

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY IN THE LATER  
THIRTEENTH CENTURY

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i

THE Cobham family in the thirteenth century belonged to that class of prosperous gentry, whose degree of wealth, leisure and education, made them leaders in their counties and links between the latter and the central government. Men like the Cobhams formed the channel through which law, order and national policy could be administered, but they were never passive instruments, as kings found to their cost, possessing a strong sense of independence and community.

This class has always interested historians, but it is not one which has left the most records. Whereas detailed accounts of ecclesiastical estates and the great baronies have survived, we know little of lesser lay manors. It is intriguing, therefore, to find three thirteenth-century manuscripts, all compiled within one generation, relating to the estates of the Cobham family.

Firstly, we have the official view drawn up in standard form, the Inquisition *Post Mortem* of John Cobham the Younger, of 1300:<sup>1</sup> five manors neatly classified according to arable, pasture and meadow. Secondly, there is a rental in the Cobham Cartulary,<sup>2</sup> an assortment of rents and dues which it is difficult to match with the information in the inquisition. The third document, the Steward's account for the Manor of Cobham for the year 1290-91,<sup>3</sup> reveals the actual working of a medieval estate.

ii

The Inquisition *Post Mortem* of 1300 describes five manors: Westchalk, Beckley, Aldington, Cobham and Cooling (see Table 1), all situated near one another. They form a sufficiently good sample of north-west Kentish manors to compare with Kosminsky's conclusions drawn from a study of Inquisitions *Post Mortem* for the counties covered by the Hundred Rolls<sup>4</sup> in his *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* and so to note the similarity or otherwise of Kentish manors to the system in other parts of England.

<sup>1</sup> Public Record Office C133/94.

<sup>2</sup> Hatfield MS. 306 F.44 ff.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Harleian Roll D.1.

<sup>4</sup> Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Warwickshire.

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

Kosminsky classified the manors which he studied into large (over 1,000 acres), medium (500-1,000 acres) and small (under 500 acres). Following this, only the manor of Cobham is a large manor; Cooling falls into the medium category, and the other three into the small.

The value of this source is somewhat diminished on two counts. In the first place, the original document is in a bad condition, many entries being partly or wholly illegible. Secondly, the figures in the Inquisitions tend to be underestimated. Bearing these reservations in mind, the general picture presented by the Inquisitions is still a useful one. Moreover, rents and tenants, perhaps the most interesting part, do not lend themselves so easily to under-assessment. The rent-roll for Cobham Manor can be compared with that in the Cobham Cartulary, and we find that the total of rents is nearly the same in both sources.

Probably the most striking feature of the Cobhams' Manors as revealed by the Inquisition is the high proportion of demesne to tenant land (see Table 2). On the three small manors the demesne

TABLE 2

	Demesne land	Tenant land	Value of demesne	Rents
Westchalk	237 acres 62%	c. 149 acres 38%	8 <i>l</i> .11 <i>s</i> .6 <i>d</i> . 65%	4 <i>l</i> .12 <i>s</i> .3½ <i>d</i> . 35%
Beckley	103 acres 86%	18½ acres 14%	3 <i>l</i> .11 <i>s</i> .8 <i>d</i> . 81%	16 <i>s</i> .7½ <i>d</i> . 19%
Aldington	132 acres 51%	c. 124 acres 49%	4 <i>l</i> .0 <i>s</i> .2 <i>d</i> . 49%	4 <i>l</i> .4 <i>s</i> .7 <i>d</i> . 51%
Cobham	585½ acres 51%	c. 556½ acres 49%	29 <i>l</i> .2 <i>s</i> .11 <i>d</i> . 73%	11 <i>l</i> .0 <i>s</i> .3½ <i>d</i> . 27%
Cooling	736 acres 85%	c. 128 acres 15%	22 <i>l</i> .10 <i>s</i> .3 <i>d</i> . 88%	c. 31 <i>l</i> 12%

formed 62 per cent., 86 per cent. and 51 per cent. of the whole, on the medium manor 85 per cent. and on the large manor 51 per cent. Now this is much higher than the proportions in the area studied by Kosminsky where the average demesne was 41 per cent. of the whole on small manors, 35 per cent. on medium manors, and 25 per cent. on large. Yet the absence of villeinage in Kent and hence of labour services in any significant quantity, might have led one to suppose that a smaller-than-average demesne would be found in that county; that leasing rather than direct demesne exploitation would be more attractive to the lords.

TABLE 1  
EXTENT OF MANORS DESCRIBED IN THE INQUISITION *POST MORTEM* OF 1300

Demesne	Cobham	Cooling	Westchalk	Beckley	Aldington
Capital messuage	6s.8d.	6s.	18d.	12d.	6d.
Arable	158 acres = 7l.18s. 202½ acres = 101s.3d.	113 acres = 113s. 233 acres = 116s.6d.	15 acres = 15s. 160 acres = 4l.	12 acres = 12s. 48 acres = 24s.	80 acres = 26s.8d.
Woodland	32 acres = 8s.	(underwood) 15 acres = 3s.9d.	—	—	52 acres = 13s.
Marshland pasture	—	300 acres = 7l.10s.	55 acres = 27s.6d.	42 acres = 21s.	—
Pasture	180 acres = 45s.	60 acres = 10s.	7 acres = 3s.6d.	(? 1 acre)	—
Meadow	3 acres = 3s.				
Salt meadow	10 acres = 5s.	15 acres = 7s.6d.			
Mills	2 = (56s.)	2 = (2l.3s.4d.)	1 = (44s.)	1 = (13s.4d.)	1 = (40s.)
Total value of demesne	29l.2s.11d.	22l.10s.3d.	8l.11s.6d.	71s.8d.	4l.0s.2d.
Profits of the court	4s.	—	2s.	—	12d.
Tenant land; Acreage of tenant land	c. 556½ acres	c. 128 acres	c. 149 acres	18½ acres	c. 124 acres
Rents in cash	10l.10s.4½d.	2l.19s.2½d.	4l.12s.3½d.	16s.7½d.	3l.15s.9d.
Produce Rents	69 hens and 7 cocks (9s.2½d.) 170 eggs (8½d.)	22 hens (? 3s.8d.)	—	—	402½ eggs (1s.8d.) 35 hens and 2 cocks (4s.6d.)
Value of labour services	—	—	—	services rendered but no value given	2s.10d.
Tenants	101	45	42	12	33
Payments to superior lords	—	—	13s.11½d.	—	—

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

The demesne comprises arable, pasture, meadow and woodland (unlike tenant land which was mainly arable), of which arable and meadow were valued most highly (see Table 3). It is noticeable that

TABLE 3

	Value per acre of				
	Westchalk	Beckley	Aldington	Cobham	Cooling
Arable	1s. 6d.	1s. 6d.	4d.	1s. 6d.	1s. 6d.
Salt and marsh pasture	6d.	6d.			6d.
Pasture				6d.	2d.
Meadow	6d.			1s. 6d.	6d.
Woodland			3d.	3d.	3d.

meadow is not rated higher than arable, as is often found in Inquisitions *Post Mortem*, probably because the abundance of marshland in north-west Kent provided high-quality grazing land.

The mill appears as a very important part of the manor (see Table 4).

TABLE 4

	Westchalk	Beckley	Aldington	Cobham	Cooling
Total value of demesne	8l.11s.6d.	3l.11s.8d.	4l.0s.2d.	29l.2s.11d.	22l.10s.3d.
Mills	2l.4s.0d.	13s.4d.	2l.	2l.16s.0d.	4l.3s.4d.

It represents about a quarter of the value of the demesne on Westchalk and Beckley, and half that of Aldington. The larger manors have two mills each, and these comprise between one-fifth and one-sixth of the value of the Cooling demesne, and between one-ninth and one-tenth of Cobham's. In contrast, the profits of the courts appear insignificant—12d., 2s. and 4s. This item was generally underestimated in the Inquisitions, and by comparison the Steward's Account for Cobham Manor in 1290-91 lists a total of 11s.3½d. from the Courts of Luddesdown, Randall, Shorne and 'Romscoth'. Perhaps the jurors on the Inquisition took only one of these courts as pertaining to the Manor of Cobham.

Examining the rent rolls of the Cobham Manors one is struck by the

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

frequency of petty holdings of five acres and under. The amount of land necessary to support a family in the thirteenth century has been the subject of much controversy, but the estimates do not fall below five acres. H. S. Bennett concluded that five to ten acres was necessary. Kosminsky argued that even without paying feudal dues, a five- to ten-acre tenement would not produce enough to feed a household. In the mid-fourteenth century a bovate (between ten and fifteen acres) was reckoned too small to provide a livelihood. It seems safe, therefore, to take five acres as below subsistence level.

Table 5 is not strictly representative of all tenant holdings, partly

TABLE 5

	Holdings of 5 acres and under	6-10 acres	11-20 acres	21-30 acres	Other
Westchalk	32 78% of all tenements	7	2	—	—
Beckley	12 100%	—	—	—	—
Aldington	8 61%	6	2	4	1 (48 acres)
Cobham	70 77%	11	5	2	2 (82 acres and 139 acres)
Cooling	20 87%	2	1	—	—

because of a certain number of illegible entries, partly because a tenant's holding often includes or comprises an undefined messuage. Moreover, although different holdings of the same man have been counted together, one does not know whether any of the tenants held land elsewhere. But several factors indicate that the overall percentages would not be much changed if we did know. Firstly, there is the tendency, observed by students of Kentish medieval agriculture, for an individual's holding to be concentrated in one part of a parish. Secondly, among the tenants, only two hold land on more than one of the five manors studied, if we discount such surnames as Faber, Molendinarius and Welle, which occur in most villages. Thirdly, when we add together the holdings of the two men, it makes no difference to the category in which they fall. Richard Tymberwood holds a messuage, two acres and two roods on Cobham Manor and two acres on

## ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

Beckley. Roger Tymberwood holds two and a half acres on Cobham and two acres on Beckley. So after adding together their respective tenements both Tymberwoods remain in the 'five acre and under' class.

To see how the number of these petty tenements compares with other parts of the country, we can refer to Kosminsky's figures for petty holdings in the counties covered by the Hundred Rolls. He calculated that, of the holdings studied, those of five-acre and under (both villein and free) comprised 36 per cent., the proportion increasing in the east, on small manors and among free tenants.<sup>5</sup> The percentage on the Cobham Manors is 80 per cent., reinforcing frequent observations on the prevalence of near-landlessness in that county.

If the majority of these tenants were living on holdings too small for subsistence, it might be expected that they looked to the demesne for the work and wages with which to eke out a livelihood. However, according to the Account Roll of 1290-91 none of its permanent staff were tenants of the manor of Cobham. Occasional skilled workers such as coopers, tilers and smiths were quite well paid, but their numbers were few. Fifty-two occasional agricultural workers were employed, some for only a few days, and an unspecified number of people at threshing and winnowing. This does not amount to a great deal of work for the hundred plus families on the manor. On the other hand, the richer tenants probably also hired the labour of their poorer brethren.

The rents on the five manors vary widely (see Table 6) and it is difficult to discern any trend in the variations. Rents are highest on Beckley which has the smallest demesne and the smallest tenements. Eleven out of its twelve tenants pay between 8*d.* and 1*s.* 4*d.*<sup>6</sup> per acre for their land. Whereas the lowest rents are on Cobham Manor which has the largest demesne (but not the largest tenements); here, nearly two-thirds of the tenants pay 4*d.* per acre or under. On Westchalk and Cooling the most common rent is between 4*d.* and 8*d.* per acre, and on Aldington 3*d.* or 4*d.* per acre. (The exceptionally high rent of 6*s.* per acre is paid by Richard Molendinarius, who owes 6*d.* for half a rood; probably his mill stood on it.) But beyond the mean, the rents vary as widely as four shillings and under a penny per acre.

These variations may be partly due to different qualities of arable land and to the changing conditions of the market. Land changed hands comparatively quickly in Kent; within one generation on Cobham Manor, two-thirds of the tenant land passed from old families to new. Plagues in men or cattle, good or bad harvests, a decline or rise in

<sup>5</sup> Kosminsky, *Studies*, 228.

<sup>6</sup> All rents per acre include the value of any produce rent and of labour services due.

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

TABLE 6<sup>7</sup>

WESTONHALK Cash rents only	
No. of tenants	Rent per acre
4	1 <i>d.</i> -3 <i>d.</i>
32	4 <i>d.</i> -8 <i>d.</i>
1	9 <i>d.</i>
2	1 <i>s.</i> -1 <i>s.</i> 2 <i>d.</i>
1	1 <i>s.</i> 10 <i>d.</i>

BECKLEY Cash, rents and labour services <sup>7</sup>	
No. of tenants	Rent per acre
1	4 <i>d.</i>
4	8 <i>d.</i> -10 <i>d.</i>
7	1 <i>s.</i> -1 <i>s.</i> 4 <i>d.</i>

ALDINGTON Cash and produce rents and labour services <sup>7</sup>	
No. of tenants	Rent per acre
2	1 <i>d.</i> -2 <i>d.</i>
7	3 <i>d.</i> -4 <i>d.</i>
4	5 <i>d.</i> -7 <i>d.</i>
1	9 <i>d.</i>
1	1 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>
1	6 <i>s.</i>

COOLING Cash and produce rents	
No. of tenants	Rent per acre
3	2 <i>d.</i> -3 <i>d.</i>
4	4 <i>d.</i>
12	5 <i>d.</i>
7	6 <i>d.</i> -8 <i>d.</i>
5	9 <i>d.</i>
1	1 <i>s.</i>
1	2 <i>s.</i> 4 <i>d.</i>

COBHAM Cash and produce rents	
No. of tenants	Rent per acre
10	1 <i>d.</i> or less
13	2 <i>d.</i>
21	3 <i>d.</i> -4 <i>d.</i>
10	5 <i>d.</i> -7 <i>d.</i>
4	8 <i>d.</i> -9 <i>d.</i>
7	10 <i>d.</i> -1 <i>s.</i>
4	1 <i>s.</i> 1 <i>d.</i> -1 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>
3	1 <i>s.</i> 8 <i>d.</i>
1	2 <i>s.</i> 2 <i>d.</i>

the village population might result in a very different land-market within the space of a few years. The very low rents of 2*d.* or under are probably quit-rents, where the tenants have bought themselves out of any but a nominal rent by paying a large lump sum, a *gersum*. The Cobham Cartulary contains several examples of such transactions.

<sup>7</sup> Ten tenants on Aldington owe mowing services and six on Beckley owe services of mowing and fencing.

## ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

John Mywerd who pays a halfpenny a year for a messuage and four acres on Cobham, presumably so bought himself out.

The produce rent is by no means insignificant. On Cobham, 24 tenants out of 91<sup>s</sup> pay it in cocks, hens and eggs; on Cooling 13 out of 27, in hens; on Aldington all tenants render cocks, hens and/or eggs. The many fractions of hens in the hen-rent and the absence of round numbers in the egg-rent (valued at 20 for a penny) indicate that there was much fragmentation of land since the original rents were imposed; a normal characteristic of freehold land and especially of gavelkind land. There is no obvious reason why some people pay produce rent, their holdings are no larger, nor the rent lower than that of tenants who only pay cash.

The same is true of the tenants who render labour services, but a clue as to their origin is furnished by the recurrence of similar surnames on the Manor of Beckley. Here, six out of twelve tenants owe labour services, which consist of mowing a varying amount of land in autumn (between eight dayworks and one and a quarter acres), fencing work, and in one case, binding the harvest. Food is provided by the lord during the work.

If we study the names of the tenants, the following pattern emerges:

Tymerwood, Richard (renders services); Quintin (none); Roger (none).

William Cissor (services).

Austyn, Henry (services); Roger (none).

William Welle and Henry Kingewelle (services); Margery Welle (none).

Christina Paynes (services).

John Rogger (services).

Martin Neue (none).

Robert Holond (none).

The list suggests that some holdings have been divided between heirs, but whereas the money rent was divided also, only one of the heirs performed the labour services due from the one whole tenement. Martin Neue and Robert Holond do not necessarily upset the pattern when it is remembered how frequently a portion of a divided holding is sold by one or more of the heirs. These two tenants may well be holding parts of a once whole tenement for which the labour services are performed by someone else. It is possible that the apparently haphazard incidence of produce rent also hails back to this kind of partition among heirs.

<sup>8</sup> All these figures relate only to entries in the Inquisition which are legible; in each extent there are several entries which are too erased to be of any use.



## ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

Rents on the Cobhams' Manors are not noticeably different from rents paid elsewhere. Kosminsky's investigation of rents in the Hundred Rolls counties<sup>9</sup> revealed that, apart from petty holdings, the average rents did not rise above about 4*d.* per acre for freehold, and 10*d.* an acre for villein tenements (including the value of labour services). The Cobhams' tenants' rents, therefore, approximate more nearly to the villein tenements than the freehold; though the Kentish gavelkinders were free, they were not as well-off in the matter of rent as the free tenants in other counties. The tendency to pay lighter rents for larger tenements and vice versa, which Kosminsky noted, is entirely absent on the Cobham Manors. The lords were neither exploiting nor favouring their petty tenants.

The information yielded by the rental for the Manor of Cobham in the Inquisition is complemented by that in the Cartulary. The latter can be taken to be a dependable source, having been drawn up for the family's use. It nowhere contradicts the Inquisition.

### iii

In the Cobham Cartulary there is a rental of the Quartermars fee and certain lands in Cobham and Shorne which formed the basis of the Manor of Cobham, as well as various other family possessions in the time of John Cobham, the Younger. The latter succeeded to his estates in 1251 and died in 1300, but the appearance of the same eight names and the same tenements in both Inquisition and Cartulary suggests that the two sources are not separated by more than about thirty years.

The rental reminds us that a medieval manor was far from being a single contiguous entity. Some of the components of the Manor of Cobham were very small and/or distant from the manor house: such were, the tenement 'Herdeland' in Shorne, the marshes of Bulham and Swanpool in Shorne; a tenant paying 2*s.* and three hens per year in Frindsbury, two tenants in Henherst, and four in Luddesdown. Nor do the tenants' lands appear as unified as they do in the Inquisition where all the holdings of an individual are aggregated. In the Cartulary, tenants are shown holding two, three or even eight separate pieces of land, which make up the whole tenement. The rental distinguishes the nature of the tenements; the vast majority consist of arable only. On the Quartermars fee only three include woodland in addition and one, meadow. It seems that among the lowest stratum of landowners, the 'mixed' tenement was rare.

The rental for the area later called the Manor of Cobham, lists 123 tenements held by individuals or groups of tenants, rendering a total rent of 10*l.*15*s.*11½*d.*, 87 hens, 6 cocks, 278½ eggs and 4 plough-shares.

<sup>9</sup> Kosminsky, *Studies*, 244.

This compares pretty closely to the rent-roll for the Manor of Cobham in the Inquisition which mentions about 96 tenements,<sup>10</sup> and rents totalling 10*l.*10*s.*4½*d.*, 69 hens, 7 cocks and 170 eggs. It appears that the number of tenants decreased over the years, not surprisingly in a county where gavelkind tenure often resulted in the sale of excessively small inheritances. The produce rent may have decreased or it may have been underestimated by the jurors of the Inquisition.

More striking is the fact which emerges from a comparison of the two rentals, that two-thirds of the tenements on the Manor of Cobham changed hands within one generation. Only 22 tenements can be identified in both rentals as having been kept intact in the same family.<sup>11</sup> Fifteen cases can be found where a family mentioned in the Inquisition seems to hold part of the tenement in the Cartulary, but where the holding has altered significantly. The majority of tenements, however, had changed owners in the interval and probably size and shape as well.

The greater detail of the Quartermars rental in the Cartulary reveals a considerable number of tenants of partitioned holdings. Of the 123 tenements, 15 are held by groups of co-heirs and co-heiresses, and the frequent presence of several members of a family within one field suggests that parcellation had taken place. Five tenants surnamed Keneword, for instance, pay rent *de terra que vocatur 'Kenewardesland'*. Similarly, Dionisia and Agnes, daughters of Walter Cornmonger, pay 10*d.* for a messuage and one acre in Reinoldscroft, while John, William and Walter, sons of Martin Cornmonger, pay 10½*d.* for a messuage, and an acre in the same croft. Altogether, 42 of the holdings on the Quartermars fee (about a third) appear to be such parcels of a once whole tenement.

The Cartulary describes other possessions of the Cobham family and illustrates the diverse and scattered sources from which the family drew its revenue. Reginald Cobham's lands,<sup>12</sup> for instance, are scattered through Cobham, Shorne, Luddesdown, Rochester, Cliffe, Hoo, Stone, Dartford, Bexley and Eynsford. His income includes not only rent from arable, pasture and meadow, but also from three houses, two shops and a stall. Acreage is hardly mentioned; it is the rents which are all important, and they are paid in money, in sheep, in hens, in cheese and in spices. One entry speaks of 'tenants of *magister* James Cobham' at Hodone in Strood 'whom he bought from the heirs of John Clark of Cliffe'. Some revenue does not relate to land at all, such as the judicial dues from the tithings in the hundred of Shamel.

<sup>10</sup> The exact number is not known owing to the illegibility of several holdings.

<sup>11</sup> This includes the case of several holdings of various members of a family being united in the hands of one heir.

<sup>12</sup> F.40r.

The extent of the Manor of Dartford-le-Temple presents a great contrast to the Manor of Cobham, where tenants pay a straightforward money and produce rent. On Dartford the lord's revenue is derived from the commutation of ploughing services, 'Ertheselver', rents for the use of meadow 'Medgavel', the farm of mills, ale rents, tolls of river and market, as well as assised rents. An association of tenants, presumably for the enjoyment of certain privileges, *quedam liberata vocatur Gilde*, pays 23s.3d. The reeveship yields 39s. per annum, and the tenants provide a horse for the lord twice a year to travel between Winchester and Dover.

Not all tenements were held of the Cobhams by gavelkind tenure. Three tenants at Cobehamnesland cannot alienate their land, *non possunt dictam terram vendere neque dare nec alienare*. In Hoo two holdings are *traditis at voluntate domini*.

It is interesting to note that along with the lease of marsh pasture, the Cobhams sometimes provided sheep for the lessees. An entry on Folio 34r records the debts owed by tenants of marshes to the lord for the sheep which they bought from him. One of them is obliged to send his sheep to the lord's fold. None of these tenants appear anywhere else on the Cobhams' rent rolls in the Cartulary or the Inquisition; they must have been quite prosperous men, judging by the capital costs involved. These ranged from 3*l.* for 60 sheep, to 10*l.*10s. for 190 sheep. It was clearly not a way in which smallholders could supplement their income.

The Inquisition and Cartulary are useful mainly for information about the *rentier* aspect of the medieval lord; for a picture of the lord as farmer of the land we have to turn to our third source, the Steward's Account.

## iv

We know from the Inquisition *Post Mortem* of 1300 that Cobham was the family's largest manor, whose demesne land was just over half of the estate and was valued at nearly three times the value of the tenant land. The Account Roll of Thomas Gobbyngdale, serjeant of the manor for the year 25th September, 1290–24th September, 1291, gives us an insight into the actual working of the demesne; its labour force, its crops, its stock, and the operations of the agricultural year.

The account is written on three sheets of parchment, each 25 in. × 10 in., sewn together. The right side is in fairly good condition, but the dorse or reverse side is in places illegible, the text on the lowest sheet, which contained a description of miscellaneous items sold for 19*l.*8s.5½*d.*, being completely rubbed away.

The account relates not only to the Manor of Cobham, but also to

TABLE 7  
RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES ON COBHAM MANOR, 1290-91

Repairs and Renewals:				Value of Receipts of Grain:				
£	s.	d.		£	s.	d.		
Ploughing ..	5	18	10	Wheat ..	104	17	9	
Carriage ..	3	0	9	Rye ..	—	—	—	
Buildings ..	1	8	5	Winter barley ..	19	11	8	
Mills ..	1	6	8	Palm barley ..	88	3	0	
Miscellaneous ..	5	13	10½	White peas ..	1	5	—	
	17	8	6½	Grey peas ..	14	2	2	
		8	7	1	Vetch ..	8	6	8
				2	Oats ..	7	7	4
				5	Maslin ..	—	—	—
				10		28	16	0
				1				
				3½				
				7½				
				25				
				15				
				7½				
				98				
				8				
				11½				
				108				
				2				
				4				
				33				
				14				
				2½				
				6				
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## ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

the estates of North Court, Abbot's Grange, Monk's Grange<sup>13</sup> which the lord leased from a religious body. The yield of grain from these estates is distinguished but expenses are not apportioned.

The right side begins by listing sales of corn (28*l*.10*s*.3*d*.), stock (3*l*.2*s*.3*d*.), issues of the Manor (17*l*.15*s*.6¼*d*.) (wool, fleeces, pelts, hides, butter and cheese), and various things as contained on the dorse of the roll (19*l*.8*s*.5¾*d*.). 33*l*.6*s*.8*d*. are acknowledged as received from the lord's coffer for the purchase of sheep. Payments from the courts of Luddesdown and Shorne are set down and rents for two meadows.

The next section lists the cash expenses of the Manor under the following headings: 'Expenses of Ploughing' comprise mainly materials and labour for the repair of ploughs, the shoeing of horses and oxen, halters, etc. 'Necessary Expenses' are a miscellaneous collection, including purchase of staves and ditch partitions for fencing off sown fields from public ways as a protection against cattle, the purchase of a tenement for 6*d*., hurdles for sheep-folds, cloth and cap for the sergeant, and occasional wages for mending agricultural implements, for making rails, for herding sheep and cattle and so on. 'Expenses of Carting' consist of materials for the repair of carts, wheels, nails, shot-board, etc., ropes, collars, and horse-shoes for the horses and wages for the carrying out of the repairs and for shoeing the horses. 'Expenses of Buildings' again are mainly materials and wages for maintenance (mainly tiling), as are the items listed under 'Cost of Mills'. Then follows the list of wages paid for threshing and winnowing; the cost of purchased grain and stock, and the annual stipends paid to the regular staff of the Manor. The section closes with the entry 'Foreign Expenses', that is payments which were made by the sergeant but did not relate to Cobham Manor, including wages to collectors of tithes, and to labourers nor working on the Manor. Also at the end of the 'Expenses of Buildings', and 'Expenses of Threshing', a stated part of the total is said to be 'Foreign Expenses' without distinguishing the items to which these relate.

The reverse side contains a list of receipts of grain and the uses to which it is put, as shown in Table 7, and an account of livestock of the manor. The third and lowest sheet contained a description of the items mentioned at the beginning as sold for 19*l*.8*s*.5¾*d*. which is now illegible.

I have summarized the information contained in the roll in as near a manner as possible to the form of a modern profit and loss account (see Table 7). It has been held that, in the absence of livestock

<sup>13</sup> I have not been able to identify these estates, no trace of the place-names remaining. It is likely that Northcourt was situated near what is now Court Wood, just east of Shorne and adjoining the A226. Cobham Manor included land in both Cobham and Shorne parishes, and the estates in question must have been adjacent or at least near to the manorial lands.

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

TABLE 8  
RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES PERTAINING TO ARABLE FARMING

	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	Value of grain produced on demesne:	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Repairs and Renewals:							Wheat	104	17	9			
Ploughing .. .. .	7	19	7				Winter barley	19	11	8			
Carting .. .. .	3	4	3				Palm barley ..	88	3	0			
Miscellaneous .. .. .	7	18	0				White peas ..	1	5				
Buildings .. .. .	2	12	0	21	13	10	Grey peas ..	14	2	2			
							Vetch .. .. .	8	6	8			
Wages:							Oats .. .. .	7	7	4			
Threshing and winnowing .. .. .	8	1	1								242	10	0
Cash wages .. .. .	5	0	6										
Masin allowances .. .. .	43	9	0										
				56	10	7							
Value of Grain Sown .. .. .				108	2	4							
Value of fodder for livestock used in arable husbandry .. .. .				26	15	2							
? Profit .. .. .				29	8	1							
				£242	10	0					£242	10	0



prices, it is impossible to estimate the profit in this way, and as a result we have very little idea of the profitability of a medieval manor beyond the notional leasing price in the *Inquisitions Post Mortem*. The obstacle has, perhaps, loomed too large. Although, ideally, livestock should be brought in at valuation as at the beginning and end of the year, on a manor such as Cobham where animals were not reared for sale but for their labour and produce (wool or milk), they can be treated as working capital without throwing the profit figure too much out. From the roll it appears that the aim was to maintain a basic number of beasts, and if natural increase did not fill the complement, the lord was rich enough to make it up by purchase, and to sell off weak or useless animals. Thus, over the years the value of livestock would tend to be the same. A certain number would be slaughtered each year to feed the household, and this, I think, represents the profit element. I have, therefore, brought it into the account at the average prices for 1290–91 given in J. Thorold Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices in England*.

Changes in livestock during the year are shown in Table 10 and an estimate of the capital outlay required to build up the kind of stock needed on a large manor is made by valuing the animals at the average prices mentioned above. It will be seen from the table that the 'basic quota' did not apply to sheep. The lord was building up a larger flock both for Cobham and for other manors. On the other hand, nowhere is the 'capital' aspect of livestock more pronounced than with sheep reared for their wool.

Another difficulty in the way of arriving at an accurate profit is the many benefits enjoyed by the lord and his household which are not mentioned in the roll—butter, cheese and eggs from the farm, produce of the kitchen-garden, firewood, in winter, and so on. Nor do we know what was in the 'Miscellaneous Sales' of 19*l*.8*s*.5*d*., though internal evidence suggests that these included the sale of malt made on the manor, also eggs and probably the sale of wood and/or receipts for the use of woodland by others.

The final profit figure, therefore, can only be a rough estimate; nevertheless, I think that the exercise is worth attempting. Some notion of the profitability of a large lay manor is essential to medieval economic studies, as much for the actual profit as for the analysis of the nature and values of ingoings and outgoings. Other than on ecclesiastical manors, which sometimes attained a highly sophisticated accounting system,<sup>23</sup> we can only arrive at such a notion by a series of estimates to fill the gaps in the scanty evidence available.

The Manor of Cobham lay in the arable-biased farming area of

<sup>23</sup> *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (5th series), xii, 'Profit and Loss Accounting at Norwich Cathedral Priory', E. Stone.



north-east Kent, where wheat and barley were the most popular crops, and sheep were reared in preference to other stock, due to the prevalence of marshland locally. So we find that the main crops on the Manor are wheat (37 per cent. of the total yield) and barley (45 per cent.); peas (6·5 per cent.), vetch (5 per cent.) and oats (6·5 per cent.), taking a minor place. Although a large part of the Manor's revenue was derived from the sale of corn, this was not the first consideration. In the steward's account of the uses to which grain is put (see Table 7) sowing comes first, then according to its kind, feeding the lord's household, allowances to labourers, liveries sent at the lord's command, fodder for livestock and lastly sales. The proportion of sales to the total receipts is low; about 20 per cent. of the total receipt of wheat was sold, but only 6 per cent. of the barley (plus another 5 per cent. representing malt sold which was manufactured from the barley) and 3 per cent. of the peas, while oats and vetch were not grown for sale at all. Wheat was used mainly for feeding the household. A large proportion of the barley (111 quarters) also went to supply the household (of which 54 quarters were used for brewing malt) but a similar amount (80 quarters) after being mixed with rye to make 'maslin' was paid as wages to labourers on the Manor, a common practice in Kent. The recipients would use the barley for brewing or for making into bread. Oats were the main fodder of livestock, the amount produced being insufficient and needing to be augmented by purchases. Peas and vetch were fed to the livestock, too, but the main reason for their production was that they were nitrogenous crops which could be sown on the fallow.

The corn that was sold was the most expensive, wheat at 9s. or 10s. a quarter, barley at 8s. a quarter, and peas at 7s.6d. per quarter. Crops grown only for use on the Manor were the less costly kind—vetch at 5s.4d. per quarter, oats at 4s.4d. per quarter, winter barley at 6s.8d. per quarter. It is clear that the Cobhams were exploiting their demesne with a view to market prices and sales on the market, even though the account says that wheat was sold 'for the necessities of the Manor'. The sale of 21 quarters 3 bushels of barley (presumably received as toll from the mills) for 8s. a quarter and the purchase of 26 quarters 4 bushels of barley at 7s.6d. per quarter, mentioned in the account is a case in point.

A good deal of the yield of grain was augmented by purchase, especially oats, but there are signs in the account that the lord's policy was to make the manor more self-supporting. The amount of oats sown in the year, 50 quarters 1 bushel, was greater than the whole yield of oats. Other grain purchased, as shown in Table 10, was probably to make good manorial shortages rather than to change the seed as recommended by Walter of Henley. There is no evidence that the

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

recommendation was followed by the Kentish lords at this time. On Cobham Manor seed was selected from the current year's yield as appears from the entry 'payment to four women collecting 98 quarters of wheat for sowing'.

The sowing of nitrogenous crops, vetches and peas, on the fallow, in a three-course crop rotation was, however, practised on the Manor, and the amount appeared to be increasing (see Table 11); the yield of

TABLE 11  
1290-91

	Demesne Yield	Acres Sown <sup>24</sup>
Autumn Crops:		
Wheat	220 quarters	(97 quarters 2 bushels) 194 acres
Winter barley	49 quarters	(25 quarters 2 bushels) 50 acres
	<hr/> 269 quarters (45%)	<hr/> 244 acres (44-47%)
Spring Crops:		
Spring barley	220 quarters	(72 quarters 7 bushels) 117-125 acres
Oats	34 quarters	(50 quarters 1 bushel) 50- 80 acres
	<hr/> 254 quarters (43%)	<hr/> 167-205 acres (31-36%)
Fallow Crops:		
Vetch	31 quarters 2 bushels	(41 quarters 1 bushel) 26 acres
Peas	37 quarters 6½ bushels	(13 quarters 2 bushels) 82 acres
	<hr/> 69 quarters (12%)	<hr/> 118 acres (21-22%)

nitrogenous crops in the year was about 12 per cent. of the whole but the acreage sown with them for the following year was 21-22 per cent. This must have followed from the increase of cultivated land during 1290-91, of which there are many indications in the account. There is a general increase in the amount of crops sown, particularly of oats and vetches. The amount of wheat spent on sowing is explained *hoc anno quia xij acres terre apud Hodeler et v acres apud . . . ate Stone de (nova) reprisa*, and again with regard to barley sown *hoc anno quia xj acres terre sub. Bonekakesdone de nova reprisa et xiiij acres inter magnum boscum et boscum vocatum Kenneword. 2s.3d.* is paid to three men burning gorse for six days. Land reclaimed from gorse would be poor,

<sup>24</sup> Acreage sown estimated on the following basis: wheat and winter barley, peas and vetch, at 4 bushels to the acre; spring barley at 4½ bushels to 5 bushels per acre, oats at 5-8 bushels per acre, cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1963), 147-60, 'Regional Differences in Crop Production in Medieval Kent', A. Smith.

and would need to be planted with nitrogenous crops before it would yield anything more valuable.

Apart from sheep, livestock was reared only for use on the manor, for ploughing and carting, for butter and cheese, for meat for the household. Such animals as were sold, were sold *propter infirmitatem*, though the sale of hides of beasts which died or were slaughtered brought in 21s.

Wool, however, was an important source of cash revenue and sheep were reared on a large scale.<sup>25</sup> There were 392 sheep and 58 rams on the manor at the start of the year, and a further 176 sheep were purchased at the special order of the lord. The profit rate on sheep-rearing was much higher than on arable farming (see Table 8). The costs of the latter were about 213*l.* as against the value of corn produced, 242*l.*, but against the 15*l.* from sales of wool, fleeces and pelts, the expenses of sheep-rearing are only wages to shepherds and shearers, 7*l.*16*s.* worth of maslin and 18*s.* in cash and the cost of staves for sheep-folds, etc., 10*s.*9*d.*, a total of 8*l.*17*s.*9*d.* That a well-organized market for wool existed is attested by the statement that half of the wool was sold wholesale.

The total running expenses of the manor are listed in Table 7. Corn for sowing was the largest item (41·2 per cent.) and labour costs a close second (39·6 per cent.), not surprisingly on a manor whose tenants owed no labour services. Animal fodder (11 per cent.) formed quite a high proportion considering that livestock grazed on the Manor's meadow and pasture and the stubble of fields after harvest. Some 300 sheep, 6 bullocks and 32 oxen were pastured partly in the Weald. There seems to have been no difficulty in keeping livestock alive during the winter, apart from sheep. The latter were particularly liable to succumb to the murrain and whole flocks could be wiped out. On Cobham Manor during the year 11 ewes died out of a 100, 13 rams out of 58 and 13 lambs out of 90; also 27 sheep were sold because they were sickly.

The labour employed on Cobham Manor fell into three categories: (i) the *famuli*, the permanent farm servants; (ii) casual agricultural labour paid either by the day or by piece-rates; (iii) skilled craftsmen contracting for work to be done, such as the tiler, cooper or blacksmith.

The permanent staff was a typical thirteenth-century one. Sixteen of them were employed for the whole year: the sergeant, three carters, seven ploughmen, a shepherd, a shepherd-cum-swineherd, a dairymaid and a gardener. There were ten others employed for shorter periods: six ploughmen for the winter half of the year, one sower for the winter, a reap reeve and a stacker in the autumn, and a shepherd who was

<sup>25</sup> On a large scale that is, for the size of Manor. Obviously the flock does not compare with, say, that of 13,730 kept on Christ Church, Canterbury, in 1322.

ESTATES OF THE COBHAM FAMILY

TABLE 12

Running Expenses

	£	s.	d.	
Maintenance of farm buildings and equipment .. .. .	23	17	7½ <sup>26</sup>	9·2% [Labour—7 <i>l.</i> 15 <i>s.</i> 1 <i>d.</i> (3%) Materials— 16 <i>l.</i> 2 <i>s.</i> 6½ <i>d.</i> ]
Wages for agricultural labour (other than included above) in cash and kind .. .. .	96	8	11	36·6%
Value of own corn for sowing .. ..	108	2	4	41·2%
Value of own produce used as animal fodder .. .. .	33	14	2½	13%
	£262	3	1	

employed partly in looking after the tenants' sheep and partly those of the lord.

These persons received a *stipendium*, i.e. an annual wage in cash and some of them a maslin allowance in addition. The exception was the sergeant who received only a maslin allowance of 6½ quarters. No doubt he was expected to make his profit in the course of managing the demesne. The highest wages were paid to the herder of ewes and pigs, 8*s.* plus 6½ quarters of maslin, worth 2*l.*12*s.* at the 8*s.* per quarter it was debited in the account. The three carters and six ploughmen each received 7*s.* 6*d.* for the year, and 6½ quarters of maslin. Other 'full time' staff received similar though slightly lower remuneration, except for the dairymaid and the gardener, who received 5*s.* and 6*s.* respectively, without any corn allowance. The winter ploughmen received 3*s.* and a maslin allowance but the other 'part-time' staff received only *stipendia* of between 2*s.* and 4*s.* a year.

The permanent staff was supplemented by casual labour, mainly to help with the harvest. The account does not give the number of such workers, though it enumerates some, such as thirty-one ploughmen, three carters, a harrower, two men spreading manure, six forkers, a stacker, a drover, twelve shepherds, four women selecting seed,

<sup>26</sup> The deduction of 'Foreign Expenses' of 40*s.* from wages for threshing and winnowing is straightforward, but that of 38*s.* from 'Repairs to Buildings' less so as no indication is given whether this was in respect of wages or materials. I have, therefore, deducted the sum from both classes of expenses in the same ratio as they appear in the costs of maintenance, i.e. materials to labour 2 : 1.

three men burning gorse, a man pruning trees, and three women performing unspecified tasks. But we do not know how many people were employed in peat cutting, which cost 25s., in shearing 701 sheep, in weeding corn, in making and mending rails, in repairing mills or in threshing and winnowing. The duration of such casual labour varied from a few days to nearly half a year.

These casual labourers earned generally 6*d.* or 1*s.* per week, or between 1*d.* and 1½*d.* per day. Shepherds, carters, ploughmen, and forkers were paid in maslin, ½-bushel or 1 bushel per week; others were paid in cash. The skilled craftsman's wages tended to be higher; for instance, the tilers were paid at 6*d.* per day.

Piece-work payment was applied to the major operations of the year: threshing and winnowing, and sheep-shearing. Threshing was paid by the quarter: 3½*d.* per quarter of wheat, rye or winter barley; 2½*d.* per quarter of palm-barley, peas and vetches; 1½*d.* per quarter of oats, while winnowing was a penny a quarter for all grain. These were above-average rates for the South of England, though wages in the South were lower than in Eastern or Northern England. Sheep were sheared at a penny for sixteen sheep, and thirty a penny for lambs. Shoeing horses was also paid by piece-rates, at a penny for eight shoes.

It is worth noting that the more important labourers, the permanent staff and the occasional ploughmen, carters and shepherds, etc., were paid either in a maslin allowance, the value of which greatly exceeded their cash stipends, or in maslin only. This suggests that in thirteenth-century Kent, corn was still reckoned the first necessity and money second. Payment in corn also had the merit of keeping pace with changing food prices.

It is tempting to compare the profit figure in Table 7, 85*l.*15*s.*6*d.* with the value of the manor as shown in the *Inquisition Post Mortem* of 1300, 40*l.*7*s.*2½*d.* This was the price which the jurors thought could be obtained by leasing the Manor. What was the profit that a leaseholder could make? The manorial account includes as well as Cobham itself, the leased estates of Northcourt, Abbot's Grange and Monk's Grange. Although receipts of corn from these sources are distinguished, expenses are not, the value of corn produced on Cobham as against that for the leased land being in the ratio of 10 : 1. If we reduce the total profit accordingly (i.e. multiply by 10/11) a figure of 78*l.* results, which gives a wide margin of profit to the intending leaseholder. Too wide perhaps—the figure in the *Inquisition* was probably underestimated and we should remember that 1290–91 was an unusually good year, when prices were high. I would not, however, dismiss the jurors' figure as completely unrealistic, as is sometimes suggested. In this period of agricultural boom landlords found that intense demesne cultivation paid; it was not until later, about the second quarter of

the fourteenth century when prices slumped, that the lords turned more and more to leasing their lands, and eventually became a class of *rentiers*.

## V

Such then was the economic background which enabled the Cobham family to take its place as leaders of the gentry in Kent and administrators in a government service for which private means were an essential qualification. These means were derived—in cash, produce or services—from scattered lands large and small, from rents of tenements and also houses and shops, from customary dues and rights, and from judicial privileges. The rents came in partly from a few large tenements held by social equals, but overwhelmingly from petty tenants scraping an inadequate living from five acres or less. Though the rents were meticulously recorded, down to every half-hen, there seems no attempt to rationalize the rents or to stop tenants buying themselves out of paying rent, with a *gersum*. For in this last quarter of the thirteenth century the landlord's attention is focused on the demesne. The Steward's account has many marks of a flourishing and expanding cultivation—the large-scale purchase of sheep, the clearing of land, the increase in acres sown. Though the maintenance of the household is still the first charge on produce, sales of surplus corn and wool bring in substantial cash revenue.

This was a good time for the gentry, when direct contact with the land was still maintained, even if only supervisory. There is more to land-owning than the size of the profit, and few satisfactions to equal the contemplation of one's own acres under cultivation. At this time the cultivation was highly profitable, so no conflict arose between the lord's natural and preferred way of life and keeping up the standard of living to which he was accustomed. When farming ceased to be profitable and landlords took to leasing their estates, a sourness appears in the history of nobility and gentry alike. Not inappropriately, when this process was well-nigh complete at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the main Cobham line died out for want of a male heir.

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