

Landowners and their Estates in the Forest of Arden in the Fifteenth Century*

By ANDREW WATKINS

Abstract

This paper studies the evolution of the seignorial economy in forest of Arden during the fifteenth century. This was a wood pasture area, whose resident landlords were mainly lesser peers, gentry, and smaller religious houses. In contrast to other areas in the later Middle Ages, where direct demesne exploitation by the lord was abandoned in favour of the leasing out, the Arden demesnes and their management were adapted to the particular circumstances of the fifteenth century to create home farms, while other manors were involved in commercial cereal cultivation, livestock raising, and generating cash from the woodland and industrial resources of the estate.

How did English landowners respond to the economic conditions of the fifteenth century? The better documented estates of the higher nobility and greater religious institutions suggest that the seignorial class experienced considerable reduction in revenue from their lands. Very few were able to innovate or modify their estate management to restore lost incomes, and their response was to abandon direct management and put their estates out to farm. However, income from this source declined as the fifteenth century progressed, and many greater lords, both lay and ecclesiastical, encountered hardship through lost revenues.¹ A different perspec-

tive on the experiences of the seignorial class is furnished by the study of the fortunes of the gentry and smaller religious institutions from more marginal areas. Postan was among the first to believe that the smaller landowner found the fifteenth century less uncomfortable than his social superior, while from his work on Owston Abbey in Leicestershire Hilton observed that smaller scale religious houses often fared better than their larger, wealthier counterparts. Dyer has described how a small landlord, John Brome, who lived in such a marginal area, the forest of Arden in Warwickshire, was able to thrive in economic conditions of the fifteenth century through astute and rigorous management of his lands. Other work on Warwickshire has shown that although Brome may have been the most dynamic, he was far from being the only member of the fifteenth-century Warwickshire gentry still utilizing their manors, while recently Miller has suggested that many smaller landlords throughout the country maintained some parts of their estates to feed their households.²

* I should like to thank Jean Birrell, Christopher Dyer, and Rodney Hilton for their advice and support in the preparation of this paper.
¹ J M W Bean, *The Estates of the Percy Family, 1416-1537*, 1958, pp 17, 26-7; C C Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society*, 1980, pp 164-72; R H Hilton, *The Economic Development of some Leicestershire Estates in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, 1947, pp 85-8; J A Raftis, *Ramsey Abbey*, Toronto, 1957, pp 292-5; E Searle, *Lordship and Community: Battle Abbey and its Banlieu 1066-1538*, Toronto, 1974, pp 324-37; J Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall 1300-1500*, 1970, pp 148-71; J M W Bean, 'Landlords' in E Miller, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, III, 1348-1500* [hereafter *Ag Hist III*], 1991, pp 568-74; F R H Du Boulay, 'A rentier economy in the Later Middle Ages: the archbishopric of Canterbury', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XVI, 1963-4, pp 427-38; B J Harris, 'Landlords and tenants in England in the later Middle Ages', *Past and Present*, XLIII, 1969, pp 146-7; C C Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages*, 1989, pp 27-48; R A L Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, 1943, pp 12-3; C Rawcliffe, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 1394-1521*, 1978, pp 10, 53, 107, 115, 133; R H Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500*, 1993, pp 197-8.

² M M Postan, 'Medieval agrarian society in its prime-England,' in M M Postan, ed, *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, I, 2nd ed, 1966, pp 595-6; Hilton, *Leicestershire Estates*, p 121; C C Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', *Midl Hist*, I, 1972, pp 1-14; A D Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden in the later Middle Ages', *AHR*, XXXVII, 1989, pp 17-23; A D Watkins, 'Society and economy in the northern part of the forest

This study seeks to contribute to our appreciation of the fifteenth-century seignorial economy by focusing upon the fortunes of the landowners, both peerage and gentry, lay and ecclesiastical, in the forest of Arden in Warwickshire, and their response to the particular circumstances of the fifteenth century. The Arden was a well-defined *pays* during the later Middle Ages. The enclosed landscape of woodland and pasture described by Leland in the early sixteenth century had already been established at the beginning of the previous century. The area did not experience the same degree of economic and social distress as those areas where over dependence on cereal production had often been superseded by the profitable, but socially destructive, grazing of sheep. Instead, the local economy of the Arden was based on cattle grazing and the exploitation of its woodlands, while the nature of its social institutions allowed the opportunity for economic individualism. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Arden had been colonized and substantially cleared through assarting, and such newly claimed land was usually given over to arable cultivation. By the fifteenth century pastoralism had become increasingly significant, while the importance of arable cultivation declined. The landscape which had developed during the dynamic colonization of the area, of small, enclosed fields, whose regulation lay beyond the scope of the village community, proved advantageous in livestock rearing. Cattle were widely kept by both lord and peasant, while many sheep were also pastured within the Arden although not on the same scale as in the Warwickshire Feldon. Both demesne and peasant producers cultivated wheat, barley, oats, drage, and peas and beans, and during

the course of the fifteenth century the pastoral economy of the area encouraged an increasing acreage to be given over to fodder crops, such as legumes and hay. The carefully managed woodlands of the area allowed the pursuit of timber by-occupations, the manufacture of wood based fuels and much gathering of underwood, fruits, game, wax, and honey, while within villages and hamlets resources were swelled through brewing, butchery, flax soaking, and the cultivation of hemp.³

Although its pastoral and woodland economies may have kept the local economy of the fifteenth-century Arden comparatively buoyant, the area was not isolated from the hardships which afflicted many parts of champion England. Within the Arden land no longer tilled by the plough became *frisc*, that is to say it lapsed from arable land into pasture, holdings were abandoned, buildings became ruined and grassy tofts took their place. Rents plunged in value on many estates, while arrears accumulated on a number of manors during the mid-fifteenth century, and decays and allowances are testimony to the decline and abandonment of holdings. In 1411 Coventry Cathedral Priory had 20 acres in Keresley waste 'which divers men...wont to hold All which now lie unoccupied'. Seignorial buildings, especially mills and barns, were allowed to fall into disrepair, some deteriorating so badly by the mid-fifteenth century that they passed into the lord's hands. However, not all these trends had detrimental effects on the Arden's rural economy. The movement towards pasture was especially beneficial, and by the 1430s demesnes at Middleton,

of Arden, Warwickshire, 1350-1540', unpublished PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1989, pp 124-68; C Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, 1992, pp 153-95; C Carpenter, 'The fifteenth-century English gentry and their estates' in M Jones, ed, *Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval Europe*, Gloucester, 1986, pp 36-60; *Ag Hist III*, pp 23-4, 575-6.

³ L Toulmin Smith, ed, *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales*, 1908, p 47. For the fifteenth-century economy of the Arden see: Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 1-14; C C Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, XXVII, 1981, *passim*; Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden', pp 17-23; A D Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden in the later Middle Ages', *Midl Hist*, XVIII, 1993, pp 19-32; Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', pp 124-299; A D Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey in the late 1490s', *Warwickshire Hist*, IX, 1994, pp 87-104.

Lea Marston, Maxstoke Castle, and Tanworth-in-Arden were all pasture, and substantial lands at Kingsbury and Sutton Coldfield were also given over to grazing. This is mirrored by the conversion of arable land to pasture on many peasant holdings. The greater fluidity of the land market, coupled with a relaxation of already weak tenurial status, allowed for the rise of peasant entrepreneurs.⁴ In the aftermath of the Black Death many demesnes continued to function more or less as before, with the emphasis very much on arable cultivation, until at least the 1380s, if not until the end of the fourteenth century. Those in the Arden at Astley, Kingsbury, Maxstoke Priory, and Nuneaton Priory, continued under direct management until the beginning of the fifteenth century.⁵ From then on many estates were put out to farm. In many instances landlords often retained an interest in the lands on their home manors, often initially farming out their more distant estates, such as the Bracebridges, who leased out their manor at Bracebridge in Lincolnshire by 1392, whilst retaining in hand their cluster of estates around Kingsbury. Nuneaton Priory also farmed out its more distant glebes and tithes in the fifteenth century, whilst retaining the manors closer to the nunnery at Horeston and Eton. Often as in the case of the Mountfords and Willoughbys, the home

manor was retained while the remaining estates were leased.⁶ This paper seeks to determine to what extent the fortunes of the landowners living within the forest of Arden during the fifteenth century correspond to the traditional view of the fortunes of the landlord during this period, which is characterized by adverse economic conditions, and as a consequence reduced incomes. Many lords chose to abandon direct exploitation of their lands, while many resorted to leasing out manors to farmers. In order to do this it will be necessary to examine the nature of the pastoral, arable, and woodland activities which existed on some of the Arden estates, the levels of investment by landlords into the buildings and other productive resources of the lands, and how estate management evolved in response to the particular economic circumstances of the period.

I

One of the most obvious features of the seignorial economy in the fifteenth-century forest of Arden was the development of the home farm on those manors where the lord was resident. These were to provide the household with grain, meat, dairy produce, fruit, and vegetables, and often made use of demesne and pasture land within hunting parks. This frequently involved the rationalization and reorganization of lands through enclosure and investment into the productive resources of the estate. Livestock was grazed and cereals cultivated, with most of the tasks being undertaken by wage labourers. To establish such a farm landlords often had to expand and consolidate their estates by taking up leases of lands in adjacent manors. Often this was characterized, as at Baddesley Clinton in the 1440s, by building up a compact block

⁴Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', pp 127-31, 140-45; Queen's College, Oxford, Warwickshire Mss No 7; Nottingham University Manuscripts Department [hereafter NUMD], MiM 167, MiM 175, MiD 4227; Birmingham Reference Library [hereafter BRL], Norton Mss 53; Staffordshire Record Office [hereafter SRO], D 641/1/2/269; Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust Record Office [hereafter SBT], DR 37/107/1; NUMD, MiL 5; SBT, BRT 1/3/180. For social structure of the Arden see R H Hilton, *Social Structure of Rural Warwickshire in the Middle Ages*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, IX, 1950. For rising families see Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, pp 30-1; Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden', pp 17-9; Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', pp 265-93.

⁵Warwick County Record Office [hereafter WCRO], CR 136/c150-c153, CR 136/c143; NUMD, MiM 162; Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], SC 6/1040/8-11; British Library [hereafter BL], Add Rolls 49752-4, 49757, 495759, 49764. The Freville estates at Lea Marston had already been put to farm by 1377: NUMD, MiM 165.

⁶NUMD, MiM 162; BL, Add Ch 48034, 48035, 48044/6, 48057, 84874, 84875, 49154; SBT, DR 37/73.

of leased lands of mixed tenurial status. During the same decade the Willoughbys were similarly able to increase the extent of their pastures in Middleton by leasing from the Botillers, while the gentleman, William Lisle of Moxhull, rented considerable lands from the Bingham in Middleton in 1456. Maxstoke Priory was similarly able to expand its resources through the acquisition of Hermitage farm in Little Packington and by leasing pasture for its horses in Kingsbury Park from the Bracebridges, while towards the end of the century Merevale Abbey leased the wood pastures and coppices of Bentley Park from the Lisles.⁷

Maxstoke Priory was a typical example of such a seignorial home farm. The earliest surviving account roll of the priory from 1345 suggests that from its creation in the previous year, the priory had been almost self-sufficient in foodstuffs, and even in the fifteenth century, when considerably reduced in numbers, the canons were still trying to live off their lands. By the mid-fifteenth century the priory was surrounded by hedged and ditched fields of arable, pasture, and meadow land, while above the house on the eastern side of the hills of the Blythe valley were extensive woodlands composed of coppice and great timber. Their lands had been further extended by the acquisition of a large, compact farm, Hermitage, in Little Packington, which lay adjacent to the priory manor in Maxstoke.⁸

Considerable efforts were made to follow good agricultural practices. Investment

was made in improving the ground by hedging and ditching. Often such work was quite specific in terms of length of hedging, and occasionally in depth of ditching, as in 1491 when a new ditch dug next to the 'great pool' in the park was specified as being as 'depe as the old dych'. The priory also improved and reclaimed land through stocking, a process of clearing trees and bushes from land which had become overgrown. By the fifteenth century such clearances on Arden estates were common, and were usually of demesne land which had fallen out of cultivation, suggesting landlords were finding it necessary to recover lands which had been allowed to lapse. At Maxstoke Priory in 1433 two mattocks were purchased for stocking, presumably to break and grub up the roots of the undergrowth. In 1443 a new stocking was created, while in 1449 eleven labourers were paid 43s 4d between them for extending part of the lord's park to create a pasture, to fell trees, and repair the ditch under the park pale.⁹

Some of the courtyards within the priory resembled a modern farmyard, containing barns, animal sheds, stables, an ox house, and stone sties built along the outer wall of the priory. Ubiquitous throughout the site were poultry: for example, in 1449-50 when the kitchener listed some 21 capons, 124 geese, and 271 hens in his care. There were also large numbers of pigs within the walls, with the cellarer reporting in 1442 6 boars, 39 sows, and 81 piglets.¹⁰ The priory also maintained a dairy herd, and in 1442 this consisted of a bull and 19 cows, with 26 calves, which produced 36 stone of cheese, 176 gallons of milk, and 10 gallons of butter.¹¹ The canons also maintained

⁷ For home farms on estates in the fifteenth century see *Ag Hist III*, pp 23-4; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp 68-9. For those in Warwickshire see Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp 176-80; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 4-5; NUMD, MiM 131/33, MiD 4462; Bodleian Library [hereafter Bod Lib], Ms Trinity 84, p 22, 50, 98, 108; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 94-7.

⁸ PRO, SC 6/1258/7; *Victoria County History of Warwickshire* [hereafter *VCH*], IV, p 184; Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', p 51. The topography of the priory estate in Maxstoke has been reconstructed using evidence drawn from the cartulary: Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 2, 20, 33, 39, 50, 52, 83, 99, 100, 102, 107, 109, 134; J R Holliday, 'Maxstoke Priory', *Trans Birmingham Arch Soc*, V, 1878, pp 64-80; SBT, DR 671/30-1 (Survey of Lord Leigh's lands at Maxstoke, 1776).

⁹ Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 8, 14, 24, 33, 39, 52, 62, 72, 99, 100, 107, 110, 125, 128, 134, 139, 213, 219, 225, 227, 228, 232, 239, 259, 263. For the recovery of overgrown lands on other Arden estates see: Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 5; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i-iii); Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, pp 10-11.

¹⁰ Holliday, 'Maxstoke Priory', pp 64-5; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 15, 24, 33, 99, 244, 113, 143.

¹¹ Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 129, 132, 134; SBT, DR 37/114.

beef animals, having a herd of 46 steers, kine, bullocks and heifers in 1442, which by 1449 had expanded to 69 store beasts. Although some were sent to market, most animals were slaughtered to feed the household, which by the mid-fifteenth century numbered some 30 brethren, servants, guests, and children.¹²

It is well known that members of the gentry were involved in maintaining home farms. The Mountfords of Coleshill kept small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep in their parks at Coleshill, Kingshurst, and Hampton-in-Arden to feed their household. The careful management of demesne pasture and meadows at Middleton in the late 1440s enabled the Willoughbys to reorganize their lands for grazing, while the Ferrers of Tamworth seem to have created a home farm around their castle at Tamworth. Maxstoke Priory was not the only religious house to be involved in cattle grazing. Towards the end of the century Merevale Abbey owned considerable numbers of cattle, with a dairy herd, store beasts, and a beef herd. Incidental references suggested that other families such as the Ardens, Bracebridges, Clintons, Ferrers of Tamworth, and Harewells may also have kept animals on their demesnes during the fifteenth century.¹³ Members of the peerage also established home farms. At Astley Castle the Greys maintained a small dairy herd, usually of about a dozen cows, and a small store herd to supply meat. There was another herd of beef animals on their manor of Weddington, near Nuneaton, and beasts were interchanged between the two manors. Grey was not the only member of the peerage to create a home farm with animals grazing amid his parklands. By the mid-fifteenth century on the duke of Buckingham's

estate at Maxstoke Castle, the park and parts of the demesne had been converted into grazing for cattle and sheep, and also deer and horses.

In a number of instances a wider estate was integrated into such a system.¹⁴ Beasts were fattened on the earl of Warwick's pastures of Wedgnoek Park during the first half of the fifteenth century, a dairy herd maintained on his estate at Claverdon, whilst animals were grazed on other Beauchamp manors at Lighthorne and Moreton Morrell. Elsewhere on the earl's lands grains were cultivated at Budbrooke, while the large manor at Tanworth-in-Arden housed a horse stud and provided the rest of the estate with timber and underwood. Underpinning this whole operation was the profitability of pastoral farming. In 1418 Wedgnoek Park supported over 200 cattle and dairy cows and a flock of over 40 sheep. The earl's agents, as well as travelling to buy Welsh animals from the market towns of the Severn valley, often dealt directly with drovers from Wales. A herd of animals accompanied the household of the countess of Warwick on her travels in 1421. Wedgnoek was the central manor of this wider estate, and its pastures not only supported many cattle and sheep, but its woodlands yielded faggots and timber. These manors in Warwickshire were in turn only part of a much wider estate economy, which saw the Beauchamp's demesne managers transfer cattle from their lands at Barnard Castle in County Durham, to their Midland residences.¹⁵

¹² SBT, DR 37/114; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 129.

¹³ SBT, DR 37/73; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i-iii); Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 95-7; Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden', pp 96-7; Dyer, *Lords and Peasants*, p 215; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p 172.

¹⁴ WCRO, CR 136/c152; Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden', pp 15-6; SRO, D 641/1/2/269-276; BRL, DV2 168236; PRO, SC 6/1040/15; Maxstoke Castle, Fetherstone-Dilke Mss (I am greatly indebted to Captain C B Fetherstone-Dilke for making this document available to me); Rawcliffe, *The Staffords*, pp 69-70.

¹⁵ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, pp 4, 20; WCRO, CR 1886/484-88, DR 895/8/11-20; Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden', p 22; SBT, DR 37/107/1-29, DR 37/108/30-52; Watkins, 'Cattle grazing in the forest of Arden', pp 13-5; C D Ross, 'The household accounts of Elizabeth Berkeley, countess of Warwick, 1420-1', *Trans Bristol and Gloucestershire Arch Soc*, XXXIV, 1951, p 90; K B McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 1973, p 194.

It was not only the earls of Warwick who were able to integrate their estate. As we have seen the Mountfords of Coleshill made direct use of their demesnes at Coleshill, Kingshurst, and Hampton-in-Arden. Maxstoke Priory continued to make use of its glebe rectories at Tanworth-in-Arden, Aston Cantlow and Long Itchington, while Merevale Abbey continued to exploit its lands at Pinwall and Seal, growing grains on its Leicestershire estates, and grazing cattle on its woodland Arden manors.¹⁶ Less common was the landlord who was raising livestock for the market. The cattle grazing of John Brome of Baddesley Clinton is well documented, and he often raised herds of seventy or so beef animals for sale to butchers. Other landlords were also selling beasts at market. In 1449–50 Maxstoke Priory sold 16 steers, 6 calves and 15 sheep, while the size of herds at Merevale Abbey clearly suggest that the monks were involved in commercial grazing. At the Beauchamp's estate of Wedgnoek, cattle grazing generated a good cash income. Sales of cattle and sheep to butchers from Warwick, Birmingham, Coventry, and occasionally London, were worth £68 12s 3d, while in 1424 such sales generated £53 2s 5d, whilst in an exceptional year, 1431, the sale of 162 cattle brought the estate £100 17s 4d.¹⁷

II

On a number of home farms cereals and legumes were grown. At Baddesley Clinton only about 30 acres, out of a demesne of some 300 acres, were sown with wheat, along with crops for animal feed. Much of the harvest was consumed by Brome's household, but some was preserved and stored in barns while Brome awaited a

better price before sale. Similarly peas, barley and oats were cultivated at Astley, mainly for livestock fodder. Cereal production was also revived at Moxhull and Middleton during the late 1440s, and at the latter location seed grains were purchased, and payments made for ploughing, harrowing, hoeing, reaping, binding, threshing, and winnowing. Interestingly, as at Baddesley Clinton, only somewhere between 10 and 20 acres were cultivated out of a total demesne of around 300 acres. Even so sufficient grains and legumes were gathered at Middleton in 1446–7 to employ Richard of the Lee for four days to cart them from the fields to the manor's barns. Small acreages of wheat and oats were cultivated at Wedgnoek, again usually well under 20 acres.¹⁸ Cereals and grains were grown at Maxstoke Priory during the 1440s, with quantities of grain and legumes held back for seed. In 1442 nearly 140 acres were sown with peas, wheat, and barley, but this would appear to be an unusually large acreage, as details from the late 1440s suggest that more often only about 60 acres was sown, with wheat usually composing at least two-thirds. Payments made to labourers indicate that Merevale Abbey was still cultivating its arable lands in the late 1490s.¹⁹

An important supply of crops to both the religious houses and the gentry households came from tithe. Merevale Abbey continued to collect tithes in kind. Local officials were paid as collectors, while the monks invested in maintenance of barns to store tithe produce at Moorbarn, Woodbarn, Witherley, and Twycross,

¹⁶ Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 6; WCRO, CR 136/c150–c152, c154; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i–iii); WCRO, CR 1886/484.

¹⁷ Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 98, 109, 133–4; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 94–5; WCRO, MIR 1. The calculations of acreage sown is based upon information on yields given in J Z Titow, *Winchester Yields*, 1972, p 13; W O Ault, *Open-Field Farming in Medieval England*, 1972, pp 20, 38; B M S Campbell, 'Agricultural progress in medieval England: some evidence from eastern Norfolk', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXVI, 1983, p 30; D Oschinsky, *Walter of Henley*, 1971, pp 323–5.

¹⁸ SBT, DR 37/73; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 11, 105, 127, 136, 137, 142; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 94–5.

¹⁹ Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 6–10; SBT, DR 37/114; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 94–5; WCRO, CR 1886/484, 486, 488.

while a tithe barn was constructed by the abbey towards the end of the medieval period at Newhouse. In some years Maxstoke Priory collected grains and legumes from two glebe rectories at Aston Cantlow and Tanworth-in-Arden, which were a mixture of crops harvested from the glebe lands and of tithe from their parishioners. In some years grains and legumes from both estates were sold, such as in 1441 when 51 quarters of wheat, 45 quarters of barley, and one rick of peas, collected at Aston Cantlow were sold, or at Tanworth-in-Arden the following year when 45 quarters of wheat and 3 quarters of peas were sent to market, while in others such as 1442 some 17 quarters of wheat, 47 quarters of barley, and 47 quarters of peas were carted to Maxstoke to be consumed by the household.²⁰ Members of the gentry also made good use of tithe grains. The Willoughbys leased tithes of parishes that neighboured Middleton and the Mountfords similarly farmed the tithes of Bickenhill and Coleshill. It is interesting to note that when John Brome purchased seed for his estate, he not only patronized the grain merchants of Warwick market, but also went to the rector of Lapworth and vicar of Rowington presumably buying from them tithe grains for seed.²¹

Limitations in surviving documents have meant that the role of the kitchen garden in the seignorial economy is better imagined than recorded. At Maxstoke Priory there were two walled gardens, that of the sacristy, and that of the infirmary. The latter was much the larger, and the wall was regularly maintained and its ditches kept in a good state of repair. It contained an orchard of apple and pear trees, lawns mown to provide herbage for livestock, a fishpond, and many hives. Garlic, leeks, onions, and cabbages were

sown, as well as industrial crops, such as hemp and flax, while the infirmary made a liquor, *acetum* or verjuice, from the apples from his orchard. The true value of the garden lay in providing the household with honey, fresh fruit, and vegetables, and although produce was sold it never amounted to a significant element in the income of the house.²² In 1458, for example, the sale of one quarter and six bushels of apples and eight gallons of *acetum* only brought in 21s, and sales of six bushels of apples, two pipes, and two gallons of *acetum* and garlic, only yielded 18s 11d. Kitchen gardens provided the countess of Warwick with fresh vegetables in 1420-1, while money was invested in the convent garden wall at Merevale Abbey in 1498. At Middleton investment was made in the gardens and orchard of the manor house. A garden gate was constructed in 1446 and in the same year hedges around the Hall Orchard were repaired, and extended by 14 rods in 1451. In this year John Degan was paid 7½d for three days work grafting an apple tree. By the time of the more detailed Willoughby household books of the 1510s and 1520s the garden and orchard were a flourishing and integral part of the estate economy. Payments are recorded for seed, while in 1520 the orchard, which presumably contained many of the same fruit trees as in the mid-fifteenth century, yielded crab apples for which payments were made for 'gryndyng of crabbys' to make verjuice.²³

²⁰ Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 94-5; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 11, 127, 137, 134-6, 105.

²¹ NUMD, 5/167/101(iii), MiA9 fos 7 v, 33-33 v; SBT, DR 37/74, DR 3/805.

²² For a discussion of seignorial gardens see J Harvey, 'Vegetables in the Middle Ages', *Garden Hist*, XII, 1984, pp 89-99; C C Dyer, 'Jardins et vergers en Angleterre au moyen âge', in *Jardins et vergers au moyen âge*, Centre Culturel de l'Abbaye de Flaran, 9e journées internationales d'histoire, 1987, pp 145-64; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 245-89; T J Hunt and I Keil, 'Two medieval gardens', *Proc Somersetshire Arch and Nat Hist Soc*, CIV, 1959-62, pp 91-101.

²³ Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, p 258; Ross, 'Household accounts of Elizabeth Berkeley', p 102; PRO, E 315/283, fos 20-20 v; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i and iii); *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord Middleton*, Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1911, p 330; NUMD, MiA 9, fo 5 v, MiA 14, fo 14 v, MiA 15, fo 1, MiA 18 fo 4.

III

The economy of many Arden demesnes was further stimulated by the exploitation of woodland resources, as trees and underwood took the place of livestock and grains as cash generators on many estates. Woodland pasture and browse wood were also of value and provided fodder for cattle at Maxstoke, Merevale, Middleton, and Wedgnoek, while game birds and rabbits supplemented the larders of many Arden manor houses. The value of these resources was clearly realized by the landlord and is demonstrated by the high standard of their management on many estates. These were carefully exploited assets, with new growth carefully preserved until it reached maturity. This is reflected in investment in ditching and enclosing woodlands, and in the zealous way in which they were guarded and protected.²⁴ Direct exploitation by the landlord in the Arden was not common, with most leasing out whole woods, or contracting for either specific numbers of trees or acreages of underwood. At Coleshill, the Mountfords entered into a number of such agreements. In 1402 they leased 'the whole of the wood of Beltesley' to a collier, or charcoal burner, for £60 13s 4d over four years, while in 1482 they sold 660 trees in Coleshill Park and in 1487 126 oaks in Kingshurst Park. A number of other estates made specific sales of great timber from their parks, such as at Maxstoke Priory, Nuneaton Priory, and the Beauchamps at Tanworth-in-Arden, where in 1409-10 120 ashes were sold. At Baddesley Clinton such sales brought in over £5 a year, or nearly a sixth of the manor's revenue in the 1440s, while elsewhere demesne woods at Sheldon, Middleton, Maxstoke, and Merevale yielded annual sums ranging from £5 to £15. At Maxstoke Priory money was also raised through tithes on woodlands as in

1431-2 when this yielded £3.²⁵ On a number of manors, notably Maxstoke Priory, Middleton, and Sutton Coldfield underwood was leased out by the acre. On some occasions larger sums of money could be generated from woodlands. A survey made of Middleton in 1419 revealed that leases of woodland were worth £28 6s 8d a year, and at Wedgnoek sales of faggots generated £19 4s in 1417-8 and £17 16s 8d in 1425-6, while at Fillongley in 1471 sales of woodland brought in £17 16s 8d, well over a third of the estate's income. Maxstoke Priory received £29 in 1450, while in an exceptional year, on the Beauchamp manor of Tanworth-in-Arden in 1404, wood sales generated £100 out of an estate income of £108.²⁶

In areas with mineral resources, landlords were able to contribute to their income by developing industry on their manors. A number of Arden manors were associated with industrial processes during this time. By the mid-sixteenth century the Arden's abundance of wood-based fuels encouraged some lords to establish blast furnaces on their lands, notably at Middleton and Furnace End in Over Whitacre. However, these projects required iron ore to be imported from the Black Country to be smelted by Arden charcoal, for although some medieval woodland areas, such as the forest of Dean and the Sussex Weald, were rich in mineral deposits they do not occur in the Arden, and no such blast furnaces are recorded before the reign of Elizabeth. It is well known that coal seams outcrop along the eastern end of the Arden plateau, and coal had been mined in the Nuneaton area since Roman times. Nuneaton Priory had coal workings on its manors, and

²⁴ BRL, A 433, A 519, A 589, A 629, A 635; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 12, 14, 29, 121; BL, Add Rolls 49755, 49757, 49758, 49760, 49763, 49764; SBT DR 37/107/1-2, 13, 22, 24, DR 37/108/31, 32, 34; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 9; SRO, 26/D53/1/125; NUMD, MiM 139-142; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 14, 20, 29, 102, 115, 118, 121; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 97-9.

²⁵ NUMD, MiM 175, MiM 214; WCRO, CR 1886/484, 487; Coventry Record Office, E 10; SBT, DR 37/107/13.

²⁴ For a general discussion of the woodland economy of the area and its impact on the seigniorial economy see Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden', pp 19-25.

during the last few years of the fourteenth century these had yielded about 50s a year. By the early fifteenth century these were no longer generating cash, probably because the easily-mined, outcropping seams had become exhausted. The priory was not the only landlord to have coal workings on its estates. Towards the end of the fifteenth century an area near to Merevale Abbey was known as 'le Colputt', probably a pit where coal was extracted, although no material has survived to suggest how this was exploited.²⁷

There were also some stone workings within the Arden. Within her extensive woodlands the prioress of Nuneaton owned a number of quarries. By the later Middle Ages, these seem to have been leased, generating such sums as just under £2 towards the end of the fourteenth century. The stone quarry at Baddesley Clinton was considered by Brome to be among his most important assets. Over the years he invested some £4 7s 2d in refurbishment of the quarry and the acquisition of equipment, and in return received £7 8s 10d through sales of stone, while Maxstoke Priory and Merevale Abbey also had quarries. Tiles were fired on a number of estates. In 1457 John Brome refurbished a tile works on his demesne, enlarging the tile house and furnace, the pit for storing water, and the drying place, while part of the demesne at Coleshill was known as Kilnmeadow towards the end of the fifteenth century. Merevale Abbey had a fully functioning tile kiln at Pinwall, which also fired bricks. This was capable of a large

output, firing as in 1499 some 20,000 tiles and 20,000 bricks.²⁸

The most common industrial activity on Arden estates by the later Middle Ages was the manufacture of wooden building materials. Great timber for the frames of buildings was felled, and spars, rods, laths, and joists were cut and dressed within many demesne woodlands, such as at Middleton, Nuneaton Priory, Tanworth-in-Arden, Maxstoke Priory, and Merevale Abbey. For example, at Middleton in 1449-50, several men were paid for twenty-seven days work cutting and dressing oaks in the park and in an enclosure called Woodhurst, to produce timber for laths, joists, and spars for building work within the manor. Demesne coppices provided underwood to be used for the infill of buildings, as well as a multitude of other purposes, at Sutton Coldfield, Nuneaton Priory, Tanworth-in-Arden, Middleton, and Maxstoke Priory. It is well known that building materials from the Arden served a wide area, including the Avon valley, Feldon, south Staffordshire, and parts of Leicestershire. In 1434 the Mountfords of Coleshill sent timber to be sold at Henley-in-Arden on the verge of the receding woodlands of the south Arden and the Avon valley, while the Beauchamps similarly sold timber from Tanworth-in-Arden at Warwick, Knowle, and Coventry. Arden timber was also finding its way to Leicester, and wood from Sutton Chase was sold widely around the immediate area.²⁹

IV

One of the most obvious features of the fifteenth-century rural economy are the

²⁷ S M Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry in the Fifteenth Century*, Derbyshire Record Society, VIII, 1983, pp 21-22; R A Pelham, 'The establishment of the Willoughby ironworks in north Warwickshire in the sixteenth century', *Univ Birmingham Hist Jnl*, IV, 1953-4, pp 18-29; WCRO, DR(B) 38/3/2, p 29; Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden', p 29; *VCH*, II, pp 219-20; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', p 98; J Hatcher, *The History of the British Coal Industry. I: Before 1700*, 1993, pp 135-6.

²⁸ Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden', pp 28-9; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 10; PRO, SC 11/683; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 98-9.

²⁹ Watkins, 'The woodland economy of the forest of Arden', pp 30-31; NUMD, 5/167/101(iii); SBT, DR 37/73; DR 37/108/31; T H Lloyd, *Some Aspects of the Building Industry of Medieval Stratford-upon-Avon*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, XIV, 1961, pp 16-22.

reports of the dilapidated and ruinous condition of many buildings, on both demesnes and on peasant holdings. Landlords did little to alleviate this, failing to put capital into their estates. Contemporary treatises on estate management did not expound the virtues of re-investing profits into new building, livestock, or equipment, while many of the aristocracy preferred to spend their profits on ostentatious personal display, and on patronage to retain the support of their retainers. Studying records of the larger religious houses and the peerage, Hilton estimated that frequently they spent less than 10 per cent and often as little as 4-5 per cent of their manorial profits on capital investment. Although the later Middle Ages are usually seen as a period of falling investment, he did notice a trend for a slight increase in expenditure, both in demesne buildings and also on tenants' houses.³⁰ Between 1437 and 1508 the Buckinghamshire re-invested only slightly over 4 per cent of their total manorial receipts into the demesne at Maxstoke Castle. The Astleys seem to have spent a comparatively low sum at Astley Castle, while Hilton has estimated that in the 1470s managers of the earl of Warwick's manors spent up to 9 per cent on the estates. The Willoughbys invested well above these figures in buildings, the repair and extension of enclosures, and in the purchase and maintenance of equipment. In 1446-7 some £5, or about 15 per cent of the income of the estate, was spent in these areas, while in 1451-2 almost 28 per cent of the manors' income was spent on maintaining manorial assets, mainly on this occasion in the construction and repair of enclosures.³¹ However, most

money was spent on buildings of a domestic nature, such as in the castles at Maxstoke, Astley, and Tamworth, the conventual and appropriated churches and glebe buildings on the Maxstoke Priory and Merevale Abbey estates, and the hall and other domestic buildings at Middleton. Most expenditure was put into repairing existing structures rather than creating new ones. The most obvious form of capital investment into the productive resources of their manors for landlords was in demesne buildings such as barns, stock-houses, and mills.³²

At Merevale Abbey demesne properties such as the Old Storehouse, the Carters barn, the Abbot's stable, the 'hyndehouse', the Abbot's barn, and the storehouse barn were repaired. The abbey also sought to maintain buildings on its properties in good states of repair. Work was undertaken on barns at Moorbarn, Woodbarn, Witherley, and Twycross, and on dovecots at Orton-on-the-Hill and Mancetter. Money was spent on the upkeep of a rabbit warren at Orton-on-the-Hill, while at Pinwall the arches of a tile kiln were repaired. At Maxstoke Priory stables, barns, the sub-prior's mill, the forge, the ox house, and a woodhouse located within the southern courtyards of the priory all had work carried out upon them. There was also a bakehouse, with its own attached water-wheel which was repaired along with the roof and furnace in 1435.³³ The canons of Maxstoke carefully monitored their expenditure both in these areas and on their conventual buildings. During the 1450s a list was drawn up detailing all the monies that Prior Green had expended on buildings for each year that he was prior. Over a period of some seventeen years the priory invested £314 in its buildings, with the majority of this going into the conventual

³⁰ R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*, 1975, pp 174-214; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, p 80; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 5, 8-10; Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', pp 147-8; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp 165-6.

³¹ Watkins, 'Society and economy in the Forest of Arden', p 165; Hilton, *The English Peasantry*, pp 174-214; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i and iii).

³² SRO, D641/1/2/269-279; WCRO, CR 136/c150-c157; BRL, DV 592 437894; NUMD, 5/167/101.

³³ Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 93-4; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 6, 8, 15, 22, 24, 26, 33, 40, 72, 99, 106, 119-20, 139, 244, 247.

structures. The Willoughbys invested in the demesne buildings at Middleton. A new barn was under construction in 1428-9, and in 1446-7 work, mainly roof repairs, was carried out on the buildings which surrounded the hall, such as the barn, the bakehouse, the stable, the cart stable, the hay barn, the 'ryggyng' barn, and the swinesty. Internal fittings were renewed in the barns and stables, including 'rakkes' to hold animal feed. The motivation for such investment in buildings was twofold. First, on those estates, such as Merevale Abbey, Middleton, Maxstoke Priory, and Baddelsey Clinton, where active agricultural use was still being made by the lord of the demesne, they were clearly integral elements in the estate economy, and investment in them is an obvious indication of continued direct exploitation on these manors. A second motive for landlords to invest in the repair and maintenance of such demesne assets was to increase their value when put out to farm. This is suggested in the correspondence of a female member of the Armeburgh family, a minor gentry family who held the small manor of Brokholes in Mancetter, in which her mother was informed that 'byldyng of newe houses & reparacion of olde houses... yis cost most nedys be doon or we schall have no fermours'.³⁴

Among the most seignorial buildings most obviously needing investment were mills. By the 1440s both the mills of Middleton had fallen into such poor condition that they were not put out to farm. Again, landlords were prepared to invest in them both to restore them to full working order, and to make them more attractive to potential lessees. As part of the Willoughby's revival of the estate 55s 2½d was spent in 1447 on the house attached to Park Mill, including cartloads of clay,

underwood for filling the walls, 5000 tiles and 30 crests. Money was also spent on the mill itself, repairing its millstones and the internal mechanism. In addition, four cartloads of stone were required to repair the lord's well. A further 3s 6d was spent on the mill dam, around the 'myr in le pole'. Similarly, workmen were paid to repair a gutter flowing into the moat. In 1493 the Mountfords entered into agreement with the farmers of the two mills of Coleshill, that while the lessees were to maintain the mills and the floodgates and banks, the Mountfords would undertake to supply loads of timber and clay for repairs. The lessees were also allowed 40s from their rent of £9 to pay for this. Similarly at Sutton Coldfield, the countess of Warwick supplied ten trees from the chase for the bay, water and cog wheels of a new mill in the early sixteenth century. The Erdingtons were prepared to invest in repairing a mill on their estate, during the 1450s, and mills and their associated floodgates and dams were attended to by the monks of Merevale on their estates at Altcar on the Mersey estuary, Mancetter on the river Anker, and at Woodbarn, while another new water-mill, 'Kyngsmyll', had been built at Maxstoke in 1473.³⁵

Demesne fisheries required investment by landlords. In the Arden they were often associated with mill complexes. The leasing of fisheries within the area did occur, but some households retained them to supply fresh fish. At Baddesley Clinton Brome spent some £4 16s in 1445 on his three demesne fishponds, scouring and digging them out, and providing sluices. The canons of Maxstoke had a system of fishponds within the courtyards of the priory site, fed by streams which rose above the priory and ran through the upper courtyards. These required considerable labour in maintaining the flow of water through

³⁴ Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 119-20; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, p 164; NUMD, 5/167/101(i); Chetham's Library, Mun E 6 10 4: I am indebted to one of my anonymous referees for furnishing me with this reference.

³⁵ NUMD, 5/167/101(i); BRL, A 644; NUMD, MiDa 84, 5/169b/15.

channels and pipes. Merevale Abbey had an even more extensive complex of fishponds. In 1546-7 it was recorded that 17 acres of ground were covered with water, divided into seven pools, which modern fieldwork confirms still exist. Much of the work completed at Middleton in the late 1440s on the mill dam and the moat should probably also be seen in this context, while repairs were also carried out to fishponds at Tanworth-in-Arden. Two accounts give some indication of the levels of investment required to re-stock them. In 1445 John Brome spent some £1 16s 9d on 22 bream, 7 tench and various roach, as well as two barrels each of 16 gallons capacity, a pannier, and their carriage costs. In 1461 the Erdingtons spent a remarkably similar sum, £1 17s 10d, purchasing from a peasant supplier, John Summerlane of Castle Bromwich, 80 'couplis' of bream at 4d a couple, 100 couples of bream at 1½d, and 20 couples of tench.³⁶

On some estates, such as those of the Beauchamps and Fountains Abbey, landlords not only repaired demesne buildings but also the houses of their tenants. Often this took the form of supplying building materials, and occasionally by making grants of money. Two holdings, which had come into the Willoughbys' hands in Middleton by 1449-50, were extensively repaired. One was re-roofed, while the other had some 10s 3d spent in enlarging it by the construction of a new chamber. Merevale Abbey in 1498 commenced work worth 4d on 'Mosses' house, while the abbey considered replacing the house of eight bays which had been destroyed by fire at Whittington. Work was undertaken on the house of Thomas

Beckett, and payments were made for thatching the house of Elizabeth Milner, and also for carrying clay for daubing its walls, while in the following year the abbey built a large, new house on stone foundations for their shepherd at Pinwall grange.³⁷

The landlords of the Arden also invested in the construction and maintenance of hedges, ditches, and fences around meadow land. Enclosure added to the value of the land if it were put out to farm, while the important part which pastoral husbandry played in the economy of the area meant that there was a constant need to invest in the repair and extension of enclosures. The comparatively low cost of employing men to make such enclosures meant the amount invested in this was generally small in terms of overall estate revenue, being only about £1 a year at Maxstoke Castle. On some estates it could be higher, as at Baddesley Clinton where Brome spent £2 9s 3d in 1442 and £3 5s 8½d in 1446 on hedging and ditching, while at Wedgnoek Park in 1426 some £10 5s 8d was invested in enclosing. At Middleton in 1446-7 the Willoughbys spent £1 7s 6d, but in 1451-2 £7 4s 8½d, nearly 28 per cent of the manor's income, was spent on repairs and new enclosures. Motivated by the needs of their own husbandry and also to increase the value of lands if they were to be put to farm, all Arden landlords, who have left records, invested in the upkeep of hedges and enclosures, and the construction of new ones.³⁸

The continued exploitation of many Arden demesnes is also suggested by investment in livestock, grains, and agricultural

³⁶ B K Roberts, 'Medieval fishponds', *Amat Hist.*, VII, 1966, pp 122-23; SBT, DR 3/804; M Aston, ed, *Medieval Fish, Fisheries and Fishponds in England*, BAR, British Series, 182(i), 1988, p 423; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 24, 33, 41, 100, 107, 219, 225; W B Bickley, ed, *Monastic and Other Estates in the County of Warwick*, Dugdale Society, II, 1923, p 87; SBT, DR 37/107/22, DR 37/108/37; BRL, DV 329 347939, 329 347943.

³⁷ Hilton, *The English Peasantry* p 192; C Dyer, 'English peasant buildings in the later Middle Ages', *Med Arch*, XXX, 1986, p 23; NUMD, 5/167/101(iii); PRO, E 315/283, fos 10, 18, 20-20^v, 24-24^v, 25^v-27^v.

³⁸ SRO, D641/1/2/269-279; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 5; WCRO, CR 1886/487; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i-iii); SBT, DR 37/73; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity, pp 2, 8, 15, 20, 24, 62, 72, 99, 100, 107, 110, 125, 128, 134, 213, 219, 227, 228, 232, 239, 259, 263.

equipment. In 1434 the Mountfords, for example, invested £9 5s in 23 steers, 20 sheep, and 6 pigs, from Coventry. Merevale Abbey had to buy in outside stock for its large cattle herd, sometimes Welsh beasts from Atherstone market, and sometimes from peasant producers. In 1449 Maxstoke Priory invested £7 3s 6d in 7 bullocks, and later in the same year bought a further 16 steers, 11 calves, and 13 sheep. The commercial orientation of John Brome and the earl of Warwick meant their investment in beasts was high. In 1447 Brome spent £35 6s 2d on 65 bullocks, while at Wedgnoek even greater sums were disbursed. In 1418 133 cattle were purchased for £64 18s 7d, while in 1431 the estate spent £74 8s on 169 beasts.³⁹ Investment in equipment and tools was also high. The Mountfords, Brome, the Willoughbys, Maxstoke Priory and the Astleys all paid for repairs to ploughs, wains, carts, and harrows, as well as buying hand tools, such as riddles, mattocks, rakes, spades, and forks, and harness. At Middleton in 1447 a wheelbarrow and a 'beryng' barrow, presumably used to carry heavy loads, were purchased; and at Maxstoke Priory, the infirmarer invested in equipment for the manufacture of *acetum*, axes to prune trees, repairs to barrels, and new pipes or barrels for the brewing process, storing and retail.⁴⁰

V

Although commercial considerations dictated the scale of operations at Baddesley Clinton and Wedgnoek, on other manors, which were only producing for subsistence, the size of household obviously determined

the scope of the home farm. Thus, the thirty or so inhabitants at both Maxstoke Priory and Merevale Abbey required larger home farms to support them than the smaller households of the gentry. It is extremely difficult to determine the size of gentry households, but in all probability both the Mountford and Willoughby households were smaller than those at Maxstoke Priory and Merevale Abbey. Both these families were near the top of gentry society, and it is likely that the households of less prominent members of the gentry were even more modest affairs. There were several contrasts between the way home farm estates were managed in the fifteenth century and the organization of demesnes in the pre-plague era. A well-known characteristic of the manor owned by a small landowner was the greater control they could exert over the day-to-day running of the estate. John Brome was clearly the driving force behind the profitability of the estate at Baddesley Clinton, while the East Anglian gentleman, John Hopton, also exerted personal management over his small cluster of Suffolk manors.

However, most of the day-to-day running of the estates in the Arden was not conducted by resident landlords, but instead seems to have devolved onto those drawn from the peasantry. For example, at Middleton by the fifteenth century only one or two servants were employed throughout the year, and these were specialist stock keepers. At Merevale Abbey and Maxstoke Priory stockmen were also in annual employment, while Merevale Abbey and Nuneaton Priory also maintained managers for their woodlands. Much of the other work on these home farms, which was seasonal, was carried out by wage labourers, in some instances well-paid specialists, rather like modern agricultural contractors. Ploughmen prepared the ground, while the abundance of stock in well-enclosed fields no doubt helped to

³⁹ SBT, DR 37/73; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 96-7; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 89, 113; SBT, DR 3/801; WCRO, CR 1886/484 and 488.

⁴⁰ SBT, DR 37/73; DR 3/801; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', p 6; NUMD, 5/167/101 (i-iii); PRO, E 315/283, fos 11^v, 14^v, 18, 20-20^v; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 61, 134, 208, 224, 229, 232, 263; SBT, DR 37/114; WCRO, CR 136/c159; SRO, D 641/1/3/4.

supply those labourers paid to spread manure at Merevale and Maxstoke.⁴¹

As we have seen it was often necessary to clear ground through stocking, and this was recorded at Baddesley Clinton, Maxstoke Priory, and Middleton, but probably occurred on other lands as landlords once again sought to utilize directly their estates. It may be that some form of convertible husbandry was taking place on a number of Arden manors. At the earl of Warwick's fringe Arden manor of Budbrooke it was reported that Grovefield had once been under grass and had become overgrown with bushes. It was cleared in 1424-5 and cultivated during the next year. However, in the year following it had once again reverted to pasture. On a number of other Arden estates, such as Baddesley Clinton, Maxstoke Priory, and Middleton, crops were grown in fields that had been previously used as pasture or meadow, and similarly stock grazed on lands that had once been arable.⁴²

Another feature of the renewed seignorial interest in exploiting lands is the short-term nature of some home farms. This allowed the lord to make use of his lands in one year, whilst leasing them in another, and allowed for a sophisticated and flexible response to both market circumstances and household needs for a particular year. For those lords who owned more than one estate the establishing of a home farm was obviously a reflection of where their main residences lay. The motivation of others is less obvious. For all his exertions in the 1440s Brome was content to rent out his assets by 1465. The Mountfords had abandoned any direct use of their estate at

Coleshill by 1495, while the exploitation of the demesne at Middleton followed a similar pattern. Only the church landowners, Maxstoke Priory and Merevale Abbey, seem to have maintained a long-term continuity of production on their manors.⁴³

VI

Recent work on lesser landlords during the later Middle Ages has concentrated on their national and local political role during a time of civil strife, and so much of our awareness of the economic fortunes of the landowning classes during this period is derived from well-established studies of the greater estates. Much of our knowledge of the later medieval seignorial economy has therefore been accumulated as a result of accidents of survival, rather than through any systematic survey, and indeed much of our understanding of the management and nature of a gentry estate in the fifteenth century is still derived from Dyer's work on John Brome at Baddesley Clinton. It has long been appreciated that gentry land management could be less inert during the fifteenth century than that pursued by their social superiors, and often they were in the forefront of those taking on leases of demesne lands of large religious institutions and greater lords. There is now a growing appreciation that some members of the gentry may not have withdrawn from active economic management of their estates to the same extent as the nobility. In some parts of the country during the fifteenth century where local conditions encouraged particular economic specialization, as in Kent and Sussex during the latter part of the Hundred Years War and in Derbyshire, the gentry were active in livestock farming and stimulating industrial

⁴¹ Watkins, 'Society and economy in the forest of Arden', pp 50-1; SBT, DR 37/73; Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp 68-9; R. H. Britnell, 'Minor landlords in England and medieval agrarian capitalism', *Past and Present*, LXXXIX, 1980, pp 3-10; Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 1-13; C. Richmond, *John Hopton*, 1981, pp 32-95; Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 87-104; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 129-31; NUMD, 5/167/101(iii).

⁴² Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 5-6; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 33, 39, 52, 100, 139; NUMD, 5/167/101(ii); Dyer, *Wanwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, pp 10-1, 14.

⁴³ Dyer, 'A small landowner in the fifteenth century', pp 3-12; PRO, SC 11/683; NUMD, 5/167/101(i-iii); Watkins, 'Merevale Abbey', pp 87-101; Bod Lib, Ms Trinity 84, pp 109, 136.

development on their manors, while others used their lands as a source of food supply.⁴⁴

The present appraisal of the fifteenth-century seignorial economy of the Arden is limited by the surviving documentation. Few, if any, of the Arden estates have long sequences of account rolls over consecutive years, and therefore it is difficult to determine trends on particular manors; instead we are offered glimpses of activities on a variety of manors in a number of individual years. However, even if only isolated snapshots do survive to illuminate Arden demesnes during this time, there still are sufficient to indicate that home farms and other types of economic exploitation were common on many estates, certainly on all of those which have left records, and such activity can be traced throughout most of the century.

The maintenance of home farms may have been much more widespread than we can now detect. The use that John Brome, Hugh Willoughby, the abbot of Merevale, and the prior of Maxstoke made of their estates is known to us because, however inadequately, they kept estate records, and some of these have survived. Of the management practices of those members of the gentry below them in status we are largely ignorant; here the lack of survival of material suggests that record keeping, if it existed at all, was very rudimentary. Nevertheless, while we are aware that some of the better documented members of the fifteenth-century Arden landowning class made use of their lands, they were unlikely to have been the only ones who continued to exploit their estates, and such exploitation no doubt extended below into the ranks of those either who kept no estate records, or whose documentation has not survived. It is often assumed that the nobility were among the first to abandon direct exploitation; yet in the Arden, the

duke of Buckingham, Lord Grey, and the earl of Warwick adapted their estates for specific needs, cattle grazing, the exploitation of woodland, and horse breeding. The prevailing economic circumstances of the fifteenth-century Arden, with its benign pastoral and woodland economies, offered opportunities to landlords, both lay and ecclesiastical, noble and gentry, to restructure, diversify, and experiment with their estate economies.

The fifteenth-century economy of the forest of Arden offered particular opportunities to its resident landlords, but their experiences need to be placed into a wider context. It is clear that they were far from unique. It was not only within the Arden that the fifteenth-century Warwickshire seignorial class was continuing to make use of estates. Landlords from the rest of Warwickshire, such as the Bishopdons, Catesbys, Dalbys, Lucys, Staffords of Grafton, Throckmortons, Coventry Cathedral Priory, and Bordesley Abbey appear to have created home farms and pursued pastoralism, in the case of those with Feldon estates through sheep ranching.⁴⁵ It is even possible to extend this beyond the county boundary. Even the most cursory glance at published studies and printed sources reveal that throughout the rest of the country in the fifteenth century landlords were adapting their estate economies to create small home farms to generate foodstuffs, with some often becoming more specialized in their production. It is impossible to generalize with such a diversity of location as only more detailed studies will reveal the individual and local circumstances which dictated such evolutions in estate economies. In East Anglia such developments can be found in the dairying of Sibton Abbey, and on the estates of the Townshends in

⁴⁴ M Mate, 'Pastoral farming in south-east England in the fifteenth century', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XL, 1987, pp 523-36; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, pp 12-28; *Ag Hist III*, p 24.

⁴⁵ Dyer, *Warwickshire Farming 1349-c 1520*, pp 4, 13-22; Carpenter, 'The fifteenth-century English gentry', pp 40-50; Carpenter, *Locality and Polity*, pp 176-88; C Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City*, 1979, p 21; PRO, SC 6/1058/4-5.

Norfolk, the lands of Alice de Bryene, John Hopton and the Sulyards in Suffolk.⁴⁶ The bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, gentlemen in the Honour of Tutbury, the Talbots, Leicester Abbey, Sir William Skipworth of Lincolnshire, and the gentry of Leicestershire and Derbyshire were active in the Midlands, while in the West Country similar traces can be identified on the lands of the bishop of Bath and Wells, the Lady Porlock, some of the gentry of Devon and Cornwall, and Tavistock Abbey.⁴⁷ In the south, reports have been made of the continued exploitation of manors of the bishopric of Winchester, Battle Abbey, Canterbury Cathedral Priory and some of the gentry. Similarly, in the

north there is evidence from Durham Cathedral Priory, the Lancashire gentry, some Yorkshire gentlemen, Fountains Abbey and Selby Abbey.⁴⁸ If few of these landlords, both within and without the Arden, were as dynamic as Brome, they were not as inert as many of the larger institutions of the time. These developments, if not representing a revivification of the seignorial economy, suggest that it was not as moribund and stagnant as often believed. They indicate evolutions of estate economy in the Arden, and elsewhere, that were peculiar to the circumstances of the fifteenth century; yet, in many ways the re-organization of land and the investment in estates to form compact, specialized, enclosed farms worked by forces of wage labour foreshadow later developments in English agriculture and rural society.

⁴⁶ A H Kenny, ed, *The Sibton Abbey Estates: Selected Documents 1325-1509*, Suffolk Record Society, II, 1960, pp 35-9; E W Ives, *The Common Lawyers of Pre-Reformation England*, 1983, pp 345-53; *Household Book of Dame Alice de Bryene*, Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History, 1931, pp 116-34; Richmond, *John Hopton*, pp 32-95; C Richmond, 'The Sulyard papers: the records of a small family archive', in D Williams, ed, *England in the Fifteenth Century*, Woodbridge, 1986, pp 203-4; *Ag Hist III*, pp 281-3.

⁴⁷ C M Woolgar, ed, *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, new ser, XVIII, 1992, part II, pp 455-57, 460, 462-7, 470-1, 550-1; A J Pollard, 'Estate management in the later Middle Ages: the Talbots and Whitechurch, 1383-1526', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXV, 1972, pp 553-66; Hilton, *The Economic Development of Leicestershire Estates*, pp 79-86; K J Allison, 'Flock management in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XI, 1958, pp 98-112; E Acheson, *A Gentry Community*, 1992, pp 55-61; Wright, *The Derbyshire Gentry*, pp 12-28; *Ag Hist III*, pp 24, 290, 315-22; H P R Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, Newton Abbot, 1969, pp 96-149.

⁴⁸ D L Farmer, 'Grain yields on the Winchester manors in the later Middle Ages', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXX, 1977, pp 555-66; M J Stephenson, 'Wool yields in the medieval economy', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXI, 1988, p 371; E Searle and B Ross, eds, *The Cellarer's Rolls of Battle Abbey, 1217-1513*, Sussex Record Society, LXV, 1967, pp 18-9; P Brandon, 'Cereal yields on the Sussex estates of Battle Abbey in the later Middle Ages', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXV, 1972, pp 411-4; Smith, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory*, p 200; Mate, 'Pastoral farming in south-east England', pp 523-36; N Saul, *Scenes from Provincial Life*, 1986, p 133; R A Lomas, 'The priory of Durham and its demesnes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXI, 1978, p 350; R A Lomas, 'A northern farm at the end of the Middle Ages: Elvenhall Manor, Durham, 1443-4 - 1513-4', *Northern Hist*, XVIII, 1972, pp 26-9; J L Drury, 'Early settlement in Stanhope Park, Weardale, c 1406-79', *Archaeol Aelina*, 5th ser, IV, 1976, pp 141-7; M J Bennett, *Community, Class, Careerism*, 1983, p 86; *Ag Hist III*, pp 189-91.