Chapter 2
The Keeping of Agricultural Records in Late Medieval England

2.1 Late Medieval Agriculture and Manorial Accounts

In the Late Middle Ages demesne farming, the direct management of part of the lord's land instead of its complete leasing to tenants, was considerably more widespread in England than on the continent. For ensuring the honesty of the administrative personnel and for giving information concerning the state of the agricultural and pastoral sectors and for evaluating the profitability of the manor, it was essential that the manorial officers rendered account of the activities on the manor, its income and expenditure to the lord. The resulting records are known as manorial accounts, and they are the source that allows agrarian historians to form a comprehensive picture of the English seigniorial agriculture in the Late Middle Ages, including cropping trends, sowing rates, harvest success, livestock density and labour input. By their very nature these records contain a plethora of direct and indirect information on the environment, and particularly on weather conditions.

The East Anglian countryside differed from the Midlands with respect to village and field layout; the fully nucleated village was not the standard form of habitation and the field layout was less regular than in the Midlands. The parochial and manorial organisation was also marked by differences, villages in East Anglia frequently possessed more than one parish church and multi-manorial vills were common. With regard to the social composition of the village population, the high percentage of freeman in the east was unrivalled in England.[1] The information stored in the manorial records shows that seigniorial agriculture in Norfolk was highly intensive during the Late Middle Ages.

Based on manorial accounts from southern and eastern England and the Midlands – areas where the direct management of the demesne land was common – Campbell has defined farming regions with respect to seigniorial agriculture. The differences between those regions are the varying degree of intensity of the

[1] On those differences and their causes, see Williamson, Explaining regional landscapes.

K. Pribyl, *Farming, Famine and Plague*, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-55953-7_2

agricultural production and the type of crops.[2] Eastern Norfolk and other areas close to Norfolk's north and northeast coast, stand out by being subjected to the most intensive and productive cropping type in medieval England, which featured wheat and barley and devoted a large percentage of the sown acreage to legumes.[3] Other areas – especially regions on poorer soils like the sandy Breckland in the south-west of the county (with access to the market and port of King's Lynn), the 'Good Sands' in northwest Norfolk (close to the coast and its small ports) and the hinterland of Norwich with its light sandy soils – were managed on a less intensive level and employed the 'rye with barley' regime.[4]

The intensive agricultural regime in eastern Norfolk was able to maintain soil fertility and favourable yields,[5] although the number of livestock units per hundred sown acres was comparatively low and the fallow almost eliminated. This was the result of the large-scale cultivation of legumes (as a fodder crop and for fixing nitrogen to the soil), as well as of the careful management of other resources to maintain soil fertility. The demesne cattle and other animals were often stall-fed, the resulting farmyard manure was spread on the arable; this was a laborious task. Marling, spreading dung from sheep-pens on the fields and keeping the sheep on the fallow over night were other methods employed to supply the soil with nitrogen. Productivity was also raised, because the light soils of eastern Norfolk could be tilled with horses, which could work faster and longer than oxen. Often sowing rates, especially for oats, were high to smother weeds, and fallow ploughing was employed for eliminating thistles. The high population density of medieval East Anglia ensured a cheap labour supply for tasks like weeding and manuring.[6]

Although no comparable sources are available for peasant agriculture, it is likely to have been even more labour-intensive and productive. The peasants had to ensure their families' survival from the produce of the soil. Additionally the location of eastern Norfolk also provided an easy access to the urban markets of Norwich and Great Yarmouth and the maritime trade.[7]

---

[2] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 249–305.

[3] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 270–271. The medieval agriculture of Norfolk has been thoroughly investigated by Campbell. Of his numerous works on the subject the ones used here primarily are: Campbell, Field systems, idem, Eastern Norfolk; idem, Arable productivity in medieval England, and idem, Overton, Norfolk farming c.1250 – c.1850. Comparably advanced agricultural regimes as in eastern Norfolk were to be found in eastern and northeastern Kent as well as parts of coastal Sussex, Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 271–272. The agricultural system of eastern Norfolk matched that of the Low Countries, the first reference to the elimination of the fallow in East Anglia even predates the continental one by more than fifty years, idem, Eastern Norfolk, 41.

[4] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 267–269.

[5] For a comparison of yields in eastern Norfolk with other regions, see Campbell, Land, labour, livestock, and productivity trends, 161.

[6] Campbell, Field systems, 21–22; idem, Eastern Norfolk, 28–39; idem, Seigniorial agriculture, 269–271. On cost, use and timing of weeding and fallow ploughing, see Postles, Cleaning the medieval arable, 133–142. Fallow ploughing was probably more common in East Anglia than in the Midlands, ibid., 142.

[7] Campbell, Eastern Norfolk, 28, 39–41; idem, Seigniorial agriculture, 270.

The inclination to favour the direct management of the demesne over leasing it out, is usually attributed to the prices for agricultural products which began to rise in late twelfth-century England. This was most likely due to population pressure. The trend continued throughout the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, so that by 1330 the price for grain had increased four- or five-fold compared to the price in 1180. However, because of the population growth and the consequent ample supply of labour, wages displayed no similar tendency in the thirteenth century. It was not before the 1330s that wages caught up with the price level.[8] This situation of rising prices and stable wages prompted the great landlords to reconsider their economic strategy after 1200. Up to the end of the twelfth century most of them – like their continental counterparts – had followed a system of leasing their estates, whereby they received a fixed annual rent from the lessee. If they wanted to profit from the new economic circumstances, the direct management of their resources would prove to be much more advantageous. Thus around 1200 landlords began to abandon leases and take their manors into hand.[9] During the first half of the thirteenth century the movement gained ground and embraced eastern England, which at the beginning had showed itself more conservative than the rest of the country.[10] In the north of England demesne farming remained more confined than in the southern part of the country.[11]

For non-resident landlords the direct management of the demesne land was effected with the help of administrative personnel: usually on smaller estates a reeve, sergeant or bailiff would run the manor, on larger estates a reeve or sergeant would manage the day to day business on the manor, under the supervision of a bailiff, who was responsible for a group of manors.[12] To ensure their honesty, to oversee their work and capability, and later on also to check the profitability of the demesne land in hand, accounts had to be created.

The account survival rate increases sharply after 1270.[13] Consequently the indirect information on weather as well as direct references to adverse weather that interfered with farming and raised costs or cut profits, also multiply in the late thirteenth century. Tendencies to abandon the direct management of the demesne land gained ground in the decades after the Great Pestilence and with it the manorial accounts became superfluous. Between c.1380 and 1400 many manors were leased

[8] Farmer, Prices and wages, 1042–1350, 718.

[9] Harvey, The adoption of demesne farming, 345, 353; idem (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 13; Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 225–228.

[10] Harvey, The adoption of demesne farming, 354. However, Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 27–28, states that early extant lay and ecclesiastical accounts relate to East Anglia.

[11] Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 228; Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 33, 36.

[12] Harvey (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 12–13; Bennett, English manor, 157–158, 162–175 on steward, seneschal, bailiff and reeve and their obligations and responsibilities.

[13] Britnell, Winchester Pipe Rolls, 31, Harvey (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 17. For the treatises on estate management and accounting appearing after the mid-thirteenth century, see Oschinsky, Walter of Henley, 5, 9, 89, 144. Although many copies of the texts are to be found in the archives of Benedictine foundations, it appears that the monasteries rather used texts of more individual character for their own estates, ibid., 56–59.

again and the end of the direct management came about 1430. Only few manorial accounts, apart from those made for home farms, which were directly managed for a longer time, survive in detailed form after this point.

The long and more continuous series of account rolls, that are still available today, come mainly from ecclesiastical landlords. The longevity of those institutions, their high level of education and the advantage of proper muniment rooms ensured a better survival of their archives than those of lay lords.[14]

Manorial accounts were usually drawn up annually after the end of the agricultural year at Michaelmas (29 September). An account was made for one individual manor with information supplied by the responsible manorial officer.[15] They are written in medieval Latin. The front of the parchment rolls (face) records information on receipts (from rents, income from manor courts and sales of manorial produce or customary labour services) and expenses (on the various sectors and activities of the manor, for example ploughing, carting, construction and building maintenance, dairy farming, harvesting). On the back of the roles (dorse) are the grange account (issue and receipts, outgoings with details on quantity sown, sowing density, acreages sown, liveries), the stock account (issue and receipts, loss in death, liveries) and – especially from the fourteenth century onwards – the detailed works account (day- and boon works).[16]

The definition of seasons in the manorial accounts differs from the modern one. The agricultural year started after the harvest with the winter sowing. Winter itself covered the months from October until March or even April. Summer was loosely defined as the months May to July, whereas autumn, *autumpnus*, referred to the harvest season which lasted normally from 1 August to 29 September and marked the end of the agricultural year.[17] Naturally for an agricultural record the information in the manorial accounts in general, and consequently also the information on weather conditions, is concentrated on the growing period and harvest season; autumn and winter are less well represented.

In some collections of manorial accounts the direct weather references are frequent, as in the Pipe Rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester.[18] The references on weather in the manorial accounts invariably take the form of complaints and outline – farmers of all times would feel sympathy – how the weather put stress on the agricultural or pastoral sector. The pastoral sector was particularly vulnerable to summer droughts, which interfered with the growing of grass and hay and consequently endangered the fodder supply of cattle, sheep and horses. For the success of the hay and grain harvest on the other hand, dry weather at harvest time was crucial, as wet weather would increase the drying time for hay and grain; hay and corn would have to be turned more often, corn-sheaves might also have to be unbound,

[14] Britnell, Winchester Pipe Rolls, 34, Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 31–36.

[15] Harvey (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 22–23.

[16] Harvey (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 19; Bennett, English Manor, 188.

[17] Titow, Le climat à travers les rôles de comptabilité, 312–313.

[18] Weather references transcribed by Titow, Evidence of weather and idem, Le climat à travers les rôles de comptabilité.

dried and tied again. Stacking wet hay and storing wet corn would have resulted at least in a loss of nutrients or even a total loss of the hay or grain due to spoiling.[19] Consequently, precipitation that hindered the hay- or grain harvest was mentioned in the *compoti*. Causes for concern were also flooding due to excessive precipitation (mostly of meadow or pasture land in the winter half year), or a hard and long winter that required the supply of the manorial livestock with extra-fodder, especially of the draught animals at ploughing time.[20] In addition to those direct weather references, indirect information on weather (proxies) can be gleaned from the accounts; for example late winter and early spring weather conditions are reflected in the mortality rate among lambs and the time of spring ploughing and sowing, the date of the grain harvest can serve as a proxy for the mean temperatures of spring and summer, and the harvest length reflects to a good degree the precipitation frequency and amount at harvest time.[21]

The weather information supplied by the manorial accounts is very reliable: it is contemporary and it was checked by audit. The audit was undertaken by men who knew the manor and land, and the auditing process was aimed at detecting fraud or mismanagement.[22] During this process, information on weather was used to explain the underperformance of a sector of the manorial economy. Occasionally weather information was added to the accounts during the audit in the margin in another hand than the main text. The accounting and auditing process, as well as the possibility to collect parallel evidence from different manors or estates, makes the *compoti* a high quality source for weather related information.

2.2 Norwich Cathedral Priory

2.2.1 Norwich Cathedral Priory and Its Temporalities Until c.1300

In 1095 bishop Herbert de Losinga moved his see from Thetford to the more important and populous Norwich. By 1300 Norwich's inhabitants may have exceeded 15,000 and made it potentially the most populous provincial town in England[23]; by 1330 the town had grown to 25,000 inhabitants.[24] Norwich was an inland port with access to international trade via the rivers Wensum and Yare and the North Sea port

[19] For hay, see Stone, Wisbech Barton, 645; for grain, see Ault, Open-field farming, 27.

[20] Titow, Evidence of weather, 361.

[21] Stern, A Hertfordshire demesne, 29–30, Oliver, Problems of agro-climatic relationships in Wales, 193.On harvest date and mean growing season temperature, see Pfister, Getreide-Erntebeginn und Frühsommertemperaturen, 29 and on harvest duration and precipitation, see Chap. 7.

[22] Harvey (ed.), Manorial records of Cuxham, 51–53; Bennett, English Manor, 175, 188–192; Drew, Accounts of St Swithun's Priory, 15–16.

[23] Campbell, Norwich before 1300, 29.

[24] Campbell, Ecology versus Economics, 80.

at Great Yarmouth.[25] In fact, stone used for the construction of the cathedral arrived from Caen, France, and could be shipped directly into the cathedral precinct on an artificial canal.[26]

When Losinga decided to construct the new cathedral in Norwich he also established a community of about sixty Benedictine monks for its upkeep. The size of the priory placed it in the first league of monastic cathedrals.[27] In addition to the monks there were servants, clerks and visitors populating the precinct, bringing the number of inhabitants that needed to be provisioned with victuals to 250–270.[28]

To guarantee the priory's income and food supply,[29] Losinga, his successors and a few lay men granted the priory temporalities in the form of landed estates and other revenues. These possessions and rights were mostly situated in Norfolk (Fig. 2.1).[30]

The estate of Norwich Cathedral Priory included Martham and Hemsby, these villages lie close to the North Sea coast in the fertile and highly productive Flegg district of eastern Norfolk. In nearby Scratby the revenues of the monks came from the appropriated church. A substantial group of manors lay in the direct vicinity of Norwich: Catton, Monks' Grange (Pockthorpe), Trowse Newton, Lakenham and Eaton. Together with the manor of Heigham owned by St Benet's of Hulme and the nunnery at Carrow these ecclesiastical estates almost encircled Norwich and contributed to the permanent tensions between its citizens and the cathedral monks.[31] These conflicts led to several violent eruptions, the most severe of them took place in 1272.[32] Still close to the town were the manors of Arminghall and Taverham and the lands at Plumstead and Bawburgh. Further west were the possessions stemming from the first see of the bishopric at North Elmham, the manors North Elmham and

[25] Although as pointed out by Edwards, Hindle, Transportation system, 131 the increasing size of the sea-going ships would have cut Norwich off the direct access to the sea. Dunn, Trade, 224–225 states, that in the Late Middle Ages it would have been unlikely, that the sea-going vessels would navigate the Yare. In consequence goods had to the transshipped at Yarmouth, adding to transport costs.

[26] Blake et al., The Norfolk we live in, 39. The canal protruded at Pull's Ferry from the river Wensum towards the cathedral. No local stone was suitable for the surface work of the cathedral. The location of the canal is still visible in today's street layout; it followed Ferry Lane.

[27] Dodwell, Monastic community, 231. Norwich Cathedral Priory was on par with the older foundations of Worcester and Winchester.

[28] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 92, 162.

[29] The priory's grain provision has lately been studied by Slavin, Bread and ale.

[30] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 35. A map of the property rights is displayed ibid., xii. A complete list of the revenues of Norwich Cathedral Priory is given by Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 4, 556–62. On the reluctance of the lay magnates to endow the priory with property rights, see Virgoe, Estates, 342, who also provides a simplified list of the landed possessions of the priory, ibid., 346. There was a relative paucity of lay investment to Norwich Cathedral Priory, the nobility rather established monastic communities on their own estates, Harper-Bill, Church and the wider world, 302.

[31] Campbell, Norwich before 1300, 9.

[32] Tanner, The cathedral and the city, 259–261.

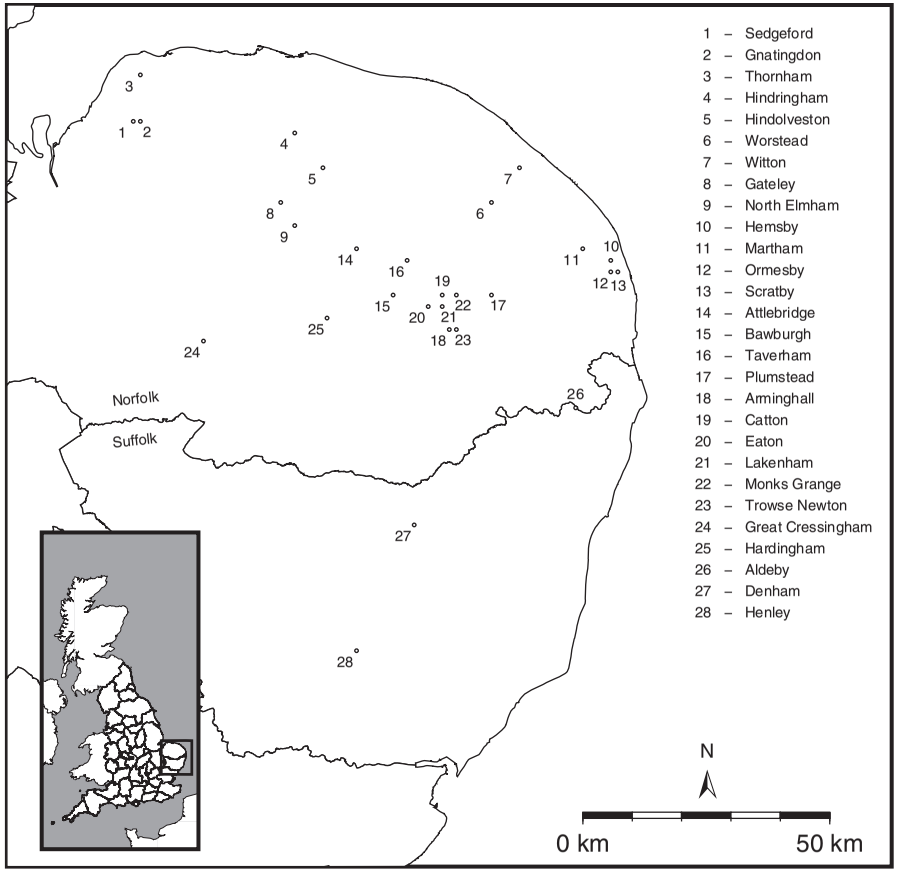

Fig. 2.1 Norwich Cathedral Priory: distribution of manors and other endowments. Shown are only places where accounts detail harvest information. Map with modern county boundaries

Gateley.[33] The monks were also endowed with manors at Hindolveston and Hindringham towards the north coast. A large agglomeration of the priory's land was situated in the northwestern corner of Norfolk, close to the Wash and the North Sea: the complex of the extensive manors of Sedgeford and Gnatingdon and the small unit at Thornham. The priory also owned the manor of Great Cressingham, in the Breckland in western Norfolk,[34] land at Worstead – a village famous for its textile production in the northeast of Norwich – and lands at Denham, Hoxne and Henley in Suffolk and Chalk in Kent.

Until the thirteenth century most of those manors were fee farms, partly leased out for rents in kind. In the thirteenth century the continuing population growth[35] and inflation made the direct exploitation of the land and a market-oriented production of grain more profitable for the landowner. Therefore in this period, Norwich Cathedral Priory, following the national trend, showed a marked tendency towards enlarging its demesne lands. Since donations in the form of landed property were no longer common, the priory had to acquire land by purchase.[36]

At the beginning of the thirteenth century the main temporalities and thus most manors had been apportioned to the *magister celarii*, an office peculiar to Norwich Cathedral Priory, and the cellarer himself. The other obedientiaries held sources of revenues according to their current need and expenses. This allocation stabilized around 1270 so that certain sources of revenues became fixed to certain offices, and the master of the cellar was left in control of most manors and demesne land.[37] Under prior Henry de Lakenham (1289–1310) the policy of acquisition came to a halt, and a move to a centralized policy and to an expansion of the income of the priory through efficient exploitation of its possessions was realized.[38] Hence, when the landed estates and property rights of the cathedral priory stabilized at the end of the thirteenth century, the 16 large estates, know as the prior's manors, were under supervision of the *magister celarii*: Martham, Hemsby, Plumstead, Trowse Newton, Monks' Grange, Catton, Eaton, Taverham, North Elmham, Gateley, Hindolveston,

[33] The see was transferred from North Elmham to Thetford in the early 1070s, Harper-Bill, Church and the wider world, 281. This relocation was not unusual, the Council of London in 1075 authorized the transfer of the bishoprics of Lichfield, Selsey and Sherbourne. North Elmham was a small manor; bishop Herbert de Losinga gave the manor and land to the cathedral priory, Yaxley, North Elmham Park, 517, 562

[34] For the economic development of the Breckland during the later Middle Ages, see Bailey, A marginal economy.

[35] The English population reached a climax around 1300, estimates range from 4.75 million to almost 7 million. They are summed up by Britnell, Economic development, 11–12.

[36] Virgoe, Estates, 343.

[37] Ibid., 348–350.

[38] Virgoe, Estates, 351–352 and Stone, Profit-and-loss accountancy, 41–42. These strategies of prior Henry seem to position him within the wider movement of heads of religious houses being apt administrators aiming at the successful exploitation of their estates at the end of the thirteenth century, Postles, Administrators, 38.

Hindringham, Sedgeford, Gnatingdon, Thornham and Denham (Suffolk)[39]; the cellarer had control over the manors at Great Cressingham and Hopton (Suffolk)[40]; the chamberlain over the manors at Arminghall and Lakenham[41] and the precentor was in charge of land associated with the church in Plumstead.[42]

As in other Benedictine houses the main attention at Norwich Cathedral Priory was turned to cereal farming,[43] nonetheless the extensive landed estates allowed for a certain degree of specialisation on individual manors. Sheep were mainly raised at considerable distance from Norwich: the priory's wool manor was in the northwest of the county, at Sedgeford.[44] Sedgeford's flocks would also graze on Gnatingdon, Thornham and 'Lyng' ground.[45] The Sedgeford-Gnatingdon complex – Gnatingdon would also be referred to as 'East Hall', whereas Sedgeford constituted the 'West Hall' situated in the village itself – was also the largest grain producing unit of the priory[46]: around c.1300 Sedgeford had 430.5 acres under crop, Gnatingdon 423 acres (Fig. 2.3).[47] They were situated on the 'Good sands', well draining soil, and they were less intensely worked than the eastern Norfolk manors.[48] They would retain their status as the largest demesnes managed directly until the end of demesne farming at Norwich Cathedral Priory, although their arable demesne would shrink, especially after the Black Death, until finally in 1417 there would be 276 acres under crop in Sedgeford and 243 acres in Gnatingdon and their sown acreage was to fall further until 1431, when Sedgeford manor, and Gnatingdon most likely, too, were leased out (Fig. 2.3). Yet, the demesne of other manors also dropped or they were leased out altogether. The highly productive eastern Norfolk manors of Martham and Hemsby were also kept in hand by the priory until the 1420s.[49]

The main grain in Norfolk was barley, which also served as bread grain. It was the largest crop on the cathedral priory manors, usually making up about 60% of the demesne produce.[50] Wheat, rye, oats and peas were grown virtually everywhere.

---

[39] Meeres, Records of Norwich Cathedral, 1. Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 76–77 lists the manors apportioned to the department of the master of the cellar, but does not give Eaton and Trowse Newton, though he gives additionally Aldeby.

[40] Virgoe, Estates, 353.

[41] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 114, Virgoe, Estates, 353.

[42] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 134.

[43] Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 128.

[44] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 35, on the following page he lists further sheep rearing places. Virgoe, Estates, 352 explains that sheep would mainly be raised on manors on the periphery, because the profitability of sheep farming was lower than that of grain production.

[45] Yaxley, The prior's manor-houses, 21.

[46] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 35.

[47] The data on the acreages of the different crops and the total arable demesne of each manor have already been collected by Bruce Campbell. However, since his public access database was neither functioning nor maintained during the work on this part of the thesis, the data have been extracted again by the author.

[48] Stone, Estates, 348, 355.

[49] Virgoe, Estates, 355, Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 235–236.

[50] Virgoe, Estates, 352.

However, the Flegg manors, in fertile eastern Norfolk, like other manors in that region, usually grew no or very little rye. It was partly replaced by mixed corn, *maslin*, a wheat-rye mixture.[51] The manors at Denham and Gateley also hardly ever sowed rye or *maslin*. At Hindolveston and Hindringham a clear preference for wheat can be detected, too.[52] Plumstead usually had more wheat than rye or *maslin* on its fields.[53] Sometimes small estates also omitted the sowing of rye.[54] On the other hand the manors around Norwich, Monks' Grange, Catton, Eaton and Taverham, grew much rye and partly no or very little wheat.[55]

The preference for wheat or rye is partly due to soil conditions, but the rye cultivation at the manors around Norwich is also explained by a close and hungry market in the town; due to the low price of rye, it was not profitable to transport it over a long distance.[56] Whereas the acreages sown with rye in Norfolk dropped after the Great Pestilence 1348–1349, those sown with wheat remained stable.[57] However, in

[51] Campbell, Eastern Norfolk, 31. The last time rye was sown in Hemsby is in 1287–1288, from 1294–1295 onwards mixed corn appears in the accounts and occupies a falling percentage of the sown acreages until the Hemsby rolls end in 1334–1335. The development in Martham mirrors closely the situation in Hemsby. The last time mixed corn is mentioned is in 1349–1350, afterwards only wheat was grown as winter corn in Martham until the 1420s. Scratby usually grew wheat, but never rye and rarely mixed corn.

[52] In Hindringham wheat and rye were sown until 1312–1313 (except 1287–1288, when no rye was sown). However, normally the number of acres sown with wheat was twice that for rye. Rye was replaced by *maslin* 1317–1318 and 1318–1319. From 1320–1321 onwards no rye or *maslin*, was sown at Hindringham. A similar situation prevailed in Hindolveston. Until the early 1300s wheat and rye can be found on the demesne (except in 1272–1273 and 1273–1274, when rye was omitted, and 1287–1288, when it was replaced by *maslin)*. After c.1310 rye was apart from individual years (1320–1321, 1395–1396, 1397–1398 and 1398–1399, probably in connection with wet conditions) not sown any more.

[53] The cropping strategy here was variable. Between 1312–1313 and 1331–1331 rye was replaced by *maslin*, after the mid-1330s both were sown. Very little rye or *maslin* were sown after 1354–1355. In the late 1390s the rye acreages increased again. Throughout the 1410s and 1420s more rye and *maslin* were grown in Plumstead, than ever in the second half of the fourteenth century, excepting the late 1390s.

[54] Thornham in northwest Norfolk sowed no rye in 1318–1319, 1322–1323 and 1325–1326. Worstead probably cultivated no rye after the Black Death. In 1330–1331 no wheat was sown.

[55] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 268. Monks' Grange had often wheat in very small parts of its demesne land between 1317–1318 and 1334–1335, but not before. Eaton generally grew no wheat, but exceptions occurred mainly in short phases during the mid-1290s, the late 1310s and early 1320s and between c.1359 and 1370. At Catton some wheat was grown around 1320 and in the early 1340s. Taverham gave over a small part of its land for wheat cultivation until c. the mid-1290s, then no wheat at all was grown until the mid-1330s. At the end of the 1330s wheat reappeared again and its acreages increased after the Black Death, when between the mid-1350s and the mid-1370s wheat occupied even half of the acreage dedicated to rye. Also during the last phase, c.1415–1425, the wheat acreage averaged one third of the rye acreage; only in 1413–1414 and 1420–1421 it was not grown.

[56] Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 219–20, 267–269.

[57] Campbell, Overton, Norfolk farming c.1250 – c.1850, 54. On the consumption of bread made of wheat, rye and/or barley, see Rogers, Was Rye Ever the Ordinary Food of the English?, 121–124 and Stone, Consumption of field crops, 13, 17–23.

a county that mainly grew barley, barley bread was the most important staple food of the urban poor.[58]

Several estates had woods: Hindolveston, Eaton, Thurning, Gateley, Plumstead and Monks' Grange (part of Thorpe wood). Mostly underwood or coppiced wood was sold, but Hindolveston, Eaton, Thurning and Gateley also occasionally sold timber. The most important and valuable wood was at Hindolveston, which was the location of a wood market.[59] It is noticeable, that even when the manor was leased out in the 1380s this wood was kept under direct management by the priory.[60] Occasionally the wood-accounts in Hindolveston mention storm damage (Appendix 1).

In Eaton, Saunders identified a manor specialized on fuel and carrying. The tenants of Eaton performed carting services also for other manors, as well as heath-reaping and washing the priory's sheep.[61]

According to Saunders, Monks' Grange carried no tenants in the usual sense, at least there were no tenants' lands. Most likely the manor was worked by hired labour and by labour from other manors.[62] As such its income would almost entirely depend upon market sales. As long as prices were high the demand by the inhabitants of Norwich would guarantee fine profits, nonetheless Monks' Grange was highly vulnerable to agricultural depression, when profits from prices would fall and there was no secure income from rents. It is no surprise therefore that the last manorial account from this manor comes from the mid-1330s, a decade when many good harvest and an increasing currency shortage led to deflationary tendencies.[63]

Catton was submitted to another unusual process: between 1282–1283 and 1285–1286 its demesne land disappeared, though no evidence for its leasing-out

[58] Rutledge, Economic life, 183; Stone, Consumption of field crops, 17.

[59] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 77–78.

[60] NRO, DCN 60/18/43A-49, 1382–1383 to 1391–1392.

[61] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 36. Interestingly his example for the carrying service of the men of Eaton (Stow MS., f. 26) is a transport of wheat from Sedgeford to Norwich, stopping overnight at Sedgeford and receiving supplies on the way back in North Elmham. Obviously the c.60 km could be covered by half a dozen empty and – on their way back – half-laden carts in one day. A fully laden cart, carrying about 40 bushel of grain, could travel up to 39 km on a single day, Masschaele, Inland Trade, 202–204. For allowing the exceptionally long distance from Sedgeford to Norwich the carts of the Eaton tenants were merely half-laden, with about 18 bushel of wheat. The arrangement was profitable for Norwich Cathedral Priory, because they could rely on the carrying service of the tenants of Eaton; these men received no or very low wages for their work and kept the horses and carts at their own expense. It should be noted that Farmer, Two Wiltshire manors, 5–7 sets the normal distance of grain transports to the market on roads at 16.5 km, so that a return journey could be made within a single day.

[62] Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 36–37. Two manors of Canterbury Cathedral Priory operated upon the same principle. Between c.1290 and 1330 a large part of their income – around 85% – was constituted by sales, no tenants' rents contributed to it, Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 173, 182.

[63] On the harvests of the 1330s, see Campbell, Nature as historical protagonist, 299. For information on the currency shortage and deflation starting in the late 1320s with the situation deteriorating considerably during the 1330s, see Mayhew, Numismatic evidence, 7–12 and Britnell, Commercialisation 1000–1500, 179, 182–183. The exportation of coinage in the Hundred Year War contributed to the deflation and crisis, Bridbury, Before the Black Death, 407–410.

appears. It seems, that the demesne was put under the charge of the officials at Monks' Grange, where an increase of the acreage under crop occurred in the last quarter of the thirteenth century.[64]

2.2.2 *The Making of Manorial Accounts and Their Economic Context*

The concentration on the direct management of the demesne land by Norwich Cathedral Priory in the thirteenth century resulted in the need for stricter supervision and administration. The earliest surviving *compoti* date to 1255–1256, but the start of the keeping of written administrative records must pre-date this year. Early *compotus* rolls appear not to have been preserved with the tightest regularity.[65] The last manorial account of a demesne under direct management survives for 1430–1431. In the period between 1256 and 1431 there are 840 surviving accounts from Norwich Cathedral Priory's manors in East Anglia.

The interpretation of the temporal distribution of the surviving accounts is complicated by the lack of a detailed economic and estate history of Norwich Cathedral Priory.[66] The density of the priory's surviving *compoti* over time as displayed in Fig. 2.2 is to a certain degree linked to the development of the demesne farming and thus to economic trends and administrative decisions at the cathedral priory.

After 1260 the number of surviving account rolls increases, although survival is patchy and there remain very many gap years. This coincides with a significant augmentation in the acreage of demesne land under the plough between 1260 and c.1300. During this time the total acreages of demesne land under crop was increased by an eighth from c.2583 acres to 2928 acres. At Sedgeford the increase was much more drastic, although in Gnatingdon the sown acreage had already been large before (Fig. 2.3). Only Catton, Gateley, Hindringham and Hindolveston witnessed a reduction of demesne land.[67] Central Norfolk and eastern manors increased the acreages for wheat.[68] From 1270 to 1320 the price-wage ratio was favourable for

[64] Stone, Estates, 343 and 620, note 27; Saunders, Obedientiary and manor rolls, 36, had assumed that the 'lord [Norwich Cathedral Priory] was bought out at Catton'.

[65] Dodwell, Muniments, 330. On the reasons for drawing up accounts and keeping them properly see King, Estate management, 6–11.

[66] The economic history of Norwich Cathedral Priory has not been as studied as profoundly as that of similar houses, Virgoe, Estates, 340. Virgoe's article itself is a short overview of the subject from the twelfth century until the dissolution of the cathedral priory 1538. Stone, The estates of Norwich Cathedral Priory, 1100–1300, stops in 1300. Campbell's work on agricultural history includes a high quantity of manorial accounts and other material relating to the estates of Norwich Cathedral Priory, but does not focus on this house. Slavin, Bread and ale, focuses on the supply of the cathedral priory with grain.

[67] Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 232.

[68] Virgoe, Estates, 352.

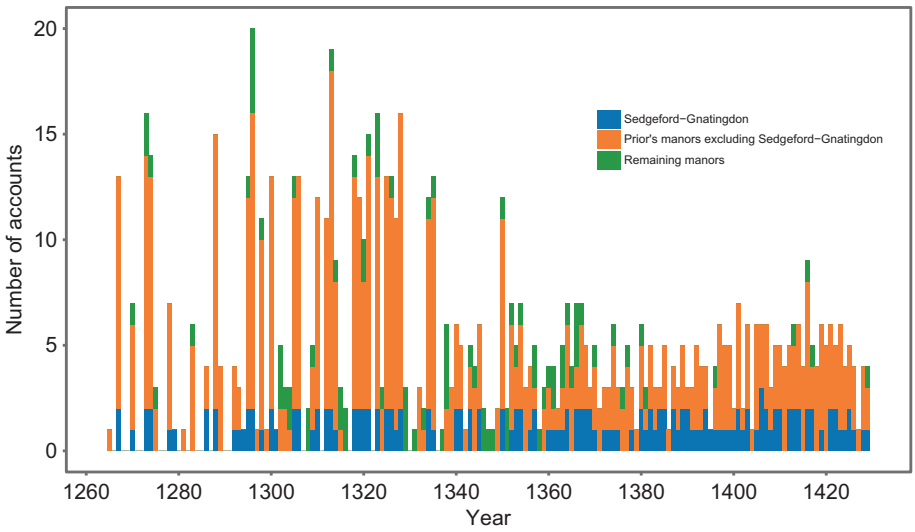

Fig. 2.2 Norwich Cathedral Priory: numbers of accounts per year 1256–1431. The prior's manors supply the most reliable data, and Sedgeford and Gnatingdon form the most complete series amongst the prior's manors

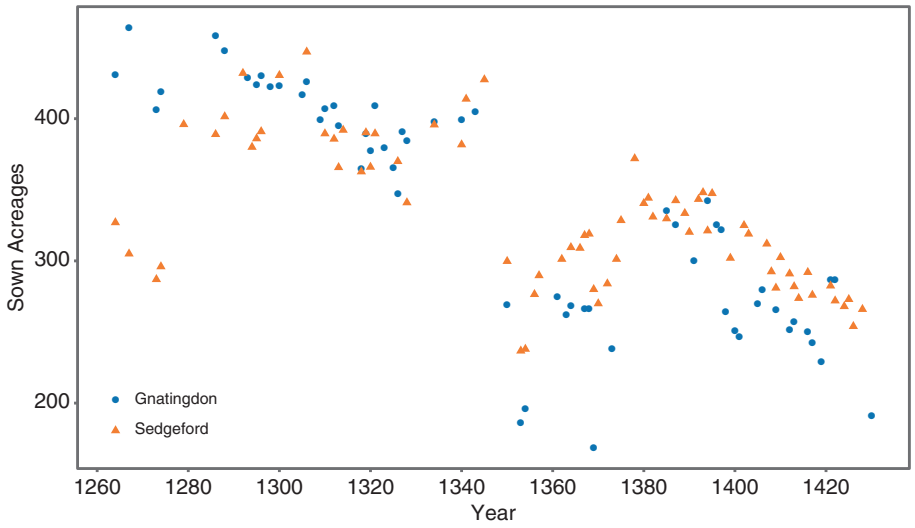

Fig. 2.3 Sedgeford and Gnatingdon: cultivated demesne land 1264–1431. Sedgeford and Gnatingdon possessed the largest demesnes lands of Norwich Cathedral Priory

demesne agriculture, prices were high and wages low[69]; it was the period of 'high farming'.

The very low number of accounts before 1272–1273 and especially in those years immediately preceding 1272 can be explained by the attack of the citizens of Norwich on the cathedral precinct in summer 1272, which caused widespread damage to the priory's buildings by arson and pillaging.[70]

Under prior Henry de Lakenham (1289–1310) a centrally directed process to expand the income of the priory set in. This included a temporary halt of the acquisition of land[71] and a refinement of the accounting process by the introduction of the accounts of *proficua maneriorum*.[72] These records on the profits of the manors appear as separate documents the first time in 1293–1294 and were made until 1341.[73] During the priorates of Henry de Lakenham and Robert de Langley (1310–1326) the interest in the direct exploitation of the demesne combined with enhanced accounting procedures results in a high number of accounts per (surviving) year from the mid-1290s to the late 1320s (Fig. 2.2). Henry de Lakenham's approach towards direct cultivation mirrors the general attitude of his contemporaries, which was marked by a growing concern about profitability and efficiency of demesne farming.[74] This was caused by a temporary drop in grain prices in the latter quarter

[69] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 235–236. Stone calculated the ratio between prices and wages by dividing the yearly price of wheat by yearly wages for reaping and binding corn.

[70] Noble, Norwich Cathedral Priory, 16.

[71] Stone, Profit-and-loss accountancy, 41–42. This was a marked change of attitude, as under Prior William de Kirkby demesne farming was seen almost unreflected as positive and was therefore increased, ibid., 41. The halt of enlarging the demesne lasted about a decade, but no major changes took place afterwards. In contrast to the general trend, the small unit at North Elmham was increasing after 1300 and reached its peak around 1320. The land under direct control was then falling in accordance with other manors from c.1327 onwards, Yaxley, North Elmham Park, 570–571. He also indicates a profit maximisation strategy of Norwich Cathedral Priory, ibid., 573. Normally the wheat produced at North Elmham would be sent to the monks, but in years of high wheat prices, it was sold, so 1319–1320 and 1320–1321 60% and 1391–1392 40% were marketed.

[72] Denholm-Young, Seigniorial administration, 129–130 calls the improved accounting methods in the form of the *proficuum* as employed by Norwich Cathedral Priory (and by a few more landlords) 'an attempt to change the bias of the account from an estimate of the liability of the accounting official to an estimate of yearly profit and loss'.

[73] Virgoe, Estates, 351 names 1295 as the first year for the profit of the manors. However, the manorial account Sedgeford NRO, DCN 60/33/10 in 1293–1294 has no profit of the manor entry at the bottom of the face any more (where they were to be found before) and the first *proficua maneriorum* are dated 6 Henry [de Lakenham], which is 1293–1294. Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 453–466 and Stone, Profit-and-loss accountancy, 36, too, place the first account of profit of the manors under 1293–1294. In the NRO catalogue they are compiled under DCN 40/13.

[74] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 199–201. Profit calculations were introduced in the accounts of many other ecclesiastical landlords, ibid., 199. According to Harvey, Westminster Abbey, 149, at Westminster Abbey the abbot introduced profit calculations by the end of the thirteenth century, prior and convent followed about a decade later. As a result the less profitable demesnes lands were put at lease.

of the thirteenth century (apart from the famine years in the mid-1290s), rises in wages and a very high taxation level.[75]

Within this period the years 1314–1315 to 1316–1317, the time of the Great Famine, hold a very low number of preserved *compoti* (Fig. 2.2).[76]

The cattle plague 1319–1320 and repeated cattle diseases in the 1320s and 1330s took their toll on the manors of Norwich Cathedral Priory, though its estates and Norfolk in general suffered comparatively light losses in the outbreak of 1319–1320.[77] Nevertheless an impact on the agricultural demesne production is visible in a temporary augmentation of arable at the expense of pasture in the direct aftermath of the cattle plague on some manors of Norwich Cathedral Priory: an increase of about 10% of the sown acreage occurred in Hindringham, Martham and Monks' Granges. This can on the one hand be explained by a depletion of bovine stocks,

[75] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 203–205. The fact that the first group of separate profit of the manors calculations was done at Norwich Cathedral Priory in 1293–1294, introduces another facet. Grain prices were very high in the years following the harvests 1293 and 1294 and still elevated after the harvest 1295, see Munro, Revisions of the Phelps Brown and Hoskins 'Basket of Consumables' commodity price series . For Norwich Cathedral Priory as a landowner this was the opportunity for increased profits through the sale of grain and therefore the establishment of the accounts of *proficua maneriorum* might have been triggered by the desire to evaluate the potential for higher financial gains under these conditions.

[76] For the difficult years of the Great Famine very few manorial accounts survive for Norfolk in general, Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 28. Concerning Norwich Cathedral Priory it may that the accounts, especially for the usually well documented prior's manors, were either having difficulties getting through the auditing process, or were indeed not even drawn up. However, the state of the preserved documents during those and bordering years, raises the possibility that the accounts of this period were damaged beyond repair, possibly by humidity or bad storage. The *compoti* of the prior's manors made in the years preceding and following the Great Famine are all in a bad condition. The accounts for 1313–1314 are creased and partly discoloured, their state is often worse on the right edge of the face respectively the left edge of the dorse, than on the rest of the document. In 1317–1318, the right edge of the face of all twelve surviving rolls of the prior's manors is damaged. For the crisis years 1314–1315 to 1315–1316 merely five accounts survive, they are also damaged; only one of them belongs to a prior's manor, BLO, MS Rolls Norfolk, Eaton 25 in 1314–1315. The other accounts are from Scratby, Worstead and Arminghall. The Scratby rolls, for the land attached to the church in this village, for 1314–1316, NRO, DCN 60/30/04–5, are both marked by damage on the right edge of the face respectively the left edge of the dorse. Worstead NRO, DCN 60/39/06 in 1315–1316 also fits the emerging picture. Although Attlebridge NRO, DCN 61/16 for 1314–1315 is not in a good state, either, being partly discoloured and the ink faded, the right edge of the face is in no worse condition than the rest of the account. No accounts are available for 1316–1317. The damage that threatened the *compoti* of the prior's manors for 1313–1314 and 1317–1318 might have destroyed the parchments made during the Great Famine or affected them so badly that they were removed from the collection at a time, when BLO, MS Rolls Norfolk, Eaton 25 had already been separated from the main collection which is today in the NRO. Since most accounts suffered at the same side, the right edge of the face, this side must have been exposed to the cause of damage, maybe while being kept in hutches in the muniment room.

[77] Slavin, Cattle plague, 175. He also notes, that against all odds the estates at Sedgeford (though not Gnatingdon) and North Elmham escaped the cattle plague 1319–1320 and a very low mortality can also be registered for Gateley, close to North Elmham. Manors like Monks' Grange and Eaton lost about half of their bovids. Worst hit were the eastern estates at Martham and Hemsby, Hemsby's loss rate lay above 70%, ibid., 168, 171.

which led to a pasture surplus, and on the other hand by still sufficient numbers of surviving draught-animals to ensure the ploughing of the arable. The additional arable was sown with legumes and oats, to ensure soil fertility and the supply of fodder for stots.[78]

By 1324–1325 the cathedral had begun experimenting in leasing out the dairy production on the prior's manors. In this year Hindringham reports the dairy *ad firmam*.[79] This experiment started, when prices for cheese and butter were falling after a post-cattle plague high in the early 1320s and when a severe drought was impacting on pastures and meadows (Sect. 6.2). Very dry conditions also dominated in the summer half year 1326 and can not have strengthened the faith of the monks in the economic viability of dairy production. In the following years the leasing out of the dairy sector gained ground. In 1326–1327 many cattle and sheep died of pestilence on the Canterbury estates and caused a decline in stock-farming and dairy profits.[80] In the Norwich accounts, too, references to sick or dead cattle appear in the agricultural year 1325–1326, as in Gnatingdon, Hindolveston, Martham, Monks' Grange, North Elmham, Plumstead and Taverham.[81] As a consequence in 1327–1328 the cows in Hemsby, Hindolveston, Hindringham, Martham and North Elmham were farmed out[82]; 1328 was another year of warm and dry weather during the growing season, which must have reduced grass growth. Cattle health was affected, Hindolveston reported some cows not calving, being sterile and being dry or not giving milk; the North Elmham roll mentions two sterile cows. The dairy sector at Plumstead was at farm by 1331–1332 and at Monks' Grange it was leased between this year and 1333–1334[83]; it should be noted that the years 1331–1333 had very warm and dry summer seasons. Sedgeford and Gnatingdon were the only manors that still kept the dairy production under direct management[84] until c.1339–1340, the first Sedgeford account in which the cows are leased is in 1340–1341, in

[78] Slavin, Cattle plague, 174. In Norfolk draught-horses were already often used for ploughing, so this sector of the arable production was less disrupted in Norfolk than elsewhere, Hallam, Eastern England, 298; Langdon, Was England a technological backwater, 282–283. See also Fig. 2.3, which shows the slight increase in the arable land at Sedgeford and Gnatingdon 1318–1319 to 1320–1321, NRO, DCN 60/33/20-22, NRO, DCN 60/14/17-19 as described by Slavin also for other manors. Although Sedgeford escaped the cattle plague, Gnatingdon did not. Both demesne were closely linked and under the supervision of the same sergeant, John de Elmham, so that the loss of livestock in Gnatingdon would have affected both units. Sedgeford in fact send cattle to Gnatingdon and Thornham, Slavin, Cattle plague, 179.

[79] NRO, DCN 60/20/22. The lease started at 2 February 1325.

[80] Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 109, 165.

[81] Gnatingdon NRO, DCN 60/14/22, Hindolveston NRO, DCN 60/18/25, Martham NRO, DCN 60/23/21, Monks' Grange NRO, DCN 60/26/21, North Elmham NRO, DCN 60/10/21, Plumstead NRO, DCN 60/29/21 and Taverham NRO, DCN 60/35/23.

[82] Hemsby NRO, DCN 60/15/15, Hindolveston NRO, DCN 60/18/28, Hindringham NRO, DCN 60/20/23, Martham NRO, DCN 60/23/22 and North Elmham NRO, DCN 60/10/22.

[83] Plumstead NRO, DCN 60/29/23, Monks' Grange NRO, DCN 60/26/23 and NRO, DCN 62/02.

[84] As already noted, Sedgeford had not been affected by the cattle plague, see, Slavin, Cattle plague, 169.

Gnatingdon the dairy was at farm in 1342–1343.[85] The paragraphs listing the profits of the leased dairy production of the other manors continue to report sterile, dry or non-calving cows as an explanation for low rents paid.[86] Restocking was a slow process and usually the landlords concentrated on rebuilding the numbers of the oxen as plough animals first. In accordance with the national trend the dairy cattle on the estates of Norwich Cathedral Priory were not restocked before the mid-1340s.[87]

During the mid-1320s the prices for agricultural products began to fall, additionally the impact of the cattle plague 1319–1320 was still being felt. These altered macro-economic conditions led to a reassessment of the profitability of demesne farming at Norwich Cathedral Priory under the new prior, William de Claxton (1326–1344): the dairy production was farmed out on many manors, the two vineyards of Norwich Cathedral Priory in Sedgeford and Plumstead leave no further trace in the manorial documents (Sect. 6.7), and there was generally a slight downturn in the acreages of demesne land under plough. In those years the priory reduced its demesne land by about 3% compared to the pre-famine peak.[88] This readjustment mainly hit the northwestern and central Norfolk manors, as well as some estates near Norwich, whereas the demesne at the very productive units at Martham and Hemsby remained stable and the directly managed land at Trowse Newton near Norwich actually increased; the agricultural production of Norwich priory now concentrated on the estates in the region east of Norwich and on some estates near the town itself.[89]

It appears that after 1327–1328 the preservation of the manorial accounts was less strict. Perhaps after the audit and after the processing of the *compoti* data in the rolls for the profits of the manors, the main attention was turned to safe-keeping the *proficua* documents rather than the actual manorial accounts. In any case the *proficua maneriorum* accounts for the late 1320s and the 1330s survive, but the number of preserved manorial accounts is very low. Many account rolls are available only for 1333–1334 and 1334–1335. The *proficua maneriorum* contain indications that by the 1330s Norwich Cathedral Priory was experimenting with piecemeal letting as well as with letting whole manors to farm, as the manors of Hindolveston, Hindringham and Thornham for several years in the 1330s.[90]

---

[85] In 1339–1340 the dairy production was still under direct management in both manors, NRO, LEST/IB 17 and NRO, LEST/IC 06. The following year, 1340–1341, it was leased in Sedgeford NRO, LEST/IB 18 and probably in Gnatingdon, too. However, the next useable Gnatingdon account dates to 1342–1343, NRO, LEST/IB 08; the dairy production was at farm.

[86] Information on infirm, sterile or otherwise unproductive cows is given under the *daeria vendita* section when the dairy production is at lease, since for the non-productive cows less rent would be paid. When the dairy production is directly managed by the cathedral priory, this paragraph displays lists of milk, butter and cheese produced and sold.

[87] Slavin, Cattle plague, 177.

[88] Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 233.

[89] Ibid., 233.

[90] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 233–234, Hindringham and Hindolveston were leased in 1333 and back in hand by 1339, Thornham was at farm by 1334 and again directly managed in the 1340s. Hindolveston's short *compoti* for the mid-1330s indicate leasing, the accounting official is the (rent) *collector*, NRO, DCN 62/02 in 1333–1334 and NRO, DCN 60/18/29 in 1334–1335.

This decline in demesne farming is in accordance with tendencies of other ecclesiastical landowners, such as Canterbury Cathedral Priory, where a downturn is also noticeable.[91] The income of the manors of the bishop of Ely fell by more than half from 1325 to 1333 and sank even further in the years 1333–1346 (compared to 1319–1323), hand-in-hand with this development went piecemeal letting of the demesne.[92] This trend seems to have been caused by a declining population, a heavy fall in prices for agricultural products and impacts of adverse weather, such as sea incursions resulting from storm activity.[93] The grain price recovered shortly in the years around 1330, but due to good harvests, deflationary tendencies and currency shortage it entered a real depression afterwards which lasted until the beginning of the 1350s.[94] As a result of the unfavourable development of the price-wage ratio, landlords turned to less labour-intensive forms of agriculture on demesne land.[95] The shrinkage of market-profits of demesne cultivation had set in before the Black Death, but the epidemic accelerated and aggravated this problem.[96]

The supply of manorial accounts of Norwich Cathedral Priory remains low throughout the 1340s, and the last *proficua maneriorum* accounts were made in 1340.[97] Especially the years preceding the Black Death 1348–1349 are badly accounted for, among them the partly wet summers and bad harvests of 1345–1346 (Sect. 8.2). However, it appears that the return to demesne farming at the central Norfolk manors and at Thornham led to an increase of demesne cultivation on the estates of Norwich Cathedral Priory, so that before the Black Death the area under crop rivalled the extent of the demesne land in the pre-Great Famine years (Fig. 2.3 for Sedgeford and Gnatingdon).[98]

The high number of accounts dating to 1349–1350 can be attributed to the effects of the Great Pestilence. A number of the manors was probably at farm before 1348–

[91] Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 144.

[92] Miller, Ely, 105–106, a consequence was also the reduction of capital investment in the manors by the bishop.

[93] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 45–46 on the role of the indecisive and partly negative population trend, falling prices for agriculture goods, murrains and potential weather impacts. He gives Westminster Abbey and Crowland Abbey as exponents of a policy of leasing some demesne land during the 1330s and 1340s. According to Hybel, Grain trade, 244, the import of Baltic grain, mostly rye and oats for the urban proletariat, contributed to the depression of grain prices in England after 1325–1326. Its most important effect was to smooth the peaks of the grain prices in the months preceding the harvest, when most of those imports entered England, ibid., 235. For the impact on the estates of Canterbury Cathedral Priory respectively on those of the bishopric of Ely, see: Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 126 and 144, Miller, Ely, 105. Concerning the flooding, see Bailey, *Per impetum maris*, 190–191, 205–207 on the high storm activity c.1275–1350 and the declining profitability of agriculture in coastal areas which resulted in an insufficient upkeep of the sea defences.

[94] Bridbury, Black Death, 579. For literature on the good harvests, deflation and currency shortage, see note 63.

[95] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 236–243.

[96] Britnell, Commercialisation 1000–1500, 190–191.

[97] Virgoe, Estates, 351.

[98] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 234.

1349. Considering the high mortality in this year it seems likely that upon the lessees' death the priory had to take several manors back into direct management.

Although grain prices oscillated at a high level after 1351 for a quarter of a century, and so helped to usher in the 'Indian summer of demesne farming',[99] labour costs were rising[100] and thus narrowing the potential for profit. Hence Norwich Cathedral Priory was reviewing its economic strategy at the beginning of the 1350s.[101] During the spring of 1352 an inventory of the prior's manor houses was drawn up, for assessing their state after the pestilence and probably for helping the monks to form a future strategy.[102] After 1350 it is basically the *compoti* of Catton, Hindolveston, Martham, Plumstead, and Taverham as well as Sedgeford and Gnatingdon that were stored in Norwich Cathedral Priory. Some accounts also survive for Eaton, Gateley, North Elmham and Hindringham. Between 1351 and 1431 the number of preserved accounts per year averages merely four, but the supply is steady and gap years are rare. The demesne land under cultivation of most manors, for which accounts before and after the Black Death are available, drops considerably after 1350 (Fig. 2.3),[103] exceptions are the small units at Taverham, North Elmham and the land attached to the church in Scratby. This reduction in directly managed demesne land and the fact that after 1350 it is a small circle of manors that provides manorial accounts for over 80 years, until the end of the period under consideration here, does imply that the priory made a scrupulous and conscious decision about the manors that were worth keeping in hand under the new economic circumstances and which manors were not sufficiently profitable under such an arrangement and were better off being let at farm.[104] Consequently Hindolveston was leased out and was followed at the end of the decade by the small demesnes at Thornham, North Elmham and probably also Gateley and Catton. In consequence by the mid-1370s the area under direct management had fallen by 70% compared to before 1350. The c. eleven demesne still under direct control also sowed merely three quarters of the land tilled before the Black Death (Fig. 2.3).[105]

Careful decisions and foresight were needed by the monks in the period after the Great Pestilence, because the priory already faced financial problems before that

[99] So termed by Bridbury, Black Death, 584; Mate, Agrarian economy after the Black Death, 345.

[100] Farmer, Prices and wages, 1350–1500, 471, 516–20.

[101] The immediate short term effect of the pestilence on the manors of Norwich Cathedral Priory might have been disastrous; widespread disruption and loss of income was common for landlords in those years, Britnell, Commercialisation 1000–1500, 191. This was also the case on the Canterbury estates, see Smith, Canterbury Cathedral, 144.

[102] Yaxley, The prior's manor houses, 1. The inventory was made for eleven manor houses: Hemsby, Plumstead, Trowse Newton, Eaton, Taverham, North Elmham, Hindolveston, Hindringham, Sedgeford. Gnatingdon and Thornham.

[103] Virgoe, Estates, 354 and Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 235.

[104] As Stone, Medieval agriculture, 83–84, points out, that the 'Indian summer' of demesne farming was severely clouded for some landlords, among them Ramsey Abbey, Battle Abbey, and some demesnes of the bishopric of Winchester. In the 1350s abandoning the direct demesne agriculture became a real option for landlords in England, Britnell, Commercialisation 1000–1500, 188.

[105] Campbell, Seigniorial agriculture, 235.

time. Although the 1330s were generally still good times for Norwich Cathedral Priory the obedientiaries' income was falling since this decade[106] and in 1347 bishop Bateman's injunctions also show his anxiety about the priory's financial state.[107]

In addition to these factors the performance of the administrative personnel for the demesne cultivation might not have been up to the expected standard. After the Great Pestilence landlords faced increasing difficulties in finding capable and reliable managers for their demesne. Complaints about their performance and a high turnover of administrative personnel were not unusual.[108] The estates of Norwich Cathedral Priory, too, were subjected to rapidly changing managers during the early to mid-1350s (Appendix 2), which resulted in the need for closer supervision of the demesne agriculture.

This and the narrowing margin for profit in demesne farming are mirrored in the tightened accounting procedures and careful dating structure introduced under prior Laurence de Leck (1352–1357) in the accounting/agricultural year 1354–1355. From now onwards there appear detailed sections for performed or sold *opera,* and *terra* accounts at the end of the grange account, listing the total acreage sown, the acreage in fallow, the area used as a sheepfold etc. In the grange accounts under each crop the acres sown with the crop in the individual fields appear. All acres and the quantity of seed used are then summed up and the average sowing density is given. For dating, a combination of the prior's years in office with the king's regnal years is used and raises the dating safety.[109] These measures of regaining control during the priorate of Laurence de Leck materialized in Sedgeford and Gnatingdon

[106] Noble, Norwich Cathedral Priory, 30–32, 39–41. The running of the monastery, its financial status and administration are discussed ibid., 10–91.

[107] Cheney, Norwich Cathedral Priory, 94, 97, Dodwell, Monastic community, 253 notes that the annual (obedientiary) accounts were not coming in as they should. Not that all those measures were of much use in the overturned economic and social circumstances after the Black Death: by 1363 the annual deficit recorded in the *status obedientiarorum* for 1347, £173, had trebled, Cheney, Norwich Cathedral Priory, 97.

[108] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 216–219.

[109] Only in one period after the accounting reform is the dating problematic. In the early part of the reign of Henry IV the prior's years in office are in conflict with the king's regnal years. This irritation was caused by Richard II abdicating on Michaelmas 1399 and the parliament accepting the abdication one day later. Whereas the prior's years of Alexander de Totyngton run smoothly over the 1390s and the first decade of the fifteenth century, the regnal years fall out of step between 1400 and 1408. With the new prior Robert de Burnham (elected 1407) the situation was rectified and on the accounts the regnal year 9–10 of Henry IV is given in two consecutive years, with the first year in office of Robert de Burnham (1407–1408) and with his second year (1408–1409). The confusion is obvious, because the manorial accounts of Norwich Cathedral Priory for this time had in the past been separated into two different collections which are today both in the NRO. The majority of *compoti* are in the Dean and Chapter Archives (DCN), but the accounts for Sedgeford and Gnatingdon are in the Le Strange of Hunstanton collection (LEST). The collections were originally dated independently; whereas the DCN collection was dated over the prior's years, the Le Strange collection was dated over the regnal years and hence is a year misdated in the catalogues and was re-dated for this study.

in the form of a halt to the free fall of the demesne acreage under plough which had begun with the Great Pestilence (Fig. 2.3).[110]

The turbulent 1350s were followed by two decades of relative stability with regard to the manors under direct management and the demesne land under crop. The recurrent waves of plague in 1361, 1369 and 1375 (Chap. 10) and the 'Pokkes' in 1365 (Sect. 8.4), however, brought population numbers down further. Due to high mortality and the dislocation of the workforce in the short run the epidemics had a potentially disruptive influence on the acreage of demesne land sown.[111] This effect is obvious in Sedgeford, Gnatingdon and Taverham in the outbreak 1369, when comparing their demesne under crop between 1368 and 1373 (Fig. 2.3).[112] The information from Hindolveston and Sedgeford in 1375 does not indicate a drop in sown acres (Fig. 2.3),[113] and for the wave of 1361 too few data are available. Generally after the Great Pestilence the productivity of some estates was hindered by an increased use of unwillingly performed, but cheap, customary labour services, instead of expensive hired labour.[114]

In the mid-1370s, however, the favourable conditions, which allowed the continued flourishing of demesne farming in England after the Black Death, came to an end when the bumper harvests of the mid- and late 1370s, which caused the grain prices to fall from 1376 onwards,[115] occurred amidst the decreasing population trend,[116] which lead to rising wages.[117] In consequence the direct exploitation of the agricultural demesne became less and less profitable. At Westminster Abbey – which had been considering putting manors at farm ever since the Black Death – the pendulum swung fully towards a policy of leasing after 1370.[118] In the 1380s more monasteries and cathedral priories decided to return at last to the system of leasing out whole demesnes (apart from the home farm),[119] among them Canterbury

[110] The continued fall of sown acreages at Sedgeford and Gnatingdon in the early 1350s can be due to the shortage of labour as well as to the prevailing dry conditions in at least 1352. Sedgeford and Gnatingdon are very drought sensitive being situated on sandy soil.

[111] Stone, Medieval agriculture, 251–252.

[112] NRO, LEST/IB 30-32, NRO, LEST/IC 17-19, NRO, DCN 60/35/37-40.

[113] NRO, DCN 60/18/41-43 1367–1368 to 1379–1380, NRO, LEST/IB 33-35 1373–1374 to 1377–1378.

[114] The lower productivity of customary labour as compared to hired labour lead to lower hay yields, slower corn harvesting and slower weeding on the manor of Wisbech Barton in Cambridgeshire, Stone, Wisbech Barton, 648–649, 652–654.

[115] Bridbury, Black Death, 584–585, Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 430. In 1378 the price fell further and remained low for the rest of the Middle Ages, Bridbury, Black Death, 579.

[116] In 1377 there were about 2.5 to 3 million people in England, that was a net decline of c.45% since 1348 when population would have numbered around 4.5 to 6 million people, tending rather to the higher estimate (the real peak, however, was around 1300), Hatcher, Plague, 68.

[117] Bridbury, Black Death, 585–586.

[118] Harvey, Westminster Abbey, 151.

[119] Bridbury, Black Death, 584, Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 430. Generally, as the price of land fell and that of labour rose, the most intensive farming systems downgraded their degree of intensity, Campbell, Fair field once full of folk, 63. Consequently sheep farming also became more popular

Cathedral Priory.[120] At Norwich Cathedral Priory a similar tendency can be detected. Sedgeford, Gnatingdon and Martham seem to have been kept in hand, but at Sedgeford the sown acreage was reduced around 1380 (Fig. 2.3).[121] After the violent shock of the Peasants' Revolt 1381[122] and with the election of prior Alexander de Totyngton in spring 1382 the economic strategy at the cathedral priory was drastically modified. More manors were put at lease. Plumstead dropped out of direct management after 1383. Hindolveston was farmed out in 1382–1383. Since the large wood at Hindolveston continued to be managed by the priory, accounts for that place continue to be drawn up. Obviously the cathedral priory was not overly hopeful concerning the future prospects of demesne farming in Hindolveston, because the accounts between 1382–1383 and 1391–1392[123] specify that the manor was leased out to the *firmarius* Nicholas Bottes for 40 years starting in 1382–1383. Hindolveston's fate was shared by Taverham, Monks' Grange and probably Eaton. The monks were now cultivating barely half the acreage compared to the time before the Black Death.[124] The economic crisis faced by the monks manifested itself also in the administration of the manors that remained under direct management. At Sedgeford and Gnatingdon the administrative structure was changed (Appendix 2.1). Until 1381–1382 a reeve and a hayward had supported the sergeant in his work in Sedgeford; in Gnatingdon the offices of reeve and hayward had existed likewise. Latest by 1384–1385, however, the office of the reeve was abolished.[125] As soon as the first manorial accounts were drawn up under the new prior Alexander de Totyngton in autumn 1382 the density of weather references in those documents increased substantially (Appendix 1). It may well be that this increased documentation of factors interfering with agriculture or raising costs was linked to the decreased mutual control of the manorial officers due to the reduction in administrative personnel.

After this depressed period, a change in the attitude towards demesne farming came on in East Anglia in the early 1390s. The manor of Hindolveston was back under direct management by the cathedral priory at the latest in 1395–1396.[126] By that time in addition to the *compoti* of Sedgeford, Gnatingdon and Martham, accounts for Plumstead, Eaton and North Elmham are preserved again. It appears

amongst landholders in Norfolk and elsewhere, Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 413–416 and Campbell, Overton, Norfolk Farming c.1250-c.1850, 77–78.

[120] Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 192.

[121] NRO, LEST/IB 35-38.

[122] The high tide of the Peasants' Revolt swept over East Anglia in June 1381, in Norfolk the manorial records of Abbey of St Benet's of Hulme were burned, but the revolt was over by July; Oman, Great Revolt, 99–134. The uprising was violent and widespread in Suffolk, the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds was ransacked and a number of monks killed, see Bailey, Medieval Suffolk, 186.

[123] NRO, DCN 60/18/43A-49.

[124] Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 235.

[125] Sedgeford NRO, LEST/IB 38-41, Gnatingdon NRO, LEST/IC 19-21.

[126] NRO, DCN 60/18/50.

that the poor harvests 1389 and 1390 and ensuing raised grain prices[127] resonated in Norwich Cathedral Priory and fuelled a desire to revive demesne farming on a larger scale, so that leased demesne land was taken back into hand. Even though another plague wave affected England in the early 1390s, economic conditions during that decade were more favourable for demesne farming than in the 1380s and instead of a loss a slight net profit could be made from the arable sector of the cathedral priory.[128] The changed circumstances where also felt in other eastern areas; at the Westminster Abbey manor of Kinsbourne in Hertfordshire profits were high throughout the 1390s.[129] Hence in the first decade of the fifteenth century the direct cultivation of demesne land of Norwich Cathedral Priory amounted to 64% of the acreage under crop on the eve of the Black Death.[130] Finally, when the North Elmham rolls end in 1410–1411, the bailiff's accounts for Taverham (1413–1414 to 1423–1424) and Great Cressingham (1412–1413 to 1416–1417) reappear. Generally record density is again satisfactory from the mid-1390s onwards, and the 1410s are particularly well documented.

During the 1420s this trend was decisively reversed[131]: Martham was leased by 1424 and the last manors under direct control were Sedgeford and Gnatingdon in 1430–1431 or 1429–1430 respectively.[132] By the early 1430s the era of demesne farming at Norwich Cathedral Priory had passed.[133]

This long insistence upon demesne farming sets Norwich Cathedral Priory apart from many other large ecclesiastical landowners, who, except for the more conser-

[127] Munro, Revisions of the Phelps Brown and Hoskins 'Basket of Consumables' commodity price series. Values advanced by one year. According to Walsingham, Historia Anglicana, vol. 2, 195, 198 the grain harvest was below average in 1389 and bad in 1390, see also Sect. 6.2.

[128] Slavin, Bread and ale, 78–79.

[129] Stern, A Hertfordshire demesne, 154.

[130] Campbell, Seigniorial Agriculture, 235–236.

[131] This development was perhaps helped by the raised mortality amongst the monks throughout the 1420s. Seven monks died in the outbreak of plague in 1420, and then about three monks died every year until 1425. Amongst them were also obedientiaries. Such a mortality in a community of then c. fifty monks resulted in a loss of expertise for managing the monastery as Noble, Norwich Cathedral Priory, 58–61 observes. This would apply to the direct management of the demesne, too.

[132] NRO, LEST/IB 70 and NRO, LEST/IC 42. Sedgeford was at farm in 1432–1433, NRO, LEST/IB 71, probably Gnatingdon was leased out in the same year, there is merely no account of Gnatingdon stating that it is at farm.

[133] As long as the income of Norwich Cathedral Priory was partly made up by demesne farming, the yearly income had varied greatly and enhanced the structural annual deficit. After deciding for a policy of leasing the priory achieved a much greater financial stability over the next fifty years, Virgoe, Estates, 357. However, that does not imply that farming generally was not profitable any more at all. Large, non-resident landowners might have faced particular difficulties during the period c.1410–1430, as pointed out by Stone, Medieval agriculture, 221–228. Apart from a narrowing margin for profit in commercial agriculture, these problems included potentially a decreasing quality of administrative personnel, since apt men could find good chances elsewhere in the agricultural sector, problems to exert labour services and the quality of performed work. It was during the agricultural depression of the 1460s and 1470s, that smaller landowners, like the Pastons in north-east and eastern Norfolk, faced severe difficulties in marketing grain, maintaining the level of rents, finding lessees and receiving arrears from unwilling tenants, Britnell, The Pastons, 137–142.

vative ones, had by 1400 abandoned demesne cultivation aside from their home farms.[134] The movement towards leasing had started in the 1380s and gathered pace in the 1390s[135]: Canterbury Cathedral Priory in a sudden move in the mid-1390s had given up demesne cultivation almost entirely,[136] Westminster Abbey and the bishopric of Worcester turned towards the same direction.[137] Ramsey Abbey followed between 1400 and 1410,[138] and the estates of Durham Cathedral Priory were also generally at lease in the fifteenth century.[139]

Out of the 840 manorial accounts from Norwich Cathedral Priory for the years 1256 to 1431, 561 provide a harvest date. The harvest date supply rate mirrors the survival rate of the accounts on a lower level (Figs. 2.2 and 3.5).The most reliable information comes from the prior's manors listed at the beginning of this chapter. Further information is provided by Aldeby, Great Cressingham, Henley, Plumstead (precentor's property), Scratby and Worstead as well as the much shorter series from Arminghall, Attlebridge, Bawburgh, Hardingham, Hevingham (bishop's manor), Heythe, Lakenham, North Elmham (bishop's manor), Ormesby, Thornage, Wicklewood and Witton.[140]

It can be concluded, that the data density of harvest dates provided by these *compoti* is sufficient for executing a statistical analysis and temperature reconstruction; the periods with low data coverage are the 1250s to 1290, the 1330s and 1340s as well as the 1380s. The information of the 1330s, 1340s and 1380s can be supplemented with data from the manorial records of other landowners.

---

[134] Miller, Introduction: Land and People, 13.

[135] Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 430.

[136] Smith, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 192.

[137] Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 430.

[138] Raftis, Ramsey Abbey, 266.

[139] Halcrow, Durham Cathedral Priory, 355–356. The movement towards leases began here in the 1380s, Britnell, Britain and Ireland, 430.

[140] These 840 manorial accounts include the listed estates under NRO, DCN 60 (Aldeby, Catton, Denham, Eaton, North Elmham, Gateley, Gnatingdon, Great Cressingham, Hemsby, Henley, Hindolveston, Hindringham, Martham, Melton, Monks' Grange, Trowse Newton, Plumstead, Plumstead (precentor's property), Scratby, Sedgeford, Taverham, Thornham and Worstead), as well as stray accounts from other places: Arminghall NRO, DCN 61/06, Lakenham NRO, DCN 61/10-11, Le Gannoc NRO, DCN 61/14, Attlebridge NRO, DCN 61/15-16, Bawburgh NRO, DCN 61/18-24, Fordham NRO, DCN 61/29, Hardingham NRO, DCN 61/31, Heythe NRO, DCN 61/33-34, NRO, DCN 62/02, Ormesby NRO, DCN 61/39-41, Postwick NRO, DCN 61/42, Wicklewood NRO, DCN 61/45, Wiggenhall NRO, DCN 61/46, Witton NRO, DCN 61/48. Accounts from the episcopal estates, surviving in NRO, DCN 95, are included: Thornegg/Thornage NRO, DCN 95/06, Hevingham NRO, DCN 95/11 and North Elmham NRO, DCN 95/07 and NRO, DCN 95/09. The accounts for Great Cressingham are under NRO, MC/212. Additional accounts of the major estates are also listed under Sedgeford NRO, LEST/IB and Gnatingdon NRO, LEST/IC, Martham NRO, NRS 5889, 20 D1-5920, 20 D3, and BLO, MS Rolls Norfolk, Eaton. The accounts have been checked for harvest information up to 1435. Harvest date information is available for all the manors listed under NRO, DCN 60, except for Melton.

2.2.3 *Archival History of Norwich Cathedral Priory*

The muniments of Norwich Cathedral Priory are mainly held in the Dean and Chapter Archives (DCN) at the NRO in Norwich. Over the course of time some *compoti* have become separated from this main collection: most of the accounts for the manors of Sedgeford and Gnatingdon from 1339–1340 to 1430–1431 are held in the Le Strange of Hunstanton collection (LEST) in the NRO, the manorial accounts of Martham from 1355[141] to 1423–1424 are in the holdings of the Norfolk Record Society (NRS) in the NRO, the Great Cressingham rolls are in the Minor Collections (MC/212), and most rolls of the manor of Eaton from 1358–1359 to 1422–1423 are in the Bodleian Libary in Oxford (BLO) under MS Rolls Norfolk.

Around 1300 Norwich Cathedral Priory witnessed the attempt to install a central storage room for the important documents and *acta*, whose arrangement was also checked and revised. This revision did not extend to the manorial accounts.[142] They would normally have been stored in the office of the obedientiary concerned, probably in hutches.[143] Usually the obedientiaries would also keep their own financial accounts, the so called obedientiary or obediental accounts, at hand for at least a while, although they should have been assembled in the central muniment room. This surely also applies to the less important manorial accounts.[144] Consequently the documents thus kept outside the central storage room were more likely to succumb to fire, riots or simple loss, as is demonstrated by the poor survival rate of manorial accounts in the years preceding the attack on the cathedral and the fire in the precinct in 1272 (Fig. 2.2).

The documents of the prior's manors must have been kept together and in good order throughout the fifteenth century and at least until 1538, the year of the dissolution of the cathedral priory. This continuity is underlined by the fact that the post 1354–1355 accounts for the prior's manors have been updated at some point after the end of the period under consideration here, that is after 1431. *Compoti* of the second half of the fourteenth century and later were often rolled from top to bottom and for identifying an account without unrolling it, information at the lower end, usually the dorse, is necessary. At this place the post mid-fourteenth century accounts were originally just dated with regnal years. In the cathedral priory, however, time was rather reckoned with the help of the prior's years in office, and

[141] NRO, NRS 5891, 20 D1 is an account only for summer 1355.

[142] Dodwell, Muniments, 327.

[143] Ibid., 330.

[144] This outlined storage system of the manorial accounts is supported by the evidence on the rolls themselves. So in 1317–1318, the right edge of the face respectively the left edge of the dorse of all twelve surviving rolls of the prior's manors is damaged. 1-3 cm of the parchment are missing. However, the roll Scratby NRO, DCN 60/30/06, which was made for the land attached to the appropriated church there and which did not belong to the prior, survives in an undisturbed condition with both edges intact. It can be concluded that the accounts of the prior's manors were kept together, perhaps in a hutch or pigeonhole, and all rolls were inserted in the same direction and kept in a yearly order.

consequently at some time after 1431, but probably before the dissolution of the priory, the prior's years in office were added at the lower end of the dorse for all accounts of the prior's manors. The *compoti* of the cellarer's manor of Great Cressingham and the accounts of Scratby and Worstead, which were not held by the prior, do not contain this additional information.

The break in the keeping of the muniments did not occur with the dissolution of the cathedral priory and the establishment of the Dean and Chapter at Norwich Cathedral in 1538, though it is likely the records of the now Dean and Chapter archive were not kept in good order in the later sixteenth century.[145]

The disruption of the continuity for the Dean and Chapter archive came during the Commonwealth in April 1649, when the Dean and Chapter were abolished in England. Their estates were seized for sale and the records of the confiscated lands had to be transported to London. In 1660 Parliament declared the sales of church land void, but the muniments would neither be returned promptly nor in good order to their ecclesiastical home institution. It seems likely that during this time some runs of accounts became detached from the main collection of the Dean and Chapter Archives and are today in minor collections, if not lost. When at Norwich Cathedral Priory a newly appointed prebendary found the records in 1681 in the 'treasury' in the cathedral precincts they were in a sad state and badly preserved.[146] Three hundred years later, in 1975 they were handed over to the NRO.

The Dean and Chapter archives of Norwich Cathedral Priory were first sorted, dated and described by H.W. Saunders.[147] Later Barbara Dodwell also turned her attention towards the history of the muniments of the priory and began sorting and classifying its documents.[148]

2.3 Supplementary Series

Some short and non-continuous series of harvest dates can be gained from account rolls for the holdings of the Abbey of St Benet's of Hulme, St Giles's Hospital (Great Hospital), the Norfolk manors of Hunstanton, Heacham, Ringstead, Fincham and Kempstone, and the Suffolk manors of Hinderclay, Redgrave and Akenham (Fig. 2.4). Many of these series give only short runs of information on the harvest, their value lies in supplementing and verifying the Norwich Cathedral Priory series

[145] Dodwell, Muniments, 331–332. The records of the estates of the medieval bishopric did not survive the reformation in a similarly favourable state. In 1535 the estates of the bishopric were almost completely granted to King Henry VIII. Consequently the records of these lands were handed over to the royal administration; the few stray documents left behind in Norwich are in the NRO in the 'Records of the estates of the bishopric of Norwich' under NRO, DN/EST 15 (Records relating to the bishop's estates before the exchange with St Benet's) and in the Dean and Chapter archives under DCN 95/1-23. The muniments sent to the royal administration are lost.

[146] Dodwell, Muniments, 332, Meeres, Records of Norwich Cathedral, 2.

[147] It should be noted that a number of misdatings occur in the collection.

[148] Meeres, Records of Norwich Cathedral, 5.

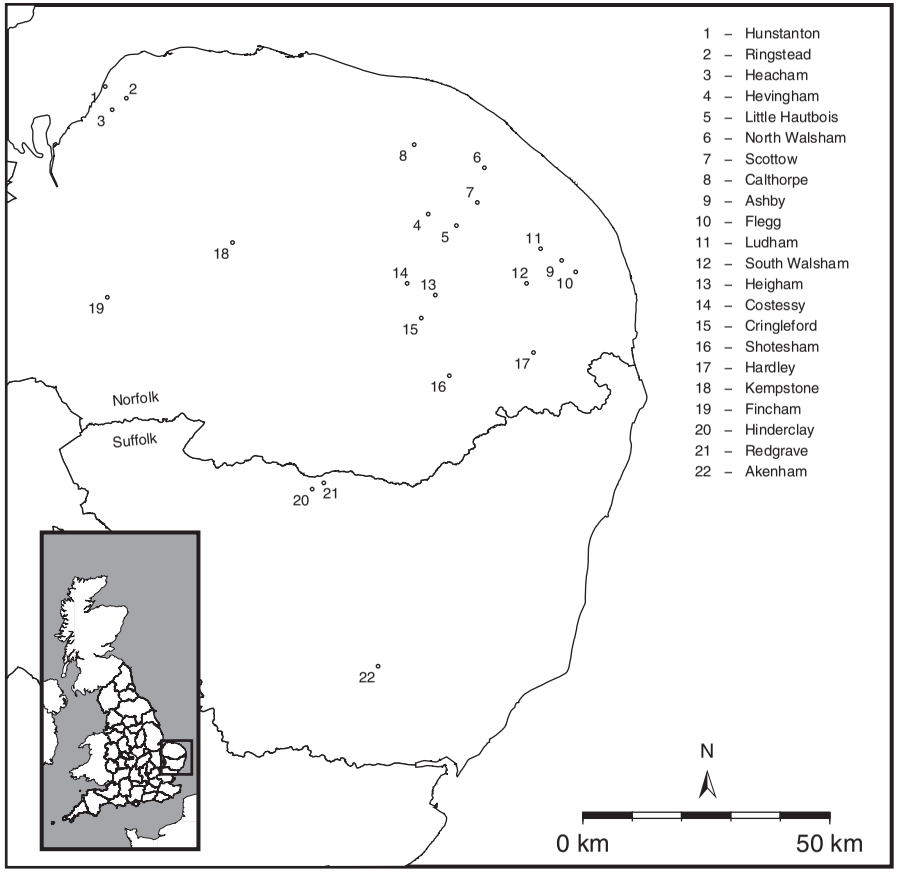

Fig. 2.4 Supplementary series: distribution of manors and other endowments. Shown are only manors, where accounts detail harvest information. Map with modern county boundaries

and filling some gap years. Especially the data density of the 1330s, 1340s and the 1350s, which are periods for which a relatively low number of Norwich Cathedral Priory accounts survives, is raised by integrating the data of those individual series.

A small series of 54 manorial accounts survive for the estates of the Abbey of St Benet's of Hulme in the relevant period 1256–1431. The earliest *compotus* dates 1284–1285 and the last one 1430–1431. They are held amongst the 'Records of the estates of the Bishop of Norwich' at the NRO.

The abbey was situated in eastern Norfolk near the village of Horning in a very isolated location at the junction of the rivers Bure and Thurne. According to legend the first religious community settled there as early as the year 800, but was dispersed by the Danish incursions in 870. The site was rebuilt in the tenth century. In 1019 King Cnut (re-) founded the convent and twenty-five monks were to live under the Rule of St Benedict. The King bestowed on the abbey the manors of Horning, Ludham and Neatishead. The possessions and privileges of the abbey augmented; its extensive property lay entirely in Norfolk. It was an institution of regional importance.[149] In 1536 St Benet's Abbey was annexed to the see of Norwich and whereas the possessions of the bishop were granted to the king, the bishop took over the estates of St Benet's of Hulme.[150]

Consequently the records of St Benet's Abbey were incorporated into the diocesan archive; only a few of its manorial records survive today. During the Peasants' Revolt 1381 many of the abbey's manorial records were lost.[151] Very few account rolls survive for the period before 1350. In the early 1350s and during the 1360s there is a denser supply of rolls. Sporadic accounts are dotted over the 1370s and early 1380s. Towards the end of that decade a period with a relatively good survival rate sets in and continues – in the fifteenth century somewhat reduced – until 1430.

Considering the survival rate of the manorial accounts of St Benet's of Hulme, the substantial number of rolls available in the first part of the 1350s might be explained by changing economic and social conditions. When the new prior William de Haddiscoe was elected in 1349, he was confronted with the social upheaval and changing conditions for demesne farming due to the population decrease caused by the Great Pestilence. Closer supervision and a readjustment were a common answer by ecclesiastical institutions to the new circumstances.[152] Most accounts of the 1350s and 1360s come from Flegg, a fertile area just east of the abbey, where the monks were important landowners.[153] For the late years of William de Haddiscoe

[149] Page (ed.), History of the county of Norfolk, vol. 2, 330. As Pestell, Landscapes of Monastic Foundations, 138–146 points out, there is very little contemporary evidence for the early history of St Benet's of Hulme. For the possessions of the abbey at the time of the Domesday survey, see Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 11, 51–52.

[150] Page (ed.), History of the county of Norfolk, vol. 2, 336. Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 4, 539–542 lists the estates received by the bishopric.

[151] The manor court rolls were destroyed by rebelling peasants in 1381, Page (ed.), History of the county of Norfolk, vol. 2, 334.

[152] For example St Swithun's Priory, Winchester, tried to compensate for a reduced income by tightening its audit process, Drew, Accounts of St Swithun's Priory, 24.

[153] The term probably covers the hundreds of East and West Flegg. In both hundreds St Benet's Abbey possessed considerable estates.

and the first years of his successor, William de Methwold, elected in 1365, a fairly good supply of records survives again. It follows a period of few surviving documents in the 1370s. In England demesne farming was in accelerated decline after 1375 and in many places estates were leased in the 1390s.[154] This development could be reflected in the drying up of the supply of manorial accounts of St Benet's of Hulme over the same time and finally by the years 1379–1380 to 1386–1387, for which no accounts at all survive. Conditions changed towards the end of the 1380s and the early 1390s. The bad harvests 1389–1390 and the plague-ridden early 1390s had changed the socio-economic conditions once more, and Norwich Cathedral Priory showed a renewed interest in the direct management of its estates. For St Benet's manorial accounts are also again available for this time. From 1392–1393 onwards they mainly came from Shotesham, then after 1405 from Flegg.

In seventeen of the manorial accounts from St Benet's Abbey the date of the beginning of the grain harvest is mentioned. Most of those *compoti* were made in the 1350s and 1360s and they were drawn up for Flegg, Little Hautbois (Horning), Ludham, North Walsham, Scottow and Shotesham (Fig. 2.4).[155] The estates of St Benet's were largely situated in eastern Norfolk. Horning and Ludham are villages bordering the abbey to the west and north. North Walsham is a town in northeast Norfolk and whereas Scottow is about 6 km to the south of it, Little Hautbois is c.10 km to its southwest. Shotesham is a village about 10 km south of Norwich. At Little Hautbois and Horning the almoner maintained hospitals.[156] Most *compoti* between 1350 and 1370 record the harvest date.[157] Only two earlier accounts also contain the grain harvest date, they both come from Heigham near Norwich at the beginning of the fourteenth century.[158] The last harvest date is to be found in the roll from Ashby in the hundred of West Flegg in 1377–1378.[159] Generally the manors grew wheat, barley, peas and oats, occasionally also vetches and rye. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Heigham cultivated the latter probably for the Norwich poor, and in 1302 it listed no wheat in the grange account.

---

[154] Mate, Agrarian economy after the Black Death, 354, Stone, Medieval agriculture, 122. Bridbury, Black Death, 586 puts the retreat from demesne farming a decade earlier.

[155] Flegg NRO, DN/EST 09/05-11; Little Hautbois NRO, DN/EST 01/13 summer account; Ludham NRO, DN/EST 01/11; North Walsham NRO, DN/EST 10/02-3; Scottow NRO, DN/EST 11/03; Shotesham NRO, DN/EST 11/05, 10. Concerning the abbey's possessions at the various places see for Little Hautbois and Horning Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 6, 299 and ibid., vol. 11, 56, for Ludham, ibid., vol. 9, 330, for North Walsham ibid., vol. 11, 73–77, for Scottow ibid., vol. 6, 340–341 and for Shotesham ibid., vol. 5, 503, 512–513.

[156] The almoner surveyed the St James's Hospital at Horning as well as the hospital at Little Hautbois, Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 11, 56 on Horning and ibid., vol. 6, 299 on the hospital in Hautbois. According to Blomefield's entry for Hautbois the hospital there would render account together with the hospital at Horning. Consequently the harvest date in Little Hautbois NRO, DN/EST 01/13 might refer to Horning instead of Little Hautbois.

[157] Between 1349–1350 and 1370–1371 eighteen account rolls survive. Fourteen of them give information concerning the onset and duration of the harvest. The other account rolls are either damaged, fragile or almoner's accounts for the hospitals.

[158] Heigham NRO, DN/EST 01/05 harvest 1302 and NRO, DN/EST 01/06. For the lands of St Benet's Abbey at Heigham, see Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 4, 503–505.

[159] Ashby NRO, DN/EST 09/01.

After 1377–1378 until the end of the relevant period accounts from Ashby, Flegg, Heigham an a number of other manors merely list the duration of the harvest. Apart from the data for Flegg,[160] the information is too scarce to be included in any analysis of the harvest duration. On other manors more and more land and activities appear to have been farmed out.[161]

St Giles's Hospital was founded in 1249 and endowed amongst others with churches and land at Costessey, Cringleford, Calthorpe and Hardley and St Mary at South Walsham,[162] but it is in the accounts of those five villages, that usable information on the harvest date can be found (Fig. 2.4). Of those holdings the first two are to the west and southwest of Norwich and today are suburbs of this city. Calthorpe lies about 25 km to the north of Norwich close to the river Bure. South Walsham is situated halfway between Norwich and the east Norfolk coast, and Hardley about 15 km southeast of Norwich.[163] Often several accounts of one place are sewn together; many parchments have suffered in the course of time. Two groups of harvest dates can be distinguished. From Calthorpe and Cringleford come data between 1332 and 1347.[164] These accounts are dated with the help of regnal years and occasionally the dominical year. The information from Hardley is from a methodological point of view more insecure than that of other hospital estates,[165] but since it agrees with parallel data, it has been included. The second group of hospital harvest information ranges from 1392 to 1408 and also includes data from Costessey and South Walsham. The year dating of the rolls is based on regnal years, usually

[160] NRO, DN/EST 09/12-15, 17–19.

[161] There are 25 rolls in all. One is fragile and was not checked: North Walsham NRO, DN/EST 10/05 another one, Flegg NRO, DN/EST 09/16 is so faded, that it is not clear, if it records the harvest duration. The six accounts made for Shotesham after 1392–1393, NRO, DN/EST 11/06-11, give the impression to come from a manor of which many parts had been at lease. The same applies to Flegg NRO, DN/EST 09/20 and the unidentified manor NRO, DN/EST 01/22. In the almoner accounts NRO, DN/EST 01/17-18 it is stated that Hautbois is *ad firmam*. Barton NRO, DN/EST 01/21 is short and gives no harvest duration.

[162] Page (ed.), History of the county of Norfolk, vol. 2, 443–444. For Calthorpe see Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 5, 519–520, for Cringleford, ibid., vol. 5, 35, for Costessey, ibid., vol. 4, 416–417, for Hardley, ibid. vol. 10, 137–141 and for South Walsham, ibid., vol. 11, 138–143. For a description of the holdings and rights of St Giles's Hospital, as well as a map of the estates, see Rawcliffe, Medicine for the soul, 70–83.

[163] The hospital records are now part of Records of Norwich in the NRO: NCR Case 24 Hospital Shelf c-i Rolls of various manors.

[164] Not all of these available harvest dates stem from the harvest paragraph of the account rolls. The information in the accounts NRO, NCR Case 24 Shelf c Calthorpe 1340–1341, 1345–1346, 1346–1347 is indirect and comes from the *liberatio* list and for the first two rolls also from the *vadium* payments: the harvest date is the date given for the end of the liveries and payments for the *famuli* and the reeve. This would usually coincide with the opening of the lord's table at harvest time. For the different forms of harvest date information in the accounts, see Sect. 3.2.

[165] The information does not refer to the harvest or the lord's table itself, but it is found in the *liberatio* section and indicates, when the manorial workforce was stopped being paid in kind in summer (Sect. 3.2). The harvest dates in the Hardley rolls are indirect and also more biased to saints' days, than the dates of the other hospital accounts; for the medieval practice of dating days with references to saints' days, and on the use of saints' days as days for starting the harvest, Sect. 3.5.

listing the year of opening as well as closing of the accounts, and the year runs from Michaelmas to Michaelmas.

Hunstanton, Heacham and Ringstead are situated in the northwestern region of Norfolk,[166] and are almost neighbours of the Norwich Cathedral Priory manors Sedgeford, Gnatingdon and Thornham. The manor of Hunstanton was already in the possession of the Le Strange family in the Late Middle Ages.[167] The manors of Heacham and Ringstead formed part of the *temporalia* of religious houses, Heacham of Lewes Abbey and Ringstead of Ramsey Abbey. After the dissolution the Le Strange family gained control of both manors and received some of their records.[168]

The account rolls of Hunstanton supply harvest data for the period 1331 to 1371. In some respects the Hunstanton *compoti* defy the standard characteristics of manorial accounts: the first three accounts supplying information, for the summers 1331–1333, as well as the account for 1345–1346 cover the whole year, but start and end at 1 August.[169] This has to be taken into consideration, when dating the harvest. The other accounts for the 1330s and early 1340s are half year accounts, usually ranging from late spring to mid-October and mid-October to late spring. The Hunstanton account for 1342–1343 then ranges over a whole year, but starts and ends in mid-October.[170] The rolls around 1370 are also for the full year, but the accounting year now changes at Michaelmas.[171] The accounts date with the help of the regnal years, usually listing the year for the opening as well as for the closing of the account roll.

The account rolls for Heacham offer harvest information for 1296–1297, 1300–1301 and 1303–1304.[172] The Heacham accounts cover the whole agricultural year and run from Michaelmas to Michaelmas. They date the year with the help of the regnal years.

Of the surviving manorial accounts for Ringstead only the *compotus* for 1390–1391 records the harvest date.[173]

For Fincham (New Hall), a lay manor in western Norfolk,[174] a number of account rolls survive between the second half of the thirteenth and second half of the fourteenth century.[175] Some harvests dates are available from early accounts.

[166] The manorial records for those three vills are kept in the Le Strange of Hunstanton collection in the NRO: Hunstanton LEST/BG 1-24, Heacham LEST/DG 1-7, Ringstead LEST/EG 1-12.

[167] Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 10, 314–320.

[168] Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 10, 308–9, 340 and Raftis, Ramsey Abbey, 15.

[169] NRO, LEST/BG 2, 4–5, 13.

[170] NRO, LEST/BG 12.

[171] NRO, LEST/BG 15–17.

[172] NRO, LEST/DG 1.1, NRO, LEST/DG 3.3 and NRO, LEST/DG 1.2.

[173] NRO, LEST/EG 03.

[174] Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 7, 348.

[175] Britnell, Winchester Pipe Rolls, 33, NRO, HARE 780–790.

Kempstone belonged to the temporalities of Castle Acre Priory,[176] the manor served as the home farm for this monastic house until 1449, its records give mostly information on harvest length.[177]

The villages of Hinderclay and Redgrave are situated just across the border in the county of Suffolk. Their manors were part of the estates of the Benedictine abbey of Bury St Edmunds and especially for Hinderclay harvest data are available in an impressive series of accounts from the late thirteenth to the early fifteenth century; harvest dates fall between 1296 and 1319 and harvest lengths are supplied by the whole series of account rolls. The material for Redgrave covers a shorter time span from the third decade to the end of the fourteenth century, it contains mostly information on the harvest duration.[178] The *compoti* use regnal years in general, early accounts end in July, later accounts at Michaelmas.

The manor of Akenham is to be found just north of Ipswich in Suffolk. The accounts date to the late thirteenth and to the fourteenth century, but the harvest information clusters in the four decades after 1350; the data are mostly on harvest length and only include a few references to the harvest date.[179]

[176] Blomefield, History of Norfolk, vol. 9, 523–524.

[177] NRO, WIS 02–06, 08–10, 12–15, 17–19, 21–37.

[178] Hinderclay CUL, Bacon 405–510, Redgrave, CUL, Bacon 325–374.

[179] Raynham Hall, Akenham 1278 to 1397.