

LONDON AND NORTH-WEST KENT IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LAND MARKET

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The vision of north-west Kent as an area from which thousands of inhabitants daily pour on to the platforms of Charing Cross or Victoria to complete a working day, only to return the same evening jostled and tired to their original railway stations has at first sight no relevance to the county in the late Middle Ages. Or has it? What is now a commuter-belt in which live many who have business in London comprises great economic variations of rich and poor. Already in the later medieval period it exhibited tendencies, albeit pre-industrial ones, of the same sort. Rich gentry who had interests both in London and elsewhere were widespread in the south-east; while changing social conditions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries enlarged this group still further, encouraging those who principally lived and worked in the capital to escape from the pressures and the recurrent dangers of plague or financial loss by investing in a tranquil residence out of town which could, in emergency, be realised once again into a liquid asset.

For this purpose any land available in the Home Counties would have served and a cursory glance at the lay subsidy roll for London in 1436¹ shows that of the 358 men with assessments of over £5, 37 are also specified as holding land in Kent, 33 in Essex and 35 in Middlesex while fewer, 17 and 15 respectively, had property in Surrey and Hertfordshire. Kent was therefore a popular choice and, by inference, had an active land market. At first sight this may seem surprising for the soil of north-west Kent, i.e. the general area bordered by the county boundary to the west and the river Medway to the east, is not good. It is mostly chalk, sand and layers of clay and gravel and is not a good grain or wool growing region. Indeed, it is so poor that the estates of the bishopric of Rochester, all of which lay here, were never able to produce sufficient surpluses to enable them to participate actively in the expanding markets of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries despite their proximity to the capital. Much of the landscape, especially in the valleys of the Darent

¹ Printed in S. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, Michigan, 1948, Appendix B.

and the Cray, had been densely wooded but it was here that tree-felling was early and heavily carried out to provide staves for London coopers and later, from the time of Henry VII, to build new and larger ships. The clearances thus formed were to transform local husbandry, but in the earlier period the attractiveness and productivity of the landscape were much less self-evident to prospective buyers. Not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when changes in farming brought the introduction of fruit trees did the wealth of this area improve.²

If the land was poor, there were compensations. Much of the county was dominated by great ecclesiastical foundations, notably Canterbury and Rochester, but there were numerous others, for example: Leeds Priory, Aylesford, Boxley, Dartford and Malling, to name only some within the location under discussion. These created opportunities, not purely for clerics, within departments of estate administration and such service would be rewarded by grants of land. Where the Archbishop and the Bishop of Rochester were concerned, there were additional vacancies in personal households. Both these men paid regular visits to London and maintained residences in the capital. More importantly from the viewpoint of the prospective purchaser, there was the very favourable tenurial system. Most land in Kent was held in gavelkind tenure and was freely negotiable on the open market. It could be alienated at will without reference to the lord and could be bought in small fragments to be built up gradually into largish estates over a period of time. The buying out of gavelkind parcellings, or co-parceners, had long been a regular feature of the Kentish land market.³ Partible inheritance provided for the division of a deceased man's property between his sons, or between his daughters if there should be no male heir. Frequently, the resulting holdings were small and despite the provisions of custom, or the desire of the deceased expressed in a last will, it was more economical for one person to buy up the shares of his brothers in order to keep a viable agricultural unit, either providing a home for the brothers on the estate or else enabling them to leave the land and seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Although we have no records of the fate of the majority, we know that a few were granted a house or a pension, and that others left the area altogether, so we must therefore assume that most ought work in other places. Under Kentish custom such movement of labour was both possible and easy. Anyhow by the fourteenth century there was little, if

² C. W. Chalkin, *Seventeenth Century Kent*, London, 1965, pt. II.

³ Conveyancing deeds, now at Kent Archives Office belonging to Rochester Cathedral illustrate this clearly. Some can be dated to the mid-twelfth century; see, for example, DRc T173/1, T173/2 and T230/1, T230/2, T231–T247, a collection dating from c. 1150–c. 1250 showing the build up of estates by the de Ores family on the manor of Frindsbury.

any, legal bondage in the county;⁴ such economic burdens as were placed upon the peasants were due not from the men as villeins but from the land they cultivated. Whoever owned the land was responsible for performing, or finding others to perform, the services due from it. Tus it is common to 2nd great lords, such as Lord Cobham in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and Lord Brooke in the sixteenth century, technically owing services and suit of court for their holdings in Frindsbury and Southfleet, or even having to act as Reeve.⁵ This situation was no doubt an historical development arising from the widespread flow of money into Kent which gave gavelkinders the economic power to struggle for their rights against the demotion of free land to villein land that had taken place elsewhere in Norman England; a struggle that was won in 1293 with the judicial recognition that Gavelmen (sometimes known as Werkmanni), the bulk of the peasant population in Kent, were of free status.⁶

Obviously, such a system bred its own 'rising' and 'declining' small-holders, but a man who felt compelled to sell out did not always do so to his relations. He went, one assumes, to the person prepared to pay the best price, and increasingly such people might be Londoners seeking country holdings or richer local men engaged in estate building. In addition, the evidence suggests that quite a few gavelkinders were prepared to sell out to Londoners in return for an apprenticeship in the city.

There was thus satisfaction of a dual need: the need on the one hand for employment and income, which a rapidly expanding city could supply, and on the other for investment and relaxation, which could be found in a county where land transactions were unrestricted. Such early evidence as we have suggests that the former was the first development.

⁴ Sir William Septvenn (*sic*) made a testament on 29 August, 1407 (see the Register of Thomas of Chillenden, Commissary-General appointed by Archbishop Arundel, Kent Archive Office, PRC 32/1, fo. 11r), in which, as a Canterbury man, he requested to be buried in Canterbury Cathedral next to Sir Thomas Fogg. His bequests are all local and he ends by granting to Adam Standerde*, Thomas Hamonde*, Robert Standerde, Robert Cherche and John Rychefford, his servants and *nativi*, their full liberty for their good service, each of them to have a charter of manumission. Those marked * are also bequeathed 20s. each. This entry was noted in *Arch. Cant.*, xii (1878), 285, and then by Alexander Savine, 'Zondmen under the Tudors', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, new series, xvii (1903), 283, n. 5, who says 'The Kentish origin of these villeins is not perfectly certain'. The same applies to Simon Burley's bondman released from Maidstone jail by the rebels in 1381.

⁵ Lord Cobham was cited for non-attendance at Southfleet at almost every court held between 1513-1528. Lambeth MSS 952(93). In 1474-5, Cardinal Bourghier's brother, the Earl of Essex, was fined for not taking up the office of reeve on the manor of Otford in circumstances which suggest that it was more usual for most high-ranking gentlemen to fulfil such obligations. See, F. R. H. Du Boulay, *The Lordship of Canterbury*, London, 1966, 266-7.

⁶ *Statutes of the Realm*, i, 223-7.

Since many migrants to London were of necessity landless, few acquired great wealth or possessions in the capital and most probably died with little or no real property. But some received citizenship and the numbers of these increased in the fifteenth century when yeomen were both wealthier and more anxious for education and could afford to apprentice sons to specific masters. There were enough of them to make travel to and from Kent a regular occurrence, and the numbers were augmented by men who made frequent brief visits: the peasants performing their carrying services. All the holdings of the bishop of Rochester owed such services, and these included journeys by boat as well as overland. The tenants of 'inlond' at Stone, near Dartford, had to keep in readiness a boat and a mariner to go on the lord's business to wherever he sent them and this included London. Tenants in Trottscliffe, Halling and Snodland had to provide horses and riders for the same purpose. If the journey involved an overnight stop, then they and their mounts were fed at the lord's expense.⁷ Even so, the trip took the best part of a working day and no return could be expected the same night. One fast journey was that of Archbishop Reynolds in 1326; he travelled from Lambeth to Otford in a single evening, a distance of 20 miles,⁸ but neither he nor his party was weighed down by the sacks of corn which would have been the load of the normal peasant. It may, however, have been through introductions such as these to the London scene that gavelkinders and their more prosperous superiors made the contacts and observed the benefits that were to be had from apprenticeships in the city.

In the years immediately before and in the period after the Conquest Englishmen holding lands in Kent are known to have held high offices in the capital.⁹ Later the choice of Westminster as the centre of government and the establishment there of a permanent judiciary created more opportunities to enter the ranks of London citizens. The demands and opportunities of a thriving and ever-growing city brought the foundations of new city dynasties, many begun by younger sons of county families. The Calendar of Wills of the Court of the Husting reveals such branches, e.g. Gregory de Rokesle, the goldsmith, a member of the Rokesle family who held lands in the Footscray/Sidcup area. He himself owed service for $\frac{1}{2}$ a knight's fee in Footscray as well as owning much property in London, Rochester and Canterbury.¹⁰ William Le Neve probably had connexions with the Le Neves of Wouldham, the main branch of which held lands there from before 1210 until they died

⁷ Kent Archives Office, DRc *Registrum Temporalium*, 9.6–6v, 8.3r.

⁸ F. R. H. Du Boulay, *op cit.*, 115.

⁹ D. Douglas (ed.), *Domesday Monachorum of Christ Church Canterbury*, London, 1944, 58–63.

¹⁰ R. R. Sharpe (ed.), *Calendar of Wills of Court of Husting, London*, London, 1890, vol. I, 98–9. (Henceforth C.W.C.H.).

out in the reign of Edward II or early Edward III.¹¹ Similarly, Adam Le Blund, who held Sundridge of Gilbert de Helles in 1227, was connected with the large city families of that name who still owed service for $\frac{1}{4}$ of a fee there in 1346 and who provided a Constable of the Tower, Peter, in 1250,¹² and a Mayor and Sheriff of Kent when John held these offices in 1307 and 1311.¹³

The land hunger of the thirteenth century presented, towards the end of the century, new opportunities for the less wealthy, provided they had at least a little land to lease or sell. In 1298 William, son of Richard Durant, a small-holder in Sevenoaks, leased his share of the lands inherited from his father to the local estate-builder, Henry Bruton. The lease was for all his lands except 3 virgates¹⁴ 3 dayworks and was to last for 7 years on condition that Henry paid William a pension of 2s. per annum and apprenticed him to a craft, unspecified, in London. The lease also contained a clause allowing Henry to keep the land if William in any way defaulted on the apprenticeship indentures.¹⁵ Such agreements were common, but they were open to abuse. In 1361 John Costantyn, a well-known London alderman who had already acquired property in Dartford, unscrupulously sought to enlarge it. After the death of one John Aleyn, the eldest of his four sons, all minors, demised his share of the as yet undivided lands to Costantyn who thereupon seized the wardship of the boy and two of his brothers. (The fourth had died.) The second son, Thomas, still under 15, then also enfeoffed his share to the alderman on condition that John should render him yearly for life 10 marks and a gown and make him his apprentice draper according to the custom of the city. John never paid Thomas the rent, nor made him his apprentice and maliciously prosecuted him on a writ of trespass in the King's Bench so that the children were outlawed and forced to leave England. While abroad, Thomas and his elder brother died and although the younger brother was adjudged to be the right heir, whether he ever recovered his lands is not specified.¹⁶

John Aleyn was a prosperous landowner, which no doubt accounts for the attraction his property held for Costantyn. The passage of time, however, made it increasingly difficult for all save the very rich to buy apprenticeships in the most powerful London mysteries. Such vacancies as occurred were normally reserved for the children of other aldermen in the city. Professor Sylvia Thrupp has shown that although few sons

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 333 and *Feudal Aids*, vol. III.

¹² *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1247-1258*, 65. (Henceforth C.P.R.).

¹³ C.P.R. 1301-1307, 548, and C.P.R. 1307-1313, 318.

¹⁴ A Kentish virgate was usually $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre. Canterbury Cathedral MSS E24, fos. 1-2, 70-72 etc. See also, H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems*, Harvard, 1915, 298-99.

¹⁵ Dorothy M. Owen, *A Catalogue of Lambeth Manuscripts 889-901 (Carte Antiquae et Miscellaneae)*, London, 1968, vol. V, n. 47. (Henceforth L.C.A.M.).

¹⁶ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol. xi, no. 4.

followed their fathers in the same guild¹⁷ most were apprenticed to other powerful crafts, and also that the period of great influx into prosperous city life had finished by 1330. This is not to say that the ranks could not fill up with outsiders; merely that the outsiders had to be increasingly wealthy.

Poorer people were apprenticed to the lesser trades: between 1496 and 1500, the fathers of Kentish boys apprenticed to the Skinners Company consisted of a wheelwright, a fletcher, a butcher, a shipwright and two yeomen¹⁸ and the same was probably true at the beginning of the century, too. The will of Richard Swann,¹⁹ a citizen and skinner who died in 1429, reveals that all the other members of his family were agriculturalists from Southfleet.

It would seem, therefore, that entry into top London society was rare and was achieved when it happened before 1300. Access to smaller guilds, however, was not only frequent but commonplace for the sons of richer small-holders from the late thirteenth century onwards.

The converse movement, of Londoners into north-west Kent, increases very noticeably from c. 1340 on, and is better documented in that it was a movement of richer rather than poorer people. It seems likely that this activity derived, either directly or indirectly, from the long war with France. Although royal taxation on wool was high, much of it could be passed on to less wealthy people, enabling the rich to stay rich while the poor got proportionately poorer. Trade however was less secure. Merchants accordingly invested profits in land as a necessary precaution to counteract the current inflation or as a bulwark to support them if trade dwindled to a disastrously low level. Land became cheaper after 1349 and Londoners are increasingly found as holders of knights' fees having bought out the older local families. As in the twentieth century, it became fashionable for the wealthy to work in London but to maintain a country retreat. Of the 91 men whose connexions with guilds are known, no fewer than 45 belonged to the very wealthy Fishmongers, Drapers, Grocers and Goldsmiths. From an examination of the purchases, it also appears that the wealthiest bought large properties lying further from London, while the less wealthy acquired smaller tenements in the closer suburbs such as Woolwich, Greenwich and Dartford. As the latter were the bigger group, these areas became increasingly populated with the passage of time.

Space here is limited, while examples of land purchase by Londoners are legion. John de Mocking, fishmonger and alderman from 1336 until his death in 1347, began acquiring estates in Tottenham, Middlesex, in

¹⁷ S. Thrupp, *op cit.*, chapter 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁹ Public Record Office Prerogative Court of Canterbury Will Register Luffenham II. (Henceforth PCC).

1332 and died seized also of property in Borden, Newington-by-Hythe and Elmley in Kent which, together with his London property, brought him an annual income of £50.²⁰ John de Pulteney, draper and mayor no fewer than four times, bought the whole manor of Peshurst and in 1340 constructed its extremely fine beamed domestic hall.²¹ After his death in 1349, the property remained in the hands of his descendants, or the descendants of his wife, for approximately 70 years, one of whom, Sir John Devereux, was steward to Richard II and in turn Constable of Dover Castle and Warden of the Cinque Ports. The purchase of whole manors was in general rare. John Peeche, the fishmonger, bought the manor of Lullingstone from John, the grandson of Gregory de Rokesle in 1360²² and William Neuport, also a fishmonger, bought the manors of Cleyton and Rous as well as the castle of Lullingstone before his death in 1391.²³ But the more usual practice was for citizens to buy up small properties either adjoining each other, or in separate locations. Walter Neel, the blader, as well as his manor of Oakleigh, bought 6 acres 1 virgate in two separate places in Frindsbury.²⁴ Richard Beere granted John Gegge, the vintner, approximately 13 acres in Southfleet in 1466.²⁵ There are numerous records of the purchase of tenements in the fast-growing suburbs. Of the 232 Londoners who had lands in Kent that were investigated, 65 held in these places, and of those 65, 20 owned at least one tenement in Greenwich. The number was in reality probably much higher, for many wills do not specify the exact location of the testator's property but simply say 'my lands in Kent'.

But rich merchants were not the only men investing in property. Administrative officials were also busy. To use two notable examples from the end of the fourteenth century: Robert Belknap, the Chief Justice at the time of the Great Revolt, was amassing property in flamboyant style. In 1365, he acquired from Sir William de Say the manor of Shawstead and all its appurtenances in the vills and parishes of Chatham and Gillingham.²⁶ He spent the years 1366–1375 building up the property by buying out small-holders owning crofts and lands belonging to the manor,²⁷ but then, in 1376, he granted the whole lot to the Priory of St. Andrew, Rochester, together with half the manor of Lidsing,²⁸ in return for an annual payment of 22 marks and specified religious services connected with his obit. But this was not his sole

²⁰ *C.W.C.H.*, vol. I, 499; *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol. ix, no. 28.

²¹ *C.W.C.H.* vol. I, 609–10; *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, vol. ix, no. 183.

²² J. Phillipott, *Villare Cantianum or Kent surveyed and illustrated*, London, 1776, 226–7.

²³ PCC Rous 7.

²⁴ Kent Archive Office DRc T256.

²⁵ *L.C.A.M.*, vol. V, no. 46.

²⁶ DRc T87/1.

²⁷ DRc T88, 89, 90/1, 91, 92, 93.

²⁸ DRc T94/1.

excursion into the land market. In 1366, he received a royal pardon for acquiring from the Abbot and Convent of Battle the manor of Kingswood at an annual rent of 40 marks.²⁹ In 1380, he bought up the enormous manor of Sandling, which lay in the towns of Orpington, St. Mary's Cray, St. Paul's Cray, Chislehurst, Chelsfield and Sevington³⁰ and, in 1381, he purchased the remaining half of the manor of Lidsing.³¹ All of these he forfeited on his banishment to Ireland in 1388, but his widow recovered at least Sandling, for she died possessed of it in 1414.³²

A counterbalancing example is Geoffrey Chaucer, whose wealth could in no way be compared with that of the great citizens or justices but who nevertheless bought up a property in Kent. Although no direct record of his purchase exists, many of his friends lived in Greenwich, the Cray valley or near the North Downs. The most notable of these was Gregory Ballard, an official of Archbishop Arundel and butler to Richard II, a post later held by Geoffrey's son Thomas.³³ Gregory himself bought property in East Greenwich in 1395-6 and Chaucer appears among the witnesses, thus placing him in all probability among the Greenwich residents. His other official duties, which included sitting as Knight of the Shire and as a Commissioner to inquire into the kidnapping of a Kentish heiress with others, all from north-west Kent, would seem to substantiate this proposition.

There develops, therefore, with the passage of time the impression that from the early fourteenth century north-west Kent was becoming increasingly built up and was serving as much as anything as a residential area in a countryside of mixed farming, a little cloth production and some wood production. Perhaps above all it was a home for those making good in administration on behalf of their lords, but also for those engaged in commerce.

Although it is more restricted, there is evidence of the flow in the opposite direction. Again, it is not always easy to trace; after all, the medieval city of London occupied little over one square mile, even if it was becoming increasingly built up to the north and west outside the city walls, and these people migrating into its confines were not often wealthy, and did not always make good.

In the period before c. 1340, as we should expect, Kentish men also holding land in London were the more substantial country gentry, men

²⁹ *C.P.R. 1364-1367*, 336.

³⁰ *C.P.R. 1377-1381*, 557.

³¹ DRc T94/4. He also held lands of Bilsington Priory, see T. F. Tout, *Chapters in Medieval History*, Manchester, 1928-37, vol. III, 422 n.4.

³² *Calendar of Fine Rolls 1413-1422*, 79.

³³ F. R. H. Du Boulay, *op cit.*, 394-398; E. F. Jacob (ed.), *The Register of Henry Chichele 1414-1443*, London, 1938-47, pt. II, 114-5. See also M. M. Crow and C. C. Olson (eds.), *Chaucer Life Records*, Oxford, 1966.

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such as John de Northwode,³⁴ Richard de Ewelle,³⁵ John de Cobham,³⁶ and Robert de Arderne,³⁷ all men whose work in local government carried them frequently to the capital and who could afford to and found it expedient to maintain residences there.

After this date, the magnetic attraction of the fast growing city markets began to have a noticeable effect. Although officials in royal service continued to maintain their London residences, the social origins of Kentish men with city property became more commercial and we find men such as Stephen Grege of Strood,³⁸ Robert Bykenore of Dartford,³⁹ William Paxton of Gravesend,⁴⁰ John Bussh, chandler from Southfleet,⁴¹ Thomas Cake, the mason from West Malling,⁴² William Ederyth, mariner and haberdasher from East Greenwich,⁴³ or Thomas Woodman, a brewer from Southwark.⁴⁴ These were people whose business regularly took them to the capital either in search of raw materials or as part of their network of transactions. Occasionally, there is evidence of men maintaining two or more definite centres of trade of whom William Moore is an example, which may reasonably be inferred. He was an alderman and vintner from 1384–1400 whose specifically manorial property outside London was in Cambridgeshire, but whose commercial ventures made it expedient for him to purchase tenements in both Southwark and Rochester, which were in each case big enough to store wine.⁴⁵

By the end of the fifteenth century, therefore, regular trips for the purpose of selling manufactured goods, rather than corn, had enticed many north-west Kentish artisans to London where the more prosperous and the most frequent travellers bought shops, store houses and/or residences to lessen the costs of repeated transportation of merchandise.

But how important were these new holdings to their purchasers? It was common practice for testators to set aside certain property to be sold to pay outstanding debts and to fulfil testamentary bequests. Of the 232 investigated, 65 made provision for this to happen either immediately on their own death or following the death of their wives. Not all these 65 testators were childless; 20 had at least one direct heir, and others may have done so too, for it was common practice for

³⁴ *C.W.C.H.*, vol. I, 81

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, 82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁰ PCC Stokton I.

⁴¹ *C.W.C.H.*, vol. II, 348.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 402.

⁴³ PCC Stokton I.

⁴⁴ PCC Wattys 5.

⁴⁵ *C.W.C.H.*, vol. II, 352–3.

children for whom provision had already been made to be omitted from the lists of bequests. This was especially true in the case of daughters who were already married and had therefore received their dowries. Further, since the majority, 88, made no such provision and these include many of the wealthier men, particularly members of the Fishmongers, Grocers and Drapers, e.g. John Fetiplace, the draper, who left his eldest son £800 and to each of his 3 other sons and 1 daughter £400 apiece,⁴⁶ it is likely that the retention of county holdings was important, if circumstances permitted. Where wealthy citizens sold off lands and tenements, it was usually because they had no direct male heir. William Neuport, the fishmonger who purchased the manors of Cleyton and Rous, left only a daughter; Thomas Exton, the goldsmith who disposed of 150 acres in Lewisham, Beckenham, Battersea and elsewhere, left no known heir, and Gregory de Rokesele (*d.* 1291), who ordered the sale of his remaining properties in the dioceses of Rochester, Canterbury and London (outside the city), left only nephews. Where wealthy people with heirs sold off part of their London estate, it was frequently to support a chantry, as in the case of Roesia de Burford in 1329,⁴⁷ or to have money that could be distributed for pious and charitable uses. Occasionally, richer citizens made provision for disposal if the payment of debts should make such action necessary. Thomas Ballard, son of Chaucer's friend Gregory, specified that tenements in Deptford and elsewhere should be sold, if there were outstanding obligations; if not, they were to go to his son Robert, who also got the financial remainder if the sale had to be made. Significantly, however, his manorial property, the manors of Horton and Sapyngton, were to pass intact.⁴⁸ Obviously, the most important holdings were retained and the less valuable ones designated for sale.

Of the 65 who ordered immediate sales, 45 disposed of their Kentish lands and 29 (including 9 of the first group), sold their London holdings. A few of this latter group were the county men who had acquired their London houses in order to facilitate their local government business and then arranged for the sale when they saw no further need for it.⁴⁹ More numerous were the clerks with city holdings. Since none of these had direct heirs, the property was to be sold to provide the money to fulfil their bequests, normally donations to the parish church where they served (not always in London), or to religious foundations. This was also true of the 9 testators who wished the disposal of all their holdings, both in Kent and London.

⁴⁶ PCC Godyn 5.

⁴⁷ *C.W.C.H.*, vol. I, 352.

⁴⁸ PCC Godyn 14.

⁴⁹ See notes 33–36 above.

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Despite the importance of land as a source of wealth in the Middle Ages, many testators had to make provision for the disposal of at least part of their estate and the fact that 45 opted to sell their Kentish tenements suggests that these were, on the whole, less valuable and might accordingly be disposed of with least inconvenience to the family. It would, therefore, be reasonable to assume that city property was always valuable; it could always be sublet to incomers from all parts of England and the number of these migrants remained high throughout the Middle Ages. On the other hand, lands acquired outside the capital could not be so easily, nor so profitably, leased and were therefore put on to the market, which was as we have seen, thriving, and where a good price could be expected.

There was thus, even amongst this limited group who owned property in both places, a regular turn-over of real estate, some of it large, from the mid-fourteenth century on. This made it possible for prospering men to find suitable purchases in the area of their choice, and this market was vastly increased by sales ordered under the wills of local tenants who were mostly agriculturalists and very poor. Such men were forced to sell parcels of their property to meet debts and legacies; of the 430 wills made by tenants of the manors of the bishopric of Rochester between 1440 and 1481, almost all include such provision.

Land, and its accumulation, retained its importance; it was the lack of heirs on the part of the rich, or force of circumstances in the case of the poor, that created the thriving market and the opportunities of commerce which kept it thus.

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