Economic Dealing of Prior John the Almoner of Spalding, 1253-74

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Professor Miller has observed 'even on the best documented estates it is never possible to chart in detail the stages by which landlords changed their policies or to discern the motives of individuals amongst them.' There is therefore all the more reason for pinpointing exceptions, and one of these was John the Almoner of Spalding, prior between 1253 and 1274 of the rich fenland house of Spalding Priory in Lincolnshire. E. E. Hallam has in fact already drawn attention to him and analysed in commendably clinical fashion a number of surveys of the free and bond tenants of Spalding Priory made by John. Besides these, there is a great deal of information on Prior John in the enormous Spalding Register which has so far gone untapped, including a survey almost entirely composed of his acquisitions of land and rent, and it is the purpose of the present paper to examine this evidence. It is useful to medieval economic historians because it sheds most interesting light on the dynamics of ecclesiastical estate management in the third quarter of the thirteenth century in a number of important directions: the extension and consolidation of a house's land by free grants and purchases; its policy towards knights, freemen, and villeins in terms of the land market and rents; and the consolidation of the holdings of freemen, and to a lesser extent, knights.

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of Prior John's dealings, however, something should be said about the man himself. Little is really known about him, but according to allegations made in 1275 he was charged with exceeding the bounds of his free warren, giving shelter to felons, and generally treating certain persons with inhumanity and contempt. He granted him whatever he desired and allowing a bridge to fall down to the great detriment of the countryside. These accusations were not investigated, however, because John was already dead.

Before he became prior, John was the Spalding almoner. There is no way of discovering the dates of the Spalding almshouses, though there is a chance reference to John as almoner in the Close Rolls in 1250 when he received a royal gift of five oak trees for timber for the construction of a lady chapel. It was in his capacity as almoner that John first made his reputation for his activity in the land market. A list of acquisitions made by him for the almonry towards the end of the second volume of the register includes an enclosure, three headlands, a plot, a drove way, over 60 acres of land and rents totalling around £4.12s. in Spalding, Moulton and Pinchbeck, almost all of this in Spalding, with a large proportion of the land and rent coming from Gilbert, son of Simon of Peckbridge. It was this aggressive territorial policy on a much bigger scale that characterised John's period as prior.

As the survey concerning his acquisitions shows, Prior John obtained in Spalding, Weston, Moulton, Pinchbeck, Surfleet, Gosberton, Whaplode, Holbeach, Boston, Wyberton, Sutton, Ewerby, Ewerby Thorpe, Othonse, Lound, Laythorpe, Kirkby, Evedon, Alkborough, Witham, Halton, Lincoln, Bourne, Stickney, Norfolk, and Barnack (Northants.), about 700 acres of land of all sorts, plus 3 bovates and 2 carucates of land, along with various unspecified sevices, tofts, messuages, plots, buildings, a saltern, a windmill and a house, as well as annual rents totaling a little over £5, all for a total of around £1450. His main areas of land investment were: Witham, where he acquired 80 acres and more (7 amplus) of wood and 42 acres of land for £134.14s.4d; Whaplode 153 acres 15½ perches of land for £194.16s.6d; Othonse 2 bovates and 60 acres of land for £40.6s.8d; Surfleet and Gosberton, which are classified together, 88 acres of land for £274.13s.4d; Spalding, 78 acres 48½ perches of land for £221.11s.2d; Pinchbeck, 72 acres 22½ perches of land for £152.11s.1d; Holbeach, 57 acres of land for £51.6s.8d; Laythorpe, Kirkby and Evedon, which are classified together, 2 carucates and 3 sevices of land for £116.1s.10d; Wyberton, 429 acres for £78.16s.4d; Weston, 26 acres 3 stongs 27 perches for £66.6s.10¾d; and Lound, a bovate of land for £18, with additional small unspecified portions of land in some of these and lesser acreages in other vills. The Priory already had manors in Spalding, Weston and Pinchbeck, together with extensive possessions in Kirkby Laythorpe, but by his fairly substantial acquisitions in Whaplode, Witham, Lound, Surfleet and Gosberton, Holbeach, Wyberton and Othonse, Prior John was branching out into areas where his house held little or no land. Almost all of this was arable, with the exception of 3 acres of meadow in Wyberton; common pasture for eight oxen and four cows in the marsh of Ewerby and Ewerby Thorpe; 4 acres of meadow in Alkborough and 10 acres of meadow in Bourne; 120 perches of turfy in Weston; 26 acres 7 perches of land in Pinchbeck; 7 acres 8½ perches in Weston; 80 acres and more of wood in Witham, and perhaps a few of the small unspecified areas of land. The main acquisitions of rents, which often appear to have been of redemptions of annual payments the Priory had to make for lands it held, were of 43s.10d. in Spalding, 18s.4d. in Lincoln, 12s.9¾d. in Surfleet and Gosberton, 11s. 4d. in Othonse, 9s.8d. in Weston, 9s.5d. in Pinchbeck, and 9s.2d. in Stickney.

One of the most interesting features of the survey is that it consists of the acquisitions of Prior John and not merely of his purchases. As a result, it is possible to compare the land investment of Spalding Priory in the third quarter of the thirteenth century with the free alms bestowed upon it. This is in fact one of the most important aspects of the survey, because often the abbreviated transactions in it appear elsewhere in full charter form in the register, and although they are quite clearly purchases in the former, there is no mention of money or sale in the latter, which would thus make it impossible to say anything definite at all about Prior John's acquisitions merely from charter evidence. What the survey does show in this respect is that free alms were not very important, and that the great proportion of land acquired by Prior John was acquired by purchase. By far the biggest grants in free alms were from Sir William of Fleet, with 32 acres of land in Whaplode, from Lady Mary, widow of Sir Geoffrey de Qut, with 3¾ acres 6 perches of land and the lordship of a bovate of land in Whaplode, and from Godfrey Chaplain, who granted the house 27 acres of arable and 4 acres of meadow in Alkborough in gift (de dona). There were however other donations on a smaller, or small, scale. Sir Baldwin Wake granted the Priory 10 acres of meadow in Bourne. Lady Dulcia granted the Priory an annual rent of 1d. in gift and 4 sevices of land in Alkborough. Sir John of Tydly granted the Priory 1¾ acres 8½ perches of land in Sutton. Walter Sturdi of Holme granted the house a plot with buildings on it lying on the bank of Spalding. Robert, son of Gilbert of Barton, granted the house 20 perches of land also lying on the bank of Spalding. William, son of Ralph, granted the house a messuage in Spalding once Simon of Cambridge's. Walter Brandon granted the house an annual rent of 8d. in gift in Lincoln and John of Newton granted it a rent of 5s. a year in the same town. Apart from these instances, all the rest of the acquisitions made by Prior John were purchases and would thus account for about 90% of his land acquisitions. By the third quarter of the thirteenth century, therefore, the flow
of alsoms to Spalding Priory, which seems to have done very well in this respect earlier in its history, had slackened very perceptibly. This might, to some extent, explain the aggressive territorial policy adopted by Prior John.

It was a policy, in fact, which was not without drawbacks, since the survey amply demonstrates that the prices paid by Prior John for the land he bought, by far the greater part of it in Lincolnshire, were often very high indeed, even allowing for the fact that it is so difficult to estimate the relative dearness and cheapness of land. A large number of instances can be cited in this context. In Spalding, 2½ acres 8½ perches of land were bought from Stephen of Thresherfield for ¾ marks, 9½ marks of land lying at Golewilla from Sir Henry Engaine for 80 marks, and 40 acres of land in Mattemore from Sir John of Fulney for 140 marks. In Weston, 26 acres of land were bought from Andrew of Weston, rector of the church of Lea, for 90 marks. In Mortcure, 8 acres of land were bought from John, son of Simon, for 17 marks. In Pinchbeck, 70 marks of land were bought from Sir William le Moine for 225 marks. In Whaplode, 1 acre 1 stong of land were bought from Reginald Damet for 16 marks. In Wyberton, an acre of land was bought from Isabella for 46s.8d, another acre from Simon of the Bakery for 40s, a stong of land from Sir Thomas of Frampton for a mark and 3 stongs of land from John, son of Thomas Gernon, for 40s.

There are many other examples of this nature which need not be given, with one exception, which perhaps best illustrates the expense to which Prior John had sometimes to run to procure land. This is when John, son of Godfrey of Surfleet, granted the prior 2 messuages and 72½ acres of land in Surfleet and Gosberton, being paid 60 marks at the first entry. His rent from this land paid by the Priory over a period of four years while he was still alive amounted to 40 marks and in 1272-73 his widow received 5 marks rent. Other properties included: holding 10s. in Spalding and Pinchbeck for 10 marks from the nuns of Chatteris, 26 acres of land in Weston for 90 marks from Andrew of Weston, rector of the church of Lea and a rent of 1s. in Surfleet and Gosberton for 10s. from the nuns of St. Radegund of Cambridge; titles in Lindsey for 20s. from the Abbey of Selby; a restitution of all land in Stickney of the Priory’s fief, plus a rent of 9s.2d. and a quietclaim of all its right from the Abbey of Revesby for £1 10s.

A considerably greater proportion of land, though one that is very hard to define in terms of percentage because of the unspecified nature of the messuages, pieces of land, carucates and bovates in his total acquisitions, came from peasants (including clerks). Some of these peasants were certainly the Priory’s own tenants. Thus Thomas de Bradou, who sold the house 15 acres of land in Mattemore in Spalding for £4 24s. appears in the survey of the Priory’s free tenants in Spalding, among other properties, holding 40 acres of land, defending 2 bovates of land in the dyking of the sea and marsh, and paying 31s.2d. a year. In the same survey, Alan, son of Stephen, who sold Prior John a windmill in Spalding near Halmer for £10, is referred to as holding 8 acres of land beside Alkebarwick and paying 1s.10d. a year. Likewise, William, son of Robert of Pinchbeck, who sold Prior John a message in Spalding for 6s.8d., is mentioned therein as defending the third part of two bovates of land, holding 17 acres of land, and paying 17s. a year. No doubt the Matilda, daughter of Alexander Kede, who sold Prior John an acre of land in Moulton for 26s.8d., and the Robert, son of Ralph Kede, who sold Prior John an annual rent of 2d. in Moulton for 2s., were related to one of the two branches of the Kede family who appear in the survey of the Priory’s free tenants in Moulton. Other peasants who sold land to Prior John were outside the confines of his immediate lordship, and so there are often confirmations of grants by such peasants by the holders of the fiefs in which the land was situated. For example Prior John paid Sir Adam of Hagebeach £3 for confirmation of 12 acres of land in Whaplode he bought from William and Nicholas, sons of Peter Crust, for 40 marks; Sir William Huntingfield £5 for confirmation of 18 acres of land and 3 acres of meadow he bought from Alexander of Boston, clerk, in Wyberton; Sir Baldwin Wake 15 marks for confirmation of various lands he bought in Witham and Lound, among them being a message and 1½ bovates containing 30 acres of land in Witham bought for 20 marks from Master Henry of Edenham, clerk; and Sir William D’Arcy 3½ marks for confirmation of 27 acres of arable and 4 acres of meadow in Alkborough received from Godfrey Chaplain in free alms.

The greatest proportion of land acquired by Prior John came, however, from the knightly class. The most important grants from them were: 9½ acres of land in Spalding from Sir Henry Engaine bought for 80 marks; 40 acres of land in Spalding from Sir John of Fulney bought for 140 marks; 94 acres of land and rents of 5s.8d. in Spalding, Pinchbeck, and Whaplode from Sir William le Moine bought for £180.1s.4d.; 16 acres of land in Whaplode from Sir Adam of Hagebeach bought for 32 marks and 6 cows priced 60s; 22 acres of land in Whaplode from Sir William Angeyyn bought for 33 marks and a falcon priced at 20s; 51 acres of land in Holbeach from Sir Thomas de Moulton, in two closes of 18 and 33 acres, bought for 122 marks; a bovate of land in the villa of Lound from Ralph of St. Land, with Gilbert, son of Hugh, son of Brian, his serf, and all his offspring, bought for 27 marks; 80 acres and more of woodland in Witham from Sir John de Bricourt bought for 120 [blank]; a message and 12 acres of land in Witham from Sir John of Witham bought for £13.6s.8d; 2 bovates of land in Otthorpe from Nicholas of Carby, uncle of Sir Richard of Carby, bought for 15 marks; a carucate of land with four serfs and all his tenements in Laythorpe, Kirkby and Evendon from Sir Henry of Horringer bought for 77½ marks; £40 an annual rent of 11s.4d. in Otthorpe from Sir Ralph, son of Sir Richard Falconer, and Margery his wife, bought for 10 marks; a carucate of land in Laythorpe and Kirkby from Geoffrey of Buckton, brother of Sir William of Buckton, bought for 80 marks and a horse priced 5 marks; and 60 acres of land in Otthorpe from Sir Gilbert de Gant bought for 45 marks.

These transactions quite clearly demonstrate that the knightly class in the third quarter of the thirteenth century was far more concerned with selling parts of its possessions than in doling them out for nothing, since, as has been indicated, Prior John did not benefit to any great extent (about 49 acres with the lordship of a bovate of land) from knightly donations in free alms. Why were they selling out? There are a number of possible explanations. It may well have been in the odd case that a knight thought he would be obtaining a good bargain, and was therefore willing to sell at a high price. The prior and knight may have come to an agreement together, or through the agency of a third party, to do each other a favor by selling the land or some knights may have been financially embarrassed and were having to sell land to rescue themselves from trouble or political difficulty and were needing money to buy their way out of it. The last two of these theories are
particular interest in that Prior John’s office spanned the Barons’ Wars. Certainly a number of knights did run into political trouble, among them Sir Thomas de Moulton, an opponent of the King, and Sir Adam of Haghe, who was pardoned for various transgressions in 1268. Sir William le Moine ran into both financial and political difficulties, perhaps connected, and Prior John, besides paying him generous sums for land to keep him afloat, had to give him £10 gratis to free him from the Jews, into whose hands he fell. He appears to have committed diverse trespasses at the time of the Barons’ Wars, and in 1271 the king gave the ransom of his Lincolnshire lands to Nicholas of Yattendon. Sir Gilbert de Gant was taken against the king at Kenilworth, and later pardoned in 1268. However, whether it was their political eclipse that forced two of these four knights (Sir Gilbert de Gant would seem to be an exception) to sell so heavily as Sir Thomas de Moulton seems to have been back in royal favour by the time of his sale in 1271) and any of the rest of the knights or their relatives to sell lands to Spalding Priory is a moot point, since, as is the case with other of these sales, it is not known exactly when the land was sold to the house.

With the inescapable evidence that Prior John was investing very heavily in land from a variety of sources, the question naturally presents itself of what he was doing with it. There is no sure answer here, but the very strong probability is that he either added it to, or kept it as, demesne land, or else he portioned it out amongst his villeins, because he granted only a very small fraction of it to the house’s free tenants. Again matters are complicated by the fact that a largish proportion of his total acquisitions is unspecified and his charters to freemen occasionally take the unhelpful form of an undefined area of land, but he may have granted out about a fifth of his total land acquisitions to freemen. These grants, a number of which appear in the survey under the titles of rents of fidecommissaries through Prior John’s charters in Spalding, Weston, Moulton and Pinchbeck, are very common and are almost invariably of very small amounts of land, usually of an acre or less. The very high rents charged indicates that Prior John was successfully recouping himself for some of the huge prices he paid for land. In 1253-65, he confirmed to Gerard Swihon and his heirs an acre of land in Spalding for 4s. a year; in 1266-67, he confirmed to Reginald, son of Gilbert Rouleau and his heirs an acre of land in the same will also for 4s. a year; and in 1265-66, 1265 and 1265 respectively, there were exactly similar grants to Richard, son of Reginald Navet, Nigel Foul and Thomas Heucel of Spalding. Even on the few occasions when he did grant out slightly larger amounts of land, the fees were very profitable for the Priory. Thus for example in 1266-67, when he confirmed to Nicholas, son of Anke of Spalding and his heirs, 6½ acres of land in Spalding at Woolhem Wyate, the house had from Sir William le Moine, and a plot of ground with buildings on it in the market place of Spalding 66 ft. in length on the east side, 54½ ft. in length on the west side, and 54 ft. in breadth at each of the headlands, the rent was a massive 26s. a year. Such purchases were very profitable for Prior John and even more profitable for the Priory. As regards freemen, the exchanges concerning different villas can in turn be accounted for by the fact that it was not too uncommon for Spalding Priory’s free tenants to hold land in more than one township, as, from the descriptions in three of these exchanges did Milcent, wife of Jecous Tailor, with land in Spalding and Fulney; William Bremen of Weston, with land in Weston and Holbeach; and Robert, son of Alexander, there is no land in Spalding. There is also the more simple reason of willingness to move on the tenant’s part, perhaps aided by the incentive of having his entire tenement in one township as against two. As regards tenants, their holdings would rarely be confined to one vill in any case and there is no such case where Prior John exchanged land. Finally, before commencing a more detailed analysis of the twenty-four exchanges, it may be noted that in the majority of cases the land involved was terra de officinalis or terra mensurata, measured land being a feature of the Priory’s main manors. Normally the measure used was the 18 foot perch, but there are instances elsewhere in the cartulary of a 16 foot perch or 20 foot perch. Sometimes the measurements used in the exchanges were very exact indeed, most the exact being the 1 acre 1 stong 37 perches 2 ft. Prior John granted Lady Sybil de Cressy to consolidate her holding in Pinchbeck for an exactly equivalent area in the same vill, and the most exact measurements of all in

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of twenty four exchanges made by Prior John, ten of them, from the descriptions in the deeds, seem to have been effected for the consolidation of the holdings of free peasants and knights, and not, at least directly, for the consolidation of the Priory's own holdings. Of these ten, eight were made with free peasants and two with knights, and the areas exchanged ranged from a small plot of ground of only a few perches to thirteen acres. The comparatively large number of ten out of twenty four exchanges which the Priory made with other parties rather than its own in terms of consolidation of holdings may reflect a certain complaisance in Prior John's attitude to rank or to his superior tenants, and such on occasion may have proved the case. On the other hand, he was also more than willing on occasion to take a cut for favours rendered. A good example here is provided by the exchange he made with Mathew, son of Mathew of Spalding, whereby he exchanged 3 37¾ perches of land in Spalding, the south headlands of which abutted on Mathew's land, with a drystone containing 32 perches as its entrance and exit, for 4 acres of land in the same vill. Here, the Priory not only had a territorial advantage for enabling Mathew to consolidate his holding, but it also gained by charging 5d. a year extra on top of the 4d. rent he was already giving the house. No doubt Mathew was willing to grant more and pay more to secure a more compact tenement. It is in fact securing a more compact tenement could entail a peasant division of holdings is, again, a better consolidation in another, as was the case with William, son of Gilbert Pevings, to whom Prior John granted ¾ acre of land in Spalding for an acre of land in the same vill. The acre which William gave actually adjoined his land to the north, but the ¾ acre were next to his and Geoffrey Bonde's lands to the south and also abutted at the west headland on his land. A similar case, but with the notable difference that the party giving was giving slightly more than it was getting, occurred when Prior John granted William, son of Ralph of Spalding, a ½ acre of land in Spalding for 45 perches of land in the same vill. Here, William was dividing his holding in one place as the 45 perches adjoined his land and the land of John Cook to the south, to better consolidate in another, as his new ½ acre adjoined his land alone to the north, with no doubt the territorial advantage he derived from the agreement being an additional incentive. Peasant initiative in other words could be very much to the fore and nowhere more so than on the Priory's home manor of Spalding. As previously indicated, Spalding was by far the most prominent manor in numerical terms as far as exchanges were concerned, with nine out of twenty four, and no less than six of these were made for the benefit of free peasants. It is of course impossible to say of the eight exchanges between freemen and the Priory in this category which reasonings were the deal, but since it was the peasants and not the Priory who were benefiting in terms of consolidation of holdings, it would be safe to assume that it was they in at least some of the cases, and where it was not, whatever may have been the Priory's reasons, whether it was acted by the prospect of gaining more land or rent or by more enlightened motives, they were actively willing to benefit to the interests of better or easier estate management.

Of the remaining exchanges, eight were made by Prior John to consolidate the Priory's holdings, although the other party involved does not appear to have had this idea in mind. Of these eight, three were made with freemen, four with knights and one with another ecclesiastic. The areas involved ranged from just over a ¼ acre to around 16 acres, the latter, for which Prior John had to give a corresponding area in Moulton and Weston, enlarging the Priory's enclosures called Karogloft in Weston. No doubt in terms of consolidation of holdings Prior John would have scored where he could, but the only township where he seems to have adopted a systematic policy of rounding off holdings was in Whaplode. Here there were four exchanges during his period of office and all four were to consolidate Priory holdings, one of unspecified size to acquire land next to its manor (ubi manerium coramdem stitum est) on one side, one of unspecified size to enlarge a Priory enclosure; one of unspecified size, consisting of the dower land of Christine, widow of Sir Robert de Oiri, to acquire land next to its own land and one to acquire 1¾ acres 9½ perches adjacent to its own property in Whaplode. Both in terms of actual land acquisition then, as indicated above, and the coalescence of holdings, Whaplode seems to have been an area of particular concentration on Prior John's part, with the Priory making a determined drive to enlarge and consolidate in that particular township. If this was consolidation on a fairly large scale, Prior John could be just as careful or opportunistic with regard to tiny amounts of land, which is perhaps best illustrated in an exchange he made with John, son of Thomas Smith of Laythorpe. Here, he granted John 1 stong 3 perches of land in a field of Laythorpe, the south headland of which abutted on the Priory's land, for 1 stong 3 perches of land beside the Priory's land to the east opposite the door of its manor (in opposto ianue maneri coramenda) and for 1¾ stongs in the same field lying between the Priory's land on either side. For this highly beneficial exchange, and presumably to account for the larger amount of land the Priory received, Prior John gave John 20s. This last exchange also indicates that the Priory was willing to split up its possessions in one place to consolidate in another, a process which is more clearly illustrated in an exchange Prior John made with Simon Carpenter, to whom the Priory gave 2¾ acres of land in Spalding for 2¾ acres in the same vill. The 2¾ acres the Priory granted were next to some of its own land on one side, but the 2¾ acres it received were not only next to its own land on one side but they also abutted at the north headland on its own land. Simon and his heirs had to pay 1s. a year for the exchange, again presumably to account for the greater area granted by the house. And finally mention may be made of the only exchange Prior John made with another ecclesiastic, John of Greatford, vicar of the church of All Saints in Moulton, in 1263, where he granted the vicar 2 acres 3 stongs 1¾ perches of land in Moulton for 4 acres in the same vill next to the Priory's land to the west, no doubt a highly satisfactory agreement for the house in terms of area gained and consolidation effected and perhaps also due to the fact that John had been presented to the church of All Saints by the Priory.

The other six exchanges made by Prior John, four of them with free tenants and two with knights, were for mutual benefit in terms of territorial consolidation and the areas involved ranged from a ¾ acre to 30 acres. There is nothing particularly extraordinary in these six exchanges except that in two cases the Priory was quite obviously giving more than it was receiving. In the first case, Prior John granted Sir John of Tydd 30 acres of land in the marsh of Tydd adjacent to Sir John's land to the north, for 20 acres of land in the same marsh next to the Priory's land to the south. In the second, Prior John granted Robert, son of Alexander of Surfleet, 6 acres of land in Cheal of which 4¾ acres lay between Robert's land on either side, for 4 acres 53 perches of land in Surfleet, 2 acres 8 perches of which adjoined on one side the land of the Priory called Estercot, an exchange in which Robert seems to have got the better of it in every way.

As a finale to a consideration of the dealings of Prior John, a few words must be said about his policy as regards rents. As far as can be seen, there is only one occasion when he raised a free rent and this increase was of only a temporary nature. However, there are rather more instances of Prior John raising villein rents. In a document entitled tenants of the prior in bondage in the vill of Moulton the following entries appear:

Lambert of Hawcock, Geoffrey his brother, Agnes Guthier, Warin of Hardwell, and Mabel, wife of Alan Kainer, hold 25 acres 9 perches rendering 1s. 6d. a year, and each of them gives 7d. called hearthpennies, and each of them performs the same services as Nigel
Geri. Mabel, wife of Alan Kaicin, holds 1 acre 3 stongs of land paying 3d. a year to the heirs of Lambert Clerk. All of them pay 6s. 23d. of new farm (de nova forma). 123

Roger Bolston holds 31½ acres 20 perches rendering 2s. 7d. a year. He gives 7d. called hearthpennies at the feast of St. Botolph, and he performs all other services performed by Nigel Geri. He pays 9d. of new farm for his own land (pro terra sua propria). He holds in the marsh 6 acres 3 stongs. 124

Walter Bolston holds 13 acres 3 stongs rendering 5½d. a year. He gives 7d. called hearthpennies, and he does all other services done by Nigel Geri. He pays 4½d. of new farm for his own land. 125

Geoffrey Bolston holds 22 acres rendering 1s. 3½d. a year. He gives 7d. called hearthpennies at the feast of St. Botolph, and he performs all other services performed by Nigel Geri. He pays 4½d. of new farm for his own land. 126

In a document entitled 'tenants of the prior in socage in the vill of Weston' there is the entry: William, son of Hugh, holds 4½ acres rendering 3s. 9½d. a year. He gives 7d. called hearthpennies at the feast of St. Botolph, and he performs all other services performed by Hugh Toli. He pays 2d. of new farm for the said land, and 4d. of new farm for 2½ acres which he bought from William, son of Hugh Agnes. 127

It is evidently the case that all these money rents were raised apparently arbitrarily, for the serfs' own land.

It also seems that bondmen were having to pay extra rent for land they acquired from other peasants, more particularly from other bondmen, Spalding Priory, as the surveys of the servile tenants of the house at the time of Prior John show, allowing its villains to deal in land. 128

The William, son of Hugh Agnes, mentioned in the last entry, given above, concerning William, son of Hugh, was in fact another bond soman in Weston, appearing as such in an inquisition covering the children of the Weston villains dated 1268-69. 129

In the same survey of the bond somen in Weston, Gilbert Edric is mentioned as paying 2s. a year of new farm for 3 acres of the land of Reginald of the Almonry and Gilbert Kitoun (de terra Gilbertii Kitoune 7 terra Reginaldi de eleemosinaria). 130

the latter of whom is referred to as another bond soman holding land in Weston. 131

And later in the same survey, Alan, son of Emma, is described as paying 7d. a year of new farm for 1 acre 3 stongs of the land of Gilbert Kitoun. 132

In the survey of the bond somen of Mounton, Adam Diniel is mentioned as paying 6d. a year of new farm for 2½ acres of the land of Walter Bolston. 133

Peter Baldwin as paying 6d. a year of new farm for 1 acre 20 perches of the land of the same character and Nigel Geri as paying 1s. 9½d. a year of new farm for 4 acres 20 perches of the land of Roger Bolston. 134

The other for 320 marks from Sir Henry of Stanho in 1272, 135 also paying Edmund, son of King Henry III, 80 marks for a confirmation of them both. 136

Even more noticeable at this period and slightly later was Ramsey Abbey, where 'abbot Hugh de Sulgrave 1253-68, who appears to have initiated the policy of heavy investment in land by the purchase of Gravenhurst Manor for 250 marks, purchased some twenty small properties in nine manors', and Abbot William de Godmanchester 1268-88 'to mention only two transactions, paid £166.11s.4d. for the land of comprising Barmwell, Hemington and Crowethorpe manors, a fee in Littlethorpe and the church advowson in Barmwell, and secondly, £500 for the Le Moigne family holdings in Niddington, Holywell, Ramsey, one hide in Woodhurst, one hide in Walton, and one half hide in Fen Drayton'. 137

Peterborough Abbey was also investing heavily in land between 1265 and 1280. 138 Prior John's rent increases fit into a pattern already well established by historians, and the profits he made in this sphere from inter villicen sales were much on a par with those of the Bishops of Winchester at Bishops Waltham. Even his land exchanges, at least as far as Spalding Prior goes, were not out of the mainstream, since these had been fairly frequent under Prior Simon 1229-35, and were to remain frequent under Prior William 1274-94. Some of these indicate what was demonstrated in a different context some years ago, that the Lincolnshire freemen were a very go-ahead race of peasants. 139 A parallel for his economic activity can be found in an almost exact contemporary of his, Prior Walter de Colveley 1254-76 of Selc Priory. 140 In other words, Prior John's period of office 1253-74 provides in microcosm a by no means inaccurate illustration of movements at work on some estates in the third quarter of the thirteenth century.

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FOOTNOTES
3 In the British Museum (subsequently BM), Additional Manuscript (Add.), 50296 and Harleian Manuscript (Harl.), 742.
Amongst them 40s. worth of land from Gilbert de Gant, Earl of Lincoln, plus a bovate of land from Ristegar, one of his men around the mid twelfth century (BM, Harl. 742, ff. 287v-288). See also the Hundred Rolls (R.I.), I, p.243.

21 Of these areas, Othorpe may have been a renewed centre of operation for the Priory, because in the late twelfth century it had over 6 bovates of land in Othorpe which it exchanged in 1205 for 12 bovates in Hotham (Yorkshire, East Riding), from Philip, son of Rabed of Keal (BM, Harl. 742, ff. 301v-302).

22 BM, Adv. 35296, f.426v. These 3 acres of meadow and 18 acres of land in Wyerton were sold to the Priory by Alexander of Boston, clerk, for 50 marks. There is a charter concerning this transaction dated 1208 (BM, Harl. 742, f.230v). According to the Crown act of the deed in 1299 (Calendar of Charter Rolls, C.C.R., II, p.129) Alexander might have sold out to go to Jerusalem, as he also confers another acre on the Priory with the proviso that he keeps it if he returns from the Holy Land (et de terrae sancta indem pratum rohabeam). See also BM, Harl. 742, f.230v.

23 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427. The proportion of arable against meadow might possibly be lower than suggested, since ‘terre’ does not necessarily designate arable, and could, in fact, denote pasture. However, given that the document is arenders of glebe or land granted to the Priory, it is likely that the proportion between the two types of land as stated here is accurate.

24 Ibid., f.427. The price Prior John paid for rents was usually ten or twelve times their annual value. For a short discussion of this type of investment, see F.S. Hockley, Quarr Abbey and Its Landholdings, 1161-1361 (Lancaster, 1971), p.241.

25 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427. The Hundred Rolls mention that William granted Prior John 67 acres of land in Whaplode and Holbeach around 1262-1263 (R.I, p.272), but very likely part at least of this was sold.

26 BM, Adv. 35296, f.426. A fairly safe assumption in that Spalding Priory was founded in 1052 and was in possession of its principal manors of Spalding, Moulton, Weston and Finchingfield, by the early thirteenth century. It certainly acquired some large holdings in the first 150 years or so of its existence. Apart from its central manors, the early history of which is rather indeterminate, it retains, among other grants, 11 bovates of land in Stibbe with the men holding them and their servants from William de Roumara I and II, Earls of Lincoln (BM, Harl. 742, f.249v-249v, 249v). See also Documents Illustrative of the Social and Economic History of England and Wales, Vol. V, (London, 1920), p.xxv, note, the church of Alkborough from William de Roumara III and the tithes and obventions of his demesne in Normandy with a bovate, a bovate of land and a half, and the tithe of his fishery in the Trent (BM, Harl. 742, f.278v). And finally, from the same earl, the service from two carucates of land held by Lambert of Moulton in Minningby. See ibid., f.280v. Also, Eustace de East confirmed 12 bovates of land in Hotham (Yorkshire, East Riding) to the Priory (Ibid., f.306v). All of this may not have been given gratis, but there is a very good chance that much of it was given gratis.

27 Even allowing for the fact that it is elsewhere clear, i.e. in a charter concerning this transaction in the second volume of the registry (Ibid., f.66), that this land had holdings on it, a circumstance which could greatly raise its value, a sum of very nearly 66s an acre is still startling.

28 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427v. 29 Ibid., f.427v. 30 Ibid., f.427v. 31 Ibid., f.427v. 32 Ibid., f.426. 33 Ibid., f.426. 34 Ibid., f.426. 35 Ibid., f.426. 36 Ibid., f.426. 37 Ibid., f.426. 38 Ibid., f.426. 39 Ibid., f.426. 40 Ibid., f.426. 41 Ibid., f.426. 42 Ibid., f.426. 43 Ibid., f.426. 44 Ibid., f.426. 45 Ibid., f.426. 46 Ibid., f.426. 47 Ibid., f.426. 48 Ibid., f.426. 49 Ibid., f.426. 50 Ibid., f.426. 51 Ibid., f.426. 52 Ibid., f.426. 53 Ibid., f.426. 54 Ibid., f.426. 55 Ibid., f.426. 56 Ibid., f.426. 57 Ibid., f.426. 58 Ibid., f.426. 59 Ibid., f.426. 60 Ibid., f.426. 61 Ibid., f.428. 62 Ibid., f.428. 63 Ibid., f.428. 64 Ibid., f.428. 65 Ibid., f.428. 66 Ibid., f.428. 67 Ibid., f.428. 68 Ibid., f.428. 69 Ibid., f.428. 70 Ibid., f.428. 71 Ibid., f.428. 72 Ibid., f.428. 73 Ibid., f.428. 74 Ibid., f.428. 75 Ibid., f.428. 76 Ibid., f.428. 77 Ibid., f.428. 78 Ibid., f.428. 79 BM, Adv. 35296, f.426. The Hundred Rolls mention that Thomas granted the Priory 44 acres of land in Holbeach around 1271-72 (R.I., p.584), and there are two deeds in the register referring to two grants, a letter of seisin to the second being dated 1271 (BM, Harl. 742, f.210v-216). 80 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427. Although apparently not a knight himself, I have the impression that Ralph was of this ilk. A final concord in the register shows that the Priory was in possession of this land by 1262 (BM, Harl. 742, f.309v-310), and Ralph’s sale was confirmed by the Crown in 1269 (C.C.R., II, p.129). Sales of villagens infrequently appear in the survey. Another case was when Sir Thomas of Moulton sold William, son of Stephen de Campo, his serf, with all his heirs. To Prior John for 10 marks (BM, Adv. 35296, f.427), a rather oddly placed entry since it occurs in the section of that prior’s rent acquisitions in Weston. On occasions like these, the Priory was guilty of malpractice, because the buying and selling of villagens had been banned by the Council of Westminster in 1102, as Professor Finberg has pointed out, adding that he finds no record of such transactions on the Tewstwick Abbey manors [H.P. Fincham, Tewstwick Abbey, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, New Series, Vol. 2, (Cambridge, 1951), p.77]. For further discussion of traffic in villagens, see A.L. Poole, Obligations of Society in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, (Oxford, 1946), pp.14-15.

81 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427. The clerk’s total at the end of the section on lands acquired in this year is 254 acres; prior John’s sale was confirmed by the Crown in 1269 (C.C.R., II, p.129).

82 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427. A final concord shows that the Priory was in possession of this land by 1271 (BM, Harl. 742, f.313v-313v).

83 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427v. A deed in the register dated 1258 mentions that Prior John gave Nicholas 17 marks for the two bovates (BM, Harl. 742, f.308v).

84 BM, Adv. 35296, f.427v. In 1242-43, Henry held a third part of a knight’s fee in Kirby and Evedon (Book of Fees, II, p.1080).


86 Ibid., f.427v. Two deeds in the register mention that Gilbert sold this land (though for 40 marks) to the Priory in 1263 (BM, Harl. 742, f.306v-306v), and the Hundred Rolls place the same grant (though it is referred to as 50 acres) in the same year (R.I., p.345). The Calendar of Close Rolls indicates that Gilbert’s grant of all his demesne land in Othorpe to the Priory was confirmed by the Crown in 1269 (C.C.R., II, p.127).

87 Following Sir William Angervyn’s sale in the survey is: to a certain mediator (custos mediatori) who procured this land to the use (ad opuer) of the Priory, two quarters of corn priced 8s. (BM, Adv. 35296, f.426a). For a good study of the changing and social role of knights in the third quarter of the thirteenth century, see R. F. Treherne, ‘Knights in the Period of Reform and Rebellion: A Critical
SOME ECONOMIC DEALINGS OF PRIOR JOHN

Four entries following William's show that the Priory was benefiting by the disposal of his land to the tune of 13s. 4d. a year, since Godfrey de Angulo held 3 acres of his land for 45s, Nigel Seintamare an acre for 6d, William Villius 18 perches for 4d, and Robert Hiton an unspecified area for 15d. (Ibid., f.226).

For example, Robert de Cathorn, Richard de Pliss, Matilda, wife of Thomas Spink, Nicholas Wedecoc, Gilbert Couper, Cecilia, daughter of Rand, and Robert de Cathorn, William and Hugh Tovi, and John Lemberton (Ibid., f.225r. 226).

They had to do exactly the same services as Nigel Ceti, who is the prototype, in terms of service, for many of the other Moworth serfs, and who performs full villein services (Ibid., f.195r).

The above evidence concerning villein rents is different from that concerning the Peterborough villeins in 

Carte Naturorum in that Peterborough Abbey does not usually appear to have been using inter villein trading to raise servile rents, and in that most of the villeins, as on some of the Canterbury estates, held from each other and not, as the Spalding evidence would imply, from the lord (F. R. H. Du Boulay, The Lordship of Canterbury, An Essay on Medieval Society, London, 1866), p.155).

However, at Bishops Waltham, belonging to the Bishops of Winchester, inter villein trading did result in increased rents, though again the bondsman generally held from one another and although on one occasion the rent of the original villein holder was reduced (Carte Naturorum, p.xiii).

The emphasis on Ramsey Abbey estates was on payment by the villein buyer of an entry fine (Raftis, Tenure and Mobility, p.65), with no mention of rent increase. It is important to add here that Spalding Priory did not benefit from the market in boundland only in terms of rents. It also charged for licences to allow such activity in the first place, and fined delinquents who bought or sold without obtaining licences, sometimes exacting heavy penalties in such cases. (The Agrarian Economy of Medieval Lincoln before the Black Death, Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand, Vol. 11, No. 42, (1964), pp.167-168.)

Cambidge University Library, Add. 3021, f.379v.

Spalding Gentlemen's Society, West Park Charters, f.117.

Ibid., f.120-121.


King, op. cit., p.67.


Hallam, Settlement and Society, p.222.


Book Reviews

EDUCATION IN A MARKET TOWN : HORNCASTLE by J. N. Clarke, xv + 188pp., illus., Phillimore, 1976, £3.75.

Eleven years ago Rex Russell observed, in the Preface to the first of his admirable booklets on the history of education in Lindsey in the nineteenth century, that even after his series was completed there would be a need for detailed histories of schools and adult education' in Lindsey. Mr. Clarke provides a detailed account of all the educational facilities available in Horncastle from the Middle Ages to the present day.

Horncastle was fortunate in the possession of schools which grew in range from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Even in 1814, when Horncastle's population was three thousand, schools could be given to five hundred children outside the grammar and private schools. By 1870, for a population of nearly five thousand, 730 school places were available, still not counting private schools. The questions to be asked are how effective these schools were and how they approached their task.