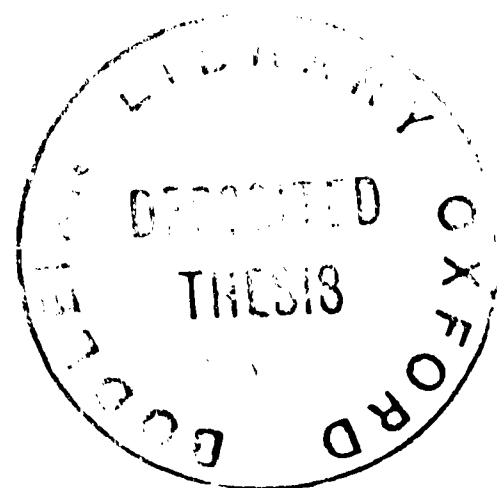


**SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND LORDSHIP IN DEVON IN THE AGE
OF THE FIRST TWO COURTENAY EARLS, c. 1297-1377**

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This thesis is a contribution to the social history of medieval Devon and the south-west in the lifetimes of the first two Courtenay earls, Hugh II (1275-1340) and Hugh III (1303-77). The fourteenth century was an era of particular importance to the region's social evolution, in which many sectors of the non-agrarian economy – cloth production, mining, fishing, ship-building, international commerce – attained impressive levels of growth, interrupted perhaps only moderately by the demographic crises of the middle decades. Further encouragement to economic prosperity came from the war with France, which stimulated demographic and urban communities on the south coast and provided fresh opportunities for employment and personal advancement.

Against this backdrop of economic change, the pattern of aristocratic power in the south-western peninsula was undergoing a fundamental transformation and shift in focus. Two great Anglo-Norman honors were united in 1297 under the Courtenays, giving a single aristocratic dynasty unprecedented influence and leverage over local society. Permanently resident in the county and led by vigorous personalities, the family rapidly became ubiquitous in all sectors of public life and the region experienced a quality and intensity of lordship rarely witnessed in the previous two centuries.

The current work supplies a deficiency in the study of the medieval south-west, but also makes a case for extending the remit of a traditional county-based study to encompass a wider cultural and economic hinterland. Particular attention is paid to the influence of the physical landscape and geography on economic and seignorial development in medieval society. The thesis is divided into two parts: the first dealing with the economic and social infrastructure, and 'setting the scene' with a long-term historical survey; the second focusing specifically on the fourteenth century and placing a discussion of local power structures in a wider 'national' context.

LONG ABSTRACT

The thesis addresses major social and economic themes in the history of medieval Devon and south-west England, focusing specifically on the evolution and operation of a concentrated vein of magnate lordship in a distant corner of the English realm. Challenging, but not wholly rejecting, the dominant 'county community' approach to local history, it makes reference to a wider range of overlapping communities and affinities current in the later middle ages, and provides a broad context in which the dramatic economic, demographic and seignorial trends of the fourteenth century can be properly understood. The inter-play of centre and periphery is examined in depth by drawing on strands of 'national' historiography, with particular attention given to the local repercussions of the political crises of Edward II's reign, and the French wars of Edward III.

There is no detailed study of medieval Devon that comprehends a spectrum of historical elements, rather than focusing primarily or exclusively on a single economic or familial unit, and the current work is an attempt, within the confines of the evidence, to supply at least partially this deficiency. It works on the premise that, notwithstanding the demographic crises of the middle decades, the fourteenth century was a period of quite considerable economic growth in the south-west; which has not always been fully appreciated by historians. This economic theme, set out at length in chapter two, pervades much of the thesis, with emphasis placed on the influence of the region's physical landscape on long-term historical trends; not only demographic, but also in the formation and evolution of territorial lordships. A substantial body of recent and current research in the economic and agrarian history of the region is summarised and consolidated with fresh interpretation, and there is a thorough re-assessment of widely held, but insufficiently tested, assumptions about magnate affinities and lordship in the late-medieval south-west.

Although a wide range of original source material is drawn upon, this thesis has had particular recourse to two, hitherto under-exploited, archival collections. First, extensive use has been made of two fourteenth-century secular cartularies (the 'Powderham' and the 'British Library'), commissioned by the first and second earls of Devon respectively, in reconstructing the Courtenay family's rise to prominence and the composition of its affinity. Secondly, the recently opened Arundel archive at the Cornwall Record Office, containing a wealth of material relating to the Dynham and other local families, features strongly in a consideration of the late-medieval gentry and their lifestyles. Other material used is too varied and miscellaneous to list in detail here, but it will be noted that manorial account rolls and *extenta* have been exploited extensively in this thesis.

The current work is divided into two main sections: structural and chronological. The former lays foundations for the rest of the study by describing the county's medieval social and economic infrastructure over a longer period of time, while the latter focuses specifically on the fourteenth century and the inter-twining of 'local' historical phenomena with the 'national'.

Chapter one is a broad survey of the major units of tenurial lordship in the south-west, temporal and spiritual, tracing their origins and long-term historical evolution. It outlines the process by which Devon's two largest seignorial honors came to be united under the auspices of the Courtenay family towards the end of the thirteenth century, and briefly compares the alternatives to this apparently hegemonic model of lordship. The residual importance of 'feudal' bonds of tenure is a unifying theme to this chapter, which contrasts the relatively new affinity of the Courtenays with older and more established networks; for while the Courtenays were undeniably the most potent and dynamic focus of lordship in Devon in the fourteenth century, deep-rooted 'feudal' traditions added complexity to the seignorial landscape and frequently complicated local political relations. The relative importance of religious lordship to secular is also considered here, and the bishops of Exeter are introduced as powerful seignorial lords in their own right and, on occasion, worthy competitors to their secular counterparts. A flavour of popular piety in the locality is given through an examination of trends in monastic foundations and habits of religious benefaction among the

laity. The chapter concludes that seignorial lordship in the county was highly fragmented and dispersed, making attempts to assert leadership over the mass of petty knights and gentry appear daunting on the one hand, but on the other relatively easy for a powerful magnate with the strength and charisma to bring cohesion to his dominions. Similarly, among the religious, there was no vested monastic interest, and a strong-willed bishop could forge unity across the whole diocese through his strength of personality. In this fragmented landscape of tenurial lordship, considerations of neighbourhood and locality became at least as important as 'feudal' bonds in forming seignorial relationships, giving powerful newcomers, such as the Courtenays, the opportunity to establish their influence relatively quickly.

Chapter two provides an overview of the county's economic and social infrastructure, drawing upon and consolidating a substantial body of recent and current research into the economic and agrarian history of the medieval south-west. The economic dimension of seignorial lordship is introduced, and the economies of the greater landed estates are discussed in detail and compared. Continuing a theme outlined in the previous chapter, however, it emphasises also that the bulk of the county's wealth was concentrated not in these big economic concerns, but was dispersed among a larger mass of petty landowners and an increasingly prosperous mercantile class. Consideration is given to the 'alternative' economy of this upland, essentially pastoral region - activities such as mining, fishing, shipping, mercantilism and cloth-manufacture - by way of a corrective to the overwhelming agrarian focus of much recent economic historiography of the later middle ages. Although the impact of demographic crisis was felt no less severely here than elsewhere in fourteenth-century England, it will be argued that a combination of environmental factors, economic diversity, and a low dependence on grain monoculture, helped to shelter many parts of Devon and the south-west from the worst excesses of plague. Attention is given also to the timing and scale of the retreat from demesne agriculture over the course of the fourteenth century, and to the growing commercialisation of the local economy in an era of war.

Chapter three focuses on Devon's knights and esquires (the 'squirearchy') and their position in the county hierarchy. It first analyses them quantitatively, with a consideration of their importance in relation to other landowners, and then qualitatively, by examining the sources of their wealth and its disposal. The prospects for social mobility within their ranks are examined in depth, and fundamental questions of identity - how these men perceived themselves in relation to the locality, and where they set the parameters of their social horizons - are also addressed. The 'Severnside' dimension - a cultural province that exceeded the bounds of English county society and brought Devon into contact with adjacent communities in Wales and Ireland - is treated here in an attempt to establish whether the county really was the primary focus of their social and political aspirations. The mercantile classes receive special mention, with the onset of commercialisation aiding their acceleration through the upper echelons of county society.

The formation and composition of the Courtenay affinity is the principal business of chapter four. It is introduced through the examination of a major succession crisis facing the earldom of Devon at the turn of the fourteenth century, which is contrasted with a similar incident in a neighbouring barony to help illuminate Edward I's alleged 'policy' towards his greater magnates. The late-medieval affinity is reconstructed, principally from the charter evidence, and its composition analysed, with special attention given to the influence of physical geography on recruitment, but also to the centrality of family in its ranks. The importance to the Courtenays of the contractual retainer in relation to traditional 'feudal' recruitment, a theme first broached in chapter one, is explored in greater depth here.

Chapter five adopts a slightly wider perspective, focusing on the political crises of the reign of Edward II and their impact on the locality. This is pursued primarily through the agency of Walter Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter and a prominent government minister of the period. It examines the composition of his regionally-based secular affinity and assesses the extent to which concern for its members' interests may have coloured his political judgment during the rebellion of 1321-2 and its aftermath. It considers also the actions and motives of two other magnates, Hugh Courtenay and William Martin, within the context of a strong

under-current of anti-Despenser sentiment in the south-west, fostered primarily by the fragmentation of the earldom of Gloucester estates after 1314.

Chapter six deals with the process of political reconciliation in the 1330s and the arrival at a semblance of social unity on the eve of war with France. Contrasting the relatively orthodox episcopate of John Grandisson with the controversial administration of his predecessor, it describes the process by which the county's social hierarchy gradually reverted to a more 'natural' state in the aftermath of Edward II's regime. The growing ascendancy of the Courtenays in public life in the south-west, a strand of narrative left hanging in chapter four, is returned to here and brought to a conclusion with the end of Edward III's reign, when the comital dynasty had apparently achieved domination of the local structures of lordship and the apparatus of county government. The fourteenth-century wars with France provide a colourful backdrop to this discussion: continuing the theme of the 'alternative', non-agrarian, economy outlined in chapter two, war is presented primarily in terms of the economic benefits, and disadvantages, that it brought to the region.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE THESIS

(Full references are to be found in the bibliography)

<i>1332 Subsidy</i>	<i>The Devonshire Lay Subsidy of 1332</i>
<i>AHEW</i>	<i>Agrarian History of England and Wales</i>
<i>BPR</i>	<i>Register of Edward, the Black Prince</i>
Bodleian	Bodleian Library
BL	British Library
Buck, <i>Walter Stapeldon</i>	Mark Buck, <i>Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II. Walter Stapeldon, Treasurer of England</i> (Cambridge, 1983)
<i>CChR</i>	<i>Calendar of Charter Rolls</i>
<i>CCR</i>	<i>Calendar of Close Rolls</i>
<i>CFR</i>	<i>Calendar of Fine Rolls</i>
<i>Cal. Inq. Misc.</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous</i>
<i>CIPM</i>	<i>Calendar of Inquisitions Post-Mortem</i>
<i>Cal. Pap. Letts.</i>	<i>Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers: Papal Letters</i>
<i>Cal. Pap. Pets.</i>	<i>Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers: Petitions to the Pope</i>
<i>CPR</i>	<i>Calendar of Patent Rolls</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom</i>
<i>CFF</i>	<i>Cornwall Feet of Fines</i>
CRO	Cornwall Record Office
<i>DB Cornwall</i>	<i>Domesday Book, 10, Cornwall</i>
<i>DB Devon</i>	<i>Domesday Book, 9, Devon</i>
<i>DB Dorset</i>	<i>Domesday Book, 7, Dorset</i>
<i>DB Somerset</i>	<i>Domesday Book, 8, Somerset</i>
D&CRS	Devon and Cornwall Record Society
<i>DFF</i>	<i>Devon Feet of Fines</i>
<i>Domesday people</i>	<i>Domesday People: a Prosopography of Persons Occuring in English Documents, 1066-1166</i> , ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge, 1999)
DRO	Devon Record Office

ECL D&C	Exeter Cathedral Library, records of the Dean and Chapter
<i>Ec.HR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>FA</i>	<i>Inquisitions and Assessments Relating to Feudal Aids, AD 1284-1431</i>
<i>Fasti</i>	<i>Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae, 1300-1541. Exeter</i>
Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall'	H. S. A. Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', in <i>AHEW</i> , iii, 152-74, 303-23, 722-43
Hatcher, 'South-western England'	John Hatcher, 'South-Western England', in <i>AHEW</i> , ii, 234-45, 383-98, 675-85
<i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>	Orderic Vitalis, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica</i>
<i>Historical Atlas</i>	<i>Historical Atlas of South-West England</i> , ed. Kain & Ravenhill (Exeter, 2000)
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
Hoskins, <i>Devon</i>	W. G. Hoskins, <i>Devon</i> (2 nd edn., Tiverton, 1992)
Kowaleski, <i>Medieval Exeter</i>	Maryanne Kowaleski, <i>Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter</i> (Cambridge, 1995)
Oliver, <i>Monasticon</i>	<i>Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis</i> , ed. George Oliver (Exeter, 1840)
<i>Parliaments</i>	<i>Parliaments of England, 1213-1702</i> (1878)
<i>Pipe Roll</i>	<i>The Great Roll of the Pipe</i> (Publications of the Pipe Roll Society)
'Powderham Cartulary'	M. P. D. Collison, 'The Courtenay Cartulary from Powderham Castle' (MA thesis, University of Exeter, 2 vols., 1972)
PRO	Public Record Office
<i>PW</i>	<i>Parliamentary Writs and Writs of Military Summons</i>
<i>RBE</i>	<i>Red Book of the Exchequer</i>
RCHM	Royal Commission for Historical Manuscripts
<i>RH</i>	<i>Rotuli Hundredorum</i>
<i>RJG</i>	<i>Register of John de Grandisson</i>
<i>RP</i>	<i>Rotuli Parliamentorum</i>
R.S.	Rolls Series
<i>RTB</i>	<i>Register of Thomas de Brantyngham</i>
<i>RWS</i>	<i>Register of Walter de Stapeldon</i>
<i>SFF</i>	<i>Feet of Fines for the County of Somerset</i>

<i>Sheriffs</i>	<i>List of Sheriffs for England and Wales</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>VCH</i>	<i>Victoria County History</i>
Watkin, <i>Dartmouth</i>	<i>Dartmouth. Pre-Reformation</i> , ed. Hugh R. Watkin (1935)
Wrottesley, <i>Crecy</i>	<i>Crecy and Calais</i> , ed. George Wrottesley (1898)
<i>Year Books</i>	Selden Society Year Books

INTRODUCTION

DEVON AND THE SOUTH-WEST IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The present study is a contribution to the social history of medieval Devon in the eighty years between the coming-of-age of Hugh Courtenay II (1275-1340), in 1297, and the death of his son Hugh Courtenay III (1303-77). As this chronological framework may suggest, the subject will be approached primarily through a study of that society's propertied and monied elite; its noblemen, prelates, knights, lawyers, clerks and merchants. This is partly a reflection of the overwhelmingly 'seignorial' character of the surviving source material. More importantly, however, it has grown from an intention to analyse the evolution of a vein of strong and concentrated magnate lordship, with its associated networks of power, authority and sociability, in a local community that was both remote and isolated from the recognised centres of power and wealth in the English realm.

It is no accident that the fourteenth century has been identified as an era of particular importance in the social history of Devon and indeed of the south-west – which for the purposes of this study corresponds approximately with the Cornubian peninsula of modern-day Devon and Cornwall - as a whole. This was by any measure a period of impressive growth in many areas of the non-agrarian economy, interrupted perhaps only moderately by the demographic crises of the middle and later decades. The seeds of economic prosperity, sown comparatively late in a wave of secondary colonisation from the twelfth century onwards, began in the fourteenth to shoot and even bear fruit.¹ They helped to sustain the communities of south-western England at a time when maturer, but perhaps intrinsically less flexible and diverse, regional economies elsewhere were coming under intense pressure. The mining of tin and other minerals in Devon and

¹ Below, pp. 70-4

Cornwall, for example, remained reasonably buoyant, even in the face of persistent disruption to export markets and overseas trade by war.² Devon's cottage-based cloth industry – the foundations of which had been laid in the previous century by large-scale seignorial investment in technology – was stimulated in this period by a high demand for cheap textiles and the growing tendency of landowners, in the wake of Black Death, to turn from mixed farming to less labour-intensive systems of specialist livestock husbandry; and herein lies the origins of the county's subsequent fame for cattle rearing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³

The wars with France, which loom so large in the annals of the fourteenth century, were a further stimulus to economic growth. New foreign markets were opened and existing ones made secure, ensuring that the urban development of some of Devon's southern coastal communities continued apace. Plymouth in particular experienced tremendous demographic expansion in the century or so between the reigns of Edward I and Richard II, when it was effectively transformed from a small fishing community into a regional entrepôt and the principal gateway to the English dominion of Gascony. Devon's most abundant natural asset, the sea, was in this period exploited to its full potential: war encouraged the growth of a domestic ship-building industry, stimulated commerce and presented new opportunities for service and personal advancement. It was in this century too that the core of a regionally-based naval elite of captains, mariners, adventurers and merchants - ubiquitous in the pages of Tudor history - began to establish itself.⁴

Against this backdrop of economic change, the balance of aristocratic power in the south-west was also undergoing a fundamental transformation. Isabella Fortibus, the last direct descendant of the Redvers earldom of Devon, died without surviving heirs of the body in 1293, and her estates, and eventually the comital title also, were inherited by Hugh Courtenay II, the young head of a major baronial family in the region. In 1297 the two large Anglo-Norman honors of Okehampton and Plympton were for the first time united under a single lord, giving the

² Below, pp. 74-6; chapter 6

³ Below, pp. 94-8

Courtenay family unprecedented influence and leverage in local society.⁵ The Courtenays, as a consequence of both royal policy and necessity, continued to concentrate their activity as seignorial lords almost exclusively in Devon, despite the obvious disadvantages inherent in residing so far from the major focal points of political and economic life in the kingdom. As earls, they were mostly vigorous and physically active throughout the period and successfully avoided the damaging minorities that had consistently plagued the Redvers dynasty over the past two centuries: it is evident that Devon was to experience a rare quality and intensity of magnate lordship. The ubiquity of the Courtenays in all spheres of public life in the south-west, to the extent that they were seen by others as the 'natural' leaders of local society and came to regard that society as their 'country', is a central theme of this thesis.

Courtenay lordship was not, however, a monolithic structure, nor was hegemony an inevitable outcome. Alternative circles of power and influence that overlapped, competed with, or complemented one another, touched the region in different ways and with varying degrees of effectiveness. The origins of some of these networks are obscure, their foci lying well beyond the county boundaries, but they could nevertheless be revived under exceptional circumstances. The earldom of Gloucester, for example, continued to exert a considerable degree of influence over its feudal tenants in Devon, even after the extinction of the main line of the Clare family in 1314.⁶ Other sources of lordship, more modest in scale, transcended the boundaries of the shire, or even English society itself, providing an instructive contrast to the dominant Courtenay affinity, which was essentially confined to Devon. The Martin barons of Dartington and the knightly families of Fleming, Carew, Bryan and Cogan, comprised a group of landowners who held estates in both south-west England and in the marches of Wales and/or Ireland, and who presided over networks of tenants and well-wishers united by the common experience of cross-channel proprietorship.⁷

⁴ Below, pp. 81-2, 246-7, 253-5

⁵ Below, pp. 32-4, 153

⁶ Below, pp. 39-42, 216-18

⁷ Below, pp. 40-2, 139-42

Such widely-based circles of lordship and sociability were apparently beyond the ken of the Courtenays who concentrated their resources on dominating a far more narrowly-defined 'country'. Did the existence of these 'alternative' networks of lordship in any way derogate from the earls' authority in the fourteenth century or undermine their claim to lead a homogeneous 'county society'?

Another theme in Devon's social evolution was the increasing tendency of the Crown and its agents to interfere in local administration and politics. On one level, this was an inevitable corollary of the war with France and a reflection of the heightened importance of the region to the Crown as a centre for naval operations. The king needed to secure important military resources and, in so doing, rode rough-shod over local interests and sensibilities; this can be seen above all in attempts to wrest control of the ports of Dartmouth and Plymouth from their seignorial owners.⁸ But it was also reflected in the revival and reconstruction of the old earldom of Cornwall, as a duchy, from 1337. Under Edward III's heir, the Black Prince, Cornwall experienced vigorous magnate lordship from an aristocrat whose military and political interests were more closely tied to the south-west than any of his predecessors'. The earl of Devon's closest comital neighbour had been reinvigorated, creating the potential for rivalry and friction in the region.⁹

Comital leadership in Cornwall had hitherto been sporadic and infrequent, with Cornishmen rarely gracing the counsels of the earls; a neglect of duty that stunted the growth of fully functioning Cornish aristocracy. The more important inhabitants of Cornwall tended therefore to look eastwards, to neighbouring Devon, for good marriages, property investment, and even lordship and service. The earls/dukes of Cornwall may have had a vested interest in their vast economic resources and control of the apparatus of local government, but persistent non-residence and the consequent lack of 'good lordship' meant that much of the social elite of

⁸ Below, pp. 241-6

⁹ Below, pp. 253-8

Cornwall had orientated itself elsewhere. The extent to which the 'county community' of Devon penetrated and encompassed Cornish society, and the evolving relationship between magnate lords in the two counties, is explored in chapters three and six of the thesis.¹⁰

A further consequence of intensified royal activity in the south-west was the growth - in size, importance and wealth - of a corps of professional lawyers and royal clerks: in later centuries Devon was noted for the size and quality of its legal profession. The Crown provided local men with new avenues of employment and new sources of income. Fortunately for the historian, clerks, lawyers and merchants were usually wholly conventional in their social outlook and invested much of their surplus cash in the traditional land market, thereby effectively buying their way into the established hierarchy. Expenditure and consumer habits are useful guides to medieval wealth and these professionals are especially conspicuous in the historical sources.¹¹ On occasion, however, men of otherwise limited social importance could acquire reputation and fame through their service to the Crown. Bishop Walter Stapeldon (d. 1326), treasurer of England in the 1320s, and Sir John Cheverston (d. c. 1375), seneschal of Gascony in the 1350s and 1360s, are exemplars of men of local provenance who, through their professional activities, exposed regional society to the occasional glare of central politics.¹²

Physically isolated from the English court and the centres of political life, the extent to which the affairs of state impinged directly on county society is always likely to have been limited. Nevertheless, there were times when ostensibly 'local' matters had 'national' implications. The opening phase of the Hundred Years' War and the heavy reliance of the English Crown on Devon's maritime resources, already touched upon here, was evidently one such occasion. Another, less easy for the historian to detect but of no lesser significance to contemporaries, was the political unrest of the reign of Edward II, when Devon's two most powerful magnates became embroiled in central politics, perhaps even in direct opposition to one

¹⁰ Below, pp. 44-5, 135-8, 156-7, 253-8

¹¹ Below, pp. 143-9

another. Hugh Courtenay II, a consistent champion of baronial reform, had been alienated by the king's persistent refusal to deal seriously with his claim to the earldom of Devon and may also have had cause to quarrel with with Bishop Stapeldon, an accomplished royal servant and possible crony of the Despenser regime. Through them, through the continued and pervasive influence in the south-west of the earldom of Gloucester, and perhaps also through those local knights with landed interests in Glamorgan, reverberations of the political divisions in the English realm were felt and, to a certain extent, replicated in local society.¹³

THE 'COUNTY COMMUNITY' AND OTHER HISTORIOGRAPHICAL MODELS

Before beginning the thesis proper, some basic historiographical issues must be addressed. Can another county-focused study of late-medieval English society be justified on historical grounds? To a certain extent this approach has been determined by the nature of the source material. At first glance the surviving evidence does not make medieval Devon a particularly promising topic for research. With the notable exception of Tavistock Abbey, there is no single archive or body of documentation sufficiently copious to support a historical account based solely, or even principally, on the study of a single aristocratic lineage or religious corporation.¹⁴ For neighbouring Cornwall, this approach has been adopted by John Hatcher and Mark Page in their respective histories of the late-medieval duchy and the thirteenth-century earldom.¹⁵ But the Cornwall earls and dukes were royalty and, as such, exceptional cases from which it is difficult to draw useful conclusions about the 'conventional' day-to-day operation of magnate lordship in the localities. An examination of their estates, although it may tell us much

¹² Below, chapter 5; pp. 248-50

¹³ Below, pp. 210-18

¹⁴ H. P. R. Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey: a Study in the Social and Economic History of Devon* (Cambridge, 1951)

about economic management and agricultural techniques in the later middle ages, illuminates only dimly the complex structure of lordship networks and social hierarchies, and reveals little of the relationship between centre and locality.

The recent accession of the Arundel archive to the collections of the Cornwall Record Office has brought into the public domain a substantial corpus of material relating to the Dynham family of Hartland, in north-west Devon - of which a number of continuous series of late-fourteenth and fifteenth-century account rolls are of special historical interest - and has provided the focus of recent doctoral research by Hannes Kleineke.¹⁶ Kleineke's thesis in some ways illustrates the pit-falls of adopting a comparatively narrow historical focus. The Dynhams were wealthy knights and socially important in their own right, but for most of the later middle ages absented themselves from the public arena. The family's estates, although quite extensive and widespread, were equally unremarkable in the context of economic history, being located on some of the more mediocre terrains of the south-west, and the main point of interest is the rapidity with which they were taken out of cultivation in the fourteenth century. The thesis is primarily a study of seignorial agriculture and aristocratic life-styles and, to that end, works better as a point of comparison with studies of similar dynasties - for example, Nigel Saul's Etchingham family of Sussex - than it does as a comprehensive and balanced account of local society.¹⁷

The sparsity and uneven coverage of the documentary evidence is admittedly an unavoidable obstacle for the would-be historian of the medieval south-west. Unfortunately it has proven insurmountable for many writers, who have tackled Devon's medieval past with a singular

¹⁵ John Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall, 1300-1500* (Cambridge, 1970); Mark Page, 'Royal and Comital Government and the Local Community in Thirteenth Century Cornwall' (University of Oxford, D.Phil. thesis, 1995)

¹⁶ Hannes Kleineke, 'The Dinham Family in the Later Middle Ages' (University of London, Ph.D thesis, 1998)

¹⁷ Nigel Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life: Knightly Families in Sussex, 1280-1400* (Oxford, 1986), p. 19

lack of enthusiasm or conviction.¹⁸ In numerous local histories the medieval period, if not ignored altogether, is passed over briefly as a preface to the better documented and supposedly more absorbing ‘golden’ era of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the social elite of Devon ruled the high seas, and the county’s expertise in livestock husbandry and cloth-manufacturing was the envy of the world. Regrettably, this tendency to sweep over whole centuries has left gaping holes in Devon’s historiography.

From the point of view of the social historian, the deficiency is most apparent in the treatment of the county’s medieval aristocracy. The families of Grenville, Raleigh and Carew appear in the history books as fully-fledged servants of the Tudor government, with little serious treatment of their often equally illustrious predecessors. Similarly, no attempt has been made to write a comprehensive history of the English Courtenay family – ubiquitous in the south-west from its first appearance in the late-twelfth century through to its elimination in the mid-sixteenth – since Ezra Cleaveland’s largely hagiographical account of 1735.¹⁹ That omission has been partially corrected by Martin Cherry’s study of the decline of the Courtenays’ political fortunes in the first half of the fifteenth century, but many equally important aspects – notably the process by which they acquired the earldom of Devon and the role of Hugh Courtenay II in the crises of Edward II’s reign – remain largely neglected. In particular, the assumption that the family’s domination of county society was complete and unrivalled by the late-fourteenth century – on which, incidentally, much of Cherry’s thesis rests – has not been rigorously tested.²⁰ In the case of the Courtenay family, at least, the difficulty lies not so much in lack of evidence but in the uneven distribution of the surviving documentation, which does not always lend itself readily to a straightforward chronological narrative.

¹⁸ For the neglect of Devon’s medieval past in general, and a critical bibliography of recent historical writing, see Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 554-71

¹⁹ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 558-9; Ezra Cleaveland, *A Genealogical History of the . . . Family of Courtenay* (Exeter, 1735)

²⁰ Martin Cherry, ‘The Courtenay Earls of Devon: the Formation and Disintegration of a Late-Medieval Aristocratic Affinity’, *Journal of Southern History*, i (1979), pp. 71-97

Much work therefore remains to be done on the history of medieval Devon in particular, but also on the wider south-west. It is evident, however, that if an adequate account is to be made, a more sympathetic and accommodating approach to the material needs to be taken. On one level this will involve a partial resort to the now rather unfashionable ‘county community’ school of history. The earliest, and greatest, academic exponent of the ‘county history’, W. G. Hoskins, expended no effort in apologising for or justifying his method. The county for him, as for many of those who followed in his footsteps, was an obvious and accessible *topos* for historical research: his pioneering objectives, in the 1940s and 1950s, helped to make local history respectable in academia and to raise the standards of antiquarianism.²¹

The ‘county community’ has traditionally been regarded as a convenient model for the medieval historian because the bulk of the primary evidence – comprising the records of chancery and other institutions of central government – was collected and organised through the administrative network of English shires. The ‘county history’ became academically fashionable in the 1970s and 1980s through the efforts of medieval and early-modern historians who claimed to have identified independent, self-conscious and often politically-active ‘county communities’ in the shires.²² In south-west England the county-focused approach was adopted, albeit somewhat uncritically, by C. J. Tyldesley, who believed that Devon and Cornwall at the turn of the fifteenth century were coherent political communities, and also by Martin Cherry who chronicled the decline of the “single lineage” system of social and political leadership in Devon afforded by the Courtenay family.²³

²¹ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. xi-xxviii, xxxiv-xxxviii

²² Seminal works include: C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975); A. Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War: Sussex, 1600-1660* (London, 1975); J. R. Maddicott, ‘The County Community and the Making of Public Opinion in Fourteenth Century England’, *TRHS*, (1978), pp. 27-43; Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires in Fourteenth Century Gloucestershire* (London, 1981); Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983)

²³ C. J. Tyldesley, ‘The Crown and the Local Communities in Devon and Cornwall, from 1377 to 1422’ (University of Exeter, Ph.D. thesis, 1978)

Recent historical research has been more sceptical of this approach to the history of the provinces, suggesting that the nature of the evidence has led us to over-state the centrality of the county and its organs in local society; but it has done little by way of advocating a satisfactory alternative. In addressing this problem, Christine Carpenter's research on fifteenth-century Warwickshire has been particularly influential. For Carpenter, the county could become an important focus of sociability and political loyalty when exceptional magnates – and the fourteenth-century earls of Devon would certainly fall into this category – lent it cohesion through strength of their personal leadership and charisma. But even under such circumstances, which in any case were usually only temporary, the 'county community' was just one of many facets of social identity, and the historian embarking on a county-based study should be prepared to acknowledge also an indeterminate number of smaller or larger, often overlapping, loyalties and personal relationships. An important factor underpinning these sub-county or super-county identities, especially in the larger shires, was the physical landscape, and in particular topographical features such as rivers or tracts of upland countryside, which could both circumscribe or expand the horizons of medieval rural communities: accordingly, a discussion of the geography of Warwickshire is central to Carpenter's study.²⁴

As a starting point, therefore, it would be useful to consider the evidence, if any, for the existence of a 'county community' in medieval Devon. Two episodes immediately stand out in suggesting that Devon may have been something more than a mere administrative unit or passive receptacle of central government. In 1204 the "*comitatus*" of Devon negotiated with King John for a charter of disafforestation, collectively raising the sum of five thousand marks demanded as a fine. The coordination of effort required to achieve this and then to petition for the charter's renewal on subsequent occasions in the thirteenth century, points to the existence of a reasonably cohesive body of men who identified Devon, the royal shire, with their 'country' and who were

²⁴ M. C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: a Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), especially chapters 1 & 2; Idem, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', *Journal of British*

sufficiently well organised and potent to be able to claim to represent the interests of its tax-paying inhabitants.²⁵ Over a century later, in 1337, the bishop of Exeter, John Grandisson, together with the earl of Devon and the sheriff, Sir John Raleigh, wrote to Edward III to explain why the king's recent demand for a subsidy had not yet been approved. Grandisson claimed that the request had been discussed in county court ("*ad plenum comitatum*") with the knights, stewards and bailiffs of the hundreds and liberties, and others present, but hinted that it might yet founder, since the countryside was barren and its inhabitants had already been burdened by the cost of repairing coastal defences. In this matter the bishop claimed to speak "*pro tota communitate Devonensi*".²⁶

There was then clearly some sense, and not necessarily just a negative one, in which men could identify themselves with a community or social grouping based on their county of residence. The county court was on occasion more than just an instrument for the taxation of local communities and the dissemination of royal propaganda. It was used by men of social distinction to articulate their demands and voice their concerns to the Crown. But what of the entity they purported to represent? Did the constituency of these men coincide with the arbitrary – as they appear to us – boundaries of the medieval shire, laid down by chancery; or was the county to them a more vague and fluid concept, that took its reference from elsewhere and which could change with circumstances and the passing of time?

Medieval Devon was certainly more than a mere unit of administration imposed by bureaucratic fiat. Taken together with neighbouring Cornwall to the west, it comprised a peninsula in south-western England – the Cornubian peninsula – that broadly coincided with the ancient British kingdom of Dumnonia, subsequently adopted by the Romans as an administrative canton. Part of Devon's eastern border may also represent the western-most limit of the kingdom

History (1994), pp. 340-80

²⁵ J. R. Maddicott, 'Magna Carta and the Local Communities', *Past and Present*, cii (1984), pp. 27, 29; Below, p. 73

²⁶ *RJG*, i, 300-1

of Wessex after the initial phase of Saxon colonisation. As the rulers of Wessex pushed further westwards, from the second half of the seventh century, the native inhabitants of Dumnonia were driven back into Cornwall. Rivers have great significance as physical boundaries in pre-modern societies and the River Tamar, which practically bisects the peninsula, was apparently determined upon as the farthest extent of Wessex's territorial ambitions: it coincides almost exactly with the western border of Devon. Besides being an imposing natural feature, the Tamar also demarcated an important cultural division, with English place-name elements absent from all but a small enclave on the western bank of the Tamar, while the 'Celtic' names typical of Cornwall occur only sporadically in Devon. It can therefore be stated with some confidence that the boundaries of the medieval county of Devon, far from being arbitrarily imposed from above, were based upon pre-existing patterns of settlement and cultural identity.²⁷

Physical landscape afforded a further element of unity, since most of Devon, and all of Cornwall, lies within the two-thirds of the British Isles designated by Cyril Fox as his "upland zone".²⁸ Although the topography of the south-west is immensely varied – fertile sandstone valleys sit cheek-by-jowl with barren granite moorland within a remarkably compact area – its general characteristics are essentially those of an upland pastoral region and distinguish it clearly from the countryside of champion England. Land, climate and soil in the south-west are on the whole unsuited to sustained and large-scale grain cultivation, and the documentation gives the impression of limitless tracts of rough pasture. The physical environment largely determined the timing and pattern of settlement and demographic movements – most notably the region's relatively late Saxon colonisation – as well as the chronology of major economic trends, such as the rapid contraction of demesne cultivation in the late-fourteenth century.²⁹

²⁷ M. Todd, *The South-West to AD 1000* (Harlow, 1987), pp. 236-7, 267-73; O. J. Padel, 'Place Names', in *Historical Atlas of South-West England*, ed. Kain & Ravenhill (Exeter, 2000), pp. 88-94; Susan Pearce, *The Kingdom of Dumnonia* (Padstow, 1978), p. 2

²⁸ Cyril Fox, *The Personality of Britain* (4th edn., Cardiff, 1959)

²⁹ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Highland Zone in Domesday Book', Idem, *Provincial England* (1963), pp. 15-52

Devon was therefore to some extent a recognisable territorial entity, demarcated culturally and physically from its neighbours, and with well-established structural foundation. Narrowing the historical focus, is there any evidence to suggest the existence of a self-conscious 'county community', or a wider regional community, in the fourteenth century? Again, two examples present themselves readily: the first, that of the Courtenay family and the extent to which it seemed to identify itself with Devon, supports the traditionally-conceived 'county community'; while the second, concerning the unity that the bishops of Exeter occasionally brought to their diocese, is more suggestive of a regional identity.

In marked contrast to the Redvers, their comital predecessors, the fourteenth-century Courtenay earls were almost permanently resident in the county from which they took their title and, by the time Hugh II was formally recognised as earl in 1335, the name of Courtenay had become practically synonymous with the shire. The family's manors were mainly concentrated in Devon – a consequence of choice, accident and royal policy – while its economic and political ambitions were circumscribed to a remarkable degree by the shire frontiers. The Courtenay earls positively identified themselves with 'their' county and can probably be said to have had a direct interest in sustaining at least some vague notion of a 'county community'. Their authority as local magnates was also far more securely established than the Redvers' had ever been. When, after 1293, Edward I and Edward II contrived to deprive Hugh Courtenay II of his full inheritance, the family was restricted to expansion within its existing 'country', with the result that it built up a remarkable concentration of territorial power within a single county: this situation was further exacerbated by the persistent absenteeism of the neighbouring earls/dukes of Cornwall, their only effective magnate rivals in the south-west. The Courtenays therefore occupied a position at the apex of regional society and had acquired the resources to underpin their claim to leadership.

It was Hugh II who first seems to have emphasised a continuity of interest between family and county, perhaps as part of a wider strategy to win recognition of his title to the

earldom. From the 1310s the family began to dominate local judicial commissions, a process that was more or less complete after the death of their nearest baronial neighbour, William Martin, in 1324: a senior Courtenay subsequently presided over nearly every major local commission for the rest of the fourteenth century. The careers of cadet members were similarly circumscribed by locality and forged with the intention of bolstering the family's standing. Through such measures, and through their almost permanent residence, the Courtenays presented themselves to the both public and Crown as 'natural' leaders of local society.³⁰

Nor was Hugh slow to promote and exploit his family's recently-found social pre-eminence. In December 1335, shortly after his ennoblement, Bishop Grandisson complained that the new earl was presuming to act like a king before the "simple folk of Devon" (*simplices Devenicos*).³¹ The death of his wife Lady Agnes in 1340 brought further opportunity for Courtenay to advertise his 'arrival' to the ranks of the English peerage through a lavish display of wealth, and he distributed a large sum of money among all the religious houses of Devon.³² He viewed the county from which he took his title with an air of paternal proprietorship and, to that extent, fostered a sense of 'county community' less superficial than that portrayed by the records of central government, since it was personified by the leadership of an active, powerful and ubiquitous aristocratic dynasty.

After 1326, Hugh Courtenay II's only effective seignorial rival in the south-west was a spiritual magnate, the bishop of Exeter. The diocese of Exeter encompassed the whole of Devon and Cornwall and the bishops' landed wealth was widely dispersed across these two counties, and elsewhere in southern England: if the Courtenays identified themselves closely with a single county, the episcopal sphere of power and influence was rather more broadly based. Although economically important as a economic unit, the episcopal estates were less compact and geographically coherent than the Courtenays', and it was in Cornwall, which lacked a resident

³⁰ Below, pp. 163-5, 167-8, 258-60

³¹ *RJG*, i, 293-4

magnate and where the earls of Devon had made no more than piecemeal efforts to extend their influence, that the bishops' temporal authority was probably most potent. A vigorous prelate with influence at court could offer the ambitious, yet frustrated, Cornish knight the opportunity for service, reward and advancement that was lacking in Cornwall and that others were unable or unwilling to provide. If he possessed an independent base of power, as Bishop Walter Stapeldon did, his secular authority and influence could be extended across the whole of the diocese and even present a challenge to the authority of more conventional secular lords.³³ As a unit of administration, the diocese had a pedigree almost as long as the shires it encompassed and it was firmly imprinted on the collective imagination. When talking about the 'county community', the possibility that wider regional communities, such as that afforded by the bishops across the whole of the south-west peninsula, should also be entertained.

We have begun therefore to make the case for a 'county community', but have also suggested an alternative model. Coherent though the county may have been in terms of landscape and culture, its sheer physical size – and that of the Cornubian peninsula as a whole – ensured that internal travel and communication remained a major problem for medieval society. Not even the Courtenays could dominate all parts of this large county, but instead concentrated their resources on acquiring land and consolidating influence in a relatively small enclave, mainly in the hinterland of Exeter. That they possessed no land in large swathes of north and west Devon, where other networks of lordship and sociability may have existed independently of theirs, does not, however, necessarily derogate from their claims to primacy in the county: successful magnate lordship in the later middle ages was not, as we shall see, simply a case of physical domination. Few of the county's numerous rivers were deep enough to navigate, thereby rendering useless the most efficient form of transport available to medieval society, and several parts of Devon lay more than a day's ride from the county court at Exeter, either because of

³² Below, p. 124

³³ Below, pp. 47-50, 202-9

distance or difficult terrain: James Baucombe, for example, the steward of Sir John Dynham of Hartland, had to make two overnight stops in 1381 when journeying from his employer's demesne in the far north-west of the county to Exeter, because he wished to avoid the more direct route across Dartmoor, where in the previous year he had been robbed.³⁴ Most knights of any importance resided on manors within reach of Exeter or at least one of the other major market centres, but a few were physically isolated and effectively debarred from regular participation in what we might consider to be conventional social and political discourse in the locality.

Many communities in north Devon, for example, were better situated for access to the coastal towns of south Wales and south and east Ireland than they were to Devon's own major commercial centres, which were concentrated principally in the south of the county. Ordinary shire knights who lived in the north, or whose estates were mainly situated there, tended to move in different social orbits to their southern counterparts, a tendency that was reinforced by the influential 'feudal' networks of the earldom of Gloucester and the honor of Barnstaple, which broadened their tenants' horizons to the opposite side of the Bristol Channel. Our concept of a 'county community', already widened to take account of a regional community based around the diocese of Exeter, may therefore have to be modified further to comprehend a more nebulous and vaguely-defined 'cross-channel' province of adjacent communities, facilitated by the sea, and fostering extensive social, tenorial and commercial links.³⁵

STRUCTURE AND SOURCE MATERIAL: SOME PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

Apart from the usual miscellany of charters, deeds and other estate material that one would expect to find in the major repositories (British Library, Public Record Office, Devon Record Office, Cornwall Record Office), three major classes of documentation have been drawn

³⁴ CRO AR37/40, m. 1

³⁵ Below, pp. 139-43

upon in the writing of this thesis: ecclesiastical and secular cartularies; the episcopal registers and the archives of Exeter Cathedral; and the records of the city of Exeter. Medieval Devon is particularly well-endowed with cartularies. Two of the secular variety relate to the Courtenay family: the 'Powderham' cartulary, compiled in the first half of the fourteenth century, contains private deeds detailing the development of the Okehampton estate from the point at which it was acquired by the Courtenays in the late twelfth century, as well as a version of the Forde Abbey chronicle, outlining the origins of the English branch and its title to the earldom of Devon; the second, a register begun in the 1330s, contains details of purchases made in the fourteenth century and a wealth of information about the honors of Okehampton and Plympton.³⁶ Another secular cartulary is a fifteenth-century compilation belonging to the Dynham family, which illustrates its establishment as an English landowner from the twelfth century onwards.³⁷ In addition there are at least a further ten monastic cartularies, of variable quality and interest, but often with valuable snippets of information.³⁸ Much of this material, along with other ecclesiastical evidence now lost, is printed in the *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis* of George Oliver, a nineteenth-century antiquary and canon of Exeter cathedral: although idiosyncratic in its compilation and sometimes inaccurate, Oliver's work is more comprehensive and generally more reliable than Dugdale's *Monasticon*, and is a potential mine of detail.³⁹

The editorial policy of the Reverend F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, who published nine volumes of the late-medieval bishops' registers, was even more eccentric. The series begins in 1267 and is complete for almost the whole of the fourteenth century, apart from the episcopate of

³⁶ M. P. D. Collison, 'The Courtenay Cartulary from Powderham Castle' (University of Exeter, MA thesis, 1972), vol. ii; BL Add. MS 49359

³⁷ BL Add. MS 34792 A

³⁸ Those used in this thesis are: *RJG*, iii, 1563-1610 (Buckfast Abbey); BL Harley MS 3660, partly printed in *The Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*, ed. Vera C. M. London (D&CRS, new ser., 1965); *Collectanea Topographica et Genealogica*, i (1834), pp. 60-5, 184-9, 250-4, 374-88 (St. Nicholas Priory, Exeter); *The Cartulary of Forde Abbey*, ed. Steven Hobbs (Somerset Record Society, lxxxv, 1998); Deryck Seymour, *Torre Abbey* (Torquay, 1977); Eton College Deeds, 32 (Modbury Priory); Bodleian, Top. Devon d. 5, BL, Arundel 17 (Newenham abbey); Bodleian, James 23, BL Harley 6974 (Plympton Priory, seventeenth century transcripts)

³⁹ George Oliver, *Monasticon Diocesis Exoniensis* (Exeter, 1840)

Thomas Bitton (1292-1307), whose register is lost, and the years 1326-9, when normal record-keeping was severely disrupted in the aftermath of Bishop Stapeldon's murder.⁴⁰ Hingeston-Randolph initially intended to provide no more than a bare index to the manuscript, but later volumes are fuller, and the three relating to John Grandisson contain extensive abstracts of material, albeit the selections of a Victorian clergyman. Nevertheless, the volumes are an adequate introduction and guide to a vast and otherwise fairly indigestible body of evidence. Also noteworthy among the extensive diocesan archives are the fabric accounts of Exeter cathedral, chronicling the bishops' role in a period of major restoration in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁴¹

The voluminous records of the city of Exeter, used exhaustively by Maryanne Kowaleski in a recent study of the urban and regional economy, comprise another major category of documentary evidence.⁴² Prominent among them are the mayors' court rolls, an almost continuous series from the late-thirteenth century onwards containing - apart from the routine records of Exeter's principal judicial court - copies of testaments, final concords, records of elections and awards of freedom of the city: in short, the utility of this material is not restricted to municipal history.⁴³ The city archives contain various other series of court rolls and financial accounts, of which the accounts of the port of Exeter, which served as the customs centre for the whole of the south-west, are of particular interest to the economic historian.⁴⁴

As suggested earlier, the patchy coverage of the documentation is a significant constraint and has to a certain extent determined the structure of the thesis: consequently

⁴⁰ F. C. Hingeston-Randolph, *The Register of Walter de Stapeldon, A.D. 1307-1326* (1892); Idem, *The Register of John de Grandisson, A. D. 1327-1369* (3 vols., 1894-99); Idem, *The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, A.D. 1370-1394* (2 vols., 1901-6); described by R. L. Poole in *HMC Various Collections*, iv, 13-222

⁴¹ ECA D&C 2600-2711; *HMC Various Collections*, iv, 23-95; A. M. Erskine, *The Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral, 1279-1353* (D&CRS, new ser., xxiv, xxvi, 1981-3)

⁴² Maryanne Kowaleski, *Local Markets and Regional Trade in Medieval Exeter* (Cambridge, 1995)

⁴³ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 336-43

⁴⁴ Maryanne Kowaleski, *Local Customs Accounts of the Port of Exeter, 1266-1321* (D&CRS, new ser., xxxvi, 1993); *The Receivers' Accounts of the City of Exeter, 1304-1353*, ed. Margery M. Rowe & John M.

it is anticipated that the ‘originality’ of this work will lie not so much in the presentation of entirely new material as in the forging of a reasonably cohesive historical account from various disparate strands of evidence and elements of recent research. The thesis is divided into two main sections – ‘structural’ and ‘chronological’ – although, as will become clear, it is less easy in practice to separate the dynamics of historical process from a narrative of historical structures, and neither category is wholly exclusive of the other. The first establishes foundations with a treatment of the county’s social and economic infrastructure and an introduction to some of the principal historical ‘players’. Chapter one is an overview of the major temporal units of secular and ecclesiastical lordship in Devon and their long-term historical evolution. Chapter two surveys the social and economic structures of the medieval south-west and assesses the influence of exogenous factors, such as physical landscape and natural environment, on demography and the economy: recent and current research will be consolidated with historiographical critique and original interpretation. Chapter three identifies and analyses the county’s resident social elite, quantitatively and qualitatively, through its wealth, occupational structure, and social and consumer habits. The remainder of the thesis is given over to a more detailed narrative treatment of the fourteenth century specifically. Chapter four deals with the emergence of the Courtenays as leaders of local society and traces their evolving relationship with the Crown. Chapter five analyses the crises of the reign of Edward II and the concurrent ‘politicisation’ of local society, through the eyes of Bishop Walter Stapeldon and his secular ‘affinity’. Chapter six concentrates on the period post-1330s, assessing the impact of war on local communities in Devon and the arrival in the

Draisey (D&CRS, new ser., xxxii, 1989); *Exeter Freeman, 1266-1967*, ed. Margery M. Rowe & Andrew M. Jackson (D&CRS, extra ser., i, 1973)

south-west of Bishop John Grandisson (1328-69), whose more conciliatory and orthodox style of spiritual lordship contrasted sharply with that of his predecessor.

PART ONE: STRUCTURAL

1. THE SEIGNORIAL LANDSCAPE OF MEDIEVAL DEVON

The seignorial structures of fourteenth-century Devon encompassed a patchwork of petty and fragmented fiefdoms, co-existing with a handful of more substantial lordships, in which title was frequently obscure and multiple ownership common. Geographical peripherality and the acute difficulties of defending the coast of the south-western peninsula had, in the early years of the Norman regime, encouraged the creation of small, compact and easily defensible 'military' estates held directly of the Conqueror.¹ These units, precursors of the feudal honor, gave rise in time to a proliferation of minor tenants-in-chief and a highly complex web of tenurial relationships. Few magnates had estates of any great significance here, making it relatively easy for those who did, and who were normally resident, to establish their pre-eminence, at least in theory. In practice, however, the county's sheer physical size and its fragmented manorial structure militated against the domination of landed society by any one single magnate, but instead supported a multitude of knights and gentry who between them may have held as much as three-quarters of the land and who were too numerous and diverse to be accommodated under the umbrella of a single magnate affinity.²

Studying the 'feudal' origins of these social structures helps not only to reconstruct the landscape of seignorial lordship in the fourteenth century, but also to suggest how its style, quality and intensity were determined by longer-term historical factors. Was 'feudalism' a sound basis for fostering seignorial relationships in our period, or had the fragmentation of the great Anglo-Norman honors and discontinuity in proprietorship diminished the importance of tenurial lordship to the extent that it was now regarded as little more than a device for the exaction of fiscal dues and 'incidents'? Were short-term 'bastard-

¹ J. A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 50-1

² Calculated from the 1316 *Nomina Villarum* survey (*FA*, i, 272-85); Below, p. 113

feudal' contracts the very essence of formal lordship in our period, or could ancestry and ancient tenure still play their part?³

In addressing these questions, the county's four most visible units of secular lordship in the fourteenth century – the honors of Okehampton/Plympton and Dartington/Barnstaple, and the earldoms of Cornwall and Gloucester – will be contrasted and placed into a wider historical context. Each differed markedly from the others in size and scale, chronology of formation, and the relationship of the proprietor-lord to local society. The first part of this chapter, therefore, sets the scene by examining the pre-fourteenth century history of these units and their resident families, and assessing how important their networks of authority and power were to social and political intercourse in our period. Part two concentrates on the ecclesiastical dimension, introducing the diocese of Exeter through a preliminary survey of its estates, and considering the county's major prelates in their role as secular lords.

1.1 THE SECULARS

1.1 (i) THE HONORS OF OKEHAMPTON AND PLYMPTON

After the county's vast royal demesne, the single greatest lay estate in eleventh-century Devon lay in the hands of Baldwin ('the Sheriff') de Meulles (d. 1095), son of the count of Brionne. His *caput* was located in the small borough of Okehampton, on the northern fringe of Dartmoor. Some 174 manors in Devon belonged to Baldwin's fief and, although he also possessed land in the neighbouring counties of Somerset and Dorset, his importance as an Anglo-Norman baron was essentially localised and geographically confined.⁴

³ G. L. Harriss, 'Introduction', in K. B. McFarlane, *England in the Fifteenth Century* (1981), pp. ix-xviii; D. A. Carpenter, 'The Second Century of English Feudalism', *Past and Present*, clxviii (2000), pp. 30-71

⁴ *DB Devon*, 16; *DB Somerset*, 20; *DB Dorset* 42; *CP*, iv, 308-11; *Domesday People*, p. 162

Baldwin had been one of the Conqueror's most consistently loyal allies. In attendance at the siege of Exeter in 1068, he was left there by the king to command the garrison and to construct a new stone castle.⁵ Written sources of the early Anglo-Norman period leave the impression that the south-western peninsula, with its two separate coastlines, was vulnerable and under continual threat of invasion, aside from the more immediate risk of internal rebellion. Orderic Vitalis attached particular significance to the proximity of Exeter to both Brittany and Ireland, perceptively so, since both Devon and Cornwall had been subjected to repeated attack by Danish invaders over-wintering in those parts from at least the ninth century.⁶ King Harold's mother, Gytha, had held an extensive estate in Devon and members of the English former royal household were active in co-ordinating early West Saxon resistance to the new regime. Following the subjugation of Exeter, two of Harold's sons fled the realm and found refuge with King Dermot of Leinster, reappearing in the following year off the south coast of Devon with a fleet of sixty-six Irish ships.⁷ By 1086 nine coastal manors in south-west Devon had been devastated "*per Irlandinos homines*", while no less than thirty-eight houses in the former Saxon *burh* of Barnstaple, linked to the Bristol Channel by the broad and navigable Taw estuary, were reported to have been destroyed since the Conquest.⁸

It is in this context of vulnerability and military necessity that Baldwin's lordship is best understood. His authority, like that of his neighbour, Judhael of Totnes, was rooted in his position as royal castellan. The estates of Baldwin's honor of Okehampton and Judhael's Totnes were located mainly in Devon and both exhibited a high degree of geographical coherence, with those of Totnes being concentrated in a tight bloc in the south-west of the county. Most of the demesne manors had already been subinfeudated in small parcels to knights by 1086, indicating the overt military function of these baronies: they were relatively

⁵ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ii, 211-15

⁶ *Ibid.*, 211; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (London, 1961), pp. 42, 49, 55, 57, 63, 80, 84, 85; Below, p. 238

⁷ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ii, 225; Green, *Norman England*, pp. 63-8

⁸ *DB Devon*, 17/33-41 (coastal manors); 1/1, 3/3, 16/2, 28/17 (Barnstaple); H. C. Darby, *The Domesday Geography of South-West England* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 273-4

easy to itinerate and the defence of their outlying territories was now amply provided for.⁹ This is important to bear in mind for the fourteenth century when considering to what extent the territorial ambitions of the Courtenay earls of Devon, Baldwin's successors, were circumscribed by the shire boundaries, or even coincided with the horizons of a self-conscious 'county community'. Territorial policy in Okehampton may have been directed not so much by choice as by the structural framework of the original Anglo-Norman honor, which in turn was a product of the military situation in the eleventh century.

Two of Baldwin's sons, William (d. 1096) and Richard (d. 1137), succeeded in turn to the English estates and occasionally held the shrievalty of Exeter as their father had. William FitzBaldwin, under the command of Roger, earl of Shrewsbury, led a pioneering expedition to Dyfed in 1093 and built a castle at Rhydygors (near Carmarthen), thereby establishing an important early bridgehead between south-west England and Wales, and laying the foundations of what would become an extensive trans-Channel network of tenure and lordship.¹⁰ William's younger brother, Richard, had been granted an extensive estate in south Wales by King Henry I in 1102, which further consolidated his family's influence in the March.¹¹ Although the FitzBaldwins were ultimately unable or unwilling to remain in control of their new dominions, some of their knights left a more lasting impression on marcher society in Wales and added an interesting dimension to the Okehampton tenurial network. For example, Okehampton's most important tenant, the Bryans, who in 1291 held the manors of Slapton and Torbryan (Devon) for the service of nine knights, were also lords of Laugharne (Carms.) and the manor of Walwyn's Castle (Pembs.); while the descendants of Robert Punchardon, who in 1086 had held of Baldwin four manors over-looking the Bristol Channel, seem to have been connected to the cantref of Puncteston in Cemais (Pembs.).¹²

⁹ J. W. Williams, 'Judhael of Totnes: the Life and Times of a Post-Conquest baron', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, xvi (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 275; *Domesday People*, pp. 285-6

¹⁰ *Brut y Tywysogyon, or the Chronicle of Princes: Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), p. 20; R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 34-5

¹¹ *Brut*, p. 24; Davies, *Age of Conquest*, p. 41

¹² I. J. Rowlands, 'The Making of the March: Aspects of the Norman Settlement in Dyfed', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, iii (1981), pp. 148-9; *CIPM*, iii, 31; *Domesday People*, p. 378; *DB Devon*, 15/69-74

William and Richard FitzBaldwin both died heirless and Okehampton descended through the line of their sister Adelicia.¹³ The balance of power in Devon was now tipped firmly in favour of Baldwin Redvers (d. 1155), whose father Richard (d. 1107) had recently had the honor of Plympton created for him by Henry I.¹⁴ By 1166 Okehampton had fallen into the hands of Robert (d. 1172), second husband of Adelicia's granddaughter Matilda (d. 1173) and an illegitimate son of Henry I.¹⁵ The Crown took possession of Okehampton when Matilda died without sons and placed it temporarily in the custody of Reginald Courtenay (d. c. 1188), a young nobleman of Paris and a courtier of Henry II, who had only recently arrived in England. Reginald also had wardship of Matilda's two daughters and heiresses, Hawise (by her first husband, William Curcy) and Matilda (by Robert): he reserved the marriage of Hawise for his eldest son and heir, Reginald II (d. 1194), while Matilda was betrothed to William, a younger son living in Normandy; and thereby secured the inheritance intact for his own family.¹⁶

The extinction of the FitzBaldwin line and the occupation of Okehampton by female heirs for about half a century created a vacuum of seignorial power in Devon that was at least partially filled by the Redvers dynasty. Richard Redvers, a hitherto anonymous knight of the Cotentin, was in the service of Henry I from at least 1090. Upon Henry's accession, Richard had been handsomely endowed with land, which included the honors of Christchurch (Hants.) and Carisbrooke (Isle of Wight), and also Plympton (Devon), a barony of comparable size to Okehampton, that had been newly created through the amalgamation of several small tenancies-in-chief.¹⁷

Given his father's indebtedness to the patronage of Henry I, it is no surprise that Baldwin Redvers emerged as one of the most consistent baronial supporters of the Empress

¹³ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 342

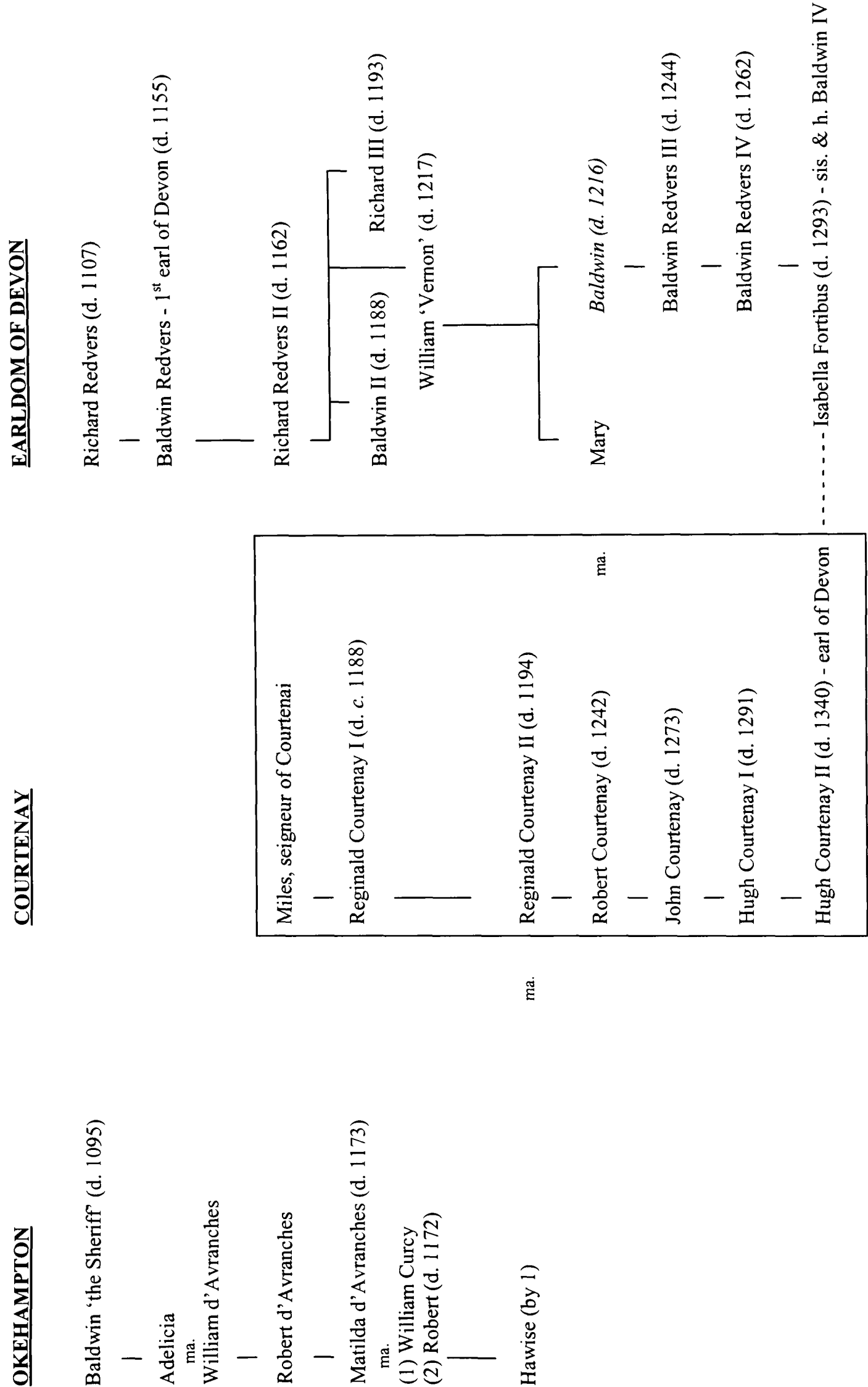
¹⁴ *Domesday People*, pp. 162, 360-1

¹⁵ *RBE*, i, 251-4; Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 342 (chronicle account of the origins of the barons of Okehampton)

¹⁶ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 342; Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 75; *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France*, ed. J. Horace Round (1899), no. 30, *et passim* (Courtenay as a royal charter witness); Below, Fig. 1.1 (p. 32a), for genealogy

¹⁷ *Domesday People*, pp. 360-1; *CP*, iv, 308-23; *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon, 1090-1217*, ed. Robert Bearman (D&CRS, new ser., xxxvii, 1994) pp. 2-3

FIG. 1.1: DESCENT OF THE HONOR OF OKEHAMPTON AND THE EARLDOM OF DEVON



Matilda. In 1136 he ignored a summons to Stephen's court, ostensibly because he had not been granted the shrievalty of Exeter, an office in which the balance of local power in Devon was effectively vested, and which had passed between the FitzBaldwins and the Redvers's since 1106. He was duly 'disinherited' by Stephen who refused to confirm the grants made by his uncle to Richard Redvers. Baldwin retreated to Exeter, where he had been castellan, and garrisoned the city against the king. But, as a 'new man', Baldwin's cause elicited rather less sympathy than those of the other 'disinherited' and his support ebbed away in the face of royal intransigence. It was only through the cautious diplomacy of Robert, earl of Gloucester, and the indecisiveness of the king, that Baldwin managed to escape with his life, if not his lands. He fled to France and found asylum at the court of Anjou, returning to England in July 1139 at the head of a large pro-Matilda army, and by June 1141 he was witnessing the empress' charters as earl of Exeter or Devon. Together with Matilda's half brothers Robert and Reginald, earls of Gloucester (cr. 1122) and Cornwall (cr. 1140) respectively, Baldwin now formed the backbone of resistance to Stephen's regime in western England.¹⁸

Baldwin's son Richard Redvers II (d. 1162) was subsequently confirmed as earl of Devon by King Henry II. He acted as sheriff in 1155-7 and married one of the daughters of Reginald, earl of Cornwall. The Redvers had therefore assumed the position of Devon's premier baronial family by the mid-twelfth century, but their ascendancy proved to be shortlived, as it was obscured and damaged by a succession of lengthy minorities: the pendulum of power in the region now swung back towards the Courtenay lords of Okehampton.¹⁹ In 1297, upon the death of his cousin Isabella Fortibus (d. 1293), dowager countess of Aumâle and Devon and the last direct descendant of the Redvers, Hugh Courtenay II (d. 1340) inherited the honor of Plympton: his great-grandfather Robert Courtenay (d. 1242) had been married to Mary, daughter of the fifth earl of Devon, and Hugh was now Isabella's closest male relative. Despite an impeccable claim to the entire comital inheritance, circumstances in the late-thirteenth century conspired to deprive Hugh of much of

¹⁸ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K. R. Potter (Oxford, 1976), pp. 30-46; R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen, 1135-1154* (3rd edn., 1990), pp. 22-4, 39, 57, 95, 134, 139-40, 143, 145; *Charters of the Redvers*, p. 6

the estate, restricting him to those lands that lay mainly within his existing sphere of influence: his territorial power had therefore been enlarged and intensified, but was narrowly confined to his present county of residence.²⁰ The newly united Okehampton-Plympton estate represented a remarkable concentration of lordship on the geographical peripheries of the English realm, to which few local knights of any note could remain wholly unattached, and the Courtenays' territorial and seignorial pre-eminence in Devon was now seemingly complete.²¹

Ten of the twenty-one manors held in demesne by Baldwin in 1086 were still farmed directly in the fourteenth century. These were concentrated primarily in the Vale of Exeter and in mid-Devon although tenants of Okehampton, who were more numerous than those of any other single lordship, were dispersed widely throughout most parts of the county.²² Beside the demesne estates, the Courtenays possessed important 'feudal' rights, including ownership of six hundredal courts in Devon and a theoretical entitlement to the 'third penny' of the county revenues, a remnant of Baldwin's hereditary office.²³ Therefore, even before they acquired Plympton and were formally recognised as earls, the Courtenays had become ubiquitous in Devon and were already asserting a degree of proprietorship over the offices and mechanisms of the shire. Any consideration of the importance of tenure as a factor in fourteenth-century lordship must take into account this overarching physical presence, since a family that had arrived in England only in the second half of the twelfth century would probably have laid no great store by the tenurial networks and ancient traditions established nearly two centuries previously by only distantly related ancestors. If there was a prevalence of Okehampton, and to a lesser extent Plympton, tenants in the counsels of the Courtenays in the fourteenth century, this may have had less to do with preference for ancient tenure than with the inevitability that most local knights would hold at least a portion of their lands from

¹⁹ *Charters of the Redvers*, p. 1

²⁰ Below, pp. 157-60

²¹ BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 42v.-43r.; 47v.-48r. (register of the tenants of Plympton and Okehampton, 1310-11)

²² *DB Devon*, 16/1, 14, 43, 58, 94, 136, 140, 164; *DB Somerset*, 20/1; *DB Dorset*, 42/1; *CIPM*, iii, 31; *CIPM*, xiv, 325; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 47v.-47r.

one of these two large honors, irrespective of the precise nature of their relationship with the family. On the other hand, given that the tenorial bond was at its strongest when underpinned by ties of locality and neighbourhood, the distinction made here between a seignorial relationship based on tenure and one based on personal affinity may be less relevant than it at first seems.²⁴

It is certainly true that the most prominent Okehampton tenants often ranked among the Courtenays' most important familiars. Sir Stephen Haccombe (d. 1331), whose ancestor Stephen had held three manors of Baldwin the Sheriff in 1086, was the premier knight of Hugh Courtenay II in the early-fourteenth century, serving in his retinue, acting as lawyer and attorney, and witnessing more charters than any other single man.²⁵ Yet for every Haccombe, there was a Beaumont or a Punchardon, Okehampton knights of similar stature, wealth and lineage, but whose seignorial relationship with the Courtenays was apparently limited to formal homage and the routine payment of customary dues.²⁶ In this example, neighbourhood had almost certainly taken precedence over tenure in recommending Haccombe as a household knight, since his manors were located on the south coast, close to the Courtenays' own centres of territorial interest, whereas the Beaumont and Punchardon estates were both situated in the far north-east of the county. Whatever the reasoning that lay behind their recruitment of men, therefore, the Courtenays' ubiquity should not blind us to the likelihood that their style of lordship was every bit as 'modern' and 'bastard-feudal' as that of magnates in other parts of the realm where the honor was less coherent and seignorial power less concentrated. The composition of the fourteenth century Courtenay 'affinity' is to be examined in detail in chapter four, but in all probability it was more recently constructed and grounded more firmly in personal, short-term relationships than the family's impressive domination of the county's 'feudal' structures may suggest.

²³ *CIPM*, viii, 273

²⁴ D. A. Carpenter, 'English Feudalism', p. 30

²⁵ *DB Devon*, 16/110, 112, 152; Below, pp. 176-8

²⁶ *DB Devon*, 16/65, 67, 68, 137; 16/69, 72, 74; *Domesday People*, pp. 374-5, 378

1.1 (ii) THE HONORS OF DARTINGTON AND BARNSTAPLE

Dartington and Barnstaple were inherited by William Martin III (d. 1324), in 1282 and 1308 respectively, and briefly united under him and his son, William IV (d. 1326). The founder of the English line of this family, known simply as Martin, had died before 1086, leaving his widow Geva, the daughter and heiress of Serlo de Burcy, a modestly endowed baron of Somerset and Dorset. Geva remarried William de Falaise, a tenant-in-chief of Devon and Somerset, and the estates of both Burcy and Falaise, which came to be known collectively as the honor of Dartington, descended ultimately to her son, Robert (Fitz)Martin (d. c. 1159).²⁷ The capital manor of the honor lay in the lowlands of south Devon, upstream from the Saxon *burh* of Totnes.

Martin's origins are shrouded in obscurity. He does not appear to have possessed any land of his own in England and may have arrived sometime after the Conquest as either an adventurer or mercenary. In the foundation charter of Totnes Priory, dated about 1080, he appears in the witness list as "Martin de Walis", suggesting that his interest in the Welsh March pre-dated the officially sanctioned expedition of his compatriot Baldwin the Sheriff, although it is difficult to connect him to any one specific act of colonisation.²⁸ His son Robert was, however, firmly established in the cantref of Cemais (Pembs.) by about 1115, when he founded the Benedictine abbey of St. Dogmaels.²⁹ Remarkably, given the isolation and strategic vulnerability of their new possession, the Martins remained in control of Cemais, almost without interruption, up until the extinction of the main line in 1326. Dartington thus became the focus of a small trans-Channel tenurial network, in a similar way to Okehampton, only in this instance with a lord who had a material interest in making these ties effective. The abbot of St. Dogmaels held his manor of Rattery and a quarter of a knight's fee in Whiteoxen (Devon) of the family, while representatives of the FitzMaurice, FitzRichard and

²⁷ *DB Somerset*, 20; *DB Dorset*, 48 (Burcy); *DB Devon*, 20; *DB Somerset*, 27 (Falaise); *CP*, viii, 530-2; Below, Fig. 1.2 (p. 35a) for genealogy

²⁸ *The History of Totnes Priory and Medieval Town*, ed. Hugh R. Watkin (Torquay, 1914), pp. 2-5

²⁹ *Calendar of Documents Preserved in France*, nos. 995-7; R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest*, pp. 41, 181

Hood families, who figured among the more important gentry tenants of Dartington in the mid-thirteenth century, regularly witnessed the charters of Nicholas Martin I (d. 1282) in Cemais.³⁰

Tenure on the Dartington estates was further complicated in the first decade of the fourteenth century when William III inherited the honor of Barnstaple in right of his mother. Barnstaple had been the fief of the bishop of Coutances who forfeited it to the Crown in 1095 after the rebellion of his nephew and heir apparent, Robert, earl of Northumberland. Most of the lands, which included a thriving borough on the north coast of Devon, were subsequently granted by Henry I to Judhael, the unfortunate lord of Totnes who had lost all or part of his own estate in the 1090s: Judhael's son, Alfred, was later a key supporter of Baldwin Redvers, a co-beneficiary of Henrician patronage, in the rebellion of 1136.³¹ The honor of Barnstaple, and any claim that Judhael still had to Totnes, eventually descended through his daughters to Philip Braose (d. c. 1150), an important Welsh marcher, and to Henry Tracy (d. 1165), the lone baronial supporter of King Stephen in the south-west during the Anarchy.³² Philip's grandson, William, forfeited his share of the inheritance when he fell foul of King John in 1207 and, although Totnes was subsequently recovered by a kinsman, Reginald (d. 1228), Barnstaple was apparently granted in its entirety to Henry Tracy III (d. 1273).³³ Henry's granddaughter, Maud, then carried it in marriage to Geoffrey Camville (d. 1308), and then to William Martin III, a son by her first husband, Nicholas Martin II (d. 1260).³⁴

Dartington-Barnstaple was a rather smaller affair than Okehampton-Plympton and geographically more confined; the Dartington estates were concentrated in an area to the south of Dartmoor, while the manors of Barnstaple were mainly situated in north Devon. In contrast to the corps of powerful Okehampton knights, the typical Dartington tenant rarely held more than a single knights' fee, while Barnstaple was so small that few of its tenants

³⁰ *Book of Fees*, ii, 766, 781-2; *Baronia de Kemeys* (1862), pp. 48-57; Rowlands, 'Making of the March', pp. 148-9

³¹ Green, *Norman England*, p. 306; *Domesday People*, 285-6; Williams, 'Judhael of Totnes', pp. 283-9; Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 23

³² *DDF*, i, 1, 56; *VCH Devon*, pp. 557-60; Davies, *Age of Conquest*, p. 277; Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 76

³³ D. A. Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III* (1990), pp. 87, 179

held their lands exclusively of it.³⁵ There is insufficient evidence of the Martins' affinities to allow us to assess the residual importance of the 'feudal' bond, but it should be noted their tenurial connection with Dartington was rather longer-established than the Courtenays' with Okehampton, and 'feudal' ties may be expected to have been correspondingly more important. On the other hand, William Martin III was cast in quite a different mould of lordship to Hugh Courtenay II. Like his grandfather before him, he was legally trained and served as an itinerant justice on the western circuit from 1305, and later as justiciar of South Wales.³⁶ William therefore had a power base independent of his estates and which was not reliant upon his standing among his tenants: attracting the support of local men may have been less of an imperative than it was for Courtenay, since he did not necessarily need to dominate his 'country', which in any case was more dispersed and incoherent.

Barnstaple was a recent acquisition, made shortly after Hugh Courtenay had secured possession of Plympton and, like Plympton, it is unlikely that any residual loyalty based on tenure could have been transferred so rapidly to a completely new lord. The Beaupel family, for example, perhaps the most important of Barnstaple's sub-tenants, moved not in the orbit of William Martin in the 1300s and 1310s, but in that of the neighbouring Stapeldon family. It is scarcely surprising if the Beaupels were disillusioned, since the honor had lain dormant in the hands of an absentee lord for the past thirty-five years: the Stapeldons' sphere of territorial influence coincided largely with that of Barnstaple, and Bishop Walter presented himself to its tenants as an obvious alternative source of lordship.³⁷ After the death of William IV in 1326, Dartington and Barnstaple were split between his widow and two sisters. A nephew, James Audley (d. 1385) of Heleigh (Staffs.), became the sole heir to the entire fortune, which he had received in its entirety by 1359. Audley turned out to be another

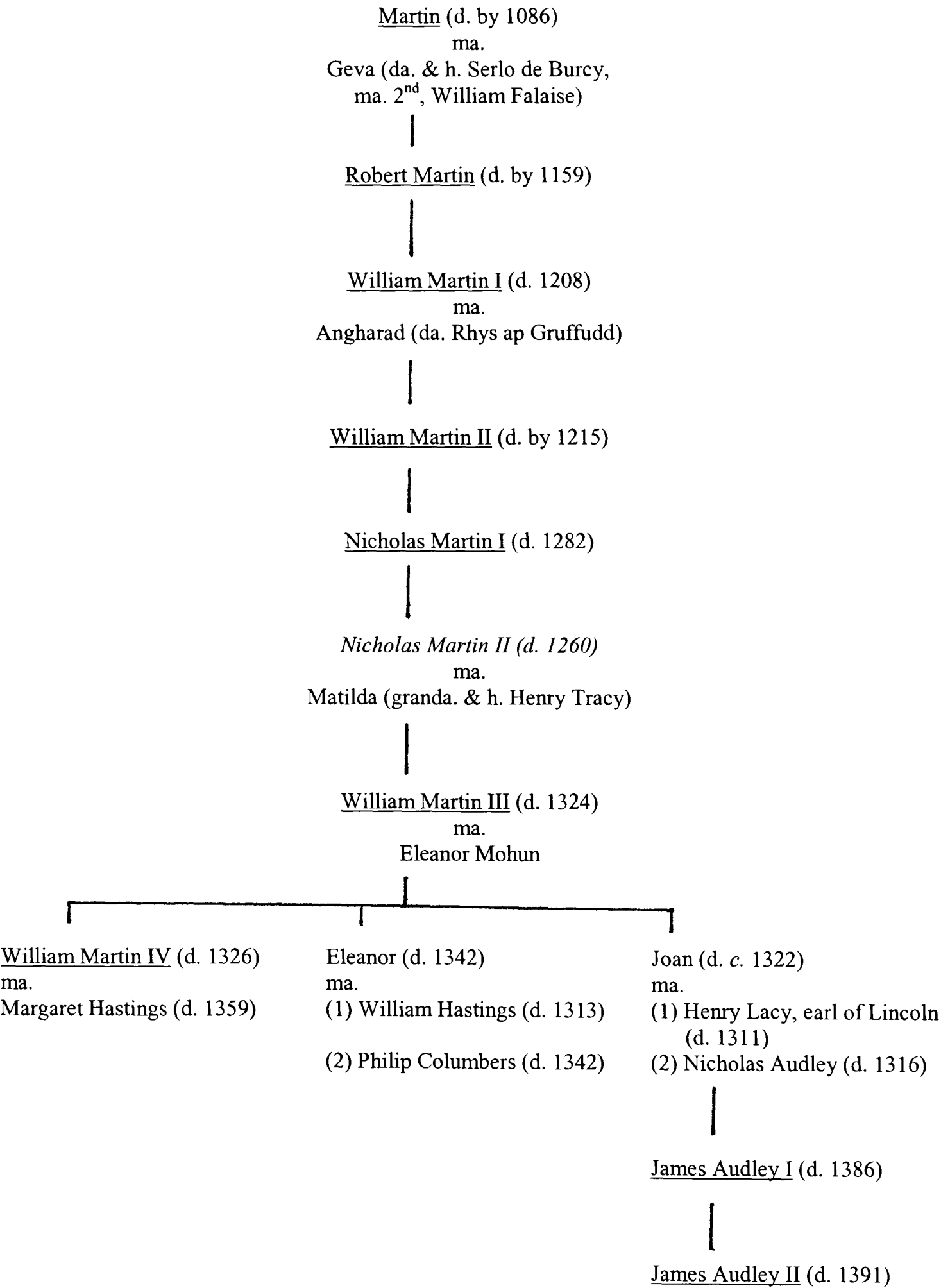
³⁴ *CP*, iii, 533-5; *CIPM*, ii, 76; *Ibid.*, v, 143; *CFR* (1307-19), p. 30; Below, Fig. 2.2 (p. 38a)

³⁵ *CCR* (1323-7), pp. 595-602 (feodary of Dartington and Barnstaple, 1326)

³⁶ *Ibid.* (1302-7), pp. 280, 298, 496; *CFR* (1307-19), pp. 232-3, 257

³⁷ Below, pp. 193, 202-24

FIG. 1.2: SIMPLIFIED GENEALOGY OF THE MARTIN FAMILY



occasional lord whose frequent absences effectively removed Dartington-Barnstaple as a serious rival to the hegemony of the dominant Okehampton-Plympton network.³⁸

1.1 (iii) THE EARLDOM OF GLOUCESTER IN DEVON

If the tenurial bond was not particularly resilient, or at least not valued highly, on Devon's two principal seignorial estates in the fourteenth century, then the earldom of Gloucester, whose lord was not even resident in the county, presents an instructive contrast. While the FitzBaldwins and the Martins were helping the Crown to secure control of south-west Wales at the turn of the twelfth century, Robert FitzHamo (d. 1107) was concentrating his efforts and resources on the lowland south-east. Robert, a staunch ally of William II, had received from the king the huge western estate of the Saxon *thegn*, Brictric, sprawling across swathes of Gloucestershire, Cornwall, Devon and Dorset. Upon the death of Rhys ap Tewdwr in 1093, an event that seems to have provided the impetus for William FitzBaldwin's own Pembrokehire expedition, Robert invaded and subjugated most of lowland Glamorgan. Much of the conquered territory was distributed in rewards among Robert's followers, thereby laying the 'feudal' foundations of one of the greatest of all the marcher lordships. FitzHamo's daughter and heiress, Mabel, married Robert (d. 1147), an illegitimate son of King Henry I, and the estates subsequently formed the nucleus of the earldom of Gloucester, newly created for Robert in about 1122.³⁹

About forty-five knights' fees in Devon belonged to the earldom in 1295 and its tenantry included local knights of some substance, whose identities can be gleaned from the witness lists of comital *acta*. Gilbert Umfraville had served FitzHamo in Gloucestershire from at least 1100 and by the 1130s held the lordship of Penmark (Glams.) and five knights'

³⁸ *CP*, i, 339-40; *CIPM*, viii, 396-7

³⁹ R. A. Griffiths, 'Robert FitzHamon and the Twelve Knights of Glamorgan', Idem, *Conquerors and Conquered in Medieval Wales* (New York, 1994), pp. 21-4; *CP*, v, 683-6

fees in Devon from the earldom of Gloucester.⁴⁰ Sir Henry Umfraville III (d. 1349), a descendant of Gilbert, was still in possession of Penmark and three Devon manors - Lapford, Downe Umfraville and North Lew – in 1314. The Umfravilles regularly witnessed comital charters in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and were important benefactors of the abbeys of Tewkesbury and Margam, both Gloucester-patronised houses. Henry Umfraville I (d. c. 1233) had married within the Gloucester affinity, taking to wife one of the heiresses of Matthew of Torrington, at that time the earldom's most important tenant in Devon; while Gilbert Umfraville II and Gilbert III campaigned in Wales in the retinues of Earl Richard Clare (d. 1262) and Earl Gilbert (d. 1295) respectively, in the mid-thirteenth century.⁴¹

One of Gilbert's contemporaries, Richard Grenville, had an estate in Neath, in the far western corner of the county of Glamorgan. Grenville was a constable of the first earl Robert and appears to have been recruited after the initial conquest to consolidate Norman power and to aid in the task of secondary colonisation. In about 1129, however, he set aside all his property in Glamorgan, which included a castle, to endow a Benedictine abbey for twelve monks in Neath.⁴² The act of foundation was witnessed by both Robert Umfraville and Robert Grenville, a kinsman who eventually inherited Richard's lands in Devon. In the fourteenth century the Grenvilles held of the earldom the port-town of Bideford in north Devon and the Cornish manor of Kilkhampton, as well as land in Somerset and the manor of Compton Grenville in Gloucestershire.⁴³ The 'feudal' connection proved to be as tenacious for the Grenvilles as it had been for the Umfravilles and, in as late as 1277, one Richard Grenville IV was preparing to go to Wales in the service of Earl Gilbert Clare.⁴⁴ Other members of the Gloucester network who held land in both Glamorgan and Devon included

⁴⁰ Griffiths, 'Knights of Glamorgan', p. 25; *CIPM*, v, 538 (pp. 339-40); *Glamorgan County History*, iii, ed. T. B. Pugh (1973), p. 17

⁴¹ *Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. Robert B. Patterson (Oxford, 1973), nos. 43, 88, 132, 139, 140, 148-9, 189; *Cartae et Alia Munimenta quae ad Dominium de Glamorgan Pertinent*, ed. G. T. Clark (Cardiff, 1910), pp. 442-5; *CCR* (1242-7), p. 337; R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest*, pp. 322, 388; Michael Altschul, *A Baronial Family in Medieval England: the Clares, 1217-1314* (Baltimore, 1965), pp. 72, 125

⁴² *Cartae de Glamorgan*, pp. 74-6, 309, 311, 315; *Glamorgan County History*, iii, 23-4; Griffiths, 'Knights of Glamorgan', p. 27

⁴³ *RBE*, i, 289; *CIPM*, v, 538 (p. 339-40); *FA*, i, 237, 328, 374; *Ibid.*, ii, 253, 276; *Ibid.*, ii, 291

⁴⁴ *CPR* (1272-81), p. 220

the Bonvilles of Shute (Devon) and Bonvilston (Glams.) and the Sullys of Iddesleigh (Devon) and Sully (Glams.), whose members appear regularly in conjunction with the Umfravilles in a number of Glamorgan related charters.⁴⁵

These knights, with lands on both sides of the Bristol Channel, were instrumental in preserving the seignorial relationship between the earls of Gloucester and their tenants in Devon, and on occasion revitalising it. This they did despite formidable obstacles faced by men of comparatively modest means: the financial burden of itinerating a dominion divided by water; the need to secure effective legal representation in each country; and the continuous depredations of pirates and other bandits. One measure of the strength of the Gloucester affinity can be taken from the almost unanimous support in the south-west in the 1140s for the cause of Matilda, a phenomenon which is generally attributed to the influence in those parts of her half-brothers, the earls of Gloucester and Cornwall: Gloucester tenants associated with Matilda's faction in this period include the Devon knights William FitzJohn, William FitzOdo and Henry Pomeroy.⁴⁶ Later, in the 1320s, the tenacity of the Gloucester bond had at least some bearing on the audible anti-Despenser sentiment emanating from Devon, a theme that is treated in greater depth in chapter five. Sir Henry Umfraville, whose ancestors we have already encountered, served three years in prison for his role in the rebellion against the Despensers who had, among other things, attempted to appropriate to themselves the whole of the former earldom's lordship of Glamorgan. Although this act of resistance probably had more to do with the desire to protect his own position in the March than it did with any residual loyalty to the comital Clare family, extinct in the male line since 1314, it does suggest how far reaching the implications of 'feudal' lordship could be.⁴⁷

At the beginning of our period the earls of Gloucester maintained a small presence in Devon through their demesne manors of Langtree and Chittlehampton and the nearby

⁴⁵ *Cartae de Glamorgan*, pp. 210, 236, 259, 260-3, 443-6, 467, 472, 536-7, 537-42, 572-3, 976-7; *CCR* (1242-7), p. 337

⁴⁶ *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 54-5, 99, 140; R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen*, pp. 12-15, 22-4; Green, *Norman England*, p. 306

⁴⁷ Below, pp. 216-8

borough of Winkleigh, which contained the honorial court.⁴⁸ The Clares were, on occasion, still capable of making their presence felt here. Lady Amicia Clare (d. 1284), daughter of the first Earl Gilbert (d. 1230) and wife of Earl Baldwin Redvers III (d. 1245), had part of her widow's dower assigned from the earldom's demesnes in the county.⁴⁹ Her sister-in-law, Matilda (d. 1289), wife of Richard Clare II, refounded a monastery at Canonsleigh, in east Devon, as a convent for nuns in 1284. Originally an Augustinian priory for male canons endowed in the twelfth century by a Gloucester tenant, Walter Claville, Canonsleigh had become disorderly to the point that it was in need of urgent reform. The bishop of Exeter, Peter Quivil, readily consented to Matilda's proposal to install forty canonesses to pray for the soul of her husband and promptly evicted the incumbent prior and his unruly canons. A deposit of six hundred marks was made by the countess until lands and rents suitable for permanent endowment could be found, and the project was eventually completed after her death by her son Earl Gilbert Clare (d. 1295).⁵⁰

1.1 (iv) THE EARLDOM/DUCHY OF CORNWALL IN DEVON

Cornwall, our fourth and final example, was the domain of a royal magnate and, as such, can scarcely be expected to have conformed to the conventional rules of tenurial lordship. Frequent absenteeism and discontinuity in ownership had weakened the links between the earls and their tenants, but on occasion these could be revived and exploited by a vigorous lord, as the Black Prince did in the early decades of the Hundred Years' War.

Robert, count of Mortain (d. 1090), a half-brother of King William I and commander of the knights of the Cotentin at Hastings, carved for himself an enormous territorial empire out of the counties of the south-west, which included most of the county of Cornwall. He held no fewer than 248 manors there, and a further seventy eight in Devon, although all but

⁴⁸ *CIPM*, iii, 371; *Ibid.*, v, 538 (p. 330)

⁴⁹ *CIPM*, ii, 539

⁵⁰ *The Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*, ed. Vera C. M. London (D&CRS new ser., viii, 1965), pp. ix.-xii.; Altschul, *A Baronial Family*, pp. 36-7

four of the Devon manors had been subinfeudated to knights by 1086.⁵¹ The fief escheated to the Crown after his son William rebelled against Henry I in Normandy in 1106 and was used subsequently to endow Reginald Dunstanville (d. 1175), a royal bastard who was created earl of Cornwall in 1140 by his half-sister, the Empress Matilda. Earl Reginald, who was also sheriff of Devon in 1173-5, left no legitimate heirs and his lands were granted to Prince John, becoming Crown demesne once more in 1199 when John ascended the throne. Although debarred from inheriting, Reginald's bastard son, Henry 'FitzCount' (d. 1222), continued to exert influence in the south-west, serving as sheriff of Cornwall and then as warden of the stannary until 1219 when he submitted to the conciliar government of Henry III.⁵² He also purchased the honor of Bradninch, the demesnes of which were to form subsequently the core of the re-constituted earldom of Cornwall's estate in Devon.⁵³ The earldom lay dormant until 1225 when it was revived by Henry III for his brother Richard (d. 1270). By this time, most of the original Mortain lands had been granted away, so a new demesne was created from the widow's portion of the king's mother, Queen Isabel, comprising the royal manors of Kenton, Great Week and Lifton, and the city of Exeter.⁵⁴ To these were added in 1239 Lydford borough, a former Saxon *burh*, and the Forest of Dartmoor which, at more than fifty-thousand acres, was probably the single largest manor in late-medieval England.⁵⁵ In addition, in 1244, Earl Richard obtained the honor of Bradninch in east Devon.⁵⁶

Although financially dependent upon the revenues of their south-western demesnes - at least a third of their average annual income of £5,000-£6,000 was drawn from Cornwall alone, mainly from the sale and taxation of tin - the earls of Cornwall rarely visited the region in person. By failing to invest the level of itineration and personal attention needed to maintain effective seignorial authority, they lost the goodwill of some of their more important tenants who became careless and looked elsewhere for 'good lordship'. The extent to which

⁵¹ *DB Cornwall*, 5; *DB Devon*, 15

⁵² *VCH Devon*, pp. 562-3, 569-72; *CP*, iii, 426-37; *CPR* (1216-25), pp. 202, 204, 231

⁵³ *Pipe Roll*, 3 Henry III, p. 23

⁵⁴ *CPR* (1216-25), p. 507; *Ibid.*, (1225-32), p. 134; *CCh.R* (1257-1300), p. 24

⁵⁵ *CChR* (1226-57), p. 247; *Ibid.*, (1257-1300), pp. 84, 131; H. S. A. Fox, 'Medieval Dartmoor as seen through its Account Rolls', *The Archaeology of Dartmoor* (Devon Arch. Soc., lii, 1994), p. 150

Richard had neglected or even alienated his tenantry was brought into stark relief in 1264 after the earl had been taken prisoner at the Battle of Lewes and his manors were surrendered without resistance to Simon de Montfort. Upon his release, the earl set about re-establishing his authority by neutralising the power of two of Cornwall's major baronial families, whom he suspected of betrayal, through the forcible purchase of their lands and castles: these were re-granted to two of his household knights, with the objective of creating a more dependable clientage in the region.⁵⁷

After the death of Earl Edmund in 1300, the estate returned once more to the Crown in whose hands it remained until 1307 when the earldom was controversially bestowed upon Peter Gaveston. Exeter and the manors of Bradninch, Lydford and Dartmoor subsequently comprised the dower of Peter's widow, Margaret Clare (d. 1342), who carried them by marriage to her second husband Hugh Audley, along with her share of the earldom of Gloucester that she had inherited from her brother in 1314.⁵⁸ An immense 'feudal' estate was therefore united under the hitherto relatively innocuous Hugh Audley. Complaints made by Audley in the early years of the reign of Edward III, regarding theft from his Devon manors and the illegal hunting of game on Dartmoor, illustrate some of the problems faced by an absentee lord attempting to control estates from afar in an unfamiliar locality. His tenants evidently had little respect for their new landlord or for his property, since the list of those accused of trespassing in Dartmoor in 1335 included Sir John Dauney, Sir William and Sir Richard Champernowne, and Sir William Ferrers, all leading tenants of the earldom of Cornwall.⁵⁹ An earlier attack, in 1328, on six of Audley's manors in Devon, bears more than a passing similarity to the sustained assault on the episcopal estates following the murder of Bishop Stapeldon, and also in the aftermath of the Despenser regime.⁶⁰ Hugh had himself

⁵⁶ *CCh.R* (1226-57), p. 281

⁵⁷ Page, 'Thirteenth Century Cornwall', pp. 36-7, 40-3, 52-9, 62, 74; Mark Page, 'Cornwall, Earl Richard and the Barons' War', *EHR*, cxv (2000), p. 23; N. Denholm-Young, 1947, *Richard of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1947), p. 163; L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (1955), p. 161; J. R. Maddicott, *Simon de Montfort* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 43, 309-10, 324; Below, pp. 156-7

⁵⁸ *CCh.R* (1300-26), pp. 131-2, 138; *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 3-4; *Ibid.*, (1327-30), pp. 472, 479

⁵⁹ *CPR* (1327-30), p. 558; *Ibid.*, (1330-4), p. 206; *Ibid.*, (1334-8), pp. 214, 281

⁶⁰ *CPR* (1327-30), p. 283; *RJG*, i, 95-6, 101, *et passim*

played a part in the turmoil of the 1320s and, although he eventually stood at the opposite end of the political spectrum to Walter Stapeldon, was tarred by the same brush of public notoriety: their reputations made them easy targets for the general venting of popular anger and frustration that followed the deposition of Edward II.⁶¹ Bonds of tenurial lordship, already weakened by the neglect of the Cornwall tenantry in the south-west and by the fragmentation of the earldom of Gloucester, were further eroded by Hugh Audley's short but eventful incumbency.

The earldom was briefly revived in 1333 for Edward III's uncle, John (d. 1336), when the port of Plymouth was added to its possessions. In 1337 the remaining comital estates were subsumed into the new duchy of Cornwall, created for Edward III's eldest son.⁶² The south-western demesnes then attained renewed importance in the mid-fourteenth century when the Black Prince established a military headquarters in Plymouth and spent much time there: local men now had a better chance of finding employment in his service, although Chester obviously remained the principal zone for military recruitment. The Prince did in any case tend to recruit by contract rather than depend on traditional obligations: for example, Sir John Sully and Sir Theobald Grenville, both prominent Gloucester tenants and therefore anchorless after the demise of the earldom in 1314, became household knights of the Prince, 'feudal' obligations apparently being no barrier to their advancement. Sir John Dynham II, by contrast, who was the most important of all the Cornwall tenants in the time of the Prince, inclined himself more towards the affinity of his kinsman, the earl of Devon, than he did to his tenurial overlord.⁶³ The Prince was influenced more by short-term military necessity than the need to forge permanent seignorial relationships, although he did take particular care to secure the goodwill of the earl of Devon, his magnate neighbour in the south-west, by generously patronising his offspring.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Below, pp. 228, 233

⁶² Below, p. 242

⁶³ *BPR*, ii, 45-6, 99, 130, 171; Below, p. 173

⁶⁴ Below, pp. 253-61

1.1 (v) CONCLUSION

Feudal tenure clearly still had a role to play, albeit a limited one, in the networks of secular lords in the fourteenth century, and a small number of hereditary tenants could generally be relied upon to form the nucleus of a lord's affinity. The county's great fiefdoms still loomed large in the collective imagination and local barons were at least aware of who their tenants were, even if these men did not always feature prominently in their service or counsels: the meticulously compiled feodaries of the Courtenay cartulary in British Library, and the care that was taken to divide the knights' fees of Barnstaple and Dartington between William Martin's three heirs in 1326, suggest that considerable importance was still attached to tenurial lordship, even if the interest now lay mainly in the 'fiscal' side of the relationship; in the exaction of aids, fines and death-duties. The honor continued to live, mainly through its courts, and it afforded unity and an element of corporate identity to the greater fiefdoms. On the other hand, discontinuity in hereditary succession and the fragmentation of estates among multiple heirs, had invariably reduced the efficacy of the tenurial relationship. The Courtenays' comparative 'newness' to the south-west made it less likely that they would rely solely, or even principally, upon the traditional loyalties of their tenants. On the estates of the earldom of Gloucester too, strong and seemingly inviolable bonds of tenure disintegrated within a few years of the death of the last earl.

Neighbourhood and locality were at least as important as tenure in the formation of seignorial relationships, for where a lord aspired to leadership of his 'country', he needed to draw a high proportion of the most prominent local families into his circle of intimacy. For magnates like the Courtenays, however, whose territorial ambitions in the fourteenth century had been circumscribed by royal fiat and who rarely needed to attract service from beyond their immediate sphere of influence, the simplistic distinction that has been made here between the 'feudal' relationship based on ancestry and the 'bastard-feudal' relationship based on short-term need and personal charisma, may not have been so obvious or clear-cut.

The honor, that traditional sphere of territorial influence, therefore had the potential for acquiring importance in the hands of a vigorous magnate with the ambition to dominate his 'country' and to establish a dynastic hegemony. That is not to underestimate the importance of newly-emerging contractual forms of lordship, but to emphasise that elements of old-style 'feudalism' were still apparent in relationships between magnates and their knights in the fourteenth century and could on occasion attain considerable social and political significance.

1.2 THE RELIGIOUS

1.2 (i) THE BISHOPS OF EXETER

The medieval see of Exeter emerged in 1050 as one solution to the problem of fragmented ecclesiastical government in the Dumnonian peninsula. Bishop Leofric (r. 1046-72), an English-born prelate, received official sanction to merge the Saxon bishoprics of Crediton (Devon) and St. Germans (Cornwall) into a unitary diocese with its seat in Exeter. A chapter was established on the site of a decayed Benedictine house in the city and the old monastery at Crediton was reformed as a secular college to provide additional prebends for Exeter canons. Work on a new Romanesque building began in 1114 and the cathedral was finally dedicated in 1133. The authority of the bishop of Exeter was now practically unchallenged in the south-west as even Cornwall, despite its cultural peculiarities and distance from Exeter, proved to be largely amenable to the new system of ecclesiastical administration.⁶⁵

The bishopric in 1086 was reasonably prosperous, thanks largely to Leofric's enterprise and to the efforts of his successor, Osbern (r. 1072-1103), a former chaplain of Edward the Confessor, who acquired further land in Oxfordshire and Sussex and secured possession of the royal free chapel of Bosham (Sussex). The fourth largest diocese in 1086, Exeter also had the sixth wealthiest bishop in England.⁶⁶ It was, however, sprawling and remote and contained vast expanses of practically impenetrable countryside: the episcopal manors were consequently distributed widely across the peninsula to ease the laborious task of itineration by the bishops. One fourteenth-century prelate, Bishop John Grandisson, whose career thus far had not taken him much beyond the sheltered confines of the papal palace at

⁶⁵ Frank Barlow, 'Introduction' to *English Episcopal Acta*, XI: *Exeter 1046-1184*, ed. Barlow (Oxford, 1996), pp. xxix-xxxi; Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'Ecclesiastical Institutions in 1086 and Monastic Houses, c. 1300', in *Historical Atlas*, p. 206; Nicholas Orme, *Exeter Cathedral as it was, 1050-1550* (Exeter, 1986), pp. 12-14; Nicholas Orme & C. G. Henderson, 'Exeter Cathedral', in *Historical Atlas*, pp. 499-500

⁶⁶ *DB Devon*, 2; *DB Cornwall*, 2; *DB Oxfordshire*, 5; *DB Sussex*, 6; Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'From 1050 to 1307', in *Unity and Variety. A History of the Church in Devon and Cornwall*, ed. Nicholas Orme (Exeter, 1991), pp. 24-5; Sally Harvey, 'The Bishopric of Exeter', in *AHEW*, ii, ed. Hallam (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 100-1; Barlow, *Exeter Acta*, p. xxix

Avignon, was dismayed at the sight that first greeted him on his arrival in England and daunted by the prospect of governing a diocese isolated from the rest of the realm, surrounded by a “barely navigable” ocean: Exeter lay not only at the “ends of the earth”, he plaintively informed his patron, but at the “end of the ends” (“*dum nedum in mundi finibus, set . . . in finium finibus consisto*”).⁶⁷

It was not just size and inaccessibility that complicated the business of ecclesiastical government in Exeter, but also potentially difficult cultural barriers in Cornwall, where a Celtic language was widely spoken. The Church shared and nourished a widespread mistrust of the Cornish, a people who, it was popularly held by contemporaries, were given to rebellion and general awkwardness. In 1342 Mgr. Adam Carletone, a long-serving (and long-suffering) archdeacon of Cornwall, petitioned the bishop for dispensation to exchange his living in the south-west for a less demanding benefice in Huntingdonshire, where he had friends and could at least speak the language. The men of Cornwall were, according to the jaded Carletone, “*rebellis et difficilis ad informandum et corrigendum*”.⁶⁸ A fourteenth-century scribe of Newenham Abbey, in east Devon, was equally dismissive of the incumbents of his monastery’s benefice of Pelynt (Cornwall), declaring that the Cornish, whom he described as “*natis*”, were a malign influence that had brought ill repute on the house.⁶⁹ Not even the archdeacon of Totnes found a good word when he was informed by the parishioners of Mary Tavy that funds reserved for the repair of their rectory had been misappropriated by certain men of Cornwall with “no conscience”.⁷⁰ Unloved though they were, the pastoral needs of these peculiar people required special attention and it is heartening to learn from the episcopal registers that at least some of the Exeter bishops regarded a working knowledge of the vernacular tongue to be a pre-requisite for clergymen in most Cornish parishes.⁷¹ Bishop

⁶⁷ *RJG*, i, 97-8

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, 956-8

⁶⁹ BL Arundel 17, f. 43r. (cartulary of Newenham Abbey)

⁷⁰ C. G. Coulton, ‘A Visitation of the Archdeacon of Totnes in 1342’, *EHR*, xxvi (1911), p. 119

⁷¹ *RWS*, 219; *RJG*, ii, 910; *Ibid.*, iii, 1146

John Grandisson, before setting out for the church of St. Buryan in the extreme west of the county, showed particular foresight in having the text of his sermon translated in advance.⁷²

By the time of the papal assessment of 1291, Exeter's wealth in relation to the other English bishoprics had declined substantially: this was partly a reflection of the poverty of benefices in Cornwall but, taken as a whole, Exeter was now poorer than any other English diocese except Rochester.⁷³ This was due in no small measure to a legacy of persistent under-investment in the episcopal demesnes and the conservative economic policy of successive bishops. The Exeter estate in 1086 was extensive, containing perhaps as much as a hundred thousand acres in Devon and Cornwall, but the manors were under-exploited and the revenues meagre in comparison to similar estates further east.⁷⁴ The bishops gave little encouragement to urban or commercial development until the thirteenth century, when Bishop William Brewer (r. 1224-44) established new burghal communities in Crediton and Penryn.⁷⁵ It was, however, not until the episcopate of the more worldly Walter Stapeldon (r. 1307-26), who used his legal experience and influence at court to gain a whole tranche of commercial privileges for the manors in Devon and Cornwall, that the episcopal estates really began to realise their true economic potential.⁷⁶

Despite these early set backs, the bishops of Exeter were without doubt the single greatest ecclesiastical landowners in the diocese. Relations between the bishop and the cathedral chapter had been intimate and largely amicable since Bishop William Warelwast (r. 1107-37) reformed the Exeter hierarchy in the first half of the twelfth century. That close association was maintained in the late-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the bishops over-saw the re-building of the Norman cathedral church in the Decorated style, a project that was in large part funded out of the episcopal coffers.⁷⁷ In addition, Bishop Stapeldon continued to patronise the former minster at Crediton and Bishop Grandisson founded a

⁷² Ibid., ii, 820

⁷³ *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England, 1200-1400*, ed. Alexander & Binski (1992), p. 227

⁷⁴ Holdsworth, '1050 to 1307', p. 206; Orme & Henderson, 'Exeter Cathedral', p. 212

⁷⁵ Barlow, *Exeter Acta*, pp. xxxiv, xlvii-liii; *RWB*, i, xliii

⁷⁶ *CCh.R* (1300-26), pp. 133, 183, 224

⁷⁷ Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, pp. 14-20

collegiate church of his own in the parish of Ottery St. Mary, thereby reinforcing their authority in the diocese. The bishop and these three major 'secular' communities (the cathedral, Crediton and Ottery St. Mary) were to a large extent interdependent and, as such, their wealth is best considered separately from that of the monastic estates. Individually, both the bishop and the chapter had rather greater wealth at their disposal than even the most prosperous Benedictine house in the diocese; collectively they represented an extremely powerful landed interest which underpinned the superiority of the bishop as both a religious and temporal lord.⁷⁸

1.2 (ii) THE MONASTIC ESTATES

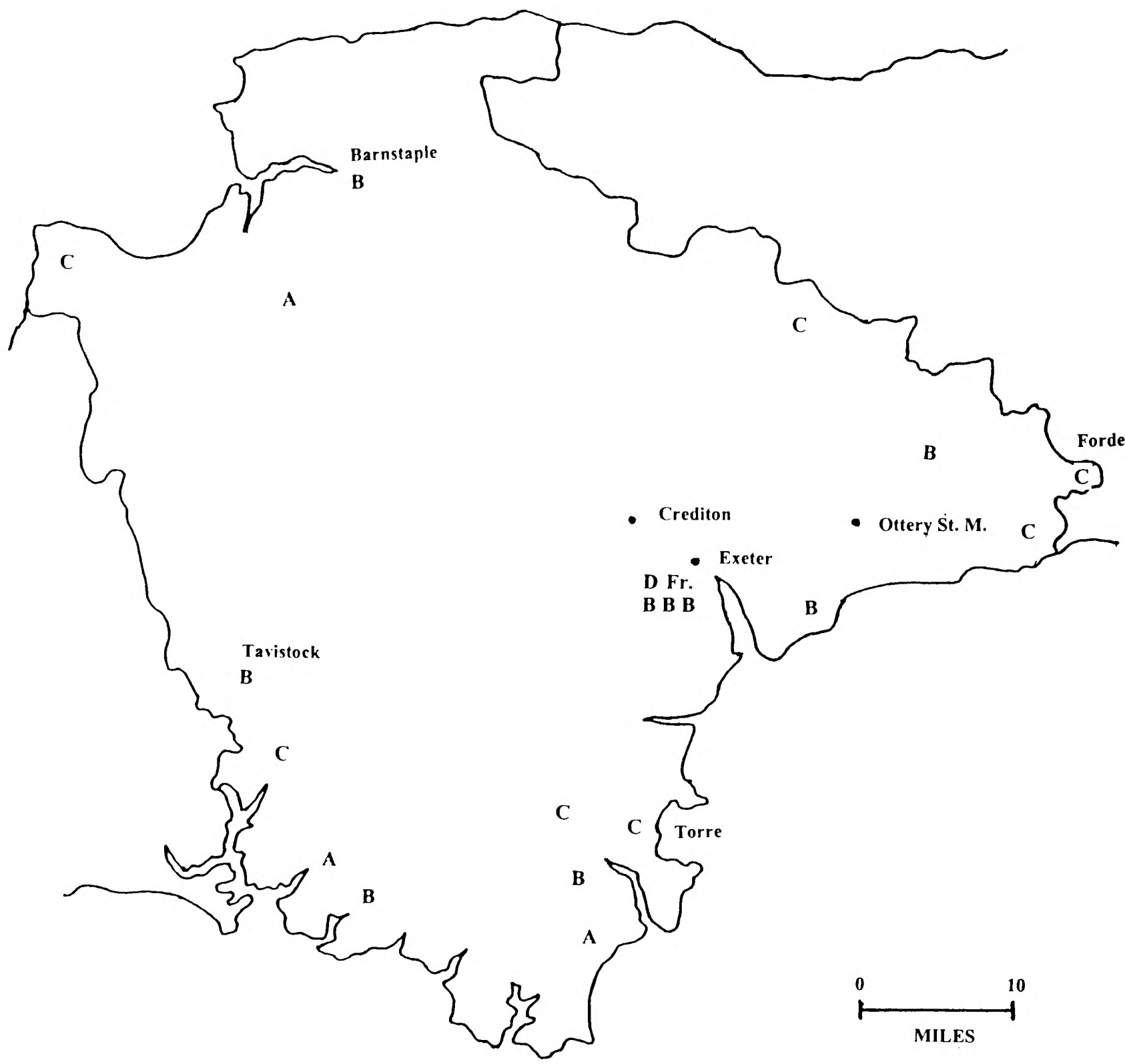
The diocese of Exeter had no one particularly strong tradition of monasticism. In 1086 Devon had just two abbeys, Tavistock and Buckfast, both off-shoots of the recent Benedictine revival and foundations of the local nobility, but neither was particularly wealthy by contemporary standards.⁷⁹ Tavistock, situated between the western fringe of Dartmoor and the Cornish border, had been destroyed by Danish invaders as recently as 997, and its finances were consequently precarious. The manors, remote and situated on poor arable land in west Devon and in Cornwall, were mediocre and under-populated, and the abbey was further crippled by the Crown's determination to exact in full knight service owing on the estate: by 1086 about a third of the abbey's lands had been settled by tenant knights in order to help meet this obligation.⁸⁰ Despite such inauspicious beginnings, Tavistock later prospered and by the fourteenth century possessed the largest monastic landed estate in Devon. As a representative of the Benedictine order in England, however, it was only of middling importance, with a community of about twenty monks before 1348-9. Tavistock abbots were generally of a high social calibre - they included a son of the earl of Devon - and

⁷⁸ Below, Fig. 1.3 (p. 51b)

⁷⁹ Holdsworth, 'Ecclesiastical Institutions', pp. 206-7

⁸⁰ *DB Devon*, 5; *DB Cornwall*, 3; *Monasticon*, pp. 89-112; *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales*, ed. Knowles & Neville Hadcock (1953), p. 78; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 8-10

MAP 1.1: DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN MEDIEVAL DEVON



KEY	
A	Augustinian
B	Benedictine
C	Cistercian
D	Dominican
Fr.	Franciscan

Fig. 1.3: THE PRINCIPAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES OF MEDIEVAL DEVON

INSTITUTION	RULE	FOUNDATION	SIZE ¹	VALUE ²
Barnstaple Priory	Ben. (Clun.)	Judhael of Totnes (<i>c.</i> 1107)	6	£123
Buckfast Abbey	Ben./Cist.	Earl Aethelweard (1018)/King Stephen (1136)	14	£466
Buckland Abbey	Cist.	Amicia Redvers (1278)	8	£241
Canonsleigh Abbey	Aug.	Walter Claville (1160)/Matilda Clare (1285)	50	£197
Cornworthy Priory	Aug.			£ 63
Cowick Priory	Ben.	William FitzBaldwin (<i>c.</i> 1144)	6	£ 78
Dunkeswell Abbey	Cist.	William Brewer (1201)	12	£295
Exeter Friary	Dom.	<i>c.</i> 1232	36	
Exeter Friary	Franc.	<i>c.</i> 1240	34	
St. James Priory, Exeter	Ben. (Clun.)	Baldwin Redvers (1141)	2	£ 16
Forde Abbey	Cist.	Richard FitzBaldwin (1136)	30	£374
Frithelstock Priory	Aug.	Robert Beauchamp (<i>c.</i> 1220)	8	£127
Hartland Abbey	Cist.	Geoffrey Dynham (<i>c.</i> 1165)	11	£306
Kerswell Priory	Ben. (Clun.)	Matilda Peverell (<i>c.</i> 1119)	6	£ 28
Modbury Priory	Ben.	Ralph Valletorte (<i>c.</i> 1140)	6	£ 70
Newenham Abbey	Cist.	Reginald Mohun (1247)	23	£227
Otterton Priory	Ben.	King William I (<i>c.</i> 1080)	4	£120

INSTITUTION	RULE	FOUNDATION	SIZE	VALUE
Plymouth	Carm.	c. 1296	40	£912
Plympton Priory	Aug.	Bishop Warelwast (1121)		
Polsloe Priory	Ben.	c. 1159	16	£164
Tavistock Abbey	Ben.	Ealdorman Ordulf (c. 975)	21	£902
Torre Abbey	Cist. (Prem.)	William Brewer	13	£396
Totnes Priory	Ben.	Judhael of Totnes (c. 1088)	6	£124

¹ Approximate numbers of religious resident in fourteenth century

² Approximate value of house at Dissolution in c. 1535

reflected the monastery's pre-eminent position within Devon's ecclesiastical hierarchy: consequently, they were apt to conduct themselves in ways more befitting their secular counterparts. Yet, despite the best efforts of prelates, such as Robert Bonus (1328-34) and John Courtenay (1334-49), to bankrupt the house through their reckless pursuit of hunting, drinking and general high-living, Tavistock's finances remained reasonably robust throughout the fourteenth century, and it even acted on occasion as banker to the Crown, lending Edward II, for example, the sum of £300 in 1318.⁸¹

Nearby, to the south-east, lay Buckfast, founded by Earl Aethelweard in 1018. Its origins are obscure and in 1086 it was one of the poorest of all the English Benedictine monasteries. It did subsequently find a patron in the future King Stephen who, as count of Mortain, granted it land in Lancashire in the 1120s to establish a daughter-house. By 1136, however, standards had apparently deteriorated to such an extent that a group of monks from Waverley was invited to re-colonise Buckfast: the Benedictine abbey was dissolved and reformed as the first Cistercian house in the south-west, thereafter prospering as one of the more successful establishments of that order.⁸²

The pattern of monastic development in Exeter thereafter conformed largely to national trends.⁸³ In the half century or so after 1086, a further six Benedictine priories and three Cluniac, an early reform of the Rule, sprang up to complement the monastic landscape in Devon. None was particularly large, all had been founded by kings or local magnates, and all were dependent on mother-houses in France or England; some, in fact, may have been little more than collection centres for revenues by the French monasteries.⁸⁴ Cornwall, by contrast, fared less well in the twelfth-century revival of monasticism, since only about a quarter of all houses in the medieval diocese were located here and most were poorly

⁸¹ Below, pp. 126, 234-5; *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 59, 273; *CFR* (1307-19), p. 384

⁸² *DB Devon*, 6; *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 61, 105; Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'The Cistercians in Devon', in *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill *et al.* (Woodbridge, 1989), p. 181; Barlow, *Exeter Acta*, p. xxxi; Robert Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 418-19

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 418

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 418-19; Barlow, *Exeter Acta*, p. xxxi; *Medieval Religious Houses*, pp. 61, 63, 65, 71, 74, 78, 79, 88, 95-7

endowed; a reflection both of the lack of a decent-sized resident aristocracy to support the religious, and a tendency by the earls of Cornwall to direct patronage mainly to establishments on their estates elsewhere in England.⁸⁵ In both Devon and Cornwall the newer foundations tended to conform to a clear geographical pattern, being situated primarily in the sheltered valleys south of the moorlands: in Devon, this resulted in a concentration of monks in the lowland southern and eastern regions of the county.⁸⁶

The evangelical Augustinian movement, which began in the 1120s and 1130s, was welcomed and promoted enthusiastically in Devon by successive bishops of Exeter, and three former collegiate churches were re-founded as Austin monasteries.⁸⁷ The most important of these was Plympton Priory, on the south coast, reformed by Bishop Warelwast in 1121 and which became one of the largest houses of that order in the British Isles, with a community of about forty canons. It alone could be said to have rivalled Tavistock in terms of wealth, although the latter was by far the more important landowner since Plympton, like many other Austin houses, drew the greater part of its income from spiritualities. It was also rather less independent than its Benedictine neighbour, with the bishop continuing to exercise tight supervision in the fourteenth century through the offices of the Exeter Cathedral chapter, to which Plympton was closely attached.⁸⁸ Another important Augustinian foundation of the twelfth century was Hartland Abbey, reformed in the 1160s under the patronage of the local Dynham family, and thereby reinforcing a tradition of strong secular influence over Devon's monasteries.⁸⁹ Canonsleigh Abbey, originally established as an Austin community of male canons at about the same time as Hartland, was dissolved and reformed a century later as a convent for canonesses.⁹⁰

The Cistercian reform movement had arrived in the south-west by the mid-twelfth century, where it found particular favour among the laity, with the proportion of white to

⁸⁵ Holdsworth, 'From 1050 to 1307', p. 45

⁸⁶ Holdsworth, 'Ecclesiastical Institutions', p. 209; Above, Map 1.1 (p. 51a)

⁸⁷ Barlow, *Exeter Acta*, pp. xxxi, xxxiv

⁸⁸ *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 151; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 129-50

⁸⁹ *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 138; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 215-21

⁹⁰ *Medieval Religious Houses*, p. 132; *Cartulary of Canonsleigh Abbey*

black monks being considerably higher than the national average. All Cistercian houses in Devon were lay foundations and, although there is no evidence of antipathy to the Order from the episcopal establishment, Exeter bishops on the whole opted to patronise Austin canons rather than the white monks.⁹¹ Forde Abbey was established in 1136 by one of the sons of Baldwin the Sheriff and it thereafter maintained a close association with the Courtenay family, several of whose members were interred there. It also spawned a major centre of learning in the south-west.⁹² The curialist William Brewer (d. 1226) founded the Premonstratensian (white canons) house of Torre, near to the place of his birth, in 1196, and established a regular community of Cistercians at Dunkeswell shortly after: he entered Dunkeswell towards the end of his life and was buried there. Torre was extremely well endowed by its patron, who used his influence to induce a stream of further grants from local knights. Even in the fourteenth century, when secular donations to the monasteries had all but dried up, Torre remained the most favoured monastic recipient of lay patronage in Devon.⁹³ Newenham Abbey was founded in 1242 by William Brewer's son-in-law Reginald Mohun and another Cistercian house, Buckland Abbey (fd. 1278), was sponsored by Amicia Redvers, the countess of Devon.⁹⁴ There was, therefore, considerable interest on the part of the laity in founding new monasteries from the twelfth century onwards, and justifiably so given the degree of influence that a benefactor could exert over his protégée. Not only would the house provide a source of exclusive religious services and hospitality, but the lay patron could also expect to have a say in the election of a new prior or abbot, or in the administration of the estates during a vacancy.⁹⁵

The Cistercian Order was therefore a success in Devon and some elements of the agrarian economy so distinctive to Cistercian monasteries elsewhere – rural isolation, cultivation of wastelands, and large-scale sheep husbandry – are evident here. Buckfast, with

⁹¹ Holdsworth, 'Cistercians in Devon', pp. 179-80, 185

⁹² Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 341-2; *The Cartulary of Forde Abbey*, ed. Steven Hobbs (Somerset Record Society, lxxxv, 1998), pp. vii-ix; Christopher J. Holdsworth, 'John of Forde and English Cistercian Writing', *TRHS*, 5th ser., xi (1961), pp. 117-35

⁹³ Deryck Seymour, *Torre Abbey* (Exeter, 1977); Holdsworth, 'From 1086 to 1307', p. 43

⁹⁴ *Medieval religious houses*, pp. 108, 112; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 380-2

its Benedictine origins, was a notable exception, bringing with it a well-developed manorial structure more reminiscent of a secular concern than the compact and tightly-controlled estates typical of the Cistercians.⁹⁶ The temporalities of Forde were also spread widely, across four different counties, but by the mid-thirteenth century a system of granges – agricultural sub-stations directly accountable to the cellarer – had established itself.⁹⁷ At Dunkeswell too, demesne activity was concentrated in four contiguous grange farms.⁹⁸ As pioneer-cultivators, however, the Devon Cistercians were either less successful or less resilient than their counterparts elsewhere in England, and were hampered by the local environment. The monks of Forde, for example, who had originally colonised a site in northern Dartmoor in 1136, conceded defeat just five years later and were only prevented from returning to their mother-house when their patron's sister offered them alternative accommodation in the more hospitable climes of lowland Dorset.⁹⁹ Torre Abbey was also agreeably situated, on the south coast, and, being at the heart of a populous and increasingly prosperous maritime and naval community, notably rebelled against the Cistercian ideal of isolation: it was this, however, which had perhaps ensured its continued success in attracting lay patronage at a time when support for nearly all the other Devon houses was declining.¹⁰⁰ A further departure from Cistercian conventions, especially apparent at Torre and Buckland, was the high proportion of revenues that these houses accrued from spiritualities, when the Rule specifically prohibited communities from receiving income from churches.¹⁰¹

2.2 (iii) CONCLUSION

It is evident from this short survey that, with the exception of the estates of the bishopric, religious lordship in the county was dispersed, fragmented and on the whole

⁹⁵ Holdsworth, 'Ecclesiastical Institutions', p. 209

⁹⁶ Holdsworth, 'The Cistercians in Devon', p. 181; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 375-8

⁹⁷ *Cartulary of Forde*, p. ix; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 353-5

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 397-400

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342

¹⁰⁰ Seymour, *Torre Abbey*, p. 57

limited in impact, and that there was no vested monastic interest: most houses were of too recent origin to have accumulated landed estates of any particular importance. The bishop's primacy in the diocese was undisputed and challenges to his authority in the fourteenth century tended to come from prelates reluctant to abandon their profane habits, rather than from over-mighty monks. The relative weakness of monasticism may also be interpreted as a consequence of the relative superiority of secular lordship to religious in Devon: in 1316 just 14% of the manors enumerated in the *Nomina villarum* survey were in the hands of the religious.¹⁰² Nearly all the county's monasteries were secular foundations and most maintained quite strong links with their lay patrons in the fourteenth century.

Some measure of the flavour of popular piety in the fourteenth century may be taken from the *inquisitiones ad quod damnum* of chancery, which were effectively licences for the alienation of land and property to the Church. A sample of grants to Devon houses taken from between about 1284 and 1377, reveals that Torre Abbey was the principal monastic recipient of lay patronage, with Tavistock not far behind.¹⁰³ Exeter Cathedral, however, received more grants than all the monasteries combined: the period coincided with a major programme of re-building and the bishops appear to have been successful in persuading the laity that the fabric fund was more worthy of their pennies than the monastic orders. For example, it was the single largest beneficiary of the large donation of cash distributed by Hugh Courtenay II among all the major religious ecclesiastical institutions in the county in 1340, to commemorate the death of his wife.¹⁰⁴ The chancery documents also illustrate a tendency for lay bequests to be diverted, as the fourteenth century progressed, from the older and grander establishments towards small parish churches or private chapels on family estates, reflecting perhaps a widespread public disillusionment with the monastic ideal.

This trend is discernible in the Courtenay family's religious patronage. Hugh I had been involved in a long-standing dispute over military service with Forde Abbey, the house

¹⁰¹ Holdsworth, 'Ecclesiastical Institutions', p. 211

¹⁰² Below, p. 113

¹⁰³ *Inquisitiones ad quod Damnum* (PRO Lists and Indexes, xvii, xxii, 1904-6)

¹⁰⁴ Below, p. 125-6

traditionally patronised by his ancestors and where his own father was buried, which resulted in the near-fatal shooting of one of the abbot's men in 1288 and the distraint of livestock by Hugh from the abbey's granges.¹⁰⁵ On his death in 1291 Hugh chose to be buried not in the abbey, where most of his English ancestors lay, but in the tiny priory of Cowick on the outskirts of Exeter, which presumably had proven to be more pliable. Hugh II made peace with the abbot of Forde but also opted for burial at Cowick, alongside his wife.¹⁰⁶ Hugh III, on the other hand, withdrew from funding monasteries altogether and directed financial resources to a private chapel that had recently been established in his manor of Colyton. He was later buried in Exeter Cathedral where his son William Courtenay, at that time bishop of London, had reserved a site for a family chantry.¹⁰⁷ In this way, an established monastic community suffered from the changing fashions of its lay patrons who had decided that their spiritual interests were best served outside the cloisters. There was a growing distaste for the monastic life in Devon, from which not even the newer reformed houses were immune: the Cistercian abbey of Buckland (fd. 1278), and the convent of Canonsleigh (fd. 1282), founded in a spirit of piety no less intense than that of the twelfth century, apparently fared no better in attracting lay patronage than the older and supposedly more 'corrupt' establishments.

¹⁰⁵ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 344

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 344; 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 218

¹⁰⁷ Below, p. 126

2. LANDSCAPE, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY: THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF SEIGNORIAL LORDSHIP

2.1. HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS AND THE PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

The methods conventionally employed by historians to measure the prosperity of medieval agricultural societies – direct comparisons of population density and arable productivity, land use and wealth distribution – contribute to a dismal picture of economic and demographic progress in medieval Devon. In the returns of the 1334 lay subsidy, Devon ranked thirty-second out of the thirty-nine assessed counties in terms of rateable wealth per acre, and sixteenth in gross yield, despite comprising the single largest geographical area. Between 1086 and 1377 its population expanded by just 26%, the lowest rate of growth for any shire, placing Devon among the least densely-settled regions of medieval England.¹ Usually such evidence is accepted at face value and the county's apparent economic backwardness – to be explained by its relatively late colonisation, its vast tracts of uncultivable land, and the general under-exploitation of agrarian resources – has been taken for granted. More detailed studies of the south-west have, however, questioned the suitability of using this data – which essentially equate economic success with densely-populated areas of countryside rich in corn – to measure prosperity in an upland economy geared more towards pastoral husbandry and which was structurally unsuited to the demands of high-density communal settlement. John Hatcher, for instance, has helped to dispel the myth of late-medieval Cornwall's 'Cinderella' economy by placing greater emphasis on the importance of non-agrarian activities to the local economy, especially tin-mining, and by highlighting the innovative social experiments in tenure pioneered on the duchy of Cornwall estates in the fourteenth century.² In Devon, H. P. R. Finberg has demonstrated how

¹ *The Lay Subsidy of 1334*, ed. R. E. Glasscock (1975), pp. 49-66; W. G. Hoskins, *Old Devon* (1966), p. 164; Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 9-10

² Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, pp. 8-36

flexibility and agricultural diversification could bring success even to the second-rate arable of the Tavistock abbey demesnes.³

A re-appraisal of the evidence is clearly overdue as a corrective to the overwhelming impression of economic backwardness and demographic sluggishness left by the documentation of central government. A greater reliance on the meagre, yet often fruitful, corpus of locally-produced economic evidence - even where it fails to conform neatly to accepted views of late-medieval agriculture formed from the better documented estates of lowland England - will help to realise this objective. Far from flattering the received wisdom, a study which embraces rather than ignores or disparages the region's agricultural, commercial and industrial idiosyncrasies will begin to reveal a diverse and even dynamic economy, arguably better equipped to weather the agrarian and demographic crises of the fourteenth century than the more 'advanced', yet perhaps inherently less flexible, structures of champion England.⁴

First, however, it is necessary to gain some sense of the physical landscape, an immutable feature that, probably more than any other single factor, influenced the evolution of late-medieval Devon's economic and social infrastructure. Most of the county lies within Cyril Fox's 'Highland Zone', the southern-most tip of the dividing line being the mouth of the Exe estuary in east Devon.⁵ That division does, however, tend to over-simplify the enormously varied topography of the south-western peninsula, and a more apt description of the environment is perhaps Malcolm Todd's "un-English promiscuity of upland and lowland", which takes into account not only wide variations in land relief and the dramatic conjunction of water and earth, but also the sharply contrasting geology that occurs within a compact and relatively small geographical entity.⁶

Reconstructing past landscapes is no easy task for the historian, but certain universal features may be extrapolated and used to good effect. Of these the unseen geology and the

³ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 86-128

⁴ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 684-5; Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, p. 12

⁵ Fox, *Personality of Britain*, p. 29

⁶ Malcolm Todd, *The South West to AD 1000* (1987), p. 1

visible soil are least susceptible to short-term physical change or human interference and have therefore had the single most important influence on the evolution of the natural landscape.⁷ Practically every geological era left its mark on the Cornubian massif, as the Devon-Cornwall peninsula is referred to by geologists, but two rocks, the Devonian and the Carboniferous, predominate and have determined many of the physical characteristics of the landscape. The red sandstones of the Devonian era, formed in a tropical climate, are concentrated mainly in the lowland coastal area of the South Hams, in south-west Devon, but appear also on higher terrain in north-east Devon. Younger sandstones characterise the cliffscape and some of the interior of east Devon, and also the large, flat, hinterland of the Vale of Exeter, where there are deposits of chalk and limestone. By contrast, the Carboniferous period produced a mixed bag of sandstones and shale, less porous than sandstone, that cover the large swathe of north Devon and the interior known as the Culm Measures. Dartmoor comprises a third major geological formation, essentially a high plateau of granite sparsely covered with peaty earth and scrubland.⁸

Soil is the outward manifestation of the underlying geology, its form and quality being determined by the type of rock on which it is based. Broadly speaking, the light, 'warm' sandstones, found predominantly in the south and east, tend to produce more fertile and easily-worked soils, while the poorer quality arable is concentrated in the north, west and centre, where the terrain is poorly-drained and the clay is most difficult to work. The granite peaks of Dartmoor support the shallowest and least fertile soils. Analysing this aspect of the physical landscape gives us some idea of the potential for effective crop cultivation and other agricultural activity in different regions of the county; an essential pre-requisite to making sense of the bewildering array of impressions left by the medieval manorial records.

⁷ C. J. Caseldine, 'Environmental Setting', in *Historical Atlas*, p. 25

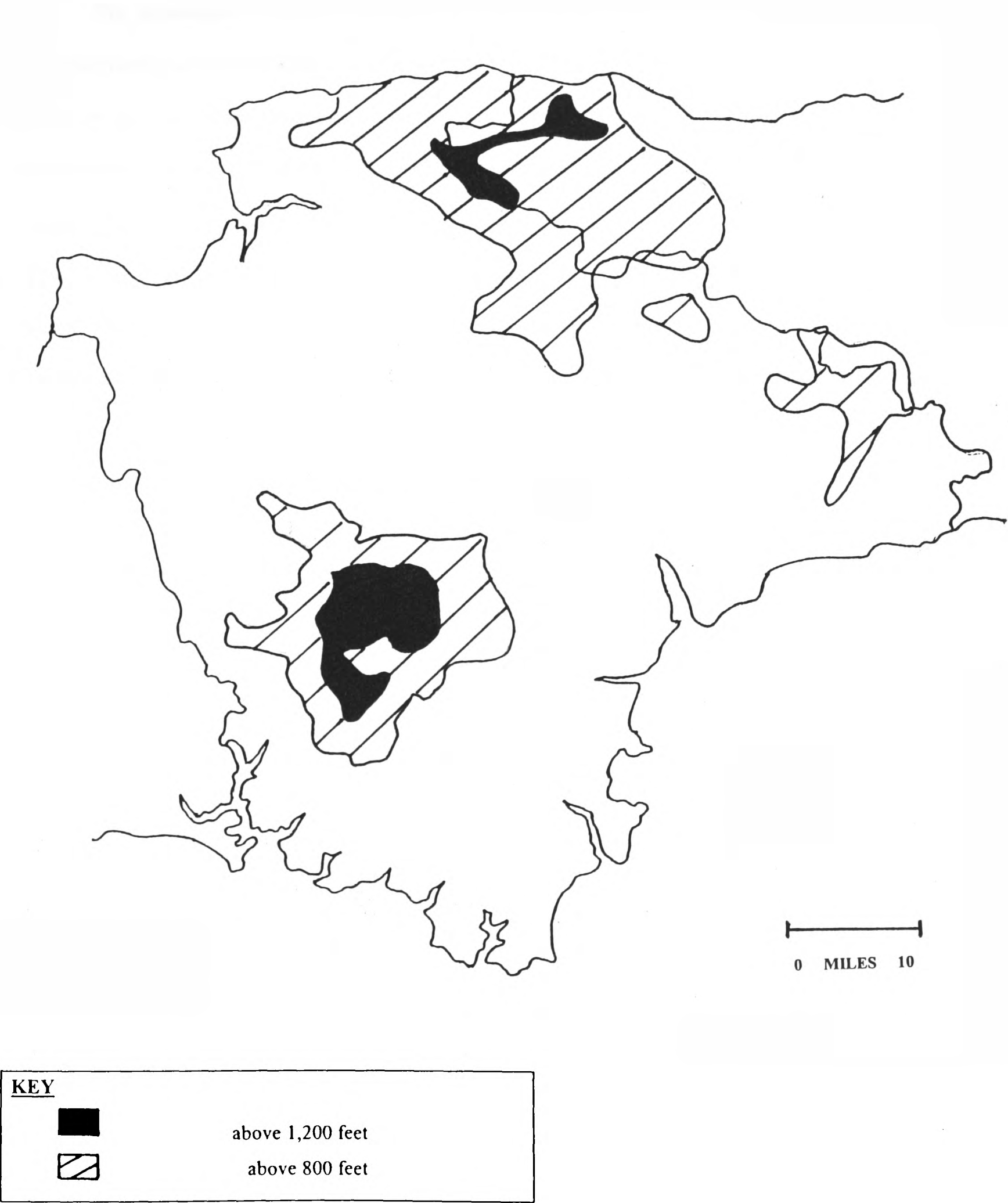
⁸ Henry de la Beche, *Report on the Geology of Cornwall, Devon and West Somerset* (1839); H. Dewy, *British Regional Geology: South-West England* (1948); R. Weldon-Finn, 'Devon', in *The Domesday Geography of South-West England*, ed. H. C. Darby & R. Weldon-Finn (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 225, 227; E. M. Durrance & D. J. C. Laming, *The Geology of Devon* (Exeter, 1982); Caseldine, 'Environmental setting', pp. 25-34

This brief geological survey is clearly an over-simplification of the true complexity that underpins the county's topography, but it does enable us to identify important sub-county identities in the landscape, which will be useful as short-hand in the following discussion of rural economy and society. The division of Devon into four broadly coherent geographical 'regions' - north, south, east and central, with separate consideration for the areas of moorland - is one that has been generally accepted by historians of the south-west.⁹ There are of course anomalies and exceptions, and these designations can only be considered as a very general guide. For example, while the soil of most of the northern region is poorly drained and deficient in essential nutrients, parts of the coastal north-east contain premium arable, by local standards, as do the sheltered and well-irrigated plains of the Taw-Torridge river delta. Similarly, while the arable of the south-east contains some superb 'red' (sandstone) soils, much of the interior is too hilly and barren for anything but grazing.

Climate is another important environmental factor. A high average rainfall – today, most parts of the county receive at least thirty-seven inches of precipitation a year – has usually been the main limitation on the cultivation of crops, particularly in the colder and frequently water-logged clay soils of the interior: 'premium' grains, such as wheat and barley, are ill-suited to damp growing conditions. Some compensation is afforded by the relatively mild and humid climate which permits a longer than average growing season, but water remains a defining feature of the physical landscape. The only English shire to possess two separate coastlines, Devon's interior is penetrated by myriad small water-courses, riven with steep-sided valleys, and graced with a handful of wide river deltas. Water is the county's most bountiful natural resource and the problems of distribution commonly associated with champion England are practically unknown here. This has had a profound impact on demographic evolution since it means that almost no part of the county is uninhabitable. With little need to husband a normally precious resource, there has historically been less

⁹ For example: F. W. Morgan, 'The Domesday Geography of Devon', *TDA*, lxxii (1942), pp. 305-31; R. Weldon-Finn, 'Devon', pp. 290-2; Hatcher, 'South-Western England'; Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall'; Mark Stoye, 'Divisions within the County Community of Devonshire' (University of Oxford, D. Phil. thesis, 1992), pp. 11-18; Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 9-16; Below, Map 2.1 (p. 61a)

Map 2.1: LAND RELIEF



incentive to imitate the large-scale communal settlement patterns found in the English midlands and lowland south and, consequently, the small hamlet or isolated farmstead emerged as the most common form of settlement in medieval Devon.¹⁰

The abundance of water, combined with vast tracts of hilly, sub-standard arable, provided ideal conditions for the development of specialised pastoral farming. Less labour-intensive and less reliant upon expensive capital equipment, the growing tendency towards pastoralism militated still further against the evolution of large rural communities in late-medieval Devon, resulting in a thinly-dispersed population of some sixty-thousand in 1377.¹¹ This, as we have seen, was manifest in slow demographic growth and in the low subsidy yields of the fourteenth century, and has tended to excite allegations of ‘economic backwardness’ from historians. If, on the other hand, one were to interpret these characteristics of Devon’s economic and social infrastructure as products of the immanent landscape and environment, rather than attempt to write history on the basis of criteria derived from the study of very dissimilar societies, a more sympathetic and less structurally biased model of research for the history of the medieval south-west begins to emerge. Then the diverse and more unusual elements of the late-medieval economy may be appreciated not as deviations from the norm but rather as outward signs of a flexible and highly-adaptable system.

2.2. AN ECONOMIC SURVEY OF THE PRINCIPAL ESTATES

Our enquiry begins with an overview of Devon’s three outstanding landed economies, the manors of which lay in more than one county and under whose auspices thousands, rather than dozens or hundreds, of tenants were accommodated. These units – the Courtenay and Martin estates, and those of the bishop of Exeter – were at the beginning of the fourteenth century in the hands of ordinarily resident lords and, in the period under

¹⁰ Below, pp. 89-91

¹¹ J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Populations* (Albuquerque, 1948), p. 78

discussion, all underwent enlargement or at least a substantial consolidation of their resources: the Courtenays' by the addition of Plympton in 1297 and by purchases of new land; the Martins' by the inheritance of William III's mother, which was united with patrimonial Dartington in 1308; while even the episcopal estates experienced modest expansion and economic revitalisation under the worldly stewardship of Bishop Stapeldon.

These three economic operations, with their resident and generally vigorous lords, afforded an equilibrium and introduced a degree of stability to the local balance of power that was proven subsequently to be both temporary and unsustainable. The Martin dynasty failed in the male line in 1326, whereupon the estates were split into three, not to be reunited until 1342, under an absentee lord.¹² The turbulent episcopate of Walter Stapeldon (r. 1307-26) was succeeded by the more orthodox administration of John Grandisson (r. 1327-69), whose management of the estates was more conservative.¹³ Only on the Courtenay demesne was there a semblance of continuity, and Hugh II prospered in the temporary vacuum of power left by the successive deaths of Martin and Stapeldon in 1326, consolidating his entrenched position in county society and finding favour with the new political regime.

What follows is a description of these estates as they stood in the early fourteenth century – their size and scale, their geographical distribution, and the nature of economic activity within them, as well as the major phases in their subsequent development - by way of a prelude to a more general consideration of demographic and economic structures. An initial note of warning should be sounded concerning the units of measurement referred to in this chapter, since customary weights and measures sometimes replaced the statutory in Devon. In particular, the customary acre used in many parts of the county - the 'Dumnonian' acre also had currency in parts of lowland south Wales where it had probably been introduced by English settlers in the twelfth century - was nearly a fifth larger than the statute equivalent and it is usually not possible to tell which is being referred to in the documentation.¹⁴

¹² Above, pp. 36-9

¹³ Below, chapter, 5; pp. 233-40

¹⁴ B. E. Howells, 'The Distribution of Customary Acres in South Wales', *National Library of Wales Journal*, xv (1967-8), p. 227; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 301

Admittedly, the problems presented by this anomaly are not nearly so severe as the elusive ‘Cornish’ acre - a fiscal unit that could range from anywhere between fifteen and three hundred statute acres – but they should be borne in mind.¹⁵

The episcopal demesne, which at the beginning of our period consisted of some sixteen manors scattered widely across Devon and Cornwall, with a sprinkling of lands elsewhere in Somerset and southern England, had altered little in its overall structure since it was first assessed in 1086.¹⁶ The immense manor of Crediton, which had been the seat of the bishops until 1050, was economically the most advanced of all these estates and, at 185 ploughlands, easily the largest single agricultural unit in Devon.¹⁷ Well settled in 1086 with a tenant population of 407, it may already have acquired some of the urban features that distinguished it in 1307-8 when it contained a medium-sized borough and five mills, one of which was a fulling mill to exploit the burgeoning local cloth industry.¹⁸ Crediton was valued at £75 in 1086 and a healthy rental income testifies to its continued strength in the early-fourteenth century, but by now the manors of Paignton, Chudleigh and Tawton, all located on the choicest soils of south and east Devon and which contained the bishops’ other official residences, had also developed into important centres of economic activity.¹⁹ Near to Paignton, on the south coast, was Teignton, with its appendant port of Teignmouth, and the borough of Ashburton, one of Devon’s four stannary towns, lay to the north, in Dartmoor: the bishop was entitled by custom to the tithe of all tin weighed in Devon.²⁰ To the east of Exeter lay Clyst, on a fertile estuarine plain, while Bishops Tawton and Bishops Nympton nestled in the sheltered Taw valley, in the north of the county.

¹⁵ *The Cornish Lands of the Arundels of Lanherne*, ed. H. S. A. Fox & O. J. Padel (D&CRS, new ser., xxxxi, 2000), pp. liv-lv

¹⁶ *DB Devon*, 2

¹⁷ *DB Devon*, 2/2

¹⁸ *RWS*, p. 23

¹⁹ *Roll of Divers Accounts*, ed. Fred A. Cazel (PRS new ser., xxxxiv), p. 43 (vacancy account for the temporalities of Exeter, 1223); PRO SC/1138/1 (vacancy account, 1292); *Account of the Executors of . Thomas Bishop of Exeter*, ed. William Hale (Camden Soc., new ser., x, 1874), pp. 14-22 (executors’ account, 1310 for 1307); *RWS*, pp. 23-8 (rent roll, 1307-8); *Ibid.*, pp. 570-5 (executors’ inventory, 1330 for 1326); PRO SC/1138/2 (vacancy account, 1369-70); BL Add. Ch. 28859 (summary account, 1372)

²⁰ *Cal. Chancery Warrants (1244-1326)*, p. 444

The bishops' estates therefore contained extensive tracts of some of the best arable in the south-west, with the Cornish manors being located mainly on the fertile coastal lowlands. The evidence is insufficient to draw useful conclusions about the size of the demesnes or modes of cultivation, but, according to an account of Bishop Stapeldon's executors, almost 1,100 acres of arable, mainly in Devon, were sown exclusively with wheat and rye in 1326, a considerable achievement in this damp environment.²¹ A fragment of a vacancy account of 1292 appears to confirm the unusual specialisation of the episcopal demesnes in these premium grains, with oats in evidence only as animal fodder.²² The scattered documentary evidence also suggests that practically all the Devon and Cornwall manors were being directly cultivated in the first half of the fourteenth century, a reflection perhaps of the bishops' itinerant lifestyle and the need to victual several households. Lesser interest was shown in the Somerset estates, while those in Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire were largely redundant as demesne enterprises by the beginning of the fourteenth century.

These manors were among the agriculturally most mature in the south-west, with the bulk of potential arable under cultivation in 1086, yet it is the vast areas of pasture and woodland and the large quantity of livestock that catch the eye. Most of the episcopal demesne herds and flocks had grown significantly between 1086 and 1307 and the expansion of the flocks continued and even gathered pace over the course of the fourteenth century. Although the evidence is imperfect, consisting of executors' accounts of the sale of moveable goods, it is clear that animal husbandry had now become a major part, perhaps even the mainstay, of the episcopal economy. For example, while the sum received from the sale of Bishop Stapeldon's corn was almost two-thirds less than that accounted for Bishop Bitton's twenty years earlier, sales of cattle, sheep and pigs had all risen markedly, although this may be partly explained by the widespread pillaging of the episcopal manors in the aftermath of Stapeldon's murder.²³ Crediton had become the centre of the bishops' livestock operations in

²¹ *RWS*, p. 574

²² SC1/1138/2

²³ *Account of the Executors*, pp. 14-22; *RWS*, pp. 570-4; Below, Fig. 2.8 (p. 95a)

Devon and hosted what was probably the county's largest livestock market in the fourteenth century, supplying the rising urban demand from Exeter for meat, hides, skins and fleeces.²⁴

The trend towards specialist livestock husbandry, which exploited the abundance of hillside pasture and rough moorland grazing and was less reliant upon a diminishing pool of human labour, was probably the most significant agricultural development on the bishop of Exeter's estates in the fourteenth century. On the eastern manor of Clyst, the only episcopal demesne for which we possess continuous account rolls, sales of pastoral produce in the 1370-90s were consistently the second largest item of income after rents. Husbandry here was efficient, with livestock yields above the regional average and the incidence of disease and sterility at normal levels. The greatest advantage of pastoralism in the middle ages was the comparative ease with which the end product could be transported and marketed, and cattle and sheep from Clyst were driven to the bishops' own market at Crediton. Grain cultivation in Clyst, by contrast, consisted mainly of oats which were sold or used as animal fodder, and followed a relatively inefficient system of continuous and intensive cropping.²⁵ A further indication of the centrality of animal husbandry to the episcopal economy is the bishops' seemingly eccentric persistence in exacting customary payments of 'berbiage' (sheep rent) and 'churchscot' (normally a corn rent, but here paid in hens), rather than accepting cash in lieu.²⁶

Devon's two largest secular demesnes were of more recent creation. The Martins' Dartington-Barnstaple estate appears to have been the more impressive in scale, with some 4,200 acres of potential arable in Devon alone in 1326, and at least as much again in pasture, meadow, woodland and hunting parks, although it is difficult to enumerate precisely as many of the manors were located in conspicuously pastoral countryside where grassland was commonplace and too low in unit value to bother recording.²⁷ The patrimony consisted of

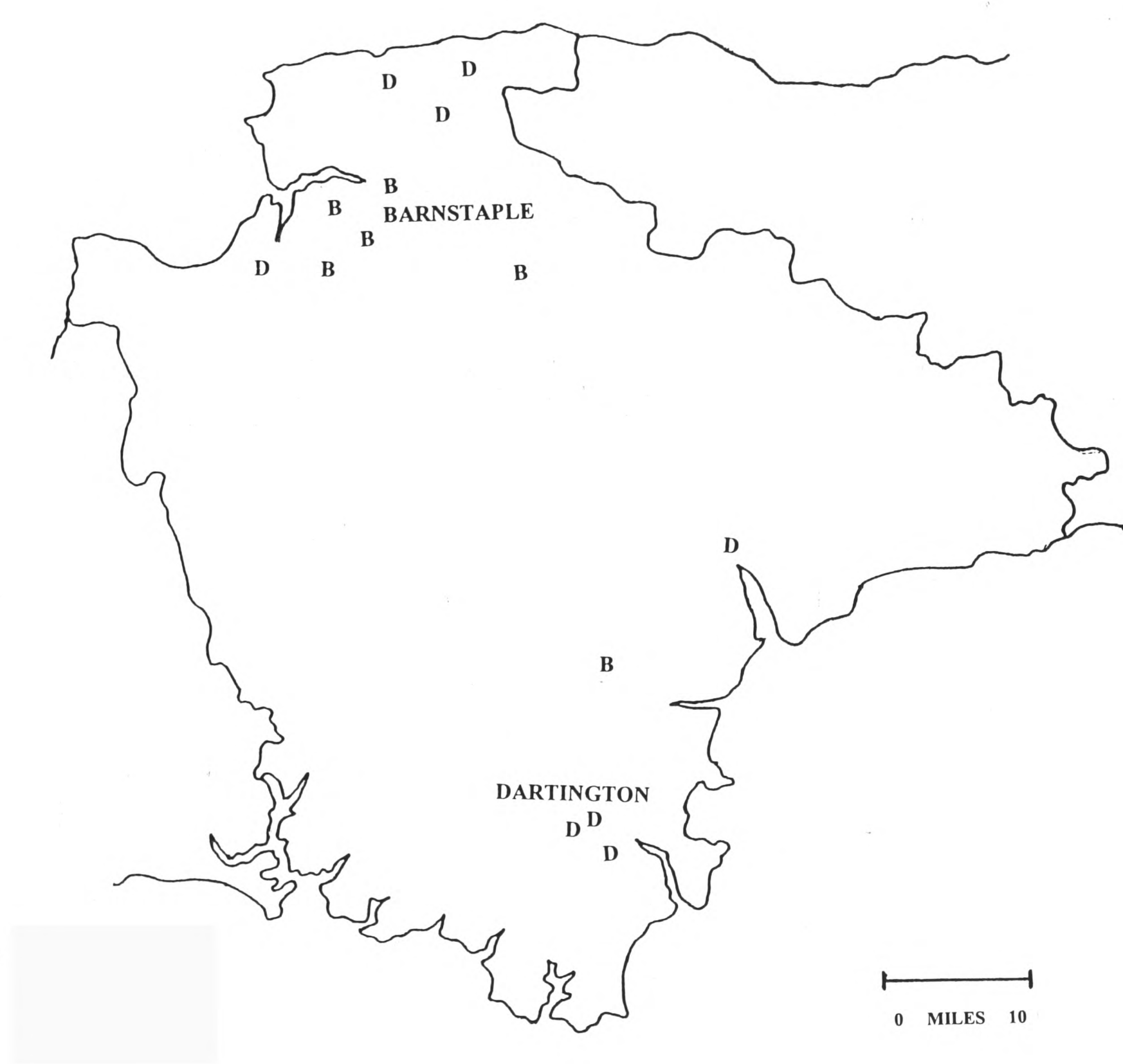
²⁴ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, p. 294

²⁵ DRO W1258.G3 1-10 (manorial accounts of Bishops Clyst, 1374-1421), printed and discussed in N. W. Alcock 'An East Devon Manor in the Later Middle Ages', *TDA*, ci (1970), pp. 141-87

²⁶ *RWS*, pp. 23-5; *The Cornish Lands of the Arundels*, p. 142 & n. 56 (explanation of berbiage)

²⁷ PRO C134/99 (IPM, William Martin IV, 1326); Bruce Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 86; Below, Map 2.2 (p. 66a); Fig. 2.1 (p. 68a)

Map 2.2: THE MARTIN ESTATES IN DEVON, c. 1326



<u>KEY</u>	
DARTINGTON	honorial <i>caput</i>
D	manor belonging to Dartington estate
B	manor belonging to Barnstaple estate

seven manors and a number of hamlets in Devon, four manors in Somerset, and the marcher lordship of Cemais in western Pembrokeshire, and had been accumulated over some two and a half centuries through a combination of marriage, conquest and royal patronage. To this William III had added his mother's Tracy inheritance in 1308, the lands of which were concentrated in the Taw valley region of north Devon and included the populous and commercially important town of Barnstaple.²⁸ Together with South Molton, on the southern fringe of Exmoor, the northern ports of Combe Martin and Ilfracombe, and a share in the north-western borough of Great Torrington, William now wielded a commanding stake in the urban life of north Devon, and Barnstaple came to occupy a position of strategic importance to the Martin estates. With easy access to the Bristol Channel, via the wide Taw estuary, its commercial orbit encompassed overseas markets as far afield as Carmarthen (Pembs.) and Waterford (Carlow), and afforded a convenient point of embarkation for Newport, an urban settlement in Cemais, which had itself recently undergone economic revitalisation at the hands of William III's father and grandfather: Barnstaple's status as the regional entrepôt of north Devon and as the hub of a wide, trans-channel commercial network, was thereby enhanced by its addition to the Martin family's equally far-flung territorial empire.²⁹

William Martin's estate, like the bishops', was one of above average-sized manors (Dartington, Fremington, Kingston and Nymet Tracey all contained more than one thousand acres of demesne land each), and the pastoral dimension was equally apparent here. But it also contained some of the finest arable to be found in Devon, with that on the baronial *caput* of Dartington valued at as much as 8d. per acre.³⁰ The total arable in demesne on four of those manors (Tawstock, Fremington, Nymet Tracey and Bovey Tracey) had increased by an average of approximately 56% between 1308, when William III received his mother's lands,

²⁸ Above, p. 37

²⁹ *Reprint of the Barnstaple Records*, ed. J. R. Chanter & T. Wainwright (2 vols., Barnstaple, 1900), i, 151, 252 (commercial treaty with mayor of Carmarthen, 1356; fine in mayors' court over infringement of trading rights in Waterford); E. A. Lewis, 'A Contribution to the Commercial History of Medieval Wales, *Y Cymmrodor*, xxiv (1913), pp. 136-8; *Historical and Municipal Documents of Ireland, AD 1172-1320*, ed. J. T. Gilbert (Rolls ser., liii, 1870), pp. 3, 6, 32, 113; *Baronia de Kemeys*, pp. 50-2, 57-60

³⁰ PRO C134/99, m. 14

and the death of William IV in 1326: in that same period, the unit value of arable rose by at least 1d. an acre, leaving the impression that William III had invested substantially and prudently in the improvement of agriculture on his new possessions.³¹ The meticulous recording of gardens, orchards and other small enclosures on most of the Martins' lands, is further proof of the vitality of arable husbandry in this estate at the beginning of the fourteenth century.³²

By contrast, the smaller, compact and more regular-sized manors of the Courtenays' Okehampton estate conform readily to most historians' idea of the 'classic' manorial demesne: the average unit size of arable demesnes in eleven of the Okehampton manors at around the turn of the fourteenth century was 137 acres, compared to about 342 acres on the Dartington-Barnstaple estate in 1326, and not one was extended at more than four hundred acres, unlike William Martin's vast estates at Dartington and Fremington.³³ The Courtenays' manors may have been smaller but demesne activity was probably no less pronounced. The severe contraction of agriculture on the comital manors of Tiverton, Topsham, Plympton and Exminster in the thirteenth century had stabilised by the 1290s and arable husbandry on the estate as a whole appears to have been maintained at a fairly consistent level right up until the mid-1380s, when the demesnes began to be leased out: the total acreage of arable in direct cultivation on those manors for which we have comparable data shrank only slightly in the time span of our period, from approximately 1,600 acres in 1292 to 1,300 acres in 1377.³⁴

Despite the apparent robustness of crop cultivation on the Courtenays' estates, the total land available in Devon for agriculture was small in comparison to the Martins', and scattered receivers' accounts of the 1380s and 1390s suggest that a high proportion of their

³¹ PRO C134/10, no. 12 (IPM, Geoffrey Camville, 1308); C134/99, mm. 9-10

³² PRO C134/99, mm. 4, 6-7, 9-10

³³ PRO C133/62, no. 7; C135/360, no. 3; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 67; Below, Fig. 2.1 (p. 68a)

³⁴ PRO E364/1, mm. 1, 3; E372/69, m. 15 (minsters' accounts, minority Baldwin Redvers III, 1223-6); C132/3, no. 10 (IPM, Earl Baldwin III, 1245); C132/29, no. 2 (IPM, Earl Baldwin IV, 1262); C133/40, no. 5 (IPM, Amicia Fortibus, 1284); SC6/827/39 (reeve's account, earldom of Devon, 1286-7); E152/4, m. 14 (IPM, Isabella Fortibus, 1293); SC6/829/27 (minsters' accounts, minority Hugh Courtenay II, 1293-7); the material here is printed and discussed in K. Ugawa, 'The Economic Development of some Devon Manors in the Thirteenth Century', *TDA*, lxxxiv (1962), pp. 630-82; DRO CR/490 (reeve's

**FIG. 2.1: DISTRIBUTION OF DEMESNE ACREAGES ON THE DEVON MANORS OF
HUGH COURTENAY II (1297) AND WILLIAM MARTIN IV (1326)**

	ARABLE	PAST.	MEAD.	WOOD	MISC.	TOTAL
<u>COURTENAY¹</u>						
Aylesbeare (1273)	120		6	12		138
Chawleigh (1291)	80					80
Chulmleigh (1291)	142		93	60		295
Colyton (1291)	186					186
Esse (1273)	45	7	1			53
Exminster (1294-5)	88	186	30			304
Kenn (1273)	100		10	5	40	155
Musbury (1273)	150		20	20		190
Okehampton (1291)	32	52	40	240		364
Plympton (1293)	264	66	15			345
Sampford Courtenay (1273)	120		10	20		150
Tiverton (1293)	73	16	16			105
Topsham (1294-5)	158				73	231
Whimble (1273)	100		8	20		128
	(1658)					(2724)
<u>MARTIN²</u>						
Bovey Tracey	213	6	30	60	40	349
Combe Martin	182	16	13	10	150	371
Dartington	486	54	18	300	100	958
Fremington	741	184	8	54		987
Holne				160	60	220
Kingston	863		15	80		958
Langacre	152	38	17			207
North Lew	80			18		98
Nymet Tracey	132	29		1000	150	1311
Raddon	81	105	5			191
Shillingford	55		2			57
Tawstock	813		18	6	60	897
Up Exe	156		12	10	40	218
Warkleigh	102	110	2		82	296
Wotton	135		3		50	188
	(4191)					(7306)

¹ Estates inherited by Hugh II in 1297, with data from the nearest available extent: PRO C133/6, no. 1 (IPM, John Courtenay, 1273); C133/62, no. 7 (IPM, Hugh Courtenay I, 1291); E152/4, m. 14 (IPM, Isabella Fortibus, 1293); SC6/829/27 (ministers' account, earldom of Devon, 1294-5)

² PRO C134/99 (IPM, William Martin IV, 1326)

landed income was drawn from outside the county and consisted mainly of cash rents and leaseholds. Non-agrarian assets in Devon included four thriving boroughs (Tiverton, Plympton, Honiton and Okehampton) and a semi-industrial suburb (Exe Island) in the environs of Exeter, containing six mills, which helped to bolster seignorial finances as revenues from traditional manorial sources declined in the final decades of the fourteenth century.³⁵

2.3. THE MEDIEVAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Our preliminary sketch of the county's main economic units completed, we turn now to those who operated within the structures of manorial lordship. Rural society in the medieval south-west differed in several fundamental respects from that of the better documented and more exhaustively researched manors of lowland England, most notably in the categories of tenurial status and conditions of villeinage, and it is necessary here to outline some of its most distinctive features.³⁶ It has become a habit of some medieval historians to depict social conditions in the south-west as inherently 'reactionary' or oppressive, with conservative-minded landlords holding a large servile population in thrall. The large proportion of slaves recorded in Domesday for the counties of western England – with over three thousand *servi* in 1086, Devon had the dubious honour of heading the rankings - is usually cited as evidence of this, with E. B. Fryde helpfully explaining that the "agricultural backwardness and consequent poverty" of Devon and Cornwall had rendered them especially susceptible to serfdom.³⁷ Other scholars have, by contrast, been at pains to emphasise the

account, Tiverton manor, 1308-9); PRO C133/62, no. 7 (IPM, Hugh Courtenay I, 1292); C135/260, no. 3 (IPM, Hugh Courtenay III, 1377)

³⁵ BL Add. Ch. 13906; 64317 (receiver's account, 1380-1); 64318 (receiver's account, 1387-8); 13972 (receiver's account, 1392-3); 64321 (receiver's account, 1397-8); 64322 (receiver's account, 1399-1400); Below, pp. 103-11

³⁶ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', p. 675

³⁷ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 76; Sally Harvey, 'The Bishopric of Exeter', in *AHEW*, ii, ed. Hallam (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 68-9; E. B. Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 1996), p. 209

relatively 'liberated' condition of rural communities in the south-west, identifying various ways in which the conditions of the peasantry were ameliorated in the later middle ages.³⁸

The movement towards the colonisation of vast areas of countryside previously classified as 'waste' (moorland, marsh and woodland), which had begun in the eleventh century and sustained momentum until the demographic crisis of 1348-9, combined with slow population growth - both, perhaps, elements of Fryde's notion of "agricultural backwardness" - actually promoted the evolution of a large free tenantry and a villeinage on whom the burdens of customary obligation fell comparatively lightly.³⁹ The expansion of the tin-mining industry in both Devon and Cornwall from the mid-twelfth century, and the fashion among Devon landowners in the thirteenth century for creating small seignorial 'boroughs', also hastened the development of a 'freer' peasantry by giving rise to new species of non-servile tenure.⁴⁰ In this way society in fourteenth-century Devon differed quite markedly from that of longer established and more densely-settled communities in the midlands and southern England, and the 'classic' manorial structure of the English lowlands, characterised by intensive arable cultivation and tight social regulation, is rarely apparent here. But far from being a symptom of economic backwardness, this had helped to shield communities from the worst effects of land shortage and famine in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries by encouraging economic diversification away from grain mono-culture, and ensured that the local economy would continue to remain moderately buoyant in the immediate aftermath of Black Death.⁴¹

Whilst it is true that an unusually large proportion of the population of Devon in 1086 existed in a state of slavery or unfreedom, the impression of abject servility is slightly misleading and may have been exaggerated by historians. The oft-cited *liberi homines* and *sochemanni* - usually regarded as benchmarks of 'freedom' in the counties of central and eastern England - are wholly lacking from the Devon survey, in which *villanus* was used in a

³⁸ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 675-85

³⁹ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 77-9, 89-90; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 56-8, 68-9; Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 675-6

⁴⁰ Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 70-1; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 70-3

very broad sense: it stood not only for 'villein', as that term came to be understood in later centuries, but encompassed a wide range of tenants, from Saxon *thegn* to Anglo-Norman peasant. There is also less of a firm distinction between *villani* and *bordarii* or *cottarii* in the Devon returns, and the latter are best understood as economic gradations of *villani*, probably inferior in status.⁴² Semantic irregularities should not distract us, however, since although Domesday was conceived as a universal survey, its contents may not always be interpreted uniformly: in short, the failure of the Devon returns to differentiate precisely between classes of tenants is a reflection not so much of a servile county as of peculiar local conditions and the methods of enquiry employed by commissioners.⁴³

However, the large class of *servi*, a term less ambiguous in its meaning than *villani*, cannot be explained so easily. Finberg has calculated that *servi* accounted for some 26% of the recorded population of Devon in 1086, a far higher proportion than in either the counties of the English midlands or of eastern England, where they were sometimes absent altogether.⁴⁴ Levels of slavery seem to have fluctuated quite widely on individual estates in Domesday Devon - from about 29% of the total tenantry on the modest demesnes of the abbot of Buckfast, to as little as 12% on the large episcopal estate - and is worth bearing in mind when considering Fryde's assertion that slavery was rife on the large ecclesiastical, and by implication 'reactionary', demesnes in the south-west.⁴⁵ Nor was there a simple correlation between the number of slaves on a manor who, one presumes, were engaged primarily in agricultural labour, and the total area of demesne arable under cultivation: while Bishop Ordulf may have required forty men to drive the thirteen ploughs in Crediton, the dean and chapter of Exeter Cathedral had no slaves at all to work their five ploughlands at St. Marychurch.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 684-5

⁴² Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 56-7

⁴³ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', p. 675

⁴⁴ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 60

⁴⁵ Fryde, *Peasants and Landlords*, p. 209; Below, Fig. 2.2 (p. 71a)

⁴⁶ DB Devon, 2/2, 8

FIG. 2.2: PERCENTAGES OF SLAVES (*SERV*) ON A SAMPLE OF DOMESDAY ESTATES

Domesday Estate	Manors	Tenants	Slaves
Royal demesne ¹	67	3086	17%
Bishop of Exeter ²	15	1067	12%
Ralph (of Pomerai) ³	37	524	23%
Buckfast Abbey ⁴	11	247	29%
Tavistock Abbey ⁵	9	232	20%
Robert (of Aumale) ⁶	9	184	24%
Robert (of Pontchardon) ⁷	5	75	24%
Robert (of Beaumont) ⁸	5	50	14%

¹ *DB Devon*, 1

² *Ibid.*, 2

³ *Ibid.*, 34

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16, 69-72, 74

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16, 65-8, 137

The factors underlying the creation of this large servile population need not detain us for long here: in very general terms, they are linked to the relatively late Saxon colonisation of the region and the consequent under-development of its social institutions.⁴⁷ The large number of charters of manumission surviving from the following century is an expected corollary of this situation and suggests that the high ratio of *servi* to *villani* in 1086 may have been but a transient phase.⁴⁸ Domesday can be used to illustrate a further demographic feature that had profound implications for agricultural development in subsequent centuries. Although this large county had been extensively colonised by 1086 – W. G. Hoskins counted over nine-thousand distinct settlements distributed fairly evenly, even on the remoter and most inhospitable slopes of Dartmoor and Exmoor – vast areas of land remained uncultivated and under-exploited.⁴⁹ For example, just forty-five of the 110 ploughlands in the royal manor of Hartland were in cultivation in 1086, while in Bishop's Tawton forty-four of the 150 ploughlands available remained untilled.⁵⁰ There are also records of large tracts of non-arable land, such as the 3½ square leagues of pasture, one league of woodland and twelve furlongs of underwood on the royal demesne manor of Exminster, or the two hundred acres of pasture and five leagues of woodland in episcopal Crediton.⁵¹

Opportunities therefore abounded for those hardy enough to tackle the 'waste', and there are numerous examples from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of lords granting small estates on the fringes of their manors to colonist-peasants who subsequently appear in the documentation as free tenants.⁵² The outcome of this process was a high concentration of free tenants on some estates in the north and west of the county where moorland and heath – the 'marginal arable' sought by the pioneer-colonists – were most prolific. For example, in 1301 no less than eighty-seven *liberi homines* were residing on the manor of Hartland, where in

⁴⁷ Todd, *South-West to A.D. 1000*, pp. 267-72

⁴⁸ Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 431-6; F. Rose-Troup, 'Exeter Manumissions and Quittances of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *TDA*, lxix (1937), pp. 417-44

⁴⁹ Hoskins, 'Highland Zone', p. 20; Below, Fig. 2.3 (p. 72a)

⁵⁰ DB Devon, 1/30, 2/11

⁵¹ DB Devon, 1/4, 2/2

⁵² W. G. Hoskins & H. P. R. Finberg, *Devonshire Studies* (1952), pp. 320-1; Hatcher, 'South-Western England', p. 240

FIG. 2.3: ARABLE DEMESNES IN CULTIVATION ON A SAMPLE OF DOMESDAY ESTATES

(expressed as percentage of ploughs to ploughlands; demesne arable to total available land)

Domesday Estate	P/lands	Ploughs	Cultivated	Total arable in demesne
Royal demesne	1707	1166	68%	11%
Bishop of Exeter	602	477	79%	8%
Ralph (of Pomerai)	215	175	81%	32%
Tavistock Abbey	138	84	61%	14%
Buckfast Abbey	91	53	58%	11%
Robert (of Aumale)	75	59	79%	20%
Robert (of Pontchardon)	41	27	66%	29%

1086 unreclaimed waste had far outweighed the cultivated arable.⁵³ Despite their sterling efforts, legal restrictions on the cultivation of marginal land on the county's extensive royal demesne continued to hamper the progress of the colonists: this is manifest in the countless petty fines paid by Devon men for breaching forest law in the twelfth century.⁵⁴ The demand for virgin land may be partly measured by the enormous sum of five thousand marks pledged by the commonalty of Devon for a charter of disafforestation in 1204.⁵⁵ W. G. Hoskins' somewhat romanticised vision of the pioneer-farmer carving out a smallholding from the wilderness of moorland, forest or heath may, therefore, not have been far removed from the truth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁵⁶

The marshlands of Devon's numerous estuarine plains presented further opportunities for land improvement and self-advancement. In the 1170s William Sokespitch, a merchant of Exeter, bought a furlong of arable land and a salt marsh overlooking the River Clyst: included in the purchase price was licence from his lord to take any land he could reclaim from the adjacent tidal flats (*"cum toto conquesto quod poterit ex parte maris perquirere ad sui correctionem"*).⁵⁷ Similar sub-clauses are to be found in charters granted to individual residents of the port of Dartmouth by as late as the fourteenth century. Most of the town's population made a living from the sea, and land on the Dart estuary was consequently valued for the construction of quays, boathouses and warehouses: the lord of Dartmouth had himself set an example in the thirteenth century when he dammed the seignorial mill, lying at the mouth of a tidal inlet, to create a causeway linking two separate settlements in his manor.⁵⁸

One of the main factors underpinning the renewed demand for land was the revival and rapid expansion of Devon's ancient tin-mining industry in the second half of the twelfth century: as an economic pursuit, mining did in itself contribute significantly to the

⁵³ PRO C133/102, no. 2; *DB Devon*, 1/30; Below, Fig. 2.4 (p. 73a)

⁵⁴ eg. *Pipe Roll*, 13 Henry II, pp. 171-2

⁵⁵ *Pipe Roll*, 6 John, p. 85; *RWS*, p. 139; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 70

⁵⁶ Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 71

⁵⁷ W. G. Hoskins, 'Three Devon Families', in *Devonshire Studies*, ed. Hoskins & Finberg (1952), pp. 105-19

⁵⁸ RCHM, 5th rep., 602-3; Watkins, *Dartmouth*, p. 44; Below, p. 243

FIG. 2.4: DISTRIBUTION OF TENURE ON A SAMPLE OF SECULAR ESTATES

(data drawn from extents in IPMs, including Devon manors only: figures refer to number of tenants enumerated in each category of tenure)

Seignorial Lord	1	2	3	4	Total	Unfree
William Martin ¹ (1326)	133	692	72	628	1525	48%
John Courtenay ² (1277)	45	436	0	286	767	57%
Edmund, earl of Cornwall ³ (1300)	17	324	0	47	388	84%
Joice Dynham ⁴ (1301)	104	255	0	27	386	66%
Matthew FitzJohn ⁵ (1309)	20	297	44	?	< 361	?
Richard Fleming ⁶ (1301)	13	98	8	0	119	83%
Nicholas Moeles ⁷ (1316)	21	64	0	0	85	75%
John Cogan ⁸ (1301)	21	27	0	30	78	35%
William Champernowne ⁹ (1305)	15	42	19	0	76	55%
Thomas Peverel ¹⁰ (1299)	10	49	0	0	59	83%
Robert FitzPayne ¹¹ (1316)	9	15	16	0	40	38%

KEY TO CATEGORIES OF TENURE:

- (1) Free tenants (*liberi homines*)
- (2) Customary tenants (*villani, cottari, nativi* – counted here as ‘unfree’)
- (3) Conventiary tenants (tenure *per conventionem* - counted here as ‘free’)
- (4) Burgesses (counted here as ‘free’)

¹ PRO C134/39
² C133/6, no. 6
³ C133/95
⁴ C133/102, no. 2
⁵ C134/6, no. 9
⁶ C133/100, no. 12
⁷ C134/48, no. 1
⁸ C134/38, no. 3
⁹ C133/118, no. 16
¹⁰ C133/94, no. 5
¹¹ C134/48, no. 5

development of free tenure in Devon.⁵⁹ Anticipating and seeking to regulate the consequent economic boom, the Crown issued a charter of liberties in 1201, conferring on the tanners of Devon and Cornwall an extraordinary package of legal privileges, more far-reaching and generous than those enjoyed by miners in any other part of the realm. These included partial or total relief from customary services owed to landlords, exemption from lay taxation, and the right to be tried in civil matters under an exclusive code of stannary law. The charter was confirmed in 1222 and thereafter at regular intervals, and it effectively created a distinctive community within local society, theoretically independent of the control of seignorial lords.⁶⁰

Although by our period levels of tin production were well past their peak and would decline further still - a consequence both of inept management by successive amateur farmers of the stannary and of the collapse of the local labour force in 1348-9 - the 'free' tanners continued to comprise a significant proportion of the working population, perhaps about seven hundred men in 1327.⁶¹ A smaller number was employed in the county's three silver-lead mines which, like the stannaries, were a Crown monopoly. Because of the relatively small numbers involved in silver mining, the local workforce had been unable to meet the demands of a mini economic boom in the 1290s, and the Exchequer was obliged to recruit more than one hundred miners from Wales.⁶² The stannaries too periodically experienced problems of under-staffing and the Crown frequently had to resort to contracting labour from outside the county, or even distraining local men to work its mines.⁶³ The method of extraction most commonly employed in tin-mining was 'streaming' - essentially panning for the mineral in rivers - which was both unstable and inconsistent in terms of output: a seam

⁵⁹ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 71

⁶⁰ G. L. Lewis, *The Stannaries: a Study of the English Tin Miner* (Boston, 1908), p. 36; John Hatcher, *English Tin Production and Trade before 1500* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 47-8, 62-3; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 71-2, 177-8

⁶¹ L. F. Salzman, 'Mines and Stannaries', in *The English Government at Work, 1327-1336* ed. J. F. Willard, vol. iii (Massachusetts, 1950), p. 91

⁶² PRO E101/260/4 (account, Birlond and Combe Martin mines, 1291-3); E101/260, m. 5 (receipts of silver, Combe Martin and Birlond, 1292-8); E101/260/17 (documents concerning the sending of miners from Wales to Devon, 1296)

⁶³ CPR (1292-1301), p. 179; Ibid., (1301-7), p. 331; CCR (1307-13), pp. 91, 273; Ibid., (1318-23), p. 134; Ibid., (1323-7), p. 478; CPR (1358-61), p. 343

could provide rich pickings for several years before drying-up altogether.⁶⁴ Mining was therefore too unpredictable to offer a full-time occupation for most, and the typical Dartmoor stannary man was likely to have combined his trade with a smallholding, relying, like the rest of the rural population, on agriculture for the sustenance of himself and his family: fortunately, the predominantly pastoral economy of Dartmoor made it relatively easy to combine mining with occasional agriculture.⁶⁵

Tin miners were therefore not altogether removed from the rest of society, and their comparative state of 'emancipation' is likely to have had wider social ramifications. On occasion, the rights of this privileged community caused friction and resentment among the wider population, resulting in complaints being levelled against tin and silver workers who, it was alleged, denuded woods and turbaries in extracting for fuel for the smelting process. In 1307 the abbot of Buckland received compensation of £400 for losses sustained when a wood belonging to the abbey was arbitrarily distrained and harvested by the warden of the Devon mines, Thomas Sweynefeld.⁶⁶ In 1314, and again in 1315, the "*pauperes homines*" of Devon complained to parliament that the stannary men were destroying arable land in the county at the improbably high rate of three hundred acres a year.⁶⁷ In return, the miners were not reticent to defend what they regarded as their inalienable 'rights': a petition of 1376 accused the owners of mines in both Devon and Cornwall of fraudulently claiming the benefits of stannary law for themselves, when these were explicitly applicable only to working tinnern.⁶⁸

There were, however, rather less arduous ways of obtaining and asserting at least a modicum of free status. Burghal tenure, which commonly conferred on the holder exemption from the most of the servile duties of villeinage, was an obvious alternative.⁶⁹ Devon in the fourteenth century contained a remarkably high concentration of boroughs, perhaps as many

⁶⁴ Hatcher, *English Tin Production*, pp. 44-6; Sandy Gerrard, *Dartmoor* (English Heritage, 1997), pp. 83-97

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 47, 58, 148; H. S. A. Fox, 'Medieval Rural Industry', in *Historical Atlas*, p. 325; Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 17-18

⁶⁶ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 385 (no. 8)

⁶⁷ *RP*, i, 297-8, 312

⁶⁸ *RP*, ii, 343-4

⁶⁹ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 72

as seventy-one and more than twice as many as its nearest rival, Somerset.⁷⁰ This was due in part to the difficulties of internal transportation, but it was also connected to the growing commercialisation of many sectors of the non-agrarian local economy – mining, shipping, fishing and cloth-manufacturing - which required easily accessible centres for the marketing of their products. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries had witnessed a fashion among, mainly secular, lords for the creation of small seignorial boroughs. In some instances, however, it is apparent that the founders of these boroughs were not overly, or even primarily, concerned with the promotion of trade or urbanisation on their estates.⁷¹ The burghal communities established were frequently too small or located too remotely to have had any real prospect of commercial success. Sometimes the sole evidence for the existence of these ‘urban’ communities is the identification of burgesses as a separate category of tenant in documents such as manorial surveys or extents. The lord of Alphington manor, for example, had just eight ‘burgesses’ from whom he collected a mere two shillings in annual rent.⁷² Similarly, the borough of Harton, which in 1301 boasted twenty-seven burgesses, was too isolated to attract passing trade, and its function was probably limited to supplying the basic requirements of the Dynham household: in the 1380s and 1390s, when the manorial account rolls for Hartland begin, any foodstuff more elaborate than staple cereal products had to be bought from Great Torrington, some seven miles to the south of Harton.⁷³ Burghal tenure, in these examples, may have been regarded less as a sign of urbanisation than as a mark of free status, which was perhaps extracted by peasants from their lords in a similar fashion to the charters of emancipation obtained by the colonist-farmers hitherto described.⁷⁴ The demographic evidence suggests that Devon was relatively under-populated and lightly-settled both before and after the Black Death, making recruitment and retention of labour a continual problem for seignorial lords. It is therefore not difficult to imagine how Devon peasants were at an

⁷⁰ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 41-3; Below, Map. 2.3 (p. 76a)

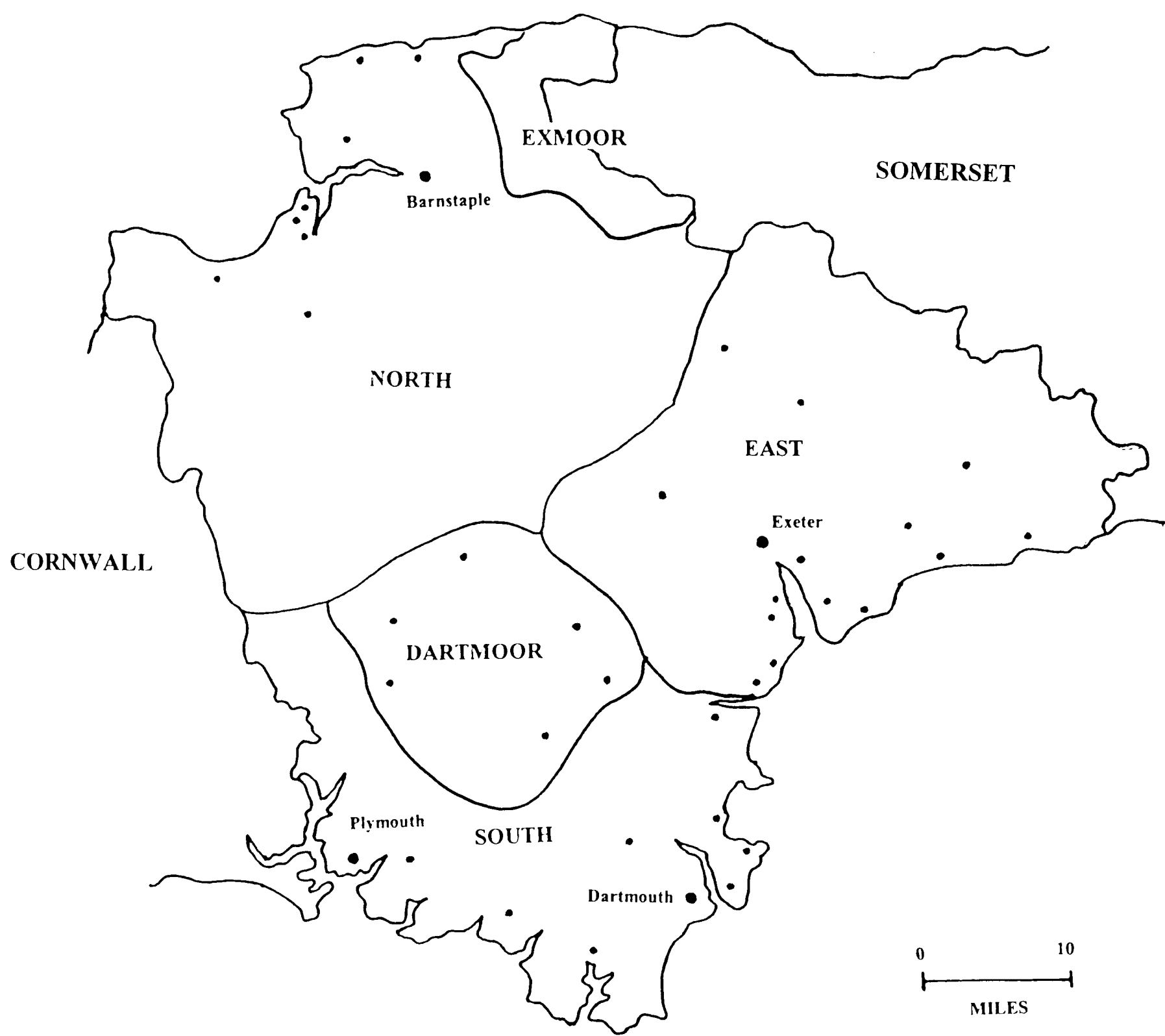
⁷¹ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 43-53

⁷² C133/54, no. 4

⁷³ PRO C133/102, no. 2; CRO AR2/539/1-8 (account rolls, Hartland manor)

⁷⁴ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 73

Map 2.3: REGIONAL DIVISIONS AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF URBAN AND MARKET CENTRES IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DEVON



advantage when their tenures were up for negotiation, long before the crises of the fourteenth century swung the pendulum firmly in favour of smallholders throughout the realm.⁷⁵

The economic and demographic trends described here combined to transform the social infrastructure of medieval Devon from the mainly servile population of 1086 to the large free tenantry that is apparent when the evidence re-commences in the thirteenth century. E. A. Kosminsky, using the evidence of the *Rotuli hundredorum* for five counties in southern and central England, calculated a ratio of three serfs to every two free tenants in 1279.⁷⁶ Roughly similar proportions are applicable to those Devon estates for which there is sufficient evidence from other sources – the *Rotuli hundredorum* are far less comprehensive for the south-west – which represents quite a progression from the situation just two centuries previous.⁷⁷ That is not to say that the distribution of villeins and free tenants on individual manors was uniform: while Hartland may have had eighty-seven free men, just 16% of the enumerated tenant population of 388 on the earldom of Cornwall's four Devon manors in 1300, and only six of the 175 tenants on Matthew FitzJohn's manor of Stokenham in 1309, were free.⁷⁸ On the majority of estates, however, and particularly on the larger manors, there was greater consistency in the proportion of free tenants which was, by national standards, relatively high: for example, the manors of the honor of Okehampton had a villein population of just 57% in 1277, while on the Martin family's estates in 1326, free men may have comprised more than half the total number of tenants.⁷⁹

Moreover, the evidence suggests that the conditions of serfdom in late-medieval Devon may have been rather less onerous than elsewhere. The conditions of customary tenure on individual estates were as varied as the ratios of free to unfree tenants, but in general the burden of villeinage seems to have been considerably easier to bear in Devon than in many other parts of the medieval realm. Commutation of villeins' works for cash was

⁷⁵ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 9-10; Russell, *British Medieval Populations*, pp. 53, 132, 313

⁷⁶ E. A. Kosminskii, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 205-6

⁷⁷ Above, Fig. 2.4 (p. 73a)

⁷⁸ PRO C133/102, no. 2; C133/95; C134/6, no. 9

⁷⁹ PRO C133/6, no. 1; C134/99

frequently permitted, whilst burdensome week-work – regarded by some historians as the defining feature of villein status elsewhere in England – was practically unknown. Villeins usually performed specific and limited tasks in the lord’s fields at the busiest times of the agricultural year, or were required to transport goods, or helped maintain and repair capital equipment.⁸⁰ Tenants of the prior of Otterton’s home manor, for example, were obliged to do little more than plough an acre of demesne arable each, while the annual sowing, reaping and hay-making services of most villeins of Axmouth manor amounted to no more than five days.⁸¹ Villeins’ duties in Stokenham were somewhat more demanding, but were also limited by custom – they included ploughing or reaping a fixed acreage, thatching a building, or repairing the mill – rather than being left open to interpretation as vague and unspecified ‘works’.⁸²

Relief from many of the duties owed by the villeins of Axmouth and Stokenham could in any case be purchased relatively cheaply. On the earldom of Cornwall’s manor of Kenton in 1296-7, the sum received from the commutation of villeins’ works, £10/12s., was the second largest item of gross income after the rents of assize.⁸³ The heaviest customary obligations were apparently to be found on the earl of Devon’s manors of Plympton and Exminster in the 1290s, where villeins were theoretically liable to compulsory week-works of up to five days each. In practice, however, these were frequently commuted to cash payments, and tenants in comital Topsham and Tiverton performed less oppressive boon-works, whereby food or even a small wage was provided. Such variation in the treatment of serfs, even within a single seignorial administration, is indicative of the strength of local custom and suggests that the freedom of a lord to influence social conditions on his estates was in fact quite limited.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Hatcher, ‘South-Western England’, pp. 678-9

⁸¹ Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 254, 367-9 (customals of Otterton and Axmouth manors)

⁸² PRO C134/16, no. 9

⁸³ *Ministers’ Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall, 1296-7*, ed. L. Margaret Midgley (Camden Soc., 3rd ser., lxvi, lxviii, 1942-5), ii, 215-17

⁸⁴ Ugawa, ‘Economic Development of some Devon Manors’, pp. 640-6, 653-7

Often the services actually performed were lighter than those described in the extents and custumals. Tenants of Ottery St. Mary, for example, who protested vehemently when the bishop of Exeter attempted to exact in full their obligations shortly after purchasing the manor in 1335, were pacified with a conciliatory compact whereby each customary tenant holding more than a furlong of land could, on payment of 2s./6d. a furlong, obtain relief from most labour services and obligations, including the merchet fine.⁸⁵ To John Grandisson's immense displeasure, the men of Ottery had appealed over his head to the earl of Devon who, in his opinion, was every bit as malicious and disobedient as his tenants: an acerbic missive from the bishop's pen reveals that Earl Hugh had been more than willing to entertain a dispute that might have embarrassed and inconvenienced his old sparring partner, even at the risk of sowing dissent among his own tenants in nearby Tiverton.⁸⁶ Years of absentee stewardship by the dean and chapter of Rouen Cathedral had, unfortunately for the new lord, promoted solidarity and a mood of militancy among the tenantry of Ottery St. Mary: only the previous year, twenty-six men had deserted their holdings in protest at the assessors of the lay subsidy who, it was alleged, had increased the levy on their township by more than 25%, apparently out of animosity to the foreign landlord.⁸⁷

In nearby Bishops Clyst the villeins performed no labour services at all, and, judging by the absence of cash payments in the account rolls, had never been accustomed to do so, since agricultural labour was apparently surplus to requirement on this small seignorial demesne. Moreover, the bishop of Exeter was bound by custom to repair the tenements of his cottars. These dwellings, according to a series of account rolls from the 1370s-90s, were frequently vacant which may explain why the burden of serfdom in Clyst was so light. Demand for labour now exceeded supply, as it did throughout England, and the tenancy market was beginning to work to the advantage of the Devon peasantry.⁸⁸ Where works were

⁸⁵ F. Rose-Troup, 'Medieval Customs and Tenures in the Manor of Ottery St. Mary', *TDA*, lxvi (1934), pp. 214-5

⁸⁶ *RJG*, i, 290

⁸⁷ *Cal. Inq. Misc*, iii, 1606; J. R. Maddicott, 'The English Peasantry and the Demands of the Crown, 1294-1341', *Past and Present* supplement, i (1975), pp. 14-15, n. 39

⁸⁸ Alcock, 'An East Devon Manor', pp. 172-3

assessed for commutation or enumerated in the extents, they were rarely valued highly and are often not mentioned at all. This was especially so on manors in the hillier and less fertile parts of the county where demesne arable was negligible or had already been leased, thereby rendering worthless conventional villeins' works such as ploughing, reaping and carrying. The growing preference for waged labour over customary indicates that there must have been a substantial amount of coinage in circulation to make cash payments, and in this way seignorial lordship also helped to accelerate the commercialisation of the local economy.⁸⁹

Labour services may have been light, but the Devon villein bore other incidents of serfdom – aids, entry-fines and heriots – like any other unfree man. Heriots were commonly used as a death duty and were sometimes more burdensome than elsewhere: the prior of Otterton, for example, was accustomed to take his deceased tenant's second best animal, as well as the first, ostensibly to cover burial costs.⁹⁰ On Tavistock Abbey's manor of Werrington, the heriot was assessed at one third of the deceased man's chattels, or all of his property if he had died without heirs of the body.⁹¹ Aids were another common incident – an incoming Otterton prior was entitled to a subsidy of ten marks from his tenants to buy a palfrey - and frequently valued more highly than labour services.⁹² Sheep-rent (*berbiagium*) was owed by tenants on a number of estates, such as Stokenham where 175 bondmen owed fifty-six ewes, and on five of the manors of the bishop of Exeter, where it raised, in alternate years, 189 ewes and twenty-seven pigs, or 184 ewes and twenty-two pigs.⁹³ The bishop was in addition entitled to levy churchscot (*chursectum*), which he took in hens instead of grain (291 hens in 1307-8). Other episcopal rents contained such whimsical items as the twenty-four woodcocks owed annually by the tenants of Chudleigh. These dues and others, such as the relief of 4s./6d. owed by the men of Paignton to avoid their obligation to make 148

⁸⁹ R. H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society, 1000-1500* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 109-112

⁹⁰ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 254

⁹¹ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 132

⁹² Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 254

⁹³ PRO C134/6, no. 9; *RWS*, pp. 23-8

hurdles for the demesne sheep pens, reflect the distinctly pastoral nature of the bishop's estates.⁹⁴

Customs elsewhere also reflected the local environment or exploited its resources. Twenty-seven serfs of coastal Stokenham had, in lieu of all other services, to fish for mullet each day between Candlemas (2 February) and Hockday (second Tuesday after Easter): the lord then claimed either a third of the catch or a third of the cash when sold, and there was a special tariff fixing the prices that he would normally pay for fish caught by his tenants. The same men, along with any other tenant who owned a boat, were also required to transport wine purchased by the lord of Stokenham from the nearby ports of Dartmouth, Totnes and Kingsbridge, although they were reimbursed to the tune of 4d. a boat.⁹⁵ The most prized catch in Stokenham was porpoise, worth one shilling a head, and the prior of Otterton also laid claim to any porpoises landed on the shores of his demesnes in east Devon. This, together with his customary right to purchase the best hake for the price of the worst ("*debet habere meliorem tamquam ad forum peioris*"), ensured that the monastic larder remained well stocked throughout the year.⁹⁶ Marine fishing was a crucial element in the diversified economies of the south-west, which drew upon an exceptional richness and variety of species in the local waters. The expansion of the fishing industry, particularly towards the end of the fourteenth century, was an important feature of the blossoming maritime sector which had contributed substantially to rising prosperity in the south-west. But, as these customs show, fishing was already a major occupation for the inhabitants of coastal communities such as Stokenham, Otterton and Yarcombe, well before the onset of commercialisation.⁹⁷

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of rural society in late medieval Devon was the development of novel forms of tenure and, in particular, the conversion of villeinage into leasehold. Contractual tenure (commonly described as tenure "*per conventionem*") had been in use on the manors of the earldom of Cornwall from at least the mid-thirteenth century, by

⁹⁴ RWS, pp. 23-8

⁹⁵ PRO C134/6, no. 9

⁹⁶ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 255

which time most of the land had been already been taken out of demesne, and it seems to have influenced tenurial arrangements elsewhere in Devon and Cornwall. The earl's 'assessionary' system was revised and modernised in 1333, and adopted largely intact by the succeeding duchy administration in 1337. 'Conventionaries', who comprised some 75% of the entire tenantry, could be either free or unfree in personal status. What they held in common was the capacity to negotiate leaseholds, rents and services with their lord or his agent, and the right to hold land and tenements by written contract rather than customary law. Duchy contracts lasted for a fixed period of seven years and were not heritable or automatically renewable, unlike traditional forms of tenure, but had to be renegotiated, upon expiry, at special courts of assession. The benefits of the contractual system to both landlord and tenant were considerable. The landlord had more freedom to adjust rents to market forces, or to eject destitute or undesirable tenants from their holdings. The tenant, although he had lost the security of life-tenure and heritability, gained, at least in theory, the freedom to negotiate a fair rent, and perhaps also to obtain exemption from some of the more archaic and humiliating customary services: villeins who held their land by contract could therefore be said to have attained a certain degree of 'freedom'.⁹⁸

Conventional tenure therefore further blurred the distinction between 'free' and 'unfree' tenants, since no attempt is made to distinguish between the two in most contemporary extents and rentals. The bondman whose lord had condescended to consult with him over the conditions of his tenurial status, was naturally less 'servile' than the *nativus* whose inherited social condition lay beyond his control. He had gained a modicum of 'freedom' and can no longer usefully be described as *villanus*, even though he may not have been formally emancipated. The Benedictine scribe of Otterton had anticipated this outcome in as early as 1260 when he observed, with some regret, that a bondman who held his land by charter would henceforth consider himself to be free ("*nativus qui tenet aliquam terram per cartam incontinenti dicit se liberum*"). For the prior there was evidently no greater

⁹⁷ Maryanne Kowaleski, 'The Expansion of the South-Western Fisheries in Late Medieval England', *Ec.HR*, 3rd ser., liii (2000), pp. 429-54

“pestilence” on his estates than this sort of tenant who, it was believed, permanently disinherited the monastery (“*nec est peior pestis quam liber in manerio et volunt perpetuum quod per gratiam tolleratur*”).⁹⁹

The best recorded example of leasehold tenure in action in Devon is on the estates of Tavistock Abbey where, in 1339, the abbot set aside 809 acres of arable and a similar area of pasture and meadow from three manors, to let to tenants either for life or for a fixed term: in practice, contracts ranged from between twenty and fifty years, and were therefore rather less flexible than the duchy of Cornwall system. The abbot’s intention was clear: the lands were currently worth just ten shillings annually to the abbey, but the new contracts were expected to yield a sum in excess of £10. The conversion of villein tenements into leaseholds was not, however, entirely new and had been practised on a small scale by Tavistock from at least 1288, before this mass leasing took place.¹⁰⁰ Elsewhere in Devon it is less easy to detect the timing or reasoning behind the shift from customary to leasehold tenure. The earls/dukes of Cornwall may have encouraged by their pioneer experiment some of the knights who held lands of them in fee. Nineteen of the twenty-three tenants on Sir William Champernowne’s manor of Coleridge in 1305, for example, were conventionaries; but conversely, and surprisingly, not one of the 388 tenants of the earldom’s five demesne manors in Devon in 1300 enjoyed the tenorial status possessed by their counterparts in Cornwall.¹⁰¹

William Martin was not a Cornwall tenant, but he was one of the few lords in Devon to experiment with conventional tenure on a large scale: there were seventy-two conventional tenants on five of his manors in 1326. The reforms had apparently been carried out at some stage between 1308 and 1326 and may therefore be interpreted in the wider context of agricultural improvement and economic rationalisation on the newly-acquired Barnstaple estates, whose economic fortunes seem to have deteriorated substantially under the temporary stewardship of William’s step-father, Geoffrey Camville (1273-1308).

⁹⁸ Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, pp. 52-8; Hatcher, ‘South-Western England’, pp. 677-8

⁹⁹ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 254

¹⁰⁰ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 249-51; C143/251/8

¹⁰¹ C133/118, no. 16; C133/77, no.3

The main effect of these improvements was to increase slightly the rateable value of land on at least three of the manors. Holsworthy, geographically peripheral to the major centres of agricultural activity, was taken out of cultivation altogether by William and converted into a purely rent-based economy, and it was here that conventional tenure was most prevalent.¹⁰²

In Bovey Tracey and Holsworthy, the new conventionaries had apparently been recruited directly from the ranks of those described as villeins in 1308, but in Tawstock, where the number of genuinely free men rose in the same period, the new tenures appear to have been created for completely new tenants. Each of the ten conventionaries here rented a messuage and a piece of land from a previously unrecorded site referred to as 'Merlond', which suggests that deliberate planning and the release of new land underpinned this innovation. The new contractual tenure may therefore have been regarded as a tool of economic regeneration, used to repopulate these large but perhaps hitherto neglected manors: it was of course also related to the contraction of demesne cultivation, but we may not be mistaken in detecting an element of positive economic policy at work. Conventional tenure made particularly good sense in Holsworthy, where the complete cessation of demesne cultivation by 1326 had rendered most of the customary services of villeinage surplus to requirement.

Economically it was more sensible to re-negotiate tenures to ensure a decent level of cash income than it was to insist on the performance of obligations which, although they may have reinforced traditional peasant-lord relations, were practically meaningless in material terms. Evidence for the new leaseholds has been drawn from the IPM of 1326, which unfortunately gives little clue as to the precise details of the contracts, although there is a suggestion that the twenty conventionaries of Holsworthy held their lands for life. Like Tavistock, this was longer than the term offered to the duchy tenants, whose tenures were all fixed at seven years; a reflection both of the flexibility of the conventional system in adapting to individual circumstances, and also the impracticability of regularly negotiating

¹⁰² C134/99; C133/6, no. 6; C134/10, no. 12; Below, Fig. 2.5 (p. 84a)

Fig. 2.5: DISTRIBUTION OF TENURE ON THE ESTATES OF WILLIAM MARTIN IN 1326

(PRO C134/39: figures refer to number of tenants enumerated in each category of tenure)

Estate	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL
(b) Barnstaple	0	153	0	0	0	153
Bovey Tracey	11	64	12	46	0	133
Combe Martin	9	82	0	30	3	124
Dartington	22	0	0	31	6	59
Fremington	8	0	0	141	39	188
(h) George Nympton	0	0	0	9	0	9
Holne	0	0	0	73	11	84
Holsworthy	19	19	20	17	0	75
(b) Ilfracombe	0	49	0	0	0	49
(h) Kilmington	0	0	0	7	0	7
Kingston	7	0	15	26	21	69
Langtree	1	0	0	23	18	42
(b) Little Totnes	0	58	0	0	0	58
(h) North Lew	0	0	0	7	0	7
Nymet Tracey	7	0	15	0	0	22
Raddon	3	0	0	21	6	30
(b) South Molton	0	160	0	0	0	160
(h) Tackbeare	4	0	0	0	0	4
Tawstock	8	0	10	80	31	129
(b) Torrington	10	43	0	4	0	57
(h) Up Exe	1	0	0	18	0	19
Warkleigh	23	0	0	24	0	47
	133	628	72	557	135	1525

KEY TO CATEGORIES OF TENURE:

- (1) Free tenants
- (2) Burgesses
- (3) Conventiary tenants
- (4) Customary tenants (excluding *cottari*)
- (5) Cottars

Each unit constitutes an individual manor unless:

- (b) Borough
- (h) Hamlet

contracts on smaller estates with less well developed bureaucracies than the duchy of Cornwall.

2.4. SEIGNORIAL AGRICULTURE: CHARACTERISTICS, TECHNIQUES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

2.4(i) CROP HUSBANDRY

Arable farming in Devon has historically attracted a dismissive, if not downright scornful, literary treatment. John Leland's *Itinerary* is woven around monotonous descriptions of endless pastures and unimproved waste in the south-west.¹⁰³ Earlier, in the twelfth century, Richard of Devizes confirmed the impression of William of Malmesbury that the soil around Exeter was too mediocre to support anything but "barren oats" (*steriles avenas*), when he observed that local men were accustomed to eat the same food as their horses ("*Exonia eodem farre refecit homines et jumenta*").¹⁰⁴ Even the relentlessly patriotic Thomas Westcote, writing in the seventeenth century, admitted that the soil "... cannot be by nature fruitful ... but requireth and expecteth some help by the labours and manurance of the husbandman".¹⁰⁵ As with all generalisations, however, it is not always easy to reconcile these assertions with the evidence. Even the most superficial examination of the mass of surviving manorial extents reveals a wide variation in unit land values throughout the county, with arable ranging from anything between 1d. and 8d. an acre, and meadow from a shilling to as much as 2s./6d. Similarly, the variety of crops cultivated, and the proportion of the demesne given over to arable or livestock husbandry, fluctuated widely from manor to manor. The physical environment, more than any other factor, determined the nature and development of agricultural practice in medieval Devon and many of its more unusual

¹⁰³ John Leland's *Itinerary: Travels in Tudor England*, ed. J. H. Chandler (Stroud, 1993), pp. 103-26

¹⁰⁴ *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1998), p. 217; *Chronicon Ricardi Divisiensis*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (1858), p. 62

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Westcote, *A View of Devonshire in MDCXXX*, ed. Oliver & Jones (Exeter, 1845), p. 55

features are therefore best understood not as deviations from a 'classic' manorial norm, but as the result of pragmatic attempts to adapt to nature and to exploit it efficiently.

The chroniclers were nevertheless correct in identifying oats as the favoured grain of agriculture in medieval Devon. Arable farming in the south-west concentrated on the cultivation of coarse and hardy grains, such as oats and rye, which are tolerant of the damp climate and the cold, poorly-drained clay soils that characterise much of the Devon interior. In general terms, these crops thrived on Devon demesnes in the fourteenth century and the gross annual yield on well-managed estates was often higher than the national average; a point worthy of note in a region that could in no way stake a claim to be prime corn-growing country. Crop specialisation, which was usually determined by the local environment, may have encouraged improvements in agricultural techniques and, rather than being regarded as the unfortunate consequence of necessity, should perhaps be taken more seriously as evidence of agrarian progress.¹⁰⁶

Oats was the predominant cereal crop in Devon, as it was in many other parts of western England, comprising on average about 50% of the total cultivated acreage on the small number of fourteenth century manors for which there is adequate evidence of seed distribution and grain yields.¹⁰⁷ It was the principal cash crop of the prior of Otterton's eastern manor of Yarcombe in the 1320-30s and, by the 1370s, over half the demesne arable there was sown with oats.¹⁰⁸ The attractiveness of oats lay in its versatility: it was used to produce a variety of foodstuffs and beverages and, as Richard of Devizes observed, could be fed to both man and beast. Where the seignorial oats crop was not sold, it was mainly used to feed the demesne animals, but portions were sometimes distributed in liveries to estate workers: while it may not have been the food of first choice, it was certainly fit for human consumption.¹⁰⁹ In the manorial accounts, oats is often distinguished as 'great' (*grossa*) or

¹⁰⁶ Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', p. 308; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, p. 115

¹⁰⁷ Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', pp. 303-5; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 225; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 94-6; Below, Fig. 2.6 (p. 86a)

¹⁰⁸ DRO CR/1431, mm. 3-5 (account rolls, Yarcombe, 1328-1332); CR/1434, mm. 2-6 (Yarcombe, 1369-73); CR/1346 (Yarcombe, 1320-1)

¹⁰⁹ BL Add. Ch. 7657 (account roll, Rockbeare, 1377-8); DRO CR/1431, m.3

FIG. 2.6: DISTRIBUTION OF CROP TYPES ON A SAMPLE OF DEVON MANORS

(expressed as percentage of total arable in demesne in one particular year, or an average over a period of two or more years)

Manor	Date	Region	(W)	(B)	(R)	(O)	(M)	(L)	Average cultivated acreage
Barton ¹	1286-7	E	20		17	63			149a.
Bishops Clyst ²	1372-1400	E	15	4	16	56		9	93a.
Bishops Nympton ³	1378-9	E	8		14	78			77a.
Buckland Filleigh ⁴	c. 1315	N	11		18	68		3	109a.
Burrington ⁵	1357-8	N	14		19	67			43a.
Canonsleigh ⁶	1377-8	E	35	3	10	48		4	177a.
Exminster ⁷	1286-7	S	5	2	9	83		1	225a.
Holcombe Rogus ⁸	1369-95	S	34	2	14	49		1	42a.
Kingskerswell ⁹	1362	S	58	10		23		9	65a.
Oakford ¹⁰	1377-8	E			26	74			61a.
Plympton ¹¹	1286-7	S	39	18	2	37		5	228a.
Tiverton ¹²	1286-7	E	27		8	65			215a.
Topsham ¹³	1286-7	S	4	6	23	67			70a.
Totnes Priory ¹⁴	1337	S	7	1	21	69		2	272a.
Yarcombe ¹⁵ (pre-plague)	1328-31	E	37	1	4	36	16	6	144a.
Yarcombe ¹⁶ (post-plague)	1368-73	E	43				56	1	60a.

REGIONS (refer to Map 2.3, p. 76a): (N)orth/Central; (S)outh; (E)ast

CROP TYPES: (W)heat; (B)arley; (R)ye; (O)ats; (M)aslin; (L)egumes

¹ PRO SC6/827/39
² DRO W1258M/G/3
³ DRO W1258M/G/6/10
⁴ DRO 1262M/M 81-94
⁵ DRO W1258M/G/1/42
⁶ BL Add. Ch. 7656
⁷ PRO SC6/827/39
⁸ DRO DD54888, DD54892, DD54901, DD54902, DD54907
⁹ CRO AR2/858
¹⁰ BL Add. Ch. 7658
¹¹ PRO SC6/827/39
¹² PRO SC6/827/39
¹³ PRO SC6/827/39
¹⁴ *Monasticon*, p. 242
¹⁵ DRO CR/1431, CR/1436
¹⁶ DRO CR/1434

‘small’ (*minuta*), denoting grades of quality and, on estates where the landscape was particularly conducive to its cultivation, such as the west Devon manors of Tavistock Abbey, there were yet further varieties of this versatile crop.¹¹⁰ Although its market value by gross weight was rather less than that of the other cereals, oats should not automatically be regarded as the inferior cultivation, sown only on soils too poor to grow wheat. That it was dominant on nearly all Devon manors, no less so on the warmer sandstones of south Devon which could support large acreages of wheat, suggests that its prevalence had as much to do with local dietary habits as it did to environmental factors: even on the five prime arable manors of the earldom of Devon, over 60% of the cultivated demesne was sown with oats in 1286-7.¹¹¹

The cultivation of rye, an equally coarse grain, was by comparison more sparsely and unevenly dispersed in Devon. The few demesnes on which it was sown in any great quantity were mainly confined to those parts of the county where the soil was most intractable and least suited to the demands of successful wheat cultivation: a cheap alternative to wheat, rye was often used as a substitute in bread.¹¹² On those manors where a surplus of rye was produced, it was the grain most commonly distributed in liveries to the *famuli*.¹¹³ Where rye does not appear in the accounts as a separate crop, it had sometimes been mixed with wheat seed to produce maslin (*mixtil*), a tolerant cultivation better suited than virgin wheat to the soils and climate of the south-west: maslin too was more usually distributed in liveries than it was marketed or consumed by the seignorial household.¹¹⁴

The ‘premium’ crops of wheat and barley, so called because they were more difficult to cultivate and therefore produced the most costly grain, were particularly susceptible to the vagaries of a varied and unpredictable environment. Many demesnes in Devon could support a fair-sized acreage of wheat, the bulk of which was consumed internally, but few were capable of emulating the immensely valuable crop of over one thousand acres of wheat and

¹¹⁰ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 95-6

¹¹¹ Ugawa, ‘Economic Development of some Devon Manors’, p. 665; Fox, ‘Devon and Cornwall’, p. 305

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 303-4; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 220

¹¹³ DRO 1262M/M/81-84 (account rolls, Buckland Filleigh, c. 1300-1315); W1258M/G/1/42 (account roll, Burrington, 1357-8); W1258M/G/6/10 (account roll, Bishops Nympton, 1378-9)

rye that was apparently in cultivation on the bishop of Exeter's south-western estates in 1326.¹¹⁵ Wheat requires high levels of nitrogen, generally lacking in Devon, and is unsuited to the acidic soils of the south-west. Large acreages of wheat invariably coincided with the most valuable arable, as revealed by the manorial extents, and the heavy demands of growing this crop in Devon apparently did not dissuade most farmers from at least trying: although often grown on a limited scale, wheat was unmistakeably the second most important cereal crop after oats.¹¹⁶

Barley, on the other hand, was of marginal importance, having been largely supplanted as an ingredient in bread and ale by the local preference for oats. Legumes, another staple of the manorial economy in champion England, were similarly inconspicuous in, and often altogether absent from, Devon manors. Those lords wealthy enough to maintain estates in more than one county could compensate for these 'imbalances' in grain cultivation by concentrating the more difficult crops in regions where the local environment was likely to be most conducive to their success. For example, the 'classic' combination of wheat, barley and vetch on the Dynham family's Somerset manor of Buckland Dinham, where wheat was the dominant cultivation, could not have been so easily emulated on their Devon demesnes. South Pool and Clayhidon, the family's two other estates for which there is evidence of crop distribution and yields, were located in what were probably the choicest arable regions that Devon had to offer, yet oats on these manors were still more important than wheat and no other crop was grown in significant quantities.¹¹⁷

Small areas of manorial gardens might be sown with peas or beans, which were usually given in feed to pigs and horses, but legumes were frequently substituted by fruit, especially cider apples. Although not as widely drunk as ale, or as luxurious as wine, cider was consumed in quantity by even the most noble households of the south-west. The cellarer

¹¹⁴ DRO CR/1431, m.3, m.6

¹¹⁵ *RWS*, pp. 570-5

¹¹⁶ H. S. A. Fox, 'Medieval rural industry', in *Historical Atlas*, p. 273; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 218

¹¹⁷ CRO AR2/495 (account rolls, Clayhidon, 1377-1397); AR2/858 (executors' account of the estates of Thomas Courtenay, 1362); Kleineke, 'The Dinham Family', pp. 63-4, 67-9, 73-80

of Tiverton, where cider manufacture had been practised commercially since at least the 1280s, accounted for one tun and eighty-two barrels imbibed by the earl of Devon's establishment in 1383-4.¹¹⁸ Apples were also an important item in the demesne economy of Bradninch manor in 1296-7, when five and a half quarters were sold, while the trouble taken by the clerk who wrote the IPM of William Martin IV in 1326 to enumerate separately the size and value of the garden on most manors, suggests that the cultivation of fruit was regarded as a serious activity here too.¹¹⁹

Apart from the types of crops grown, the techniques used in Devon agriculture, especially those concerned with the fertilisation and improvement of the soil, also exhibited distinctive characteristics. Arable land in the county is, on the whole, deficient in nitrates and too acidic to support sustained and intensive crop cultivation, and soil nutrition was therefore of primary importance to agrarian society.¹²⁰ The problems of fertilisation are reflected in the region's relatively low unit land values: whereas the national mean for arable land was around 4d. an acre, that figure is closer to 2d. in the south-west. The heavy, clay soils that characterise much of the county's interior are a major hindrance to efficient crop production, being especially susceptible to waterlogging and requiring substantially more draught-power to plough. The light, sandy soils of the coastal regions and east Devon are more easily worked, but rather less fertile or stable than the nutrient-rich loams of southern England and the midlands.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the pattern of demographic settlement in medieval rural Devon, inclined more towards dispersed small-holdings with large outfields of pasture and woodland than large nucleated villages with centrally-controlled resources, may have made it easier to adapt to the drawbacks of the local environment, and even to innovate in arable husbandry.¹²²

¹¹⁸ DRO CR/491 (steward's account, Tiverton, 1383-4); Ugawa, 'Economic Development of some Devon Manors', p. 632; Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 94

¹¹⁹ *Ministers' Accounts*, ed. Midgley, pp. 212-5; PRO C134/99 (fruit was in cultivation in the gardens of at least eight of the Devon manors)

¹²⁰ Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 383-99; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 88, 91-4, 104-7

¹²¹ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 347, 353-4, 418

¹²² Hoskins, 'Highland Zone', p. 20; Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 234-44

The enclosure of arable land, entailing the replacement of common property rights by private ownership, was one possible response to the problem of low unit values and economic rents and was, at least in Devon, a largely medieval development. For large swathes of the countryside, mainly in the centre and the north where the population was most thinly spread and the soils were most difficult to work, there is little or no evidence for the existence of sub-divided ('open') fields, and most holdings had probably been 'enclosed' at the point of their creation. Sub-divided fields were far less common in Devon than in the English midlands, but not completely absent, as was once asserted by some historians. They were located mainly in the gentle valleys of east Devon, in the larger villages south of Dartmoor, and in the estuarine plains of north Devon. These examples do, however, bear little resemblance to the compact, regular-sized units of champion England and were more likely to have evolved through the gradual fragmentation and division of a large estate once farmed in singularity, than through deliberate joint colonisation. Water and pasture, the two natural resources whose scarcity was most likely to have encouraged mutual cooperation, were abundant in most areas of the south-west, thus providing little incentive for communal settlement or organisation.¹²³

Settlement in medieval Devon was dispersed, consisting mainly of small hamlets and isolated farmsteads. This is amply illustrated by the extent of the north Devon manor of Hartland in 1301, where 207 customary tenants were scattered among more than thirty-five hamlets, while some of the free tenants lived apart on individual farmsteads.¹²⁴ The classic nucleated village, found mainly in low lying areas of fertile arable, did exist in Devon, but it too had little in common with its counterpart in champion England. In the Devon model, strips of arable were typically distributed among several small, irregularly-arranged units,

¹²³ H. S. A. Fox, 'Field Systems of East and South Devon. Part I: East Devon', *TDA*, civ (1972), pp. 88-9; H. S. A. Fox, 'The Chronology of Enclosure and Economic Development in Medieval Devon', *Ec.HR*, 2nd ser., xxviii (1975), p. 183; Hoskins, 'Highland Zone', pp. 15-52; H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Open Field in Devon', *Idem*, *West Country Historical Studies* (Newton Abbot, 1969), pp. 129-51; Grenville Astill, 'Fields', in *The Countryside of Medieval England*, ed. Astill & Annie Grant (Oxford, 1988), pp. 81-3; Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 24, 414

¹²⁴ PRO C133/102, no. 2; R. Chope, 'The Manor of Hartland', *TDA*, xxxiv (1902), pp. 418-54; H. S. A. Fox, 'Peasant Farmers, Patterns of Settlement and Pays', in *Landscape and Townscape in the South West*, ed. Robert Higham (Exeter, 1989), p. 48; Fox, 'Medieval Rural Agriculture', p. 277

described inter-changeably as furlongs or fields. For example, the widow's dower assigned to Lady Eleanor Gorges in 1324 from her husband's manor of Braunton included 26½ acres of arable divided into nineteen individual portions of varying size; while the demesne arable on the abbess of Canonsleigh's Rockbeare estate was divided into sixteen units of between two and twenty acres each.¹²⁵ In such an arrangement the two or three-field crop rotation systems widely used in the English lowlands were practically impossible to emulate. Moreover the few surviving fourteenth-century court rolls for Devon manors contain no trace of the intricate communal by-laws necessary for communal agrarian activity to succeed on any scale.¹²⁶

The system of agriculture that prevailed on a number of Devon demesnes, if such a random and haphazard array of techniques can correctly be described as a 'system', was that of convertible husbandry, whereby fields were sown with a series of crops before being let out to pasture, when animal dung would be used to manure and revitalise the soil.¹²⁷ The field patterns described here were probably a consequence of the convertible system which required the demesne arable to be divided into many parts, each at a different stage in a variable cycle of cropping and pasturing. The avoidance of intensive cultivation, combined with regular dung fertilisation, made for reasonably successful and sustainable agriculture on what was frequently second-rate arable; the consequent abundance of pasture also facilitated the growth of demesne flocks and herds and made it easier to adjust to falling demand for grain after 1348-9. A system of convertible husbandry prevailed on the estates of Tavistock Abbey, where fields were sown with a sequence of crops before being grassed over and allowed to recover as fallow or pasture. The improvement in efficiency is immediately noticeable, with some Tavistock yields well above the average for England as a whole and the monastic economy looking considerably sleeker than that of Bishops Clyst, where the land was cultivated continuously and where grain yields were correspondingly poorer. The soils

¹²⁵ PRO C134/81, no. 23; BL Harley 3660, 143r.-145r. (extent of Rockbeare manor, 1323)

¹²⁶ Fox, 'Chronology of Enclosure', pp. 183, 189; Hatcher, 'South-Western England', pp. 384-5

¹²⁷ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 104-8; Ugawa, 'Economic Development of some Devon Manors', pp. 632-3; Alcock, 'An East Devon Manor', pp. 167-8

of this episcopal farm, situated in a warm, sandstone valley of east Devon, were easier to work than most of the Tavistock estates, and it was perhaps this that had made the cultivators of Clyst more complacent and resistant to innovation than the farmer-monks of Tavistock.¹²⁸

Most of our knowledge of grain yields for Devon is derived from the Tavistock data and, although it is possible to glean evidence of convertible husbandry from elsewhere, it is more difficult to illustrate how it worked over any period of time, or to assess its economic impact, without the aid of continuous account rolls. The attractiveness of the system lay in its infinite flexibility since, despite the impression given by the extents, there was rarely a firm distinction drawn between demesne land in pasture and that in arable. Arable plots in medieval Devon were typically small and compact, surrounded by a large outfield which could be brought into, or taken out of, cultivation in response to environmental factors or market demand. Thus, on the manor of Dartington, fifty-four acres of designated pasture was described as being 'in arable' and valued accordingly.¹²⁹ In Ermington, twenty acres of 'pasture' was assessed at 6d. an acre, the same as the most valuable portion of arable land in that manor, suggesting perhaps that it was under cultivation at the time but that the clerk had been unable to reconcile this style of husbandry with chancery conventions.¹³⁰ Unfettered by the institutional constraints of organised, communal agriculture, the Devon farmer was free to adjust and make modifications to land use on a year-by-year basis. This unfortunately makes the task of trying to reconstruct husbandry patterns from the statistics of isolated accounts or extents, which of course only record the situation at a single point in time, rather problematic: a system that probably took years to complete its 'cycle', which then might change altogether, is not easy to reconstruct from such spartan evidence.

Fig. 2.7 illustrates how convertible husbandry may have worked in practice on the estates of the earldom of Devon.¹³¹ What is apparent from these data is that no single recognisable crop-rotation system could have governed crop husbandry on all of the earls'

¹²⁸ Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 104-7; Alcock, 'An East Devon Manor', pp. 142-4

¹²⁹ PRO C134/99, m.14

¹³⁰ C134/81, no. 3

¹³¹ Below, p. 92a

Fig. 2.7: PATTERNS OF CULTIVATION ON SOME DEMESNE MANORS OF THE EARLDOM OF DEVON

(A) TURN OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY¹

Manor	Sown Arable	Pasture	TOTAL
Exminster			
1286-7	225	21	246
1294-5	88	186	274
1295-6	24	250	274
Plympton			
1286-7	228		228
1293-4	20	313	333
1295-6	151	183	334
Tiverton			
1286-7	215		215
1294-5	45	331	376
1307-8	234		234
1308-9	178		178

(B) JUNE 1377²

Manor	1	2
Aylesbeare	107	30
Chawleigh	60	28
Chulmleigh	100	38
Colyton	105	60
Exminster	120	106
Hulham	30	20
Kenn	145	60
Musbury	60	40
Okehampton	100	30
Plympton	100	74
Sampford Courtenay	80	40
Stedcombe	100	66
Tiverton	86	31
Towsington	120	30

- (1) Potential arable available
(2) Arable actually under cultivation in Jun 1377

¹ PRO SC6/827/39 (1286-7); E152/4, m. 14 (1293); SC6/829/27 (1294-6); DRO CR490, 491 (1307-9)
² PRO C135/260, no. 3

manors at any one time. The fluctuations in land use shown in the first table are perhaps best explained by the minority of the heir, Hugh Courtenay II (1292-97), and the corresponding reduction in demand for victuals by the seignorial household while the estate was in Crown custody; they show how the system was sufficiently flexible to adapt quickly to these reduced circumstances. Of the manors mentioned in the 1377 extent – which unusually records the proportion of arable actually under cultivation as well as the total in demesne – some appear to conform to a standard two-field rotation system (half cultivated, half fallow), some to a three-field, and others to a system all of their own. In short, no one policy of husbandry was universally applied, and the result was presumably a series of *ad hoc* measures, in which the distinction between ‘pasture’ and ‘arable’ was fluid and perhaps no more than nominal.

There were of course other ways in which the soil could be improved. Peat-burning was a commonly used method, whereby the turves on fallow land were cut, dried and burned, thus sterilising the soil and replenishing levels of nitrogen through the release of phosphate. In later centuries this technique came to be so closely associated with the county that it was known colloquially as ‘denshiring’ (‘Devonshiring’).¹³² Some fifteen acres were prepared in this way on the manors of Topsham and Tiverton in 1286-7, and the method was commonly practised by the monks of Tavistock to bring marginal land into cultivation.¹³³ Lime was also highly prized for its phosphate, which helped to counteract the natural acidity of south-western soils: listed among the capital assets of Bishop Stapeldon in 1326 was a hundredweight of lime stored at Paignton, while another episcopal manor, Chudleigh, accounted for the impressive sum of £19/1s./10d. for sales from the lime kilns in 1372.¹³⁴ Those landowners with coastal demesnes, or access to a beach, had a third option of fertilisation in sea sand. In Plympton, on the south coast, £3./1s./6d. was spent in a single year on the wages of two full-time ‘sandmen’ and on maintaining the six barges and six horses needed to transport sand to the manorial fields, where it was folded into the soil. The

¹³² Westcote, *View of Devonshire*, pp. 55-6; H. S. A. Fox, ‘Medieval Rural Industry’, pp. 273-4

¹³³ Ugawa, ‘Economic Development of some Devon Manors’, p. 635; Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, pp. 91-4

¹³⁴ *RWS*, pp. 571-2; BL Add. MS 28859

objective was to introduce high levels of organic matter into the soil, and seaweed and dead fish may also have been spread.¹³⁵ Animal dung, of course, remained the most obvious source of fertilisation and, compared to the manorial communities of lowland England, was rarely in short supply. On that note, we turn now to the livestock aspect of the rural economy.

2.4(ii) LIVESTOCK HUSBANDRY

Despite the relative abundance of rough pasture and grazing on most demesnes, which to some extent had militated against the development of a classic open-field system, the rural economy of fourteenth century Devon remained on the whole a balanced one and, as elsewhere in England, extremes or specialisations in husbandry were rare. The county's subsequent reputation for specialist livestock husbandry, evoked in the prose of Leland, was scarcely apparent in the first half of the fourteenth century when most demesnes produced a fairly balanced mixture of livestock and crops, with income from the sale of grain usually higher than that from animals and their associated products. That crop husbandry was marginally superior to livestock, even in the upland south-west, is surprising given the distinctively 'pastoral' appearance of the landscape, with its endless expanses of rough grazing and plentiful supplies of water. A growing trend towards pastoralism gathered momentum after 1348-9, however, primarily in response to the depressed market for crops and the collapse of the local labour force, but also to satisfy an increased demand for meat and dairy products from the upwardly-mobile urban classes, and for raw materials by the nascent cloth-manufacturing industry. One aspect of this trend, on the estates of the bishops of Exeter, is illustrated below in Fig. 2.8.¹³⁶

As with arable husbandry, regional approaches to pastoralism make it unwise to over-generalise. The surviving evidence for livestock husbandry in Devon is in some ways even less satisfactory than that for arable: the account rolls rarely contain comprehensive livestock

¹³⁵ Ugawa, 'Economic Development of some Devon Manors', p. 635; Hatcher, 'South-Western England', p. 377

¹³⁶ Below, p. 94a

Fig. 2.8: ANIMAL HUSBANDRY ON THE DEMESNES OF THE BISHOP OF EXETER¹

Manor		Horses	Cattle	Sheep	Swine	Other	TOTAL
Bishops Clyst							
	1086	1	26	63	3	0	93
	1307	8	82	210	3	9 peacocks	303
	1326	18	62	120	0	0	200
	1372	4	53	384	0		441
Bishops Nympton							
	1086	0	6	31	0	0	37
	1307	8	40	149	2	bees	199
	1326	0	45	0	0	0	45
	1372	4	61	294	12		371
Bishops Tawton							
	1086	1	15	153	0	0	169
	1307	6	134	360	24	0	524
	1372	6	84	604	3		697
Bishopsteignton							
	1086	2	7	410	7	40 goats	466
	1307	3	74	337	8	6 peacocks	422
	1326	6	64	581	0	6 geese	657
	1372	2	63	587	10		662
Chudleigh							
	1086	1	6	24	0	0	31
	1307	7	54	348	61	goats	470
	1326	5	35	520	9	5 peacocks	574
	1372	2	50	414	20		486
Crediton							
	1086	4	64	388	57	0	513
	1307	7	90	263	13	0	373
	1326	6	115	381	22	0	524
	1372	4	60	852	6		922
Paignton							
	1086	4	20	350	16	0	390
	1307	6	82	594	7	16 peacocks	705
	1326	9	78	916	19	7 peacocks	1029
	1372	6	71	978	35		1090
<u>TOTAL DEVON²</u>							
	1086	12	143	1710	95	54	2014
	1307	45	596	2261	118	34	3054
	1326	47	515	2991	50	23	3626
	1372	30	500	4293	86		4909

¹ *DB Devon*, 2 (1086); *Accounts of the Executors . . .*, ed. Hale & Ellacombe, pp. 14-17 (1307); *RWS*, pp. 570-5 (1327); BL Add. MS 28859 (1372)

² Includes manors not listed above

TOTAL CORNWALL

1086	18	26	320	7	12	383
1326	40	367	2886	4	12	3309
1372	38	363	2440	45		2886

TOTAL OTHER

1307	20	145	929	166		1260
1326	19	92	602	107	3	823

NB: These statistics cover a broad time span and were compiled from a variety of sources with different objectives: although they do not bear direct comparison, they do illustrate general trends in the evolution of demesne flocks and herds.

inventories before the second half of the fourteenth century and frequently the evidence has to be gleaned from incidental details, such as income derived from the leasing of pasture, from the sale of dairy products, or from the sale of skins and fleeces.¹³⁷ Fortunately, the Domesday returns for Devon and Cornwall contain records of demesne livestock more detailed than for most other counties, providing us with a good platform from which to make a comparative study. Domesday of course tells us only about seignorial animals and should not be used uncritically as evidence for the region as a whole, especially as some of the archaeological evidence suggests that the composition of peasant herds and flocks may have differed quite markedly from those of their lords, to an extent that crops did not. Surviving manorial court rolls are even rarer than accounts and do little to redress the imbalance between seignorial and peasant demesnes.

Domesday reveals a preponderance of sheep on Devon's seignorial estates, accounting for approximately 75% of the total enumerated heads of livestock. Even allowing for draught oxen which are not listed separately, sheep must have formed more than 60% of the total livestock of manorial demesnes in 1086. Cattle, used for both traction and food, was the next most numerous species, but swine were of secondary importance in the south-west and rather less numerous than goats, of which there were nearly as many in Devon as cows.¹³⁸ Counting heads of animals in this way is not an ideal approach to the study of medieval husbandry, but the relative proportions thus revealed can to some extent be reconciled with the archaeology of six sites in Exeter, which confirm the predominance of cattle and sheep in the market economy of a major urban centre and suggest that there was little overall change in the balance between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries. The popularity of goats, however, appears to have been transient and their numbers, revealed both in the archaeological and documentary evidence, were not sustained in subsequent centuries. Pigs, which in other

¹³⁷ Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', pp. 308-9, 316

¹³⁸ Weldon-Finn, 'Devon', pp. 285-8; Bartlett, *Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 306-7

regions were the primary source of meat, occupied a marginal position in Devon's livestock economy throughout the middle ages.¹³⁹

These proportions are also reflected quite closely in the data for the episcopal herds and flocks in Devon and Cornwall in the fourteenth century. Pigs were rarely to be found in great numbers on the Devon estates and their importance declined further as the century progressed. There was now also practically no sign of the Domesday goat population.¹⁴⁰ Other domestic species included fowl, and in particular hens and geese, which tended to be found in greatest concentrations on monastic estates, such as Yarcombe manor where the prior of Otterton kept over two hundred birds in 1320-1.¹⁴¹ The bishop of Exeter also owned a small number of peacocks, but these were more likely to have been bred for display than consumption. Bees were another favourite of the religious, and the monks of Otterton kept no less than thirteen hives on their home farm in 1331, although all but one had been taken out of operation by 1372.¹⁴²

The largest demesne flocks in the fourteenth century tended to be found in the east of the county, while the largest herds of cattle were concentrated in north Devon: both regions contained extensive tracts of under-exploited pasture.¹⁴³ Sales of livestock, meat, skins, hides, fleeces and small amounts of pasture were buoyant on the northern manor of Buckland Filleigh from about 1280, when the records begin, through to the 1390s, when demesne cultivation had largely ceased. These informative, yet somewhat idiosyncratic, account rolls also contain evidence for the production of cheese.¹⁴⁴ The substantial quantities of oats purchased by the steward of Hartland manor, presumably for animal fodder, in the 1380s and 1390s, when the cultivation of grain surpluses had ended, show how animal husbandry continued to prosper, and even expanded, at a time when the rest of the seignorial agricultural

¹³⁹ Bruce Levitan, 'Medieval Animal Husbandry in South West England', in *Studies in Palaeoeconomy and Environment in South West England*, ed. N. D. Balaam (1986), pp. 67-9

¹⁴⁰ Above, Fig. 2.8 (p. 94a)

¹⁴¹ DRO CR/1436

¹⁴² DRO CR/1431, mm. 1-7; CR/1434, mm. 2-6

¹⁴³ Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', pp. 154, 316

¹⁴⁴ DRO 1262M/M 81-94 (account rolls, Buckland Filleigh, c. 1280-1397)

sector was in decline: in June 1400, there were seventy-two head of cattle and 206 sheep in Hartland.¹⁴⁵

In Dartmoor, an estate belonging to the duchy of Cornwall and consequently the best documented tract of countryside in medieval Devon, cattle and sheep were the mainstay of the manorial economy. The bulk of receipts in 1296-7 was derived from a combination of tolls for the grazing and movement of cattle, fines from villeins who had let their animals stray in the Forest, and from sales of manure: the duchy employed several herdsman and underherdsman to administer the system.¹⁴⁶ Those who leased pasture from the duchy and the commoners of Dartmoor, who might have been expected to have enjoyed free grazing but who in fact were obliged to pay 1½d. per head of cattle, made a far greater contribution to seignorial income in the second half of the fourteenth century, when continuous ministers' accounts begin, than did the ordinary manorial tenants through their rents: H. S. A. Fox has calculated that by about 1400 the number of grazing cattle alone on Dartmoor – the number of sheep was certainly higher still, but is not recorded – was in excess of ten thousand.¹⁴⁷ Demand for pasture had risen steadily in the second half of the fourteenth century, despite the parallel demographic decline resulting from the desertion of some settlements in the extremities of the moor, reflecting the general regional trend towards specialist husbandry.

In south Devon, where demesne crops remained an important source of revenue on many manors until quite late on in the fourteenth century, herds and flocks were rather smaller and geared more towards dairy production than meat: their proximity to important market centres made this a more feasible enterprise than it would otherwise have been in the more sparsely populated regions of north and mid Devon. There were of course exceptions, with the earl of Devon maintaining a large flock of sheep on his coastal manor of Plympton in

¹⁴⁵ CRO AR 2/539/1-8; AR 37/32 (inventory, 1400)

¹⁴⁶ *Minister's Accounts*, ed. Midgley, pp. 219-21

¹⁴⁷ PRO SC6/829/1-6 (ministers' accounts of Dartmoor); H. S. A. Fox, 'Medieval Dartmoor as seen through its Account Rolls', in *The Archaeology of Dartmoor* (Devon Archaeological Society, lii, 1994), pp. 156-62

1387-8, while the bishop of Exeter had apparently made the south Devon manor of Paignton his principal sheep ranch by 1372.¹⁴⁸

It was in east Devon, with its varied landscape of rolling hills and sheltered valleys which offered the perfect combination of fertile arable with almost unlimited grazing, where the most even balance of crop and livestock activity had been achieved by the end of the fourteenth century. Bishops Clyst, which in the 1370s had a demesne arable acreage of about one hundred acres, a herd of some sixty cattle and an expanding flock of sheep, typifies the mixed husbandry practised in this corner of the county. Net profits from the sale of livestock and fleeces showed an overall growth between 1374 and 1400 and helped to compensate for the often meagre returns from grain sales, particularly after a disastrous oats harvest in 1374. On average, some 150 cheeses and three hundred fleeces from Clyst were sold annually. By comparison with arable husbandry on this manor, which was conducted rather inexpertly and unimaginatively, pastoral farming was reasonably efficient with above average yields and normal levels of disease and sterility.¹⁴⁹ Small wonder then that the bulk of the Courtenay earls' territorial wealth came to be concentrated in this populous and increasingly prosperous corner of south-east Devon. The family had shifted its seat of power from Okehampton castle, on the northern fringe of Dartmoor, to the more hospitable climes of Tiverton borough in about 1300, when the manorial grange was apparently converted into a central depot for the collection of surplus agricultural produce from across the county and from beyond.¹⁵⁰

2.5 THE COMMERCIALISATION OF THE RURAL ECONOMY

Pastoral husbandry and the trend towards livestock specialisation helped to stimulate growth in other, non-agrarian, sectors of the medieval economy; further outward signs of the diversified economic structures of the south-west. The appearance of a large number of

¹⁴⁸ BL Add. Ch. 64318 (valuation of the earldom of Devon, 1387-8); BL Add. Ch. 28859

¹⁴⁹ DRO W1258.G3 (account rolls, Bishops Clyst, 1374-1421); Alcock, 'An East Devon Manor', pp. 153-4, 158-9, 166

¹⁵⁰ DRO CR/490 (reeve's account, Tiverton, 1308-9); CR/491 (steward's account, Tiverton, 1383-4)

fulling mills in the documentation of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example, is testimony to the growing importance of cloth-manufacture in Devon. The fulling mill (colloquially known as a 'tucking' mill) consisted of a large hammer driven by the force of running water, which flattened and cleaned the woven cloth.¹⁵¹ This item of capital equipment represented a major item of seignorial investment but clearly one that was widely held to be sound: seignorial landowners generally preferred investing capital in projects that guaranteed immediate financial returns, such as mills, markets, fairs and boroughs, rather than in the improvement of their land.¹⁵² Hugh Courtenay III had by 1377 installed a fulling mill in his borough of Colyton, in the heart of prime pastoral country, and one of the five mills on the suburban manor of Exe Island was also used for cloth refining: both locations had good access to urban markets and rural sources of supply.¹⁵³ William Martin IV also owned two fulling mills, in the semi-rural boroughs of South Molton and Bovey Tracey.¹⁵⁴

The manufacture of woollen cloth was well established in the towns of Exeter and Totnes in as early as the late-twelfth century. By the start of the fourteenth, cloth was regularly exported from Exeter and Plymouth and, by the 1350s, Devon exports accounted for at least 15% of the recorded national total. By concentrating on the manufacture of coarse, rough cloths - the product of generally poor-quality local materials - the county cornered a lucrative market among the poor and the waged labourers, both of whom experienced a relative rise in their earning power in the second half of the fourteenth century. When the aulnager accounts begin in the 1350s, sales of cloth are revealed to have been highest in central and north Devon which, conversely, had the smallest number of fulling mills and a widely-dispersed population, and were not exactly conducive to the evolution of a successful manufacturing industry. Barnstaple, with access to the markets of Ireland and Wales, had nevertheless become a major regional centre for the marketing of cloth manufactures by the mid-fourteenth century: thereafter it declined in importance, probably because of the

¹⁵¹ Fox, 'Medieval Rural Industry', pp. 325-9; Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 19, 22-7

¹⁵² Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, p. 429

¹⁵³ PRO C135/260, no. 3

¹⁵⁴ PRO C134/99, mm.10-11

overweening influence of Bristol to the east and its isolation from the more lucrative continental export markets.¹⁵⁵

By contrast, the social structure and farming practices of east Devon were ideally suited to 'industrial' growth and, by the mid-fifteenth century, this region had developed into the principal area of cloth production in Devon, with the city of Exeter functioning as a commercial lynch-pin and pool of auxiliary workers, such as tailors, weavers, and dyers. Manufacturing here was dispersed among numerous small towns and villages, ensuring that the economic benefits of the industry were not confined to the large urban centres. In south Devon and Dartmoor, by contrast, cloth production was concentrated more in the larger towns and the effects of commercialisation were therefore more limited in scope.¹⁵⁶

Exeter was the premier urban centre in the south-west in the fourteenth century. Its importance rested on its status as the seat of the diocesan, its position as the administrative and legal centre of Devon, and its strategic location at the hub of the medieval roads network and at the head of a major river estuary. Three weekly markets and seven annual fairs underlined its position at the pinnacle of the regional commercial hierarchy, whilst the corporation enjoyed an extraordinary degree of independence from royal or seignorial control, unparalleled anywhere else in the south-western peninsula. The vigour and confidence of the Exeter corporation is manifest in its prolonged legal dispute with successive earls of Devon from the thirteenth century onwards, over commercial rights and access to fishing grounds on the Exe. Although lying more than ten miles from the coast, the city exercised jurisdiction over most other harbours along the Exe estuary, but its advantage was challenged in the early years of the fourteenth century when Hugh Courtenay II sought to establish his newly acquired borough of Topsham as the main commercial exchange for imported goods in the Exe valley.¹⁵⁷ Exeter was populous by local standards but, with an estimated residential

¹⁵⁵ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 19-27; Fox, 'Medieval Rural Industry', pp. 325-9; Maryanne Kowaleski, 'The Port Towns of Fourteenth Century Devon', in *The New Maritime History of Devon*, i, ed. M. Duffy (Exeter, 1992), p. 64

¹⁵⁶ Fox, 'Chronology of Enclosure', pp. 181-202

¹⁵⁷ A. M. Jackson, 'Medieval Exeter, the Exe and the Earldom of Devon', *TDA*, civ (1972), pp. 57-79; Kowalaski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 222-4

population of just 3,100 in 1377, probably ranked as no more than a medium-sized town in a wider English context.¹⁵⁸

The extraordinary number of so-called ‘boroughs’, already noted here, suggests that Devon was at an advanced stage in its commercial evolution, but this probably had less to do with genuine urbanisation than with topography and social structure. Sheer physical size necessitated a greater number of market centres, and the problems of internal transport, stemming from the difficult terrain and a shortage of pack-horses and carts, meant that these centres had to be located at regular intervals for perishable agricultural goods, such as meat and dairy products, to be successfully marketed.¹⁵⁹ A comparatively late burst of economic and demographic expansion, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, had led to increased demand for foodstuffs, manufactured goods and services, thereby promoting monetisation and the establishment of formalised patterns of trade in the county. The success of non-agricultural occupations, the increase in the use of cash wages - a consequence of reduced dependence upon customary services - and the addition to the local population of thousands of soldiers in transit to France from the 1340s, helped to stimulate demand for goods and services, to absorb the landless population, and generally to boost the commercial evolution and economic fortunes of Devon’s towns. Trying to establish the ratio of urban to rural population is, however, probably fruitless since many of those settlements taxed by the Crown as ‘boroughs’ were in fact little more than villages. As we have seen, the ‘pastoral’ and ‘urban’ elements of the late-medieval economy were often inextricably entwined – in the same way that mining was usually combined with farming to provide a complete livelihood – and it therefore makes little sense to delineate arbitrarily the rural population from the non-agrarian. For example, while the borough of Crediton was undoubtedly an important town and marketplace with advanced commercial features and trading links to Exeter, its prosperity

¹⁵⁸ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 81-89; Kowaleski, ‘Port Towns’, pp. 62-3

¹⁵⁹ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 41-4

was almost entirely dependent upon agricultural activity and the pattern of settlement elsewhere in the manor was distinctively rural.¹⁶⁰

Next to Exeter in the commercial hierarchy came Barnstaple, its position as a small regional entrepôt guaranteed by its vast hinterland on the north coast. Originally an Anglo-Saxon *burh*, Barnstaple was already well established in the fourteenth century, but its government was far less autonomous than Exeter's since it remained in the hands of a seignorial lord: this did not, however, deter the burgesses from periodically asserting their independence and, from 1340 onwards, audaciously attempting to extract a new charter of liberties from the Crown under false pretences.¹⁶¹ Barnstaple's relative isolation largely excluded it from the new commercial and military opportunities opened up in Europe in the fourteenth century, and its overseas markets were largely restricted to southern Wales and southern and eastern Ireland; although even here it was overshadowed by Bristol, its more powerful neighbour along the Severn coast. The southern port towns of Plymouth and Dartmouth alone came near to rivalling Exeter and Barnstaple in terms of size and wealth: although their internal hinterlands were relatively restricted, their importance as naval centres was enhanced by the wars with France and their prosperity rose as the regular populations were swollen by billeting troops, demanding provisions and maritime services.¹⁶² Beside these four major urban centres, a further sixteen towns were regularly taxed as boroughs by the Crown, out of a potential seventy-one 'boroughs' identified in the extents, although the likelihood that all of these sixteen could support a full range of commercial and urban services is slight: Lydford, for example, the site of royal castle which in the tenth century had minted its own coins, had a population of just forty-five burgesses in 1377.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 41-77, 294; Britnell, *Commercialisation of English Society*, pp. 79-101

¹⁶¹ Susan Reynolds, 'The Forged Charters of Barnstaple', *EHR*, lxxxiv (1969), pp. 699-720

¹⁶² Below, pp. 240-7

2.6 DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS AND THE RETREAT FROM DEMESNE FARMING

Implicit in the foregoing discussion of agrarian trends is an associated decline in the direct cultivation of seignorial estates. More will now be said of a theme hinted at earlier in the chapter, namely the contraction and leasing of demesnes towards the end of the fourteenth century. The 1370s is the earliest starting date for many of the manorial account rolls, making it difficult to compare meaningfully levels of demesne activity before and after the Black Death. It would be useful to have data from both halves of the century because, in a number of cases, the retreat from demesne agriculture may have been in progress, or even complete, well before 1348-9, and therefore cannot be directly attributed to demographic collapse. The following discussion is consequently a fairly hypothetical one, based on the scattered evidence of a few random survivals.

As a general rule, modes of management on seignorial demesnes in the south-west were slow to change after 1349. This was partly a manifestation of what Bruce Campbell has described as the “Indian summer” of seignorial farming, in which inflationary pressure and statutory curbs on wage rises kept the prices of agricultural products artificially high and sustained a false sense of security among demesne managers. One of the more important effects of the plague on agricultural production throughout England was to tip the balance of husbandry decisively in favour of pastoralism: grassland farming was less labour-intensive than arable, pastoral goods were more easily transportable than crops, and there was a growing demand for animal products from an urban population with a higher disposable income. In the south-west, however, where pastoral farming was already quite widely-spread before 1348-9 and where good arable land remained at somewhat of a premium, there was less immediate incentive to turn away from the existing pattern of mixed husbandry.¹⁶⁴

The progress of plague in the south-west can be reconstructed from the mortality rate of clerics in the diocese of Exeter, inferred from institutions to ecclesiastical benefices in the

¹⁶³ Kowaleski, *Medieval Exeter*, pp. 71, 75

¹⁶⁴ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 7-8; Fox, ‘Devon and Cornwall’, pp. 152-3

episcopal registers: the figures available are by no means wholly accurate, but the trends thus revealed are clear enough to indicate the scale and approximate timing of the catastrophe.¹⁶⁵ The contagion, which first arrived in England through the ports of Dorset in June 1348, had clearly taken hold in Devon by the middle of that month when there were reports that the sheriff and his entire staff had been taken critically ill.¹⁶⁶ The full impact was apparently not felt among the clergy, however, until January 1349, although one must allow for the inevitable delay between the death and replacement of a priest. The epidemic peaked between March and July 1349, but it was not until 1352 that mortality rates returned to pre-plague levels. A second phase began in 1361 and peaked in 1362 and, although its effects were felt rather less severely in Devon than before, the Cornish clergy suffered disproportionately. A third, less severe outbreak, occurred in the second half of 1375.

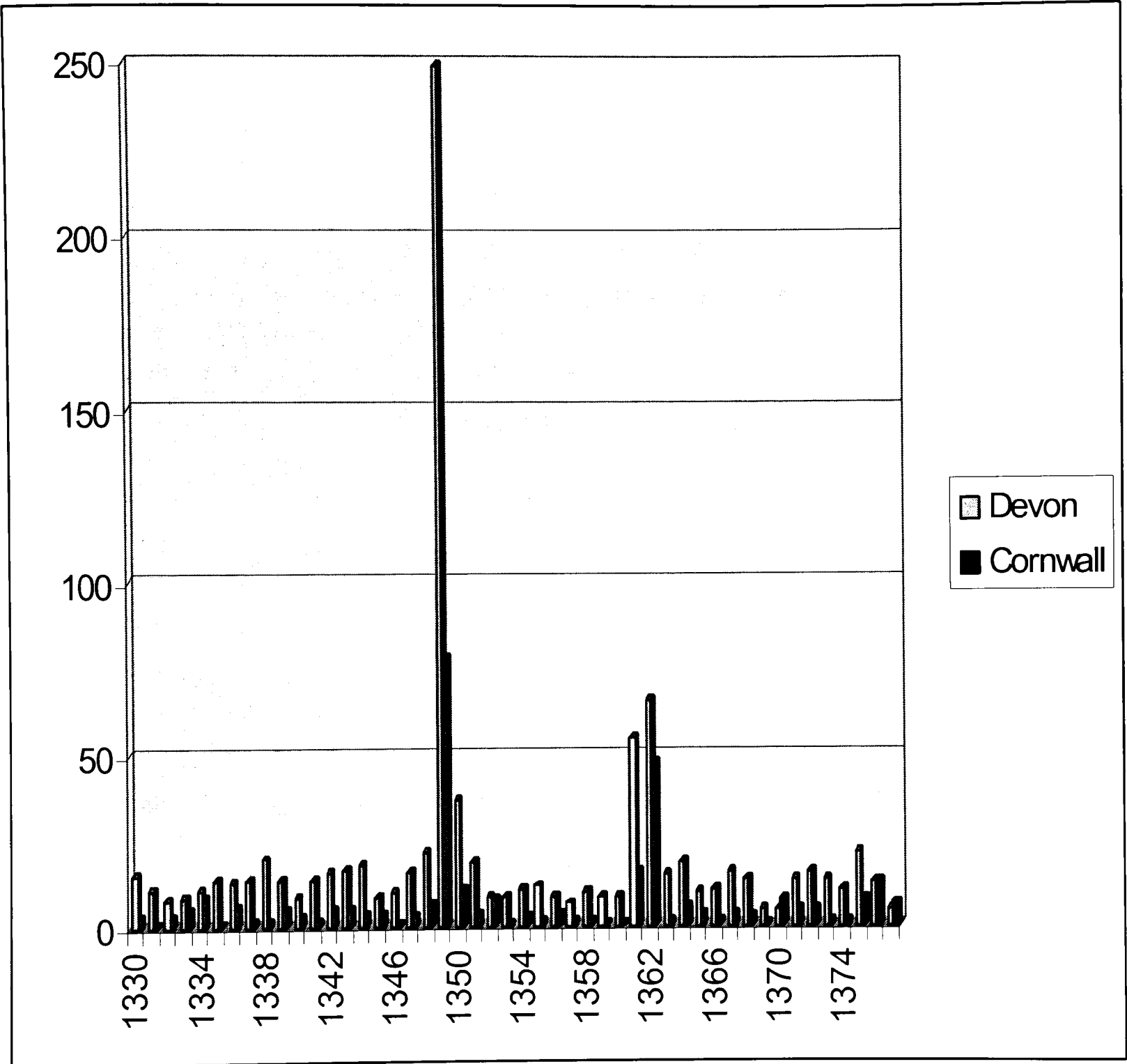
Although the crises of these years affected different regions of the county with varying degrees of severity, it is clear that in general changes in land use in Devon took place slowly and over a long period of time. The direct management of seignorial resources made sense only while it ensured better financial returns than leasing the land, or while it supplied the lord's household with produce otherwise difficult to obtain: changes in demesne management are therefore likely to be indicative of wider economic trends. On the other hand, where the population crisis did apparently initiate the retreat from demesne farming, this was not necessarily a rapid or inexorable process. The timing is not easy to reconstruct with any precision, but the crucial period of transition seems to have been in the final two decades of the fourteenth century, with most seignorial demesnes in Devon completely abandoned by the 1410s and 1420s. Cultivation on some large estates, however, remained reasonably buoyant until perhaps as late as the 1390s, and signs of economic distress here were not particularly acute. The Black Death may have precipitated a major shift in agricultural practice, but it can scarcely be said to have been a sudden or dramatic one.

¹⁶⁵ Below, Fig. 2.9 (p. 104a)

¹⁶⁶ Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', p. 745

FIG. 2.9: ANNUAL MORTALITY RATES AMONG THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF EXETER (1330-1377)

(figures extrapolated from presentations to benefices in John Grandisson’s register)



The impact of mortality on the rural landscape was felt most heavily in north and mid Devon, which were, paradoxically, the least densely-populated areas of the county. Arable in these regions had never been heavily exploited and swathes of recently and lightly cultivated land effortlessly lapsed back into waste and pasture: the overall acreage of arable land available in north Devon declined by about 30% between 1300 and 1500. With yet more rough grazing to add to the existing stock, these regions turned to specialised animal husbandry, and in particular to cattle rearing which was less dependent upon easy access to markets.¹⁶⁷ The abandonment of arable on the equally unforgiving soils of Dartmoor was by contrast rather less pronounced, since arable land here was in any case ‘marginal’ and had never been intensely cultivated. There were instances of settlements, usually on the highest and most exposed terrain, being totally abandoned after 1349, but the commercialised economy of the moorlands – supported by itinerant tanners, mercantile activity in the stannary towns, and demand for natural commodities such as pasture and granite – helped to sustain a reasonable market for grain and other arable produce.¹⁶⁸

The contraction of demesnes in the lowlands of south Devon was similarly undramatic. As in Dartmoor, the existence of a mature network of commercial markets and the continuing demand for victuals by the non-agrarian populations of the county’s major seaports, encouraged the cultivation of surplus grain for several decades after Black Death, despite labour shortages. On the large coastal manor of Yealmpton, for example, income from the sale of corn in 1395-6 was almost £18, with nearly half that amount again coming from the proceeds of livestock, wool and dairy products.¹⁶⁹ In the hills and valleys of east Devon, where the movement towards the enclosure of previously sub-divided arable was already well underway by the mid-fourteenth century and a rural economy more balanced than that in south and north Devon had already emerged, the transition from a seignorial economy rooted in demesne agriculture to one based on rents was smoother still. The hilly countryside easily absorbed the burgeoning flocks and herds, while the region’s growing

¹⁶⁷ Fox, ‘Devon and Cornwall’, pp. 152-4, 157-8, 164-5

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 158-9, 167-8

importance as a semi-industrial cloth-manufacturing centre helped to stimulate the depressed agrarian economy.¹⁷⁰

On the Devon estates of the Courtenay earls, demesne agriculture was apparently sufficiently buoyant for at least 650 acres still to be under seed, at fourteen separate locations, by the time of Hugh III's death in the summer of 1377. Some of those lands in cultivation - Hulham, Stedcombe and Towsington – had only recently been acquired and it is not possible to say how they were cultivated before the Black Death: it is evident, however, that demesne activity was commonplace on the comital estates in Devon, albeit on quite a modest scale, more than a generation after the Black Death.¹⁷¹ Randomly surviving account rolls of the earldom, beginning in 1374-5, help us to trace the subsequent evolution of the manors but not, unfortunately, in any great detail, since these are essentially stewards' summaries of income and expenditure for the administration as a whole.

The *compoti* of 1387-8 and 1390-1 do, however, contain just enough detail to permit comment on certain individual manors.¹⁷² Gross receipts from the capital manor of Tiverton in 1387-8 were in fact the highest recorded since the thirteenth century and, although levels of arable production are likely to have been modest, income from the demesne corn mill was healthy. By 1390-1 some of the demesne arable had been leased and mill receipts had fallen, but sales of manorial produce remained the second most important item of income after rents: thereafter, receipts declined sharply, falling to less than half the 1387-8 level in 1393-4.¹⁷³ In Okehampton, the Courtenays' ancestral home, the corn mill had already been farmed out in 1387-8 and customary works sold exceeded the value of those actually used, but sales of produce were still relatively high and there was some livestock on the manor: yet by 1390-1 most of the land in Okehampton had apparently been leased. The manor of Whimble, in the Vale of Exeter, seems to have been taken out of cultivation at the same time. Conversely, the seignorial mill at Dolton, which was farmed out in 1387-8, had been taken back into demesne

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 154-6, 169; PRO SC6/830/29 (ministers' account, Yealmpton, 1395-6)

¹⁷⁰ Fox, 'Field Systems of East Devon', pp. 126-7; Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', pp. 156-7

¹⁷¹ PRO C135/260, no. 3; Above, Fig. 2.7B (p. 92a)

¹⁷² BL Add. Ch. 64318, 64319

by 1390-1. Most mills had, however, been leased by the 1380s to ensure a stable income. The four corn mills and one fulling mill in Exe Island realised a total annual rent of £25 in 1387-8, only slightly less than their estimated value when in demesne in 1292.¹⁷⁴

Demesne activity on the comital estates in the 1380s was most intense in Plympton, in south Devon. In 1387-8 there were thirty-four cattle, 232 sheep and thirty-five draught beasts, while sales of grain realised almost ten pounds. Nevertheless, Plympton's demesne farm had clearly shrunk quite markedly in the course of the fourteenth century, since sales of surplus villeins' works now accounted for more than £15. Manorial receipts remained fairly constant – at about £137 in 1374-5, Plympton was by far the most valuable of the Devon manors – until the 1390s when they began to fall steadily, in common with most of the other Courtenay estates.¹⁷⁵ That they had remained buoyant until so late was probably a reflection of the economic and demographic boom in neighbouring Plymouth: manorial rents in 1390-1 were £66/11s./11d., nearly £6 higher than in 1387-8, and more than £20 was spent in this year by Edward Courtenay on repairing houses in the manor, presumably in the hope of attracting new tenants from the competitive local market.

Two important estates fell to Hugh III in the 1370s, thereby inflating the figures in the accounts. The manors of Sutton Courtenay (Oxon.) and Waddesdon (Bucks.) reverted to the main comital line shortly after the death of Hugh V in 1374.¹⁷⁶ Demesne activity in these manors, which are treated as a single estate for the purposes of accounting, was especially lively with sales of grain and other manorial produce exceeding £85 in 1387-8, a reflection of the prime arable locations in southern England.¹⁷⁷ The death of the earl's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth (née Brian), in the following year, led to the recovery of a large estate that had been created for Hugh III's eldest son and heir almost thirty years previously, but here the lands were almost entirely leased out by the time they first appear in the accounts in 1387-8.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ BL Add. Ch. 13972

¹⁷⁴ PRO C133/62, no. 7

¹⁷⁵ BL Add. Ch. 13906

¹⁷⁶ *CIPM*, xiv, 14

¹⁷⁷ BL Add. Ch. 13906, 64318, 64321

¹⁷⁸ *CCR* (1374-7), p. 167; BL Add. Ch. 64318

Edward Courtenay (d. 1419), Hugh III's grandson and eventual heir, added to the comital estate the inheritance of his mother Emmeline (d. 1371), the heiress of Sir John Dauney (d. 1346), which included some fifteen manors in Devon and Cornwall.¹⁷⁹ There were nearly 1,500 demesne sheep and about four hundred head of cattle on the Cornwall manors of this estate in 1387-8. It is not clear whether the earl had intentionally concentrated livestock activity in Cornwall or if lack of interest in these peripheral estates had allowed pastoral husbandry to survive here when its importance elsewhere on the Courtenay estates had declined, since no further detailed information is forthcoming.¹⁸⁰ Ironically, at a time when direct cultivation was becoming unprofitable and seignorial landowners were beginning to wind down their operations, the earls of Devon found themselves inundated with new land.

The death of Lady Margaret Courtenay in 1391, brought a valuable widow's dower back into the fold. Margaret's IPM, like that of her husband in 1377, records the acreage of arable then under cultivation on each manor, only now at a time when agrarian retreat was in full swing. Although six of Margaret's ten manors in Devon were ostensibly still in demesne, the acreages actually under cultivation had shrunk dramatically: in the four manors which appear in both the 1377 and 1391 IPMs, the total cultivated area had fallen from 256 acres to just sixty-eight.¹⁸¹

It is becoming evident, therefore, that the date at which demesnes were taken out of cultivation on the Courtenay estate varied from manor to manor, and that no obvious conscious planning lay behind the retreat. A general pattern in the timing of the transition from a demesne to a rent-based seignorial economy is, however, fairly clear. Demesne activity had remained reasonably buoyant on most of the comital manors until about the 1380s when, possibly as a consequence of unfavourable environmental factors, land began to

¹⁷⁹ *CIPM*, xiii, 99

¹⁸⁰ BL Add. Ch. 64318, 13972

¹⁸¹ *CIPM*, xvii, 1-9; PRO C136/70

be leased on a large scale: manorial incomes plummeted in the 1390s, for what reason these accounts do little to explain, and all demesnes had been leased by 1422.¹⁸²

As a rule, that timing was probably representative of an overall regional pattern, but there were of course exceptions. On the Tavistock estates, a large tranche of land had been leased out as early as 1339, and smaller parcels were also released as the monk-farmers adopted more of a supervisory role, but some demesne activity was sustained until the very end of the fifteenth century, and wheat was still being cultivated on a large scale on two manors at the time of the Dissolution.¹⁸³ The timing was also less than coherent on the Dynham estates. Active cultivation on the Cornish demesnes at Bodardle and Downinney had apparently ceased by as early as 1301, and when the account rolls begin in the 1380s, nearly all the land in each had been leased out, with income now derived mainly from rents, tolls on tin mining, and sales of turves.¹⁸⁴ On the home farm of Hartland, the largest and most valuable of the manors, production of grain surpluses had all but ceased by the time the account rolls begin in 1383-4: small quantities of wheat and oats were grown for household consumption, but sometimes even these had to be brought in from outside. Practically the whole of the gross annual income for Hartland in the 1380s and 1390s, which ranged from between £98 and £138, was derived from fixed rents, fines of court and, from 1390-1, sales of customary works; further evidence of a declining interest in arable farming.¹⁸⁵

More revealing perhaps than these big concerns, which would in any case have been cushioned from the full impact of economic upheaval by their superior resources, is the one or two-manor estate typical of the average county knight or gentleman. A chance survival of miscellaneous accounts and deeds relating to the Filleigh family's north-western manor of Buckland Filleigh in the fourteenth century, makes such an enquiry just about possible. Buckland had been mortgaged in 1274 by the widow, Lady Ermegarde Punchardon (d. c. 1279), to Sir Nicholas Filleigh (d. c. 1301), for the sum of £36, and was thereafter adopted by

¹⁸² BL Add. Ch. 64317-22, 643125; DRO CR/584; SC6/1118/6 (ministers' account, earldom of Devon, 1421-2); Fox, 'Devon and Cornwall', p. 173

¹⁸³ Above, p. 83; Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 109

¹⁸⁴ PRO C133/89, no. 3; Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', pp. 49-52

the Filleighs as their principal residence.¹⁸⁶ Sir Nicholas had certainly found himself a bargain, perhaps through the misfortune of a vulnerable widow, and he invested in Buckland's future success. Shortly after this transaction he purchased sixteen marks-worth of arable in the adjacent hamlets of Grenliscote and Taddiport, and the rents of two free tenants.¹⁸⁷ By about 1280 the manor had been healthily stocked, with sixteen horses, thirty-eight oxen, sixty-seven cattle, 253 sheep and twenty-six swine in the demesne pastures; and by the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the rather eccentrically compiled accounts begin, substantial quantities of oats and rye, as well as a little wheat, were already in cultivation.¹⁸⁸ Thomas Filleigh (d. c. 1328), Sir Nicholas' son, secured the future of his father's investment by purchasing the manor outright in 1315 for £60.¹⁸⁹

Some of the land bought by Nicholas in the late thirteenth century was leased by his grandson William (d. c. 1374) in 1340, but grain production in Buckland had expanded rather than declined: the volume of oats in the granary in about 1347 was 15% greater than in 1343, while the quantity of rye had almost doubled. The demesne herds and flocks had also grown slightly since the time of William's grandfather.¹⁹⁰ John Filleigh (d. c. 1407) succeeded his father William in about 1374 when he began, perhaps somewhat imprudently, to make new additions to the demesne. He bought a rent and the reversion of some land in 1375, purchased the holding of one of his free tenants in 1379, and obtained arable and woodland in 1380.¹⁹¹ But the young man seems to have over-reached himself and his ambitions foundered on economic reality. In 1388 he leased out the land he had obtained only nine years earlier and, between then and the date of the final Filleigh deed in 1405, leased or sold most of the former demesne estate.¹⁹² Unfortunately, the account rolls are silent between 1352 and 1396, so the process of contraction cannot be accurately reconstructed. The account of 1396-7, however,

¹⁸⁵ CRO AR2/539/1-8; Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', pp. 55-9

¹⁸⁶ BL Add. Ch. 29008, 29009, 29010, 29011, 29012, 29013, 29018, 29021

¹⁸⁷ BL Add. Ch. 29028, 29030

¹⁸⁸ DRO 1262 M/M85 (livestock inventory, Buckland Filleigh); 1262 M/M81 (account roll, Buckland Filleigh, c. 1300)

¹⁸⁹ BL Add. Ch. 29037; *DFE*, ii, 1025

¹⁹⁰ BL Add. Ch. 29055; DRO 1262 M/M89 (account roll, Buckland Filleigh, 1342-3); 1262 M/M90 (inventory, Buckland Filleigh, c. 1347)

¹⁹¹ BL Add. Ch. 29095, 29099, 29100

compiled shortly after John had disposed of a large chunk of arable and most of his woodland, contains no record of grain produced or sold, and the once impressive livestock operation had diminished to a gaggle of farmyard fowl. Rents had, however, risen slightly above their pre-1350 level, one presumes as a consequence of John Filleigh's leases.¹⁹³

2.7 CONCLUSION

The regional economies of Devon and the south-west emerged battered and dismembered by successive demographic crises in the fourteenth century, much in the same way as those elsewhere in England, but perhaps better equipped than the latter to effect something resembling a swift recovery. Low dependence on serfdom, a natural environment suited to the requirements of efficient pastoral husbandry, and the continued development of non-agrarian sectors of the economy, combined to soften the blow of economic disaster. The mobility of populations, especially in the era of the Hundred Years' War, stimulated commercialisation, while flexible agrarian practices contributed to a sleeker and more efficient agricultural economy.

Devon's 'Cinderella' economic structures – characterised by low population density and mediocre grain production – had therefore helped to shield local society from some of the worst excesses of plague. The retreat from demesne agriculture had a considerably lesser impact here than elsewhere, mainly because in some areas of the county this mode of cultivation had probably ceased to be an economic mainstay long before 1348-9: the Black Death simply hastened and completed the process of contraction that in many instances had been well underway since the turn of the fourteenth century. Wealth was concentrated not in a handful of big seignorial estates, but was more widely distributed; among non-agricultural industries, among the expanding mercantile communities, and among a large base of middling

¹⁹² BL Add. Ch. 29113, 29118, 29119, 29120, 29121, 29123, 29125

¹⁹³ DRO 1262 M/M92-5

to small landowners more likely to be producing for personal consumption than profit. It is to the latter that we turn our attention in the following chapter.

3. KNIGHTS, ESQUIRES AND LAWYERS: THE WORLD OF THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY 'SQUIREARCHY'

Devon's topographers and antiquaries, since the seventeenth century, have concerned themselves chiefly with tracing the descent and tenorial history of literally hundreds of manors and small freehold estates in the county. In doing so, they reflected not only the preoccupations of their contemporary audiences but also revealed to us a complex social structure dominated by the mass of petty gentry and small yeoman farmers. Very few Devon landowners in the post-medieval era could have rivalled the aristocracy of the English Midlands, for instance, either in terms of wealth or the size of their estates.¹ Even in as early as 1316, knights and gentry may have owned as much as 72% of the land in Devon.²

The origins of this enlarged social class are to be found in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an era of secondary colonisation, land clearance and reclamation, and human emancipation, which contributed further to the fragmentation of the great Domesday estates described in chapter one, and produced a remarkably large number of free tenants.³ Evidence of its success and mobility may be inferred from the number of knightly families in the fourteenth century who took their names from aboriginal estates, on which they often still resided: Hacombe, Cockington and Cheverston were among the more substantial families to sport toponyms.⁴ The ranks of the landed wealthy were further swollen by the arrival of monied professionals - bureaucratic, legal and mercantile - who had derived their income from non-agrarian sources, but chose to invest surplus cash in thoroughly conventional ways. They literally bought their way into higher echelons of society by amassing landed estates,

¹ Thomas Westcote, *A View of Devonshire in MDCXXX*, ed. Oliver & Jones (Exeter, 1845); William Pole, *Collections towards a Description of the County of Devon* (1791); Daniel and Samuel Lysons, *Magna Britannia*, vi, *Devonshire* (1822); O. J. Reichel, 'The Hundreds of Devon', *TDA* supplementary series (Exeter, 1928-38); Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 74-9; Joyce Youings, 'Some Early Topographers of Devon and Cornwall', in *Topographical Writers in South-West England*, ed. Mark Brayshay (Exeter, 1996), pp. 50-61, 144-53

² This figure is based on the returns of the *Nomina Villarum* survey of 1316: *FA*, i, 372-85

³ Above, pp. 72-3, *et passim*

⁴ *The Surnames of Devon*, ed. David Postles (English surnames ser., vi, Oxford, 1995), pp. 118-9

often in the process preying on longer-established families who found themselves in temporary or terminal financial distress.

The landed elite was therefore transformed into a more diverse, heterogeneous and fluid social class. Devon could still boast its ancient dynasties, but these no longer automatically produced the wealthiest or most eminent members of local society. In the present work, the term 'squirearchy' will be used loosely to describe this group in its fundamental role as landowners and lords of men. It encompasses not only a traditionally conceived 'aristocracy' of barons, knights and potential knights – whose position in the social hierarchy was assured by their entrenchment in the structures of local lordship – but also men of means whose more recent purchases of land and property were readily translated into personal power and authority. 'Squirearchy' places emphasis on the specifically local dimension of seignorial power; the element of dominion over land and men that was common to the authority of any lord, be he an earl with a vast and ancient inheritance, or a lawyer with a newly acquired estate of more modest proportions. Whatever the differences in material wealth between individuals within this category, they were united above all by the fact that their authority and social status was derived ultimately from the possession of land.⁵

Any attempt to establish the size of the 'squirearchy' in the fourteenth century is however fraught with difficulty. Many potential candidates for inclusion are known to us in the sources only by an occasional, and often accidental, reference to their name and social status, which makes it practically impossible to estimate accurately their number at any one time. The returns of the *Nomina villarum* survey of 1316, which Nigel Saul used to reconstruct a cross-section of landed society in fourteenth-century Gloucestershire, are unfortunately less comprehensive for Devon, since they group together between two and five manors under the heading of one *vill* and record only the name of the principal lord of the

⁵ Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 77; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 17-22

‘township’; none at all survives for Cornwall, the second county where knights resident in Devon were most likely to own land.⁶

Fortunately, a document of 1324 gives a good idea of the size of the landed elite and enables us to make reasonably well informed quantitative judgements and comparisons. In May of that year, the leading inhabitants of the English counties were summoned to a general muster at Westminster to treat with the king over the projected war with France. In effect, these men were to represent their county of residence in parliament and may therefore be assumed to have comprised the higher social *strata* of their local communities.⁷ The list is of greater interest than earlier military summonses because it appears to omit the names of those who owned lands in Devon but were not normally resident or active there: eleven of those named were also returned for one or other of the neighbouring counties of Cornwall, Somerset or Dorset, but they can all, with some degree of certainty, be shown to have lived, to have had family, or to have participated regularly in local administration in Devon. This is therefore a fairly comprehensive survey of Devon’s resident social elite which, when supplemented with details from *Nomina villarum*, produces as complete a cross-section of higher landed society in the fourteenth century as we can reasonably expect. In 1324 individuals were categorised as “*milites*” or “*homines ad arma*”, although in practice it is evident that most were capable of supporting knighthood, but were either too young or had deliberately avoided doing so. It is not clear what the property qualification for inclusion was, although the sheriff of neighbouring Cornwall claimed that all the men returned from his bailiwick, both knights and esquires, were forty librate landowners, but in fact the true lower limit may have been closer to £15.⁸ In either case, it is apparent that all those listed here were quite substantial men.

In terms of size, Devon compared favourably to its neighbours: of a total of fifty-nine men named in the 1324 summons, thirty were belted knights and two were barons, compared

⁶ Nigel Saul, *Knights and Esquires: the Gloucestershire Gentry in the Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1981), p. 5; *FA*, i, 372-85

⁷ *PW*, II, div. 2, i, 638

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 655

to twenty-six knights in the more populous county of Somerset and fewer still in either Cornwall or Dorset.⁹ When placed alongside the evidence of the 1332 lay subsidy – the returns of the more contemporary 1327 tax are incomplete for Devon – it becomes apparent that these names generally coincide with those of the county's wealthiest taxpayers.¹⁰ The two sets of data have therefore been combined to produce an index to Devon's resident seignorial families, together with a rough estimate of tax paid on the patrimonial estate, where it is possible to calculate this, at a point somewhere towards the end of the reign of Edward II. Although a number of individuals were dead or evaded payment in 1332, and others were clearly under-assessed, this does on the whole give quite a good indication of the broad distribution of wealth among the 'squirearchy'. The number of taxation districts (hamlet, tithing, vill or borough) in which each knight was registered has also been noted, on the assumption that the wealthiest men could afford to distribute their property over the widest geographical area. Obviously these figures include only property taxed in Devon and should not be used as a definitive point of wealth comparison, since many landowners had property in other counties; but, as these men are likely to have been mainly resident and would therefore have stored the bulk of their portable wealth in Devon, the resulting table should serve as a good basic source of reference.¹¹

Most individuals have been assigned a likely principal place of residence, either on the basis of information gleaned from their inquisitions *post-mortem* (IPMs), or because the largest portion of their taxed wealth was stored there in 1332, or because additional monumental or architectural evidence identifies a family with a particular locality. It is evidently not very satisfactory to attempt to confine men with widespread interests to one particular manor or estate - just as it is far from ideal to identify great magnates with a single shire - but locating the probable 'countries' of individual landowners will help to give some idea of the geographical distribution of seignorial wealth, which can then be compared to other factors such as population density, land relief and soil quality. A map plotting the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 638, 652-3, 655

¹⁰ *The Devonshire Lay Subsidy of 1332*, ed. Audrey M. Erskine (D&CRS, new ser., xiv, 1969)

FIG. 3.1: THE RESIDENT LANDED ELITE OF DEVON, c. 1324

<u>Name</u> ¹	<u>Residence</u> ²	<u>Centres</u> ³	<u>Subsidy (£)</u> ³	<u>Status</u>	<u>Other County</u> ⁴
BAMFIELD, John (d. c. 1357)	Poltimore	2	8	<i>domicellus</i>	
BATH, Thomas	Sheepwash	1	2		
BEARE, John	Littleham	5	7		
BEAUCHAMP, John (d. c. 1350)	Silverton	3	10	<i>miles</i>	Dorset
BEAUMONT, John I (d. c. 1332)	Shirwell	6	17	<i>miles</i>	
BEAUPEL, Robert I (d. c. 1324)	Knowstone	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
BEAUPEL, Robert II (d. c. 1351)	Landkey	5	10	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
BEUDYN, Robert (d. by 1328)	Compton Gifford	-	-	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
BIGBURY, John	Bigbury	1	3		
BONVILLE, Nicholas	Shute	3	6	<i>miles</i>	Somerset
BOYS, William I (d. by 1346)	Halberton	2	3		
BUSSEL, William I (d. 1346)	Teign Week (Newton Abbot)	2	6		
CAREW, John I (1282-1324)	Weston Peverell	9	40	<i>miles</i>	Pembrokeshire, Carlow, Berkshire
CHALONS, John (d. c. 1347)	Challonsleigh	2	2	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
CHAMPERNOWNE, Henry (d. 1329)	Ilfracombe	2	4	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
CHAMPERNOWNE, Hugh	-	-	-		
CHAMPERNOWNE, Oliver	North Tawton	1	2		
CHAMPERNOWNE, Richard I (d. 1338)	Modbury	5	21	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
CHARTERAY, John (d. by 1332)	Newton Abbot	1	1	<i>miles</i>	
CLIFFORD, John (d. c. 1355)	Combeinteignhead	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
CHEVERSTON, John II (d. c. 1375)	Thurlestone	6	17	<i>miles</i>	Somerset
CHEVERSTON, William	Tamerton Foliot	2	5	<i>miles</i>	
COBHAM, John	Bridestowe	4	10		Cornwall, Somerset
COCKINGTON, James (a. 1351)	Cockington	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
COGAN, Richard	Uffculme	2	12	<i>miles</i>	Cork, Glamorgan, Somerset
COLE, John	Iddesleigh	-	-		
COTEL, Elias (a. 1332)	-	2	5	<i>miles</i>	Somerset
COURTENAY, Hugh II (1275-1340)	Tiverton	19	80	<i>baronetus</i>	Somerset, Dorset, Hants., Berks., Bucks.
CRUWYS, Alexander (d. by 1331)	Cruwys Morchard	-	-		
CRUWYS, Robert	Cruwys Morchard	3	6		

<u>Name</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Centres</u>	<u>Subsidy (£)</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Second County</u>
DAUMARLE, William II (1297-1336)	Woodbury	2	5	<i>miles</i>	Somerset, Hampshire
DAUMARLE, John II (d. 1339)	Fleet Daumarle	4	9	<i>domicellus</i>	
DAUNEY, Nicholas (d. 1332)	Goodrington	4	24	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall, Somerset
DOUNE, Ralph	-	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
DYNHAM, John I (1295-c. 1331)	Hartland	9	33	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall, Somerset
DYNHAM, Oliver I (d. 1343)	Sampford Peverell	-	-	<i>miles</i>	Dorset
ESSE, Ralph	Rose Ash	1	3	<i>miles</i>	
FERRERS, William (1282-1336)	Newton Ferrers	2	7	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
FERRERS, William (b. 1310)	Churston Ferrers	2	10		
FISHACRE, Martin (d. c. 1366)	Morleigh	3	11	<i>miles</i>	
FITZSTEPHEN, Gilbert (d. c. 1328)	Dartmouth	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
FLEMING, Baldwin (d. c. 1337)	Bratton Fleming	4	14	<i>miles</i>	Cork
GAMBON, Walter (d. c. 1343)	South Molton	4	14		
GRENVILLE, Bartholemew (d. c. 1327)	Bideford	-	-	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall, Somerset, Gloucestershire
HACCOMBE, Stephen IV (d. 1331)	Hacombe	-	-	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
HAREWILL, William	Hemerdon	2	5		
HARPATH, Thomas	South Milton	3	3		
HEREWARD, William	Dodscott	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
HORTON, Robert (d. c. 1343)	Weare Giffard	3	6	<i>miles</i>	
HUISH, Richard II (b. 1276)	Huish	2	9	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
JEW, Roger	Colyton	2	8	<i>miles</i>	
KAEL, Humphrey	Holcombe Burnell (Dawlish)	1	2		Somerset
KEYNES, John I (1292-1329)	Winkleigh	1	2		
KIRKHAM, Nicholas (d. c. 1332)	Paignton	1	5	<i>miles</i>	

<u>Name</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Centres</u>	<u>Subsidy (£)</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Second County</u>
MALSTON, Robert	East Ogwell	2	20		
MARTIN, William III (1257-1324)	Dartington	11	-	<i>baronetus miles</i>	Somerset, Pembs.
MERTON, Richard I (1280-1343)	Great Torrington	4	12		
NONANT, Roger IV	Broad Clyst	1	1	<i>miles</i>	
OXTON, Robert	Brixham	1	3		
PIPARD, William (d. 1349)	Charlton	8	43	<i>miles</i>	Suffolk
POLEYN, William	Witheridge	1	2		
POMEROY, Henry VII (d. 1373)	Berry Pomeroy	2	7	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
PRIDEAUX, Roger (d. c. 1356)	Orcheton (Modbury)	9	33	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall
PROUZ, Hugh	Gatcombe	2	7	<i>miles</i>	
RALEIGH, John	Beaudeport (Kings Nympton)	3	10	<i>miles</i>	
RALEIGH, John	Charles	2	2	<i>miles</i>	
RALEIGH, Peter	Bolham (Tiverton)	7	17		
RALEIGH, Thomas II	Raleigh	3	4		
ROHAUT, Roger	Dodbrooke	1	5		
ST. AUBYN, Gilbert	Mortehoe	-	-		Cornwall
ST. AUBYN, John	-	-	-	<i>miles</i>	
STAUNTON, John	Clovelly	2	10	<i>miles</i>	
STOCKHAY, Robert (d. 1328)	Saunton	3	4	<i>miles</i>	
STAPELDON, Richard I (d. c. 1332)	Stapelton	5	10	<i>miles</i>	Cornwall, Somerset
STRODE, Adam	-	-	-		
TALBOT, William	Spreyton	1	1		
TUDENHAM, Robert	Churchstanton	1	4		Somerset
TYREL, Henry (d. by 1332)	-	-	-		
UMFRAVILLE, Gilbert (d. 1349)	Down St. Leonard	3	8	<i>miles</i>	Glamorgan

<u>Name</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Centres</u>	<u>Subsidy (£)</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Second County</u>
VALLETORTE, Ralph	Sutton (Plymouth)	-	-		
WALLE, William (d. 1326)	-	-	-	<i>valettus</i>	
WIBBURY, Oliver	Chagford	1	1		Cornwall, Dorset, Gloucestershire
WYLINGTON, John (d. 1338)	Umberleigh	2	7	<i>miles</i>	

¹ *PW*, II, i, 638, 652, 653, 655; *FA*, i, 272-85

² Likely main residence in Devon: based on distribution of wealth in *1332 Subsidy*, and monumental and architectural evidence in Pevsner, *Devon*

³ Number of individual locations taxed in 1332

⁴ Either returned for an additional county in 1324 or is known from other sources to have held significant estates outside Devon

residences of sixty-nine of the eighty-three listed men indeed reveals some clear geographical bias.¹² Although important landowners could be found living in most areas of the county, approximately 45% of those identified were concentrated in the relatively small but fertile coastal region of lowland south Devon. Smaller clusters of landowners were to be found in the hinterland of Exeter and in east Devon. Other parts of the county, with the notable exceptions of Dartmoor and the western border region with Cornwall, were sparsely, but fairly evenly occupied. The pattern of settlement described here largely coincides with general demographic trends and the quality of soils outlined in chapter two, although it is interesting to note that seignorial lords were comparatively under-represented in the fertile valleys of north Devon, suggesting that non-economic factors – in particular, networks of sociability and the desirability of living in proximity with the great and the good – were at least as important in influencing territorial policy. The baronial *capita* of the Courtenay and Martin estates, located in east and south Devon respectively, were each the focus of small concentrations of knightly and gentry residences, showing how the quality of one's neighbours could lend an area a certain social cachet.

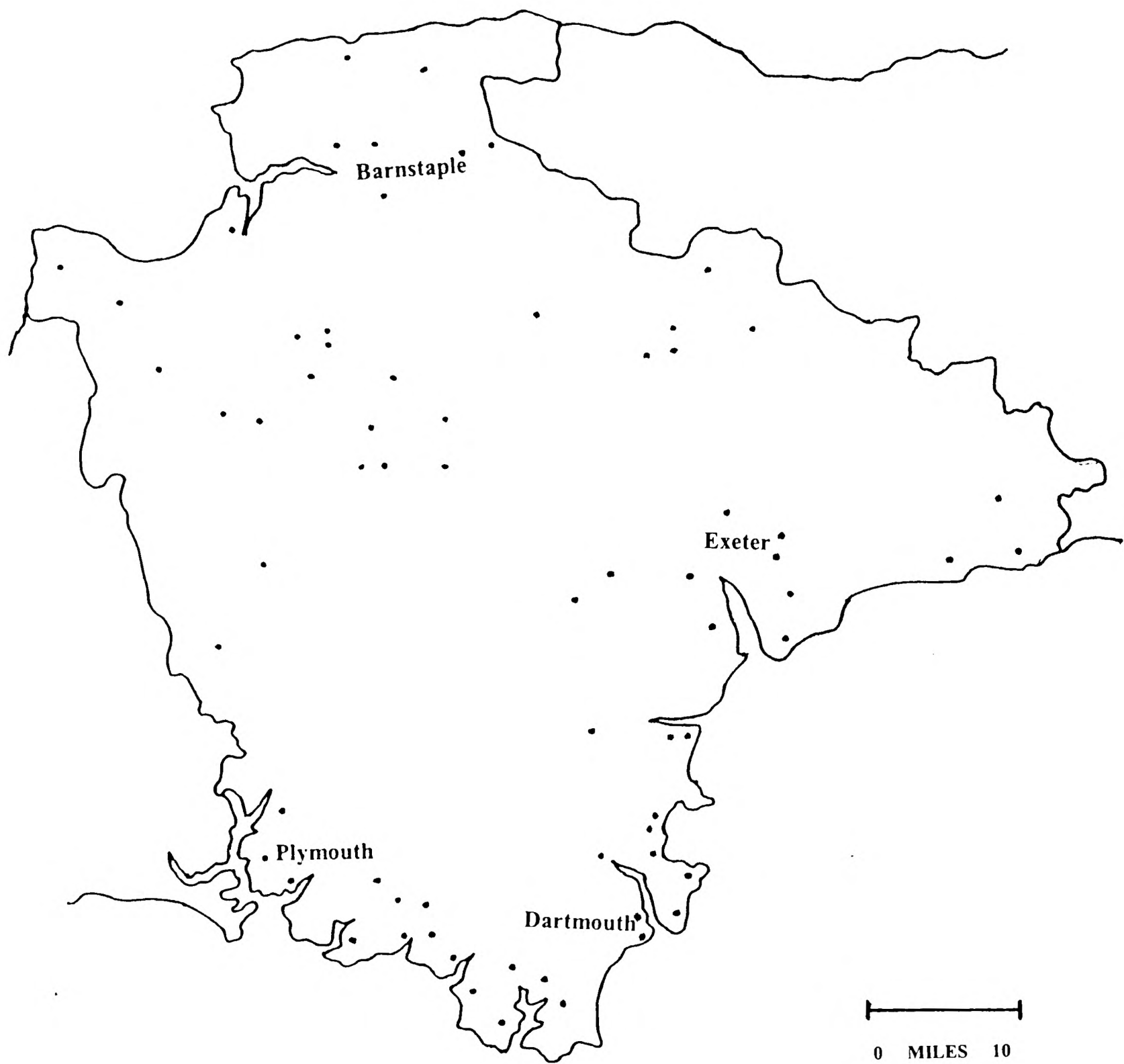
It is evident that our list can only be regarded as provisional and it does not purport to be an exhaustive or definitive survey of the county's landed elite. Lawyers, for example, are not on the whole included in this initial reckoning since, although knowledge of the law could certainly promote social mobility, fourteenth-century opinion generally refused to accord gentility to self-made men of low birth: the considerable impact that these monied professionals made on the land market does, however, demand that they merit some consideration alongside their fellow landowners.¹³ Wherever possible, therefore, some attempt has been made to describe the highest social rank likely to have been achieved by each individual in his lifetime, in order to make important distinctions between, for example, the wealthy professional and the modestly endowed knight.

¹¹ Above, Fig. 3.1 (p. 116a)

¹² Below, Map 3.1 (p. 117a)

¹³ M. C. Carpenter, *Locality and Polity: a Study of Warwickshire Landed Society, 1401-1499* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 51, 123-4, 294

Map 3.1: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESIDENCES OF THE LANDED ELITE IN DEVON, *c.* 1324



NB: Dots correspond to presumed residences of barons, knights and gentry named in Fig. 3.1

Although the evidence is insufficiently detailed to draw meaningful conclusions about the relative importance of the secular elite as a whole in landed society, it should at least be possible to make some general preliminary comments. The 197 Devon *vills* identified in 1316 contained something in the region of 566 manors. Each *vill*, containing between one and five manors, had a ‘chief’ lord: of these 197, just thirty-four were ecclesiastics, and the Church’s proportionate share of the total number of manors was even smaller. In addition there were thirty-seven hundredal courts, of which only two were now in the hands of the Crown: complaints regarding this situation had been made by the *communitas* and the sheriff to parliament in 1320, when magnate-proprietors were accused of encumbering the liberties with insufficient and corrupt bailiffs.¹⁴ This was rather disingenuous, however, because although nearly half of the hundreds were owned by magnates – eight of them by the Courtenay and Martin families – nearly as many again lay in the hands of the petitioning knights and gentry. The calculations made here are necessarily rudimentary, but they do confirm the general impression given in chapter one of a tenorial landscape in which the secular lords were considerably more prolific than their ecclesiastical counterparts, and in which the Crown had very little direct interest. Moreover, although the greatest individual landowners were secular magnates, as a collectivity they were dwarfed by the mass of gentry and small-holder knights, and may have owned as little as 15% of the total land available.

A number of specific issues will be addressed in this chapter. First, the identities of the landed families, where they came from, and how well entrenched they were socially and economically by the early fourteenth century. Secondly, the levels of wealth at their disposal, its sources, and how the way in which they spent their money reflected their social status and importance. Thirdly, how they acquired and retained land. Finally, the geographical scope of their social horizons when it came to arranging marriages or augmenting estates.

¹⁴ *RP*, i, 381

2.1 FAMILY ORIGINS AND SOCIAL PRESTIGE

Distinguished lineage and longevity were useful tools for establishing one's place in the social hierarchy and a handful of our knights could trace their ancestral roots back to the Conquest. Sir Henry Pomeroy VII (d. 1373) and Sir William Daumarle (d. 1336) were the descendants of men who had held moderately-large estates directly of the king in 1086.¹⁵ The Daumarles had, however, lost their esteemed status as tenants-in-chief early in the twelfth century, when King Henry I amalgamated a number of the smaller baronies in south Devon to create the honor of Plympton for his ally Richard Redvers.¹⁶ The Pomeroyes, whose manors were more extensive and widely dispersed, avoided this indignity but had become, by the fourteenth century, a mere shadow of their former selves, crippled by the burden of an enormous fine incurred by their ancestor, Henry Pomeroy III, for his part in the rebellion against King Richard I in 1194. The honor of Berry Pomeroy was still nominally a barony and remained a significant feudal unit, but in material terms the Pomeroyes were now barely distinguishable from the average local knightly family. The patrimonial estate, which had once consisted of thirty-six manors, now contained just three and, in its state of penury, the family was reduced to scrapping over the disputed inheritance of their distant kinsmen, the Valletorte family.¹⁷ Nevertheless, despite the Pomeroyes' financial embarrassment, high value was clearly attached to a good family name by Earl Hugh Courtenay III who elevated Henry Pomeroy VII above all the knights who travelled to Brittany in his retinue in 1345.¹⁸ William Daumarle's son, William II (d. 1362), and his cousin, John Daumarle (d. 1391), were also linked to the Courtenay affinity.¹⁹ Ancestry, and the social prestige surrounding it, may therefore have been at least as important in recommending these men to the earls' service as their more immediate personal qualities.

¹⁵ *DB Devon*, 28, 34; *Domesday People*, pp. 358, 374

¹⁶ Above, p. 32

¹⁷ Below, pp. 152-4

¹⁸ PRO E101/312/13

¹⁹ BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 68r., 70; Wrotesley, *Crecy*, pp. 84, 126; *CPR* (1348-50), p. 161; *Ibid.* (1350-4), pp. 87, 450-1; *Ibid.* (1354-8), p. 552

The Haccombe and Beaumont families could boast of similar longevity, but were descended from far more modest men: conversely, they had by the fourteenth century experienced somewhat greater success than the Daumarles and Pomeroyes in husbanding their economic resources. Sir John Beaumont I (d. c. 1332) owned a small and compact estate in north-east Devon that was essentially unchanged since his ancestor, Robert of Beaumont, had held four manors of Baldwin the Sheriff in 1086.²⁰ John's mother was Ermegarde, the eldest daughter and coheiress of the Beaumonts' knightly neighbour, Sir John Punchardon (d. c. 1300), and her inheritance secured property adjacent to the Beaumonts' existing estate, which left her son with a formidable bloc of territorial lordship focused on the *caput* and hundred court of Shirwell.²¹ The Haccomb's origins were equally unremarkable and they had been only moderately successful in improving their lot before the last surviving male representative of their line, Sir Stephen IV (d. 1330), entered the orbit of his feudal lord, Hugh Courtenay II, as a leading knight and counsellor.²² Two other fourteenth-century families, Ferrers and Fleming, had figured among the more substantial knights of the count of Mortain in 1086 and were now some of the most substantial tenants of the earldom/duchy of Cornwall.²³

A further group of knights established itself in the county shortly after 1086. The Nonant family was settled, under controversial circumstances, by King William II on the barony of Totnes in about 1090, and experienced two centuries of intimidation and challenge to its title by powerful rival claimants before Roger Nonant IV, lacking a male heir of the body, resignedly sold his inheritance in 1292.²⁴ The Dynhams were rather more successful: younger members of this distinguished Breton family – whose head acted as honorary steward to the dukes of Brittany – had arrived in England by 1122, probably at the instance of King Henry I, and eventually settled themselves on the vast manor of Hartland, in north-west Devon, where they founded an Augustinian monastery and built a castle. The Dynhams'

²⁰ *DB Devon*, 16/65, 67, 68, 137; *Domesday People*, pp. 374-5

²¹ *DB Devon*, 16/69, 72, 74; *Domesday People*, p. 378; *CIPM*, xv, 197-99

²² *DB Devon*, 16/110, 112, 152; Below, pp. 177-9

²³ *DB Cornwall*, 5/2, 5/12; *DB Devon*, 15/11, 39-41, 47, 54

²⁴ *History of Totnes Priory*, pp. 2-5; *Domesday People*, pp. 285-6; Williams, 'Judhael of Totnes', pp. 282-3; *DFF*, i, 860

English and Breton territories were formally separated in the 1190s, whereafter the English branch of the family continued to flourish on its south-western estate, aided in particular in the mid-thirteenth century by the good fortune of Sir Oliver Dynham (d. 1299), whose career as a leading royalist and household knight of Richard, earl of Cornwall (d. 1272), brought the family favour and valuable additions to the patrimony.²⁵

The families of Grenville, Umfraville and Wylington acquired lands in Devon in the early decades of the twelfth century through their service to either Robert FitzHamon or his successors, the earls of Gloucester, in the subjugation and colonisation of Glamorgan. They were rewarded with manors from Robert's vast estate in western England or, as may have been the case with the Grenvilles, were compensated with Devon lands for the loss of their estates in Wales. They formed the backbone of a new generation of landowners with territorial interests on either side of the Bristol Channel, thereby consolidating the trans-marine network established by the FitzBaldwins and the Martins in the 1090s.²⁶ Unlike those magnates, however, these were knightly families of modest means whose capacity to exert effective lordship on both shores is likely to have been limited, and their impact on either society was correspondingly limited. Nevertheless, the Umfravilles and the Wylingtons, who did manage to hold on to their estates in Devon and Wales, maintained an active interest in affairs in Glamorgan and even became embroiled in political crisis there in the early 1320s.²⁷ Over the course of the thirteenth century, the ranks of the trans-channel Devon knights were further augmented by the arrival of the Cogan family of Glamorgan and Cork, and the Carew family of Pembrokeshire, who acquired substantial estates in Devon – and the secure foothold in English society that every marcher baron craved – through fortuitous marriages.²⁸

From the mid-twelfth century onwards, the tenorial picture became increasingly complicated as new families were established primarily through the subinfeudation of existing estates. The county's wealthiest and most prestigious dynasty in 1332 was, by comparison, a

²⁵ Michael Jones, *The Family of Dinan in England in the Middle Ages* (Dinan, 1987), pp. 18, 20, 26, 28, 32; Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', pp. 17-25

²⁶ Above, pp. 39-41

²⁷ Below, pp. 210-18

relative newcomer. The Courtenays had arrived in England only in the middle of the twelfth century and did not secure possession of the Devon barony of Okehampton until about the 1180s.²⁹ The label of ‘new men’, however, appears to have had little adverse effect on their standing and image in a county bereft of powerful magnates: the vacuum left by the Redvers earls, who were crippled by minorities and mainly absent from Devon in the thirteenth century, was readily filled by the more vigorous and permanently resident Courtenay family which established itself in the region with ease and consolidated its authority largely unopposed.

2.2 WEALTH, EXPENDITURE AND PERSONAL STATUS

Surviving evidence for the wealth of Devon landowners is far from adequate. The IPMs are frequently incomplete and imprecise in detail, while secular account rolls are rare. General comparisons may be made between the wealth of individuals from their contributions to national subsidies, but a more instructive approach to measuring prosperity is by studying how the knights disposed of their surplus cash, and how their habits and tastes as consumers reflected their social status.

For the county’s two major baronial families, at least, we have reasonably accurate evidence of landed revenues. William Martin IV’s extremely detailed IPM of 1326 was taken shortly after the Exchequer had laid down guidelines for the conduct of local inquisitions, and can probably be regarded as more reliable than usual: moreover, it was used to divide an estate between three heiresses, which would have demanded a high degree of precision. The family’s lands in Devon, Somerset and Pembrokeshire were extended at approximately £810 in that year, of which about £670 worth lay in their county of residence. In addition, the Martins could expect to draw substantial revenues from the feudal incidents of their three baronies; Dartington, Barnstaple and Cemais: almost one hundred knight’s fees belonged to

²⁸ Below, pp. 134-5

²⁹ Above, pp. 32-6

this estate. A conservative estimate – given that the figures in the extents represent only the potential leaseable value rather than actual income, and are invariably on the low side – would therefore give the Martin family an annual landed income of something in the region of £1,000, of which perhaps three quarters was derived from Devon.³⁰ William Martin III (d. 1324) was also a professional lawyer and, as an itinerant royal justice from 1305, could also have expected to have taken home an annual salary in excess of £200.³¹

No comparably detailed information exists for the Courtenay family. The incomplete series of receivers' accounts for the last three decades of the fourteenth century is of limited use, since agrarian recession and the retreat from demesne cultivation had depressed revenues accruing from agriculture and rents to a substantially lower level than they might have been in the 1320s.³² Nevertheless, at the time of the second earl's death in 1377, at least one thousand acres of the comital estates were still farmed directly and the earliest account roll (1374-5) suggests that in a good year he could have expected to have received a net income, from estates in six different counties, of approximately £1,500, of which nearly two thirds was derived from the Devon manors: after this year recorded receipts fluctuated wildly, reflecting changes in accounting procedures, further shrinkage of demesne cultivation, and a succession of poor harvests in the 1390s.³³ Clearly, neither set of data can be regarded as anything more than a very general guide, but it is at least possible to prove that both the Courtenay and Martin families commanded levels of income that would have comfortably supported their elevated status. For an ordinary baron such as William Martin III, an annual income of about £1,000 was fairly exceptional, but the wealth of Hugh Courtenay II may have been somewhat on the low side by comparison to other contemporary comital families, whose ranks he joined in 1335.³⁴

³⁰ Campbell, *English Seigniorial Agriculture*, pp. 38-9; PRO C134/99; CCR (1323-7), pp. 482-3, 595-602; CPR (1301-7), pp. 352, 547

³¹ P. J. Jeffries, 'Profitable Fourteenth-Century Legal Practice and Landed Investment: the Case of Judge Stonor, c. 1281-1354', *Southern History*, xv (1993), p. 19

³² BL Add. Ch. 13906, 64317-22, 643125; Above, pp. 105-8

³³ PRO C135/260, no. 3; BL Add. Ch. 13906

³⁴ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p. 29

Using only the *extenta* in the IPMs as evidence, we can identify a handful of other resident families of minor baronial or knightly status whose lands were probably worth more than £100 p.a. The Carews, the Dynhams, the Champernownes (of Ilfracombe), and the Cogans all fall within this category.³⁵ Such a survey is obviously incomplete as the IPMs only include those who held their lands in chief or whose heir was a royal ward. In addition, the accuracy of the economic data varies greatly and there are often substantial omissions such as, in the case of the Cogan and Carew families, valuations of estates held in Ireland. A more subtle and penetrating approach to the evidence is clearly needed: for example, our knowledge of Courtenays' precise annual revenue may be hazy, but it should be possible to demonstrate their economic superiority by analysing aspects of their personal expenditure. Evidence of how money was actually spent, as opposed to merely an abstract calculation of potential income, should in any case provide a more useful guide to wealth and personal status.

Conducting the funeral of Earl Hugh Courtenay II in February 1341, Bishop John Grandisson based his sermon on the theme, "*Mortuus est in senectute bona, plenus dierum, divitiis et gloria*".³⁶ In emphasising the earl's assumed prosperity, the bishop was taking a final ironic swipe at his *bête noir*, with whom the subject of material wealth had been a bone of contention for over a decade. Shortly after arriving at his new diocese in 1328, the bishop had asked Hugh, to whom he was distantly related through his mother, for a loan of £200 to satisfy outstanding debts to the Roman *curia*, and to restock the episcopal manors which had been plundered in the anarchy following the murder of Bishop Stapeldon in October 1326. Courtenay abruptly turned down the request, explaining that he had recently incurred considerable expense in settling the affairs of his deceased mother, Lady Eleanor, and in arranging the marriage of his daughter, Elizabeth; furthermore, he had lent a similar sum to Grandisson's short-lived predecessor, James Berkeley (r. 1327), of which he had now abandoned hope of repayment. Grandisson sympathised, but Hugh had also seen fit to

³⁵ PRO C133/89, no. 5 (Dynham, 1301); C133/118, no. 16 (Champernowne, 1305); C134/38, no. 3 (Cogan, 1315); C135/169, no. 4 (Carew, 1362)

question the bishop's methods of fundraising, and even to lecture him on the virtue of living within one's means (*"Et bon est . . . de comencer a vivre du vostre et meynement, et faire droicture et grace a riches et a poveres"*). The bishop, a stout defender of ecclesiastical dignity, was outraged at the implied criticism and retaliated with a powerful broadside on the duty of charity and the division of religious life from the secular: he was studiously ignored by Courtenay, and a feud opened between the two men which simmered until the earl's death.³⁷ Matters were not improved by the fact that, just a few months earlier, Hugh had relieved the bishop of several silver vessels and a quantity of wine left over after the enthronement feast, a perquisite to which he was entitled as the bishop of Exeter's hereditary steward, but which was nevertheless undiplomatic given the parlous state of the episcopal finances at that time.³⁸

Hugh Courtenay may have been financially embarrassed in 1329, but the bishop was certainly not mistaken in identifying him and his family as the diocese's most important potential banker. We do not know how much Hugh had been obliged to spend in 1328, but we do know that he was capable of providing generously for his family. In 1299 he granted his mother, Eleanor, property worth £200 p.a. from his recently acquired inheritance to add to the existing income of about £400 p.a. that she was receiving from her widow's dower.³⁹ In 1315 he assigned four hundred marks of lands and rent to secure the marriage of Margaret Bohun (d. 1391), a daughter of Humphrey (d. 1322), earl of Hereford and Essex, for his eldest son.⁴⁰ Younger siblings were not deprived either, for in 1326 Hugh received licence to send a cash sum of £300 to his son John (d. 1349), a monk who at that time was studying in Rome.⁴¹ And, in spite the bishop's admonishments, Hugh was not usually neglectful of the charitable obligations. After gaining official recognition of his right to the earldom of Devon in 1335 he donated, according to the monastic chronicler of Forde, twenty marks to every abbey (eight in

³⁶ *RJG*, ii, 939-40

³⁷ *RJG*, i, 200-4, 290, 294-5, 305-6

³⁸ *RJG*, i, 374

³⁹ *CCR* (1288-96), pp. 236-7; *CPR* (1292-1301), p. 408

⁴⁰ *CPR* (1313-17), p. 267

⁴¹ *CCR* (1323-7), p. 633

total) and ten marks to every priory and mendicant house (eighteen) in the county. In 1340, on the death of his wife, Agnes, a similar sum of religious patronage was again distributed, as well as grants of one hundred marks each to the cathedral fabric fund - the largest single donation by a secular lord in the fourteenth century - and to Bishop Grandisson's new collegiate church at Ottery St. Mary.⁴² The provisions for his own funeral in the following year were barely less lavish, consisting of three days of mourning at Exeter Cathedral, attended by two bishops and four abbots, followed by burial at the nearby family-sponsored priory of Cowick.⁴³

Junior family members were also well provided for. Hugh's son and heir, Hugh III, had been left the sum of one thousand marks in the will of his prospective father-in-law, Earl Humphrey Bohun.⁴⁴ His younger brother, Sir Thomas (d. 1356), was sufficiently affluent in 1337 to proffer two hundred marks for the hand of his cousin, Muriel Moels, a well-endowed young heiress.⁴⁵ Another sibling, John Courtenay, one of the wealthier students in Rome in 1326, introduced his distinctly secular tastes for hunting, fine foods and servants to Tavistock Abbey, where he had been a monk and of which he was appointed abbot in 1334. Sadly, the abbey's finances proved to be less robust than his own father's, and before long the new abbot had attracted the unwelcome attention of Bishop Grandisson, who threatened him with excommunication and subsequently relieved him of his administrative duties. Whatever prejudices the bishop may have already formed against the Courtenays, he cannot be accused of over-reacting in this instance for, by March 1337, Abbot John had accumulated debts of at least £1,300 to various merchants of London and Italy.⁴⁶ By the time of Hugh Courtenay III's death in 1377, the family aspired to a pomp greater than that afforded by the local monasteries, and space was found for the earl and his countess in Exeter Cathedral – despite his preference for an anonymous burial in the local parish church - where his son, William (d.

⁴² Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 345-6; *Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral*, ii, 259

⁴³ *RJG*, ii, 939-40

⁴⁴ 'The Will of Humphrey de Bohun', ed. T. H. Turner, *The Archaeological Journal*, ii (1845), p. 346

⁴⁵ *CPR* (1334-8), p. 501

⁴⁶ *RJG*, i, 304; *Ibid.*, ii, 886-7, 889-90, 996-8, 1050-2, 1071-3; *CCR* (1337-9), pp. 109, 112, 117

1394), at that time the bishop of London, had ambitious plans to erect a private chantry.⁴⁷ In the course of the fourteenth century, the Courtenays had clearly accustomed themselves to an aristocratic lifestyle commensurate with their new status as earls and they had, on the whole, found the means by which to support it.

Similar aristocratic traits were displayed by the Dynham family of Hartland, albeit on a rather more modest scale. On the basis of the evidence of the various surviving account rolls relating to the estates and domestic arrangements of Sir John Dynham II (d. 1383) and his son, Sir John III (d. 1428), Hannes Kleineke has estimated that the Dynhams' permanent household establishment in the 1380s and 1390s consisted of about forty members; perhaps half the size of the household of the earl of Devon in 1384-5, the year for which a livery account survives. A wealthy knight at that time probably needed a household in the range of about twelve to thirty people in order to assert successfully his rank and social status.⁴⁸ John III was therefore clearly a man of substance, important enough to have received a personal invitation to the wedding of King Richard II in 1381.⁴⁹ He was the grandson of Sir Thomas Courtenay, and had inherited through his mother valuable, but scattered, estates in Devon, Oxfordshire and Hampshire: itineration therefore became a priority and a major financial outlay, and one of the most detailed sources of evidence relating to the late-fourteenth century Dynhams is a continuous set of accounts for travel within and outside of Devon.⁵⁰ About £70 was spent on travel and related expenses by the lord, his steward and the household in the financial period 1379-80, a fairly unremarkable year of mainly short journeys.⁵¹ Most of the longer trips, especially those to London on legal and other business, were undertaken by one or more of the Dynhams' officials: either the receiver, John Baucombe, or, from 1388, his son, James Baucombe; or the steward of the household, John Filleigh or Edmund Beket. Occasionally, however, the lord himself might be drawn to the city where John Dynham III

⁴⁷ *RTB*, i, 381-2

⁴⁸ Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', p. 121; Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', p. 79; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 50-1

⁴⁹ CRO AR 37/41/1 (account of journey to London for marriage of Richard II, 1381-2)

⁵⁰ CRO AR 37/37-58 (assorted accounts of the officials of John Dynham II and John Dynham III)

⁵¹ AR 37/37

displayed remarkably urbane tastes that contrasted markedly with the somewhat frugal lifestyle of his father, who resembled more closely the quiet country gentleman.⁵² After the royal nuptial celebrations, Sir John threw a lavish *convivium* for his friends in the inn where he was staying in London: little expense was spared, with foodstuffs such as beef, veal, pork, capons, rabbits, lark, exotic spices and fruits, wines and ale featuring on the menu. The evening's revelries cost £1/9s./3½d., but this pales into insignificance against the sum of £23/15s./3½d. spent by John and his wife on clothes during the same trip.⁵³

The Dynhams maintained accounts with several specialist merchants in London and Exeter, including drapers, skimmers, mercers, tailors and grocers, and rarely would James Baucombe return to Devon without bringing with him some luxury item, such as a pair of carved knives for John's wife, Lady Ellen.⁵⁴ Much of the expenditure of John III's family, revealed to us in their travel and household accounts, was deliberately lavish and ostentatious, and designed to impress onlookers. Sir John was attracted to finery, fashion and novelty: the high point of a trip to London in 1385 was an excursion to see the royal lions at the Tower.⁵⁵ His conspicuous consumption had been made possible largely by the success of his great-great-grandfather, Sir Oliver (d. 1299), as a servant and familiar of the earls of Cornwall, which brought the family a large Cornish estate, and by a succession of judicious marriages to rich heiresses. Nevertheless, not even the Dynhams could afford to disregard fiscal prudence entirely and, in about 1397, James Baucombe was dispatched to Dartmouth to speak to Sir Philip Courtenay (d. 1412), the uncle of Earl Edward and a ship's captain, about the possibility of transporting baggage from Devon to London by sea, presumably with the aim of reducing the high annual cost of overland travel.⁵⁶

⁵² Annual household expenditure in John Dynham II's principal establishment at Hartland in 1372-3 (AR 37/36: printed in *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, ed. C. M. Woolgar (Oxford, 1992), i, 18) was modest compared to that lavished on the *familia* of his father-in-law, Sir Thomas Courtenay, at South Pool (Devon) in 1341-2 (AR12/25), or that of his kinfolk at Sampford Peverell in 1358-9 (AR 2/727/1: *Household Accounts*, i, 17)

⁵³ AR 37/41/1, mm. 1, 6

⁵⁴ AR 37/41/1, mm. 2-4; AR 37/42, mm. 2-3; AR 37/44, m. 3; AR 37/45, mm. 2-4, 7-11, 13-14

⁵⁵ AR 37/46

⁵⁶ AR 37/56

For other landowners, the evidence is rather more patchy. The fourteenth century witnessed a modest revival of religious patronage in Devon, but with money now being directed to the creation of new foundations, rather than the maintenance of established monasteries.⁵⁷ This was epitomised above all by Bishop Grandisson's reformation of the parish church of Ottery St. Mary in 1334-7 as a major secular community for forty canons, but also by Bishop Stapeldon's patronage of the collegiate church at Crediton, the former seat of the bishops of Exeter.⁵⁸ The efforts of local secular landowners were, by contrast, slightly less ambitious. In 1333 Sir William Ferrers (d. 1338) established a chantry with four clerks on his manor of Bere Ferrers, near Plymouth. Prayers were to be said for the souls of his father and mother, Reginald and Margery, and for his sister, Joan, and her husband, Sir Roger Carminou: Sir William left in his will the sum of £20 for the completion of his project.⁵⁹ Sir Stephen Haccombe (d. c. 1331) also bequeathed money to enable Sir John Archdeacon (d. 1377), the husband of his granddaughter and heiress, Cecilia, to establish an oratory, with a priest and four presbyters, on the family manor of Haccombe, an objective which was accomplished in 1337. During his lifetime, Sir Stephen had spent quite large sums of money on augmenting his hitherto modest estates and it is to be assumed that much of his wealth was derived from service to the Courtenays: Hugh Courtenay II and his chaplain, Robert Pyl, were among those for whom prayers were ordained to be said.⁶⁰ In 1374 Sir Guy Brian (d. 1390), a household knight of Edward III who had made his fortune in the French wars, established a secular college on his manor of Slapton, for a priest, five presbyters and four clerks, and endowed it with an annual income of fifty marks.⁶¹ Although none of these foundations was particularly lavish – the chantry was essentially a low-cost and low-maintenance form of religious patronage ideally suited to the pockets of ordinary knights and gentry – they were all at least sufficiently well-endowed by their patrons to have survived until the sixteenth

⁵⁷ Above, pp. 55-7

⁵⁸ CCR (1334-8), pp. 22, 105, 114, 562; *RJG*, i, 117-37; Nicholas Orme, *Education in the West of England 1066-1548* (Exeter, 1976), pp. 165-7

⁵⁹ *RJG*, ii, 648, 731-4, 896

⁶⁰ *RJG*, ii, 852-5; *Ibid.*, iii, 1333; *DFP*, ii, 956

⁶¹ *RTB*, i, 345, 401-2; Bodleian, MS Wood empt. 3 (foundation charter of collegiate chantry at Slapton)

century, when in terms of wealth Sir Guy's establishment ranked alongside some of the smaller priories.⁶²

Some of the better-established knightly families openly flaunted their wealth on the landmarket in the fourteenth century, usually with the aim of bolstering their existing spheres of territorial influence rather than penetrating new areas, which was the general intention of those lawyers and clerks who invested heavily in property. Sir John Beaumont (d. c. 1363), the lord of Shirwell in north Devon, paid two hundred marks for nine tenements and five tofts in the neighbouring borough of Barnstaple in 1361. His cousin, another John Beaumont (d. 1380), had spent a similar sum on retrieving much of the senior line's estate after the death of his uncle in about 1325.⁶³ Stephen Hacombe, Bartholomew Grenville (d. c. 1327), Nicholas Bonville and Richard Merton (d. 1343) were among the knights who dabbled most prolifically in the Devon land market in this period.⁶⁴ Men might also pool their resources to buy land: thus it was that Sir John Ferrers, Sir John Daumarle and Richard Grenville, whose kinsmen had been comrades-in-arms since the siege of Calais, jointly acquired the coastal manor of Sewer in 1368 from their erstwhile captain, Sir John Cheverston, for the sum of two hundred marks.⁶⁵

In terms of purchasing muscle, however, no one came near to the Courtenay earls in acquiring new land. The Courtenays' two surviving family cartularies contain dozens of examples of the purchases made by Hugh II and Hugh III, mainly in Devon and Somerset, primarily with the intention of providing for younger dependants and daughters without depleting the stock of the patrimonial estate.⁶⁶ To the sixteen manors that Hugh II inherited in 1297, had been added by purchase perhaps a further twenty by the death of Hugh III in 1377, most of which were fixed by entail on younger sons and brothers.⁶⁷ The Stapeldon family alone, during Walter's episcopate, could claim to have matched the earls' expenditure on

⁶² Above, Fig. 1.3 (p. 51b)

⁶³ *DFE*, ii, 1490, 1517; *CIPM*, xv, 197-199

⁶⁴ *DFE*, ii, 946, 1043, 1182, 1230-1, 1369; *CFF*, nos. 520

⁶⁵ *DFE*, ii, 1476, 1489, 1497, 1532, 1542

⁶⁶ 'Powderham Cartulary', ii; BL Add. Ch. 49359; Above, p. 24

⁶⁷ *CIPM*, iii, 31; *Ibid.*, xiv, 325; *Ibid.*, xvii, 1-9

land, but only temporarily and in the short-term. Walter and his brother, Sir Richard (d. 1331), spent a large amount of the money accumulated through the bishop's professional activities - legal and secular, as well as ecclesiastical – on building up estates in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset, thereby establishing an independent base of territorial power and elevating their family from its humble and obscure social origins.⁶⁸

2.3 MARRIAGE, LAND AND SOCIAL HORIZONS

Cash purchase was, however, still a relatively unusual method of acquiring or disposing of land. For contemporaries, marriage remained the most obvious way of accumulating new estates and augmenting territorial influence. It was also a major means by which local knights expressed their social importance, making this a useful angle from which to examine the relationship between personal wealth and social status.

To gain some sense of perspective, we begin our survey of marriage at the top. There were two families in the county with the status and means by which to attract marriage alliances of the very highest order. William Martin III, whose ancestors had married within a tight circle of south-western and marcher families since the eleventh century, broke tradition in 1310 when he gave his daughter, Joan (d. 1322), in marriage to Henry Lacy (d. 1311), earl of Lincoln.⁶⁹ This union had probably been facilitated by William's recent inheritance of the estates of the barony of Barnstaple on the death of his mother's second husband, Sir Geoffrey Camville (d. 1308), and by his recent prominence as a justice of trailbaston on the western circuit: the marriage certainly did not come cheaply, with Joan's dowry consisting of four manors and a three thousand acre woodland in Devon.⁷⁰ Thirteen years earlier, when contracting the marriages of his elder children, Edmund and Eleanor, William Martin had had to content himself with a more modest alliance to the Hastings of Abergavenny, which cost

⁶⁸ *DFE*, ii, 1062-3, 1082, 1098, 1115; *CFF*, nos. 403, 463, 546; *SFF*, i, 51, 91, 93

⁶⁹ *CPR* (1307-13), p. 230

⁷⁰ Above, pp. 37-8

him a mere £100.⁷¹ The Courtenays' ability to attract marriages of this calibre was less in doubt: they had after all first gained a foothold in the south-west by obtaining the marriage of the wealthy Okehampton heiress.⁷² Hugh II's grandmother, Eleanor, was a daughter of Hugh Vere (d. 1263), earl of Oxford, and the Courtenay-Vere alliance was strengthened and reinforced in 1341 when an infant daughter of Hugh Courtenay III was given in marriage to John Vere (d. 1350), the five-year old son and heir apparent of Earl John Vere (d. 1360): Elizabeth Courtenay's dowry was apparently fixed at eight hundred marks.⁷³ The real coup, however, had occurred in March 1315 when Hugh Courtenay II secured for his son and heir the hand of Margaret, the younger daughter of Humphrey Bohun (d. 1322), earl of Hereford and Essex, and a fellow Lord Ordainer. The marriage, which took place ten years later, enhanced immeasurably the Courtenay family's standing in high society. Lady Margaret Bohun (d. 1340) was through her mother a granddaughter of King Edward I, leading the admiring chronicler of Forde Abbey to declare breathlessly, "*per quam contigit posteritatem Courtneis regio sanguine Anglico iterum renovari ex ea provenientem*".⁷⁴

Other marriages by the Courtenays in the fourteenth century were rather less auspicious. The siblings of Hugh II had been married into other baronial or knightly families of similar social standing, from various parts of the realm: his eldest sister, Eleanor, wed Sir John St. John (d. 1329), lord of Basingstoke (Hants.) and the brother of Hugh II's wife, Agnes; while Aveline and Margaret Courtenay married Sir John Giffard of Brimpsfield (d. 1322), and Sir Nicholas Moels (d. 1316), barons of Glamorgan and Somerset respectively.⁷⁵ After the earldom was won in 1335, it may have been regarded as less of an imperative to spend vast effort and resources on social advertising, since marriages now became generally more localised and aimed more towards consolidating estates in the south-west and cementing relationships with leading tenants and supporters, than securing alliances with prestigious, but often distant and unconnected dynasties. Hugh III's brother, Thomas (d. 1362), for example,

⁷¹ CPR (1292-1301), p. 314; CPR (1307-13), p. 230

⁷² Above, p. 32

⁷³ CPR (1340-3), pp. 254, 262; CP, x, 225; Below, Fig. 4.1 (p. 153a)

⁷⁴ CPR (1313-17), p. 37; Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 345

married the wealthy Somerset heiress, Muriel Moels, in 1337, and obtained an independent source of income that would, had she produced a male heir, have continued to support a cadet branch comfortably.⁷⁶ Hugh's son and heir apparent, Hugh IV (d. 1349), married Elizabeth, a sister of Sir Guy Bryan, the earldom's most important feudal tenant; and his daughter, Joan (d. c. 1391) was betrothed to his banneret, Sir John Cheverston (d. c. 1375).⁷⁷ Other offspring espoused the sons and daughters of the wealthier, but usually not very distinguished, local dynasties: Sir Edward Courtenay (d. c. 1371) married Emmeline Dauney, daughter and sole heiress of a Cornish knight, while his sister, Margaret (d. 1385), took as a husband Sir Theobald Grenville, the head of a north Devon family whose members were already well entrenched in the Courtenay affinity.⁷⁸

Descending the social scale slightly, one first encounters the Dynhams, who could evidently aspire to marriage within high society, but perhaps only after others had first taken their pick. Sir Oliver Dynham (d. 1299) took as his second wife Isabella Vere, the widow of Sir John Courtenay (d. 1274), thereby acquiring a modicum of kinship with his social superiors in the locality.⁷⁹ Other families, of similar standing, owed their very presence in Devon landed society to judicious or fortuitous marriage alliances. Sir Nicholas Carew (d. 1311), the marcher baron of Carew (Pembs.) and Idrone (Carlow), married in about 1275 Amicia Peverel, sister and heir of a local knight, and acquired an estate on the south coast of Devon, centred on Weston Peverel manor in the environs of modern-day Plymouth.⁸⁰ Their son, John Carew I (d. 1324), had been betrothed since childhood to another Devon heiress, Eleanor, one of the daughters of Sir William Mohun, who had died on campaign in Wales in 1282: Nicholas' own brother-in-law, Sir John Peverel, had himself been taken prisoner in Wales in 1260, prompting the suggestion that these men were first acquainted through their

⁷⁵ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 346

⁷⁶ *CPR* (1334-8), p. 501; *CFR* (1337-47), pp. 45-6; *CCR* (1349-54), pp. 18-19; *CIPM*, xi, 309

⁷⁷ *CIPM*, xiv, 107; *CIPM*, xvii, 5 (pp. 6-7)

⁷⁸ *CFR* (1347-56), p. 78

⁷⁹ Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 343-4

⁸⁰ DRO 484M/T8/1; *CIPM*, i, 474

mutual experience of soldiering in the conquest of Wales.⁸¹ The Mohun inheritance consisted of a further four manors in the south of the county, giving the Carews the secure foothold in English society that they had hitherto lacked, and firmly establishing them as English landowners of some considerable importance: on the evidence of the 1332 subsidy, this ‘immigrant’ family was ranked third wealthiest in Devon in terms of movable goods, having evidently transferred much of its property to the county by that date. It is probably no coincidence that the largest concentration of wealth was recorded at Weston Peverel which, with easy access to the wide harbours of Plymouth, made it the ideal base from which to control a large personal domain that extended across three separate shores: although the main line now rarely visited Pembrokeshire and was essentially an absentee lord in Ireland, there is evidence of activity and itineration in all three countries by junior members and attornies in the fourteenth century, indicating that the Carews had very substantial financial resources at their disposal.⁸²

The Cogans of Bampton were comparatively recent arrivals of similar provenance, having inherited an estate on the Devon-Somerset border through the extinction of the line of their distant kinsmen, the Paynel family, in about 1261.⁸³ They were direct descendants of Sir Miles Cogan (d. 1182), an Anglo-Norman *conquistador* from Glamorgan who had led the siege of Dublin in September 1169, and who afterwards carved up the kingdoms of Cork and Limerick with his father-in-law, Robert FitzStephen.⁸⁴ By the fourteenth century, however, fierce competition and internecine warfare in Ireland, coupled with the prohibitive expense of maintaining a cross-channel estate, had made Cogans’ position as Anglo-Irish barons less tenable than that of the Carews, and the family was apparently content to retreat to the recently-acquired estates in Devon and Somerset, leaving whatever interest remained in

⁸¹ *CCR* (1296-1302), pp. 134-5; *CIPM*, ii, 436; *CIPM*, iii, 431 (p. 329)

⁸² *Ibid.*, iii, 415; *Ibid.*, vi, 478-80; Above, Fig. 3.1 (p. 116a); *CPR* (1301-7), pp. 247, 312; *Ibid.*, (1307-13), pp. 142, 209; *Ibid.*, (1313-17), pp. 125, 334; *Ibid.*, (1317-21), pp. 21, 143; *Ibid.*, (1321-4), pp. 5, 367

⁸³ *CP*, iii, 356-60; *CIPM*, i, 139; *Ibid.*, v, 530

⁸⁴ *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, ed. G. H. Orpen (repr., Oxford, 1994), 1600-5, 1674-1700, 1722, 1976, 2208; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 46-7, 61, 205

southern Ireland to various cadet members.⁸⁵ Sir Richard Cogan (d. 1368) married the daughter of a Somerset knight, Sir William Montague, and thereby acquired an influential brother-in-law in the future earl of Salisbury.⁸⁶ He quietly assimilated himself into a new role as shire knight, serving as sheriff of Devon in 1347 and subsequently as JP in both Devon and Somerset.⁸⁷

These were, however, unusual examples. Most Devon families were socially less ambitious, and considerations of friendship, neighbourhood and locality played a greater part in their deliberations. For example, Sir John Beaumont (d. c. 1363) of Shirwell married Joan Fleming, the eldest daughter of Sir Baldwin (d. c. 1335), his most immediate neighbour in the coastal region of north-east Devon, in a ceremony at the Flemings' private chapel on the manor of Bratton Fleming.⁸⁸ Although this was a reasonably even match between two knightly families of some substance, it illustrates the relatively narrow confines of the Beaumonts' geographical and social horizons. John's grandmother Ermegarde was the daughter and heiress of Sir John Punchardon, another neighbour on the north coast; his sister Eleanor had also married a local landowner, on her father's manor of Heanton Punchardon; while his new mother-in-law, Matilda Grenville, was the sister of Sir Henry (d. 1327), lord of the port town of Bideford, which lay only a few miles to the west of Shirwell.⁸⁹ Similarly, although Sir John Cheverston could aspire to marriage with the daughter of an earl when it suited the whim of his lord, the choice of marital alliances for his own children, to the families of Pipard, Daumarle and Rohaut, all of whom lived in close proximity in south Devon, reminds us how localised the social orbit of even the county's most famous knight could be.⁹⁰

Those with the resources and ambition to gaze beyond their immediate neighbourhood for social relations most commonly turned westwards towards Cornwall. Sir

⁸⁵ *CIPM*, iv, 89, 179

⁸⁶ *CPR* (1327-30), p. 124

⁸⁷ *Sheriffs*, p. 35

⁸⁸ *RJG*, ii, 642

⁸⁹ *RJG*, ii, 642, 648; iii, 1435; *Above*, p. 120, n. 21

⁹⁰ *CIPM*, ix, 137; *DFP*, ii, 1081, 1241, 1346

Oliver Dynham (d. 1299) of Hartland, and Sir Henry Champernowne (d. c. 1295) of Ilfracombe, were leading household knights of Richard, earl of Cornwall: the earl, having destroyed the power of two of Cornwall's three baronial families in the aftermath of the Battle of Lewes, sold most of the important Cardinham estate to them on favourable terms.⁹¹ Henry Champernowne may have gone completely 'native', marrying Joan Bodrigan, a daughter of one of Cornwall's most prominent knights, and shifting his principal residence from the town of Ilfracombe, on the north coast of Devon, to Tywardraeth in eastern Cornwall: his grandson, Henry, was buried at the priory there in 1329.⁹² Another grandson, Richard (d. 1338), also benefited from the unfortunate demise of the Cornish baronage by purchasing some of the Valletorte estates from collateral heirs: by 1332, the 'Modbury' branch of the Champernowne family seems to have been at least as well endowed as the senior line.⁹³ In the fourteenth century, representatives of each Champernowne line held public office in both Cornwall and Devon, continued to witness ducal charters, and were also valuable servants of the bishops of Exeter, who more than any other lord needed the support of knights with influence across the whole diocese.⁹⁴ Oliver Dynham, by contrast, who in any case was drawn from a more substantial background, was rather less vigorous in exploiting his share of the Cornwall estates, and had very little to do with government or society in that county.⁹⁵

More than just wealthy Devon landowners with additional interests in Cornwall, the Champernownes and Dynhams, and families like them, came to form the backbone of Cornwall's now somewhat truncated aristocracy. The 'Caption of Seisin' drawn up for the new duchy of Cornwall in 1337, shows that the Dynhams, Champernownes and Ferrers were the most important of the duke's knightly tenants who still held land in the county.⁹⁶ In the 1324 summons to Westminster, five of the fourteen nominated Cornish knights were also charged with representing Devon, which gives some indication of the confluence of the two

⁹¹ Below, p. 157

⁹² *RJG*, i, 524

⁹³ *CCF*, no. 224; *DFE*, ii, 1023, 1031; *CCR* (1313-18), p. 209; *CPR* (1313-17), p. 278

⁹⁴ Below, pp. 207-8

⁹⁵ Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', pp. 49-54

counties' aristocracies. By comparison, only two other knights were similarly returned for more than one county: Sir Elias Cotel for Somerset, and Sir John Wylington for Gloucestershire.⁹⁷ In Cornwall, a county deprived of regular doses of 'good lordship', the 'horizontal' ties of sociability and kinship acquired a heightened importance in relation to the 'vertical' bonds of seignorial lordship, and consequently some of the more substantial Cornish landowners demonstrated a high degree of mobility in their social relationships and flexibility in their economic affairs.⁹⁸

Sir Nicholas Dauney (d. 1332), for example, dabbled liberally in the Devon land market in the fourteenth century, purchasing for himself a house in Exeter and estates in Stancombe and Allington, and the manors of Woodbeer and Littleham for his younger son William. Two successive husbands for his daughter Joan were taken from the county, while Emmeline, Sir Nicholas' granddaughter and heir, married Sir Edward Courtenay, the earl of Devon's second son.⁹⁹ The Prideaux family also invested heavily in Devon land, and Sir Roger Prideaux (d. c. 1356) married Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of Sir John Clifford of Combeinteignhead.¹⁰⁰ By 1332 both Prideaux and Dauney, whose patrimonial estates were primarily Cornwall based but who now circulated mainly in Devon circles, had made it into the 'top ten' of that county's wealthiest landowners.¹⁰¹ They were not the only Cornish knights to foster relationships in Devon: among the more notable mourners gathered at Exeter in 1341 for the funeral of the earl of Devon, were Sir William and Sir Reginald Botreaux of Boscastle, Sir Ralph Bloyhou, and Sir Ralph Albomonasterio of the Scilly Isles.¹⁰² Entry into society in the neighbouring county was not, however, viewed by all Cornishmen with equal enthusiasm, and on more than one occasion in the 1310s, John Arundel of Lanherne

⁹⁶ *Caption of Seisin of the Duchy of Cornwall*, ed. P. L. Hull (D&CRS, new ser., xvii 1971), pp. 11, 123, 125; *CIPM*, iv, 312; *Ibid.*, viii, 45

⁹⁷ *PW*, II, div. 2, i, 653, 655

⁹⁸ Page, 'Earl Richard', pp. 34-5

⁹⁹ *DFP*, ii, 921, 1004, 1065, 1089, 1110, 1130, 1145, 1211, 1216, 1286;

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1134, 1211, 1220, 1236; *BPR*, ii, 89

¹⁰¹ *1332 Subsidy*, pp. 6, 39, 42, 54, 93-4, 101-2, 105

¹⁰² *RJG*, ii, 939-40

stubbornly resisted his guardian, the bishop of Exeter's, insistence that he marry his niece, Joan Keynes; probably on account of her rather lowly background.¹⁰³

Among the Devon knights who speculated in Cornwall was Sir Stephen Haccombe, who owned two manors there and had secured for his granddaughter and heiress, Cecilia, the hand of Sir John Archdeacon.¹⁰⁴ The Ferrers family of Newton Ferrers (Devon) was related by marriage to John Archdeacon's neighbour, Sir Roger Carminou; while Sir Ralph Beaupel of Landkey (Devon) married one of the daughters of Sir Ralph Bloyhou, inherited property in Cornwall, and subsequently found employment as steward of the duchy.¹⁰⁵ The most active participants in the Cornish land-market in the fourteenth century were, however, the Stapeldon brothers, Bishop Walter and Sir Richard, who spent large sums of cash on establishing an independent territorial base in the county to complement and strengthen the existing episcopal demesnes: it was after all the bishopric that had provided a focus for unity and a continuity of interest between Devon and Cornwall.¹⁰⁶

In fact Devon landowners with interests in more than one county tended to orientate themselves more towards Somerset than Cornwall, although the gesture was not reciprocated by Somerset men to the same extent that it was by the Cornish: comparatively mediocre agricultural conditions in Devon probably made expansion there seem less enticing to Somerset landowners than it did to their counterparts further west. The most notable Somerset estates belonged to the Martin, Courtenay, Dynham, Daumarle (of Woodbury) and Cheverston families and, where the evidence survives, appear to have been considerably more productive than their demesne lands in Devon.¹⁰⁷ Of those who originated from Somerset but were perhaps equally active in Devon, only Sir Elias Cotel, who married a sister and heiress of Thomas Peverel (d. c. 1300) and inherited the manors of Sampford and Aller, made much of an impression in terms of wealth: he was succeeded by his daughter Edith, who in turn

¹⁰³ *RWS*, pp. 33-4

¹⁰⁴ *CFF*, no. 331; *RJG*, ii, 852-5; *CCR* (1330-3), p. 262

¹⁰⁵ *CRO AR* 1/844, 845; *RJG*, ii, 732-4

¹⁰⁶ *CFF*, nos. 403, 463, 546; Below, pp. 200-2

¹⁰⁷ *PRO* C133/99 (Martin); C133/62, no. 19; C135/260, no. 3 (Courtenay); Kleineke, 'Dinham Family', pp. 73-80 (Dynham); C134/66, no. 2 (Daumarle); *SFF*, ii, 174-6 (Cheverston)

carried the estate in marriage to Sir Oliver Dynham (d. 1343), a younger brother of Sir John of Hartland.¹⁰⁸ Neighbouring Dorset was also represented by a single landowner, John Beauchamp (d. c. 1350) of Ryme, who married a coheiress of Sir Roger Nonant and established a residence in Silverton, just outside of Exeter.¹⁰⁹

Devon was a large and under-populated area of countryside, and it should therefore come as no surprise to find that most knights and gentry acquired land and wives primarily and almost exclusively within their county of residence. But this should not automatically be taken as evidence of the insularity and inter-relatedness typical of a classic 'county community': it was simply the case that land and heiresses were in comparative abundance and, for most, there was little reason to look much further afield. Wider social ambitions could in any case entail unforeseen complications as John Bamfield, *domicellus* of Bishop Grandisson, discovered to his detriment in 1336 when he was advised that his marriage to a Scottish woman, Joan Mohant, might be illegitimate on account of the state of war that existed between England and Scotland.¹¹⁰ Some families of considerable wealth and local importance, such as the Beaumonts, demonstrated a decidedly parochial outlook in the organisation of their affairs: they were concerned primarily with reinforcing power and influence within a narrowly defined 'country' and, for them, even the county may have presented too wide a social framework.

In stark contrast to these 'parish pump' knights, and even to those who held their lands in more than one English county, stood a smaller and more exclusive group of landowners with estates in Wales and Ireland, whose social horizons therefore transcended not only geographical and administrative frontiers, but also cultural ones. How can one describe such men or begin to comprehend their social outlooks and consciousness? Were they 'Irish' barons with a foothold in English society, or 'English' barons with marcher interests? Attempts to ascribe a common identity to such a heterogeneous group for whom the far shores of the Bristol Channel represented a natural progression in territorial policy,

¹⁰⁸ *FA*, i, 383, 437; *Ibid.*, iv, 360; *CIPM*, viii, 263

¹⁰⁹ *FA*, i, 346, 369, 382-3, 432; *DFP*, ii, 1040, 1222

will ultimately founder on simplistic generalisations, and it is necessary to treat each example individually.¹¹¹

Pre-eminent among the 'trans-channel' baronage in the fourteenth century were the Martin barons of Dartington (Devon) and Cemais (Pembs.). Robert Martin (d. c. 1159) had probably acquired Cemais during the FitzBaldwin brothers' early pioneering incursions into Dyfed and, despite continuous pressure from the native Welsh, was sufficiently in control to have established a Benedictine priory there in about 1115.¹¹² He took his two wives from south-west England but his eldest son and heir, William I (d. 1209), married Angharad, one of the daughters of Rhys ap Gruffudd, in a diplomatic manoeuvre designed to secure peaceful relations between the Prince of Deheubarth and the Anglo-Norman colonists: kinship did not, unfortunately, dissuade Lord Rhys from besieging and ejecting his own son-in-law from Nevern Castle in 1191. William did, however, recover his position soon after, and in 1194 Rhys found himself once more in Nevern, only this time as the prisoner of his son-in-law.¹¹³ The Martins had therefore become engrained in the fabric of marcher society by the late-twelfth century, and occupied a reasonably strong position there.

By the fourteenth century, Cemais was still very much at the forefront of the Martins' ambitions, with a newly-established second borough thriving there, and William having recently resolved a long-standing dispute with the earl of Pembroke over jurisdictional rights in the county of Pembrokeshire.¹¹⁴ William's mother, Maud, was a daughter of Sir Guy Bryan, lord of Laugharne (co. Carms.), and his three eldest children were married to the offspring of John Hastings, lord of Abergavenny, although William himself had married a widow of Somerset.¹¹⁵ William's uncle, David, was elected bishop of St. David's in 1295 and William also held high office in south Wales, serving as justiciar in 1315-16, when he tried

¹¹⁰ *RJG*, ii, 809

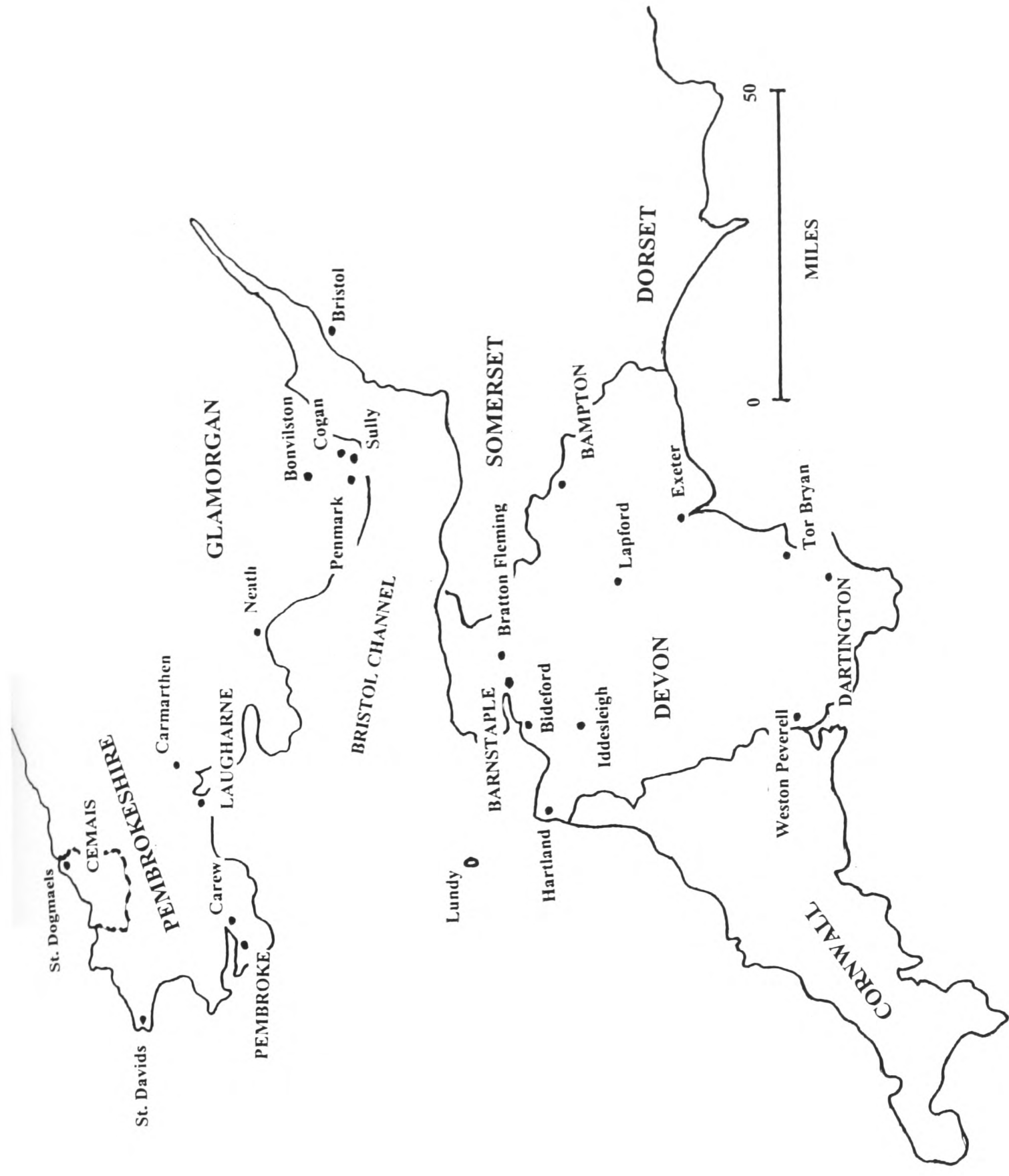
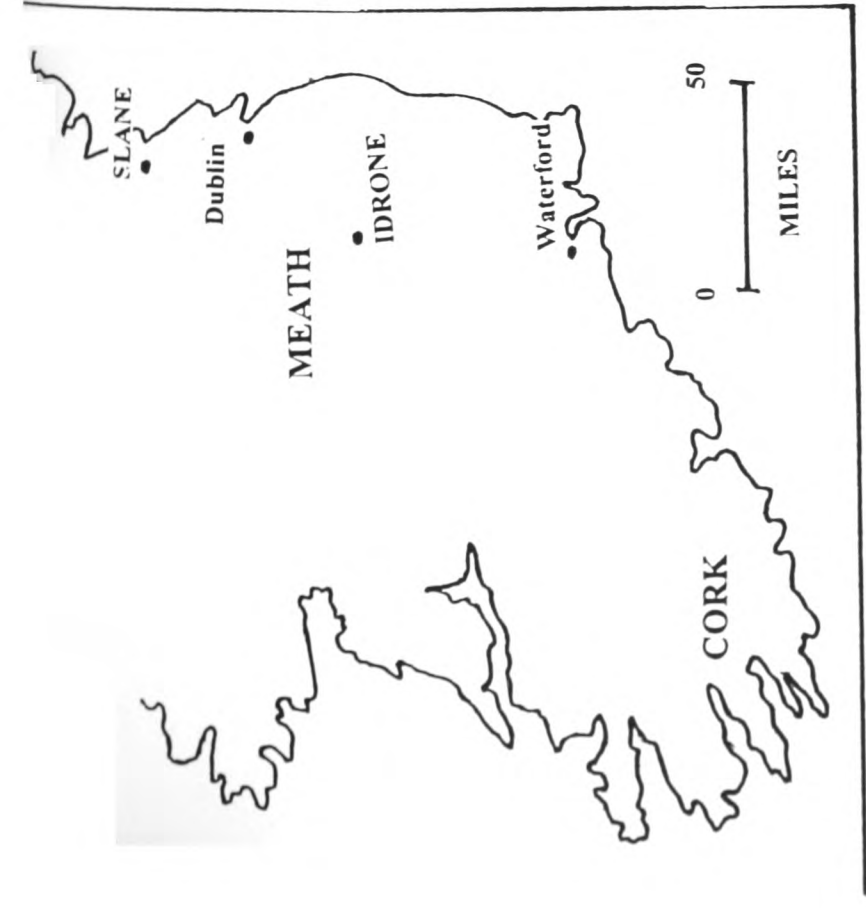
¹¹¹ R. Frame, 'Aristocracies and the Configuration of the British Isles', Idem, *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450* (1998), p. 157; Below, Map 3.2 (p. 140a)

¹¹² Above, pp. 31-2, 36-7

¹¹³ *Brut y Tywysogyon*, ed. Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), p. 51; R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest*, p. 222

¹¹⁴ *CCR* (1227-31), p. 553; George Owen, *Description of Pembrokeshire*, ed. Brian Howells (Pembs. Rec. Soc., 1973), p. 447; *CCR* (1288-96), p. 188

¹¹⁵ *CPR* (1292-1301), p. 314



Map 3.2: MEDIEVAL 'SEVERNSIDE'

pleas in Carmarthen jointly with the bishop.¹¹⁶ In short, the Martins in the fourteenth century continued to straddle the Bristol Channel as their ancestors had done for the past three hundred years: their superior landed wealth in the south-west of England, which afforded both security and cash surpluses, enabled them to do this with relative effortlessness.

A similar picture emerges for the Flemings of Bratton Fleming, whose ancestor, Archibald, had accompanied Hugh de Lacy to Ireland in 1171 in a secondary wave of immigration, when he was granted the lordship of Slane (co. Meath).¹¹⁷ Letters of protection testify to frequent itineration by members of the family between Devon and Cork in the fourteenth century, both on private and official business.¹¹⁸ Sir Simon Fleming (d. 1370) was more involved than most of his predecessors in Irish affairs, serving the earl of Ulster in Ireland in 1362-4 and sitting in parliament in 1370 as an 'Irish' baron.¹¹⁹ Yet he took to wife a daughter of Sir Thomas Champernowne of Modbury (Devon), and continued to maintain a substantial household at Bratton: in 1352 he had licence to export four hundred quarters of grain there, from his demesnes in Ireland, for its sustenance.¹²⁰ Like William Martin, Simon's dual identity hinged on his unusual tenorial situation, but the circumstances of their respective experiences as cross-channel magnates are too divergent to ascribe to them a common 'marcher' consciousness.

The Carews, whose estates in the fourteenth century stretched from Devon and Pembrokeshire to Carlow and Wexford, also had the resources to itinerate and did so frequently. Sir Nicholas Carew (d. 1311) and his son, Sir John I (d. 1324), were indentured retainers of the earl of Pembroke – and had proven to be more compliant to the earl's claimed primacy in Pembrokeshire than the county's other major marcher, William Martin – in whose service they campaigned in both Wales and Ireland the early years of the fourteenth

¹¹⁶ R. A. Griffiths, *Principality of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1972), pp. 94, 98

¹¹⁷ Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, p. 52; G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans, 1169-1216* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1968), pp. 84-5

¹¹⁸ *CPR* (1307-13), p. 230; *CCR* (1313-18), p. 193; *CPR* (1313-17), p. 480; *Ibid.* (1317-21), p. 418; *Ibid.* (1334-8), p. 547; *Ibid.* (1345-8), pp. 191, 405; *Ibid.* (1348-50), p. 380; *Ibid.* (1350-4), p. 353

¹¹⁹ *CPR* (1361-4), pp. 155, 369; *Ibid.* (1364-7), p. 154; *CP*, xii, 3-5

¹²⁰ *CPR* (1350-4), p. 356

century.¹²¹ In 1320 Nicholas secured a marriage alliance for his daughter, Beatrice, to Richard Barry, the brother of Sir John, lord of Olethan, and for a while, until Carew's sons were implicated in an attack on the household of a Barry kinsman in Pembrokeshire, the two families provided attornies for one another in both England and Ireland.¹²² Sir John Carew II (d. 1363) later served as justiciar of Ireland in 1349-50.¹²³ Their lordship of Carew, in Pembrokeshire, remained an important part of the family's territorial empire and was used to provide accommodation and pensions for younger sons, some of whom made names for themselves here: John Carew I's brother, William, for example, became bishop of St. David's in 1347, following the example of William Martin III's uncle, David Martin, before him.¹²⁴

Others, more modestly endowed, had been less fortunate than the Martins, Flemings and Carews: for while it was relatively easy to create a class of trans-marine landowners through the process of conquest and redistribution, maintaining effective lordship in each country was another matter altogether; insufficient financial resources, the depredations of pirates and other bandits, and the necessity of securing legal and political influence in two countries, militated against the success of smaller men such as the Umfravilles and Bonvilles. Although they maintained nominal rights in Glamorgan in our period and a residual loyalty to their overlords, the earls of Gloucester, there is little evidence that these could be turned into anything of material substance. Even the Cogans, who owed their position in Ireland to the success of their illustrious ancestor, Miles, the conqueror of Dublin, were struggling towards the end of the thirteenth century. Battered and bruised by the persistent bullying of their powerful kinsmen, the Geraldines of Offaly, the Irish demesnes appear to have been abandoned for good by about 1299 when a jurisdictional dispute with the abbot of

¹²¹ Ibid. (1292-1301), p. 399; J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, 1307-1324: Baronial Politics in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 256-7, 293, 297

¹²² CCR (1318-23), p. 339 (marriage contract); CPR (1327-30), pp. 26, 93, 190, 384 (attornies); CCR (1330-3), pp. 405-6; CPR (1330-4), p. 236 (dispute)

¹²³ HBC, p. 165

¹²⁴ PRO C135/169, no. 4; HBC, p. 297

Dunkeswell, the chief tenant of the recently-acquired Bampton estate, seems to mark the beginning of the Cogan's permanent settlement in England.¹²⁵

The social parameters of other knights were conditioned to a large extent by the quality of their seignorial relationships, either by the cohesiveness and insularity of the affinities to which they belonged, or by the way in which lords disposed of marriages in their gift: these dimensions of sociability are examined more fully in chapter four. What has become apparent so far, however, is that Devon county society was not simply the sum of its resident parts, and that any notion of a 'county community' must be balanced with several reservations: first, that the internal landscape of Devon militated against unity; secondly, that most knights were not involved in the government of their county and their social horizons were often somewhat narrower than its frontiers; thirdly, that the diocese of Exeter probably provided a more compelling focus of unity than the shire in the fourteenth century – simple localism and lack of social mobility cannot be taken as positive evidence of attachment to the county; fourthly, the absence of vigorous magnate lordship in Cornwall promoted close social integration with its only neighbour, despite the apparent indifference of the earls of Devon; fifthly, the Bristol Channel and Irish Sea were important lines of communication and some knights found it at least as equally convenient to orientate themselves towards communities on their far shores as they did to elite society in Exeter. The most compelling alternative to the 'county community' *topos* to have emerged so far is probably a wider region of the south-western peninsula of Devon and Cornwall, unified by geography, topography (the 'highland zone'), common ecclesiastical government, and a highly integrated aristocracy; but, as our brief study of the cross-channel baronage shows, even this tends to simplify and obscure the full complexity of social relationships in late-medieval Devon.

¹²⁵ *CPR* (1292-1301), p. 459

2.4 LAWYERS, CLERKS AND 'NEW MONEY'

For example, the biggest waves in the fourteenth century land market and social hierarchy were created not by these established families, but by the newly rich who had amassed their wealth through professional activities. Medieval Devon was notable for the size and quality of its legal profession, from the time of the jurist, Henry de Bracton (who was born at Bratton Fleming, in north Devon), in the thirteenth century, through to Sir John Cary, a chief justice, in the late fourteenth, and Sir John Fortescue in the fifteenth century.¹²⁶ Foremost among the *nouveaux riches* of the fourteenth century was Walter Stapeldon, who used part of the fortune accumulated through his varied career as an academic, lawyer, prelate and royal counsellor, to buy land for his family and establish it on a sound financial and social footing. At the turn of the century, the Stapeldons had been at best prosperous free tenants, living and working on a single farmstead: by the time of Walter's death in 1326, they held lands in at least three different counties and Richard Stapeldon, the bishop's brother, who was by now a knight, had served as an MP for both Devon and Cornwall.¹²⁷

Nicholas Tewkesbury, a chancery-trained clerk and probably steward of the FitzStephen family of Dartmouth, used his surplus cash to bail out his lord, first with loans and then by purchasing parts of the family estate, after Sir Gilbert (d. c. 1328) encountered financial difficulties in the 1290s.¹²⁸ To compound the indignity of the servant turned master, Tewkesbury - on whom the FitzStephens were apparently so dependent that he had custody of Gilbert's two daughters after his death - cuckolded the knight by conducting an illicit affair with his wife Isolda; not content merely to ape his superiors in their business, Nicholas now presumed to circulate in the same social orbit.¹²⁹ The clerk's delusions of grandeur did, however, prove to be short-lived, as the Crown, anxious to secure control of Dartmouth's strategically important naval base, compelled Nicholas to hand over his gains in exchange for

¹²⁶ Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 79

¹²⁷ Below, pp. 210-18

¹²⁸ Below, pp. 254-5

¹²⁹ *RWS*, pp. 386-7

a position at the Exchequer. One of the properties disposed of by Gilbert FitzStephen, the manor and hundred of Ermington, was snaffled by Tewkesbury's fellow clerk, Sir John Bensted (d. 1323), who had been in the service of Edward I since the 1280s and who became chancellor of the Exchequer in 1305. He was subsequently appointed a justice of King's Bench and had, by about 1311, been knighted.¹³⁰ He therefore went one step better than Tewkesbury, buying his way into landed society and then, through ennoblement, achieving effective social parity with those he sought to emulate. But the transition for this *arriviste* and social upstart was far from smooth, and on more than one occasion John Bensted was heard to complain that the deer park at Ermington had been raided by his, apparently jealous, neighbours.¹³¹

Ermington was granted after Bensted's death to another judge and fellow social climber, Sir John Stonor (d. 1354) of Oxfordshire, who subsequently bought it freehold. Stonor, formerly chief baron of the Exchequer, became chief justice of Common Pleas in 1329, and was at this time acquiring demesne land throughout southern England, aided, to no small extent, by an annual salary of £373.¹³² Unlike Bensted, however, Stonor was not just another absentee lord who derived his landed income solely from rents, and he actively invested in the demesne farm at Ermington which, with arable valued at 6d. an acre, was one of the most fertile manors in Devon. By 1351 he had stocked the manor with at least six hundred sheep and 140 cattle.¹³³ Local resentment did not abate so easily, however, and Ermington was once more plundered, this time by Sir John Ferrers (d. 1375) of nearby Newton Ferrers, who allegedly stole livestock and grain to the value of about £900.¹³⁴

The hostility demonstrated towards Bensted and Stonor proably stemmed more from the fact that they were outsiders than from aversion to their upward mobility and social pretensions. Like Judge Stonor, John Stowford (d. c. 1372) was a self-made man who found

¹³⁰ *CPR* (1302-7), p. 378; *CCR* (1307-13), pp. 231, 340, 353; *CPR* (1307-13), p. 15; Tout, *Chapters*, ii, 18-20, 37-8, 68-9, 192-3, 225-6

¹³¹ *Ibid.* (1302-7), p. 356; *Ibid.* (1313-17), p. 499

¹³² *CFR* (1319-27), p. 277; Jeffries, 'Judge Stonor', pp. 18-35

¹³³ PRO C134/81, no. 3; *CPR* (1350-4), pp. 205-6

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* (1350-4), pp. 205-6

himself standing on the threshold of gentility: unlike him, Stowford had local roots – he was probably born in the parish of West Down in north Devon - and was therefore rather more easily absorbed into the ranks of landed society. Stowford had first risen to prominence as an attorney in the service of Hugh Audley, earl of Gloucester.¹³⁵ He served on local commissions in England and Wales from 1331, was a serjeant-at-law by 1340, and in April 1342 was appointed a justice of Common Pleas, in which capacity he served until 1372.¹³⁶ In 1339 Stowford bought the manors of Brightley and Stokeinteignhead and an assortment of farm land in the northern hundred of Braunton, where his family seat lay, from Sir Robert Beupel II (d. c. 1351), for the sum of £200.¹³⁷ He married a local woman, Joan Tracy, heiress of a cadet branch of the former barons of Barnstaple, and added further land on the north coast of Devon to his rapidly expanding estate.¹³⁸

Most Devon lawyers were, however, not important enough to attain office in the central law courts or departments of state, and their activities as professionals were correspondingly rather more localised. At the most mundane level, they would offer the type of services that had hitherto been performed for free by literate knights for their neighbours. For example, Sir Robert Beupel I (d. c. 1324) acted as feoffee in entails of land for his neighbours, Richard Beaumont, in 1292, and Richard Coffin, in 1311.¹³⁹ These duties were now being taken over by professional lawyers such as John Chudleigh, who acted as attorney to numerous local knights and gentry families.¹⁴⁰ In June 1320 Chudleigh paid £100 for the manor of Ashton: he was now himself a part of the society that he served and the professional services he performed for his neighbours became increasingly indistinguishable from the everyday activities once expected of a gentry landowner.¹⁴¹ He was also successful in finding a good marriage in Thomasia, the daughter of Sir Nicholas Kirkham (d. 1332).¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Ibid. (1327-30), p. 381

¹³⁶ *Dictionary of National Biography*, xix, 8; *CPR* (1330-4), p. 42

¹³⁷ *DFF*, ii, 1287, 1301

¹³⁸ Ibid., ii, 1345

¹³⁹ Ibid., ii, 857, 980

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., ii, 1091, 1100, 1108-9, 1116, 1118, 1124, 1131, 1136, 1153, 1156, 1180, 1200, 1209, 1220

¹⁴¹ Ibid., ii, 1084

¹⁴² Ibid., ii, 1275, 1389

Legal expertise was a commodity highly prized by the nobility and it is therefore no surprise that two of the Courtenays' leading knights, Sir Stephen Hacombe (d. 1331) and Sir John Cheverston II (d. c. 1375), demonstrated evidence of at least a little learning and administrative ability. Hacombe acted as attorney and feoffee to the Courtenay family in the 1310s and 1320s, while Cheverston proved to be a competent administrator while serving as Seneschal of Gascony in the 1350s.¹⁴³ Most legal work for the family was, however, carried out by professionals, and it is clerks such as Robert Pyl and Richard Branscombe, rather than amateurs such as Hacombe and Cheverston, who emerged as the most prolific counsellors in day-to-day business matters.¹⁴⁴

Another of Devon's lawyer-clerks, John Dabernon (d. 1369), was the most tenacious and successful steward of the duchy of Cornwall in the fourteenth century. His periods of office (1350-4, 1357-69), coming in the two decades after the Black Death, symbolise to some extent a transition in the ducal administration, whereby the stewardship was removed from the hands of amateur knights such as Robert Beaupel II - who contrived to run up debts of nearly £1,200 during his short tenure (1348-50) - and run with far greater efficiency by professional bureaucrats.¹⁴⁵ Much of the money that Dabernon earned from the duchy was reinvested in land back in his native Devon.¹⁴⁶ John Dabernon was not exactly a 'new man' - his family had been established in Devon since at least 1166 - but there was novelty in the way in which he made his living and displayed his fortune.¹⁴⁷ A yeoman of the Black Prince from at least 1347, he was a dominant presence in the duchy establishment until his death in 1369, acting, at various times, as steward and receiver, custodian and constable of the Prince's castles in Devon and Cornwall, and the official gamekeeper of Dartmoor.¹⁴⁸ He was reimbursed principally with cash fees and grants of land, but John Dabernon also had a head for business and was not content merely to be the passive recipient of patronage. He

¹⁴³ *CCR* (1313-18), p. 321; *CPR* (1313-17), pp. 268, 311 (Hacombe); Below, pp. 249-50 (Cheverston)

¹⁴⁴ Below, pp. 184-8

¹⁴⁵ *BPR*, ii, 27, 39-40, 47, 127

¹⁴⁶ *DFE*, ii, 1383, 1423, 1463, 1524, 1545, 1548

¹⁴⁷ *RBE*, i, 252

¹⁴⁸ *Sheriffs*, p. 21; *BPR*, i, 102; *Ibid.*, ii, 9, 28, 37, 53

frequently speculated with his own money: for example, in 1355-60, when he underwrote a debt of nearly £100 to the duchy by one of its deceased tenants in return for a lifetime grant of that man's estate, and took a leasehold in the Devon stannary, which belonged to the duchy. At the time of his death he himself owned a number of tin mines in Devon and Cornwall.¹⁴⁹ Dabernon's testament, drawn up in 1368, is evidence not only of his large personal fortune, but also of the concerns that typically preoccupied those seeking to establish themselves socially. A new chantry was to be built in the parish church of Tavistock, and gifts of cash to the value of approximately £300 were allocated for distribution among churches, monasteries and other religious institutions throughout the south-west, primarily with the intention of keeping alive his memory: Dabernon clearly felt he had 'arrived' in high society and was prepared to spend large sums of money on making absolutely sure that others realised this also.¹⁵⁰

Finally, in this general discussion of monied professionals, we cannot ignore the mercantile classes who are, unfortunately, rather less well documented: the urban rich are, on the other hand, of less relevance to the present enquiry since their wealth was more likely to have been sunk into working capital than invested in land. In Exeter alone, eighteen burgesses contributed ten shillings or more to the subsidy of 1332, although, since boroughs were assessed at a tenth, rather than the usual fifteenth, this represents a third less taxable wealth in real terms than the equivalent for rural landowners: the figures would, however, have excluded much of the merchants' property that was deemed necessary for their trade, including costly items of capital equipment such as ships, so they are not that misleading. In Plymouth, nine men were assessed at above ten shillings, with Dartmouth and Barnstaple recording seven and five respectively. The wealthiest merchants in 1332 were John Fenton of Exeter and William Rede of Dartmouth who each paid forty shillings, a sum matched by only three members of the non-urban elite.¹⁵¹ Although these merchants rarely ventured beyond their social *milieu*, a few harboured wider ambitions. John Hawley II (d. 1408) of Dartmouth,

¹⁴⁹ *BPR*, i, 102; *Ibid.*, ii, 72, 84, 159, 169; Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, pp. 71, 237-8

¹⁵⁰ DRO 158M/T3 (will of John Dabernon, 19 May 1368)

for example, accumulated vast riches through his legitimate mercantile activities and his morally dubious privateering, a large part of which was employed in buying and leasing land in Devon and Cornwall on a grand scale. He also knew how to act the part; inhabiting the finest house in Dartmouth with his four servants, possessing perhaps as many as forty-five tenements, and being the owner of the newest and largest wharf in the borough.¹⁵²

CONCLUSION

Several outstanding features of landed society in late-medieval Devon have been revealed in this chapter. First, that it comprised a large and dispersed corps of mainly petty landowners. Secondly, that magnates featured only sparsely in its ranks, but that those who did had generally succeeded in accumulating impressive concentrations of territorial wealth. Thirdly, that it showed a distinct bias in favour of lay landowners over ecclesiastical. Fourthly, that a host of factors, environmental and human, ensured that Exeter was not the sole, or even primary, focus of its aspirations, which in equal measure were not necessarily circumscribed by the shire frontiers. Lastly, that its lower echelons were characterised by a high degree of fluidity and social mobility.

The ranks of the late-medieval 'squirearchy' were swollen by the regular injection of fresh blood throughout the fourteenth century; men with 'new' money who had inveigled their way into the upper reaches of the social hierarchy, reinvigorating and, on occasion, subverting it. Purchasing lands and marrying local heiresses, they contributed further to the fragmentation of the great seignorial estates and laid the foundations of the more broadly based grouping of knights and petty gentry that came to characterise the county in subsequent centuries, and which so occupied the minds of the early antiquaries. But they also helped to rejuvenate the old landed elite, both by improving its capacity to secure control over the

¹⁵¹ *1332 Subsidy*, pp. 109-10, 111, 114-5, 117-8

¹⁵² *The House of Commons, 1386-1421*, ed. Roskell, Clark & Rawcliffe (1992), iii, 328-31; *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381*, ed. Carolyn Fenwick (Oxford, 1998), i, 143; Below, p. 245

apparatus of local administration and by managing its assets with greater professionalism and efficiency.

The 'squirearchy' merits particular attention when considering the position of apparent hegemony occupied in this society by the Courtenay earls and their family; it was clearly not a homogenous entity to be manipulated freely by the great and the good, as this chapter has shown, and it follows that local leadership was an altogether more complicated business than simply attempting to monopolise its organs of public authority. With that in mind, our focus now turns to the earls of Devon and the establishment of their social pre-eminence in the fourteenth century.

PART TWO: CHRONOLOGICAL

In contrast to the foregoing descriptions of structures and long-term trends, the following three chapters deal specifically with fourteenth-century events and it is convenient here to recapitulate a scheme for the remainder of the thesis. In this section, local society will be placed in a wider historical context through the pursuit of general themes that linked province to centre. The eight decades or so of history under consideration here have been split into three broadly chronological passages, in each of which an outstanding historical 'player' figured prominently; it is primarily through the agency of these men – the first two Courtenay earls of Devon, Bishop Walter Stapeldon and Bishop John Grandisson – that the following enquiry will proceed. The resulting narrative, although somewhat episodic in appearance, gathers together strands left loose in the first part of the thesis and weaves them into a more general historical interpretation, in which ostensibly local affairs are inter-twined with the 'national'. Particular emphasis has been placed on the earlier decades of the period, which were especially influential in setting the tone of relations between locality and centre for the rest of the fourteenth century.

In classic 'Crown and provinces' fashion, this section opens with an examination of discord between Edward I and local landowners over property rights towards the end of the thirteenth century; a common enough experience across the realm, but one that had peculiar ramifications for seignorial and political development in our society. In particular, they affected the interests of the Courtenay family, and chapter four consequently covers material ranging from the emergence of Hugh Courtenay II as the dominant seignorial power in the south-west, to an overview of the late-medieval comital affinity. Much of this section anticipates the crises of the 1310s and 1320s, when the impact of high politics was felt acutely in the south-west, and chapter five focuses on Edward II's reign and specifically on the role played in it by his treasurer, Bishop Walter Stapeldon. Finally, the reign of Edward III, which provides a striking and instructive contrast to the two preceding decades, is the focus of

chapter six. This was a period of settlement and reconciliation in Devon in which a powerful earl, a stronger king, and a more 'orthodox' bishop, combined to restore a semblance of stability to a bruised society, and in which the experience of war provided fresh opportunities for economic advancement and political mobilisation.

4. THE COURTENAY EARLS OF DEVON: EDWARDIAN POLITICS AND THE LATE-MEDIEVAL 'AFFINITY'

4.1 THE EARLDOM OF DEVON: DISPUTED INHERITANCES AND ASPECTS OF EDWARDIAN 'POLICY'

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, in two strikingly similar yet essentially unrelated incidents, south-western landowners were obstructed by the Crown from succeeding to estates which they considered part of their rightful inheritances. First, Sir Henry Pomeroy VII (d. 1305), a moderately wealthy knight of Devon and Cornwall and co-heir to the honor of Trematon, discovered that his kinsman, Roger Valletorte (d. c. 1275), had inexplicably made over the majority of his interest in the estate to Richard, earl of Cornwall (d. 1274), shortly before his death. Secondly, Hugh Courtenay II, heir apparent to the Redvers earldom of Devon, learned that the greater part of his inheritance had been sold covertly to the Crown by his cousin, Isabella Fortibus (d. 1293), countess of Aumale and Devon. Although different in scale – a modest county knight picking at the remnants of a small Domesday barony, compared to a peer of the realm asserting his right to one of the largest concentrations of territorial power outside of the royal demesne - and involving separate royal protagonists with independent motives, a comparative study should be illuminating since both cases exhibit signs of the over-bearing royal interference and secretive dealing typifying what K. B. MacFarlane described as an Edwardian 'policy' towards the landed property of the English baronage.¹ By re-examining the evidence for the earldom of Devon and setting it alongside

¹ K. B. MacFarlane, 'Had Edward I a 'Policy' towards the Earls?', in *The Nobility of Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 248-67

that of the Pomeroy-Valletorte affair, elements of this royal ‘policy’ will be highlighted and its ramifications considered in the context of local political society.

4.1 (i) THE DISPUTE

Courtenay and Pomeroy were heirs to dynasties that had failed in the male line, and although their respective claims to kinship with these families were tenuous, they were nevertheless defensible in law. As McFarlane observed of the English earldoms, it was practically impossible for a magnate to die without blood relations, even if these were not heirs of the body: the longer established the lordship, the more extensive the network of blood ties.² Hugh’s claim was based on his great-grandfather, Robert Courtenay’s (d. 1242), marriage to Mary Redvers, daughter of the fifth earl of Devon and grandmother of Isabella Fortibus: Isabella, through successive misfortunes – the deaths of her husband William, count of Aumale (1260); her brother, Baldwin Redvers IV, earl of Devon (1262); and all five of her children by 1274 – had emerged as sole heiress to a vast estate.³ By the time of her own death in 1293, the established heir to the earldom was her second cousin, Hugh Courtenay, a relative so far removed that, Isabella was later alleged to have remarked, they could have married had she so desired.⁴ The claims of Henry Pomeroy and his co-petitioner, Sir Peter Corbet II (d. c. 1324) of Caus (Shropshire), were equally obscure. Their great-grandfather and grandfather respectively had married the sisters of Sir Roger Valletorte (d. c. 1200), baron of Trematon (Cornwall-Devon); when Roger’s grandson, Reginald (d. 1270), died childless, he was succeeded by an elderly uncle, the Roger Valletorte who was alleged to have sold out to the earl of Cornwall.⁵ The death in 1299 of Reginald’s dowager widow, Hawise, left

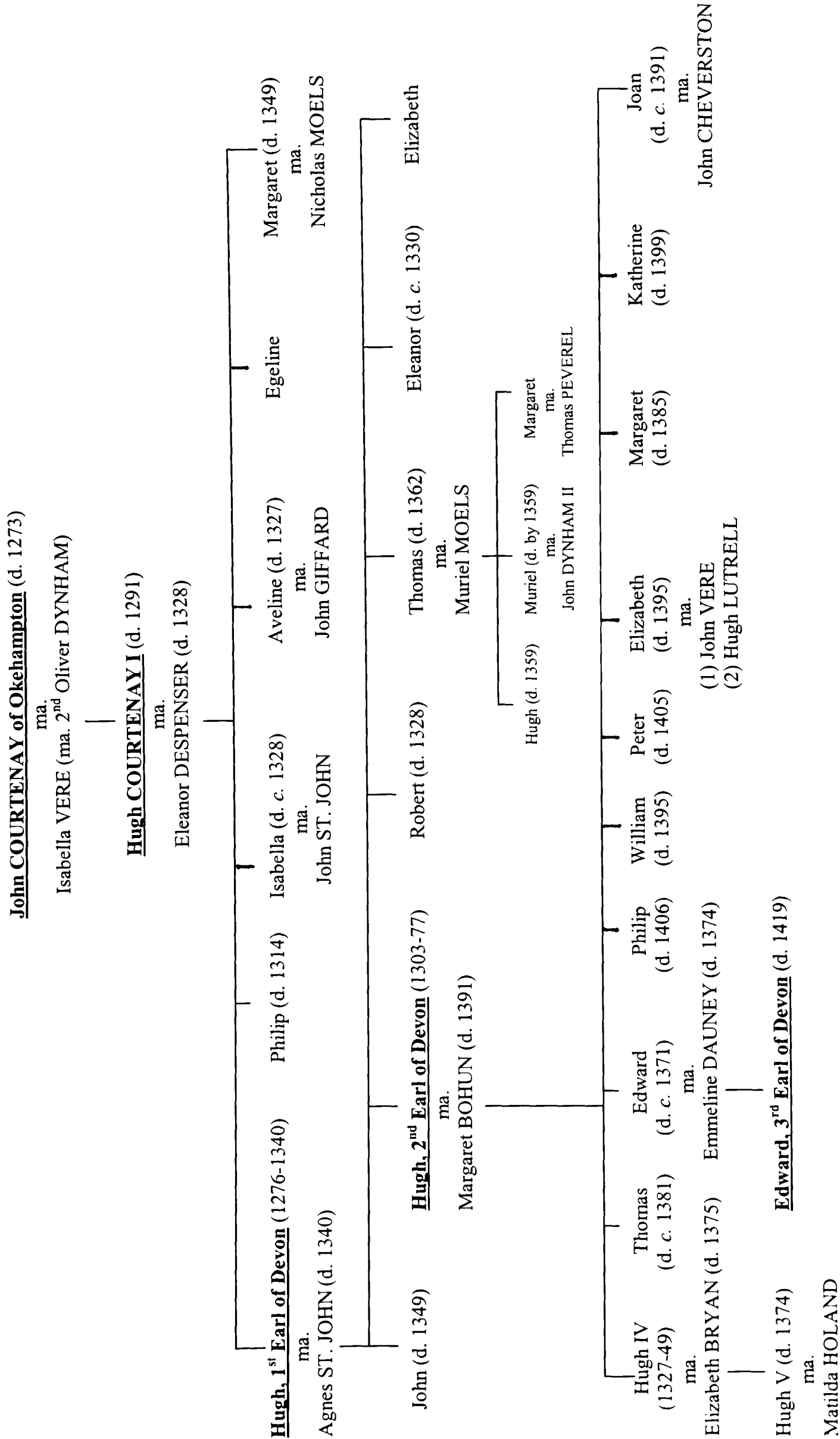
² Ibid., p. 250

³ *CP*, i, 355-6; iv, 322-3; Below, Fig. 4.1 (p. 153a)

⁴ *RBE*, iii, 1019; N. Denholm-Young, ‘Edward I and the Sale of the Isle of Wight’, *EHR*, xlv (1929), pp. 433-8

⁵ *CIPM*, i, 728; ii, 165, 201; *Book of Fees*, ii, 1297-8; *CFR* (1272-1307), p. 40

FIG. 4.1: SIMPLIFIED GENEALOGY OF THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY COURTENAYS



Pomeroy and Corbet as clear heirs and at liberty to pursue their inheritance, whereupon they uncovered the full extent of Roger's grants.⁶

The estates under consideration here differed enormously in size and structure. Lady Isabella died seised of a vast fiefdom, comprising her brother's honors of Plympton (Devon) and Carisbrooke (Isle of Wight) and her husband's county of Aumale (Normandy).⁷ The accumulation of such wealth outside the ranks of the royal family was naturally the cause of unease at court, and excited the interest of the Crown which, ever since Baldwin Redvers had used the island to escape the wrath of King Stephen, regarded Wight as being of critical importance to the defence of the south coast.⁸ In 1269, Aveline (d. 1274), Isabella's daughter and heiress, was betrothed to Edmund, earl of Lancaster, and the youngest son of Henry III, in an attempt to secure control of the inheritance, but Aveline's premature death destroyed these plans and, for the time being, placed the estate beyond royal control.⁹

By contrast, the honor of Trematon was a small, compact lordship situated mainly in a south-eastern enclave of Cornwall. It had been created for Robert, count of Mortain, with coastal defence in mind; the castle stood on the west bank of the River Tamar, guarding the mouth of the estuary and overlooking Plymouth on the opposite side.¹⁰ In 1086 Trematon, consisting of thirty-two Cornish manors and one in Devon, was held of the count by Reginald of Vautortes.¹¹ His neighbour, Ralph of Pomerai, held in chief a 'military' lordship of similar dimensions, with lands in south and east Devon: the Pomeroyes still held this 'barony' in the fourteenth century, but by then it was a shadow of its former self, with just three of the fifty-seven manors, Berry Pomeroy and Stockleigh English (Devon) and Tregony (Cornwall), still in demesne.¹²

The Pomeroyes were a reasonably distinguished family, with the resources to maintain an estate in France right up until the loss of Normandy in 1204. Ralph's grandson, Henry

⁶ *CIPM*, iii, 523

⁷ *Ibid.*, iii, 156

⁸ Above, p. 33

⁹ *CP*, iv, 323; *CIPM*, ii, 130; Denholm-Young, 'Isle of Wight', p. 433

¹⁰ Green, *Aristocracy*, pp. 50-1

¹¹ *DB Cornwall*, 5,2/1-33; *DB Devon*, 15/44

Pomeroy I (d. c. 1166), had been a constable and charter witness in the household of King Henry I, who established a tradition of royal service; Henry Pomeroy III (d. 1207) and Henry IV (d. 1221) were household knights of King John, while Henry V (d. c. 1237) and Henry VIII (d. 1367) served King Henry III and King Edward III respectively.¹³ Misfortune struck the family in the 1190s, however, when Henry Pomeroy III was obliged to fine seven hundred marks to receive his inheritance, and was subsequently encumbered with an additional penalty of 140 marks for having entered without licence. This was a financially crippling blow from which the Pomeroyes never fully recovered: the debt had risen to almost £590 in 1209, when they had only their English lands to support them, and about £300 was still outstanding by as late as 1292, when the Exchequer surveyed their estates and agreed to reschedule payments.¹⁴

It is within this context of indebtedness and financial stress that Henry Pomeroy's frenetic and increasingly desperate petitioning for the Trematon inheritance should be placed. Peter Corbet was equally impecunious and also under pressure from powerful and bullying marcher neighbours in Shropshire.¹⁵ The Trematon estate, like the Pomeroyes' own, was severely depleted, but the Valletortes had at least managed to retain control of the castle, the port of Saltash, rights in the valuable mineral mines and a salmon fishery, and a ferry on the River Tamar linking Cornwall to Devon.¹⁶ Between 1320 and 1327, when the earldom of Cornwall – successor to Mortain – was in the custody of the Crown, Trematon was farmed briefly by the admiral of the Western Fleet, Sir Robert Beudyn (d. c. 1328) of Plymouth, who was engaged in the war of St. Sardos (Gascony) in 1324: this gives some indication of the lordship's perceived military value, and the castle, situated on a promontory and bounded on

¹² Ibid., 34/1-51; *Domesday People*, pp. 19, 34; *CIPM*, iv, 296

¹³ Round, *Documents*, nos. 373, 610, 613, 1269, 1455; Davies, *Regesta Anglo-Normanorum*, ii, 1292, 1339, 1464-5, 1468, 1584, 1764; *de la Pomerai*, pp. 14-17, 26-9, 31-2, 51-7; S. D. Church, *The Household Knights of King John* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 24-5, 49, 57, 88, 101, 110, 112

¹⁴ Edward Powley, *The House of de la Pomerai* (Liverpool, 1944), pp. 23-6; *Pipe Roll*, 6 Richard I, p. 169; Ibid., 9 Richard I, p. 7; Ibid., 11 John, p. 89; *Book of Fees*, ii, 1307-19

¹⁵ Davies, *Lordship and Society*, pp. 45, 56-7

¹⁶ Hatcher, *Duchy of Cornwall*, pp. 17-18

three sides by water, was almost certainly the object of Earl Richard's recent interest in the Valletorte inheritance.¹⁷

Richard was the dominant seignorial force in thirteenth-century Cornwall, a county rarely graced by great magnates, but his power was rooted more in control of the county's vast mineral wealth than it was in alliance with the local community.¹⁸ Neither Richard nor his son, Edward (d. 1300), invested much time or energy in the itineration of their distant and isolated fiefdom, probably reckoning that their entrenched position there was not under threat from the diminutive local baronage, which consisted of just three families; the Cardinhams, the Valletortes, and the Botreaux. The Cornwall estates were peripheral to the earls' major landed interests in southern England, and had mostly been taken out of demesne cultivation by the beginning of the fourteenth century, so that the earldom now resembled little more than a depot for the collection of rents and revenues arising from the duty on tin. Cornish knights featured only occasionally in the counsels of the earls, and the vertical bonds of lordship linking magnate to knights and gentry, that we have taken for granted in neighbouring Devon, were particularly weak in Cornwall.¹⁹

Among the earls' many rights in the south-west was control of the shrievalty of Cornwall. By analysing the personnel filling the office, Mark Page has hypothesised that Earl Richard's authority here was seriously compromised in the period of baronial reform: his personal and political fortunes had reached a nadir in 1264 when he was captured at the Battle of Lewes and his estates were seized by the earl of Leicester, Simon de Montfort.²⁰ The lack of resistance shown to Montfort's supporters apparently infuriated the earl and provoked, upon his recovery, a campaign of systematic victimisation against the county's leading families. Seeking to remove the conditions that had made his humiliation possible, Richard neutered the power of the Valletorte and Cardinham families by literally buying them out of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 86; Pierre Chaplais, *The War of Saint-Sardos* (Camden Soc., 3rd ser., lxxxvii, 1954), pp. 101, 103-5, 108, 221-2, 225, 230, 232-3, 235

¹⁸ L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London, 1955), pp. 231-2; A. L. Rowse, *Tudor Cornwall* (London, 1941), pp. 77-8; M. Page, 'Earl Richard and the Barons' War', pp. 34-5

¹⁹ Page, 'Thirteenth Century Cornwall', pp. 36-8, 42

²⁰ Page, 'Earl Richard and the Barons' War', p. 31

the market; making what appear to have been compulsory purchases of land from vulnerable family members.

In 1268, in a manoeuvre that would have appealed to his nephew, Edward I, Richard approached the recently widowed Isolda Cardinham and secured the sale of the castles of Restormel and Lostwithiel, and a further five manors in Cornwall.²¹ The castles were developed into administrative centres for the earldom and became impressive symbols of comital power, while the land was distributed between Sir Henry Champernowne and Sir Oliver Dynham, two Devon knights who had remained loyal to Richard throughout the civil war.²² Two years later, the earl paid Roger Valletorte £300 for Trematon Castle, the manor of Calstock, and Saltash borough; a transaction which, his heirs would later contend, was made under duress while Roger was *non compos mentis*.²³ At the very least, the sum proffered by Richard was below the true market value since, in 1297-8, the estate had made a profit of around £40.²⁴ The earl had exploited his superior resources to intimidate and emasculate two of Cornwall's leading families, in order to consolidate his own authority, but in so doing, he had unintentionally disinherited a third party and created a future legal headache for the Crown.²⁵

The process by which Edward I cherry-picked the Fortibus estates was altogether more subtle and drawn out. The king had raised the matter of the inheritance in 1274, shortly after the death of Isabella's last surviving daughter, Aveline, while the widow was still in mourning.²⁶ An agreement was reached in 1276 whereby Isabella apparently consented to enfeoff the Crown of all but four of her manors, in return for a cash payment of twenty-thousand marks.²⁷ Either because of dissent by her new heir, Hugh Courtenay, or because Isabella suspected she had been duped, the sale fell through and was still unresolved at the

²¹ PRO E36/57, ff. 15v., 33-33v., 52v. (cartulary of Edmund, earl of Cornwall)

²² BL Add. MS 34792 A, ff. 3r.-3v., 8v.-10 (cartulary of Dynham family); CPR (1258-66), p. 509; Page, 'Earl Richard', p. 33

²³ PRO E36/57, f. 7v.; KB 27/180 (Pomeroy/Corbet vs. Rex, 1305); CFF, i, 217

²⁴ L. Margaret Midgley, *Ministers' Accounts*, pp. 237-9; N. Denholm-Young, *Richard of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 164-5, 169

²⁵ Page, 'Cornwall', pp. 28-30; Idem, 'Earl Richard', pp. 32-3

²⁶ McFarlane, 'Policy', pp. 257-9

²⁷ CCR (1272-9), pp. 347-8

time of Isabella's death in 1293. Her cousin had died two years previously, leaving a seventeen-year old boy as his successor, and thereby removing a major potential obstacle to the designs of Edward I, who had no hesitation in sending his Treasurer, Walter Langton, to lobby the countess at her deathbed. A subsequent inquisition learned that Isabella had been preparing to re-open negotiations with the king, when she was taken ill at Stockwell (Surrey).²⁸ Langton rushed to her bedside and succeeded in extracting a charter of enfeoffment, dated 9 November 1293, whereby Isabella apparently consented to the reversion of the Isle of Wight and the manors of Christchurch and Vauxhall, for only six-thousand marks; she died just hours later.²⁹ Her heir, Hugh Courtenay II, a minor in royal custody, could do nothing to defend his interest. If the sale was not actually illegal - and there are grounds for doubting its legitimacy on the grounds of inconsistent dating in the charters - the king had acted ruthlessly and with a singular lack of diplomacy; dispossessing, offending and potentially alienating the support of one of his leading subjects.³⁰

4.1 (ii) THE CHALLENGE

The possibility that Edward I may have acted fraudulently certainly seems to have exercised the mind of Hugh Courtenay, and may at least partly have informed his subsequent legal action. The contemporary chronicler of Forde, in his potted history of the abbey's patron family, also casts doubt on the legality of the sale: “ . . . *et heredes legitimos dominio Insulae nequiter et subdole huius factionis commento hucusque defraudabat*”.³¹ Upon attaining majority and receiving licence to enter his lands in June 1297, Hugh found that the Redvers inheritance had been stripped of all but the manors and castle belonging to the honor of Plympton.³² Although this represented a substantial augmentation of his existing paternal inheritance - perhaps doubling the annual revenue he could have expected to receive - it was

²⁸ *RBE*, iii, 1015

²⁹ *Ibid.*, iii, 1015-7

³⁰ McFarlane, 'Policy', pp. 257-9

³¹ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 346

but the tail end of what should have been an exceptional fortune.³³ Hugh subsequently bought the comital borough of Honiton from Isabella's former steward, Sir Gilbert Knoville, but the earldom's other lands were now specifically described as Crown property, and it is clear that further claims were unlikely to have been seriously entertained.³⁴ Courtenay was fully aware of the extent of his misfortune and wasted little time in lodging a protest. In 1301 he optimistically petitioned for the restoration of thirteen manors in nine different counties.³⁵ These efforts began to bear fruit in the following year when it was determined that Brummore and Lymington (Hampshire) did not in fact belong to the lordship of Christchurch, sold to the Crown in 1297, and therefore belonged to Courtenay.³⁶

The legal battle began in earnest in 1306 when Hugh unsuccessfully petitioned parliament for possession of the manors of Kirkby Hornblower (Yorkshire), and Newnham and Upper Hayford (Oxfordshire). This claim was subsidiary to his principal action against the Crown, concerning instead a group of manors coveted by a co-petitioner, the Insula family, related to Earl Baldwin Redvers II, and settlement was finally reached in 1309, whereby Hugh gained possession of Newnham.³⁷ In 1315, he petitioned again for the award of all Isabella's English lands and tenements, including the Isle of Wight. It was in response to this action that a commission was established to investigate fully the case: it unearthed critical documentary material relating to the sale, and took statements from surviving eye-witnesses.³⁸ Hugh was again unsuccessful, however, and had to wait a further three years before resuming the matter. In 1318, an appeal was made to the York parliament where, as a former Lord Ordainer, Courtenay might justifiably have expected his cause to attract sympathy: his attorney, Richard Chisbeach, again challenged the legitimacy of the sale, and requested an enquiry "by knights and good men", suggesting that there was some unease at

³² *CCR* (1296-1302), p. 36; *CIPM*, viii, 273

³³ PRO SC6/827/39 (ministers' account of the earldom of Devon, 1295-6); *CCR* (1288-96), pp. 236-7

³⁴ 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 35

³⁵ PRO SC8/240, no. 11,972

³⁶ *CCR* (1296-1302), p. 536; *CPR* (1301-7), p. 118

³⁷ *RP*, i, 208; KB 27/201, f. 36

³⁸ *RP*, i, 334; transcripts printed in: *RBE*, iii, 1014-25, *RP*, i, 334-6

the way in which the Crown had hitherto handled proceedings.³⁹ Yet, despite Courtenay's apparent advantage, this latest petition also came to nothing: Hugh may have had good reason to doubt the legitimacy of Edward I's transactions, but his own case lacked substance in the face of royal intransigence and a weighty body of documentary evidence. Moreover, Edward II was unlikely to have been favourably disposed to a baron who had recently colluded in the encroachment of royal authority: Courtenay could apparently do little more than bide his time until the advent of a more clement political climate.⁴⁰

Henry Pomeroy and Peter Corbet, meanwhile, were experiencing no greater success. The deaths of the earl of Cornwall, Hawise Valletorte, and Peter Corbet's elderly father, within months of one other in 1299-1300, suggest this was a propitious time to mount a fresh legal assault. According to an inquiry of 1301, Roger Valletorte had granted away most of the inheritance to a variety of people shortly before his death in about 1275, retaining only the manor of Harberton (Devon), now in Crown custody.⁴¹ The case was eventually heard in full in 1305, when the two men sued the Crown for possession of Trematon Castle and its appendant possessions. In reply, chancery produced what it claimed was Valletorte's original charter of enfeoffment to Earl Richard. Proceedings were then unfortunately disrupted by the premature death of Pomeroy and, although the Crown willed that his son and heir, Henry VIII, a minor, be given full justice, the impetus of the original prosecution had evidently faded.⁴² Much later, in 1327, it was alleged that justice could not in any case have been done while Henry was a royal ward; mirroring the concern of Hugh Courtenay's lawyer that impartial justice could not be obtained from an interested king.⁴³ Despite this set-back, the manors of Harberton and Brixham (Devon) were released from the Valletorte inheritance and

³⁹ *Rotuli Parliamentum Anglie Hactenus Inediti*, ed. Richardson & Sayles (Camden Soc. 3rd ser., li, 1935), pp. 66-8

⁴⁰ Nevertheless, a petition of 1321-2, in which Courtenay secured the return of a knight's fee wrongfully taken by the Crown, shows that his name was not completely blackened at court: PRO SC 8/6, no. 283; *RP*, i, 405-6

⁴¹ *CIPM*, iii, 523

⁴² PRO KB 27/180, m. 5

⁴³ *Rotuli Parliamentum*, ed. Richardson & Sayles, p. 71

divided between Pomeroy and Corbet: here too, Edward I was willing to make small, placatory concessions from lands peripheral to his principal sphere of interest.⁴⁴

In 1315, the now adult Henry Pomeroy petitioned parliament with his cousin Peter Corbet.⁴⁵ Central to their argument was the contention that Roger Valletorte had been of unsound mind when he made his charter. Certainly, given the rapidity with which Roger had dispensed with most of the lands almost immediately after the death of his nephew, Reginald Valletorte, this was a valid point; having outlived his elder brother by nearly thirty years, he may at least have been senile.⁴⁶ Pomeroy filed another petition in 1318, when he, like Courtenay, may have expected a more favourable hearing.⁴⁷ A fresh appeal was lodged at the first parliament of Edward III, in association with John Corbet, Peter's half-brother: a review of the case thus far shows that judgment had already been given in favour of the litigants on the previous two occasions, although the king had evidently declined to relinquish the disputed lands. Queen Isabella was therefore advised that there was no impediment to Pomeroy and Corbet succeeding, but she proved no more willing to part with Trematon, and offered instead cash compensation or alternative lands.⁴⁸ Henry's treatment at the hands of Edward II is all the more surprising, since he was a knight in the royal household from at least 1317, and might therefore have expected more success than the less favoured Hugh Courtenay.⁴⁹

4.1 (iii) THE RESOLUTION

Scenting victory, perhaps, under a more even-handed regime, Pomeroy and Corbet apparently rejected Isabella's compromise, made in a climate of political conciliation. In so

⁴⁴ *CFR* (1272-1307), p. 419; *CIPM*, iii, 296

⁴⁵ *RP*, i, 332

⁴⁶ *CFR*, nos. 217, 219, 224; *CIPM*, ii, 165, 201. On the day that he signed over Trematon to Earl Richard, he also granted Cargaul and two Cornish advowsons to the bishop of Exeter, and another manor and two hundred acres of woodland to his sister-in-law, Joan Oxton.

⁴⁷ *Rotuli Parliamentum*, ed. Richardson & Sayles, p. 70

⁴⁸ *Idem*, pp. 170-3; *RP*, ii, 438

⁴⁹ *CCR* (1313-18), p. 558

doing, they were ill-advised since the Crown, although willing in general to do justice to those wronged by its predecessor, had no intention of relinquishing control of Trematon. In 1337, Edward III found the perfect opportunity to bury the matter permanently when Henry Pomeroy – perhaps despairing of the mounting legal costs - illegally sold the marriage of his niece, Isabella Moeles, a wealthy heiress and tenant-in-chief, to Sir William Botreaux of Boscastle (Cornwall).⁵⁰ He was compelled to seek pardon and, on 24 February 1338, in what appears to have been a stage-managed occasion in the presence of the earl of Devon and several important local knights, he released to the duchy of Cornwall any lasting claim to the disputed territories. In return, he was pardoned of a debt of £242 to the Exchequer, partly inherited from his father but undoubtedly exacerbated by his lengthy legal action; in 1327, both Henry and John had emphasised the financial strain they were under. In addition, Pomeroy was granted an annual pension of £40 until lands and rents to the yearly value of £30 - below the true value of the Trematon estate - could be substituted.⁵¹ John Corbet, perhaps because he was only a half brother, received nothing from this opportunistic settlement, which appears to have been aimed specifically at exploiting Henry's financial embarrassment. The Crown had finally lost patience with the antics of two of its lesser subjects, and was no longer willing to entertain a seventy-year old dispute that it had never had any intention of losing. To the end, it had refused to treat with any gravity the presumptions of an upstart knight who, in a copy of the final concord, was condescendingly described as the king's "*symple bachelor*".⁵²

Hugh Courtenay, on the other hand, enjoyed rather better fortune. He had played a critical part in the dismantling of the Despenser regime, and was clearly on favourable terms with the Mortimer faction.⁵³ In 1328, it was found that Courtenay had been wrongfully deprived of the service of two *mesne* tenants in Devon, and that the Oxfordshire manor of Newnham, granted on petition in 1309 but apparently confiscated when Hugh II attempted to

⁵⁰ CPR (1338-40), pp. 15-16

⁵¹ CCR (1337-9), p. 387

⁵² PRO SC 8/3, no. 115

grant it to his eldest son, was part of his lawful inheritance.⁵⁴ These favourable signs continued after Edward III's resumption of power, and in December 1330 Courtenay was granted the farm of the royal hundred of Budleigh (Devon).⁵⁵

In 1334, Hugh II sought justice against the Exchequer, which was trying to distrain him for the sum of £155/16s./8d., erroneously paid to him from the 'third penny' of the county of Devon (£18/6s./8d. *per annum*). This, as Bishop Walter Stapeldon, Edward II's zealous Treasurer, had discovered, was an honorary perquisite owing to the earl of Devon; since Hugh Courtenay was not formally styled as such, he was not entitled to the payment, even though he had evidently convinced both himself and the sheriff otherwise.⁵⁶ The title had in fact always been part-and-parcel of Courtenay's claim: in 1315, he had even, somewhat optimistically, laid claim to the farm of Exeter Castle and the shrievalty of Devon; archaic hereditary rights attached to the earldom, but unexercised since the reign of King Stephen.⁵⁷ The impracticality of the Crown's position was at last becoming clear to a king more sensitive than his predecessors to the *amour propre* of the English aristocracy. Five months later, in February 1335, Courtenay was instructed to assume the style of earl, a rank that he had exercised in all but name since the beginning of the fourteenth century. On the following day, the proceeds of the 'third penny' were restored to him, and he was pardoned his outstanding 'debt' to the Exchequer.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, the Crown's generosity did not extend to the release of any more of the Fortibus inheritance, resulting in a compromise similar to the Pomeroy affair: in both instances, the Crown emerged the ultimate winner, holding on to those lands it had originally targeted, and making only moderate concessions to the litigants. The legal process had been spun out interminably, before being swept decisively under the carpet. Edward III apparently considered the new earl to be already sufficiently well-endowed to sustain his dignity, and no

⁵³ M. V. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent* (New York, 1964), pp. 187, 194, 258; *CPR* (1327-30), pp. 153, 426; Below, p. 230

⁵⁴ *CCR* (1327-30), pp. 303-4; 444-5

⁵⁵ *CFR* (1327-37), pp. 210-11

⁵⁶ *CCR* (1333-7), pp. 341-2

⁵⁷ PRO SC 8/99, no. 4923; SC 8/3, no. 101

other payment or pension, like those made to the five new creations of 1337, was forthcoming. He may have been technically correct in this assumption, but the Courtenays were far from buoyant financially, and money remained an over-riding concern throughout the fourteenth century.

It was not only in the law courts that Courtenay pursued his right, but also in the private sphere. We have seen how the Forde chronicler inserted opinionated commentary into an otherwise dry genealogical account of the Courtenay family, indicating the importance of the matter to his patron.⁵⁹ Hugh II was also probably responsible for the commissioning of two family cartularies, begun in the early decades of the fourteenth century.⁶⁰ These documents had an obvious utility in an era when the legal title of private landowners was being scrutinised by the Crown, and Hugh, who had experienced the destructiveness of royal interference at an early age, was careful to guard himself against further misfortune. Interspersed with the usual collection of charters, deeds and other miscellanea, are detailed genealogies, repeatedly emphasising the family's aristocratic French origins, some spurious, and establishing its inter-relatedness with the English nobility. The alliance of ancestors to illustrious families receives especially close attention, while Hugh III's marriage to Eleanor Bohun, a granddaughter of King Edward I, is recited *ad nauseam*.⁶¹ The commencement of the 'British Library' cartulary probably coincided with Hugh II's ennoblement in 1335, but the more expansive 'Powderham' cartulary dates back to the 1310s, and was perhaps intended to be used as a legal instrument, or a tool of propaganda.

Further evidence of 'dynasty building' may be found among the remains of the family's residences in Devon. Okehampton Castle, in a state of some disrepair in 1274, was extensively refurbished at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and new domestic facilities were installed; while Plympton, to judge from an illustration in the 'British Library' cartulary, appears to have been completely rebuilt at about the same time, imitating the distinctive

⁵⁸ CCR (1333-7), pp. 466, 376

⁵⁹ Above, p. 158

⁶⁰ BL Add. MS 49359; M. P. D. Collison, 'The Courtenay Cartulary from Powderham Castle' (2 vols., University of Exeter, M.A. thesis, 1979)

architectural style of the earl of Cornwall's castle at Launceston.⁶² Meanwhile, the manor house at Tiverton was castellated and refurbished, apparently by the same masons who had worked on Plympton: in 1308-9 alone, more than £128 was spent on constructing a new hall and chambers.⁶³ Castles were just as much symbols of power and wealth as they were units of defence, and a man who sponsored new building works on this scale – Courtenay also donated substantial sums to the cathedral fabric fund and the establishment of a collegiate church at Ottery St. Mary – clearly had exceptionally high ambitions and a keen sense of destiny. Although these grand gestures may have done little to sway royal opinion, they remain to us as impressive evidence of the self-image that Hugh was trying to project.

The positive effect of ennoblement on Courtenay's local power base is immediately discernible, and he publicised his elevation in a lavish display of religious patronage, distributing alms totalling about £240 among all the monastic establishments in the county.⁶⁴ And Bishop John Grandisson was quick to observe a certain spring in the step of the sexagenarian, when he criticised the new earl's air of self-importance and his high-handed treatment of ordinary Devon folk.⁶⁵

From these two examples of conflict between the legitimate claims of private families and the territorial ambitions of the Plantagenets, a common pattern has emerged. Royal magnates used their superior authority to bully weak and vulnerable subjects into dispossessing their rightful heirs. The Crown then affected a show of justice to the disinherited, but slowed the legal process interminably, before eventually settling the matter with piecemeal concessions. The ill-feeling thus engendered, may have at least partly influenced Hugh Courtenay's sustained support of the reformers in the 1310s. Both litigants had been treated by the king with indifference, if not outright obstruction, and both tried, without success, to exploit his vulnerability in 1318. Fresh hope seemed to be offered by the

⁶¹ BL Add. MS 49359, ff. 54-55; 55v.; 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 1-2; Oliver, *Monasticon*, pp. 344-5

⁶² Robert Higham, 'A Knight to Remember: the Building Enterprises of Hugh Courtenay', *TDA*, cxxi (1989), pp. 153-8; Idem, 'Excavations at Okehampton Castle', *PDAS*, xxxv (1977), pp. 3-42; Idem, 'Plympton Castle, Devon', *PDAS*, xxxiii (1985), pp. 59-75; BL Add. MS 49359, f. 24r.

⁶³ DRO CR 490 (reeve's account, Tiverton, 1308-9)

⁶⁴ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 346

more conciliatory Isabella-Mortimer regime, and Edward III was also sympathetic, but the territorial question at the heart of each case was clearly beyond debate and the plaintiffs were ultimately silenced with compromises that they would not have been wholly satisfied with. The Plantagenets displayed impolitic, if not downright illegal, behaviour in pursuit of their interests, backing it up with the dead weight of royal bureaucracy.

4.2 THE COURTENAY EARLS AND THEIR 'AFFINITY'

With Hugh II's pursuit of the earldom concluded, we now direct our focus to the Courtenays in their role as peers of the realm and lords of men. How did they compare to other late-medieval earls in terms of wealth, prestige and connections? How well entrenched was their authority, and what can we say about the quality and intensity of the lordship that they wielded over their 'country'? This section begins with a broad overview of the social framework of the earls' power, the late-medieval 'affinity'; a term which will, in the context of this study, be used in its widest sense to denote a loosely-based grouping of relatives, friends and colleagues, lawyers, clerks and servants, through whose support, active or passive, the family's network of influence was extended into every corner of the south-west and beyond into the wider realm. It is not my intention here to list systematically all the earls' supporters and retainers, but rather to sketch a general outline of a minor earl's circle of sociability and clientage, and to place it into a proper historical context.

No formal indentures of retinue for the earls survive, although such relationships can be inferred from letters of protection and other sources. The witness lists of charters, of which there is an abundance, have been drawn upon extensively here: for that reason, I have attempted to isolate those *acta* involving major transactions where the testators appear to form part of a permanent, itinerant establishment, rather than merely being the best men available locally at a given time. Some twenty-three such charters have been identified for Hugh II,

⁶⁵ *RJG*, i, 294

and twenty-five for Hugh III.⁶⁶ The uneven chronological distribution of the charter evidence is an obvious problem - for Hugh II, the material is restricted mainly to the late 1290s and the 1300s, while practically no charters from the 1350s exist for Hugh III – but it does reflect quite faithfully the earls' main periods of activity.

Two features common to the affinities of both earls are immediately apparent and worth emphasising from the outset. First, that men were drawn from a relatively narrow geographical range; principally from an enclave of lowland east Devon, but also from the hinterland of Exeter and around the south coast. This coincided with the Courtenays' main sphere of territorial interest in the fourteenth century.⁶⁷ In about 1300, the family moved its principal residence to the comital borough of Tiverton, close to the Somerset border and within easy reach of the London road, which became an administrative centre of the entire English estate. A short distance to the south lay Colcombe, first acquired in 1253, which was granted to the newly-wedded Hugh III in 1325, and thereafter became a favoured 'country' residence of the second earl. Other frequently-used dwellings included a house in Exeter, and an establishment in the adjacent suburb of Exminster, where William Courtenay, the future archbishop of Canterbury, was born in 1332.⁶⁸ The castles at Okehampton and Plympton were both adequately maintained in the fourteenth century, but, lying some distance from the Tiverton-Exeter orbit described here, were used less often: Hugh II did, however, create a deer park at Okehampton in the 1300s.⁶⁹ This was the area from which men were most commonly recruited. Clerks and lawyers were largely Exeter based, while knights usually

⁶⁶ *Hugh II*: 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 30, 31, 34, 35, 48, 71, 120, 135, 137, 182, 183, 184, 189, 191, 192, 194, 203, 205, 206, 208, 213, 218; BL Add. Ch. 49359, f. 63v.-64r. (1339); *The Great Cartulary of Glastonbury*, ed. A. Watkin (Somerset Record Society, 1947-56, 3 vols.) lix, 367; CCR (1313-18), pp. 185, 235; CPR (1313-17), p. 279; CCR (1318-23), p. 112; Ibid. (1334-7), p. 327; Ibid. (1337-9), p. 387; *Hugh III*: BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 63r. (1355), 63v. (1362), 64r. (1351), 64v. (1368), 65r.-65v. (1356), 66r. (1344), 66r.-66v. (1344), 66v.-67r. (1344), 67r. (1366), 67v. (1366), 67v.-68r. (1366), 68r. (1369), 68r.-68v. (1347), 69r. (1341), 69v. (1346), 69v.-70r. (1346), 70r.-70v. (1371), 70v.-71r. (1348), 71r.-71v. (1371), 70v.-71r. (1348), 71r.-71v. (1371), 72v.-73r. (1376); BL Add. Ch. 13915; *Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, pp. 430-4; CCR (1354-60), pp. 325-6; Ibid. (1360-4), pp. 261-2. Most charter evidence used in this section is listed here and references will not usually be cited again.

⁶⁷ Below, Map 4.1 (pp. 167a)

⁶⁸ Higham, 'A Knight to Remember', p. 155; Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 345; Cherry, 'Crown and Political Community', pp. 16-18; Tyldesley, 'Crown and Local Communities', pp. 20-1

⁶⁹ R. A. Higham, 'The Castles of Medieval Devon' (University of Exeter, PhD thesis, 1979), pp. 103-7, 157-8, 167-8; 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 64

Map 4.1: THE COURTENAY ESTATES IN DEVON, c. 1377



KEY	
OKEHAMPTON	honorial <i>caput</i>
TIVERTON	other major residence
O	manor belonging to Okehampton estate
P	manor belongin to Plympton estate
*	addition made to estate, 1297-1377

hailed from the coastal regions of east or south Devon, preferably within riding distance of both Exeter and the major ports of Dartmouth and Plymouth: this regional bias became even more pronounced from the 1350s onwards, as the second earl looked closer to home for the marriages of his younger offspring.

A second characteristic was the high incidence of senior clergy in the earls' counsels. The Courtenays were keenly aware of the secular advantages to be derived from association with the Church, and religious patronage was closely linked to political ambitions. Senior churchmen were pensioned and younger family members inserted into the ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁷⁰ Hugh III's brother, John Courtenay (d. 1349), was a monk of Tavistock Abbey, where he was later elected abbot; while his younger sons, Thomas (d. c. 1381) and William (d. 1395), were canons of Exeter Cathedral.⁷¹ William Courtenay, even after his career had taken him beyond the confines of the Exeter diocese, returned to act as surrogate to the absentee Bishop Thomas Brantingham, while serving as bishop of Hereford in 1370-5; on more than one occasion, he conducted ordinations in Tiverton collegiate church, near his father's residence.⁷²

Although there is little prospect of calculating precisely the size of the affinity, a livery account roll of 1384-5 at least gives some indication of the typical composition and likely scale of the inner-circle.⁷³ In that year, Earl Edward's (d. 1419) livery was distributed to 135 men and women, of whom about half are described as domestic servants. Compared to other fourteenth-century comital establishments, this was quite modest: the household of Elizabeth Burgh, dowager countess of Ulster, for example, contained almost twice as many members in 1343, including no less than ninety-three knights and esquires.⁷⁴ Edward Courtenay, by comparison, had just eight household knights and forty-one esquires, with the

⁷⁰ D. N. Lepine, 'The Courtenays and Exeter Cathedral in the Later Middle Ages', *TDA*, cxxiv (1992), pp. 41-58

⁷¹ *RJG*, iii, 1360; *Cal. Pap. Pets.*, i, 291

⁷² *Registrum Willelmi de Courtenay*, ed. W. W. Capes (Canterbury and York Society, xxxviii, 1914), pp. 4-5, 7-9, 24-31

⁷³ BL Add. Ch. 64320; Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 72-3

⁷⁴ George Holmes, *The Estates of the Higher Nobility in Late-Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 9-10, 58; McFarlane, *Nobility of Later Medieval England*, pp. 110-11

remainder made up largely of clerks and lawyers. If the peacetime affinity was less than impressive by contemporary standards, the military retinue also failed to dazzle: an outfit taken to Brittany in 1345 on behalf of Hugh III, consisted of a banneret, twenty-one knights and men-at-arms, and twenty archers.⁷⁵ It is therefore difficult not to concur with George Holmes' view that the Courtenays, who were uniquely disadvantaged in having acquired an earldom against the will of the Crown, ranked among the least substantial comital families of the later middle ages.⁷⁶

4.2 (i) FAMILY AND KIN

Family members did of course comprise the core of the Courtenay affinity, and, through their inter-relatedness, afforded it an element of corporate identity. Marital alliances contracted by the main branch were becoming progressively prestigious, thereby extending the Courtenays' influence into the wider realm and helping to publicise its recently enhanced status. The kin network was not enormous at the beginning of our period, but it underwent considerable expansion over the course of the fourteenth century through the branches of the large nucleated family of Hugh II.

Hugh himself had only one adult brother, Sir Philip Courtenay (d. 1314), who was killed in battle at Bannockburn.⁷⁷ Little is known of Philip, other than that he had already served in Scotland with his brother, and that he was of sufficiently high renown to have been called upon to accompany Prince Edward to France in March 1307, to pay homage.⁷⁸ He had also acted as feoffee to his sister and brother-in-law, Margaret and Nicholas Moels, to whom he made a grant of land in 1309; and he made other grants of property to familiars of Hugh II, possibly acting as his brother's agent.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ PRO E101/312/13

⁷⁶ Holmes, *Estates of the Higher Nobility*, p. 58

⁷⁷ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 344

⁷⁸ PRO C 81/1724, no. 12; *CCR* (1302-7), p. 531

⁷⁹ *CPR* (1307-13), p. 528; *DFP*, ii, 975, 1006, 1162

A chancery letter of protection listing Hugh and Philip among the *familiares* of their uncle, Sir Hugh Despenser (d. 1326), the future earl of Winchester, is a convenient point of departure for a discussion of kin relationships.⁸⁰ Their mother was Hugh's sister, Eleanor (d. 1328), making him an obvious first choice as lord and mentor to the two young men, especially after the premature death of their father in 1293.⁸¹ This early connection, with a family that gained widespread notoriety and odium in the reign of Edward II, turned out to be an unfortunate one for Hugh Courtenay, whose overt support of the Lords Ordainers in the 1310s may be interpreted as a direct attack on the arrogation of royal power later perpetrated by his uncle and cousin. The Despensers certainly offered no aid to their kinsman in the 1320s, when he most needed it in recovering his inheritance, despite exercising a virtual monopoly of influence at the English court: far from aiding their unfortunate relative, Courtenay's utter lack of success in these years suggests that they may even have deliberately obstructed his interests.⁸²

Relations between the two families had not been helped by Hugh II's growing *rapprochement* with Humphrey Bohun (d. 1322), earl of Hereford and Essex, and a prominent critic of Edward II. A contract was drawn up in March 1315 betrothing Courtenay's son and heir to the earl's daughter, Margaret Bohun; although the marriage did not actually take place until 1325, well after Humphrey's death, perhaps because of the controversy surrounding the prospective father-in-law, it could have done little to have endeared Hugh to the Despenser regime.⁸³ Politically sensitive though the alliance may have been, it was socially priceless, demonstrating that the would-be earl had finally 'arrived' in high society. Margaret Bohun was, through her mother Eleanor, a granddaughter of King Edward I, and the Courtenays are subsequently referred to in official correspondence as 'kinsmen' of Edward III and the Black Prince; a cachet that would be tirelessly exploited by Hugh III. With no tradition of familial ties between the Bohuns and the Courtenays - the latter were not really in the same social

⁸⁰ PRO C 81/1724, no. 12

⁸¹ Oliver, *Monasticon*, p. 344; *CP*, v, 323

⁸² Above, pp. 159-60; Below, pp. 199-200

league prior to 1297 - the contract appears to have been the product of Humphrey and Hugh's mutual activity in government in the 1310s: it was in fact sealed at Westminster in 1315, an especially good year for the Ordainers when both men were active at the centre.⁸⁴

Although Courtenay himself played no part in the rebellion of 1321-2, in which the earl perished, the Bohun alliance remained intact and became perhaps the most enduring and effective of all the kinship bonds. Although Margaret was only a younger daughter, Humphrey had provided her with the handsome dowry of one thousand marks.⁸⁵ He was evidently remembered with some affection and sympathy, since a contemporary stone effigy, depicting him in full armour, continues to reside in Exeter Cathedral, adjacent to the former Courtenay family chantry, and close to a joint monument commemorating his daughter and son-in-law.⁸⁶ Margaret's brother, William Bohun (d. 1360), a royal favourite for whom the earldom of Northampton was created in 1337, led a joint expedition of 1,500 troops in France in 1342 with his brother-in-law, the earl of Devon; five years later William successfully petitioned the king on behalf of the earl, by now stricken with ill-health, for exemption from all future military and public service.⁸⁷ Bohun again exerted his influence in 1355 to secure the papal reservation of a canonry for his young nephew, William Courtenay, thereby setting in motion an outstanding ecclesiastical career.⁸⁸ Nor was William peculiar in maintaining amicable relations with his sister's family: his elder brother, Humphrey (d. 1361), the new earl of Hereford and Essex, left Hugh III a large blue sapphire in his will, while his son, also Humphrey (d. 1372), who in 1361 inherited the earldoms of both his father and uncle, was responsible for commissioning at least one of three fourteenth-century psalters in which the arms of Bohun and Courtenay are repeatedly juxtaposed in the margins.⁸⁹ Coats of arms also adorn the 'Powderham' cartulary, revealing which familial connections were valued most

⁸³ PRO DL 27/13 (indenture and articles of marriage, 1315); *CPR* (1313-17), p. 267; Turner, 'Will of Humphrey de Bohun', p. 346

⁸⁴ Below, pp. 199-200

⁸⁵ Turner, 'Will of Humphrey de Bohun', p. 346

⁸⁶ Pevsner, *Devon*, pp. 381, 382-3

⁸⁷ *Adae Murimuth*, p. 125; *CPR* (1345-8), p. 528

⁸⁸ *Cal. Pap. Pets.*, i, 284

⁸⁹ *A Collection of all the Wills of the Kings and Queens of England*, ed. J. Nichols (1780), p. 51; *The Bohun Manuscript*, ed. M. R. James & E. G. Millar (Roxburgh Club, Oxford, 1936), p. 1

highly: apart from the Bohuns, the devices of the Vere earls of Oxford, related through Hugh II's grandmother, of the elder Despenser, and of Hugh's in-laws, the St. Johns and the Moels, are also featured.⁹⁰

Sir John Giffard of Brimpsfield (d. 1322), husband of Hugh II's sister, Aveline (d. 1327), was no less contentious a relative than Humphrey Bohun. A marcher of south-east Wales, John was implicated in the attack on the Despenser estates in Glamorgan in May-June 1321, and was attendant at the sack of Bridgnorth in January 1322: he was captured at Boroughbridge and executed as a traitor. Interestingly, despite her husband's overt opposition, Aveline avoided the humiliating treatment meted out to many of the rebels' widows and families, and died in 1327 in possession of her full dower, including the ruins of Brimpsfield castle, destroyed by a vengeful Edward II in 1322.⁹¹ Could her relatively good fortune be attributed at least in part to the political caution of her brother? Although consistently allied to the reformist cause in the 1310s, and later involved in Edward II's deposition, Hugh's relationship with the Crown in the 1320s was ambiguous: he may have retained at least some confidence with the king, who had elected him to negotiate terms of peace with the earl of Lancaster in November 1318.⁹² Again, in 1321, he was nominated to serve on the standing council, suggesting that despite his dealings with the king's enemies, he had been prudent and diplomatic enough to avoid arousing doubts about his own loyalty.⁹³ That much is apparent in the following year when, with his fellow Ordainer William Martin, Hugh was ordered to raise the county posse: neither had been instructed to desist from association with 'contrariants', usually a certain sign that a man lay under the cloud of suspicion.⁹⁴

Other alliances were more mundane and predictable by comparison, influenced largely by the burden of having to support a growing number of dependants. The marriage of Hugh II's youngest sister, Margaret (d. 1349), to Nicholas Moels (d. 1316), a Somerset

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⁹⁰ DRO 1508M, ff. 15, 16, 18r.

⁹¹ *CP*, iii, 344-5; *CIPM*, vii, 78-9

⁹² *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 112-4

⁹³ *Ibid.* (1318-23), p. 351

knight, gave the Courtenays a first sniff of an important landed estate.⁹⁵ Within months of the extinction of the main Moels line in 1336, Sir Thomas Courtenay (d. 1354), a younger son of Hugh II, had grasped the hand of his fifteen-year old cousin Muriel Moels, the elder co-heiress: the couple received lands in Devon, Somerset and Oxfordshire in 1337, and made further gains in 1349 upon the death of Thomas' aunt, Margaret.⁹⁶ The Moels estate would have provided a sound material base for the establishment of an independent cadet branch had not Thomas' own heir, Hugh (d. 1359), died in infancy, whereupon most of the lands were carried in marriage by his eldest daughter, Muriel, to Sir John Dynham II (d. 1383).⁹⁷

The Dynhams were already related to the Courtenays through Sir Oliver (d. 1299), second husband of Hugh II's grandmother, Isabel (d. c. 1305). In 1315, Hugh had intervened on behalf of his young kinsman, John Dynham I (d. c. 1330), to hasten the recovery of his father's lands following a long minority; having by now become quite expert at the business of petitioning the Crown for inheritances.⁹⁸ John's younger brother, Oliver I (d. 1343), was one of the chief mourners at Earl Hugh's funeral in 1341, and his nephew, Oliver II (d. 1351), subsequently served as a knight in the retinue of the earl's banneret, Sir John Cheverston, at Crecy in 1346.⁹⁹ The acquisition of the Moels inheritance was a welcome and timely boost to the Dynhams' fortunes, and by the end of the fourteenth century they were probably second only to the Courtenay earls in Devon in terms of landed wealth.¹⁰⁰ John Dynham II (d. 1381) was also more active in local government than his father had ever been and presided over the county Bench in 1350; perhaps not coincidentally the only occasion on which Earl Hugh was unable to attend in person. He served under his kinsman on a number of other judicial and military commissions.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, (1318-23), p. 507

⁹⁵ *CP*, ix, 6; *CIPM*, ix, 427; *CCR* (1313-18), pp. 275, 354-5

⁹⁶ *CFR* (1337-47), pp. 45-6; *CCR* (1349-54), pp. 18-19

⁹⁷ *CIPM*, xii, 333

⁹⁸ *PRO SC* 1/36, no. 65

⁹⁹ *RJG*, ii, 939-40; Wrotesley, *Crecy*, p. 126

¹⁰⁰ *FA*, vi, 416-19

¹⁰¹ *CPR* (1348-50), p. 516; *Ibid.*, (1358-61), p. 407; *Ibid.*, (1361-4), p. 64; *Ibid.*, (1370-4), p. 101

His place in the higher counsels of the realm now secure, the marriages contracted by Hugh III tended to be more localised and concerned primarily with bolstering his authority in the south-west. Whereas Hugh II's in-laws had been drawn from all corners of the realm, his own tended to look closer to home. Such a retrenchment seems paradoxical in light of the family's recent social ascendancy, and is perhaps more a reflection of the character and circumstances of the second earl, who was debilitated by illness after about 1347, than it is of the social standing of the dynasty as a whole.¹⁰² Less active in national politics and warfare than his father had been – albeit through physical necessity rather than choice – the second earl resembles a typical country landowner, more at ease hunting venison with his neighbours and tenants than he was circulating with men of affairs.¹⁰³

His own son and heir apparent, Hugh IV (d. 1349), married Elizabeth (d. 1375), daughter of Sir Guy Bryan VI (d. 1349), one of the Courtenays' more important tenants, who held land of the earl on the south coast of Devon, but who until recently had been more commonly resident in their marcher lordship of Laugharne (Carms.). The alliance coincided with renewed interest in the south-western demesnes by Elizabeth's brother, Guy VII (d. 1390), a courtier and professional soldier, who had probably arranged the union himself on account of his father's reported mental infirmity. With shared interests in the locality, relations between the Bryans and the Courtenays were good, which was fortunate given that Elizabeth held on to a large chunk of the comital estate for more than a quarter of a century after her husband's premature death.¹⁰⁴ Earl Hugh may also have helped Guy Bryan to secure wardship of Oliver Dynham II's two daughters and heiresses in 1353.¹⁰⁵ Earlier, Guy had been granted the farm of the temporalities of Otterton Priory, an alien house in the Courtenay-influenced enclave of east Devon, jointly with Sir William Daumarle (d. 1363), a tenant and protégée of the earl of Devon.¹⁰⁶ From 1356, and for nearly the whole of the 1360s, Guy was

¹⁰² Ibid. (1345-8), p. 528

¹⁰³ *CIPM*, xiv, 160 (proof of age: witnesses testify to hunting with the earl on the day in question)

¹⁰⁴ *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, ii, 1218; *CCR* (1360-4), pp. 261-2; BL Add. Ch. 49359, f. 24r.; *CIPM*, xiv, 107; Below, 248-9

¹⁰⁵ *CFR* (1347-56), p. 381; *CPR* (1354-60), p. 368; *RJG*, iii, 1451

¹⁰⁶ *CFR* (1347-56), pp. 322-3; *RJG*, iii, 1330 (Daumarle as a ward of Hugh III)

Admiral of the Western Fleet and was jointly responsible with Hugh for organising the defence of Devon and Cornwall. He was also associated regularly with two of the earl's soldier sons; Sir Philip (d. 1406), who succeeded him as admiral in 1372, and Sir Peter, who acted as his feoffee.¹⁰⁷

Hugh IV shared his brother-in-law's prowess on the battlefield and had already distinguished himself in France. He was a founding knight of the Garter and his death in 1349, at the age of just twenty-two, captured the romantic imagination: in September, Queen Philippa, who was probably touring the south-west to escape the contagion of London, visited Forde Abbey and laid a cloth of gold on his tomb.¹⁰⁸ Hugh's sole surviving son, and now nominated heir to the earldom, Hugh V (d. 1374), was given in marriage by his grandfather to a daughter of the earl of Kent in 1362, but his equally untimely demise left the earl of Devon with the double headache of having no male heir, and the burden of providing for two young widows.¹⁰⁹ It was decided that the earldom should now descend through the line of Hugh's second son, Sir Edward (d. by 1371) of Goodrington, who had married a wealthy Cornish heiress, Emmeline Dauney (d. 1371), and had acquired an extensive estate sprawling across Devon, Cornwall and Somerset: Edward (d. 1415), his son and heir, became the third earl of Devon shortly after the death of his grandfather in 1377, and augmented the comital estate with his mother's lands.¹¹⁰

Hugh III's eldest daughter, Elizabeth (d. 1395), initially married John Vere (c. 1335-50), heir apparent to the earldom of Oxford, in 1341.¹¹¹ The Vere-Courtenay connection was already well established: Hugh's great-grandmother Isabel had been a daughter of an earl of Oxford, and Hugh continued to hold the manor of Hillesdon (Bucks.) that she had brought as her dower.¹¹² It was almost certainly as a consequence of these unions that several Devon

¹⁰⁷ *CPR* (1354-60), pp. 273, 656; *CCR* (1369-74), p. 371; *Ibid.*, (1374-7), p. 82; *CPR* (1374-7), p. 499; *CPR* (1377-81), pp. 359, 471, 569 (Philip); *CPR* (1377-81), pp. 40, 567; *CIPM* xvi, 959 (Peter)

¹⁰⁸ Hugh E. L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter, 1348-1461* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 14, 289

¹⁰⁹ *CIPM*, xiv, 14; *CCR* (1374-7), p. 52

¹¹⁰ *CIPM*, xiii, 99; *CCR* (1377-81), p. 149

¹¹¹ *CPR* (1340-3), pp. 254-5; *Ibid.* (1348-50), p. 541; *Ibid.* (1354-8), pp. 460, 466-7; *Ibid.* (1358-61), pp. 234, 256; *CIPM*, xvii, 684-8

¹¹² DRO CR/670 (recognition by Robert Vere, 1319); *CP*, x, 225

knights and esquires who had earlier served under the earl of Devon's banneret, John Cheverston, were later to be found in the retinue of Elizabeth's father-in-law, Earl John Vere (d. 1360), at Crecy in 1346.¹¹³ Cheverston did himself hold land in Suffolk of the earl of Oxford, which he had possibly received as a reward for services rendered.¹¹⁴ Nine years after the death of her first husband, Elizabeth remarried the Devon knight, Sir Andrew Luttrell (d. c. 1376), who, on account of his wife's 'royal kinship', was granted a lifetime annuity of £200 by Edward III.¹¹⁵ Andrew's father, Sir John, had been a prominent witness of Courtenay charters in the 1340s, and had attended Hugh II's funeral in 1341.¹¹⁶ Hugh III's youngest daughter, Joan (d. 1391), was betrothed to Sir John Cheverston, thereby confirming that knight's pre-eminence within the affinity.¹¹⁷

Other family members eschewed marriage for the Church, but nevertheless helped to extend the network of influence through their ecclesiastical connections. The Courtenays' conspicuous patronage of the Church and its personnel has already been noted: a love of religious ceremony, pomp and finery is apparent both in the elaborate three-day funeral obsequies performed for Hugh II, and in the family chantry established in Exeter Cathedral by Bishop William Courtenay after the death of his father.¹¹⁸ Great store was set by the earls on career opportunities in the Church, and no less effort was spent in prising openings here than it was in the marriage market. John Courtenay, after he was elected abbot of Tavistock, with the complicity of his second cousin, Bishop John Grandisson, occupied a position in the local ecclesiastical hierarchy second only to the bishop himself.¹¹⁹ His nephews, William and Thomas, also owed much of their good fortune to the intervention of powerful friends and family. Thomas had succeeded in obtaining a canonry and prebend in the collegiate church of Crediton even before his ordination, and, in 1349, at the tender age of eighteen, had a papal dispensation to hold any benefice he wished, regardless of his inexperience: this proved to be

¹¹³ Wrotesley, *Crecy*, p. 92; Below, chapter 6

¹¹⁴ *CIPM*, x, 638

¹¹⁵ *CPR* (1358-61), p. 234

¹¹⁶ *RJG*, ii, 939-40

¹¹⁷ *CIPM*, xvii, 5 (pp. 6-7)

¹¹⁸ *RJG*, ii, 939-40; *RTB*, i, 381-2

superfluous, however, as he was by now an Exeter canon and held a prebend in the chapel of Exeter Castle, a living in the gift of his father, the honorary castellan.¹²⁰ Nor was anything left to chance for William, on whose behalf both Earl William Bohun and the Black Prince petitioned Rome for benefices. In 1363 his brother-in-law, Sir John Cheverston, obtained licence for him to be ordained and to study law at Oxford, and in August 1369, aged just twenty-eight, William was the pope's candidate for the bishopric of Hereford, which he held until his translation to London in 1375: six years later he was elected archbishop of Canterbury, becoming the scourge of lollardy and, in conjunction with his brothers Philip and Peter, both courtiers of Richard II, securing for the family a formidable bloc of influence at the very heart of the English polity.¹²¹

4.2 (ii) KNIGHTS AND ESQUIRES

It is not my intention here to treat at length all the knights and gentry retained by or associated with the Courtenays, since the lack of formal indentures makes quantification difficult, and further analysis of the *milites strenui* will in any case follow in chapter six. Instead, this section will offer a flavour of the personal service aspect of the affinity through short biographical sketches of three major *familiares*: men with an established tradition of service in both peacetime and war.

Sir Stephen Haccombe (d. 1331)

On the basis of the charter evidence alone, Stephen appears to have been the principal counsellor of Hugh Courtenay II, witnessing no less than fourteen of the *acta* in our sample, in the period 1299-1315. It is probable that Stephen, or one or more of his ancestors, had previously served the Courtenays in a military capacity, since he was already established as a

¹¹⁹ Above, p. 51

¹²⁰ *RJG*, iii, 1331, 1399 (Crediton); *Cal. Pap. Letts.*, iii, 304; *RJG*, iii, 1355-6, 1369, 1370, 1399 (castle), 1360 (cathedral)

leading knight when the young and inexperienced Hugh II led a small retinue on the Falkirk campaign in August 1298.¹²² Shortly after, Stephen was named alongside his lord in letters of protection issued for service in Scotland.¹²³ In 1325, when he may have been as old as sixty, he was once again Courtenay's right-hand man on an expedition to Gascony, his name taking precedence over that of Hugh's recently knighted son.¹²⁴ But the relationship extended beyond formal military service, since Haccombe was a learned man with some legal expertise to place at his lord's disposal. The year 1315, for example, was especially busy for Haccombe, who acted as Hugh II's attorney in his suit against the Crown. He was named as a feoffee in two entailments of land on Hugh's sons, and Courtenay's hand can almost certainly be seen behind the decision in March to appoint Stephen to a special judicial commission set up to investigate the breaking of his mother, Eleanor's, deer park at Chulmleigh.¹²⁵

Stephen was a knight of relatively modest social provenance. Despite an enviable pedigree – his ancestor, Stephen, had been a Domesday tenant of Baldwin the Sheriff – no Haccombe seems ever to have ranked particularly highly in the county hierarchy.¹²⁶ His own father, Jordan, made no great mark on public life, apart from being appointed escheator of two hundreds in south Devon, close to the Haccombe demesnes.¹²⁷ Stephen's association with Hugh Courtenay therefore enhanced his reputation greatly and perhaps improved his material status: he represented Devon in parliament in 1311, and sat with his lord on local commissions of peace in 1317 and 1320.¹²⁸ His true vocation, however, seems to have lain not in administration but in soldiering, and, in the volatile years of 1322 and 1324, Stephen was placed at the head of commissions of array for Devon and Cornwall.¹²⁹

The relationship was rooted in tenure, and the three small manors (Haccombe, Ringmore and Clifford) that Stephen had held of Baldwin in 1086, concentrated in the Teign

¹²¹ *Cal. Pap. Pets.*, i, 284, 291; *BRUO*, i, 502-4; Joseph Dahmus, *William Courtenay: Archbishop of Canterbury, 1381-1396* (Pennsylvania, 1966); Below, pp. 264-5

¹²² *Scotland in 1298*, ed. H. Gough (1898), pp. 38, 156, 208

¹²³ PRO C 81/1724

¹²⁴ *CPR* (1324-7), p. 168

¹²⁵ *CCR* (1313-18), p. 321; *CPR* (1313-17), pp. 268, 311; *DFF*, ii, 1169

¹²⁶ *Domesday People*, p. 423

¹²⁷ *RH*, i, 67, 74

¹²⁸ *Parliaments*, p. 35; *CPR* (1317-21), pp. 97, 459

valley on the south coast, continued to comprise the core of the family's estate in the fourteenth century.¹³⁰ Stephen was ideally located from the Courtenays' point of view, within a short ride not only of the county court at Exeter, but also the major sea-ports of Dartmouth and Plymouth, and this must have been quite influential in recommending his services. In 1309 he made a fairly major addition to his estate, spending £100 on property in the coastal manor of South Milton, adjacent to the manors of Thurlestone and Soar Bosun which were temporarily in Stephen's custody between about 1303 and 1316.¹³¹ These had been part of the inheritance of John Cheverston, described as *valettus* of Hugh II in 1298, whose son and heir John II, who features recurrently in this thesis, was now Haccombe's ward.¹³² By such methods, the interests of the affinity's inner circle were carefully managed to promote mutual dependance.

Stephen was dead by January 1333, having survived his son and heir, Jordan Haccombe.¹³³ The estate then passed by marriage to his granddaughter, Cecilia's, husband, Sir John Archdeacon, a prominent Cornish knight. In 1337, Sir John fulfilled Stephen's long-term ambition of establishing an archpresbytery in the parish church of Haccombe, his patronymical manor: six priests were to celebrate daily mass there for the souls of various Haccombes, their lord, Hugh Courtenay II, and Mgr. Robert Pyl, the earl's personal chaplain.¹³⁴ This was not, however, the end of the Courtenays' dealings with the Haccombe family: in about 1400, Sir Hugh Courtenay (d. 1425), a younger brother of Earl Edward who had a penchant for discovering rich heiresses, married Philippa Archdeacon, a granddaughter and coheiress of Sir John, and succeeded in clawing back most of the estate that had formerly belonged to Stephen Haccombe.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 213

¹³⁰ *DB Devon*, 16/110, 112, 152; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 47b.-48; *FA*, i, 313, 317, 345, 349, 351, 354, 376, 379

¹³¹ *DFP*, i, 956; *FA*, i, 351, 379

¹³² *Year Books*, 1-2 Ed. II, p. 92; *Ibid.*, 3 Ed. II, p. 17

¹³³ *RJG*, ii, 680

¹³⁴ *RJG*, ii, 852-5

¹³⁵ *House of Commons*, ii, 668-70; BL Add. Ch. 64323 (valuation of the lands of Warin Archdeacon)

Sir Thomas Cirencester (d. c. 1320)

If the Haccombe connection hinged on the strength of a single personality, those of the two other knights under consideration here, John Cheverston and Thomas Cirencester, were rather more deeply rooted. The Cirencesters had been involved in the comital administration since the time of the Redvers earls. In 1225, Thomas Cirencester, probably the grandfather of our Thomas and a knight of some reputation at the conciliar court of Henry III, was granted custody of the earldom's south-western manors during the minority of Baldwin Redvers III (d. 1245).¹³⁶ Thomas was a man of distinction in the south-west who acted as sheriff of Dorset-Somerset, and of Devon, on a number of occasions in the 1220s and 1230s; after being relieved of the comital estate in 1227, he was compensated with custody of several royal demesne manors.¹³⁷ The Cirencesters, who may already have been retained by the Redvers family, thereby obtained a working knowledge of the internal administration of the honor of Plympton, which would have naturally recommended Thomas to the inexperienced and overwhelmed Hugh Courtenay after 1297.

Thomas Cirencester witnessed Courtenay charters on a regular basis from at least 1299. Like Stephen Haccombe and John Cheverston, he had served under Hugh Courtenay II in Scotland in 1298, and did so again in 1303.¹³⁸ Unlike Haccombe, however, Cirencester appears to have tapped into a more dependable stream of reward. Appearances may be deceptive, though, since Thomas had no heirs and on his death most of his estates reverted to the Courtenays by entail. Land, when used by the Courtenays as a reward for their supporters, was typically granted for life only and from territories peripheral to the family's main regions of territorial interest. Displays of largesse to Thomas Cirencester, in the form of classic 'feudal' grants of land, were therefore balanced prudently against more practical considerations: Haccombe, whose line of descent was clearly mapped out, perhaps had to content himself with mere cash payments. In 1300, Lady Eleanor Courtenay granted Thomas

¹³⁶ *CPR* (1216-25), p. 541

¹³⁷ *Ibid.* (1225-32), pp. 40, 134; *Ibid.* (1232-47), p. 50; *Calendar of Librate Rolls* (1226-40), p. 117; *Sheriffs*, pp. 34, 37

¹³⁸ *Calendar of Various Chancery Rolls* (1277-1326), p. 88

and his wife Emma the manor of South Pool, in south Devon, and in 1311 Philip Courtenay transferred to Cirencester several houses and lands in Devon and Somerset.¹³⁹ In 1315, Hugh himself granted his knight land in Torbay, close to his existing demesnes on the south coast.¹⁴⁰ All these grants were made for life only and provided, after Cirencester's death, a reservoir from which to endow junior family members with land without fragmenting the patrimony: in this instance Hugh's youngest son, Thomas Courtenay, was the major beneficiary of the Cirencester estates.¹⁴¹

Sir John Cheverston (d. c. 1375)

The Cheverstons comprised a third and probably the most significant component of the knightly element of the Courtenay affinity, thanks largely to their greater success in survival, which enabled successive generations to serve under both earls. John I (d. c. 1306) was an esquire of Hugh Courtenay II, and his son, John II (d. c. 1375), and William Cheverston, who was probably his younger brother, both accompanied Courtenay to Gascony in 1325.¹⁴² William sat as MP for Devon in 1327, 1328 and 1330, and was sheriff for most of 1328, a year in which Hugh Courtenay's monopolisation of seignorial power in Devon, and therefore influence over local offices, was practically complete.¹⁴³ Also in 1328, William acted as surety to Courtenay after he was found guilty of having entered one of the Fortibus manors without licence.¹⁴⁴ Locally, the Cheverstons were extremely substantial, ranking among the five wealthiest families resident in Devon at the time of the 1332 lay subsidy, with moveable wealth in at least eight different locations. Like Haccombe and Cirencester, the Cheverstons' demesnes were concentrated on the south coast; on the township of Malborough, near to Plymouth.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ *DFP*, ii, 891, 1162

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ii, 1027

¹⁴¹ *CIPM*, xi, 309

¹⁴² *Scotland in 1298*, pp. 38, 208; *CPR* (1324-7), p. 168

¹⁴³ *Parliaments*, pp. 80-93; *Sheriffs*, p. 34

¹⁴⁴ *CCR* (1327-30), p. 334

¹⁴⁵ *1332 Subsidy*, pp. 6-8, 16, 55, 62, 122

The Cheverstons were tenants of neither the Courtenays nor the Redvers, but held their lands of the honor of Totnes which, by the fourteenth century, was divided and lacking a resident lord: here is an example of how the Courtenays had avoided binding their hands in the recruitment game with 'feudal' conventions, but instead opted to play the wider market. At least three generations of Cheverstons served the Courtenays in peacetime and in war, despite there being no formal tenurial bond. What they possessed instead was an impeccable armigerous pedigree. By 1284, John I had inherited the Malborough estate from Sir Stephen Bauceyn (d. 1257), an illustrious soldier who was Seneschal of Gascony in 1255.¹⁴⁶ John II was later to follow in Bauceyn's footsteps, occupying the seneschalsy for most of the 1350s: the coastal Malborough estate was an excellent headquarters for the would-be continental adventurer.¹⁴⁷ Lacking feudal ties, the Cheverstons seem to have been recruited specifically for their military prowess, in a classic 'bastard-feudal' contract, but this did not mean, however, that the relationship was either short-lived or limited in utility. From the first appearance of John I with Hugh Courtenay in 1298, to the extinction of the main line in about 1375, Cheverstons supported the family as servants, counsellors, and kinsmen. A tradition of service, as strong as any 'feudal' bond based on tenure, had been created in decades rather than centuries, and was cemented in the 1340s by the marriage of John II to Joan Courtenay.¹⁴⁸

John, who witnessed the probate of Earl Hugh's will in April 1341, continued this tradition of service and, in the era of war with France, became Hugh III's foremost knight; he is first mentioned as the earl's banneret in 1345 when he led a retinue on his behalf to Brittany.¹⁴⁹ At about the same time he was also acting as constable of Exeter castle, an office in the gift of the Courtenays.¹⁵⁰ Through Cheverston's military achievements we learn more about the retinue of Hugh III, who was incapacitated from 1347 onwards and probably unable

¹⁴⁶ *Book of Fees*, ii, 765-6, 776; *FA*, i, 323; Altschul, *Baronial Family*, p. 72; R. R. Davies, *Age of Conquest*, p. 310

¹⁴⁷ Below, p. 255

¹⁴⁸ *CIPM*, xiv, 1

¹⁴⁹ *RJG*, ii, 939-40; PRO E 101/312/13

¹⁵⁰ *BPR*, ii, 53

ever again to lead his men in person.¹⁵¹ At Crecy in 1346, as we have already seen, Sir John seems to have attached himself and his men to the earl of Oxford, Hugh III's kinsman, and later, in 1356, the two men jointly chartered a ship to transport horses and equipment to Gascony.¹⁵² As Seneschal from 1351, Cheverston began to move more in the orbit of the Black Prince, to whom he was effectively accountable, and was influential in securing the cordial relationship that existed between the Courtenays and the Prince, their closest magnate neighbour in the south-west.¹⁵³

Despite frequent and prolonged absences from the realm, Sir John continued to serve the earl of Devon, both as a knight and counsellor, right up until his death in the mid-1370s. In 1345, he secured for himself from the king half the manor of Whitford, in east Devon, with the intention of reuniting it with the other half, owned by Earl Hugh, which was subsequently used to provide for his widowed daughter, Elizabeth.¹⁵⁴ Cheverston was also sufficiently wealthy to employ his own domestic chaplain, John Michel, rector of the parish of Waddesdon (Bucks.), a living in the gift of the Courtenays.¹⁵⁵ He apparently survived all three of his sons and died without heirs in about 1375: as with the Cirencester estate, a well-constructed entail ensured that most of the lands fell by remainder to the main comital line, this time by right of his widow, Joan Courtenay.¹⁵⁶

As the availability of 'good' lordship in Devon shrank through absenteeism or the fragmentation of honors among multiple heirs, so the market-place for recruitment by the Courtenay earls expanded. It is not immediately apparent whether they cast wide their nets because they were unable to find the quality of service they required within their own demesnes, or if they deliberately exploited a period of temporary seignorial decline to augment their own sphere of influence. Following the extinction of the Clare earldom of

¹⁵¹ *CPR* (1345-8), p. 528

¹⁵² Wrotesley, *Crecy*, pp. 32-3, 92, 141; *CPR* (1354-8), p. 348

¹⁵³ *BPR*, ii, 160, 183; iv, 246

¹⁵⁴ *CFR* (1337-47), p. 413; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, ii, 1943; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 64v.-65r.

¹⁵⁵ *Cal. Pap. Regs.*, i, 389

¹⁵⁶ *CIPM*, xvii, 5 (pp. 6-7)

Gloucester in 1314, for example, former tenants such as Richard Grenville (d. c. 1370), Gilbert Umfraville (d. 1349) and his son, William (d. c. 1383), were drawn increasingly into the orbit of the Courtenay earls.¹⁵⁷ Other non-tenurial familiars included Sir William Bigbury (d. c. 1343) and his son, William II (d. c. 1380), tenants of the duchy of Cornwall who had set out by serving under Sir John Cheverston, their neighbour on the south coast of Devon.¹⁵⁸ Attracting the best service available, especially in time of war, was clearly more important to the earls of Devon than relying upon exclusively ‘feudal’ lordship. A plurality of established ‘feudal’ and temporary ‘bastard-feudal’ connections was, of course, likely to have been present in any late-medieval affinity, with the exact balance shifting from generation to generation, determined by the interests, expectations and aptitudes of both lord and retainer. It is, however, becoming clear that the Courtenays were less inhibited by ‘feudal’ conventions than some of their contemporaries, and were more willing to recruit by short-term contract.

4.2 (iii) OFFICERS, LAWYERS AND CLERKS

Little can be said with any certainty about the affinity’s administrative structure, and the following comments are largely conjectural, based on the evidence of Edward Courtenay’s livery roll and our scattered knowledge of the various beneficed clerks in the family’s employment: eight priests were in receipt of livery in 1384-5, beside a further fourteen clerks and lawyers. Particular care was taken in this period to secure the goodwill of the higher clergy and canons of Exeter Cathedral; a large accumulation of ecclesiastical benefices in their gift provided the Courtenays with an ideal pool of patronage from which these men could be rewarded.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *FA*, ii, 9; *CRO AR* 12/35; *CPR* (1343-5), p. 254; *Ibid.*, (1364-7), p. 9; *DFF*, ii, 1467, 1489, 1497, 1532, 1542 (Grenville); *BL Add. Ch.* 49359, ff. 63-64; *RJG*, ii, 939-40; *CFR* (1337-47), p. 416; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, ii, 1943 (Gilbert Umfraville); *E101/312/13*; Wrotesley, *Crecy*, pp. 33, 39, 156, 169 (William Umfraville)

¹⁵⁸ *FA*, i, 351, 380, 397; *RJG*, iii, 1341; *CFR* (1347-56), p. 92; *BL Add. Ch.* 49359, ff. 68r., 71; *CPR* (1370-4), p. 101; *PRO E 101/31/31* (retinue account roll of Sir Philip Courtenay, 1372-3)

¹⁵⁹ ‘Powderham Cartulary’, ii, 221

The Branscombe family, of whom there were numerous representatives in the fourteenth century, dominated the clerical-bureaucrat element of the affinity. Their association with the earls probably owed much to the proximity of the manor from which they took their name, on the coast of east Devon, to the Courtenays' residence at Colcombe. Branscombe was a peculiar manor of the dean and chapter of Exeter, a factor which had been influential in the career of their ancestor, Walter 'de Bronescombe', a man of otherwise obscure origins who was elected bishop of Exeter in 1258.¹⁶⁰ The episcopal connection enhanced the profile of the Branscombe family and promoted the fortunes of individual members: one Joice Branscombe (d. c. 1324) entered service as a royal clerk in the early fourteenth century, and was attorney to both the archdeacon of Exeter and the bishop, Walter Stapeldon, who, as treasurer of England, had a hand in securing Joice's appointment to offices in the Westminster and Dublin Exchequers in 1323.¹⁶¹

The Branscombes are first connected with the Courtenays in a land transaction in Colyton in 1300, but it is not until the 1330s that there are signs of a more regular relationship.¹⁶² Richard Branscombe (d. c. 1349), clerk and *magister*, was then named in a recognizance of debt, owed jointly with William and John Cheverston: the three appear to have been acting as guarantors on behalf of their lord.¹⁶³ In 1337, Richard was nominated by Sir Thomas Courtenay to receive livery of his wife's inheritance, and from 1343 he acted on a regular basis as attorney and feoffee to the earl of Devon.¹⁶⁴ Branscombe was the rector of North Cadbury parish in Somerset, a living in the gift of Hugh II's youngest sister, Margaret Courtenay (d. 1349), and the licence of non-residence that he obtained from the bishop of Bath and Wells in 1331 may signal the beginning of his service to the Courtenay family.¹⁶⁵

Thenceforth, and especially in the 1340s and 1350s, Richard was highly conspicuous in local government, apparently at the instigation of the earls. With John Cheverston, he

¹⁶⁰ *The Register of Walter Bronescombe, Bishop of Exeter, 1258-80*, ed. O. F. Robinson, i (London 1995), pp. xv-xvi

¹⁶¹ *CCR* (1307-13), p. 14; *CPR* (1307-13), pp. 28-9; *Ibid.* (1321-4), pp. 287, 323

¹⁶² BL Add. Ch. 13914; *DFP*, i, 814, 841

¹⁶³ *CCR* (1327-30), p. 104; *Ibid.* (1330-3), p. 315; *Ibid.* (1333-7), p. 528

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* (1337-9), p. 262; *CPR* (1343-5), pp. 113, 376; *Ibid.* (1345-8), p. 14; *Ibid.* (1358-61), p. 293

investigated allegations of violence against foreign merchants in 1346, and the two men sat under Earl Hugh on a special judicial commission concerning piracy.¹⁶⁶ Branscombe sat on the Exeter Bench almost continuously in the 1340s and 1350s, on one occasion with Adam Branscombe, probably his brother, who had been returned as MP for Devon in 1340.¹⁶⁷ In April 1341, he acted as one of the executors of the will of Sir Hugh Scales, a Norfolk knight and cousin of Hugh Courtenay III through his aunt, Egeline: Richard evidently performed this task tolerably well, for in the following month he was instructed to administer the estate of the late Hugh II.¹⁶⁸ Richard had therefore become well entrenched in the Courtenay establishment, and his services were even placed at the disposal of other members. In 1347, for example, he was unable to fulfil his duties as local assessor of the wool subsidy because he was engaged in the business of Hugh III's brother-in-law, William Bohun, earl of Northampton.¹⁶⁹ In 1355, he witnessed a charter of Sir William Daumarle, a former ward and current knight of Earl Hugh, with whom he had twice previously served on commissions to enact the Statute of Labourers.¹⁷⁰

Although the precise nature of Branscombe's role in the administration is uncertain - he was certainly something more than a run-of-the-mill servant, and perhaps fits into a category midway between feed lawyer and personal familiar - the patronage that he received is some testament to his success. In 1343, he was installed as the rector of Diptford parish, in the gift of Thomas Courtenay.¹⁷¹ In April 1350, he was given custody of the manor of North Cadbury, his former parish in Somerset, during the minority of its heir, and later in that year he was also granted the wardship of Thomas Beauchamp of Ryme (Dorset), whose widowed mother, Margaret, he subsequently married.¹⁷² Other family members also prospered. One Hugh Branscombe was given a prebend in the collegiate church of Chulmleigh, a Courtenay

¹⁶⁵ *Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, i, 9, 91, 99; *RJG*, ii, 691, 851

¹⁶⁶ *CPR* (1340-3), pp. 540, 542; *CCR* (1343-6), p. 566; *CPR* (1343-6), p. 426

¹⁶⁷ *CCR* (1339-41), p. 493; *CPR* (1343-5), p. 396; *Ibid.* (1348-5), pp. 165, 516; *CPR* (1350-4), pp. 87, 450; *CCR* (1354-60), p. 139; *CPR* (1354-8), p. 552; *Parliaments*, p. 132

¹⁶⁸ *RJG*, ii, 940, 946-7

¹⁶⁹ *CCR* (1346-9), p. 228

¹⁷⁰ *RJG*, iii, 1330; *CPR* (1354-8), pp. 295, 491

¹⁷¹ *RJG*, iii, 1339

manor, and appears to have filled the shoes of Richard, whose son or grandson he may have been.¹⁷³ Two proctors nominated by Hugh Branscombe in 1360 to receive a living on his behalf, William Pouton, rector of Cornwood, and William Bampton, were both subsequently employed by Edward Courtenay.¹⁷⁴ Another Richard Branscombe, presumably not the one discussed here, was elected abbot of Newenham, in east Devon, in March 1360.¹⁷⁵

The roles of other clerks were more limited and clearly defined, although relatively few members of the household administration in the fourteenth century can be identified positively. Peter Coleswayne, steward of the household in 1327, mainperned Hugh II in 1328, and later investigated complaints by Stephen Haccombe of cattle being stolen from his manors in Somerset. Peter also served on other local commissions, including one in 1331 concerning disturbances at Bindon Abbey (Dorset), which had been in the custody of Hugh Courtenay since 1329.¹⁷⁶ Walter Clopton, Hugh's receiver in 1327 and one of the executors of Lady Eleanor Courtenay's will, became a canon of Exeter Cathedral in 1330, and one of his descendants was still wearing Earl Edward's livery in 1384-5.¹⁷⁷

Robert Pyl, Hugh II's domestic chaplain and the chief executor of his testament, was also a prebendary of Exeter Castle, where he joined Walter Clopton as chaplain. Pyl had been rector of the parish of Crewkerne, a Courtenay manor in Somerset, in 1331 when he was granted episcopal licence to absent himself in order to follow in the service of his lord; the same year in which Richard Branscombe first absented himself from his living. Robert acted as a lawyer to the Courtenay family in various land transactions, and one Richard Pyl was later presented by the earl as chaplain to Crewkerne.¹⁷⁸ One of Pyl's fellow executors in 1341, Richard Vennottery, was given the benefice of Chawleigh (Devon) by Hugh III in 1328.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² *CFR* (1347-56), pp. 224, 229, 260, 381; *Ibid.*, (1347-56), p. 381; *CCR* (1349-54), p. 578; *Ibid.*, (1354-60), pp. 242-3

¹⁷³ *RJG*, iii, 1371

¹⁷⁴ BL Add. Ch. 64320; Lepine, 'Courtenays and Exeter Cathedral', p. 48

¹⁷⁵ *RJG*, iii, 1220

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (1327-30), p. 391; *CPR* (1330-4), pp. 63, 131

¹⁷⁷ Lepine, 'Courtenays and Exeter Cathedral', p. 48; *RJG*, i, 601; *Fasti*, p. 28

¹⁷⁸ *RJG*, ii, 940; *Ibid.*, iii, 1399; *Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, i, 72-3, 106, 178, 563

¹⁷⁹ *RJG*, ii, 940; *Ibid.*, iii, 1267

William Chebeseye, steward of the comital household in 1342, was rector of Stoke Damarel, a parish near Plymouth where Hugh II had acquired land at the beginning of the fourteenth century. William was an occasional attorney to Hugh III, acting in conjunction with Richard Branscombe, and he was also described as the earl's domestic chaplain. He acted on a number of occasions as feoffee to the Courtenays with either Robert Pyl, John Horncastle, another domestic chaplain, John Southdon, the rector of Musbury and public notary of the bishop of Exeter, or William Pouton. In 1376, he and John Horncastle had a grant of rent made to them by Hugh III.¹⁸⁰ Simon Devenyssh, who audited the earl's accounts in 1342, was another attorney of Hugh III, who acted as proctor to Thomas Courtenay in 1348.¹⁸¹ The rector of Mapperton (Somerset), Robert Grymstone, had a licence of non-residence to follow in the service of Earl Hugh in 1345, while Robert Vaggescombe, who subsequently wore the livery of Earl Edward, was presented by Hugh III to the chapel of Exeter castle in 1367.¹⁸²

Other men of the cloth not directly employed by the Courtenays, were nevertheless courted for their goodwill and influence. For example, Mgr. Henry Pyke, public notary and later sub-dean of Exeter Cathedral, was presented by Sir Thomas Courtenay to Stoke Damarel church in 1345.¹⁸³ William Weston, a canon of Exeter and the heir of his brother Sir John Weston, a tenant of the earl of Devon, was presented by the Courtenays to livings in Kenn (Devon) and East Coker (Somerset): months after the death of his brother in 1345, he granted or sold the manor of Towsington (Devon) to his patrons, nominating Hugh and Margaret Courtenay as his new heirs.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ *RJG*, ii, 953, 972; *CPR* (1343-5), pp. 113, 376; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 63v.-64r., 64v., 65v., 66r.-v., 67r., 67v., 68r., 68r., 70v.,-71r., 72v.,-73r.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 66r., 69r.; *RJG*, iii, 1355-6

¹⁸² *BRUO*, ii, 835-6; *RJG*, iii, 1501

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, iii, 1348; *Fasti*, pp. 6, 33; *BRUO*, iii, 1529-30

CONCLUSION

This survey of the Courtenays' inner circle is incomplete in a number of ways, not least because lack of evidence makes a comparative analysis of the affinity over a sustained period of time quite problematic. Studying individual personnel does little to shed light on the ebb and flow of relationships within the affinity, or on the relative importance of the various components to one another as they evolved in the course of the fourteenth century: chapters five and six, which adopt a more strictly chronological approach, should to some extent help to correct this defect.

The different personal qualities of the two earls must have had a substantial impact on determining the path that their dynasty followed in the fourteenth century. Hugh II, rude of health and brimming with arrogant confidence from the outset, regularly punched above his weight and promoted his family's fortunes with a robustness that probably could not have been emulated by his sicklier and less forthright son. His forays into 'national' politics, his ambitious social alliances, and his clash of personality with the bishop of Exeter, contrast with the quieter pragmatism of Hugh III, who was blighted by ill health from an early age.

Without wishing to over-emphasise its 'uniqueness', two features appear to have been characteristic of the comital affinity in the fourteenth century. The first is its essential localism, which was both a reflection and a symptom of the Courtenays' limited territorial ambit; limited because the Crown had determined by its actions that this would be so, and because it had created a new earl who barely had the means by which to maintain his status. By carefully husbanding the resources available to him and by nurturing a network of powerful relatives and friends, Hugh II survived and eventually prospered, but with the consequence that his household remained mediocre at best, and somewhat more parochial in its composition than comparable units.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., iii, 2026; *RJG*, iii, 1382; *Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, i, 503; *BPR*, ii, 129; *Fasti*, p. 26; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 66r.-67r.

The second was the heavy reliance by the earls on family and other kin to represent their interests: although the hub of the affinity lay on the peripheries of the English realm, an impressive coterie of supporters ensured that its influence extended to and was represented in the major centres of power. The Courtenay earls ruled their 'country' in person but fulfilled their wider obligations as peers of the realm largely by proxy. Their wealthier, more powerful and more influential kinsmen petitioned Crown and Church on their behalf and, in later decades, Hugh III even controlled his military retinue through the third party of John Cheverston: not surprisingly, the pinnacle of the earldom's power was reached in the 1380s and 1390s when a powerful triumvirate of brothers - William, Philip and Peter Courtenay - was well entrenched at court and had the ear of the king. The earls themselves were perhaps the least visible element of the affinity to the outside world, as they failed to achieve a wholly satisfactory balance between their duties as local lords and 'national' magnates; partly because of the prohibitive expense and trouble of representing themselves effectively in two distant centres. Instead, they concentrated their limited resources where they would be most effective, securing an impressive degree of control over their 'country', but at the same time determining that they would never carry the same sort of weight, politically or socially, as magnates in the order of, for example, their kinsmen, the earls of Northampton.

5. WALTER STAPELDON AND THE CRISES OF THE REIGN OF EDWARD II

Implicit in the previous chapter is the assumption that Hugh Courtenay's claim to the earldom had been hindered, or at least complicated, by political intrigue in the 1310s and 1320s. This section considers in more detail the upheavals of Edward II's reign, and their impact on society in the south-west, by focusing on the colourful career of Walter Stapeldon, bishop of Exeter. A man of local provenance and limited means, Walter had risen to the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in a diocese too remote to attract the attention of papal or royal nominees. It is not, however, as bishop, but as a secular lord, a royal servant, and a courtier, that he is of greatest interest here. Skilled in both canon and civil law, he placed his expertise at the disposal of government and won the confidence of Edward II, who appointed him treasurer in February 1320. By then, Stapeldon had inveigled his way to the hub of the English court, and began to reap the rewards, but also to attract the odium, of association with a controversial regime.

As the most senior official at the Exchequer, the bishop played a pivotal role in the seizure and redistribution of rebels' lands in the aftermath of Boroughbridge; and there was an apparent conflict of interest here between his obligations as a temporal magnate and his official duties, since a number of his familiars were suspected or actually found guilty of rebellion in 1322.¹ Reverberations of the political turmoil at the centre had been felt in Devon in two major ways. First, through Piers Gaveston's (d. 1312) short but tumultuous tenure of the earldom of Cornwall, which was widely believed to have been reserved by Edward I for a younger prince.² Secondly, through the untidy partition of the earldom of Gloucester estates, a major feudal unit in

¹ T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England* (2nd edn., Manchester, 1967), ii, 258; S. L. Waugh, 'The Confiscated Lands of the 'Contrariants' in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire in 1322: an Economic and Social study' (London PhD thesis, 1975), p. 44

² *Vita Edwardi Secundi*, ed. N. Denholm-Young (1957), p. 1; J. Conway Davies, *The Baronial Opposition to Edward II* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 57, 81-3; J. S. Hamilton, *Piers Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, 1307-1312* (Detroit, 1988), pp. 39-43; Pierre Chaplais, *Piers Gaveston* (Oxford, 1994), p. 30

Devon, after the death of Earl Gilbert Clare in 1314. Conflict over the prized lordship of Glamorgan, and attempts by the younger Hugh Despenser to augment his share at the expense of his co-inheritors, was a direct cause of rebellion in 1321-2, and may help to explain the motives of at least some of the Devon 'contrarians'.³

The bishop's role is therefore likely to have been of great significance, both at court and at home, but unfortunately remains to us obscure and largely ambiguous. On the one hand, Walter's friendship with Edward II, and his association with the curial regime of the Despensers, tainted his public image and brought him infamy. Later, he was popularly credited with having influenced the seizure of Queen Isabella's estates in 1324, an act which effectively drove her into exile and earned him her distrust, if not outright enmity. The succeeding administration immediately identified Walter in its maiden statute as one of the pillars of despotism in the 1320s, assigning to him equal responsibility with players such as the Despensers and Robert Baldock, whose involvement was far less ambiguous.⁴ At the same time, the bishop's authority was rooted not so much in the English court as in an established network of lordship centred on his own diocese, and much of the material gain that Walter made from his service in government was re-invested in this independent power base. The local dimension was therefore an important aspect of his authority, perhaps more so than that of any other government minister in the 1320s, and the bishop was motivated to a high degree by the interests of his affinity. Several of 'his' men, their kin or friends, were directly affected by the Despensers' machinations and the bishop could not afford to ride rough-shod over their preoccupations, but had instead to tread gingerly the path between two conflicting demands on his loyalty. This dichotomy became most apparent in the

³*Vita*, p. 108; J. Conway Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan', *TRHS*, 3rd series, ix (1915), pp. 21-64; T. F. Tout, *The Place of the Reign of Edward II in English History* (Manchester, 1936), pp. 136-41; J. R. Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 259-317; J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 214-39

⁴ *Statutes of the Realm*, i, 251-3; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 197

1320s, when Walter showed restraint in claiming the spoils of governmental office, in marked contrast to the relentless self-aggrandisement of his Despenser colleagues.⁵

What, then, are we to make of Walter Stapeldon? A political innocent whose dedicated sense of professionalism blinded him to the repellent nature of the regime he served, and which ultimately secured his own downfall? Or a calculating opportunist, who swam with the tide to further the interests of himself and his men, but was swamped by the deluge of political revolution in 1326? It is hoped that a closer examination of the bishop in his role as a secular magnate, in both a national and local context, will throw further light on “one of the most puzzling characters of the reign [of Edward II]”.⁶

5.1 SOCIAL ORIGINS AND EARLY CAREER

Walter was born in the 1260s, probably on the patronymical farmstead of Stapeldon, in a sparsely populated area of north-west Devon: his brother, Richard, was resident here in the 1310s, and Walter visited at least twice during his episcopate, on one occasion licensing a private chapel for the family’s use.⁷ The Stapeldons’ network of kin and sociability firmly locates them in this locale, which became the focal point for recruitment to the bishop’s secular affinity. Their father William is known to us only through the witness lists of the late-thirteenth century charters of Sir Oliver and Robert Dynham: the Dynhams’ chief manor of Hartland lay in an adjacent hundred, and William, although he seems to have been a reasonably successful free tenant and perhaps an employee of the Dynhams, was evidently a man of no great rank.⁸ There is, for example, no evidence that Richard Stapeldon had attained knighthood, or was capable of doing so, before his

⁵ Ibid., pp. 197-216

⁶ Tout, *Edward II*, p. 144

⁷ RWS, p. 301; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 10

⁸ CRO AR 1/609, 610-13, 617, 623-5, 1044, 1052-4

brother's election, and other family members were equally reliant on Walter's patronage for their own advancement.⁹

Similar uncertainty surrounds Walter's early career as an ecclesiastic. He first appears in the records in 1294, as the rector of Aveton Giffard, a parish in south-west Devon, when he bore the title *magister*.¹⁰ By 1301, he had obtained a canonry in Exeter Cathedral, was acting as Bishop Thomas Bytton's (1291-1307) official, and had been admitted to the freedom of the city of Exeter: in short, he had emerged from obscurity and was already making something of a name for himself.¹¹ He had also accumulated sufficient wealth to be able to purchase the wardship of Richard Merton (d. 1343), son and heir of one of the Stapeldons' knightly neighbours in north-west Devon, who subsequently appeared in the bishop's retinue.¹²

A little more about Walter can be gleaned from his involvement in an acrimonious and well-documented dispute between the dean and chapter of Exeter and the city's Dominican convent. Sir Henry Raleigh (d. 1301), a local knight of some repute, had spent his final years residing at the house, where it was alleged that he wished to be buried. After his death, however, the dean insisted on enforcing a customary right to present the body for first mass at the cathedral, and sent two canons, one of whom was Walter Stapeldon, to collect Sir Henry. The corpse was afterwards returned to the friary for burial, but it had begun to decompose and the brothers refused to receive it. Instead, they brought a suit against the dean and chapter in the court of the mayor of Exeter, alleging physical assault and criminal damage by the canons. The dean would admit to no more than having legitimately removed the body, so the friars took their case to higher authorities, obtaining judicial commissions against the chapter in 1301 and 1302, and then appealing to the Roman *curia* in 1303. The long-suffering dean agreed to exhume and surrender the body, but a feud continued to simmer until 1306, when Walter, one of the offending canons,

⁹ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 35-7

¹⁰ *CPR* (1292-1301), pp. 93, 271

¹¹ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 13-15; *Exeter Freeman, 1266-1967*, ed. Rowe & Jackson (D&CRS, extra ser., i, 1973), p. 6

was about to be admitted as reader in canon and civil law at Oxford University. Sensing the opportunity to seize an advantage, the friars wrote to the dean of Walter's faculty claiming that he was under sentence of excommunication; as no one deigned to testify in person against him, and no further evidence was forthcoming, the objection was ignored by default.¹³

In a short space of time, therefore, the talented priest of Aveton Giffard had furthered his studies, achieved ecclesiastical preferment, and established his reputation as a lawyer. That he was proficient in both of the main branches of law is revealing of his personality, and hints at the religious-secular dichotomy that characterised his episcopate. The friars of Exeter may have been exaggerating when they accused him of violence, but he was not averse to 'practical' methods. A special commission obtained in March 1305 by William Prodhomme, husband of Walter's niece, Alice Hereward, heard how the Stapeldon brothers had kidnapped Prodhomme at his home near Exeter and detained him until he agreed to enfeoff them of all his land in the manors of Wonford and Upton.¹⁴ No judgment was forthcoming, and it may be conjectured that this was the result of an over-heated family argument, but it reflects both Walter's distinctively pragmatic approach to secular affairs, and the bond of mutual dependance between him and his eldest brother. Early on in his episcopate, he suppressed a revolt by sixty villeins of his manor of Paignton with ruthless efficiency, again demonstrating that he was not afraid to sully his hands with mundane affairs.¹⁵

From 1305 until his election as bishop in November 1307, Walter all but disappears from the records: the cathedral's refectory books show that he was frequently absent, and this may signal the beginning of his career in secular government.¹⁶ In June 1306, he had letters of protection to travel abroad with the keeper of the Cinque Ports; this is the earliest reference to Walter as a royal servant and, as he was first contracted by Edward I, suggests that his subsequent

¹² *CPR* (1292-1301), p. 497; *CCR* (1318-23), p. 559

¹³ *The Franciscans and Dominicans of Exeter* (History of Exeter Research Group, iii, 1927), pp. 40-6, 66-79; *CPR* (1301-7), p. 183-4

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, (1301-7), p. 355

¹⁵ *RWS*, p. 310

¹⁶ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 17-18

success in government was founded on genuine ability rather than mere cronyism under Edward II.¹⁷ The precise nature of his business is unclear, but it may have involved diplomatic work at the French court, an area of international affairs in which Walter was later to become expert. His election as bishop, towards the end of 1307, was made by a large majority of the Exeter chapter, and royal assent was immediately forthcoming: although comparatively little can be reconstructed of his early career, it is evident that his experience as a counsellor of Bishop Bytton, his scholarly achievements, and his growing reputation in curial circles, had marked him out as the ideal candidate for high ecclesiastical office.¹⁸

5.2 BISHOP AND COURT IN THE 1310s

In 1312, the bishop was instructed to prepare a defence brief for royal officials in Gascony who had been summoned before the French parliament in a dispute over jurisdictional rights. This was not the first time the English government had approached Stapeldon for legal advice; he had already been consulted over the Gascon business and was nominated as an ambassador to the Council of Vienne in 1311, although he had never actually left England. On this occasion, however, he travelled to France in February 1313 with the earl of Pembroke, and was instrumental in negotiating an armistice whereby Edward II agreed to pay homage to Philip IV for the French territories.¹⁹ The bishop evidently took much of the credit for this relative diplomatic success, for he returned to France in 1315, and again in 1316, to fine-tune the settlement and to negotiate further concessions.²⁰ At this time, however, there is no evidence of an especially close bond between bishop and king: Tout believed Walter to have been as

¹⁷ *CPR* (1301-7), p. 438

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, (1307-13), p. 20; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 38, 47

¹⁹ *CPR* (1307-13), p. 527; *Gascon rolls, 1307-1317*, ed. Yves Renouard (1962), pp. 439, 549-50, 834, 837-41; *The Gascon Calendar of 1322*, ed. G. P. Cuttino (Camden Society 3rd ser., lxx, 1949), 187-88; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 123-5

politically 'moderate' in the 1310s as the earl of Pembroke, with whom he was regularly associated on these early diplomatic missions.²¹

Yet there are signs that Stapeldon was beginning to move more freely in curial circles. His next major assignment, to the Low Countries in 1319, although ostensibly aimed at settling a commercial dispute, seems to have involved an altogether more intimate affair; negotiating the marriage of Prince Edward to Philippa of Hainault.²² At home, he took on constitutional responsibilities, deputising for the king at the opening of parliaments in 1314 and 1317, and attending every session from 1313 until his death.²³ A modest level of royal patronage is also apparent, suggesting that the bishop had established some influence at court. In 1309, for example, he received licence to hold weekly markets and fairs, amounting to an annual total of twenty-seven days, on four of the episcopal manors in Devon, with a similar grant for the Cornwall estates forthcoming in 1311: serious commercial exploitation of the diocese's resources had hitherto been neglected, and this was the mark of a typical lawyer-bishop.²⁴ In September 1310, Stapeldon was permitted to fine one hundred marks to avoid military service in Scotland, interestingly enough at the request of Piers Gaveston, at a time when this privilege was rarely granted.²⁵ He had the farm of the hundred of Budleigh, in east Devon, granted to him in 1311, which he gave to his brother, and Richard himself was granted free warren in his demesne lands in 1314.²⁶ Also in 1314, the king ruled against the bishop of Chichester in a long-standing dispute over jurisdiction in the royal chapel of Bosham (Sussex), which had belonged to Exeter since the eleventh century, but which had been continually contested.²⁷ Edward II also promised

²⁰ *CCR* (1313-18), p. 168; *CPR* (1313-17), pp. 456, 457-8; *Gascon Rolls*, pp. 544, 1485; *Gascon Calendar*, pp. 428-30, 442-3, 445-6

²¹ Tout, *Edward II*, pp. 134-5

²² Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 126

²³ *CPR* (1313-17), pp. 169, 634; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 127

²⁴ *CChR* (1300-26), pp. 133, 183; Above, pp. 49-50

²⁵ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 121-2

²⁶ *CFR* (1307-19), pp. 101, 104; *CChR* (1300-26), p. 239

²⁷ *Cal. Chancery Warrants* (1244-1326), p. 400-1

to restore to Walter the true tithe of the Devon and Cornwall stannary, as opposed to a fixed sum, and to grant extra judicial privileges on the episcopal manors in Cornwall.²⁸

By the mid-1310s, therefore, Walter was securely entrenched in central government and may have been on familiar terms with the king: there are signs of growing amicability in 1315 when Edward II, his queen and their children, were admitted to the fraternity of Exeter Cathedral, and a special mass was ordained to celebrate the king's accession.²⁹ In the following year, Walter was appointed by Edward II to the king's council, a supervisory body imposed on him by the Lords Ordainers.³⁰ When, in 1317, he was summoned to defend himself before the Roman *curia*, Edward II personally intervened, imploring the pope to set aside the case, because he had become dependent upon Stapeldon's counsel.³¹ Despite these evidences of favour and affection, the bishop's allegiance remains ambiguous. He was certainly not a fawning courtier, having earlier been signatory to the barons' letter to Edward II, pledging that the appointment of the Ordainers would not prejudice the king's interests. Although he did not himself serve on this body, his two fellow south-western magnates, Hugh Courtenay and William Martin, and William's uncle, David Martin, bishop of St. Davids and a close colleague of Walter, were elected.³²

Nor did he resemble the archetypal minister-bishop. For most of the episcopate he divided his time fairly evenly between royal government and regular pastoral duties and, if anything, his flock may have seen rather more of him than they had of his predecessors. He certainly took the duty of visitation seriously, with Cornwall in particular experiencing an unprecedented level of attention from a bishop with first-hand knowledge of its complex internal geography.³³ The rebuilding of the cathedral church, which had begun in the 1270s, gathered pace under Stapeldon, who oversaw the refurbishment of the old Norman nave in the Decorated

²⁸ *Cal. Chancery Warrants* (1244-1326), p. 544

²⁹ ECL D&C 2162; Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, p. 46

³⁰ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 128

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-9

³² 'Annales Londonienses', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. W. Stubbs (R.S., lxxvi, 1882-3), i, 170, 172; Davies, *Baronial Opposition*, p. 361

style, and commissioned a *sedilia* of spectacular proportions, carved of wood from the bishop's own estates, to be installed in the chancel.³⁴ Since about 1298, the bulk of the funding for the restoration programme had come out of the bishop's own pocket; this amounted to an annual grant of £124/18s./8d., double the sum pledged by the dean and chapter. In 1325, Walter increased the customary donation more than five-fold, to one thousand marks (£666/13s./4d.), although it is uncertain whether he intended to sustain it at this level, as he died in the following year.³⁵ His signature project as bishop, however, was the foundation of Stapeldon Hall (now Exeter College) at Oxford, which was begun in 1311 and largely completed, with the help of Richard, by 1314: scholarships were provided for eight Devon men and four Cornish.³⁶ Outwardly, therefore, Walter maintained the appearance of a thoroughly orthodox bishop, at least in the eyes of his flock, concerned more with pious works and efficient ecclesiastical government than with the affairs of state.

His activity in the 1310s was certainly more circumspect than that of either Hugh Courtenay or William Martin, who, as Lords Ordainers, had been commissioned to hunt down the exiled Piers Gaveston in the south-west, where he was rumoured to have taken refuge on the estates of the earldom of Cornwall.³⁷ Both men were re-appointed to the standing council set up in 1318, to implement the treaty of Leake, and they witnessed royal grants, audited petitions, and carried out other supervisory work in parliament.³⁸ Although divided by a substantial generational gap, both Martin (b. 1257) and Courtenay (b. 1275) established their reputations in this period as men of affairs and vigorous defenders of baronial prerogative: while Courtenay continued in his public wrangle for the earldom of Devon, Martin pursued a career as an itinerant

³³ *RWS*, pp. 547-60 (itinerary); L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Medieval Cornwall* (London, 1955), p. 292

³⁴ *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 412, 463-4; Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, pp. 14-20; Pevsner, *Devon*, pp. 368-9

³⁵ *Accounts of the Fabric of Exeter Cathedral*, i, 164; Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, pp. 17-19

³⁶ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 99-114

³⁷ *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 27; *CPR* (1307-13), p. 405

³⁸ 'Annales Londonienses', p. 199; 'Bridlington Chronicle', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. Stubbs (R.S., 1882-3), ii, 37; Davies, *Baronial Opposition*, pp. 303, 361, 383, 448, 450-1, 471

justice of trailbaston on the western circuit, and later as justiciar of South Wales.³⁹ Their recently elevated profiles in the public eye helped them to forge prestigious marital alliances – with the earl of Lincoln and a daughter of the earl of Hereford and Essex – that their forefathers probably could not have dreamt of.⁴⁰

In November 1321, Courtenay and Martin, by now familiar faces among the ranks of the baronial reformers, were warned not to attend the earl of Lancaster's proposed assembly of magnates at Doncaster, a clear sign that they were suspected of having rebellious leanings.⁴¹ Hugh Courtenay, whose pursuit of his inheritance had been slowed down by royal indifference, if not outright obstruction, and who was on close terms with the dissident earl of Hereford and Essex, certainly had the motive for opposition. Hugh may also have harboured a grudge against royal government for the death of his younger brother Philip, with whom he had once fought alongside in arms, in the ill-planned and disastrous invasion of Scotland in 1314; and his brother-in-law, Sir John Giffard of Brimpsfield, a marcher ally of Earl Humphrey Bohun, was executed in 1322 for his role in Thomas of Lancaster's rebellion.⁴² Although Courtenay himself was never indicted as a rebel, it comes as little surprise to find him representing the baronial interest in the formal delegation sent by parliament in 1326 to inform the king of his deposition.⁴³ There is insufficient evidence to determine whether William Martin, who in any case died before the end of the reign, had similar grounds for discontent. However, the treatment meted out to his daughter Joan, dowager countess of Lincoln, who was imprisoned in 1322 on suspicion of adherence to the Lancastrian cause, along with her step-daughter, Alice, countess of Lancaster,

³⁹ *CCR* (1302-7), pp. 280, 298, 337, 496; *CPR* (1301-7), pp. 79, 352; Griffiths, *Principality of Wales*, p. 98

⁴⁰ Above, pp. 130-1

⁴¹ *Foedera*, ii, 459; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 299-300

⁴² Above, pp. 170-1

⁴³ *The Chronicle of Lanercost, 1272-1346*, ed. Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow, 1913), p. 255; M. V. Clarke, *Medieval Representation and Consent* (New York, 1964), pp. 187, 194, 258

could scarcely have endeared him to the regime: although Joan was released shortly after and her lands restored, she had expired before the year was out.⁴⁴

By contrast, the bishop's own leanings are largely undetectable. Although his diplomatic career had begun well enough, and he by now probably had the ear of the king, there is nothing to suggest that this was out of keeping with his position as a trusted royal servant. In February 1320, as part of a general re-shuffle of senior government personnel, he was appointed treasurer, but the promotion was not accompanied by particularly lavish patronage and it is difficult to detect in this any political motive.⁴⁵ His first period in office passed without controversy, and the bishop threw himself with some enthusiasm at the business of sorting and cataloguing the Exchequer archives: a number of departments of state, including the Exchequer, were at this time undergoing similar reform, usually to the conspicuous financial advantage of the Crown.⁴⁶

Ministers involved in the business of administrative reform were therefore liable to be identified with the policies of an avaricious and grasping regime. Walter seems to have been aware of the precariousness of his position and in August 1321, apparently at his own request, he was released from office.⁴⁷ That decision may have been at least partly related to the recent exile of the Despensers by parliament and the desperate attempts of Edward II to secure their return. When the king wrote to several prelates who had absented themselves during the exile proceedings, to solicit their opinions on the judgment, Walter replied simply that the will of parliament could not be overturned by royal fiat; irrespective of any personal interest in the matter, the bishop had maintained his sense of professionalism and delivered a thoroughly dispassionate and legalistic verdict. Of the twelve bishops to whom Edward II had appealed in 1321, only the bishop of Worcester whose diocese, like Walter's, was situated in the west of

⁴⁴ *CPR* (1321-4), pp. 84, 221; *CCR* (1318-23), p. 574-6, 577, 604; *CIPM*, vi, 371; *CP*, vii, 686-7; Natalie Fryde, *The Tyranny and Fall of Edward II, 1321-1326* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 64, 83, 113

⁴⁵ *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard (R.S., lxxxv, 1890), iii, 234; 'Annales Paulini', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. Stubbs (R.S., lxxvi, 1882-3), i, p. 287; *CPR* (1317-21), p. 417

⁴⁶ Tout, *Administrative History*, ii, 207

⁴⁷ Fryde, *Tyranny*, p. 49

England where anti-Despenser sentiment was most acute, had the courage to give a similar reply. The king was outraged at this unexpected riposte from a quarter where he had most expected to receive support (“ . . . *et vous de qi entre touz les aultres prelatz nous nous asseurames at entendoms qe vous estes especialement tenuz de voler bon issu de cele busoigne*”), and demanded that the bishop, who had removed himself to the safety of distant Exeter, attend him in person at once.⁴⁸

Walter Stapeldon, if not actually a creature of the regime he purported to serve, had therefore come to be regarded as indispensable by the insecure and increasingly paranoid Edward II. In May 1322, just two months after the defeat of the rebel forces at Boroughbridge, he returned to his post at the Exchequer, his reputation apparently undiminished in the eyes of the king.⁴⁹ Can his reluctance to support the Despensers unconditionally in 1321-2 be attributed solely to rigid professionalism, or were there other, more personal motives? To explain the bishop's uncharacteristic reticence in 1321, it is necessary to examine more closely his role as a local magnate, both spiritual and secular, and to consider other factors that may have governed his actions in this period.

5.3 THE BISHOP'S SECULAR AFFINITY

As noted above, Walter's social horizons were initially highly localised, and the network of kin that stood at the heart of his personal 'affinity' was correspondingly confined to a small geographical area. Sir Richard Stapeldon (d. 1332) was the only one of four brothers not to have entered the Church. He occupied the patrimonial farm, close to the Cornwall border, throughout the period, and afforded the bishop a conveniently central location from which to make his presence felt throughout the entire diocese. Like Walter, Richard also came to regard his

⁴⁸ *RWS*, pp. 441-3; Fryde, *Tyranny*, p. 52

⁴⁹ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 112

dominion in diocesan-wide terms, and quickly established influence in neighbouring Cornwall, which helped further to consolidate episcopal authority. In 1314, he was returned as MP for both shires, serving alongside Sir Ralph Albomonasterio, who in 1315 had received licence, at the bishop's request, to fortify his manor house in the Isles of Scilly, in Cornwall; and Sir Robert Beaupel II, who was later in the bishop's retinue, in Devon.⁵⁰ In 1325, Richard acted as a commissioner of array in Cornwall with Sir John Treiagu, the bishop's steward in that county.⁵¹

The brothers' careers were inextricably linked. Independently, Richard appears to have been no more successful than his father, and the material acquisitions that he made, and by association his elevation to the ranks of knighthood, were achieved largely on the back of his brother's achievements. They had a propensity for purchasing land and property jointly: Richard was apparently meant to obtain the necessary licence to alienate these acquisitions to the Church for Walter's religious projects, but occasionally the lands were added to the Stapeldon patrimony.⁵² A grant of free warren made to Richard in September 1314, listing all his demesnes, shows how much the estate had grown since their father's day: the Stapeldons now held eight manors in Devon and four in Cornwall, as well as Norton in Somerset, recently bought by the brothers for the sum of £200.⁵³ In the 1320s, during Walter's second term of office at the Exchequer, the brothers' territorial ambitions widened further still, to encompass territories in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Sussex.⁵⁴

Their working relationship was not, then, wholly one-sided: in exchange for Walter's influence, Richard provided secular services that his brother, as an ecclesiastic, was legally unable to perform. That reciprocal arrangement proved to be most effective in the foundation of Stapeldon Hall, when Richard acquired most of the endowment lands himself and re-granted them to the bishop. In the original deeds of foundation, Richard emerges as the most prominent

⁵⁰ *Parliaments*, pp. 46-7

⁵¹ *CPR* (1324-7), p. 218

⁵² Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 20-22; *CPR* (1307-13), pp. 343, 360; *Ibid.* (1313-17), p. 382

⁵³ *CChR* (1300-26), p. 239; *SFF*, i, 51, 93

testator, followed closely by his young nephew, John Keynes: in all, the bishop's kin account for more than half the witness names in these charters.⁵⁵

Compared to his brother, Richard maintained a low public profile and was never directly associated with Walter in affairs of state. On occasion, however, he could be coaxed from his natural environment, as in 1320, when he accompanied the bishop's household to France.⁵⁶ In 1318, he ventured into deeper and potentially more dangerous waters when he acted as guarantor to Sir Thomas Archdeacon, a former sheriff of Cornwall who had failed to pay a royal grant of £320 from the county issues to the elder Hugh Despenser, to whom he was now bound by recognizance.⁵⁷ Following Walter's murder in October 1326, Richard stood surety for his brother's debts to the Exchequer, and withstood a barrage of litigation from various landowners who exploited the bishop's infamy by claiming, rightly or wrongly, that the Stapeldons had extorted property from them; on the whole, however, his business association with his brother was mostly mundane.⁵⁸

Not all of Walter's dealings with kin were so blatantly secular. Another brother, Robert (d. 1311), shared his aptitude for learning: by 1305, he had become professor of Civil Law at Oxford and was principal of Checker Hall, adjacent to the site of Walter's later foundation. Within months of Walter's elevation, Robert, who had previously held only the orders of a deacon, found himself ordained to full priesthood, unlocking for him the bishop's bountiful store of patronage: he was collated to a prebend in Crediton in May 1308, which in the following year was upgraded to a canonry at the cathedral. Although he died early in Walter's episcopate, he did on at least one occasion act as the bishop's proctor in Westminster.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 21-2

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-4, 113-4

⁵⁶ *CPR* (1317-21), p. 453

⁵⁷ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 24

⁵⁸ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 423; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 26

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28; *BRUO*, p. 1764; *RWS*, pp. 205, 212, 263, 372

The youngest brother, Thomas (d. 1342), had also received a timely boost to his ecclesiastical prospects. Rector of Sutcombe (Devon) in 1297-1305, he was now the incumbent of Great Torrington (Devon), both of which were in the gift of Walter's ward, Richard Merton. When Robert resigned the Crediton prebend in 1309, it was handed down to his younger sibling, who subsequently acquired canonries at the cathedrals of Exeter and Wells, and a prebend in Bosham (Sussex), of which the bishop of Exeter was honorary royal chaplain. Thomas continued to serve as a priest in the diocese, exchanging Great Torrington in 1310 for the wealthier parish of Bishopsteignton, one of the episcopal manors. On a number of occasions he helped to institute priests to new livings in the bishop's absence, and he was an executor of the wills of both Walter and their nephew, Thomas Hereward. In 1334, he endowed a chantry at Frithelstock Priory, the Stapeldons' local monastery, with prayers to be said for the souls of his elder brothers.⁶⁰

Through his three sisters, Douce, Joan and Mabel, the affinity encompassed other local families. Two of these, Hereward and Keynes, were of some substance, although neighbourliness rather than status had probably influenced the alliances.⁶¹ Sir William Hereward I (d. by 1332), Douce's husband and the lord of Dodscott, some fifteen miles north-east of Stapeldon, appeared with Walter in an assize of novel disseisin in as early as 1286. He was described as the bishop's *familiaris* in 1323, and his two terms of office as an MP, for Devon in 1320, and for Devon and Cornwall in 1324, coincided with Walter's incumbency at the Exchequer.⁶² Joan's husband, Thomas Keynes (d. 1308), was a wealthy free tenant of Hartland, the manor where William Stapeldon had been active in the late-thirteenth century, and he also held land in Winkleigh of the earldom of Gloucester.⁶³ The third brother-in-law, Richard Inwardleigh, lived in the same

⁶⁰ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 28-30; *RWS*, pp. 39, 364, 551; *CPR* (1330-4), p. 372

⁶¹ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 32

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 31; *Parliaments*, pp. 59-61, 69-71

⁶³ *CIPM*, iv, 99; *Ibid.*, v, 8

hundred (Black Torrington) as the Stapeldons, and was in attendance on the bishop in 1309 and 1311.⁶⁴

The marriages were contracted long before Walter became bishop and it is therefore the nephews, rather than the brother-in-laws, who tend to figure most prominently in his service and counsels. John Keynes (d. 1327) witnessed eight of the Stapeldon Hall deeds and accompanied his uncles on a diplomatic mission to France in 1320. His younger brother, Mgr. Thomas, was the rector of North Tawton (Devon), a benefice in the gift of Richard Stapeldon, and another sibling, William, was left a sum of cash in the bishop's will for the maintenance of his two children. Nor did Walter neglect the welfare of his niece, Joan Keynes, who in 1316 was betrothed to the bishop's reluctant ward, John Arundel of Lanherne (Cornwall).⁶⁵

William Hereward II may have served with his uncle, Sir Richard, in Scotland in 1314, and in 1322 he was travelling with the bishop's retinue.⁶⁶ His brother, Mgr. Robert (d. 1363), was another ecclesiastical high-flyer in the Stapeldon network who gained prebends at Bosham and Exeter: his promotion, like that of the other relatives who received canonries in the early years of the episcopate, may be seen as part of a wider strategy to bolster the new bishop's influence and authority over those independent institutions. By April 1321, Robert had, conceivably with Walter's aid, found employment as a royal clerk, and he received, at the instance of none other than Edward II, permission to study civil law for five years: like his uncles, Walter and Robert, he seems to have been destined to combine secular life with religious contemplation. He too pursued a career in diplomacy, and was twice sent by the Crown to the Roman *curia* in the 1340s and 1350s to report on the state of peace negotiations between England

⁶⁴ *DFP*, i, 922, 965; *RWS*, pp. 112-3

⁶⁵ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 32-3; *CPR* (1317-21), p. 453; *RWS*, pp. 33-4; 576-8; *RJG*, i, 342

⁶⁶ *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, iii, ed. J. Bain (Edinburgh, 1887), pp. 70; *CCR* (1318-23), p. 559

and France.⁶⁷ Another brother, Mgr. Thomas Hereward, was appointed archdeacon of Exeter in 1318, occupying that office until his death in 1329.⁶⁸

Kin, which comprised the inner circle of the bishop's affinity, consisted not only of blood relations, but also neighbours, drawing attention once again to the compactness of Walter's 'country'. This was an advantage rather than an inconvenience, however, since it provided the bishop with a well-defined sphere of territorial influence at the very heart of the diocese: combined with his local knowledge, this ready-made base of support both bolstered and enhanced his authority. Socially marginal though the Stapeldons and their kinsfolk may have been, they were united by neighbourliness and a collective talent for scholarship, and the law in particular. Walter's success was founded on his legal expertise and he readily drew into his household other members of the kin group with comparable skills: in this way, patronage was diverted to his extended family, and the cohesiveness of the affinity was continually reinforced.

A major source of information about the secular affinity is a chancery letter of 5 June 1322, addressed to the sheriff of Devon, asking him to supersede a previous order to arrest certain men denounced as rebels at the time of the general summons, and to restore their chattels, since the bishop of Exeter had testified that they were of his retinue (*retinencia*) and were at the time travelling with him to the king.⁶⁹ This document is positive evidence of the bishop's formal relationships and hints at the extent to which some of Walter's men had been implicated in the recent troubles.

Conspicuous among the named were members of the Champernowne family; Sir Richard of Modbury (d. 1338), and Hugh and Oliver, either his sons or second cousins. The bishop was already acquainted with Richard's cousin, Sir Henry Champernowne, witness to an episcopal charter in 1310, and who in May 1317 was appointed to two judicial commissions obtained at the

⁶⁷ *RWS*, pp. 192, 213; *BRUO*, pp. 915-6; *Cal. Pap. Letts.*, iii, 210

⁶⁸ *RWS*, pp. 212-3

⁶⁹ *CCR* (1318-23), p. 559

request of Walter.⁷⁰ Richard Champernowne was not merely suspected of rebellious tendencies, but had actually been captured in arms at Boroughbridge, just three months previous: how he had avoided imprisonment remains a mystery, but here is the first direct evidence of the bishop maintaining a known 'contrariant'.⁷¹ Hugh Champernowne also lay under the cloud of suspicion, having been obliged in the previous August to seek pardon for his adherence to Roger Damory, one of the ringleaders behind the assault on Despenser's Glamorgan estates.⁷²

Sir Robert Beaupel I (d. c. 1324) was also on the list. A native of north-east Devon, who owned two manors in Exmoor, he had hitherto been more readily identifiable with the Courtenays, appearing as a witness in eight charters of Hugh I or Hugh II; the last date at which he is known to have witnessed, however, was November 1308, shortly after Stapeldon's enthronement.⁷³ In tenurial terms, Beaupel was a free agent, holding his lands from several lords, and it would have been relatively easy for him to shift allegiance. He witnessed at least three episcopal charters in the 1310s, and in 1314 his son, Robert II (d. 1351), sat in parliament for Devon with Richard Stapeldon.⁷⁴ The younger Beaupel had particular reason to be grateful for his father's association with the bishop. Like Hugh Champernowne, Robert and his kinsman, Ralph Beaupel, were identified as co-conspirators of Roger Damory in 1321, and, like Richard Champernowne, Robert was later taken prisoner at Boroughbridge. Whatever conjuring trick Walter may have performed for Richard, however, failed to work for the younger Beaupel, whose estates were sequestrated and who languished in gaol until June 1323, when he was bailed by the bishop's nephew, William Hereward II.⁷⁵ But Robert's fall from grace was shortlived and was sweetened in the following year when he was licensed, on the advice of the Treasurer, to search

⁷⁰ *CPR* (1317-21), p. 580; *Ibid.* (1313-17), p. 696-7

⁷¹ *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 197

⁷² *CPR* (1321-4), p. 16

⁷³ 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 27, 31, 68, 124, 184, 189, 194, 208

⁷⁴ *CPR* (1313-17), pp. 257, 367; *Ibid.* (1317-21), p. 580; *Parliaments*, pp. 46-7

⁷⁵ *CCR* (1318-23), p. 559; PRO SC6/1146/21

for ‘hidden treasure’ (tin, silver or gold) on his demesnes in mineral-rich Exmoor: this bears the mark of Stapeldon’s guiding hand and is typical of his enterprising schemes at the Exchequer.⁷⁶

No one else travelling with the bishop in 1322 was actually denounced as a rebel, although Walter’s influence in lightening the punishment of other south-western ‘contrarians’ is apparent. John Pederton, for whose arrest a warrant had been issued in December 1321, was pardoned at the request of the bishop in the following July.⁷⁷ His fellow conspirator, the Cornish knight Otto Bodrigan, who had been encumbered with an enormous fine of one thousand marks was, again at the instance of the treasurer, remitted of two hundred marks and given permission to pay the remainder in annual instalments. Following his release, Bodrigan found sureties in Adam Strode, a member of the bishop’s household in 1320, and John Prodhomme, the bishop’s *scutifer* and a relative of his niece. He was subsequently returned as MP for Cornwall, with William Hereward, to the Westminster parliament of 1324, and, in December 1326, stood surety with Richard Stapeldon for the deceased bishop’s debts to the Exchequer.⁷⁸ Sir William Daumarle (d. 1336), who by contrast had to fine a mere forty shillings for his freedom, was also mainperned by Prodhomme. William’s brother, John Daumarle, was a member of Stapeldon’s retinue in 1322, and one Walter Daumarle had acted as the bishop’s receiver in 1315: Stapeldon was himself a tenant of the Daumarle family, holding land in the manor of Milton Damarel, on the south coast of Devon.⁷⁹ Finally, John Wroxhale, a landowner of Wiltshire and Devon who was released from prison in 1324, also had recourse to the services of William Hereward.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 420

⁷⁷ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 85; *CPR* (1321-4), p. 182

⁷⁸ *CFR* (1319-27), pp. 155, 423; *CPR* (1317-21), pp. 427, 453; *Ibid.* (1321-4), p. 183; *RWS*, p. 262; *Parliaments*, pp. 69-71

⁷⁹ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 160; *RWS*, p. 289; ‘Powderham Cartulary’, ii, 180; *CChR* (1300-26), p. 239

5.4 THE CRISIS OF 1322: REBELS AND THEIR MOTIVES

What precisely had driven these individuals to rebel is less clear. The Wylington family, on the other hand, which had close links to the bishop, and whose grievances in 1321-2 were altogether more explicit, affords a potentially useful insight. The Wylingtons were among the greatest of the earldom of Gloucester's knightly tenants in western England in the fourteenth century: in 1311, their chief representative, Sir John Wylington (d. 1338), held of the earldom six manors in Gloucestershire, five in Devon, two in Cornwall, and a sprinkling of lands in four other counties.⁸¹ The immediate source of Wylington's discontent was the division of his former lord's estates in 1317, after it became apparent that the widowed countess would have no issue, between the husbands of three co-heiresses; the younger Hugh Despenser, Roger Damory and Hugh Audley. The manors and fees in Devon initially went to Despenser, who exchanged them in a dubious transaction with Hugh Audley in May 1320 for castles and lands in Wales; this was reversed in the following July, when Audley granted the whole lot back to Despenser, probably under duress. Despenser's rapacity was the most obvious cause of offence among the former Gloucester tenants who rebelled in 1321-2.⁸²

Much of Sir John's south-western demesne had been used to endow other family members: his younger brother, Sir Henry (d. 1322), held the manors of Gittisham and Uplowman (Devon); another brother, Thomas, lived in Budleigh (Devon); and their widowed aunt, Christina, held land in Devon and Cornwall.⁸³ The Stapeldon connection hinged on Sir Henry, who had served as steward of Cornwall in 1316-21. In recognition of unspecified services performed by him in office, the bishop granted his brother, Reginald, then rector of Atherington (co. Devon), an annual pension of five marks: this was made on 22 August 1321, just two days after Henry, John,

⁸⁰ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 295

⁸¹ *CIPM*, v, 538 (p. 340); *CChR* (1300-26), p. 165

⁸² *CPR* (1317-21), pp. 208, 456; *DFP*, ii, 1175; Maddicott, *Thomas of Lancaster*, pp. 257, 260, 415, 456

and their nephew, Ralph, had been obliged to seek pardons for their part in the assault on the Despensers. Stapeldon was not overly inconvenienced by Wylington's departure from local government, as his replacement was John Treiagu, the bishop's steward in Cornwall, but his patronage of Reginald demonstrates an attachment to the family, and perhaps also a tacit appreciation of their predicament.⁸⁴ Another member of the family, Mgr. Richard Wylington, was rector of North Tawton, a living in the gift of Richard Stapeldon.⁸⁵

Apart from the controversy surrounding the dispersal of the earldom of Gloucester estates, the Wylingtons had a more specific and personal grievance against the Despensers. Their father, Sir Ralph Wylington (d. 1294), had in the thirteenth century acted as keeper of Lundy Island, a small granite plateau in the Bristol Channel, some ten miles off the coast of north-west Devon.⁸⁶ Lundy was nominally the property of the Mariscos, an Anglo-Irish dynasty that had fallen from grace during the earl of Pembroke's rebellion against Henry III in 1234. While in Westminster in May 1235, ostensibly to seek a pardon, Geoffrey Marisco (d. 1245) and his son, William, were implicated in the murder of Henry Clement, a servant of the Mariscos' arch-rivals, the FitzGerald family. William fled for the safety of Lundy, an easily defensible outpost with a castle, where he lived by piracy until his capture and execution in 1244. The island escheated to the Crown, which reordered its fortifications and appointed a series of custodians, before it was re-granted to Sir William Marisco (d. 1284), a second cousin of the disgraced William, in 1281. In 1289, it was part of the inheritance of William's grandson, Herbert, a minor and ward of the Crown: Herbert's mother, Olivia, mindful perhaps of her family's tenuous hold on Lundy, had

⁸³ *CChR* (1300-26), pp. 24, 378; *CIPM*, vii, 26; PRO SC6/1146/21; *CCR* (1318-23), p. 583; *ibid.* (1323-7), pp. 39, 65

⁸⁴ *Sheriffs*, p. 21; *RWS*, p. 411; *CPR* (1321-4), pp. 16, 19

⁸⁵ *RWS*, p. 239

⁸⁶ *CPR* (1258-66), pp. 334, 353; *CP*, xii, 642-9

successfully petitioned for the island to be included in her widow's dower. Herbert had died before 1317, when he was succeeded by his son, Herbert II (d. 1326).⁸⁷

Either because of his father's brief wardenship, or because of a transaction of which we are now ignorant, John Wylington maintained some sort of claim to Lundy in the fourteenth century, and had apparently taken possession of it during Herbert II's minority. In March 1321, with his grandmother now dead, Marisco recovered the island in an assize of novel disseisin directed against Sir John, his son, Ralph, and his brother, Thomas.⁸⁸ The case is of interest to us because it gave rise to a related exchange of correspondence between the younger Hugh Despenser and his steward in Glamorgan, Sir John Inge (d. 1349). On 16 February 1321, Despenser wrote to Inge ("*nostre cher et bien ame bachelier*"), informing him of discussions that had taken place between Marisco and Edward II concerning the forthcoming assize. Inge, who had already been appointed as one of the justices, was to conclude his business in Wales and head to Exeter immediately, so that he could arrive before the hearing and do what he could to arrange for the proceedings to go in Herbert's favour. Despenser, it was explained, had a special interest in this matter, since the king had promised him use of the island if Marisco's claim succeeded.⁸⁹

Herbert Marisco was indeed known to Edward II, who in 1317 had made him a ward of Sir William Montague, steward of the royal household.⁹⁰ The king continued to take an interest in Herbert's affairs, and in October 1320 Marisco had exchanged the manor of Crookham (Berkshire) with the Crown for custody of other lands.⁹¹ An acquaintance of the king could easily become a friend of the Despensers and, less than a month after the assize had been concluded, Herbert departed for Ireland in the service of Sir Ralph Gorges (d. 1323), one of the younger Despenser's knights who had recently been appointed justiciar: the entourage never arrived,

⁸⁷ F. M. Powicke, 'The Murder of Henry Clement and the Pirates of Lundy Island', *History*, xxv (1941), pp. 285-310; A. F. Langham, *The Island of Lundy* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 13-23; *CChR* (1257-1300), p. 255; *CIPM*, ii, 531

⁸⁸ PRO JUST 1/1382, ff. 10r.-10v. (assize roll of John Foxley, 14 Edw. III)

⁸⁹ *Calendar of Ancient Correspondence Concerning Wales*, ed. J. G. Edwards (Cardiff, 1935), pp. 220-1, 260

however, instead becoming embroiled in conflict while passing through Glamorgan, where Ralph was captured and taken prisoner by Roger Mortimer of Wigmore.⁹²

John Inge, meanwhile, promptly arrived in Exeter. The justiciar's roll reveals that he sat on only the one case concerning Marisco, reinforcing the impression that he had been deliberately planted. Although he held no land in Devon and was therefore technically unqualified to sit as a justice there, he was not, as his detractors were later to allege, wholly unsuitable, since he had already worked the western circuit and had sat on judicial commissions in his native Somerset.⁹³ On 6 March 1321, John Wylington was adjudged, unsurprisingly, to have unlawfully ejected Marisco from Lundy; Herbert was awarded seisin of the island and damages of £20.⁹⁴ Inge returned with haste to Glamorgan, where an attack by the earl of Hereford was believed to be imminent, and communicated the good news to his employer; Despenser thanked him for his services and revealed his intention to purchase Lundy for himself.⁹⁵

In December 1321, the lands and chattels of John and Henry Wylington, who had already been identified as adherents of the rebels' cause in the previous August and who were now accused of having attacked Despenser's estates in Glamorgan, were declared forfeit.⁹⁶ In the following month, warrants were issued for their arrests: they had colluded in the destruction of Bridgenorth, and were now suspected to have joined the earl of Lancaster at Pontefract. By 23 February 1322, however, the brothers were still at large and managed to evade capture until the following month, when they were taken in arms at Boroughbridge.⁹⁷ The name of Wylington was now blacklisted, and two other brothers were also arrested: Reginald, the priest, was later released

⁹⁰ *CFR* (1307-19), p. 337

⁹¹ *CPR* (1317-21), p. 510

⁹² *CPR* (1317-21), pp. 508, 541, 574, 596

⁹³ *A Biographical Directory of the Judges of England, 1066-1870*, ed. Edward Foss (London, 1870), p. 367

⁹⁴ *PRO JUST* 1/1382, f. 10v

⁹⁵ W. H. Stevenson, 'A Letter of the Younger Despenser on the Eve of the Barons' Rebellion', *EHR*, xii (1897), pp. 755-60

⁹⁶ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 84

⁹⁷ *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 511-2, 513, 517; *CPR* (1321-4), pp. 19, 148; *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 198, 200

without charge, but Thomas remained in gaol until July 1322, when he fined forty marks for a pardon and the return of his lands.⁹⁸

The fate of the elder siblings, identified by the Crown as two of the ringleaders behind the rebellion, was more serious. Henry was dragged through the streets of Bristol behind a horse and hanged as a traitor: left in the open to rot, a popular cult sprang up around the body, similar to that attached to Thomas of Lancaster, and it was claimed that miracles had occurred near the site of execution, thereby turning what should have been a gruesome deterrent into a political headache for the government.⁹⁹ John Wylington was luckier and escaped with his life – probably because it was worth more financially than that of his younger brother – but found himself encumbered with an enormous fine of £3,000 and a permanent annual rent charge on his lands; the fine had been paid by November 1323, when John was more or less restored to grace.¹⁰⁰

Lundy Island, ostensibly at the heart of the Wylingtons' complaint, was granted in June 1322 to the younger Despenser, who had never disguised his eagerness to lay his hands on it.¹⁰¹ Fearing the growing strength of the coalition against him, Despenser seems to have regarded the island as a haven and escape route from Glamorgan, or perhaps even as a base from which to launch assaults on the mainland, as the Mariscos had done in the thirteenth century: at least one chronicler believed that Despenser, Edward II and Robert Baldock were bound for Lundy in 1326 when their ship was blown off course and forced to dock in Glamorgan, where the king was captured.¹⁰² John Inge was for his part rewarded with the shrievalty of Devon, which he held from November 1322 until the following May. He was also granted custody of a number castles and forfeited estates in Wales and became keeper of the royal mines in Devon.¹⁰³ The marchers' indictment of the Despensers in August 1321 alleged that the younger Hugh had perverted the

⁹⁸ *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 435, 455-6; *CFR* (1307-19), p. 160

⁹⁹ *CPR* (1321-4), pp. 148, 378

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, (1321-4), pp. 353, 442; *CFR* (1319-27), p. 155; *Cal. Chancery Warrants* (1244-1326), pp. 529-30

¹⁰¹ *CChR* (1300-26), p. 444

¹⁰² *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Synbroke*, ed. E. M. Thompson (Oxford, 1889), pp. 22-3

¹⁰³ *Sheriffs*, p. 34; *CFR* (1319-27), pp. 73, 130, 142, 189, 306; *CCR* (1318-23), p. 598

course of justice by maintaining justices, singling out John Inge for special criticism.¹⁰⁴ In context, however, Inge's offence was fairly small and he had little trouble in obtaining a pardon from the succeeding regime in 1327. Thereafter he continued to serve on judicial commissions in Devon, the county that he had dubiously adopted as his own in 1321, and elsewhere in the western circuit; he even secured appointment to the Common Bench in 1331.¹⁰⁵ But an unsavoury reputation preceded him, and further evidence of his misdeeds soon began to emerge and dog his career: in the 1340s he was obliged again to seek pardon, for a variety of abuses ranging from the smuggling of merchandise, to the acceptance of bribes from litigants and plaintiffs while working as a justice.¹⁰⁶

The surviving Wylingtons, John and Thomas, were exonerated by parliament in 1327, and Henry Wylington's lands were afterwards restored to his son, Henry II (d. 1349). Custody of Lundy was granted temporarily to the Cornish 'contrariant' Otto Bodrigan, and the Wylingtons' right to the island, whatever it may have been, was re-established.¹⁰⁷ To avoid further controversy, however, Sir William Montague, a key supporter of Edward III's coup in 1330, and who later became earl of Salisbury, set about purchasing Lundy outright for the Crown. This proved to be a costly exercise: Ralph Wylington, Sir John's son, sold his share for £200 in 1332, and in the following year Stephen Marisco, Herbert's heir, received £300; but title to ownership was by now so confused that Sir William had to find a further one thousand marks to silence the claim of Hugh Despenser's heir.¹⁰⁸

The question of how Despenser had gained a foot-hold in Devon remains unanswered, but it is important because his interference in local politics may help to explain the motives of other south-western 'contrariants'. In marked contrast to the narrowly-based regime of Edward

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., (1318-23), pp. 492-5; J. Conway Davies, 'The Despenser War in Glamorgan' *TRHS* (3rd ser., ix, 1915), p. 60

¹⁰⁵ *CPR* (1330-4), p. 43

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., (1343-5), p. 310; M. McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century* (Oxford, 1959), p. 205

¹⁰⁷ *CCR* (1327-30), pp. 20-1; *CFR* (1319-27), p. 425

¹⁰⁸ *CChR* (1327-1337), p. 444; *CPR* (1327-30), p. 18; *CPR* (1330-4), p. 364; *DFP*, ii, 1242, 1259

II, the Despensers' network of power and influence was widespread and extremely pervasive.¹⁰⁹ As we have seen, the elder Hugh Despenser, the future earl of Winchester, was related to Hugh Courtenay II through his sister, Eleanor, and the two had campaigned together in Scotland. But his influence extended also to clientage and patronage in the region. Sir Martin Fishacre of Morleigh (Devon) was retained by Despenser in the early fourteenth century, and subsequently became a knight of the royal household. In August 1322, Fishacre had letters of protection for service in Scotland with the earl of Winchester, alongside his fellow Devon knights, Oliver Dynham (d. 1343), and John (d. c. 1332) and William Beaumont.¹¹⁰ The appearance of the two latter is surprising, since in only the previous year the Beaumont brothers had sided with Roger Damory against the Despensers; yet now, either by compulsion or opportunism, they had entered the service of their former enemy. One of the Beaumonts' tenants, Thomas Langdon, was less lucky or politically astute, and died as a rebel in prison in 1325, unrepentant and unpardoned.¹¹¹

Another local knight, Sir Nicholas Dauney (d. 1332), had already travelled abroad with Martin Fishacre in 1319 in the elder Despenser's service.¹¹² Nicholas' son, John, on the other hand, was a supporter of Hugh Audley, and spent almost three years in gaol after Boroughbridge, before his father and John Treiagu, Walter Stapeldon's steward, redeemed him for £200.¹¹³ The Despensers' influence in the provinces had become so pervasive as to undermine the bonds of kinship, and Sir Nicholas was himself in trouble in 1330 when he joined the failed counter-rebellion of the earl of Kent, and was imprisoned; a measure of how complicated and divisive political relations in this decade could be.¹¹⁴

Yet, it is still difficult to detect a common motive among these and other Devon 'contrarians', beyond the climate of fear, resentment and rivalry generated in western England by

¹⁰⁹ Nigel Saul, 'The Despensers and the Downfall of Edward II', *EHR*, lxxxix (1984), p. 27

¹¹⁰ Saul, 'Despensers', p. 9; *CPR* (1317-21), p. 271; *CCR* (1323-7), pp. 169, 475; *CPR* (1321-4), 187

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, (1321-4), p. 16; *CCR* (1323-7), p. 429

¹¹² *CPR* (1317-21), p. 312

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, (1321-4), p. 18; *Ibid.*, (1324-7), p. 99; *CFR* (1319-27), p. 295; *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 268

¹¹⁴ *RJG*, i, 247

the Despensers' overbearing influence. Two other rebels, Henry Umfraville and Nicholas Bonville, did themselves hold land in Glamorgan and were justified in feeling directly threatened by the Despensers' posturing there. Umfraville, lord of Penmark (Glamorgan) and Lapford (Devon), was, like the Wylingtons, a Gloucester tenant; his Lapford estate, the most lucrative of the possessions confiscated in Devon, remained forfeit until 1324. Interestingly, Gilbert Umfraville, Henry's younger brother, was in 1322 granted the farm of Courtisknoll and Sloseigh (Devon), which had belonged to Thomas Langdon, the Beaumonts brothers' disgraced tenant, in what appears to have been an act of clemency on the part of the treasurer, Walter Stapeldon, who was primarily responsible for the redistribution of rebels' lands. In a similar fashion, Reginald Wylington, the bishop's pensioned priest who had narrowly escaped punishment in 1322, was permitted to farm his deceased brother's manors of Umberleigh, Beaford, Huntshawe and Stoke Rule (Devon).¹¹⁵ Sir Nicholas Bonville of Shute (Devon) and Bonvilston (Glamorgan), on the other hand, proved to be one of the most elusive of all the 'contrariants', and was still at large in May 1322 when the elder Despenser alleged him to be among those who had ransacked two of his manors in Derbyshire.¹¹⁶ What became of Nicholas is uncertain, but shortly afterwards he appears as mancupator to three other south-western rebels – Otto Bodrigan, Simon Raleigh and John Sully – having apparently escaped retribution himself. Another Gloucester tenant, Sir John Sully of Iddesleigh (Devon) and Sully (Glamorgan), was bailed by both Bonville and Sir Nicholas Dauney, father of another 'contrariant'.¹¹⁷

Trying to detect a pattern of behaviour or scheme of allegiance common to all these rebels is probably futile and will ultimately founder on a lack of positive evidence, but the survival of networks of tenure that the earldom of Gloucester had fostered between Glamorgan and south-western England, must be emphasised. Wylington and Umfraville were important

¹¹⁵ *CCR* (1323-7), p. 116; PRO SC6/1146/21 (possessions of the 'contrariants' in Devon); E142/31 (valor of lands of 'contrariants' in various counties)

¹¹⁶ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 167; *PW*, II, ii, 189, 192

¹¹⁷ *CFR* (1319-27), pp. 155, 158, 319

tenants whose ancestors had occupied a prominent position in the Clare earls' counsels, and they would have been particularly offended by the quarrel over territory that ensued after 1317: their discontent, and the example that they set by rebelling, may have encouraged their own tenants and neighbours. For example, a grant of free warren given at the instance of Roger Damory to Henry Wylington in 1318, appears to have been made in duplicate later in that year to John Beaumont and Robert Beaupel, Henry's neighbours in north Devon, suggesting that neighbourliness was a factor in the motives of the latter two.¹¹⁸

Walter Stapeldon's role in all this remains an enigma. As we have seen, he can be linked to the majority of south-western 'contrarians', either because he obtained pardons or remittances on their behalf, or because they were actually members of his household. Did he tacitly support their objectives, or was it merely an unfortunate coincidence that his 'country' in north Devon cut across a vein of anti-Despenser sentiment, overlapping as it did with the earldom of Gloucester's former sphere of territorial influence? Could the propensity of these men towards rebellion even be explained by a conviction that their relationship with the bishop would guarantee them a degree of protection or leniency? To answer these questions, we turn once again to the bishop in his role as a government minister and political being.

5.5 THE BISHOP AND THE DESPENSER REGIME

We left Stapeldon, the supposed creature of Edward II, in the relative safety of his diocese, refusing to be drawn on the subject of the Despensers' rehabilitation. During the period of crisis (August 1321-March 1322), he is almost wholly absent from the public records, yet he appeared once more at the Exchequer in May 1322, his reputation at court apparently intact and his appetite for the business of fiscal reform undiminished. The political turncoat of December 1321 had re-established himself, and now assumed ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day

¹¹⁸ *CChR* (1300-26), pp. 378, 392

administration of ‘contrariants’ lands: under his stewardship, the Household and Exchequer were thoroughly reformed to cope with the influx of new business occasioned by the forfeitures. How had Stapeldon been able to return so easily to government in the spring of 1322, and what were the implications for his temporal authority?

Like his Despenser colleagues, Walter Stapeldon was adept at manipulating the apparatus of government to further his own interests and those of his men. He knew most of the tricks of the trade and evidently had few scruples about using them. At least two senior judges, Harvey Staunton (d. 1327) and William Bereford (d. 1326), drew annuities from the episcopal pay roll: Staunton also served under Stapeldon as chancellor of the Exchequer until 1323, and Bereford, chief justice of Common Pleas, presided over a hearing in 1324 concerning the bishop’s jurisdiction in Bosham.¹¹⁹

Grooming friendly judges was one thing, but shielding men from the law shows the bishop’s activities in an altogether different light. In 1315, parliament heard the petition of Katherine Giffard, widow of a Cornish knight, alleging that her tenant, William Milleburne, rector of Ruan Lanihorne (Cornwall), had defaulted on six years rent (a total of 240 marks) owing on a manor that he held of her, and that he had recently sold the property without her consent: she claimed to be unable to obtain justice because Milleburne was being maintained by Walter and Richard Stapeldon. The auditors recommended the setting up of a commission of oyer and terminer, but no further action was forthcoming, perhaps because of intervention by Walter.¹²⁰ In the following year, the miscreant priest granted his patron property and land in Penryn (Cornwall), quite possibly from the unnamed manor that he had acquired under dubious circumstances, to endow a chantry in the nearby collegiate church of Glasney, with an obit for Stapeldon.¹²¹ Walter’s conduct in this affair, to the detriment of a vulnerable widow who was

¹¹⁹ *RWS*, pp. 33, 44, 73-4, 249, 378; *The Judges of England, 1272-1990*, ed. John Sainty (Selden Soc. suppl. ser., x, 1993), pp. 6, 45, 60, 109

¹²⁰ *RP*, i, 292

¹²¹ *CPR* (1313-17), p. 561

being preyed upon from other quarters, reveals an unsavoury side to his character and a singularity of mind first hinted at in his encounter with the friars of Exeter. Milleburne, it seems, was a thoroughly nasty piece of work: he was in trouble once more in 1328, when he was accused of having assaulted one Philip Cayso and stolen goods from him to the value of forty shillings.¹²²

Another of the bishop's protégés, Matthew Crauthorne (d. c. 1342), may have been to Stapeldon what John Inge was to Hugh Despenser. Crauthorne, a prominent clerk or lawyer of Exeter, had represented that city in parliament on no less than five occasions.¹²³ He was employed by several prelates in the diocese and had acted as attorney to Walter before he became bishop; he now continued to serve him in this capacity, later receiving appointment as steward of the bishop's temporalities in Devon.¹²⁴ Something of the nature of Matthew's relationship with the bishop is revealed by a petition of 1319, in which Crauthorne alleged that the sheriff of Devon had maliciously withheld a writ returning him as one of two MPs for the county in the previous year: he felt especially aggrieved because he had been nominated in full county court by the bishop of Exeter and William Martin (from whom he held his small estate in east Devon), with the assent of all present.¹²⁵ Crauthorne may in this instance have been insufficiently qualified for election, but he could also have been the unfortunate victim of circumstances, as the man returned in his place, Richard Chisbeach, was a lawyer in the pay of Hugh Courtenay II.¹²⁶

He was not to remain empty-handed for long, however. In May 1322, the month in which Stapeldon returned to the Exchequer, Crauthorne was appointed sheriff of Devon, succeeding John Inge, and remained in office until October 1325, his period of tenure coinciding almost exactly with Stapeldon's second term as Treasurer. In the same month he was once more returned, this time successfully, as MP for Devon.¹²⁷ Stapeldon seems to have been marking his

¹²² *RJG*, i, 38-9

¹²³ *Parliaments*, pp. 24, 55, 57, 60, 62

¹²⁴ *CPR* (1301-7), p. 438; *CPR* (1317-21), pp. 245, 336; *RJG*, i, 178-9

¹²⁵ *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 138; *CCR* (1323-7), pp. 596, 600

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, (1313-18), p. 321; *CPR* (1324-7), pp. 168, 170

¹²⁷ *Sheriffs*, p. 34; *Parliaments*, p. 64

return to government with political gestures in the locality. The previous June, shortly before the bishop's resignation, Crauthorne had been appointed keeper of the forfeited lands of Hugh Audley in Devon, comprising the remnants of the Gloucester estate; now he was appointed surveyor of all the rebels' lands in Devon, and he later had custody of Audley's other possessions there, the manor of Chittlehamholt and Dartmoor forest.¹²⁸ Crauthorne therefore became acquainted with the affairs of rebels in the south-west, and was potentially an important intermediary between the bishop at the Exchequer and his men back in the diocese.

Although Matthew's good fortune was closely tied to his relationship with the bishop, he was a thorough professional with a reasonable degree of independence, and emerged largely unscathed from the revolution of 1326-7, and the untimely demise of his employer: in December 1326, he was appointed receiver of Glamorgan by Isabella's administration, and he also had custody of the treasury of Neath Castle, where Edward II had earlier been taken prisoner.¹²⁹ The willingness of the Crown to entrust him with a stake in the government of Glamorgan, suggests Crauthorne was already familiar with that county's administrative arrangements, perhaps through acquaintance with John Inge, or via another Stapeldon-Despenser connection. The patronage he had enjoyed previously continued to flow even after 1326. In July 1327, he was reappointed keeper of the seal of Exeter, a post he had held since 1324, and he was commissioned to cull the royal deer in Devon. He had custody of the royal silver mines in Devon from 1329 until at least 1338, and he served twice more as MP for Devon, in 1329 and 1337.¹³⁰ But not even the slick Crauthorne could emerge from the reign entirely untainted, and in 1328 he was removed from his position as steward of the episcopal estates in Devon by Bishop Grandisson, an orthodox prelate anxious to distance himself from any whiff of impropriety that may have surrounded his predecessor.¹³¹ Grandisson's suspicions, it seems, were not wholly without foundation, for in

¹²⁸ *CFR* (1319-27), pp. 59, 139, 384

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, (1319-27), pp. 428, 429; *CCR* (1327-30), pp. 77, 81

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, (1327-30), pp. 138, 141, 480; *CPR* (1338-40), p. 124; *Parliaments*, pp. 87, 114

¹³¹ *RJG*, i, 178-9

1332 a judicial commission was initiated to investigate allegations of corruption in office by Crauthorne, the former sheriff of Devon, and his ministers.¹³²

Another of the bishop's familiars, Joice Branscombe (d. c. 1324), also profited directly from his return to government, receiving custody of the temporalities of Glastonbury Abbey in 1322, and appointment as a constable of the Exchequer in May 1323, on the advice of the treasurer. Branscombe, a former royal clerk, had also acted as lawyer to a number of ecclesiastics, accumulating ample bureaucratic experience, and after occupying his new position for just a few months, he was promoted to chancellor of the Dublin exchequer.¹³³

For Walter, on the other hand, the return to office was relatively low key and, as in 1320, not accompanied by lavish patronage. In June 1322, he was licensed to enclose his palace at Exeter with a stone wall; that he had to take this precaution, perhaps reflects an awareness of growing animosity against him, even from within his own diocese.¹³⁴ For the present, however, he was able to escape any criticism at home when the Exchequer was temporarily removed to York to prepare for the business of forfeiture. He continued his work with the archives, and the task of reorganisation had been completed by December 1322, when 'Bishop Stapeldon's calendar' was delivered to Robert Baldock for deposit in the Wardrobe. By the following June, he had finished a second major project, the drafting of the Cowick Ordinance, a wide-ranging legislative attempt at root-and-branch reform in the Exchequer.¹³⁵

Some small grants of land came the bishop's way, but these were explicitly made to support him in office and no evidence of excessive favour can be read into them.¹³⁶ One of these grants consisted of two manors in Yorkshire belonging to Joan Lacy, the widowed countess of Lincoln and daughter of William Martin, imprisoned in 1322 on suspicion of collusion with the

¹³² *CPR* (1330-4), p. 288

¹³³ *Ibid.*, (1321-4), pp. 189, 287, 323; *CCR* (1307-13), pp. 14, 242; *CPR* (1307-13), pp. 38, 39

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, (1321-4), p. 140

¹³⁵ Tout, *Administrative History*, ii, 211, 258-67; *Idem*, *Edward II*, pp. 159-60, 189-200

¹³⁶ *CPR* (1321-4), pp. 292, 339; *CFR* (1319-27), pp. 232, 321, 365, 401

rebels, but who had died shortly afterwards.¹³⁷ Stapeldon, who was on friendly terms with the Martin family, seems to have remained so even after 1322. David Martin, bishop of St. Davids (1296-1328), William's uncle, had acted as Walter's proctor in parliament, and served with him on a supervisory council in parliament in 1315.¹³⁸ In 1316, Walter and his household had been the guests of William at his hall in Combe Martin, on the north coast of Devon.¹³⁹ David Martin's successor, Henry Gower (r. 1328-47), took the unusual step in 1328 of promising forty days' indulgence to anyone praying for Walter's soul, at a time when his name elsewhere was thoroughly blackened; coming just months after David Martin's death, Bishop Henry seems to have been carrying out the wish of his predecessor.¹⁴⁰ Although Stapeldon had himself witnessed the submission of the countess of Lincoln to the Crown in July 1322, and was therefore theoretically implicated in her humiliation, he does, by securing possession of at least some of her lands, appear to have been using his influence at the Exchequer to avert a worse fate, as he had already done for some of the other rebels. Later that year, the bishop obtained on William Martin's behalf custody of Heleigh Castle and four manors in Staffordshire, during the minority of his grandson, James Audley, by Joan's second marriage; which would probably have been inconceivable without Stapeldon's intervention.¹⁴¹

This amicability is less apparent with the bishop's other neighbouring magnate, Hugh Courtenay. Despite the similar political paths trodden by Courtenay and Martin in this period, Hugh's disposition towards the bishop was somewhat cooler, perhaps because he considered Stapeldon to be a challenge to his own primacy in Devon. In 1322, shortly before his return to the Exchequer, the bishop had sued Courtenay and his steward, Peter Coleswayne, for the return of property that he claimed they had unjustly disseised him of in Somerset.¹⁴² A further blow was

¹³⁷ Above, pp. 200-1

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 311; *CCR* (1313-18), p. 185

¹³⁹ *RWS*, pp. 33-4

¹⁴⁰ *ECL D&C* 2200

¹⁴¹ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 190; *CCR* (1318-23), pp. 574-6

¹⁴² Ibid., (1318-23), p. 467

struck in the following year when Stapeldon ‘discovered’ documents in the Exchequer revealing that Hugh had been receiving the ‘third penny’ of the county since 1297, despite not being an earl. Courtenay’s battle for the earldom was now more than a quarter of a century old and had become somewhat of a *cause célèbre*. Stapeldon could not have been unaware of Hugh’s grievance and was now ideally placed to aid his fellow countryman by suppressing this unhelpful information. Either through malice, or because of pressure from other quarters, he chose not to turn a blind eye and Courtenay’s petition received a further major setback. The bishop had used his influence in government on countless other occasions to protect the interests of his friends and familiars: that he did not do so on this occasion suggests that Hugh Courtenay did not figure among their ranks.¹⁴³

The bishop’s return to government, if not heralded by spectacular material gain, was marked by a higher level of responsibility and new duties. In May 1323, he travelled to Scotland on a diplomatic mission to Robert Bruce.¹⁴⁴ In the following August, he was appointed keeper of the Tower with responsibility for reviewing security arrangements in the wake of the embarrassing escape by Roger Mortimer of Wigmore.¹⁴⁵ His most challenging assignment in this decade, assisting in preparations for the recovery of English dominion in Gascony and Ponthieu in the summer of 1324, allowed him to return home to his diocese, from where the operation was being commanded by Sir Robert Beudyn, admiral of the Western Fleet. The bishop swore in Hugh Courtenay and William Martin as keepers of the coasts of Devon and Cornwall, before travelling to Plymouth to survey the fleet in person. Richard Stapeldon, meanwhile, had a general commission to investigate felonies committed in the region by soldiers in transit to and from Gascony.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Above, p. 163

¹⁴⁴ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 279

¹⁴⁵ *CCR* (1323-7), pp. 13-14

¹⁴⁶ *CPR* (1321-4), p. 436; *ibid.* (1324-7), pp. 3, 65

It was during this sojourn that Walter seems to have committed a rare error of judgement which hastened and may even have secured his downfall. The household of Queen Isabella was financed from the issues of the earldom of Cornwall's south-western demesnes. As a foreigner, Isabella was liable to restrictions on her freedom of movement during the hostilities with France and, on 18 September 1324, upon the advice of the council which had expressed concern about the remoteness of the south-west and its vulnerability to attack, the queen's castles and lands in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset were confiscated and placed in the bishop's custody.¹⁴⁷ Isabella's independence was severely curtailed and she now depended on handouts from the Crown. Although there is no evidence to link the decision to Walter, some contemporaries detected his hand in this act and used it to explain Isabella's subsequent antipathy towards him: the full gravity of the situation in Gascony was not yet known in September, making the council's excuse of defence seem rather implausible. Irrespective of his role, Walter ended up with the booty in his hands and would now have to bear the brunt of public hostility for a vindictive measure that ultimately drove the queen into exile.¹⁴⁸

Stapeldon was eventually relieved of his duties as treasurer in July 1325, for reasons which are not immediately apparent. The anonymous author of *Vita Edwardi Secundi* asserted that the bishop had abused his office to extort vast wealth, and that he had been removed so that he could be pursued through the courts without hindrance; but, as we have seen, the evidence does not support the charge of cupidity. Nor had he obviously fallen out of favour with the regime he served, although there may have been an internal power struggle at the Exchequer. Whatever the cause of his departure, voluntary or enforced, it did little to improve his already tarnished public image.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ *CFR* (1319-27), p. 300

¹⁴⁸ *Vita*, p. 142; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 151-2

¹⁴⁹ *CPR* (1324-7), p. 128; *Vita*, p. 139; 'Malmesbury Chronicle', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. Stubbs (R.S. lxxvi, 1882-3), ii, 283; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 154-5

Out of office, Walter was free to pursue more vigorously the king's interests in France. Isabella, who by now had fled England and was installed at the French court, had attempted to broker a peace between her husband and her brother, Charles IV, by arranging for Edward II to come to Paris to pay homage. The king prevaricated and then, fearful for his safety, sent his son and heir instead, appointing Stapeldon as one of the prince's guardians.¹⁵⁰ The bishop left England on 12 September 1325, but such was his reputation that he was now regarded by some in France as equally obnoxious as the Despensers.¹⁵¹ He met the queen, but towards the end of October was forced to flee in disguise under cover of darkness, his mission unaccomplished. More serious from the government's perspective, however, was the loss of control over Prince Edward: the legitimate heir to the throne of England was now in the hands of a rival court faction.¹⁵²

Articles of correspondence between Isabella, Edward II, and the bishop, shed some light on Stapeldon's role in this episode. Following the debacle, Edward II sent letters to Paris ordering Isabella to return to England with the prince, thereby confirming the chroniclers' interpretation of events: the bishop had approached the queen, but beat a hasty retreat upon hearing rumours that some of the exiled rebels were plotting to kill him.¹⁵³ A week after Stapeldon's flight, the queen sent him a terse letter expressing surprise and dismay at his sudden departure, since he was supposed to have brought her an allowance of money from England. There appears to have been a quarrel during their brief interview in France, with the bishop claiming to have a mandate for her return to England, but refusing to show it. He had also told her that he feared for his own safety. Isabella added that she had been willing to offer him protection, but his subsequent behaviour had led her to understand that he was acting on behalf of

¹⁵⁰ *CPR* (1324-7), pp. 168, 174; *PW*, II, div. 2, ii, 276; F. D. Blackley, 'Isabella and the Bishop of Exeter', in *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. Sandquist & Powicke (Toronto, 1969), pp. 228-9; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, p. 156

¹⁵¹ E101/309/31 (account of Stapeldon's personal expenses in France)

¹⁵² *Vita*, p. 142; 'Malmesbury Chronicle', pp. 285-6

¹⁵³ *CCR* (1323-7), p. 580

Hugh Despenser.¹⁵⁴ This is revealing, for although she held no affection for the man who had colluded in depriving her of her livelihood, Isabella clearly believed that Stapeldon was still sufficiently independent of the court to be receptive to her entreaties. However, the pace of events in October 1325 caught the bishop off guard, and he had been obliged finally to abandon his carefully nurtured position of neutrality. In January 1326, Stapeldon wrote to Edward II explaining that he had withheld the promised funds from Isabella after she refused to return with him, but that she had nevertheless managed to obtain a loan from the Bardi, whom he suggested should be punished. After an undignified stumble and hasty reassessment of his position, there was now little doubt as to where Stapeldon's loyalties lay.¹⁵⁵

On his return to England, Stapeldon headed once more for Exeter. There was still no obvious deterioration in his personal standing, since he was confirmed as custodian of the royal castles in Devon and Cornwall in February 1326, and had a further grant of land in Cornwall in July.¹⁵⁶ But pressure from other quarters continued to mount, and the bishop must have been aware of his increasingly precarious position. Although allegations of corruption cannot be conclusively proven, he had through the vigorous pursuit of his secular interests – in particular, in consolidating his temporal estate and pursuing debtors – made numerous enemies.¹⁵⁷ In April 1326, he was permitted to appoint two attorneys to defend himself in the courts: this had become necessary, it was explained, because the bishop resided in a remote diocese and had been put to great expense and trouble in defending suits brought against him by ill-wishers in numerous counties.¹⁵⁸ His unpopularity was by now clearly endemic and his detractors, sensing an unaccustomed vulnerability, were beginning to close in.

¹⁵⁴ PRO SC 1/49, no. 188 (letter of Isabella to Stapeldon)

¹⁵⁵ PRO SC 1/49, no. 106 (letter of Edward II to Stapeldon)

¹⁵⁶ *CPR* (1324-7), p. 244-5; *CFR* (1319-27), p. 401

¹⁵⁷ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 198-210

5.6 VERDICT ON THE BISHOP

On 15 October 1326, a mob of Londoners descended on Stapeldon's official residence in the capital, adjacent to the Temple: Walter was in the city attending a council of bishops. Failing to find him, they broke the doors of the house and plundered his treasury. Earlier that day, the same mob had murdered John Marshall, a familiar of the younger Hugh Despenser, at Cheapside. According to the canon of St. Pauls, Queen Isabella had on her return to England requested the aid of London against the Despenser faction, whereupon "*totus populus civitatis*" rose in support of her.¹⁵⁹ Although none of the English bishops was especially popular at this time, there is an implicit assumption by the chroniclers that Stapeldon had incurred particular odium in London, where several leading merchants had been bound by recognizance to him in the 1320s: he was also believed to be responsible for procuring the general eyre of 1321, a cynical fiscal measure which had cost Londoners thousands of marks in fines and legal expenses.¹⁶⁰

Stapeldon was returning to the city from one of his manors when he learned of the attack and made a detour to the Tower; on hearing the commotion, however, he fled for the sanctuary of St. Pauls. He was apprehended on the steps of the cathedral and dragged through the streets to Cheapside, where he was decapitated with a cook's knife. Two of his servants suffered a similar fate: William Walle, esquire, was captured on London Bridge, while his steward in the city, John of Paddington, was taken at the gate of the Temple. The bishop's body was stripped and flung into the middle of the square, and the head was sent to Isabella at Gloucester, prompting speculation that it was she who had called for his execution. The corpse was initially taken in by the monks of St. Pauls but, believing a rumour that he had died excommunicate, it was later

¹⁵⁸ CPR (1324-7), p. 259

¹⁵⁹ 'Annales Paulini', p. 316; *Chronica Monasterii Sancti Albani. Thomae Walsingham, Historia Anglicana*, ed. H. T. Riley (R.S., lii, 1863-73), i, 182

¹⁶⁰ Walsingham, i, 182; Lanercost, p. 251; Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 209-16

removed and buried without ceremony in a redundant cemetery: much later, when passions had subsided, the remains were exhumed and sent back to Exeter.¹⁶¹

The first murder of an English bishop since Thomas Becket, the chronicles are remarkable only in their muted coverage of the episode and almost complete lack of moral outrage. This surely is a reflection of Walter Stapeldon's notoriety which, while perhaps not entirely deserved, he had done little to dissipate in his lifetime. The chroniclers give scant consideration to the motives of the murderers, apparently presupposing that the reasons for his downfall were widely known and perhaps largely of his own making. The author of *Flores Historiarum* alone ventured the opinion that the Londoners had been driven by evil ("*spiritu diabolico ducti*"). The St. Pauls chronicler observed that those responsible for the bishop's death were excommunicated in February 1329, scarcely a rapid response, but were shortly after absolved.¹⁶²

This impression of a tacit assumption of guilt is reinforced by the first statute of Edward III's reign. Although not explicitly charged with accroaching royal power, the bishop was guilty of extortion and corruption, and found himself condemned in the same breath as the Despensers, Robert Baldock and the earl of Arundel.¹⁶³ Appropriately enough, it was Hugh Courtenay who was appointed by parliament to reverse all transactions made by Stapeldon: for Courtenay, at least, there was to be a satisfying postscript to a tumultuous reign.¹⁶⁴ Yet, even after death, with the bishop unable to evade scrutiny, it is scarcely plausible to claim that his conduct in public office was in any way comparable to the abuses of the Despensers. His personal wealth, although impressive for a self-made man and an Exeter bishop, was liberally distributed on religious

¹⁶¹ 'Annales Paulini', pp. 316-17; *Croniques de London*, ed. G. J. Aungier (Camden Soc., original ser., xxviii, 1844), pp. 52-3; *Lanercost*, pp. 251-2; *The Scalacronica of Sir Thomas Gray*, ed. Herbert Maxwell (Glasgow, 1907), p. 74; 'Malmesbury Chronicle', p. 289; 'Vita et Mors Edwardi Secundi', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, ed. Stubbs (R.S., lxxvi, 1882-3), ii, 310; *Adae Murimuth Continuatio Chronicarum*, ed. E. M. Thompson (RS, lxxxiii, 1889), p. 48; 'Bridlington Chronicle', p. 86; *Flores*, iii, 234; *RJG*, ii, 752

¹⁶² *Flores*, iii, 234; 'Annales Paulini', pp. 344-5, 350

¹⁶³ *Statutes of the Realm*, i, 197

¹⁶⁴ *CPR* (1327-30), p. 153

projects during his lifetime: even after death, no great horde was revealed, his will consisting mainly of small donations to public works and impoverished scholars, as well as the usual pious bequests.¹⁶⁵

The man who had steered a path of political neutrality and moderation throughout his career, seems in the end to have been undone by a flawed reputation and a poor public image. Ironically, the principal cause of his downfall may have been quite the opposite of that of the other losers of the political revolution of 1326. Far from lacking roots beyond the court, Stapeldon perhaps paid rather too much attention to the local dimension of his power, and to his worthy projects, at the expense of his reputation and standing in more influential circles. Ultimately, it was not the heinousness of his 'crimes' that undid him, but the fact that he was associated in the popular imagination with an unacceptable government, and that, in the upheaval of 1326, nobody of any consequence cared enough about him to offer him an escape route. William Martin, his ally in the south-west, was already dead, and Hugh Courtenay, who was perhaps always the missing link in the bishop's affinity, had been irreconcilably alienated by his handling of the earldom affair.

What of the reaction on his own turf, where support for the bishop should theoretically have remained solid? One of Stapeldon's men, William Fishacre, had no illusion about where his lord's sympathies lay when he lodged a petition against him in parliament early in the reign of Edward III. A tenant of the episcopal manor of Paignton, William had been ordered to muster at Portsmouth for knight's service, but the horse and arms that the bishop had promised to provide him with failed to materialise, resulting in his detention for four weeks "*. . . par coveyne de le dit evesque a Hugh le Despens' le fuitz*", and a fine of twenty marks for non-service, ostensibly because the bishop coveted an acre of meadow that William owned. William, a kinsman of Sir Martin Fishacre, whom we encountered earlier as one of the earl of Winchester's household

¹⁶⁵ *RWS*, pp. 561-70

knights, must have been reasonably well informed about the internal dynamics of the Depenser affinity to comprehend what was actually going on.¹⁶⁶

Rear-guard actions of this type were perhaps all too inevitable in the political climate that obtained in the aftermath of Edward II's reign. Richard Stapeldon was left to weather much of the backwash from his brother's demise, and had to defend a number of assizes arraigned against him in the early years of the new regime.¹⁶⁷ He does, however, appear to have escaped any permanent damage to his reputation, and appears once more in June 1331 as the envoy of Bishop John Grandisson, on a mission to the archbishop of Canterbury.¹⁶⁸ Grandisson was a thoroughly orthodox ecclesiastic who would have tolerated no whiff of impropriety, and Sir Richard's rehabilitation, if it can be described as thus, suggests that there was a feeling by at least some in the diocese that Walter had been the unfortunate, rather than the wholly deserving, author of his fate. Unfortunately, Grandisson, who had in any case only recently arrived in England after the murder and would therefore not have been fully informed about political events, remains inscrutable on the delicate question of his predecessor's moral character. He knew just enough about Stapeldon to inform the pope that "*. . . in predecessore meo regia quondam familiaritas, que ipsum incolis regni plerisque*", but beyond this he, like the chroniclers, was unwilling to be drawn into detailed judgment; unusually so for Grandisson who rarely kept his counsel.¹⁶⁹ Here, in the diocese of Exeter, as elsewhere, a wall of silence was being erected around Walter Stapeldon's memory.

¹⁶⁶ *RP*, ii, 414; Above, p. 216

¹⁶⁷ Buck, *Walter Stapeldon*, pp. 25-6

¹⁶⁸ *RJG*, i, 256

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 96

6. WAR, SOCIETY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE AGE OF JOHN GRANDISSON AND HUGH COURTENAY III

John Grandisson, who arrived in Exeter in June 1328, succeeded to a diocese overshadowed by the experience of recent political unrest and in which episcopal authority had been severely compromised. Grandisson, the younger son of a wealthy Herefordshire knight, was the protégé and nominee of Pope John XXII, who had consecrated the new bishop at Avignon in October 1327.¹ Following the death of Walter Stapeldon, the dean and chapter of Exeter had hastily elected one of their own in his place, the elderly James Berkeley; his reign, however, lasted barely three months and now the pope impatiently imposed his own candidate.² A dramatic release of tension in the diocese had followed Stapeldon's murder, which the ineffectual Berkeley could do little to contain: several of the episcopal manors were robbed of their grain reserves and the cathedral had been broken into and its archives plundered.³ This, as Grandisson understood it, was out of hatred (*"ex odio"*) for his predecessor.⁴ Not only did the new bishop face serious challenges to his authority and the potential hostility of the chapter, but he had also inherited a debt of ten thousand florins incurred in legal fees by Stapeldon and Berkeley to the papal *curia*: no wonder then, when he reported back to his patron in February 1329, Grandisson admitted to grave doubts about his suitability for office.⁵

6.1 JOHN GRANDISSON AND HIS EPISCOPATE

The bishop was at least able to begin addressing his financial difficulties. Soon after his arrival, he wrote to the heads of several religious houses requesting loans of cash. Sadly, the abbots of Tavistock and Forde, the two wealthiest Benedictine houses in the Exeter

¹ *Adae Murimuth*, pp. 55-6

² *RJG*, iii (pp. v-vi)

³ *Ibid.*, i, 95-6, 172, 352-3

⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 95

diocese, decided they were unable to oblige.⁶ His approach to Hugh Courtenay II, a second cousin by marriage, met with a similar lack of success when Hugh helpfully advised the bishop to apply himself more assiduously to his pastoral duties than to worry about temporal matters.⁷ But money began to trickle in from more generous quarters and Grandisson was soon able to start re-payments.⁸ By 1330, his financial situation was sufficiently healthy for work to re-start on the rebuilding of the cathedral church.⁹

Problems of authority and government were, however, less easily resolved. Grandisson, used to the quiet dignity of religious life at the papal court, was disturbed by what he regarded as a lack of discipline among the cathedral clergy who, although going through the motions of the divine offices, all too often had “their hearts in the market place, in the street, or in bed” (. . . *cum eorum cor in foro, vico, vel lecto sit* . . .). Other canons were guilty of laughing out loud during services or, even worse, dripping molten wax from their candles on to the heads of the unfortunates sitting beneath them.¹⁰ The bishop took a dim view of this and other evidences of deteriorating standards, and in 1337 published his “Ordinal”, a formidable tome with wide-ranging prescriptions for the content and conduct of services.¹¹ Other members of the Exeter religious were also chilled by the winds of change: John Buckerel, a venerable abbot of Hartland, had perhaps reckoned on living out his twilight years in the relative obscurity of his remote monastery, but was now urged by the new bishop to put his house in order or resign; notwithstanding his kinship with the bishop’s steward, Henry Buckerel.¹² Robert Bonus, a dissolute Tavistock prelate whose heart lay more in the sun-drenched vineyards of his native Gascony than in the governance of the abbey, alone put up a murmur of resistance by unwisely testing the limits of the bishop’s patience; these, as he

⁵ Ibid., i, 102-3, 323

⁶ Ibid., i, 368

⁷ Ibid., i, 201-2

⁸ Ibid., i, 468

⁹ Ibid., iii (pp. xii-xvii, xix)

¹⁰ Ibid., i, 586-7

¹¹ Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, p. 66; *Ordinale Exoniensis*, ed. John Neale Dalton (Henry Bradshaw Soc., 4 vols., 1909-40)

¹² *RJG*, i, 209, 516-7, 521-2

discovered to his cost, were not particularly generous, and the hapless Robert was swiftly ejected.¹³

A thorough overhaul of the episcopal administration was also needed in view of the unruliness of his inherited establishment, and Grandisson, a former archdeacon of Nottingham, could draw on an ample pool of talent for new personnel.¹⁴ Several members of the Nassington family of Lincolnshire were drafted and placed in senior positions: John (d. 1334) became chancellor of the cathedral in 1328 and archdeacon of Barnstaple in 1330; Thomas (d. 1346) was the bishop's official and archdeacon of Exeter from 1331; while William (d. 1359), described in glowing terms by Grandisson as "*in utroque jure instructus*", had succeeded John as chancellor by 1331 and occupied a prominent position in the episcopal administration for the next two decades.¹⁵ Richard Gomersale, another Lincoln import, became a priestly overseer of the bishop's temporalities and worked in what may have been uneasy tandem with the secular stewards, John Billyoun (in Cornwall), and Henry Buckerel (in Devon), who had recently replaced Bishop Stapeldon's former crony, Matthew Crauthorne.¹⁶

Despite these sweeping changes, challenges to ecclesiastical authority, perceived or otherwise, remained a continual worry for John Grandisson whose spiritual outlook, informed by years of advanced scholarship, adhered closely to the high doctrine of *unam sanctam*.¹⁷ That much is revealed in a rebuke to Hugh Courtenay in 1335, reminding him that lords spiritual could not, and should not, be judged by the laity. The increasingly cantakerous magnate represented a major challenge to the bishop's authority, in Grandisson's mind at least, and delighted in tormenting the unfortunate prelate at every opportunity. Grandisson periodically attempted to assert his authority, but was largely powerless, as he discovered in 1335 when the interdict he had placed on Courtenay's private chapels was blithely ignored by

¹³ Ibid., i, 97-8, 193, 369-70, 393, 395, 397-8, 412; Ibid., 675-8, 702-6, 716-8; H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Tragi-Comedy of Abbot Bonus', *West-Country Historical Studies* (Newton Abbot, 1969), pp. 169-81; Above, p. 51

¹⁴ *RJG*, i, 101

¹⁵ *BRUO*, ii, 1337-9

¹⁶ *RJG*, i, 167-8, 178-9, 236

the earl, who even had the effrontry to usurp the testing of his tenants' wills from the bishop's court to his own.¹⁸ He found the earl's son, John Courtenay, every bit as obnoxious as his father and barely an improvement on Robert Bonus, whom he had replaced as abbot of Tavistock, originally with the bishop's support.¹⁹ But Hugh's contention that the new bishop was guilty of a singularity of mind and of oppressing his flock with excessive fiscal demands, may not have been wholly misplaced: at least one cleric from within the diocese had hinted to him at an early date that his style of government was regarded by many as over-severe.²⁰

Courtenay was not the only disobedient knight within Grandisson's jurisdiction, and the bishop might justly have despaired of the morals of the local aristocracy when, in 1329, he dealt with a case of adultery involving Hugh's cousin, Sir John Dynham of Hartland. John was charged with conducting illicit relations with one Matilda Moleton, a woman of whom he was apparently so enamoured that he had attempted to grant her land from his patrimony. He failed to appear before the bishop's court when summoned, but physically assaulted a member of Grandisson's household, whereupon he was denounced from the pulpit and excommunicated. Acting perhaps on the advice of his cousin, who had scant regard for Grandisson's fulminations, Dynham appealed against his sentence to the court of Canterbury, to the bishop's great indignation. Although he did eventually submit in the following year and voluntarily took himself abroad on pilgrimage, the affair could have done little to improve Grandisson's initial gloomy prognosis of his new diocese.²¹

Later on in the episcopate, the bishop's uncompromising vision of spiritual authority was to bring him into conflict with no less a person than the king. Grandisson, one of the few English bishops of the fourteenth century not to be a royal nominee, had already incurred the wrath of Edward III in 1341 when he circulated letters in the diocese criticising the conduct of the war with France and discouraging local justices from swearing in jurors; this somewhat eccentric distrust of juries, which he believed to be professional, corrupt and partial, is a

¹⁷ Michael Haren, *Sin and Society in Fourteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 46

¹⁸ *RJG*, i, 202-3, 294-5

¹⁹ Above, p. 125

²⁰ *RJG*, i, 284

recurrent theme in Grandisson's writings.²² The seeds of acrimony, however, were sown in the following year when the bishop mistakenly encumbered the living of Kilkhampton parish (Cornwall) with his own nominee, to the disadvantage of its true patron, Sir Theobald Grenville.²³ Grenville went to law and in 1347 was awarded judgment in his favour and damages of nearly two hundred marks. In the early hours of 24 March 1347, Grenville, Sir Thomas Merton, and a large gang of armed followers, invaded the episcopal manor of Bishops Tawton (Devon) and, on the orders of the sheriff, drove away three hundred head of cattle and a thousand sheep. The offenders were duly excommunicated, but in the following year caused a suit to be brought against Grandisson.²⁴

At the same time, in an apparent case of double standards, the bishop had caused antagonism by refusing to admit a royal nominee to a benefice in the diocese, and by gaoling one of the king's messengers. Infuriated by Grandisson's persistent recalcitrance, Edward III seized the Exeter temporalities in late 1349 and exacted a fine of two hundred marks for contempt of court in the Grenville affair.²⁵ Grandisson, as obstinate as ever, remained unrepentant until May 1352, when, in a face-saving exercise, the sum was paid on his behalf by his uncle, Otto Grandisson.²⁶ Meanwhile, a commission estimated the bishop's losses to stand at £3,000, of which he was awarded one thousand marks in damages: the matter had dragged on for too long, however, and the ruling was now quietly swept under the carpet, with the bishop even getting his brother-in-law, the earl of Salisbury, to obtain an official pardon for Theobald Grenville.²⁷ Grandisson seems to have regarded himself as a latter-day Thomas Becket – of whom he had actually written a Life – upholding the liberties of the Church against the encroachment of secular law: in reality, however, this was a trifling issue

²¹ *Ibid.*, i, 225-8, 234-5, 245-6, 259-61, 485, 488;

²² *CCR* (1341-3), p. 112; Haren, *Sin and Society*, pp. 10-20

²³ *Year Books*, 17 Ed. III, pp. 40-80, 232-72, 468-70; *Ibid.*, 17-18 Ed. III, pp. 94-117

²⁴ *CPR* (1345-8), pp. 396-7; *Ibid.*, (1348-50), pp. 164-5; *RJG*, ii, 1025-7, 1052, 1054, 1060-2; Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death, 1348-1381* (North Carolina, 1993), pp. 45-8

²⁵ *CPR* (1348-50), pp. 437, 559

²⁶ *CFR* (1347-56), p. 251; *CCR* (1349-54), p. 423

²⁷ Palmer, *English law*, p. 46; *CPR* (1350-4), p. 496

which got blown out of all proportion, and is perhaps a reflection of Grandisson's unworldliness.

Aside from his hands-on approach to government and vigorous defence of ecclesiastical rights, Grandisson, a product of the Paris schools, was a passionate supporter of learning and the arts. He presided over the final stages of the rebuilding of Exeter Cathedral - under his direction, a magnificent screen of coloured statuary was erected on the exterior of the western wall - and completed his own grand foundation, a collegiate church at Ottery St. Mary (Devon), in 1337.²⁸ Educational patronage was a quality he shared with Walter Stapeldon, the founder of an Oxford hall, and may explain Grandisson's reluctance to criticise his predecessor. In November 1332, he put into effect a scheme for the establishment of a grammar school for sixteen poor scholars, first proposed and funded by Stapeldon shortly before his death.²⁹ Grandisson's intellectual curiosity remained undiminished and undulled by the mundanities of episcopal government, and he took under his wing the theologian Richard FitzRalph (d. 1360), chancellor of Oxford University from 1332: FitzRalph was lavishly endowed with benefices by his patron, by whose hands he received major orders and was consecrated archbishop of Armagh at Exeter in 1347.³⁰ Literature also flourished under Grandisson, and a contemporary vernacular poem, *Speculum Vitae*, is commonly attributed to the pen of his chancellor, William Nassington.³¹ In 1330, the bishop ordered all the written Lives of Cornish saints to be copied and collated for posterity.³² His testament of 1369 lists substantial quantities of manuscripts, exquisite fabrics, and precious jewellery, revealing Grandisson to have been a man of quite exceptional aesthetic tastes.³³

This was not mere indulgence on his part, however, for there was a clear correspondence between Grandisson's intellectual patronage and his practical outlook as

²⁸ *Age of Chivalry*, pp. 463-7; Above, pp. 127-8

²⁹ *CPR* (1324-7), p. 257; *RJG*, ii, 666-9; Orme, *Education in the West of England*, pp. 47-8

³⁰ *RJG*, ii, 1022-3; *BRUO*, ii, 692-4; Katherine Walsh, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 4, 64-70, 252-7; Haren, *Sin and Society*, p. 61

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-9

³² *RJG*, i, 585

³³ *Ibid.*, iii, 1511-23

bishop.³⁴ He was greatly concerned with the pastoral well-being of his flock and took a particular interest in the Cornish vernacular language, as a means of dissemination.³⁵ He was also tolerant of popular piety, allowing and even encouraging the rise of a cult around the tomb of his short-lived predecessor, James Berkeley, despite initial misgivings about the veneration of an un-canonised man: needless to say, no such cult was ever attached to Walter Stapeldon.³⁶ But, even among the common folk, the bishop perceived threats to his authority, and a cult of the Virgin, fostered by the monks of the tiny priory of Frithelstock for the edification of their parishioners, had to be suppressed in 1351, on the grounds of idolatry and suspected paganism. In 1354, an attempt by the laity to establish a convent of Dominican friars in one of Dartmouth's parish churches was swiftly knocked down by Grandisson, a severe critic of that order.³⁷

John Grandisson, whose episcopate was the longest of all the medieval bishops of Exeter, also resembled Bishop Stapeldon in possessing an independent base of power, founded on his extensive network of kin. Following the death of his brother, Peter, in 1358, John inherited most of the family estate in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, and became a very wealthy man.³⁸ But Grandisson was also independent of royal government, and devoted the majority of his time and energy to diocesan business, rather than politics, during a period of acute demographic and economic stress. His orthodox theology, his energetic governorship, and his almost continual residence in the diocese, marked him out as a natural leader in a period of upheaval, placing him on a potential collision course with the Courtenays, whose own vision of authority was no less grand. His independence of the court and his compassionate pastoral leadership, heralded a new phase of more conciliatory government, that would have been unimaginable under Stapeldon. Of the two great

³⁴ Haren, *Sin and Society*, p. 61

³⁵ Above, p. 49

³⁶ *RJG*, ii, 941-3; Nicholas Orme, 'Bishop Grandisson and Popular Religion', *TDA*, cxxiv (1992), pp. 108-9

³⁷ *RJG*, iii, 1110-12; Orme, 'Popular Religion', pp. 109-13; Haren, *Sin and Society*, pp. 56-7

³⁸ *CFR* (1356-68), p. 74; *CIPM*, x, 438

challenges facing his episcopate, plague has already been touched upon in chapter two; the other, war and its impact on society, will now be treated in the following section.

6.2 WAR, THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Devon's two distinct coastlines, which historically have promoted the formation of widely-based social and commercial networks, were also the source of defensive vulnerability, exposing the county to the continual threat of sea-borne assault. From the earliest written sources, it is evident that maritime security was an issue of pressing concern to medieval society. Between the ninth and eleventh centuries, Devon was regularly invaded by Danish ships, usually based in Ireland or Wales; the most devastating of these assaults occurring in 997, when a fleet sailed northward up the Tamar estuary and destroyed the recently built Benedictine monastery at Tavistock.³⁹

The frequency of these depredations barely slowed after the Conquest, when the extensive coastline continued to compromise internal security. After the Conqueror had quelled rebellion in Exeter in 1068, some of the English royal family fled by sea to Ireland, finding refuge in exile with King Dermot of Leinster. Shortly after, they returned at the head of an Irish fleet and harried Devon's southern coast.⁴⁰ In 1086, it was reported that nine manors, sited on an exposed promontory on the south coast, had been laid waste "*per Irlandinos homines*": these correspond roughly to the estate of Sir John Cheverston in the fourteenth century, which was ravaged while he was campaigning abroad in 1340, this time by a Spanish fleet.⁴¹

The acquisition of Gascony by Henry II in 1152 coincided with a period of buoyancy in Devon's tin-working industry, fuelled by the discovery of new seams on the western slopes of Dartmoor. Industrial output peaked in about 1160-1190, and some market towns in south Devon, such as Tavistock, Ashburton and Chagford, which were fixed as stannaries (centres

³⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (1961), pp. 42, 49, 55, 57, 63, 80, 84, 85

⁴⁰ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, ii, 225

⁴¹ *DB Devon*, 17/33-41; *CChR* (1327-41), p. 482; R. Weldon-Finn, 'Devon', pp. 274, 423, 433

for the stamping of tin), were transformed economically overnight. The prospect of valuable export markets on the continent, and imports of luxury commodities such as wine and salt, boosted the economies of port towns the length of Devon and Cornwall's south coast, and for the first time turned the peninsula's exposed position into an asset.⁴²

The enclave of south-west Devon now known as Plymouth, began life as a scattering of dispersed settlements, comprising a large Saxon royal estate. Shortly after 1106, Henry I granted three of these manors – Sutton, Tamerton and Maker – to the south-western baron, Reginald Valletorte: through his honor of Trematon, Reginald already controlled the strategically-important estuaries and valuable fishing grounds of the Rivers Tamar and Plym, demarcating the western and eastern bounds of modern-day Plymouth. Henry I was also responsible for reforming the Saxon priory of Plympton, on the east bank of the Plym estuary, as an Augustinian monastery in 1121. The Valletortes subsequently endowed Plympton with lands from their estate on the west side of the Plym, including part of the manor of Sutton (Sutton Prior) and fishing rights in the adjacent harbour. A third focal point of lordship in the region, again created by Henry I, was Richard Redvers' manor of Plympton Erle, the *caput* of his honor, which shortly after became the nucleus of the comital estates.⁴³

Perhaps surprisingly, it was the priory which took the early initiative in exploiting fresh potential for economic growth created by the opening of new markets on the continent, thereby securing for itself control over an emerging urban settlement. In 1254, the prior established a borough in Sutton, which at that time was little more than a small fishing village.⁴⁴ Sixteen years later, the earl of Cornwall acquired rights over Plymouth's harbours by purchasing the honor of Trematon from Roger Valletorte, the last surviving male heir of the main line of Sutton's overlords.⁴⁵ Acting through the agency of the earldom, the Crown now began to assert control over what was a rapidly expanding centre of regional trade. An official inquiry of 1281 decided that the prior of Plympton's seignorial authority was

⁴² Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 200-1; Kowaleski, 'Port Towns', p. 62

⁴³ Crispin Gill, *Plymouth – a New History*, (2nd edn., Tiverton 1993), pp. 21-4

⁴⁴ *CPR* (1247-58), p. 263

⁴⁵ *CFF*, i, 217; above, p. 155

restricted to the bounds of his own borough, leaving the Crown with undisputed rights in the bay of the settlement described inter-changeably as 'Sutton Pool' or 'Plymouth'. Permanent quays were constructed in the deeper waters, and an important royal naval base was born.⁴⁶

Plymouth was used as an assembly point for the Gascony bound English fleet in 1294-5, thereafter developing into one of the pre-eminent ports of southern England. The town was a focal point for naval operations in 1296, and again in 1297, when Edward I was based at the priory for nearly a month.⁴⁷ Flanked by a fertile hinterland, which contained also the Cistercian estates of the recently established Buckland Abbey, Plymouth had the capacity to victual large armies quickly in times of emergency. Plympton Priory afforded suitable lodgings for royalty and nobility alike, while the overland route to Exeter was relatively straightforward. Medieval ships were generally small in size and incapable of remaining at sea for prolonged periods: consequently, kings in the fourteenth century preferred to travel overland as far west as possible, using the shorter sea crossing to Aquitaine, which made Plymouth the ideal headquarters for English naval operations on the Atlantic seaboard. When, in about 1290, deposits of silver and lead ore were discovered in the adjacent manors of Bere Ferrers and Bere Alston, the attachment of the Crown to this small corner of the south-west was further strengthened. Prospecting for precious metals was a favourite preoccupation of Edward I, who spent at least three nights as the guest of Bere's manorial lord, Sir William Ferrers, towards the end of April 1297.⁴⁸

Despite these early advantages, the harbours of Plymouth lie exposed to the prevailing south-westerly wind, and were consequently less favoured by local mariners than the sheltered anchorage of neighbouring Dartmouth, some twenty-five miles to the east. Lying downstream of the Saxon town of Totnes, an important economic centre in its own right, Dartmouth's emergence as a major naval port was perhaps less directly linked to commercial growth than Plymouth's, since its physical location, someway inland along a

⁴⁶ Brayshay, Gaskell-Brown & Barber, 'Plymouth', in *Historical Atlas*, pp. 514-17; Kowaleski, 'Port towns', p. 63; Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 454-5

⁴⁷ *Itinerary of Edward I* (List and Index Soc., cxxxii, 1976), ii, 104-5

⁴⁸ Gill, *Plymouth*, pp. 31-5; *Itinerary of Edward I*, pp. 104-5; Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, pp. 47-8

deep and easily defensible estuary, commended it naturally to the professional seaman. In the twelfth century, a large fleet bound for the Crusades assembled at Dartmouth, even though the settlement was at this time little more than an untidy sprawl of fisherman's cottages and shipyards.⁴⁹ Dartmouth played an increasingly important role in the Gascon wine trade, and in about 1200 a seignorial borough was established by the FitzStephens, one of a number of knightly families with influence in the region. The FitzStephens also constructed a watermill and dammed a tidal inlet, thereby creating a small harbour and causeway linking the two hamlets of Hardnesse (north) and Clifton (south), that constituted the town.⁵⁰

Like Plymouth, Dartmouth contributed disproportionately to the English naval effort in the fourteenth century, and, in the opening phase of the Hundred Years' War, more English ships originated from Dartmouth than from any other single port: of the eighty-eight vessels sent by the towns of south Devon to Calais in 1346, fifty-seven were registered in Dartmouth or Plymouth, along with 1,360 of the 1,929 mariners recruited.⁵¹ The military importance of these ports to the Crown was beyond dispute, yet at the beginning of the fourteenth century both lay in the hands of private seignorial lords, beyond royal control, which, given their strategic importance, was clearly unacceptable. War, or the expectation of war, had brought new opportunities for service and personal advancement to the inhabitants of these boroughs, and contributed to rising levels of prosperity, but equally important to note are the shifts in the local balance of power.

Seignorial lordship in Dartmouth, under the FitzStephen family, was somewhat looser than in monastic Sutton, and therefore easier for the Crown to undermine. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, the FitzStephens appear to have been under considerable financial pressure. In 1293, Sir Gilbert FitzStephen (d. c. 1328) granted away most of his land in the borough precincts to Nicholas Tewkesbury (d. c. 1347), a clerk residing in Dartmouth who

⁴⁹ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard (R.S., lvii, 1872-83), ii, 341; Ralph of Diss, *Opera Historica*, ii, ed. W. Stubbs (R.S., lxii, 1876), p. 65; *Flores Historiarum*, i, 156

⁵⁰ Pevsner, *Devon*, pp. 320-5; Hoskins, *Devon*, pp. 383-5; Kowaleski, 'Port Towns', pp. 63-4

⁵¹ Hoskins, *Devon*, p. 201; Kowaleski, 'Port Towns', p. 68

may have been Gilbert's steward or bailiff.⁵² The arrangement was perhaps intended to relieve temporarily Gilbert's financial embarrassment, but penury evidently continued to haunt the knight. In 1296, he disposed of the borough's mill and quay, which had been established by his ancestors and were therefore symbolic of seignorial authority in Dartmouth, to Philip Rurde, a wealthy burgess, for £200.⁵³ By 1301, Gilbert had relinquished control of the manor of Ermington and its appendant hundred court to Sir Robert Stockhay, who sold it on to John Bensted, a royal clerk who was chancellor of the Exchequer.⁵⁴ Yet another chunk of FitzStephen land, the manor of Huish, was bought by Nicholas Tewkesbury in 1303.⁵⁵ Gilbert FitzStephen had apparently been reduced to destitution in a remarkably short space of time, retaining only a small interest in Clifton, Dartmouth's southern settlement, enfeoffed by Tewkesbury on Gilbert's two daughters in 1326.⁵⁶

A familiar pattern was beginning to emerge, in which the Crown's guiding hand is apparent. In 1306, Tewkesbury bought Dartmouth harbour from the lords of neighbouring Totnes, thereby securing complete control over the port town and its harbourage. He remained nominal lord of Dartmouth until May 1327, when he conveyed the entire property to the Crown, in return for the promise of an office at the Exchequer.⁵⁷ Custody was granted temporarily to Sir John Carew (d. 1360), whose mother, Joan, had been a lady-in-waiting to Queen Isabella.⁵⁸ But the impending war with France made complete royal control of Dartmouth imperative, and in 1338 the harbour was granted to the Black Prince. Three years later, Sir Guy Bryan (d. 1391), a royal household knight and local landowner, was entrusted with custody of both the borough and manor.⁵⁹

The assertion of royal authority over Dartmouth was accompanied by a charm offensive to secure the compliance and goodwill of the burgesses, who included among their

⁵² Watkin, *Dartmouth*, pp. 14-15; *CCR* (1307-13), p. 12

⁵³ Watkin, *Dartmouth*, p. 16

⁵⁴ *CChR* (1300-26), pp. 36, 40, 353; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, i, 1914

⁵⁵ *DFF*, ii, 900

⁵⁶ *CChR* (1300-26), p. 26; *Cal. Inq. Misc.*, ii, 914

⁵⁷ Watkin, *Dartmouth*, pp. 28-9

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30; *CCR* (1327-30), p. 464; *CPR* (1334-8), p. 92

⁵⁹ Watkin, *Dartmouth*, pp. 34, 37; *CPR* (1340-3), p. 196

ranks some of Devon's richest and most influential merchants. In 1337, several customary tolls and seignorial incidents were abolished by royal fiat.⁶⁰ In April 1341, Dartmouth was incorporated by charter, in consideration, so the preamble stated, of the severe losses sustained by the town since the beginning of hostilities with France.⁶¹ Despite the tranche of extensive liberties bestowed on the burgesses by this charter, compromise still had to be made with their new seignorial lord, Guy Bryan, whose own franchise conflicted with some of the rights of the newly-established corporation. A settlement of sorts was reached in 1343, whereby Guy reserved to himself the manorial profits of Dartmouth and the right to appoint a steward who would hear pleas jointly in the mayors' court.⁶²

Dartmouth, by making itself indispensable to the war effort, had therefore gained an impressive degree of political autonomy and prestige at the very outset of the conflict. From the 1350s, the borough began to return representatives to parliament on a regular basis, and its mayors were frequently men of substance and considerable influence. Outstanding among them was John Hawley (d. 1408), shipowner, merchant and privateer, and the probable inspiration for Chaucer's "Shipman". He was elected mayor on no less than fourteen occasions in the late-fourteenth century, and was returned four times to parliament. His mercantile activities occupied, and on occasion breached, the thin dividing line between legitimate trade and outright piracy, and illustrate the dilemmas faced by mariners of Dartmouth and elsewhere in an era of disrupted commerce and rapidly changing international alliances. Hawley amassed a vast personal fortune through trade and the capture of foreign booty: he had title to as many as forty-five tenements in Dartmouth and owned at least twelve different ships in his lifetime. In common with many of the burgesses of Exeter, a large proportion of his commercial income was invested in land, and he purchased and leased

⁶⁰ Watkin, *Dartmouth*, p. 34

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3

property in Devon and Cornwall on a scale that could only have been contemplated by the wealthiest shire knight.⁶³

Meanwhile, in Plymouth, the prior of Plympton was proving less easy to dislodge than Gilbert FitzStephen. To complicate matters further, Buckland Abbey also claimed jurisdiction in the region through its hundred court of Roborough. But it was the duchy of Cornwall which eventually prevailed. Since 1270, the earls had held Trematon Castle, on the west bank of the Tamar estuary, thereby effectively controlling the approach to Plymouth, for which they had assumed principal responsibility in matters of defence. When the harbour and quay of Sutton, which the prior had previously laid claim to, were arbitrarily appropriated by the duchy in 1337, along with the right to collect customs, hold courts and take the profits of wreckage, it was clear who was the superior authority in Plymouth. Nevertheless, tangled jurisdiction retarded the evolution of urban self-government; Plymouth did not become incorporated until 1439, and it had far less autonomy in its government than Exeter and Dartmouth, or even Barnstaple on the north coast. Although the burgesses eventually secured the right to elect their own provost, the borough remained in thrall to the prior and his steward: economic growth was therefore not matched by the development of independent urban institutions, as it was in Dartmouth.⁶⁴

Maryanne Kowaleski has used the poll tax returns of 1377 to reconstruct the town's occupational structure, to gauge the extent to which Dartmouth's economy was dependant on overseas trade and the war with France. Almost a quarter of all householders here were described as shipmasters, and a similar number were engaged in foreign commerce or had travelled overseas on royal service: if it were possible to identify among the Dartmouth taxpayers common seamen, whose occupation was often transient and occasional, the orientation of the town's economy towards the sea would probably be even more pronounced. Rates of pay for masters and mariners were reasonably generous, and the prospect of bonuses

⁶³ *The House of Commons*, iii, 328-31; D. A. Gardiner, 'John Hawley of Dartmouth', *TDA*, lxxxxviii (1966), pp. 173-205; Maryanne Kowaleski, 'The Commercial Dominance of a Medieval Provincial Oligarchy: Exeter in the Late Fourteenth Century', *Medieval Studies*, xlv (1984), p. 376; Below, pp. 148-9

and booty provided additional incentives to go to sea. War therefore helped to pour hard currency directly into the local economy.⁶⁵ Shipowners were wealthier and more prevalent in Dartmouth than in Plymouth, where the occupational structure of the larger population was more balanced and less dominated by the mercantile classes.⁶⁶ No comparable data survives for Plymouth, but a measure of its economic growth, even in the early part of the fourteenth century, may be gauged from the increase in the fee farm of Sutton Pool harbour between 1296 and 1334; almost eight-fold, from £2/9s./6d. to £17/10s./0d.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, economic growth fast outstripped demographic, and, although Plymouth and Dartmouth ranked as Devon's second and fourth towns in 1377, neither would have made it into the premier league of English urban settlements. Plymouth had a regular population of some 2,700, while Dartmouth perhaps had no more than a thousand inhabitants.⁶⁸ This brings some sort of perspective to the enormous social impact that war must have had on what were relatively modest coastal settlements. In 1355, for example, when the Black Prince was preparing to embark for Gascony, some three thousand troops were billeted for almost two months in Plymouth, quite eclipsing the regular population.⁶⁹

6.3 THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

Long before the outbreak of hostilities with France, the coastal communities of Devon were in a state of high alert. In response to an anticipated incursion by the Scottish fleet in 1335, Hugh Courtenay II was appointed commander of the armed forces in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Dorset, with responsibility for fortifying the ports and maintaining a network of early-warning beacons.⁷⁰ He was later assisted in his role as warden of the coasts

⁶⁴ Kowaleski, 'Port Towns', p. 63

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 68; *Poll Taxes*, ed. Fenwick, i, 143-4

⁶⁶ *1332 Lay Subsidy*, pp. 15, 114-5, 109-110

⁶⁷ Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 35

⁶⁸ Kowaleski, 'Port Towns', p. 62

⁶⁹ Gill, *Plymouth*, p. 42

⁷⁰ *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 359-60, 362, 363, 370, 404, 420

by Bishop John Grandisson.⁷¹ The expectation of war is also apparent in the flurry of licences to crenellate domestic buildings, granted to landowners with coastal demesnes in the 1330s.⁷²

The expected invasion did not, however, come until 20 May 1339, when eighteen French ships entered Plymouth bay, attacking boats moored in the harbour and disbursing troops into the town, where they burned houses and caused extensive damage. Within days, the sixty-four year old earl of Devon had mustered an army and descended upon Plymouth. There was pitched battle in the streets before the invaders were driven back towards the sea, where a large number drowned.⁷³ Plymouth, despite its excellent defensive properties, was vulnerable because of the difficulty of supplying troops by land to a relatively isolated enclave, and because of its proximity to Cornwall, whose long narrow peninsula and sparsely populated countryside made it an obvious and easy target for invasion: as Sir Walter Raleigh was to observe more than two centuries later, “Cornewall is but an arme of lande which strecheth itselfe even to the bosome of the enemye . . . ”.⁷⁴ In 1340, the French fleet returned and torched the bishop of Exeter’s small coastal borough of Teignmouth. They sailed on to Plymouth but were again repelled, although they did escape with a hostage in tow.⁷⁵ Later that year, Sir John Cheverston was compensated by the Crown for damage inflicted by Spanish vessels on his coastal demesnes, lying midway between Plymouth and Dartmouth.⁷⁶

Hugh Courtenay II died in December 1340 and his military role was assumed, initially with equal vigour, by his son Hugh III. After the initial onslaught of 1339-40, attacks on the south Devon coast subsided. In 1342, the earl led an expedition to Brittany with his brother-in-law William Bohun, the earl of Northampton, but appears soon afterwards to have succumbed to serious illness, which precluded any further personal participation: although he subsequently played a limited role in the defence of the south-west and in military planning,

⁷¹ *Foedera*, ii, 996, 1112

⁷² *CPR* (1330-4), p. 554; *Ibid.*, (1334-8), pp. 166, 167, 529, 558; *Ibid.*, (1338-40), pp. 39, 51, 475

⁷³ *Adae Murimuth*, pp. 89-90; *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker*, pp. 64-5

⁷⁴ *The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh*, ed. Latham & Youings (Exeter, 1999), pp. 128-32

⁷⁵ *Adae Murimuth*, 109; M. M. Oppenheim, *The Maritime History of Devon*, (Exeter, 1968), p. 13

⁷⁶ *CChR* (1327-41), p. 482

he never again led a major expedition in person.⁷⁷ In another expedition to Brittany in 1345, the earl's retinue was led in his absence by his banneret John Cheverston, and Courtenay was also to miss both the Crecy and Calais campaigns.⁷⁸ In 1347, the earl of Northampton and Hugh's son, Hugh IV, successfully petitioned for a pardon for the earl's absence from parliament, and an exemption from future service, on account of his debility.⁷⁹ The teenaged Hugh IV represented his father in France in 1346-7, apparently making such an impression, or at least captivating the hearts of the romantically inclined with his tender youth, that he was later installed as a founding member of the Order of the Garter.⁸⁰

Sir John Cheverston also forged a reputation at Crecy, where he fought in the Prince of Wales' division with the core of the comital retinue that he had taken to Brittany in 1345.⁸¹ Following the siege of Calais, he was appointed captain of the town's garrison, and, early in 1351, he travelled to Bordeaux to take up the position of Seneschal of Gascony. A gifted soldier and diligent administrator – he had already served as sheriff of Devon and escheator of Devon and Cornwall – Cheverston was an ideal candidate for the office, traditionally occupied by talented, but socially undistinguished men.⁸²

His arrival in the duchy coincided with the siege of the English-garrisoned town of St. Jean-d'Angely. Wasting no time, Cheverston organised a relief force and comprehensively defeated the French in battle near Saintes on 23 April 1351. Although this failed ultimately to lift the siege, it was a celebrated victory that greatly enhanced his military reputation.⁸³ His fame assured, Sir John remained in Gascony almost continuously until about 1361, with considerable success. The financial rewards accrued from his service to the Crown were probably far in excess of what he could have hoped to have received in the exclusive employment of the earl of Devon: as captain of Calais he had an annual wage of £200, and in

⁷⁷ *Adae Murimuth*, p. 125; *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337-1396*, ed. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), pp. 40-2

⁷⁸ PRO E101/312/13

⁷⁹ *CPR* (1345-8), p. 528; *Ibid.*, (1348-50), p. 536

⁸⁰ Hugh E. L. Collins, *The Order of the Garter 1348-1461* (Oxford 2000), pp. 14, 289; *La Vie du Prince Noir, by Chandos Herald*, ed. Diana B. Tyson (Tubingen 1975), p. 120

⁸¹ Wrotesley, *Crecy*, pp. 32-3, 92, 124, 126, 141

⁸² Rymer's *Foedera*, III, i, 142; *CCR* (1346-9), p. 465; Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years' War. II - Trial by Fire* (London 1999), pp. 35-6

⁸³ *Scalacronica*, p. 137; Sumption, *Trial by Fire*, pp. 77-8

Gascony he was one of the most highly paid royal officials, with an annuity of £500, compared to a wage of eight shillings a day as an earl's banneret in war time.⁸⁴ Cheverston's duties as Seneschal were varied and went beyond the call of conventional soldiering: in 1359, for example, he was charged by Edward III with negotiating an extension of the English alliance with Castile.⁸⁵ There is, unfortunately, little evidence of how Cheverston disposed of his wealth, as he outlived his male heirs and invested little of his fortune in new land. He was, however, a notable creditor of the Crown, and in 1370 he agreed to quitclaim all debts owing to him in return for a lifetime annuity of two hundred marks from the issues of the port of Southampton.⁸⁶

Yet, despite his prolonged absences from England, Sir John was never far removed from the orbit of his lord and father-in-law. He occasionally used the patronage at his disposal as Seneschal to the benefit of other Courtenay familiars. In November 1351, for example, he appointed as his constable in Bordeaux – his deputy, with special responsibility for finances in the duchy – William Pomeroy, a canon of Exeter cathedral, while the previous incumbent languished in a French prison: William was the brother of Sir Henry Pomeroy, who had previously served under Cheverston in the earl of Devon's retinue. The gesture proved to be ill-advised, however, as Pomeroy soon fell into arrears, was found to be insufficiently qualified, and eventually had to be bailed from prison by his patron.⁸⁷ Another Bordeaux constable, John Harewell, was the kinsman of the William Harewell who had served in the retinue of Hugh Courtenay II in 1325, and who had enfeoffed the earl with a small estate in Bruckland (Devon) in 1339.⁸⁸ Throughout his time in Gascony, Cheverston also worked closely with the earl of Oxford, John Vere, Hugh III's cousin and Cheverston's immediate superior at Crecy.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ *CCR* (1346-9), p. 465; PRO E101/166/11, ff. 1338-9; E101/312/13

⁸⁵ *CPR* (1361-4), p. 18

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* (1367-70), p. 374

⁸⁷ E. C. Lodge, 'The Constables of Bordeaux in the Reign of Edward III', *EHR*, 1 (1935), p. 233; *CCR* (1360-4), p. 333; *Ibid.* (1364-8), p. 246; PRO E101/168/8; E101/170/12

⁸⁸ *Cal. Pap. Pets.*, ii, 425; *CPR* (1324-7), p. 168; BL Add. MS 49359, ff. 63v.-64r.

⁸⁹ Wrotesley, *Crecy*, p. 92; *CCR* (1349-54), p. 201; *CPR* (1354-8), p. 348

Cheverston's neighbour in south Devon, Sir Guy Bryan, prospered equally well from the war. A contemporary and personal friend of Edward III, Guy was a hugely successful soldier and statesman, who latterly became admiral of the Western Fleet (1356-71). Immense prestige was attached to the admiralty, a post not normally bestowed upon jobbing knights: Sir Philip Courtenay, a younger son of Hugh III, succeeded Bryan as admiral, and the young Earl Edward Courtenay served out his military apprenticeship in that office in 1383-5.⁹⁰ Sir Guy, also a marcher baron of Pembrokeshire, took the opportunity to reacquaint himself with his English estates, since the war with France made it necessary for him to reside permanently near a major south coast seaport. He immediately bought himself friendship and influence in the region by making his sister Elizabeth available for marriage to the earl of Devon's eldest son.⁹¹ From 1366, he was associated with the earl of Devon in commissions of peace in Devon, and he acquired further wealth and influence in western England through his second wife, Elizabeth Montagu, a daughter-in-law of the earl of Salisbury, and Bishop Grandisson's sister. Some of Guy's growing influence and good fortune may have rubbed off on to his younger brother, who became bishop of St. David's in 1349, while his principal clerk John Gough succeeded in amassing an impressive collection of canonries and other ecclesiastical benefices: Gough was later instrumental in helping Guy to establish a college of secular canons on his coastal manor of Slapton (Devon) in 1374.⁹²

Famous knights such as Cheverston and Bryan were of course exceptional. For most in the region, the fortunes of war were more mixed and came at a cost to both self and society. For the inhabitants of coastal towns, defence was a basic social obligation rather than a career opportunity, and usually had to be funded privately. While Plymouth may have been flattered by the attentions of the county elite and was generally well-equipped to weather sustained battering from enemy fleets, most settlements along the south coast were little more than fishing villages and inevitably fared less well. In 1347, for example, parliament heard how

⁹⁰ *HBC*, pp. 76, 138-9

⁹¹ Above, p. 174-5

⁹² *Complete Peerage*, ii, 361; *Cal. Pap. Pets.*, iii, 252, 268, 272, 315, 415, 436, 444, 568; *HBC*, p. 378; *RTB*, i, 345, 401-2

the tiny port of Budleigh in east Devon had lost 141 men and fifteen vessels in the recent conflict.⁹³ The episcopal borough of Teignmouth was somewhat larger than Budleigh and, judging by its contribution to naval levies, had been reasonably prosperous until the mid-fourteenth century; but it lacked a proper harbour and was ill-prepared for the depredations of 1340, from which it never fully recovered, and its economic fortunes declined markedly thereafter.⁹⁴ Earlier, in 1337, the king had received a lukewarm response to his request for a subsidy from the “*communitate Devoniensi*”, partly on account of the expense already incurred in preparing the county’s naval defences.⁹⁵ War may have promoted spectacular economic growth in the thriving urban centres of Dartmouth and Plymouth, but for many other communities the financial and human toll was great and intolerable.

The *laissez-faire* approach of the Crown to coastal defence, combined with constantly shifting international alliances, meant that the war efforts of local communities were frequently out of kilter with official royal policy. All too often, whether by accident or design, the vessels of friendly nations were mistaken for enemy shipping and plundered, placing the perpetrators beyond the law. As early as 1341, Earl Hugh had been given a wide-ranging commission to investigate acts of piracy against Spanish ships by various sailors of Dartmouth and Plymouth, and the Cornish ports of Falmouth and Looe. The Crown’s concerns over escalating piracy were justified, since continued raids by Dartmouth sailors on merchant ships from Brittany were in danger of jeopardising the fragile English alliance with the duchy.⁹⁶ Complaints of assaults by Devon mariners on Breton, Spanish, and Flemish shipping, proliferated in the 1340s.⁹⁷ Most involved understandable instances of mistaken identity, but a few, such as the attack on the Spanish ship *St. Mary Magdalene* by a fleet of thirteen Dartmouth-registered vessels whose sailors plundered the freight of wine and threatened to kill the ship’s master if he sought justice, clearly went beyond the norms of

⁹³ *RP*, ii, 213

⁹⁴ Above, p. 245; Kowaleski, ‘Port Towns’, p. 55

⁹⁵ *RJG*, i, 300-1

⁹⁶ *CPR* (1340-3), pp. 306-7

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* (1340-3), pp. 210, 306, 451, 454, 577; *Ibid.* (1348-50), pp. 78, 385

privateering, and can only be described as deliberate piracy.⁹⁸ The resumption of war with France in 1369 brought a fresh wave of complaints, in particular from Portuguese merchants in the wake of the Black Prince's recent intervention in Castilian politics.⁹⁹

6.4 WAR AND THE BALANCE OF SEIGNORIAL POWER

A less obvious side-effect of war was the subtle changes it heralded in the local balance of power, primarily because the Black Prince was obliged to lean more heavily than his predecessors upon the economic and human resources of the duchy of Cornwall. Since the Conqueror had arrived in person to quell rebellion in Exeter in 1068, royalty had rarely graced the south-west with its presence: although remote, the region had usually given the Crown little trouble. Edward I visited Devon on two occasions in the late-thirteenth century, but it was not until the 1340s that the county established itself as a major fixture in the royal itinerary. Royalty of all hues now discovered its benefits as a departure point for Aquitaine and the Iberian peninsula, as a source of men, equipment and victuals, and even as a pleasant alternative location for hunting. Edward III's daughter, Joan, set sail from Plymouth to Bordeaux, *en route* to join her fiancée, Pedro the Cruel of Castile; while her mother, Queen Philippa, visited Exeter Cathedral in 1349 during a prolonged tour of the south-west.¹⁰⁰

But it was the Black Prince who, by adopting Plymouth as his military headquarters, really set Devon on the political map. An inkling of things to come was signalled in 1346 when the Prince created a monopoly on the purchase of all tin produced in the duchy lands in Cornwall and Devon; a fixed price was to be paid to merchants so that the tin could be sold abroad and the profit used to fund the Prince's war effort. Not surprisingly, the measure proved unpopular and in October 1347 the Prince's ministers had recourse to rebuke the bailiffs of Dartmouth and Plympton for continuing to sell the commodity at market value.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid. (1345-8), p. 100

⁹⁹ Ibid. (1369-74), pp. 281, 488-9; *CCR* (1370-74), pp. 270-1, 385; Ibid. (1374-7), pp. 27, 310, 488

¹⁰⁰ Orme, *Exeter Cathedral*, pp. 47-8

¹⁰¹ *BPR*, i, 33, 92, 121

In 1351, he further alienated the burgesses of Dartmouth by attempting to reinstate local customs duties on imports and exports, recently waived by Edward III in the town's new charter of incorporation.¹⁰² The Prince was not, however, entirely insensitive to the effects of his demands, and in 1358 he ordered his steward, John Dabernon, to assess the economic impact of the monopoly on the livelihoods of Devon tanners.¹⁰³

As the Prince assumed greater responsibilities in continental affairs, the burden on the south-west grew ever greater. In the summer of 1355, he stayed at Plympton Priory for nearly two months while bad weather hampered the launch of his expedition to Gascony: the outcome of that venture was the capture of the king of France, who was brought back to Plymouth in chains in May 1357.¹⁰⁴ To fund operations, a compulsory purchase order was placed on stocks of wine in the ports of Dartmouth, Plymouth and Fowey, for re-sale by duchy agents, and four hundred quarters of grain were purveyed to victual the Prince's household.¹⁰⁵ Such large quantities of foodstuffs were hard to come by in a county not richly endowed in corn, and to forestall a further demand for two thousand quarters of oats, as fodder for the horses of the expedition force, the 'good men' of Devon proffered a payment of £200 cash in lieu.¹⁰⁶ Individuals also felt the pinch of tighter seignorial control in the duchy. Sir John Archdeacon (d. 1378), for example, found himself being relentlessly pursued for the payment of several thousand pounds worth of tin and wreck of sea allegedly removed by him from the duchy estates.¹⁰⁷

The Prince spent much of 1362 and 1363 in Plymouth as he prepared to cross the channel once more to rule Aquitaine in person, and it was to Plymouth again that he finally returned in 1370, gravely ill, and convalesced in Plympton Priory for four months.¹⁰⁸ If the Prince's relations with his tenants and merchants were sometimes strained, what did the earl of Devon make of his renewed interest in the south-western demesnes? Coinciding as it did

¹⁰² Ibid., ii, 1

¹⁰³ Ibid., ii, 147

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., ii, 79-88

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., ii, 77

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., ii, 105, 107

¹⁰⁷ *CPR* (1343-5), pp. 66, 74, 401; Ibid. (1348-50), p. 23; Ibid., (1350-4), p. 171; *BPR*, ii, 19-21

with Hugh Courtenay's effective withdrawal from active public life at the national level, did the Prince's intrusion pose a serious challenge to the earl's local hegemony by, for example, providing a more attractive and lucrative avenue of military service? Is there a sense in which local society, in which the Courtenays' ascendancy had long been accepted, was 'crowded' by the co-existence of two great noblemen?

There is in fact remarkably little evidence of antagonism between earl and duke, but rather signs that the two enjoyed a respectably cordial relationship. This had almost certainly been facilitated by the earl of Devon's banneret, John Cheverston, who had fought at Crecy under the nominal command of the Prince, and who was now directly accountable to him in his role as Seneschal of Gascony. There was initially some disagreement over jurisdiction in Exeter - the farm of which belonged to the duke of Cornwall - when the Prince's ministers removed Cheverston from his position as keeper of the castle gate, which was in the gift of the earl of Devon; but thereafter the Prince acted benevolently towards his Seneschal, remembering him from time to time with small gifts, such as armour or venison taken from Dartmoor.¹⁰⁹ Sir William Bigbury, a former ward of Cheverston who had joined his retinue in Calais in 1348 while John was captain of the town's garrison, was later to be found in the Prince's company, following him overseas on his Aquitaine expedition in 1355. Bigbury was also a witness to two of the earl of Devon's charters, and either he, or his son, also William, fought in the retinue of Sir Philip Courtenay, Admiral of the Western Fleet, in 1372-3.¹¹⁰

Another point of common interest was the Prince's bachelor, Sir Theobald Grenville (d. c. 1381), a former ward of William Cheverston, who had fought alongside Sir John Cheverston at Crecy in 1346. Richard Grenville, probably Theobald's uncle, accounted as steward of the household of Sir Thomas Courtenay, the earl of Devon's younger brother, in South Pool (Devon) in 1341-2, and acted as feoffee to Thomas and his wife Muriel in 1344. Richard's son, William, travelled abroad in the service of John Cheverston in 1338, and

¹⁰⁸ *BPR*, ii, 192-8, 200-3; *The Anonimale Chronicle*, ed. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), p. 67

¹⁰⁹ *BPR*, ii, 53, 160, 183; *Ibid.*, iv, 246

¹¹⁰ *CFR* (1347-56), p. 92; Rymer's *Foedera*, III, i, 325; BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 68r., 71; PRO E101/31/31 (account of Philip Courtenay)

Richard was himself later appointed as Cheverston's attorney while the latter went on pilgrimage to Santiago in 1364. He was also active in purchasing land and property in the immediate vicinity of Cheverston's home town of Malborough. In 1361, he acquired the manor of West Portlemouth, formerly the property of William Cheverston, jointly with Hugh Courtenay III, and in the following year he made another joint purchase with John Horncastle, one of the earl's clerks; as neither property appears in subsequent Courtenay IPMs, it is difficult to determine precisely what Richard was up to, although it is reasonable to assume he was acting as a land agent on behalf of the earl. In 1368, Richard, along with John Ferrers and Sir William Daumarle, one of the earl of Devon's knights, paid John Cheverston two hundred marks for the reversion of the manor of Soar Bosun, which had been part of his daughter, Matilda's, dowry: it seems that Cheverston, conscious of having no direct heirs, was making arrangements to disperse his sizeable estate on the south coast among the familiars of both himself and his lord.¹¹¹ John Harewell, Cheverston's constable of Bordeaux in 1362-4, was also patronised by the Black Prince who promoted him to the role of chancellor of Gascony, a post which he occupied until 1370.¹¹²

Cheverston was not formally retained by the Prince – his existing seignorial relationship with the earl of Devon may have precluded him from accepting livery – but Hugh III's second eldest son, Edward Courtenay, was a knight in the ducal household from at least 1359, when he received compensation of £55 for horses lost in Gascony. Sir Edward witnessed at least one of the Prince's *acta*, and in 1361 he was granted a lifetime annuity of one hundred marks for past and future good service.¹¹³ Edward's younger brothers, Philip (d. 1406) and Peter (d. 1405), and their nephew, Hugh Courtenay V (d. 1374), also began their careers in the service of the Black Prince, who had knighted all three after the Battle of Najera in 1367.¹¹⁴ Sir Andrew Luttrell (d. 1378), the earl of Devon's son-in-law, served the Prince in

¹¹¹ Wrotesley, *Crecy*, pp. 32-3, 92; *CFR* (1327-37), pp. 26, 83; CRO AR 12/35 (household account roll of South Pool, 1341-2); *CPR* (1364-7), p. 9; *Treaty Rolls Preserved in the PRO, 1337-1339* (1972), i, 136-7, 140-2; *DFF*, ii, 1467, 1489, 1497, 1532, 1542

¹¹² *Cal. Pap. Letts.*, iii, 509; *BRUO*, ii, 872-3

¹¹³ *BPR*, ii, 155, 183; *Ibid.*, iv, 101, 246, 271, 388, 404, 479

¹¹⁴ *La Vie du Prince Noir*, p. 120; Froissart, *Chronicles of England*, ed. Johnes (1857), i, 736

Gascony from 1355, and had perhaps been induced by him to marry Elizabeth Courtenay, 'the king's kinswoman', after the death of her first husband, John Vere. Elizabeth later attended her cousin's wife, Princess Joan, and secured a royal annuity of £200. It was Sir Andrew too who had petitioned the Prince to compensate Edward Courtenay for the loss of his horses.¹¹⁵

Mutual dependence on John Cheverston, and an overlapping of their respective affinities, may therefore have paved the way for a good working relationship between duke and earl. In October 1362, Earl Hugh granted the Prince the marriage of his grandson and heir, Hugh V, which the Prince wanted for Matilda Holand, a daughter of his late retainer, Thomas, earl of Kent (d. 1360); the earl granted the couple his manors of Sutton Courtenay (Berkshire) and Waddeson (Bucks.), while the Prince supplied Matilda with a dowry of one thousand marks.¹¹⁶ The ducal network also encompassed James, Lord Audley (d. 1386), heir to the Martin family's baronies of Dartington and Barnstaple, although the connection here probably owed more to the proximity of his patrimonial estate of Heleigh (Staffs.) to the Prince's county palatinate of Cheshire. In 1356, Audley was awarded an annual pension of £400 from the Cornish stannaries for his service in Poitiers, and he later had licence to hunt deer in the duchy's parks.¹¹⁷ Sir John Sully of Iddesleigh (Devon), a 'refugee' from the old Clare earldom of Gloucester, was another of the Prince's retainers.¹¹⁸

In short, the Prince was drawing men in time of war from a broad spectrum, and in doing so he cut across existing networks of lordship. This did not seem to offend the earl of Devon, however, who had long since resigned himself to the inconvenience of confinement occasioned by his illness, and was used to conducting military operations by proxy rather than in person, first through John Cheverston and then through his sons, Philip and Peter; allying himself to the Prince's cause and placing his familiars at his disposal was merely a continuation and extension of this practice. The Prince was of course not just any ordinary magnate, and his consanguinity with the Courtenays, however slight, made it easier for the

¹¹⁵ *BPR*, ii, 155, 202; *Ibid.*, iv, 251, 283, 476, 500

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, 194

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, 105, 197; *Ibid.*, iv, 291

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, 45-6, 99, 171

earl of Devon to integrate his affinity with the superior network of his cousin, without serious loss of face; the Prince concentrated on international politics, while the earl attended to affairs closer to home, thus avoiding a potentially serious falling out over the sudden intrusion of the former into the latter's 'country'.

Although incapacitated, the earl did not remain idle; while his relatives and knights ensured that the name of Courtenay continued to reverberate in the corridors of power or on the battlefields of France, the earl set about bolstering his authority at home and securing the material foundations of his dynasty. In this respect, illness had less severe implications than it would do for his grandson, Earl Edward Courtenay, struck by blindness in about 1400 and who found it increasingly difficult to sustain the dynamic grouping that had coalesced around his dynasty, enabling him to dominate county society. Hugh III's illness was clearly less serious, and in any case his offspring were still largely dependent upon him financially: there was, therefore, more of a sense of common purpose, with the earl's illustrious sons at the very heart of the affinity, actively promoting the fortunes of the main line in a way that was unimaginable just decades later, when faction and rivalry had shattered this unity.¹¹⁹

Now almost continually resident in the county, Hugh III established an impressive degree of control over the apparatus of local government. Although he did not succeed in 'packing' the local Bench with his familiars to the extent that his grandson would do – the composition of JP panels in the 1350s and 1360s, in any case tended to be more 'professional' than later on in the century – he did preside in person over all sessions of the peace and most other major commissions from 1350 until his death in 1377, and the majority of their personnel had some sort of association with his household.¹²⁰ The jostling for position in local government that had characterised the 1310s and 1320s when his father was earl, troubled Hugh III far less. This owed much to the fact that the current bishop of Exeter, in marked contrast to his predecessor, had no obvious desire to soil himself with the grime of secular politics. Grandisson had in any case found a useful ally in his nephew, Sir John

¹¹⁹ Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', p. 93

Montagu (d. 1390), son of his youngest sister, Katherine (d. 1349), wife of the first earl of Salisbury, having already drawn heavily upon his brother-in-law's influence at court in the troubled early days of his episcopate.¹²¹ Montagu sat continuously as a JP in Devon from 1361 until 1369, the year of his uncle's death, reinforcing the impression that he was the bishop's place-man in local government, although he was also independently powerful in his own right, having acquired an extensive estate in the county through his wife, the heiress of Thomas Monthermer.¹²²

James, Lord Audley (d. 1385), sat on the Bench only sporadically, and then perhaps only because service to the Black Prince had dragged him there from Staffordshire; otherwise he was a far less weighty presence in the south-west than his great-grandfather, William Martin, had been - although he did request to be buried in the Dominican friary at Exeter if he died in either Devon or Somerset - and consequently a less potent force in local politics.¹²³ In 1353, he had granted the reversion of most of his south-western estates to the king, indicating their low priority in his reckoning.¹²⁴ The duke of Cornwall's interest in local government was served principally by his steward, John Dabernon, who sat as a JP in Devon until 1364.¹²⁵

Despite the occasional mitigating presence of these men, the growing monopolisation by the earl of Devon of the Bench and other organs of local administration is unmistakeable. The JP appointments of December 1375, for example, the final to be made before the earl's death in 1377, included Hugh Courtenay III; Sir Guy Bryan, brother-in-law of the deceased Hugh IV; Sir John Dynham II, a second cousin and husband of his niece, Muriel; and Sir John Beaumont, an Okehampton tenant whose daughter Katherine had married Sir Hugh Luttrell (d. 1428), a younger son of the earl's son-in-law, Sir Andrew.¹²⁶ Among the bureaucratic element was Walter Clopton, kinsman of one of the first earl's servants and later a liveried

¹²⁰ Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls, pp. 75-6; *CPR* (1350-4), pp. 87, 450; *Ibid.* (1354-8), pp. 552; *Ibid.* (1361-4), pp. 64-5, 528; *Ibid.* (1367-70), pp. 192, 344; *Ibid.* (1374-7), pp. 135-6, 139

¹²¹ *CP*, vi, 60-8; ix, 143-4; *Ibid.*, xi, 387-8; *RJG*, i, 211, 243-4, 253

¹²² *CPR* (1361-4), pp. 64-5, 528; *Ibid.* (1367-70), p. 192

¹²³ *Ibid.* (1361-4), pp. 65, 528; *Ibid.* (1374-7), p. 135; *Testamenta Vetusta*, ed. Nicholas Harris Nicolas (London, 1825), pp. 117-8

¹²⁴ *DFP*, ii, 1426, 1428

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* (1350-4), pp. 87, 450-1; *Ibid.* (1354-8), p. 552; *Ibid.* (1361-4), pp. 64-5

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* (1384-7), p. 139; *Sheriffs*, p. 35; *Parliaments*, pp. 193-4

lawyer of Earl Edward; and John Cary, a lawyer who lent money to Earl Edward in the 1380s.¹²⁷ The sheriff of Devon at that time was Nicholas Pomeroy, a former retainer of John Cheverston, and the MPs returned for Devon in the following April were Sir John Beaumont and Sir William Bonville; the latter being a neighbour of the Courtenays in east Devon, who later wore Earl Edward's livery.¹²⁸

With the Courtenay affinity having insinuated itself into most of the major offices of local government, can it therefore be concluded that Devon had obtained the "single lineage" system of political leadership described by Martin Cherry?¹²⁹ Clearly not - at least not in any substantive sense - as I hope this chronicle of rapidly fluctuating fortunes in the late-thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has shown. Successful magnate lordship was not simply a matter of crude territorial domination, or monopolising the offices of local administration, and the semblance of unity and political hegemony arrived at in Devon in the 1380s was rather less permanent than Cherry had allowed for. It depended on a happy confluence of factors: on the strength of leadership emanating from the earls of Devon; on the Courtenays' continued good relations with other magnates in the south-west; and above all on the goodwill and collaboration of the Crown. These conditions, which paved the way for an Indian summer in relations between earl and Crown in the 1380s, were mainly lacking in subsequent decades, when the fragility, and perhaps unfeasibility, of this single-dynasty politics was exposed.

Unoccupied by the demands of war, the earl focused his energies instead on improving his territorial position which, with the material needs of at least ten adult children to supply, had become an imperative. The most pressing demand on comital resources in this period came from the wives of his short-lived heirs. Elizabeth Bryan (d. 1375), widow of Hugh IV, survived her husband by over a quarter of a century: her dower consisted of lands outside the earl's own sphere of territorial interest in the south-west, but depriving the main line of them for a generation inevitably led to financial strain.¹³⁰ When contracting the

¹²⁷ Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', p. 71

¹²⁸ *Sheriffs*, p. 35; *Parliaments*, pp. 184-5; BL Add. Ch. 64320

¹²⁹ Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', p. 71

¹³⁰ *CPR* (1340-3), p. 282; *CIPM*, xiv, 107

marriage of Hugh and Elizabeth's son, Hugh V, in 1362, the earl was fortunate enough to find a fairy godfather in the Black Prince who compensated him for the unexpected expense of having to endow a second heir apparent with a handsome dowry of one thousand marks. Chastened by the experience of one widow, Hugh III acted more cautiously after the death of his grandson in 1374, persuading the widowed Matilda to hand over her portion in return for an annual rent payment of two hundred marks, even though the lands had been fixed on her by entail. This proved to be especially foresighted, as Matilda's Sutton Courtenay-Waddesdon (Berkshire/Bucks.) estate was by far the largest and most lucrative of the earldom's agricultural operations in the late 1380s, when most of the earl's other demesnes were in terminal decline.¹³¹

Given the earl's expensive misfortunes in finding an heir, it is hardly surprising that his younger sons had to content themselves with less prestigious, but economically more prudent, marriages to local heiresses. With the daughters, however, he could not escape so lightly. Hugh III's eldest, Elizabeth (d. 1395), had to be supported from the patrimonial estate after she was widowed in 1350, and in 1356 the earl purchased half of the manor of Whitford (Devon) to supplement her income. Fortunately the Black Prince was at hand once more to bail him out, and potential embarrassment was avoided when Elizabeth was found a new husband in Sir Andrew Lutrell and a generous pension from the Crown.¹³² On the other hand, the marriage of Elizabeth's younger sister, Katherine (d. 1399), to Sir Thomas Engayne of Huntingdonshire, in 1351, cost Hugh III a further six hundred marks.¹³³ The middle years of the fourteenth century, in any case a period of immense economic strain, proved to be financially crippling for the unfortunate earl.

Of his younger sons, Thomas (d. c. 1381) was wedded to the Church and easily provided for with property that had been bought originally for Hugh II's younger brother in

¹³¹ *CIPM*, xvi, 14, 325; *CCR* (1374-7), p. 52; BL Add. Ch. 64318; Above, chtp. 2

¹³² *CPR* (1348-50), p. 541; BL Add. Ch. 49359, f. 65; *CCR* (1354-60), pp. 325-6; *Ibid.*, (1377-81), pp. 9-11; Above, p. 174

¹³³ *CCR* (1349-54), p. 406

1308.¹³⁴ Sir Edward Courtenay married a rich Cornish heiress, Emmeline Dauney, and he too made little call on the comital purse.¹³⁵ But a spectacular trio of younger sons, William (d. 1395), Philip (d. 1406) and Peter Courtenay (d. 1405), were more prominent in public life – William as bishop of Hereford (1370-5) and London (1375-81), and archbishop of Canterbury (1381-96); Philip as admiral of the Western Fleet (1372-5), and lieutenant of Ireland (1383-6); Peter as the chamberlain (1388-90) of King Richard II – and had to be provided for accordingly. This necessitated a flurry of purchases of new land by the earl, which his sons eventually enjoyed in full after the death of their mother in 1391; Peter was the main beneficiary, his elder brothers having already secured a fair degree of financial independence in their own right.¹³⁶ The earl also left Philip and Peter the sum of one hundred marks each in his will.¹³⁷ Earl Hugh's generosity towards his progeny, constrained though it may have been at times by his own financial limitations, succeeded in enriching the main comital line and establishing for the first time independent cadet branches; that one of these lines, the 'Powderham' descendants of Sir Philip, became so independent that it precipitated faction and feuding within the affinity in the fifteenth century, was not an outcome that could have been foreseen by Hugh III, who in the fourteenth was concerned primarily with survival and setting his nascent comital dynasty on a sound financial footing.¹³⁸

CONCLUSION

Despite the thunder of war in the not-so-distant background, the reign of Edward III had ushered in a period of conciliation and relative calm in Devon, an impression that is reinforced by the arrival and successful tenure of a largely uncontroversial bishop. John

¹³⁴ 'Powderham Cartulary', ii, 208; *CPR* (1307-13), p. 212; *Ibid.* (1354-8), p. 516

¹³⁵ Above, p. 132

¹³⁶ BL Add. Ch. 49359, ff. 66r.-67r. (Towsington, 1344); 68r. (North Pool, 1346); 69v.-71r. (Norton, 1346); 68r.-68v. (Ponsford, 1347); 64r. (Stedcombe, 1351); 63 (Musbury, 1355); 65 (Whitford, 1356); 71r.-72r. (Corscombe, 1371); 72v.-73r. (Stewley, 1376); PRO C143/379/9 (Cadleigh, 1372); *CIPM*, xiv, 325; *Ibid.*, xvii, 1-9; *Ibid.*, xviii, 1142-6

¹³⁷ *RTB*, i, 381-2

¹³⁸ Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 71-2, 95-7

Grandisson's ministry symbolised an effective break with the tumult of the 1320s, his refreshingly orthodox approach to ecclesiastical government and independence of the court bringing a much needed element of stability to the county, that was only slightly disturbed by his spat with the Crown towards the end of the 1340s. On the secular front, a more sympathetic and enlightened king finally recognised and endorsed the Courtenays' claims to local leadership, and an amicable and more sustainable relationship was forged between locality and Crown, primarily through the agency of the Black Prince. War, although it delivered mixed fortunes to the communities of Devon, also contributed to this phase of settlement, by providing a focus for united activity and helping to lift the local economy from the depths of agrarian recession.

EPILOGUE

On 23 February 1377, there were uproarious scenes at a convocation of bishops summoned to St. Pauls to prosecute the heretic John Wycliffe, when the duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt, threatened to drag out the young bishop of London, William Courtenay, by the hair of his head. Bishop William, indignant at the vocal and boisterous support gathering around Wycliffe, Gaunt's protégé, had challenged the duke's high-handedness within his own cathedral, provoking a furious riposte: "You trust in your parents, who will not be able to help you; for they shall have enough to do defending themselves" (*Confidis in parentibus tuis, qui nihil tibi commodi praestere poterunt; habebunt enim satis tuendum de se ipsis*).¹ The duke's threat, although delivered heatedly, is a good illustration of how far the Courtenays had travelled in the course of the fourteenth century; elevating themselves from a position of relative obscurity and initial weakness, to one where their power and influence was widely recognised by the time of the second earl's death.

That position of strength was reinforced in the early years of the reign of Richard II – a son of the Black Prince - when the new earl of Devon and his ambitious uncles were much favoured by royal government. Earl Edward, who served as admiral of the Western Fleet in 1383-5 and marshal of England in 1384-5, had the grandiose title of 'Lieutenant of the duchy of Lancaster in Devon' bestowed on him in 1386 by John of Gaunt, under whom he had served his military apprenticeship in the 1370s.² Meanwhile, Sir Philip Courtenay's distinguished military career culminated in his appointment as lieutenant of Ireland in July 1383; earlier, in about 1378, Richard II had presented him with a valuable gift of two silver ewers on the occasion of his marriage.³ Sir Peter, by now a household knight, acted as the king's chamberlain in 1388-90, and both brothers had annuities made to them by the Black

¹ *Chronicon Angliae, 1328-1388*, ed. E. M. Thompson (R.S., lxiv, 1874), p. 120; Dahmus, *William Courtenay*, pp. 1, 37; Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (London, 1997), p. 37

² HBC, p. 139; BL Add. Ch. 13910

Prince confirmed and augmented early in the new reign.⁴ Even Bishop William was brought into the royal fold after mediating a reconciliation between Gaunt and the citizens of London, and his election as archbishop of Canterbury in the summer of 1381 was accompanied by appointment to the office of chancellor. Upon learning of William's death in 1396, Richard II ordered the body to be interred in Canterbury Cathedral, near the tomb of his father, the Courtenays' patron, over-riding the archbishop's testamentary wish to be buried in the graveyard of Maidstone parish church.⁵

Yet, despite these propitious outward signs, dark clouds were already gathering on the horizon, and the fragility of the Courtenays' position – which seems to have rested mainly on these ambitious cadet members successfully insinuating themselves at the court of the young and impressionable Richard II, and on cherished memories of their good relationship with the king's father and grandfather – was soon to be exposed. The abrasive Sir Philip proved unacceptable to the Anglo-Irish administration in Dublin, which resented the arrival of an 'outsider' and complained vociferously of his oppressive style of government in levying extraordinary taxes and demanding military service: he was eventually removed in 1386 and imprisoned for abuse of office.⁶ His successor in Ireland was the new royal favourite, Robert Vere, earl of Oxford (d. 1392), whose territorial strength was at that time being built up by a king anxious to assert his independent authority. One of the numerous grants made to him was the reversion of the extensive south-western estate of James, Lord Audley (d. 1386), forfeited in the previous year by Richard II's half-brother, John Holland (d. 1400), who had murdered the earl of Stafford while on campaign in Scotland. This estate, entailed by Audley on Edward III and his heirs in 1353, included the greater part of the former Martin baronies of

³ *CPR* (1381-5), pp. 291, 293; *House of Commons*, ii, 670-3; J. A. Tuck, *Richard II and the English Nobility* (London, 1973), pp. 80-1

⁴ *CPR* (1385-9), p. 383; *Ibid.* (1377-81), pp. 112, 246, 456-7; *CCR* (1377-81), pp. 189, 396; *Ibid.* (1381-5), p. 517; Chris Given-Wilson, *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity: Service, Politics and Finance in England, 1360-1413* (London, 1986), p. 283

⁵ Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 37, 77, 461-2; Dahmus, *William Courtenay*, pp. 228-9

⁶ *CCR* (1385-9), p. 49; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 273-4; J. A. Tuck, 'Anglo-Irish Relations, 1382-1393', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, lxix (1970), pp. 20-3

Dartington and Barnstaple, and its descent into Vere's hands therefore represented a major potential challenge to the earl of Devon's territorial supremacy.⁷

In the event, title to the Audley inheritance was easily recovered by Holand after Vere's disgrace and exile. The earl of Devon may initially have felt more comfortable with a minor nobleman as his neighbour – indeed, Archbishop William had been instrumental in securing his return to favour – but it was in fact John Holand who posed the first serious challenge to Courtenay authority since the 1320s.⁸ The cause of Holand, who portrayed himself as a victim of Vere's encroachment on the royal prerogative, was now being championed by the Appellants, who probably influenced his creation as earl of Huntingdon in June 1388, and who approved grants of land to him totalling two thousand marks in value. Richard II deemed it prudent to court once more his half-brother, and the consequent alliance bound Holand tightly to the Ricardian regime for the duration of the reign.⁹ Whilst the granting of the Audley estate to a royal kinsman was not in itself contentious, the earl of Huntingdon's subsequent intrigue in the south-west threatened for the first time to undermine Courtenay ascendancy there.

Holand began almost immediately to establish himself at Dartington, the former *caput* of the Martin family in Devon, where he oversaw the rebuilding of the old manor house, and proclaimed his allegiance by placing a wooden boss carved with the emblem of Richard II's white hart in the vaulted ceiling of the central porch.¹⁰ Apart from the Audley inheritance, Holand received a stream of royal patronage from the duchy of Cornwall and other south-western estates after 1388, leaving him with an income from land in the region that was probably not far short of the earl of Devon's; Courtenay may have been painfully aware of this at a time when his own revenues were plummeting.¹¹ At about the same time, Edward was omitted from the panel of JPs in the county – the first time this had happened to

⁷ *CPR* (1381-5), pp. 515-6; *DFF*, ii, 1426, 1428; PRO E210/5500, E210/9200; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 182-3

⁸ *CPR* (1385-9), pp. 99, 114-5, 122; PRO SC8/129/6431; Tuck, *Richard II*, p. 79

⁹ *RP*, iii, 250-1; *CPR* (1385-9), pp. 494-5; Saul, *Richard II*, pp. 243-5

¹⁰ Anthony Emery, *Dartington Hall* (Oxford, 1970); Pevsner, *Devon*, pp. 309-14

an earl since Hugh Courtenay III's illness in the middle of the fourteenth century – and had been replaced by Huntingdon by 1390. It appears that the newly puissant king was using Holand as an agent to establish a foothold for Ricardian lordship in a region of the country where it had previously been weak, and if Earl Edward had not actually fallen out of favour at court, his interests were being blatantly disregarded.¹²

Although initially there is no sign of friction between Devon and Huntingdon, the tension that must surely have ensued surfaced in 1392 when the earl of Devon was accused of having maintained a known felon. Robert Yeo, an esquire of the earl, had allegedly ordered his servant to murder one of John Holand's tenants, with whom he had quarrelled; Earl Edward, with the complicity of the sheriff of Devon, his cousin John Grenville, had succeeded in placing Yeo beyond the reach of the law by threatening commissioners and jurors, and by ignoring writs obtained against him. The incident provided the perfect excuse for Holand to politically embarrass and inconvenience his rival, and the trial that followed, which under normal circumstances might have been expected to have gone no further than a local commission where the earl could have controlled proceedings, resulted in Devon's imprisonment; at least three members of the judicial commission were personally connected to John Holand. He was released almost immediately, following protest by his fellow lords in parliament, who presumably feared similar fates, but the episode demonstrates the length that Huntingdon was prepared to go, probably confident of royal backing, in undermining the authority of one he perceived to stand in the way of his territorial ambitions.¹³

Richard II's hand in this affair may have been partly hidden in 1392, but his intentions were made plain in September 1397 when Holand was created 'duke of Exeter' and granted land in the south-west from the forfeited estates of the Appellants; this has been interpreted as part of a wider strategy of subordinating local power structures to the centre, or even by-passing those structures altogether. Earl Edward was not himself an Appellant, nor

¹¹ *CPR* (1385-9), pp. 518, 537; *Ibid.*, (1388-92), pp. 372, 394, 488; *Ibid.*, (1391-6), pp. 15, 70, 357; *Above*, pp. 106-7

¹² Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', p. 90; *CPR* (1388-92), pp. 136, 344

did he have particularly close links to them, but his territorially-based lordship in a distant part of the English realm where Richard enjoyed little support, had clearly become unacceptable to an increasingly paranoid and insecure king. This act had the effect of driving the Courtenays into opposition, and during the revolution of 1399 Sir Peter handed over control of Bristol Castle, where he was constable, to the usurper Henry Bolingbroke.¹⁴

Huntingdon, stripped of his recent gains, but not the earldom, plotted a counter-revolution to restore his half-brother to the throne, but was caught and executed as a traitor. This was due partly to betrayal, but it also reflected his failure to gain the support of the gentry in the south-west, where he had apparently hoped to start an uprising. Despite his tinkering, many parts of county government had proven resistant to Holand's entreaties, with sheriffs and MPs, for example, continuing to be drawn largely from the ranks of Courtenay familiars throughout the 1390s. The comital affinity, although severely compromised by the appearance of a rival magnate, was by now sufficiently strong and enmeshed in the social fabric to withstand Holand's transient challenge.

Yet, at the same time, notwithstanding the apparent return to normality in the county hierarchy, or the earl's subsequent enthusiastic support of Henry IV, the consensus that had held the affinity together for much of the fourteenth century was coming under strain. The onset of blindness in the earl from about 1400 was an unforeseen and protracted crisis, and the comital 'inner circle' proved to be rather less united in response than when it had accommodated the incapacity and withdrawal of Edward's grandfather in the 1340s and 1350s; whereas Earl Hugh had counted on the more-or-less unconditional support of kinsmen to deputise for him, the cadets in Edward's family were now wealthier and more independent, and therefore less pliant to his bidding. Combined with the death, within months of one another in 1405-6, of his uncles, Philip and Peter, on whom the family's access to curial circles in the 1380s had mainly depended, and the emergence of estranged members of the

¹³ *Select Cases before the King's Council*, ed. I. S. Leadham (Selden Soc., xxxv, Cambridge, 1918), pp. 77-81; Cherry, 'Courtenay Earls', pp. 89-91; Tuck, *Richard II*, pp. 148-9

¹⁴ Saul, *Richard II*, p. 383; Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles of the Revolution, 1397-1400: the Reign of Richard II* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 120, 223

affinity as alternative founts of lordship and patronage, the earls' claim to primacy in the fourteenth century was clearly subject to severe pressure in the fifteenth.¹⁵

Whether this amounted to a “crisis of patronage”, is more debatable. The earls had never been the “political pivot” of local society in any meaningful sense, nor did they aspire to be so; despite their territorial pre-eminence, other sources of lordship with no obvious attachment to the Courtenays had always co-existed in Devon, and not necessarily in conflict. Moreover, wielding local power successfully was not simply a matter of access to royal patronage, as the case of John Holand clearly demonstrates; maintaining loyalty and good faith was an altogether more subtle and informal process than merely distributing rewards and favours. The balance of power and influence in Devon had ebbed and flowed throughout the fourteenth century; what was different now, however, was the growing willingness of the Crown, starting with Richard II, to intervene directly in local affairs, where previous attempts had been limited in scope or effectiveness. In so doing, interests were trampled on or ignored, but it does not follow that the king was solely, or even primarily, responsible for the long-term decline of the Courtenay earls' fortunes in Devon, which had its origins in a loss of momentum and coherence in the comital affinity at the beginning of the fifteenth century. The force of personality that had bound men to the earls and established them at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy, failed spectacularly in the face of a more turbulent epoch, and the stability that the Courtenays had brought to local society over three generations, was now exposed and revealed to have been based on alarmingly tenuous foundations.

¹⁵ Cherry, ‘Courtenay Earls’, pp. 90-7

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