



# Manorialisation and demographic pressure in medieval England: an analysis of the Hundred Rolls of 1279–1280

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses quantitative measurements, to examine the diversity of relationship between manorialisation and demographic pressure by landlord type and landscape region in thirteenth-century England. Classical manors have been considered to have classical structures, that is large scale and manor-parish coincidence, and to be dominated by demesne and customary tenements. However, factor analysis of the data from the Hundred Rolls of 1279–1280 shows that the two features were not always associated and that manorialisation was a two-dimensional process consisting of the development of classical structures and the dominance of demesne and unfree tenements. Therefore, the analysis reveals four types of parishes. First, there were highly manorialised parishes in both aspects where earlier-established ecclesiastical estates prevailed. Second, there were parishes that were occupied by one large manor but dominated by free tenements where earls' estates were prominent. Third, there were parishes divided into small manors comprised mainly of demesne and villein tenements as a result of the advance of demesne farming in lesser estates after 1066. Fourth, there were non-manorialised parishes separated into small manors dominated by free tenements. Many of these parishes had already been split into small manors in 1086. Further analysis shows that demographic pressure was independent of manorialisation. Although the eastern champion Midlands and western champion Midlands were similarly manorialised, demographic pressure was higher in the eastern part. Furthermore, in woodland, population growth and manorialisation were related in several ways. Demographic pressure was highest in East Anglian Heights while the level of freedom was highest in Arden Forest.

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For more than a century, medieval historians have analysed the process of manorialisation.<sup>1</sup> However, they have examined its relationship to the growth and decline of feudalism and serfdom mainly by investigating individual estates. As Mark Bailey notes, there is a 'tendency to generalize broadly about the causes of [serfdom's] decline on the basis of a single case study or a handful of striking examples', and he has insisted on the necessity of examining 'the different types of manor found in England' to 'increase the typicality of research findings'.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, a proper and balanced understanding of the manorial economy at its height

must also be based on an examination of representative samples of all the different types of manors, rather than focusing upon a small range of atypical examples. Manors varied considerably according to their size and wealth, as well as according to the relative composition of the lord's demesne land and land allocated to both the free peasantry and villeins. However, despite all the attention from historians on the process of manorialisation, and a ready acknowledgement of the existence of different types of manors, it is still not clear what the range of manorial types were, nor an established methodology for measuring their variations. Therefore, in what follows, I examine the processes of manorialisation through specific, quantitative measurements. In addition, I analyse how the development of manorial structures was related to demographic pressure and how it varied by landlord type and landscape region.

In addition, understanding the diversity of manorialisation is important for the proper estimation of economic development. In the last quarter century, economic historians have insisted that there was great economic and demographic growth in the thirteenth

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<sup>1</sup> For example, P.G. Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor*, London, 1920; E.A. Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford, 1956; B.M.S. Campbell, Complexity of manorial structure, *Norfolk Archaeology* 39 (1986) 225–261; B.M.S. Campbell and Ken Bartley, *England on the Eve of the Black Death: An Atlas of Lay Lordship, Land and Wealth, 1300–49*, New York, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bailey, *The Decline of Serfdom in Late Medieval England: From Bondage to Freedom*, Woodbridge, 2014, 82, 87.

century, which reached its peak around 1300.<sup>3</sup> The diversity of the manorial system is important for understanding this growth since agricultural practices differed based on manorial structures. Thus, in an investigation of the metropolitan markets' effects on farming systems, Bruce Campbell stated that 'Institutional and structural factors also made a difference'. For instance, 'the size of demesne also exercised a bearing upon the relative balance struck between crops and animals'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, population change has been related to manorialisation. Bailey states that 'Manorial structure tended to be highly complex and fluid in places where colonisation occurred later, [and where] population pressure was high or rising rapidly'.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, the availability of quantitative historical data is very uneven. Therefore, it always needs to be recognized how 'sample' manors chosen for study were characterized in relation to other types of manors. It is well known that manors in medieval England were diverse. For example, Evgeny Kosminsky reveals that 'classical manors' were not universal in medieval England, so that the dominance of demesne and servile tenancy, large size, the coincidence of manor and 'vill', and the maintenance of large villein holdings were not common features of manors.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it is sometimes stated that large and earlier-established ecclesiastical estates had classical structures.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the manorialisation level of these estates has not been systematically examined and the features of sample manors have not been appropriately measured by clear criteria. One reason for this is that the manorialisation process has not been analysed as thoroughly as the processes pertaining to the growth of the population and agricultural products.<sup>8</sup> There has not been a comprehensive and quantitative dataset constructed for manorialisation. Historians continue to refer to manorialisation and to variations in the degree of manorialisation without having developed a consistent methodology to measure these concepts. For example, Campbell and Bailey have separately made gallant attempts to demonstrate variations in the number of manors per vill across Norfolk and Suffolk, but their identification of individual manors and collation of information about their size and composition have lacked precision and consistency.<sup>9</sup>

Spatial variations in the types of manors and the process of manorialisation need to be expressed in a systematic and quantifiable way, which in turn would permit meaningful comparisons with other key factors, such as variations in demographic pressure. There has been a general tendency to assume that the classical manor with a large demesne and a large servile tenantry was the representative manor in high medieval England and that most estates were made up of such manors, so that variations in manorial form should be measured from this benchmark. This attitude is reflected in Kosminsky's question, 'to what extent do the manors ... correspond to

the classical characterisation of a "classical manor"?'<sup>10</sup> However, it is important not to assume in advance that manorialisation was a unidimensional process or that the classical manor was the typical manor from which variations should be measured.

This paper aims to provide a systematic basis for understanding manorialisation. First, I analyse quantitatively how the various features of manors were related to each other in each parish of the area covered by the Hundred Rolls in order to obtain an objective sense of manorial norms at the height of the medieval manorial economy in the 1270s. Once the basic structure and spatial distribution of manorial forms is established quantitatively, it is then possible to compare them meaningfully with other key variables: the type of landlord and the type of landscape region. Second, I examine quantitatively the effect of demographic pressure on manorialisation and vice versa. At present, there are contradictory arguments on the relationship between manorialisation and population growth. On one hand, it is often assumed that population growth was restrained in highly manorialised villages. For example, Campbell distinguishes "'closed" manors of strong lordship', where large villein holdings remained intact and the population grew slowly, from "'open" manors of weak lordship', where small, free and servile tenants burgeoned.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the development of the classical manor is sometimes related to population growth. As Michael Postan argued, the reason that 'landlords should have found direct exploitation of their demesnes easier and more profitable' lies in the decline of 'real wages' due to the abundant supply of labour caused by the continuous population increase.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to analyse statistically how population growth was associated with manorialisation in each parish. A quantitative view on the fundamental relationship between demographic pressure and manorialisation makes it possible to examine how the relationship varied according to the type of landlord and the type of landscape region. Finally, I examine how diverse the processes of manorialisation and population growth were by landlord type and landscape region through specific measurements. Many historians indicate that large ecclesiastical estates usually consisted of classical manors.<sup>13</sup> This postulation is examined in this study through quantitative measurements. Furthermore, recent archaeological and historical studies have revealed a variety of field systems and settlement types in medieval England.<sup>14</sup> However, the relationship between landscape region and manorialisation remains to be examined. Thus, in order to understand the process of manorialisation and demographic pressure in each landscape region I distinguish several aspects of classical manors and examine how manorialisation and demographic pressure were related, depending on lordship type and landscape region. An examination of the effects of commercialisation on manorialisation is left to future research.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, I introduce the source documents and divide the research area into six landscape regions based on recent archaeological and historical

<sup>3</sup> R.H. Britnell, Commercialisation and economic development in England, 1000–1300, in: R.H. Britnell and B.M.S. Campbell (Eds.), *A Commercialising Economy: England 1086 to c.1300*, Manchester, 1995, 8; R.H. Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000–1500*, Cambridge, 1993, 79–151; E. Miller and J. Hatcher, *Medieval England: Rural Society and Economic Change, 1086–1348*, London, 1978, 28–33, 213–239; S. Broadberry, B.M.S. Campbell, A. Klein, M. Overton and B.V. Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270–1870*, Cambridge, 2015, 1–129, 187–244.

<sup>4</sup> B.M.S. Campbell, *English Seigneurial Agriculture, 1250–1450*, Cambridge, 2000, 179.

<sup>5</sup> M. Bailey, *The English Manor c.1200–c.1500*, Manchester, 2002, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, 68–151. I examine the four features of classical manors in detail in the section entitled 'three factors of manorial features'.

<sup>7</sup> For example, M.M. Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society: An Economic History of Britain, 1100–1500*, Berkeley, 1972, 100–101.

<sup>8</sup> Broadberry, Campbell, Klein, Overton and Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth*, 3–129.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell, Complexity of manorial structure; M. Bailey, *Medieval Suffolk: An Economic and Social History 1200 to 1500*, Woodbridge, 2007, 27–34.

<sup>10</sup> Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> B.M.S. Campbell, The agrarian problem in the early fourteenth century, *Past and Present* 188 (2005) 60–70.

<sup>12</sup> Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society*, 111; see also Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England*, 219–224.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Postan, *The Medieval Economy and Society*, 110–111; Bailey, *The English Manor*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox and C. Dyer, *Village, Hamlet and Field: Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England*, Macclesfield, 2001; B.K. Robert and S. Wrathmell, *Region and Place: A Study of English Rural Settlement*, London, 2002; T. Williamson, *Shaping Medieval Landscapes: Settlement, Society, Environment*, Oxford, 2003; R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape: Beginning and Ends*, Macclesfield, 2006.

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