

Farming in Lutterworth between 1660 and 1700

This analysis is based on the probate inventories of 11 Lutterworth people who died between 1660 and 1700 who were described as either a yeoman or a husbandman.

One of the ways to examine the farming activities of the population of Lutterworth between 1660 and 1700 is to split them into yeomen and husbandmen. Hoskins explains that in Leicestershire during the sixteenth century, a yeoman was often wealthy and high in the social hierarchy owning land and many movable possessions, whilst a husbandman usually owned less and was closer to the labouring class.¹ By the seventeenth century, these definitions may have changed from a localised meaning to a more national one with a yeoman being defined more generally as 'a man holding a small landed estate; a freeholder under the rank of a gentleman ... especially one who cultivates his own land'² and a husbandman as 'a man who tills or cultivates the soil; a farmer'³ so in short, it appears that a yeoman generally owned his land by this point whereas a husbandman did not. In Lutterworth during the forty year time period, there are seven yeomen who had an average inventory value of £102 and four husbandmen with inventories worth an average of £42 each. However, probate inventories show the movable assets of a person and thus the worth of the land is not considered. Therefore this is a comparison of like for like in agricultural produce and household possessions only, suggesting that both Hoskins's local and the more broad definitions are true for Lutterworth during this period: yeomen had larger farms and were in general wealthier than their counterparts. For example, Henry Watkine who died in 1678 owned very little and these items came to a total of £3 2s. 2d. of his total worth which was £18 14s. 2d.⁴ which suggests that this husbandman made very little and what he did was spent more on the necessary items to live rather than on more long term investments. At the other extreme, Robert Neale had £29 3s. 10d. worth of household items in his total worth of £131 17s. 8d.⁵ suggesting that the yeoman had the ability from his farming activities to invest in his home and in the future. This then allowed him to also invest in cheese making and butchery equipment as well as his plough, this would thereafter be another source of income thus making him wealthier and able to invest in his home and family more. Somewhat predictably, the proportion of Watkine's wealth in household belongings is less than that of Neale (approximately 16 per cent compared to 22 per cent) which may suggest that there were

¹ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Farmer in the Sixteenth Century', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, 22, (1941/42), pp. 37-39

² Oxford English Dictionary Online, www.oed.com, 'yeoman n', [accessed 14th April 2014]

³ Oxford English Dictionary Online, www.oed.com, 'husbandman n', [accessed 14th April 2014]

⁴ LLRRO, PR/I/80/41, Henry Watkine Probate Inventory, 26th April 1678 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

⁵ LLRRO, PR/I/78/16, Robert Neale Probate Inventory, 14th April 1676 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

other important outlets of money for those who earned less. It may also be that the husbandmen earned less than yeomen possibly as a result of holding less land and influence.

Looking at the debts owing to each man upon his death, reveals an interesting pattern. Most deaths between February and July (of which there are seven), have very little debts owing to them and in most cases nothing outstanding. However the four inventories from October and November show huge amounts of outstanding debt, in the case of Henry Clarke, £195 of a total value of £312,⁶ and for Henry Burbidge in 1677, 70 per cent of his worth was in debts owing to him.⁷ This is a very small sample, but considering the pattern rather than individual cases, it is probable that after the autumn harvest the farmers sold their crops and allowed their customers to pay them at a later time because often people would not have had such a sum of money for a single payment. Alternatively, Burbidge may have been an old man who had already given his land to his son to farm and so the worth of the land was technically owed to him although he may never have expected it to be paid. His personal farming assets comprised only two cows and three sheep with no crops which seems much too small for a yeoman's farm. Hoskins suggests that this practice was commonplace in Leicestershire with the father keeping 'his parlour' and a couple of animals with some land to keep himself occupied.⁸ From looking at Burbidge's inventory, this theory could be confirmed because he had enough household possessions to live on, probably owning his own house; there were four furnished rooms mentioned alongside linen and pewter 'belonging to the house' despite having so few farming assets.⁹

Considering what they were farming, in this sample, eight people had mixed farms with both crops and animals; one had livestock but no crops: Henry Burbidge (1677);¹⁰ and two had crops but no livestock (Knight, 1675¹¹, and Flude, 1671¹²). Lutterworth was an open field parish which would suggest that most of these farmers used the open fields, however there were two large enclosed areas in the parish from sixteenth century and other local parishes had enclosures (known as a 'close') which could have been rented by people in the area.¹³ An exception to farming in the open

⁶ LLRRO, PR/I/85/118, Henry Clarke Probate Inventory, 9th October 1683 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

⁷ LLRRO, PR/I/79/112, Henry Burbidge Probate Inventory, 19th October 1677 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

⁸ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Farmer in the Seventeenth Century', *Agricultural History*, 25/1, (1951), p.12

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ LLRRO, PR/I/79/112, H. Burbidge

¹¹ LLRRO, PR/I/77/56, Francis Knight Probate Inventory, 15th June 1675 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

¹² LLRRO, PR/I/70/213, John Flude Probate Inventory, 2nd February 1670 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

¹³ J. Goodacre, *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy: Townspeople and Villagers in the Lutterworth Area 1500-1700*, (Aldershot 1994), pp.97

fields may have been Henry Clarke who had 91 sheep, 4 rams, and 3 cows 'in the ground'.¹⁴ The ground is likely to be the aforementioned close which is also documented in the inventory.¹⁵ His rams are the only ones in all of the inventories which suggests that he has a large breeding flock that none of the others did, the rest farming mostly for wool and meat. Goodacre explains that the Morbarn enclosure in Lutterworth was a very profitable sheep walk at this time and so it is likely that Clarke grazed his sheep here.¹⁶ Furthermore, eight of these nine people owned cows (or beasts) upon their death which is the most common form of livestock in this sample; Henry Watkine (1678) is the only one who does not.¹⁷ Cows can bring profit from their milk and their meat. Milk can also be made into cheese, and this can be seen within two of the inventories: Guilbert Marriott (1670) had 'one cheese presse'¹⁸ and Henry Clarke (1683) owned 'A Chese presse Barrells A Churne And A Screne'.¹⁹ In addition to this, most of the nine people who farmed animals also owned pigs, sheep, and horses, the former two would also have been useful for meat, and one inventory, that of Robert Neale, suggests he may have butchered his own meat too: 'A Rack & 2 paire of Hooks, a paire of Tongs, a Flesh-Fork'²⁰ are named in his inventory. Horses were usually working animals, for pulling ploughs and many forms of transport, and a number of the inventories include equipment for transport via horses, Neale had 'a Cart rope, a Wanty', alongside 'a Saddle & Bridle'²¹ and there are six ploughs and related instruments across the eleven inventories.

There were also ten people who were arable farmers; the aforementioned eight who farmed both arable and livestock, and John Flude (1670)²² and Francis Knight (1675)²³ who were solely arable farmers. For these agriculturalists their products are harder to split into categories and examine in some inventories than the animals because in four of those studied 'Croppe new sowed'²⁴ (or equivalent) is written thus not specifying what they were growing, and others mention 'corn', without saying if it was wheat or another cereal crop. However for those that are specified, 66 per cent have stores of peas²⁵ and three of the four husbandmen had a considerable value of the crop

¹⁴ LLRRO, PR/I/85/118, H. Clarke

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Goodacre, *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy*, p.98

¹⁷ LLRRO, PR/I/80/41, H. Watkine

¹⁸ LLRRO, PR/I/70/282, Guilbert Marriott Probate Inventory, 24th February 1671 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

¹⁹ LLRRO, PR/I/85/118, H. Clarke

²⁰ LLRRO, PR/I/78/16, R. Neale

²¹ *ibid*

²² LLRRO, PR/I/70/213, J. Flude

²³ LLRRO, PR/I/77/56, F. Knight

²⁴ LLRRO, PR/I/87/223, Thomas Cattell Probate Inventory, 17th March 1686 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)

²⁵ Goodacre, *Transformation of a Peasant Economy*, p.127

(at least ten shillings²⁶) at the time of their death. Furthermore, peas were often used to make bread which is a staple of the peasant.²⁷ W.G. Hoskins found from analysing probate records of the whole of Leicestershire that peas (including beans) occupied around 45 per cent of the sown area during the years 1669 and 1672 and he suggests that this may have been due to the clay content in the soil in Leicestershire which is good for growing these crops.²⁸ In addition to the pea crop, 60 per cent had hay which are likely to have been crop for the animals as well as for commercial use. Barley and wheat were also found in the stores of agriculturalists in Lutterworth between 1660 and 1700 although in small volumes (one person grew wheat and two grew barley).

When considering the eight mixed farms in this sample alone, three had higher value in their crop yield whilst five had more worth in their livestock. This makes it difficult to draw a conclusion about the most lucrative form of farming. The mixed farms show that open field farming was flexible and allowed both crops and livestock to be farmed. In many of the larger farms, there seems to have been some specialism, for example Wright had 80 sheep worth £24 whilst the rest of his farm was worth only £9 10s. 0d in total.²⁹

To conclude, in Lutterworth during the late seventeenth century there were both farmers of crops and animals with most of the taking part in mixed farming. The most common crops were corn of various kinds and peas, and the most commonly held animal was the cow, although there is one farmer with 115 sheep and rams. Some of these agriculturalists also created other products including cheese, and butchered their meat, although these seem to be a minority and it is more likely that most people sold the goods as produced on the land to other trades people such as butchers. The prosperity of agriculture in Lutterworth may be indicated by there being more yeomen than husbandmen.

Lauren Rowe, July 2014

²⁶ LLRRO, PR/I/70/282, G. Marriott

²⁷ Goodacre, *Transformation of the Peasant Economy*, p.113

²⁸ Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Farmer in the Seventeenth Century'

²⁹ LLRRO, PR/I/69/119, Thomas Wright Probate Inventory, 13th November 1669 (from www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk)