisitions listed in this earlier period, about two-thirds of the recultivations were of a half-bovate or more, as were two assarts. From 1307-1315, only twenty actions involved plots of six acres or more out of a total of 312 cases. The smaller size of the post-1300 acquisitions is a strong indicator that in Sowerby and Hipperholme land resources were beginning to shrink from the quickening pace of expansion. Nearly half of the larger take-ups were assarts of new land, and of these, seven were in Holmfirth. Again, this concentration of large assarts in Holmfirth to the near-exclusion of every

other district indicates that it was the colonization of new lands rather than additions to already-settled holdings that dominated the agrarian expansion here.<sup>5</sup>

Prior to the onset of the Great Famine, then, Wakefield manor demonstrated a continuing agenda of agrarian expansion throughout its western reaches. This expansion reached full development in the last decades of the thirteenth century, and continued unabated for the next twenty-five years, rising first in the Pennine uplands around Sowerby, then spreading to Holmfirth and, to a lesser extent, the Coal Measures around Hipperholme and Rastrick. Though ample reserves of waste were available for reclamation around Sowerby and Hipperholme as late as 1307, the increasing demands of a growing population ate away at those reserves. By 1308 these two districts had joined Holmfirth in expanding only at the expense of virgin lands. Though these upland districts did not suffer the acute land shortages that had begun to characterize the lowland districts, pressure clearly was mounting.

This pressure may have been due in part to an administrative policy brought about by the death of Warenne. In 1304 John, seventh earl of Surrey died, leaving an underage heir. During the two-year minority of this new lord of the manor there appears to have been a moratorium on the taking up of unclaimed lands. Though an absence of court rolls for the period between September 1298 and October 1306 make any positive conclusion impossible, the

court roll evidence supports this scenario. In the fourteen extant court sessions between October 1306 and June 1307, there were only three take-ups recorded, and two of these were actually enlargements of tofts within the town of Wakefield itself. In late May 1307 the young earl came of age, and in the following court session of June 6 there is a virtual avalanche of take-ups that continues in every court session through the end of August--118 actions in this single three-month period. There is a second, smaller surge in assarting during January of the following year, in which ninety-seven acres were taken up in thirty-eight actions. After this, take-ups level out somewhat, though still maintaining a rate higher than that of the years preceeding the assumed moratorium.<sup>6</sup> If indeed there was a ban on expansion during that two-year period, the unusually high pace of take-ups after June 1307 would be consistent with such a sudden availability of land to a hungry market.

This affected as well the type of lands taken up after 1307. The take-ups of June and July 1307 were without exception reclamations of waste, while those of August and thereafter are almost as uniformly assarts of new lands. The initial rush of expansion claimed almost all the more desirable remaining waste lands, and thereafter the less easily cultivated woodlands of Holmfirth and Sowerby were the only available acreage left for cultivation.

This agrarian expansion brought increasing revenues to the manor in a number of ways, the most obvious of which was

the simple expansion of its productive potential. The 742 acres brought into production between 1274-1315, though constituting only a small fraction of the total area of the manor, nevertheless contributed a not-insignificant increase in productive capability. An even more immediate and lucrative source of revenue these land transactions brought was in the various fees, rents and fines new landholders paid for possession of these lands. Though individually these amercements were generally small, the yearly totals amounted to a significant proportion of manorial income.

To illustrate the importance of these incomes in the pre-crisis period, the court rolls for the years 1275, 1285-86, 1297, and 1307 were selected for analysis. These years were chosen because they were among the most complete yearly series contained in the rolls, and because they fell at approximate ten-year intervals, allowing a fairly regular "snapshot" of the manorial economy and of the increasing importance land transactions played in that economy over the period of this study. Revenues for these years were broken down into four categories: heriots paid by survivors to inherit the lands and possessions of a relative; the licensing fees paid by tenants in the manorial court to buy, sell, or trade landholdings; entry fees paid to take up unclaimed lands and the yearly rents these new lands brought to the manor, and a fourth, catch-all category for all other incomes.

In 1275, income from all three categories of land



transactions amounted to twenty-one per cent of total revenues noted in the court rolls for that year, garnering £9 3s. 6d. In 1285-86 these revenues were roughly comparable, bringing £10 4s. 4d. into the manorial coffers, though the relative percentages had decreased to only twelve per cent of the total revenues for those years. Land transactions for 1297 proved even more profitable, as land-related revenues for that year totalled £12 11s. 3d., constituting forty-three per cent of all revenues accruing to the manor through the court. This increase in absolute and relative incomes from land transactions is due to the upsurge in expansion that began in the late thirteenth century and reached full flower in the last decade of that century. In 1275 and 1285-86, the most lucrative category of land transaction were the licensing fees tenants paid to buy and sell land. In both cases, this single category generated as much revenue as the other two land-based categories combined. In 1297 heriots replaced licensing fees as the single greatest category of incomes, but here the totals are skewed by a pair of unusually large exactions levied on the heirs of major landholders.<sup>7</sup> Without these two anomalous cases, the relative importance of the individual categories would remain roughly comparable to 1275 and 1285, with transaction fees predominating.

The returns for 1307 are comparable to those of 1297, in the sense that land-generated incomes amounted to forty-one per cent of total revenues. Yet in terms of the relative

importance of the individual categories, 1307 was once again a turning-point. In this year the relative importance of the three categories shifts dramatically in favor of entry fees and their associated rents. This category totalled £19 5s., over half the income from land-generated incomes, and twenty per cent of total manorial revenues.<sup>8</sup> Clearly proceeds revenues from land transactions had become an increasingly vital aspect of Wakefield's economy. In the years leading up to the Great Famine, land transactions contributed ever-greater revenues to the manor, and rose to prominence as the single greatest source of manorial income noted in the court rolls after 1300.

But did this agrarian expansion continue during the disruptions of 1315-1322? Again, the court rolls, though missing for the years 1318-1322, indicate that this was the case. Although the crisis struck very hard at the peasantry, the manor itself continued to enjoy increasing revenues and economic growth.

The onset of the crisis in 1315 apparently did little to curb the pattern of expansion that had already been established after 1297. The court rolls for 1315 list a total of thirty-two land acquisitions amounting to eighty-nine acres, mostly in Sowerby. Yet by 1316, continuing crop failures and stock epidemics brought short grain supplies and high prices, precipitating a wave of expansion as landholders sought desperately to increase production of corn. Ninety-three actions are recorded for that year, all

but six being assarts of new land. Sowerby and Holmfirth were of course major contributors to the movement, with twenty-seven and twenty-eight new acquisitions, respectively. The crisis apparently touched off another major wave of assarting in Hipperholme as well. The court rolls record twenty-seven assarts in that district totalling fifty-five acres, with another seven assarts nearby at Rastrick bringing in another  $12\frac{1}{2}$  acres. In all  $224\frac{1}{2}$  acres were brought into production in that year in an attempt to deal with the crisis.<sup>9</sup>

For the smallholder increasing the amount of land under production was necessary simply to survive the crop failures of the previous two years. His more wealthy neighbor, on the other hand, may have been motivated more by a desire to reap the benefits of the high grain prices the famines had brought in their wake. In her analysis of the socio-economic composition of the assarting movement in Wakefield, Marie Stinson argues for just such a case, observing that the crisis brought a shift in exactly which social groups were most active in this process. She observed that prior to 1315, assarting was carried on primarily by the middling and wealthy landholders, who were motivated more by market production than food production. With the onset of the crisis, middle-range landholders appear only infrequently as assarters, and small landholders come to predominate as they took up more lands in a desperate attempt to put off starvation. Only the wealthy, who could afford rising entry

fees, and the poor, who were forced to pay them out of desperation, assarted during the crisis.<sup>10</sup>

For the lord of Wakefield, the crisis of 1315-1322 was anything but an economic disaster. Not only did his revenues increase because of higher grain prices, but also because of the quickening effect the crisis had on the peasant land market. The efforts of lesser landholders to increase their holdings stimulated land sales and exchanges, particularly in the eastern district around Wakefield where lack of land reserves had already existed prior to the crisis. Though the cost of the licensing fees levied by the court for these transactions remained relatively comparable to the pre-crisis years, the sheer number of these fees in 1316 inflated revenues from this source to a grand sum of £25 16s. 1d.--a total nearly five times higher than the tally for 1307. In a rather morbid twist, the mortality wrought by the famines and epidemics also proved of financial benefit to the earl of Surrey. As with the licensing fees, the volume of heriot payments accelerated during the crisis years, and the income from this source of revenue also amounted to five times that of 1307, earning £17 11s. 5d.<sup>11</sup>

A number of managerial strategies specifically enacted to take full advantage of the conditions created by the crisis brought a dramatic increase in land-based incomes for the manor. At the onset of the crisis in 1315, the entry fees levied to take up lands increased dramatically. In

Sowerby and Hipperholme, entry fees had been set at a fairly standard rate of either 6d. or 1s. per acre throughout the period 1274-1315, with the former much more common; in Holmfirth, the higher rate was assessed in ninety-five per cent of the cases. Rents also were standardized in all the manor's districts, set at a uniform yearly rate of 6d. per acre in Sowerby and Hipperholme, and at 4d. per acre in Holmfirth. Rents remained steady at these rates even through the worst of the crisis, yet in 1315 standard entry fees doubled and tripled, and in some instances reached levels as much as eight times the previous rate. Standardization of entry fees also gave way to a broader range of fee sizes as the earl's officers charged what the market could bear. In Sowerby and Hipperholme, 3s. 4d. ( $\frac{1}{4}$  mark) or 4s. became the most common entry fee, levied on nearly two-thirds of the take-ups of 1315-1316, though these fees now ranged from 8d. per acre to 4s. per acre. In Holmfirth, the rates for these years doubled to a fairly uniform 2s. per acre, though this uniformity had dissolved by the following year. By 1317 fees were astronomical, many as high as  $\frac{1}{2}$  mark per acre, and a few reaching 7s. or 8s. per acre. Faced with starvation, small landholders could do little but pay these crippling fees. Nor were prosperous freeholders exempt from the machinations of Warenne to take advantage of the crisis, as many found the yearly rents levied on their charter lands increased significantly. For two bovates of land and a toft in Alvirthorpe, William

*filius* Robert found his yearly rent increased in 1316 by 7s. 8d.<sup>12</sup>; earlier that same year Robert Carpenter of Wakefield saw his rents increase another 9s. yearly for an unspecified amount of land.<sup>13</sup> Wherever possible, the earl of Surrey used the crisis to squeeze more profits from his tenants.

Warrenne did not stop there. In 1316 he ordered his officers to conduct a survey of landholdings in the western districts of the manor to detect illegal assarts, called *purprestures*. This survey detected a total of 255 of these encroachments, ranging in area from a few square feet to four acres, though by far the majority encompassed  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre or less. Despite the fact that many of these *purprestures* dated from as much as nine years earlier, the transgressors were assessed retroactive entry fees based on the 1316 rate, rather than the much lower rates that had prevailed when the assarts were first made. Despite the small size of the individual *purprestures*, their sheer numbers made this action extremely profitable to the manor. In entry fees alone these encroachments added £13 14s. 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. to manorial coffers that year, plus an additional £2 6s. 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d. in yearly rents thereafter.<sup>14</sup>

In sum, the period 1315-1322 was one of expanding, rather than contracting revenues at Wakefield. Crucial to this were the various revenues brought by land transactions that came to assume such a significant role in the manorial economy. Incomes from these sources increased both relatively and absolutely, making 1316 one of the most

profitable years covered by the court rolls. Incomes from entry fees and new rents alone amounted to over £44, twenty-six per cent of that year's total revenues. Combined with the inordinately high incomes brought by increased numbers of licensing fees and heriot payments, these land-based incomes totalled over £87--a full forty-nine per cent of all incomes noted in the court rolls. Devastating though the crisis was for the manor's residents, it was a financial windfall for the lord of that manor.

With the end of the crisis in 1322, land transactions settled back into their pre-1315 pattern. Waste cultures, almost certainly left vacant by the mortality of the crisis years, once again became the primary focus of expansion at Wakefield, though assarting of new land continued even now. From 1323-1331, the court rolls note twenty-three assarts, totalling  $50\frac{1}{2}$  acres. For that same period, there are fifty-seven cases of reclamation, which brought 119 acres of abandoned lands back into cultivation. Likewise, entry fees reflected the lessened demand for land, dropping from the exorbitant rates of 1316-1317 to around 1s. to 2s. per acre--still higher than those exacted prior to 1315.<sup>15</sup> Though land-based revenues fell to levels lower than those of the crisis period, they did remain comparable to pre-1315 levels, and remained a central element of manorial revenues. The pace was slowed somewhat, but expansion continued at Wakefield after the crisis period, bolstered by these land revenues, an expanding market system, nascent industrial

development, and abundant reserves of natural resources.

Though most of England was largely deforested by the early thirteenth century, Wakefield retained an abundance of this valuable commodity. This was especially true in the western districts of the manor at Sowerby, Hipperholme, Dewsbury, and Holmfirth, though Wakefield itself possessed large reserves of woodland. Woodland products were an essential element of almost every aspect of medieval life and industry, providing timber for building, brush for firewood, and the raw materials from which all manner of household items and tools were produced. Under-wood fueled the ale-pots of the brewers and the forges of the smith, and provided ash for soapmaking and the fulling of wool. Woodlands provided pasture for cattle in summer and spring, and pannage for swine in the fall, while the plentiful oaks supported a thriving tanning industry at Wakefield.

Use of such a valuable resource was tightly regulated, and the licensed exploitation of woodland provided a major source of revenue for the manor. The residents of Wakefield paid nominal fees to gather firewood, broom, herbage for livestock, thornes and brush to build and maintain hedges, and nuts. Pannage and herbage were often sold in gross to large-scale swine and cattle operation, and proved extremely profitable. An incomplete entry for October 1296 lists the returns for pannage for that year from the woods of Sowerby, Holmfirth, Hipperholm, and Wakefield at £12 16s. 11d., and in 1307 the returns for Sowerby and Hipperholme alone



amounted to £8.<sup>16</sup> The following year (1308) the herbage of Sowerby, Holmfirth, and Dewsbury woods was sold in gross in nine separate transactions for a total sum of nearly £12.<sup>17</sup>

Timber, that is, fully-matured wood, was very expensive, valued at 4s.-5s. per trunk for oak and slightly less for other species, and was sold only sparingly. Yet when it suited the earl's needs, this too could be sold off on a large scale. In the only instance of its kind in the court rolls, in April 1307 the small stand at the Westwood in Criggleston was sold in gross to four residents of that township for twenty-five marks (£16 13s. 4d.), though with clear instructions that the wood was to be coppiced<sup>18</sup> so as to replenish itself.<sup>19</sup> Access to woodland, at least in the Great Wood at Wakefield, was strictly controlled, and trespassors were heavily fined when detected. In fact several of the highest single ameracements recorded in the rolls are for this offense, particularly when they occur in the New Park, the earl's hunting preserve near Alvirthorpe. Several were assessed at a mark or more, and in one instance the vicar of Rochedale was amerced £20 for a single incident there.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from these atypical examples, the well-regulated exploitation of its woodland resources provided a significant and constant source of revenue for Wakefield. An analysis of data contained in the court rolls for the same years as used for the survey of land values above reveals the growing importance of this resource to the manorial

economy. In 1275, incomes from manorial woodlands, including sales of its resources and amercements for trespass totalled £3 8s. 2d.--eight percent of that year's total revenues as recorded in the court rolls. Ten years later the revenues were somewhat higher, at £4 11s. 7d., and constituted twenty-two per cent of total incomes for that year. Incomes jumped in the profitable year of 1297, as sales of timber, underwood, and herbage, as well as incomes from trespasses all increased. That year all these groups combined to earn over £7 in revenues and a twenty-four per cent share of total incomes. After 1300, this share of total revenues dropped, to eleven per cent in 1307 and a mere eight per cent again in 1316, but in absolute terms revenues continued to outpace those of prior years, garnering £13 and £10 respectively.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly the economic importance the abundant woodlands continued to hold at Wakefield after 1300 was significant. The incomes produced through regulated exploitation and court fines from woodland violations provided a steadily-increasing source of revenue throughout the early fourteenth century. Though relative incomes dropped after 1300, this was due only to the greatly increased incomes the manor realized from the quickening land market. It was woodlands that provided the greatest reserves of unclaimed land to fill that land hunger, and fueled--both literally and figuratively--the industrial growth of the fourteenth century.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Baildon and Lister, "Court Rolls," vols.2-4, *passim*.
- <sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.2, 63-228.
- <sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 63-191.
- <sup>4</sup>H.C. Darby, *The Domesday Geography of Northern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 15.
- <sup>5</sup>Baildon and Lister, "Court Rolls," vols. 2-4.
- <sup>6</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 86-147. This possible freeze on assarting is also noted by Marie Stinson; see note #10, below.
- <sup>7</sup>Of £2 6d. and £4 6s., respectively.
- <sup>8</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 63-132.
- <sup>9</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vols. 3-4.
- <sup>10</sup>Marie Stinson, "Assarting and Poverty in Early Fourteenth-Century Western Yorkshire," *Landscape History* 5 (1983), 62-66.
- <sup>11</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vols.3-4.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.4, 102.
- <sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>14</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.4, 116-24.
- <sup>15</sup>Ian Kershaw, "The Great Famine," 44.
- <sup>16</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 242; vol.2, 114.
- <sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.2, 172.
- <sup>18</sup>Certain species of wood, such as oak, beech, and ash, sprout new stalks from the stump once cut. The sprouts make excellent fodder for livestock for the first year or two, after which the stalks are suitable for basketry, wattle-and-daub construction, and many other specialized uses. The deliberate cutting of wood in order to produce these stalks was called "coppicing," and was widely practiced at Wakefield and elsewhere.
- <sup>19</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 172.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>21</sup>Baildon and Lister, "Court Rolls," vols.1-4.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MANORIAL ECONOMY: MARKET ACTIVITY

In economic studies such as this, the court rolls, by the nature of the information they contain, are most useful for studies of land values, court incomes, and to a lesser degree, the licensed exploitation of manorial resources. Yet they do contain other, more incidental information that provides insights into certain indicators of the economic vitality of the manor. One such indicator is the extent and scope of the manorial market system. The court rolls--and other sources--indicate that Wakefield enjoyed a very active and expanding participation in trade and commerce.

More than simply the *locus* at which local residents exchanged goods, the market had acquired a specific legal definition by the thirteenth century. It was a franchise granting to its holder a limited monopoly over sales of certain goods within a specified area. That area was defined by terrain, population, goods carried, and the operations of other markets in the region. Modern studies have recognized that the local market was the base element in a fully-integrated and increasingly regularized national economic network. By the late thirteenth century, markets were arranged spatially, temporally, and hierarchically in

an interlocking network of supply and exchange. Villagers often had three or four local markets within easy walking distance, each operating on a different day of the week. These local markets were linked to regional markets, larger towns which exchanged manufactured goods and wares not available at the local level in exchange for agricultural products and raw materials. These in turn were linked to provincial markets, major urban centers that operated as the focal point of commercial activity in an extensive area of the country, often several counties. Many of these provincial markets were involved in commerce on a grand scale (by medieval standards), exporting goods to foreign ports or to the metropolitan market center of London.<sup>1</sup>

Within this system, Wakefield appears to have functioned as a thriving regional market, conveniently sited on the Calder river along the principal Chester-York communication route. An analysis of place-name surnames contained in the Wakefield court rolls (see Appendix A) show that the overwhelming majority of those names fall within or very near to the boundaries of the manor.<sup>2</sup> The market area thus outlined assumed a roughly elliptical shape thirty miles long and twenty miles wide, with Wakefield anchoring the eastern end. Agricultural produce--grain, cattle, horses, and wool, flowed into Wakefield from the western districts, travelling from Sowerby down the Wakefield gate along the Calder, and from Holmfirth along the Saltergate road, so named for its importance as the principal route by

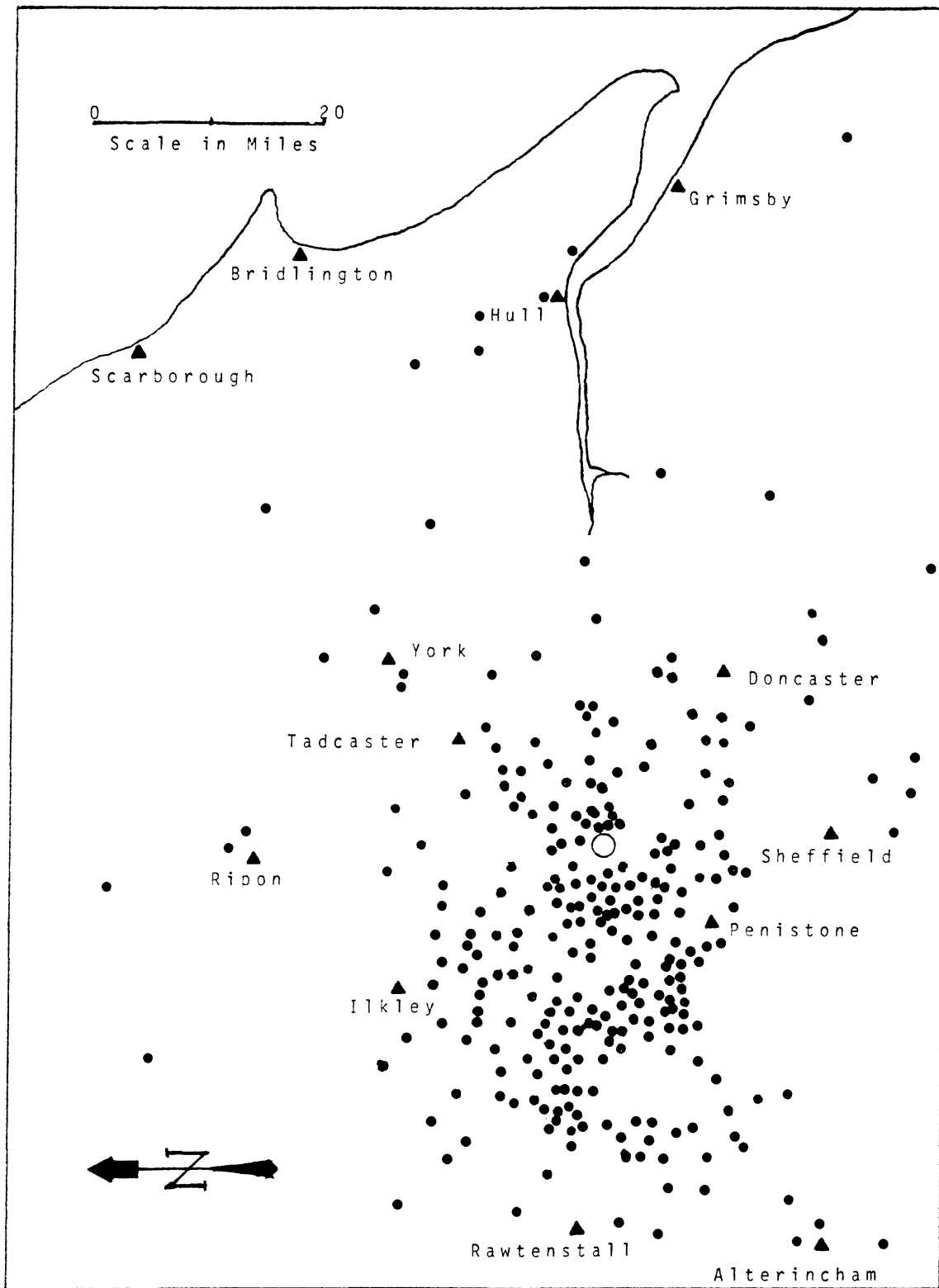


Fig.7: Wakefield Market Area

which the salt merchants of Chester brought their wares into Wakefield and points farther north.

The rather unusual shape of the Wakefield market area can be seen from map #7. The outer perimeter runs roughly along a line from Tadcaster-Doncaster-Penistone-Todmorden-Ilkley, with spurs running several miles to the northeast and southwest, along the main routes to York and Chester. Despite Wakefield's great extent, there was but a single market there, located within the town itself. During the time-span of this study, the charter rolls note only two markets in the entire expanse between the town and the watershed of the Pennines, at Elland and at Almondbury, both of which lay within the bounds of the honor of Pontefract.<sup>3</sup> This of course does not preclude the use of these markets by the earl of Surrey's tenants, but there is little indication that these markets were so used, as the court rolls make no mention of either. These were almost certainly small local markets which, because of their limited size and mid-week market days, posed no competition for Wakefield's Friday market. More likely they functioned within the Wakefield market system, as the inhabitants of these vills frequented the market at Wakefield.

The shape of the market area suggests that Wakefield served as a collecting center for agricultural goods produced in the highland regions, though it is at this time uncertain within which provincial market system it operated. York, because of its proximity to Wakefield and the easy



access afforded it by both land and riverine communications routes, would seem the logical candidate. Yet little hard evidence exists to support this contention, and the possibility that it was the Lincoln market area rather than that of York in which Wakefield functioned is entirely feasible.<sup>4</sup>

Wakefield was one of the manors that held the rights to a market by prescription, or ancient tenure. Legend has it that in the *Quo Warranto* proceedings of 1279, when asked by what warrant he held rights to a market there, the earl of Surrey drew his sword and declared that the Conqueror had not subdued the country alone, and that he held such rights by the services his ancestors had rendered.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the thirteenth century, this market had been held in the churchyard on Sunday, a common practice at the time. Yet by 1200 a growing concern by both Church and Crown for the spiritual well-being of their subjects led both to attempt to prohibit such practices. Though Wakefield changed its market day to Fridays at that time, many others did not until compelled to do so by Edward I in 1285.<sup>6</sup>

The market-place itself was the center of the village, surrounding the main crossroads in front of the church. Each of the various crafts and commodities occupied a specific area of the market place. The entire west side of the market was devoted to the sale of grain; a pride of place that was hardly surprising in an economy based on agriculture. The poulterers and lesser craftsmen were

scattered around the market cross, while the vendors of household utensils and hardware displayed their goods nearby. Provisioners of such staples as bread, cheese, butter, meat, firewood, salt and straw were likewise clustered round the cross,<sup>7</sup> while the mercer's booths opposite the west end of the church dealt in more exotic goods such as wine, herrings, cloth, and manufactured goods.<sup>8</sup>

Though the court roll entries for Wakefield market are somewhat scanty, they do present a picture of a commercial center that was at least holding its own, if not expanding, in the early decades of the fourteenth century. A strong indicator of this is the actual physical expansion of the marketplace throughout this period. In November 1284, John Nelot of Wakefield paid a fee of 6*d.* plus another 3*d.* in yearly rents thereafter for leave to lengthen his market booth by eight feet; by 1297 the cost to do so had doubled. In August of that year Walter Hogg and Robert the Lorimar [bridle-maker] each paid 12*d.* to lengthen their booths nine feet to the south, while John Cussings paid twice that to lengthen his booth another ten feet in each direction.<sup>9</sup> The continued willingness of these men to increase their store frontage, as well as the mounting fees they paid to do so indicate a healthy and growing market, very profitable to those who plied their trade there.

This process continued after 1300, even during the height of the crisis of 1315-1322. In March 1308 Elias de

Boseham acquired a booth-space in the marketplace for a relatively modest yearly rent of 6d.<sup>10</sup>; eight years later the rolls cite another six individuals taking up plots at Bichehill, within the marketplace of the town.<sup>11</sup> Ranging in size from 136 square feet to just over a thousand square feet, these plots all cost their new owners entry fees of 2s. apiece, plus yearly rents of 3d. or 6d., depending on the size of the holding. Though entry fees throughout the manor had increased in 1316, the inordinately high fees for such small plots of land is almost certainly due to their high value as market frontage. In all there are nine instances noted in the court rolls of new market frontages being taken up, or existing stallages being expanded between the years 1300-1317, indicating that the market at Wakefield remained vigorously healthy throughout the period covered by the court rolls.

Because of this profitability, the benefits offered by access to market frontage were eagerly sought and jealously protected, as is evidenced by the stiff fine of 40d. paid by Thomas Litster [dyer] in 1313 for illegally relocating his stall there to a more advantageous location.<sup>12</sup> Nor was protection of this access restricted to the officers of the earl. In April 1317, John Thorald sold a very profitable booth and all its merchandise to William Tyrsi for the rather high sum of ten marks [£6 13s. 4d.]. For failing to first obtain license for this transaction, Thorald paid a fine of 40d. to the court, while Tyrsi and his two

associates forfeited 5s. apiece. The affair had come to the attention of the court only when Thorald's wife refused to yield possession of the profitable booth to Tyrsi and his companions, and had instead raised the hue and cry against them!<sup>13</sup>

The market at Wakefield was not only a source of profit to the tanners, cloth-dealers and other merchants who plied their trades there, but for the charter holder of that market as well. It provided "internal" fees such as stallage, and "external" fees, the most important of which were tolls. The latter were charges assessed upon transactions involving goods other than those for simple household needs, and upon "foreign" merchants, middle-men who came to the market from more distant towns to buy and sell. These rents and tolls were very profitable, and were the primary reason magnates so eagerly sought the right to hold markets within their fees. In 1276, for example, the combined tolls on the Archbishop of Canterbury's men alone amounted to five marks per year at the Wakefield fairs and market.<sup>14</sup> Though the individual fees paid by stallagers were nominal, their cumulative worth was also substantial, and Wakefield market became notorious for its stringent collection of these dues.

In addition to its weekly market, Wakefield held rights to two fairs, one granted in 1204 for the Vigil, Feast, and Morrow of All Saint's (Sept.30-Nov.2), the other awarded in 1258 for the Vigil, Feast, and Morrow of St. John the

Baptist (June 23-25). These fairs dealt primarily with the sale of livestock, especially cattle and horses, driven down from their pasture atop the moors twice a year. To ensure that the revenues of these fairs were not diminished, the sale of livestock at any other time or place was prohibited within the manor, and were not to be sold in any case until marked with the lord's brand.<sup>15</sup> These fairs were justly famous for their livestock, and drew merchants from throughout the county and beyond--even procurers for the Crown.<sup>16</sup> Lee fair, located just outside the town, was the scene of a tumultuous brawl in 1315, as John de Newcastle, Alice de Scarborough, and William the Carter all brought charges against John de Heaton and his wife for assault and the destruction of their stalls.<sup>17</sup> The place-names of the plaintiffs in this single entry perfectly illustrate the drawing power of these fairs.

Apart from the economic stimulus these fairs generated simply through the crowds they drew, they, like the weekly markets, brought their holder lucrative profits in stallages and tolls. In addition, the fines and perquisites of the "pie-powder" courts<sup>18</sup> that sat hourly at these fairs to enforce the strictures of merchant law brought even more revenues. At Wakefield these two fairs proved so profitable that in 1331 Warenne petitioned successfully for the grant of a third, this one to be held on the Vigil, Feast, and Morrow of St. Oswald (August 4-6).<sup>19</sup> The addition of this third fair, coming less than a decade after the end of the

Great Famine, is a strong indicator that Wakefield's economy was enjoying a period of robust expansion, rather than contraction.

A further indicator of Wakefield's continuing economic vitality is provided by the Lay Subsidy of 1316. A taxation levied on moveable goods, it can provide a rough picture of the relative distribution of wealth among the townships of the county when the returns are broken down into shillings per square mile. Wakefield, with a relative worth of 122s. per square mile, ranks first among all townships of Morley and Agbrigg Wapentakes. Wakefield's assessed value totalled more than twice that of the second-place finisher Pontefract, despite the fact that the latter recorded twice as many individuals contributing to the tax. The primacy of Wakefield is due largely to its importance as a regional market center, and the prosperity of its merchants and tradesmen.<sup>20</sup>

Profitable though the fairs and markets were, the earls of Surrey preferred a more reliable source of income, one not subject to the vagaries of market forces. Consequently, they farmed out the town of Wakefield, including its fairs, markets, mills, and perquisites of the town court for a set fee. Wakefield's continuing economic vitality is witnessed by the increasing worth of this farm. In a court session of October 1307, John de Amyas took the farm of the town of Wakefield and its appurtenances as noted above for a term of five years, paying £100 yearly.<sup>21</sup> Nine years later, in 1316

he again took the farm of Wakefield, paying slightly over £110 for the rights to do so for a period of four years.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, farm of the rents, tolls, and perquisites of the town must have remained a profitable venture in order for the lease to remain this high.

Wakefield's continued expansion was only part of a general pattern of market proliferation that characterized Yorkshire and the West Riding in particular during the years 1200-1350. In that time twelve new settlements and fifty-six new markets were established in the West Riding, most of them along the eastern slopes of the Pennines; new fairs, too, were chartered at a prolific rate.<sup>23</sup> Much of this economic activity and expansion was the by-product of an industry that was assuming ever-greater importance in Yorkshire and elsewhere in England--wool.

The wool trade had long been a mainstay of the English rural economy and had grown in importance throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The northern counties, Yorkshire among them, were very active participants in this expansion. Though dominated by the great Cistercian monastic houses wool production was a staple element in the economic activity of most northern lay manors as well, and those of the West Riding were particularly well-suited to this enterprise. Collected at regional market centers such as Wakefield, wool was then shipped to provincial markets--in this case to Lincoln--for export to Flemish and Italian clothmakers.<sup>24</sup>

Wakefield was early on involved in this trade, an involvement that was to play an increasingly vital role in the manor's economy. Pastoral agriculture dominated the western reaches of the manor, and along the Coal Measures in particular sheep-rearing assumed major proportions. The court rolls note numerous sheep-cotes in which the manorial flocks were tended, and ameracements levied against individuals for the escape of sheep--sometimes as many as a hundred--are ever-present in the rolls. Though no figures are available for the size of the manorial flocks from the court rolls, those flocks must have been substantial judging from the number of sheep-cotes noted therein.

The wool trade remained a highly profitable venture despite the exactions levied by the Crown. According to Robert Grosseteste, a thousand sheep could be expected to yield an annual return of forty to fifty marks in sales of wool,<sup>25</sup> and though the manorial flocks at Wakefield probably did not exceed a few hundred,<sup>26</sup> sales of wool must nonetheless have remained a highly profitable enterprise. Anxious to exploit this lucrative trade to the utmost, in 1331 Warenne successfully petitioned for rights to hold the third fair already noted above. The date of this fair, extending over the three-day period of August 4-6, indicates that it was almost certainly intended to take advantage of surging wool sales that followed the mid-summer shearing.

The wool trade proved lucrative for many of the manor's residents as well. At 5s. per stone,<sup>27</sup> raw wool fetched



high prices, and the ten sheep required to produce a stone of wool were well within the means of a large percentage of the manor's residents, judging from the numbers of escapes noted in the court rolls. Transactions involving wool are common in the rolls, and in many instances this commodity served as an acceptable substitute for hard currency in debt litigations. Middle-men who dealt in wool enjoyed a high return for their efforts. Wool-dealers such as William Greenhood, John Kay and William Margeryknavé often appear in the rolls as plaintiffs against individuals who had reneged on contractual obligations to supply them with wool.<sup>28</sup> Often serving as jurors and pledges (see Appendix B) these men were prosperous and prominent members of peasant society, a status due largely to the profitability of their trade.

This prominence was shared by many of those individuals who were active in another aspect of the wool business, the manufacture of woollen cloth. Though not destined to supplant the wool trade in importance until the late fifteenth century, the cloth industry had early roots in Yorkshire and was well-established in York itself as early as 1100. Though important enough there for the weavers to win a county-wide monopoly on the manufacture of woollen cloths from Henry III, by the time of Edward I rural competition had completely undermined this urban ascendancy.<sup>29</sup> By 1250 the cloth industry in Yorkshire was concentrated in the rural settlements along the foothills

and moors of the Pennines.

Wakefield was one of those rural areas that had proven such fertile ground for this growing industry. The pastoral economy that predominated over much of the manor provided a steady supply of wool to fuel the weavers' looms. In addition, the hill regions furnished swiftly-flowing streams to power the fulling mills, and the waters they carried was soft, perfect for the fulling process itself. The composition of the manorial population was also well-suited for this industry; the combination of poor soils and an unfavorable economic climate had fostered the rise of a significant cottar class of small landholders in the western districts by 1300. Unable to subsist on agriculture alone, these smallholders turned to the manufacture of cloth as a supplemental source of income.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, many devoted themselves to this enterprise full-time, and prospered as the industry continued to grow in importance.

The wool industry was already assuming a position of importance at Wakefield by the time of the earliest surviving court rolls. Occupation names covering all aspects of the wool industry are recorded by 1275, most of them scattered along the Coal Measures around Halifax, Hipperholme, and Rastrick, though they are noted in almost every district of the manor. That the industry had already become well-established and highly lucrative is made evident by the standing of these people within the peasant community. Individuals with surnames such as Chapman and Mercer

were often prosperous landholders and burghers of the town, while Tailor, Webster [weaver], Litster [dyer], and Fuller surnames are commonly cited as pledges and jurors (see Appendix B). The cloth merchant German Filcok, himself the son of a prosperous merchant, owned two stalls at Wakefield market and was one of the leading members of the peasant community.<sup>31</sup> Even more impressive was John de Amyas, a dyer, who has already been noted as prosperous enough to farm the entire town of Wakefield on at least two occasions.<sup>32</sup>

The earls of Surrey realized considerable profits through the regulation of the cloth industry within the bounds of the manor. Fulling mills were the property of the manor, and were farmed out yearly to entrepreneurs for a sizeable sum. There were at least two such mills at Wakefield, one within the town itself and another nearby at Alvirthorpe, with possibly a third one located at Rastrick. Though the rents they brought typically were less than those for grain mills, they were very profitable nonetheless. In August 1277 William the Fuller and Ralph de Wrtley [sic] paid 40s. to farm the fulling mill at Wakefield that year,<sup>33</sup> and in 1305 the farm was only slightly less, at 30s.<sup>34</sup> Dyers and fullers were also subject to licensing fees for the privilege of practicing their craft within the manor; this could be granted as a monopoly to an individual, as was the case in 1313,<sup>35</sup> or to a group of craftsmen settled in one area.

Though the court rolls contain only incidental evidence

concerning the wool industry at Wakefield, its contribution to the early fourteenth-century economy there is unquestionable. Licensing fees and rents from the fulling mills provided a constant source of revenue for the manor, as did the tolls and tallages levied on the sale of cloth and raw wool at Wakefield's fairs and market. References in the court rolls to individuals involved in the wool industry increase after 1300, indicating the increasing importance of the industry at the manor. From the first opening of the market to the wool trade in 1308,<sup>36</sup> it continued to grow in scope and economic importance, in time growing to completely dominate Wakefield's economy and making the town one of the country's leading centers of the woollen industry.

A second industry that, like the wool industry, found its beginnings at Wakefield in the late thirteenth century and reached full fruition in the early sixteenth century was iron mining. And, as with the wool industry, the court rolls show the increasingly important role iron production played in maintaining a healthy economy at Wakefield after 1300. The manor was well-supplied with the necessary prerequisites for easy development of this industry-- plentiful wood and coal supplies to fuel the forges, swift streams to run the blowers in those forges, and rich deposits of iron ore lying near the surface. These resources were exploited early on. Mining and forging operations were already well-established at Hipperholme, Dewsbury, Sowerby, and Halifax, as well as at Wakefield by

1297. The latter in particular was a major center for the industry, as forges, shafts, and the associated industry of coal-digging are noted in the surrounding townships of Alvirthorpe, Ossett, Sandal Magna, Stanley, Durcar, and Horbury.

The relative importance of the industry can be judged by the social status of these entrepreneurs, and by the degree of organization the operations had already exhibited prior to 1300. In 1284 when Adam de Blahomner [smelter] failed to appear before the court on a charge of illegally cutting wood in Dewsbury, the court attached John le Bone, "his smith," who was his pledge.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in 1315 Richard the Smith "of John Culpon's forge" was amerced for allowing his animals to escape into the lord's woods.<sup>38</sup> Both Adam de Blahomner and John Culpin appear in the rolls on numerous occasions, and appear to have headed large-scale mining and smelting operations employing specialized craftsmen, even to procure fuel supplies for the forges. Though the court rolls do not reveal a specific instance in which colliers or coal-diggers were in the direct employ of the smelters, the presence of such professionals and their concentration in the iron-producing areas of the manor offer a convincing argument for at the very least a regularized system of supply.

These fuel supplies were stringently regulated by the manor, and as with most other forms of exploitative economic activity, were a profitable source of revenues for the

manor. Forges ran on coal, or more often, charcoal, and rather than timber, charcoal burners used coppice-wood of oaks, ash, and beech in order to preserve fuel supplies. Coppicing was widespread at Wakefield, and in 1307 the entire stand at the Westwood in Criggleston was sold for twenty-five marks to four residents of that township.<sup>39</sup> The large-scale operation almost certainly restricts this operation to a major industry, of which either charcoal or ash-burning are the most likely. Any attempts to procure either fuel or ore illegally brought heavy fines in the manorial court, though the higher value of the wood made amercements for it higher than those for the illegal taking of ore. In 1297 Thomas Dewsbury and Richard Attebroke were each fined only 6d. for digging and selling ore illegally,<sup>40</sup> while ten years later Ivo the Smith paid 12d. for the same offense<sup>41</sup> at Wakefield--an insignificant sum when compared to the exorbitant fine of £13 4d. paid by seven smiths for trespass within the Great Wood near Wakefield.<sup>42</sup>

The forges themselves paid heavy licensing fees to operate within the manor, often because the right to cut and burn wood was implicit within the lease. A single forge located in the woodlands of Sowerby brought £9 12s. in fees to the manor in 1314<sup>43</sup>, and in 1316 the operator of a similar forge at "Twyseldene" near Alvirthorpe paid 14s. a week for the right to "work and burn" there.<sup>44</sup> This area remained a center of iron working, for by 1331 smelting activity had grown so heavy that the court rolls complain of

twenty-one unfilled mining pits in the Great Wood.<sup>45</sup>

Iron-working never approached the scale or economic importance of the wool industry in Wakefield. Yet the relatively high profits the industry brought despite its seasonal nature made it an important addition to the manorial economy. The court rolls attest to its rapid expansion in the years after 1300, and this expansion bolstered the manorial economy during and after the crisis of 1315-1322, continuing to grow in importance throughout the following century. As only one among several industries that prospered in Wakefield after 1300, it was a significant element in a pattern of continuing economic expansion there that began around 1100 and halted only with the onset of the Black Death in 1349.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>An excellent development of modern market theory can be found in James P. Masschaele, *A Regional Economy in Medieval England*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1990), 11-13.

<sup>2</sup>The use of place-name surnames (*i.e.* Simon de York, John de Wakefield, etc.) has become a valuable tool in modern medieval studies. In works such as Raftis' "Geographical Mobility in Lay Subsidy Rolls," *Mediaeval Studies* 28 (1976), 385-403, Anne DeWindt's "Redefining the Peasant Community in Medieval England: The Regional Perspectives," *Journal of British Studies* 26 (1987), 163-207, and D.L. Farmer's "Two Wiltshire Manors and Their Markets," *Agricultural History Review* 37 (1989), 1-11, place-name analysis has provided information on peasant mobility, kinship networks, and market participation. In market studies it has been determined that the names contained within manorial court rolls generally correlate to those individuals who conducted business at the market. These place-names are extracted from the rolls and the places of origin plotted on a map. The resulting "shotgun" pattern provides a graphic illustration of the general market area of the town, the area of densest concentration being the normal drawing range of the market. For small local markets this drawing range was six or seven miles, while regional markets drew patrons from approximately twenty miles away.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth L. McKutcheon, "Yorkshire Fairs and Markets to the End of the Eighteenth Century," *Publications of the Thoresby Society* 39 (1939), 161-71.

<sup>4</sup>In his article "Marketing the Produce of the Countryside, 1200-1500," David Farmer asserts that prior to the fourteenth century wool travelled from Yorkshire to Lincoln's port of Boston. Only in later years did Hull become the primary outlet for Yorkshire wool. See *ibid.*, in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol.3, ed. Joan Thirsk, 324-430 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 396.

<sup>5</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, xi.

<sup>6</sup>McKutcheon, "Fairs and Markets," 21-26.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 128-29.

<sup>8</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.4, 156.

<sup>9</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 192, 302.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.2, 145.



<sup>11</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol. 4, 109.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.3, 29.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.4, 187. Lacking any sort of police, the only mode of crime control in medieval society was to "raise the hue and cry" after a criminal offender. That is, witnesses to a crime were obligated to draw the attention of the rest of the villagers, and all would immediately pursue--and hopefully capture--the miscreant.

<sup>14</sup>McKutcheon, "Fairs and Markets," 128.

<sup>15</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 97.

<sup>16</sup>*Calendar of Patent Rolls. Henry III, 1247-1258* (London: H.M.S.O., 1908; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Krause Reprint, 1971), 114.

<sup>17</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.4, 2,3.

<sup>18</sup>From the French *pieds poudreaux*, or, "dusty feet," suggestive of the travelling merchants who frequented these fairs. Roman law, which served as the basis for most European systems of jurisprudence, proved woefully inadequate to deal with the special problems that often arose in financial transactions. Consequently a second "universal" *corpus* of law developed during the middle ages to deal specifically with this area. Commonly called "merchant law," it held sway in fairs and markets throughout Europe, standardizing the legal aspects of trade and thereby facilitating the expansion of trade and commerce. With the lord's Steward presiding as judge over a jury selected from among the merchants themselves, these "pie powder" courts met hourly for the duration of the fair, dealing with legal aspects of trade, breakers of the peace, regulation of standards and measures, and the collection of tolls and fees. The amercements levied by these courts were one of the more profitable sources of manorial revenue generated by fairs and markets.

<sup>19</sup>McKutcheon, "Fairs and Markets," 169.

<sup>20</sup>Steven A. Moorhouse and Margaret L. Faull, eds., *West Yorkshire*, vol. 1, 292.

<sup>21</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.4, 117.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.3, 185.

<sup>23</sup>R.H. Britnell, "The Proliferation of Markets in England, 1200-1349," *Economic History Review*, 2d. ser., 34 (1981), 210; see also Edward Miller, "New Settlement: Northern England," in *The Agrarian History of England and*

*Wales*, vol.2, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 247.

<sup>24</sup>Farmer, "Marketing the Produce," 396.

<sup>25</sup>Lamond, *Walter of Henley's Husbandry*, 145.

<sup>26</sup>This estimate is based on a recent study by J.P. Bischoff concerning the flocks of the De Lacy family, owners of the Honor of Pontefract during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Of the thirty-five De Lacy manors listed, only eight had flocks numbering more than five hundred sheep in 1305, and only one of those was in Yorkshire, at Cridling. See J.P. Bischoff, "'I Cannot Do't Without Counters': Fleece Weights and Sheep Breeds in Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Century England," *Agricultural History Review* (1982), 148.

<sup>27</sup>Fourteen pounds. The price seems to be a fairly standard one throughout this period.

<sup>28</sup>See, for example, Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 69.

<sup>29</sup>*Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward I, 1272-1307*, vol.5 (London: H.M.S.O., 1908; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Krause Reprint, 1970), 134.

<sup>30</sup>Herbert Heaton, *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, 2d. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 24-26.

<sup>31</sup>In 1308 he is noted as taking a piece of waste in Wakefield market "between his two cloth booths." See Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 179.

<sup>32</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.4, 117; vol.3, 185.

<sup>33</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 252.

<sup>34</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.3, 183.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>36</sup>McKutcheon, "Fairs and Markets," 128.

<sup>37</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.1, 191.

<sup>38</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.3, 73.

<sup>39</sup>Baildon, "Court Rolls," vol.2, 83.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.1, 268.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, vol.2, 112.

<sup>42</sup>J.W. Walker, "Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield,"  
vol.5 *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series* 109  
(1945), 185.

<sup>43</sup>Moorhouse and Faull, *West Yorkshire*, vol.3, 781.

<sup>44</sup>Lister, "Court Rolls," vol.3, 146.

<sup>45</sup>Moorhouse and Faull, *West Yorkshire*, vol.3, 778.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The early fourteenth century was a period of great flux in England. Political disruptions, a declining birthrate, increasing involvement of the crown in the nation's economic activity, and generally low crop yields created a period of uncertainty and economic contraction throughout much of the realm. Yet Wakefield, through a fortuitous circumstance of land, resources, and a rather mercenary exploitation of the peasants' difficult economic situation by the earl of Surrey maintained a remarkable economic vitality throughout the decades prior to the Black Death.

This vitality was rooted in the abundance of unoccupied land available for the taking at Wakefield. Sparsely settled at the time of the Conquest the population-to-land ratio was lowered even further by the devastation wrought by the Conqueror in his "harrying of the north." In the great period of expansion between 1100-1300, this allowed an artificially high growth rate at Wakefield and elsewhere in the West Riding. By the late thirteenth century, when most parts of England were beginning to suffer an acute land shortage and the economic ills that accompany such a development, Wakefield still possessed large reserves of

unsettled land. Thus the pattern of agrarian expansion continued at Wakefield. Sluggish through the 1270's and 1280's, the expansion began in earnest in the 1290's, arising first in the far western reaches of the manor at Sowerby, then spreading to Hipperholme and Holmfirth. Initially simply reclamation of marginal waste, by 1307 expansion came only at the expense of virgin land. Such lands were available nonetheless, at least in the western half of the manor. In the more desirable lands to the east there had been little such land available since before 1274, when the court rolls start.

The onset of the agrarian crisis in 1315 marked a turning-point in the pattern of expansion, though positively in terms of manorial revenues. The crisis brought an intense flurry of assarting as smallholders sought to stave off starvation and wealthy landholders sought to exploit the rising grain prices. The growing demand for land was answered by the earl of Surrey with managerial policies enacted specifically to reap as much benefit as was possible from the circumstances. Gone now were the relatively modest entry fees of the pre-crisis period, as in 1316 the earl increased those fees to four or five times their previous rates. By 1317 entry fees had climbed even higher, and no longer maintained themselves at a standard rate. Because of these tactics, manorial revenues from these land transactions actually increased, rather than decreased during the crisis period. After 1322 entry fees returned to

a lower rate, though still higher than in the pre-crisis period, and unoccupied lands continued to come under the plow, though again at a reduced pace.

This expansion was largely at the expense of woodland, which in many other ways proved a significant source of revenue that contributed to the maintenance of a strong manorial economy at Wakefield. Blessed with an abundance of this commodity, the manor benefited from increasing revenues over the period of this study through a carefully-regulated exploitation of its woodland resources. Tenants paid nominal fees to gather firewood, herbage for livestock, and nuts, and paid hefty fees to take timber. Revenues from these sources rose yearly, doubling between 1286-1307, and constituted a significant and reliable source of income for the manor.

Wakefield's continuing economic vitality was further apparent in the expanding scope of its market activity. Functioning as a regional market, Wakefield's range encompassed an area of roughly seven hundred square miles, drawing agricultural produce down from the western reaches of the manor to the town and thence on to one of the provincial markets of York or Lincoln. In addition to these weekly markets, Wakefield held two fairs, dealing mainly with horses and cattle. Drawing merchants from all of northern England, these fairs provided the manor with a second profitable source of market-related income. In 1331 a third fair was established at Wakefield to take advantage

of an increasingly important source of revenue, the wool trade.

Though Wakefield was to become one of England's greatest centers of woollen cloth production in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at the time of this study it was the trade in raw wool that dominated this business. Wakefield was very active early on in this highly lucrative business, and by the time of the first court rolls in 1274 there was an active wool market in Wakefield. The wool-dealers played a prominent role in peasant society, and were very active fee farmers, contributing several pounds of income yearly to the manorial coffers. The woollen cloth industry was also emerging as a major economic enterprise at Wakefield by the late thirteenth century. Weavers, fuller and dyers are frequently mentioned in the court rolls, and, like the wool dealers themselves, occupied an elevated position in peasant society, testifying to the importance of this industry at Wakefield--an importance that would grow as time went on.

Likewise a second industry, iron smelting, played a significant role in maintaining a bouyant economy at Wakefield in the post-1300 period. Though present prior to 1300, it was in the following century that this industry grew to major importance, with large-scale operations scattered throughout the manor. Smelting operations paid high licensing fees to the manor, and though never as important at Wakefield as the wool industry, continued to

provide significant revenues for the manor throughout the fourteenth century. The revenues from these industries and the ongoing agrarian expansion stimulated Wakefield's economy, despite the ill effects of the crisis period, and that economy remained healthy until the onset of the Black Death.

Professor Postan's theory of a late thirteenth century economic contraction among English manors is essentially a valid one. Throughout much of England manorial revenues did decrease as lack of land and declining birthrates, punctuated by political and climatic disruptions, eroded the economic base of manorial economy. Yet such broad generalizations must be used with caution, for local and even regional variations in this theme do occur, as was the case at Wakefield. Only through case studies of individual manors can a more accurate picture of England's agrarian economy develop, as these local and regional variations come to light. This study is part of that endeavor, and disproves Professor Postan's thesis for that large portion of southwestern Yorkshire that was the manor of Wakefield. In so doing, it constitutes the first preliminary step in the possible development of a typology for an entire class of landholdings exhibiting such economic vitality in the otherwise unfavorable economic climate of the period. Such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this study and must await further investigation.



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APPENDIX A  
PLACE-NAME SURNAMES IN THE  
WAKEFIELD COURT ROLLS

APPENDIX A

PLACE-NAME SURNAMES IN THE  
WAKEFIELD COURT ROLLS

Abbathia	Ayketon	Blackbourne
Aberford	Aylesforth	Blacker
Ackerlands	Aynesford	Blois
Ackton	Baa	Bolling
Acom	Badsworth	Bondrode
Acreland	Baghill	Bonk
Adderigate	Baildon	Boothes
Adingham	Baldreston	Boothroyd
Aldelay	Bank	Bordeus
Aldonley	Baricloghe	Boseham
Almeley	Barkesay	Bothem
Almondbury	Barkeston	Bottomley
Altofts	Barkisland	Boure
Alverthorpe	Barn	Bower
Alyston	Barnby	Bradley
Amiens	Barnside	Braithwaite
Amyas	Bathe	Bramley
Anandene	Batley	Bramwith
Anenley	Baumforth	Brearley
Appleyard	Bayrstowe	Bredensik
Ardsley	Bayrstowe	Breryhay
Armerawe	Beaumont	Bretton
Asberne	Bedford	Bridlington
Aslay	Bek	Brighouse
Asserlay	Bellhouse	Broadbottom
Asses	Belton	Brockholes
Astey	Benninges	Broomhall
Attebarre	Benthouse	Bruce
Attebeck	Bentley	Brunneley
Attebrook	Bernicliff	Burdeux
Attecote	Bertby	Burgh
Attegreen	Beverley	Burton
Attekirk	Bickdene	Butterley
Attewell	Billcliff	Butterworth
Attewood	Bingley	Bylam
Aula	Birkenshaw	Byretall
Aunlay	Birkes	Byri
Austonley	Birkestall	Byron
Avendene	Birstall	Bythstonley
Aveneley	Biry	Cailly

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Calthorn	Cromwellbothom	Everingham
Calverley	Crosland	Ewyas
Camera	Crossley	Falholme
Cardoil	Crowshaw	Farnley
Carlcoates	Cudworth	Farsley
Carlton	Culdene	Featherstone
Cartworth	Cumberworth	Felton
Casteley	Curia	Fernoule
Castelford	Dale	Ferry
Castello	Dalton	Field
Castilstede	Dam	Finchedene
Castro	Darton	Fixby
Cawthorne	Deanby	Flanshaw
Cayley	Deman	Flockton
Chapel	Dene	Flosch
Chapelthorpe	Denton	Foghlestone
Cheadle	Derneschaugh	Foldes
Chedeshill	Dewbanks	Foolstone
Chesewaldeley	Dewsbury	Fouldon
Cheswell	Dighton	Foulewood
Chickenley	Dirtcar	Frechley
Chidsell	Dissheford	Fresley
Chivet	Doddeworth	Frith
Clay	Doncaster	Fyney
Clayton	Donefield	Galbar
Cleg	Donestorp	Garderobe
Cleveland	Donnes	Gargrave
Cliderowe	Donyngton	Gates
Cliff	Dorking	Gawthorpe
Clifton	Dounes	Geldhird
Clopton	Dranefield	Gildersome
Clough	Dronesfield	Gilstead
Cloych	Dulber	Gisburne
Clyvache	Dunningley	Gledhill
Cockcroft	Earl's Heaton	Gledholt
Coldeley	Eastfield	Godby
Coley	Eastwood	Golcar
Colleresley	Eccleshill	Golderode
Conisbrough	Ecclesley	Goldley
Connale	Edderikthorpe	Gomersall
Copley	Elcock	Gonton
Cote	Elfletburgh	Gortone
Coupland	Elland	Gouclochawes
Covenhalle	Elwardholes	Gouthelacres
Coventry	Emley	Grafford
Cowick	Erd	Gray
Craven	Erdeslawe	Greengate
Criche	Erneburg	Greenhurst
Crigglestone	Erneschaugh	Greenwood
Crimblesworth	Essetoft	Greetland
Crofton	Everhull	Grefes



## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Gresbrook	Hemmingway	Howarth
Gretton	Heptonstall	Huddersfield
Grimsby	Hepworth	Hull
Grimston	Herteley	Humley
Gris	Hertesheved	Hurst
Grotton	Heryz	Illingworth
Gunnylthwaite	Heselay	Ireland
Gunston	Heselwell	Jordham
Hackford	Hethersale	Kelingley
Haddegrenes	Hevensale	Kellesley
Hadershelf	Heya	Kellet
Hagenworth	Heyers	Kendal
Haigh	Heyrode	Ker
Hale	Hill	Kerkynhaugh
Haley	Hillingworth	Kerlinghowe
Halgh	Hilton	Kettlethorpe
Halifax	Himelsworth	Kexborough
Hall	Hingandrode	Kirkby
Hallamshire	Hipperholme	Kirkshaw
Halliwell	Hirnyng	Knockthorpe
Halsteads	Hoby	Knottingley
Hamilton	Hoderode	Lache
Hangingrode	Hodrode	Lancaster
Hanneley	Hogley	Lane
Harrop	Hokes	Langdene
Hartley	Hol	Langfield
Hartshead	Holbroke	Langley
Hasenhirst	Holdfeld	Langside
Hasley	Holdsworth	Lascelles
Hasses	Holgate	Lascy
Hastey	Holland	Lathe
Hatfield	Hollingthorpe	Lawe
Hawksworth	Hollins	Lee
Haydon	Holme	Leeds
Hazlehirst	Holmes	Leghe
Heaton	Holrode	Leghrode
Hechenshale	Holway	Lek
Heckmondwike	Holynworth	Lepton
Hedon	Hondegate	Lethe
Heeley	Honley	Letterby
Heet	Hooton	Leventhorpe
Hegeley	Hopton	Lewes
Hegrode	Horbury	Leye
Helbroke	Horn	Leyland
Helgate	Horsecroft	Leyton
Helgrene	Horton	Licche
Helileghe	Horum	Lightcliffe
Helistones	Hosit	Lighthazels
Heliwall	Hou	Lightholleres
Helm	Houneheved	Lightrige
Helon	Hoverhalle	Lingarthes

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Linley	Milnthorpe	Ovenden
Linthwaite	Mire	Overhall
Littlewood	Mirfield	Overton
Liversedge	Mixenden	Oxenhope
Lockwood	Mohaud	Padeshill
Locokes	Monkton	Paldeneleyes
Lofthouse	Monte	Pannal
Lom	Moor	Peak
London	Mora	Pendant
Lone	Morehouse	Penerith
Longley	Morley	Pennington
Longside	Morthyng	Percy
Lopperheved	Mosscroft	Pikeburne
Loukes	Motterum	Pledwick
Louthe	Mountefort	Ploulay
Lowe	Netherton	Pomerio
Loyne	Nettleton	Pontefract
Luddenden	Neville	Popelwelle
Luddington	Newbigging	Priestley
Ludham	Newland	Prigge
Luine	Newmarket	Pudsey
Lum	Newriding	Quarmby
Lundo	Newsham	Quick
Lupset	Newton	Quickeleden
Lupton	Norland	Quitakres
Lye	Normanton	Quithill
Lyille	Normanville	Quytteley
Lynne	Northcliffe	Ramsdene
Lythrige	Northend	Rastrick
Lyvet	Northfolk	Raupighel
Maladria	Northland	Ravensfield
Mallom	Northorp	Ravenslowe
Mallsheved	Northowram	Rawtonstall
Maltone	Northwood	Redcliff
Mankinholes	Norton	Rede
Manningham	Noteschage	Rediker
Manshead	Nottingham	Rhode
Mara	Notton	Richmond
Marchdene	Nunwick	Ridyng
Marisco	Nutshaw	Rigge
Marton	Oakdene	Ripon
Meaus	Oakenhead	Rishworth
Meltham	Odam	Roaldesete
Mere	Okerrodes	Rochdale
Merkinfield	Okes	Rochilsete
Merse	Okesley	Rockley
Methley	Oldfield	Rodeker
Micklefield	Oldton	Rodelsheved
Middleton	Ossett	Rodes
Midgley	Otley	Rodewood
Milleshaughe	Ouchthorpe	Rokes

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Rollesby	Skayf	Swalthill
Rommesdene	Skelmanthorpe	Swillington
Rosendale	Skelmarsh	Swineshead
Rothelesset	Skelton	Syk
Rothwell	Skircoat	Sykes
Roweley	Skriven	Tanshall
Rowell	Skulbrook	Tatersall
Rushworth	Slack	Tengetwisel
Russcheley	Slaithwait	Thachemache
Rygate	Slandene	Thickollins
Ryley	Smallshaw	Thinglow
Rythir	Smyle	Thohill
Saddleworth	Snape	Thomil
Sale	Snapethorp	Thong
Salsa-Mara	Soothill	Thorecroft
Saltonstall	Sorby	Thornes
Saltthwaite	Sothehaugh	Thornhill
Sandal Magna	Southcliff	Thornley
Sandforth	Southdene	Thornton
Santon	Southorp	Thorpe
Sausemer	Southoram	Thounges
Saville	Southwood	Thurgerland
Scamonden	Sowerby	Thurleston
Scargill	Soyland	Thurstanland
Schelveley	Spel	Thurstanley
Scholes	Spen	Tickhill
Schurbarwe	Sping	Tingley
Sculcoates	Spittel	Todholme
Scyville	Spottland	Todmorden
Selby	Stable	Toftcliff
Serlby	Stafford	Tonley
Seville	Staincliff	Toothill
Seye	Stainland	Topcliffe
Shackelton	Stainton	Tornhawe
Shackeltonstall	Standbank	Trimingham
Shafton	Stanley	Trobeker
Shagwe	Stansfield	Turton
Sharlston	Steel	Twyford
Sheffield	Steghel	Vallibus
Shelf	Stocks	Vernell
Shelley	Stockwell	Vrennegate
Shelton	Stokes	Vrenwood
Shepley	Stones	Wadethorpe
Shibden	Stonyleghe	Wadsworth
Shideshill	Stordes	Wakefield
Shipley	Storthes	Wakehirst
Shitlington	Strekeyse	Wald
Sholbroke	Studley	Walda
Shore	Styhill	Wales
Siki	Sunderland	Walkingham
Silkston	Sutton	Walronwalle

## APPENDIX A (Continued)

Walseden	Wycthon
Walton	Wygan
Waluro	Wyke
Wanton	Wylley
Warley	Wymark
Warmfield	Wyrhale
Warmley	Wyston
Wassedene	Yarworth
Waterhouse	Ydle
Waterton	Ynok
Wauton	York
Weatherby	Yrys
Wede	
Westwood	
Whitestones	
Whitewood	
Wildborleys	
Wilkeshesik	
Willeys	
Wiltshire	
Windhill	
Windybanks	
Wirkeslay	
Witaker	
Witfield	
Withill	
Witley	
Wlfdale	
Wlfwro	
Wodeheved	
Wolfker	
Wollerenwalle	
Wombwell	
Wood	
Woodhall	
Woodhouse	
Woodkirk	
Woodrow	
Woodsome	
Woodthorpe	
Wooldale	
Woolhouses	
Woolley	
Woolrow	
Wordhill	
Worteley	
Wotherode	
Wragby	
Wrenthorpe	
Wridelesford	
Wro	

APPENDIX B

PERSONAL PLEDGING AND OFFICE-HOLDING AS INDICATORS  
OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF INDIVIDUALS IN  
THE IRON AND WOOLLEN INDUSTRIES AT WAKEFIELD

APPENDIX B

Office-Holding and Personal Pledging

Individual	Occupation	Offices and Pledges			
		Juror	Pledge	Grave	Other
Culpon, John	Ironworker	3	1	-	-
Filcok, German	Cloth Merchant	7	11	1	1
Fuller, Gilbert	Fuller	-	1	-	-
Fuller, Robert	Fuller	1	1	-	1
Fuller, William	Fuller	-	1	-	-
Greenhood, William	Wool Buyer	4	1	-	-
LeBone, John	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Lister, Bate	Dyer	2	1	-	-
Lister, Gilbert	Dyer	-	2	-	1
Lister, Ralph	Dyer	-	1	-	1
Lister, Richard	Dyer	-	1	-	-
Lister, Robert	Dyer	-	2	-	1
Lister, Thomas	Dyer	-	5	-	2
Margeryknavé, William	Wool Buyer	-	2	-	6
Roscelin, William	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Sheffield, Ralph de	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Smith, Adam	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Smith, Alan	Ironworker	1	-	-	-
Smith, Henry	Ironworker	-	2	-	-
Smith, Ivo	Ironworker	1	6	-	-
Smith, John	Ironworker	1	4	-	-

## APPENDIX B (Continued)

Smith, John	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Smith, John	Ironworker	1	1	-	-
Smith, Nicholas	Ironworker	-	-	-	1
Smith, Philip	Ironworker	-	3	-	-
Smith, Ralph	Ironworker	-	2	-	-
Smith, Richard	Ironworker	2	2	-	2
Smith, Richard	Ironworker	-	1	-	-
Smith, Robert	Ironworker	1	-	-	-
Smith, Thomas	Ironworker	-	3	-	-
Smith, William	Ironworker	-	1	-	1
Smith, William	Ironworker	1	3	-	-
Swillington, Henry de	Wool Buyer	2	3	-	-
Tailor, John	Cloth	-	3	-	-
Tailor, Philip	Cloth	1	3	-	-
Tailor, Richard	Cloth	5	2	-	-
Tailor, William	Cloth	-	26	2	2
Walker, Henry	Fuller	-	1	-	-
Walker, Robert	Fuller	8	5	-	-
Webster, John	Weaver	2	5	-	-
Webster, Thomas	Weaver	1	-	-	-
Young, Robert	Ironworker	-	4	-	-

In medieval peasant society, frequency of office-holding and pledging were largely determined by the socio-economic status of the individual. All of the subjects named above were noted in the court rolls as being involved in either the iron or wool industries at Wakefield. The sheer numbers of these individuals as well as the frequency with which they served in these capacities are graphic evidence of the economic importance of these industries at Wakefield.

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