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Please cite this publication as follows:

Sweetinburgh, S. (2011) The social structure of New Romney as revealed in the 1381 Poll Tax returns. *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 131. pp. 1-22. ISSN 0066-5894.

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://www.kentarchaeology.org.uk/Research/Pub/ArchCant/131-2011/Contents.htm>

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THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF NEW ROMNEY AS REVEALED IN THE 1381 POLL TAX RETURNS

SHEILA SWEETINBURGH

The exemption of the Kentish Cinque Portsmen from royal taxation on their goods both inside and outside the liberty which contributed towards ship-service was first established by Henry III's charter in 1260, being further elaborated in a royal *inspeximus* charter sixty-seven years later.¹ By itself this should not have exempted the portsmen from the late fourteenth-century poll taxes, especially that imposed in 1377, for these new and different forms of taxation were based on the individual rather than his goods.² Moreover, the men of the Cinque Ports had contributed to the parish tax of 1371 which imposed a set fee on the parish, and, as Carolyn Fenwick has indicated, in 1377 and 1379 the Commons intended the portsmen should not escape by claiming their traditional exemption.³ Yet, as she also notes, nothing has been found for either year to show that the taxation was collected within the Liberty of the Cinque Ports, though it seems those claiming portsmen status were assessed outside the liberty in 1379. The survival of a View of Account and a Detailed Roll for the hundreds of Cornilo and Ringslow refers to such an assessment and it seems probable that this was not a unique occurrence.⁴ By 1381 the Cinque Ports had apparently re-established their privileged status, the crown acknowledging their right to exemption in the writ of *supersedeas* sent to Kent, another being sent to Sussex, giving relief from payment.⁵ As a consequence of these developments and the documents preserved at The National Archives, Fenwick reasonably believed it was 'highly unlikely that any poll tax was collected within the Cinque Ports'.⁶

However as any keen-eyed reader of *Archaeologia Cantiana* will know, M. Teichman-Derville in 1929 referred to the detailed 1381 poll tax assessment for New Romney in his description of the town's records.⁷ Nor was this the first acknowledgement of their existence because they are mentioned in the first paragraph of the Historical Manuscripts Commission's second report on the New Romney archive published in 1876, the documents themselves rescued by the report's author Thomas Riley.⁸ A far more recent (1974) passing reference to them is in Andrew

Butcher's article on the fifteenth-century freemen's lists for the town.⁹ This paper is in fact the first to examine the New Romney data in any detail particularly regarding the town's social structure.

The implications of its imposition on the Cinque Ports with respect to Kent's part in the Peasants' Revolt can only be very briefly touched upon here, and needs further investigation; nevertheless it seems almost inconceivable that these impositions did not fuel resentment against royal and some local officials in a county that was on the brink of revolt.¹⁰ Because not only was the tax itself deeply resented but, as Mark Ormrod discusses, royal interference in the form of new commissioners in early 1381 to check on those administering the levy was envisaged as an attack on local self-government, as well as potentially increasing the tax burden on 'their' communities.¹¹ Rebels are known from the jury presentments but amongst 'the divers men' and 'the divers unknown malefactors' that followed Wat Tyler or the other leaders in different parts of Kent it seems probable there was a contingent from the middling and lower ranks of the Cinque Ports.¹² Even though Canterbury was two and a half times more populous than New Romney, Butcher's analysis of the tensions within the cathedral city's community at this time seem pertinent regarding the situation at New Romney, and perhaps also at Sandwich, Hythe and Dover.¹³ Thus it is perhaps not surprising that Kent was at the forefront of events in the summer of 1381, and as a consequence the apparent priorities of Romney's leading citizens during this period are intriguing.¹⁴ On the one hand what seems to have been exercising the senior jurats was the readiness of the town's new barge that was to bring Anne of Bohemia over for her (coronation) and marriage to Richard II and the probability this would be postponed due to the rebels' activities, and on the other the requirements of those who brought a succession of royal letters to the town between June and October.¹⁵ The first of these letters patent seems to have been delivered, with the king's standard, on 7 June, two days after the insurrections the escalated in north Kent; the contents providing the town authorities with information about the various rebellions in several counties.¹⁶ Another letter was brought on 27 June and in early July the men of Romney were detailed to send a local contingent to Barham Down to meet the Lord Warden. However all was not well because on 6 July the town government was informed that a complaint had been sent to the Lord Warden following an incident at Hythe, the commons of Romney being said to have behaved badly. Perhaps the most telling pieces of evidence of the unrest in the Ports come from two further letters. The first on the eve of the feast of St James (24 July) concerned fugitive Kentish and Essex rebels in the Cinque Ports, while the second (23 October) forbade the Romney civic authorities to allow such rebels to remain there. This is interesting and appears to point to a considerable and long-lasting involvement by the portsmen.

The 1381 Poll Tax

As well as being fundamentally different from the earlier lay subsidies (what had become known as the tenths and fifteenths), the later poll taxes also varied from the 'true' poll tax of 1377 and from each other. The taxation system changed from a scheme in 1377 where every person aged fourteen or over was assessed at *4d.*, except mendicants, to the tax of 1381 which included some differentials among the sums charged per person.¹⁷ In a sense the 1381 scheme was somewhat of a hybrid between the two earlier taxes, its regulations including the directives that all lay persons aged fifteen and over, except paupers, should pay a shilling but that as a way of aiding poorer people the wealthy should bear a greater proportion of the tax burden.¹⁸ As a result the minimum fee per person was set at *4d.*, the rich paying up to a maximum of 20*s.* each, the total sum to be paid from a particular place (vill/parish/ward) being the basic assessment of *12d.* multiplied by the number of taxpayers.

A system of overseeing was introduced at the start to try to ensure the first group of commissioners was applying the rules correctly, but by late December 1380 the government brought in further measures, the county sheriffs and escheators ordered to check on proceedings. Some commissioners were fined for making fraudulent returns and evasion was considered to be a major problem when these later records were compared to those of 1377, prompting the Exchequer to appoint reassessment commissions and to try to enforce the full payment of the tax by Easter rather than by 2 June 1381.¹⁹

The form of the tax and the assessment process are important because they have implications for its usefulness to historians. Population studies have primarily focused on the 1377 taxation returns due to their perceived greater accuracy.²⁰ According to Fenwick this rests on a number of assumptions: the discrepancy between the figures for 1377 and 1381 are greater than expected compared to the slight drop in numbers that would have followed from the different minimum age between the two taxes (1377 minimum age fourteen, 1381 a year older). In addition, the Detailed Rolls of 1381 do not include as many single persons, especially women, as expected.²¹ This is thought by some to indicate relatively high levels of tax evasion. For not only was it in the interests of the poorer members of society to be exempt, but because of the way the total tax was calculated, with the richer taxpayers expected to subsidise their poorer neighbours, it was in the interests of all to minimise the number of taxpayers. Yet, as she and others have discussed, part of this apparent evasion may instead represent exemption on the grounds of genuine poverty, the 1381 tax coming at the end of a particularly heavy period of taxation, while those between the age differentials are most likely to have been single persons.²² Such shortcomings concerning the records of

Oxford, Beverley and Lichfield are discussed by Jeremy Goldberg, and he provides further ideas respecting the reasons why they occurred.²³

Nonetheless, even if there are certain problems concerning the reliability and so usefulness of the 1381 records, in some cases the Detailed Rolls do provide valuable information about the locality's social structure, and are frequently more informative than the corresponding rolls from 1379. As Fenwick comments, in 1381 taxpayers had nothing to lose by hiding their occupation because the individual tax assessment was not dependent on occupation or rank as it had been in the previous poll tax.²⁴ Also, even though a significant number of persons paid *12d.* (married couples *2s.*), the rolls do record other sums against particular names, thereby providing ideas about the relative wealth of those involved even if there is nothing to suggest more precise individual assessments were carried out by the assessors and collectors. Not all the rolls are arranged in the same way, some being organised by occupation or categories of landholding within the unit of vill, parish, street or ward, and others, perhaps the most useful, are listed by household.²⁵

Like most medieval records survival is patchy among the Detailed Rolls, and Fenwick's meticulous work in The National Archives has aided both the identification of the places covered by the extant documents and the composition of some returns that had become detached from their original position.²⁶ Although historians had previously used the poll taxes, her work has drawn further attention to these sources, as well as providing greater opportunities to study individual English towns and to assess urban society comparatively.²⁷ For Kent, nominative records survive at Kew for Canterbury 1377 (not complete) and 1381 (including a reassessment), a fragment for Rochester (1377) and, as noted above, the liberties of the Cinque Ports in Ringslow and Cornilo hundreds (1379).²⁸ Consequently the largely complete taxation list for New and Old Romney (1381) at Whitfield is an extremely valuable part of the county's medieval archive (see **Plate I**).²⁹ Its survival owes much to the timely actions of Riley in the late nineteenth century, and the individual membranes are now preserved in the first volume of the town's chamberlains' accounts.³⁰

Other records within this early chamberlains' book include contemporary maletote lists and those for subsequent years in the early 1380s. These local taxes were imposed by the town authorities on the production and sales of each freeman dwelling in the town and at double rate on resident strangers (that is non-freemen who might have come from the town's hinterland, elsewhere in England or from overseas).³¹ Only those considered to be paupers were given exemption. The scale of charges to be levied was laid out in very detailed lists in the town's custumal, and at New Romney particular attention was paid to listing the vintners, butchers, hostellers, rapiers and the master fishermen. As with the maletotes, the local civic officials who drew up the poll tax returns used

PLATE I

The Heading and Holyngbroke ward of the 1381 New Romney poll tax, in EKA: NR/Fac 1.
Copyright New Romney Town Council.

the town's wards rather than the parishes, consequently instead of being divided into the three parishes of St Lawrence, St Martin and St Nicholas, the taxpayers of New Romney are recorded under the town's thirteen wards.³²

The assessors seemingly went from door to door in that the list is arranged by household; and where the household included offspring who were fifteen or over and any designated servants, these persons were added next.³³ Such persons were almost invariably named, including surnames on a few occasions, though they were often taxed as a group. For example John Tiece's four children, William, Hugh, Jacob and Alice, were collectively assessed at 4*s.*, while John's three servants, Alice Sherte, Alice and Margery, were to pay 2*s.* The officers completely omitted the names of wives, the householders presumably seen as responsible for their joint payment. This is interesting because the civic authorities in the Cinque Ports showed particular concern respecting the property rights of married women within the liberty. Single persons generally have the term *solus/sola* after their name, but a few do not, though whether this is an oversight by the clerk is unclear but sometimes an occupation is given instead, as John Bracy, porter. From the way such persons are listed in the York returns, Jeremy Goldberg concluded they were dependent on the household head but were not servants. There is little to suggest that this was the case at Romney beyond perhaps Elicia Herward *sola*, who may have had two lodgers: the names of John Petit, tiler, and John Aksted, armourer (the son of Walter Armurer and Mabil his wife?), who were assessed individually at 12*d.* each, follow that of Elicia in the returns for Bocherie Ward.³⁴ She was a widow in 1381, having previously been married to a Romney butcher William Heiward, and may have remained in the family house after his death.³⁵

The system of listing by household has considerable advantages regarding an investigation of the town's social structure, and also provides some opportunities for comparable analysis. The administrative division into thirteen wards rather than three parishes allows for a greater breakdown of the different sectors in Romney. However the absence of any ward maps or descriptions of their boundaries does create major difficulties respecting the topographical identification of the various wards. For even though a ward such as Bocherie was named after the dominant occupation in that part of the town where their market was sited, Hospital probably refers to the leper hospital (though St John's hospital was nearby) and High Mill was located in the vicinity of this important mill, other ward names seem to relate to local, often leading, families: Colbrond, Bertelotte, Holyngbroke, Hope, Olberd, and perhaps Deme and Hope, though the latter may be linked in some way to the parish of that name. Notwithstanding these difficulties, and using Draper's and Meddens' map of the Romney parishes, property details in final concords

from the later fourteenth century and the known approximate location of a couple of wards, an attempt has been made, at least very tentatively, to try to place some of them (see **Fig. 1**).³⁶ The author hopes future scholars will amend it as necessary.

New Romney – population and social structure

It is notoriously difficult to ascertain accurate population figures for the medieval period. However, it is thought that the population peaked around 1300, falling somewhat in the early fourteenth century before the mid-century crisis of the Black Death and subsequent plague outbreaks that together may have reduced the population by as much as a half. Attempts to produce such figures have predominantly used the 1334/5 lay subsidy and the 1377 poll tax returns, and where the latter or later detailed poll taxation records exist it has also been possible to examine aspects of the social structure. Among the elements that have received greatest attention are the composition of the family (nuclear or extended), marriage patterns and the apparent importance of life-cycle servanthood. As a way of placing New Romney in this wider context of the development of medieval society, this essay considers what can be learnt from a study of the town's surviving poll tax records.

Taking the town as a whole, the 1381 returns would seem to be adequate regarding an assessment of Romney's population in the late fourteenth century. Even though there are certain caveats, as noted above, concerning these returns compared to 1377, the 1381 figures are nevertheless well worth employing.³⁷ Furthermore, New Romney's relatively small size as a whole, and the wards more especially, would have made it extremely difficult for individuals to evade the local assessors, particularly as they were probably the senior jurats. Thus only if the leading men of the town were willing to collude with their poorer neighbours would there have been an under-assessment of the number of taxpayers. There is nothing to suggest this occurred and the chamberlains' accounts list the sums collected both for the poll tax and the maletotes.³⁸ The maletotes do not correspond exactly in time for they were collected to cover eighteen months rather than the usual annual assessment, nonetheless comparing the two lists there are about fifteen names that are in the maletote list but not the poll tax. In some cases this may be due to the different timing of the two lists (John Kakiston paid for three months), but also factors such as the instability of surnames (for example, John Coupere the tailor might be referred to elsewhere as John Tailor), and the missing names on the damaged poll tax document. In addition, the regular employment of such a local taxation scheme as the maletotes meant that the jurats and townspeople were used to operating a household-based system, and though it seems highly likely the imposition of the 1381 poll tax

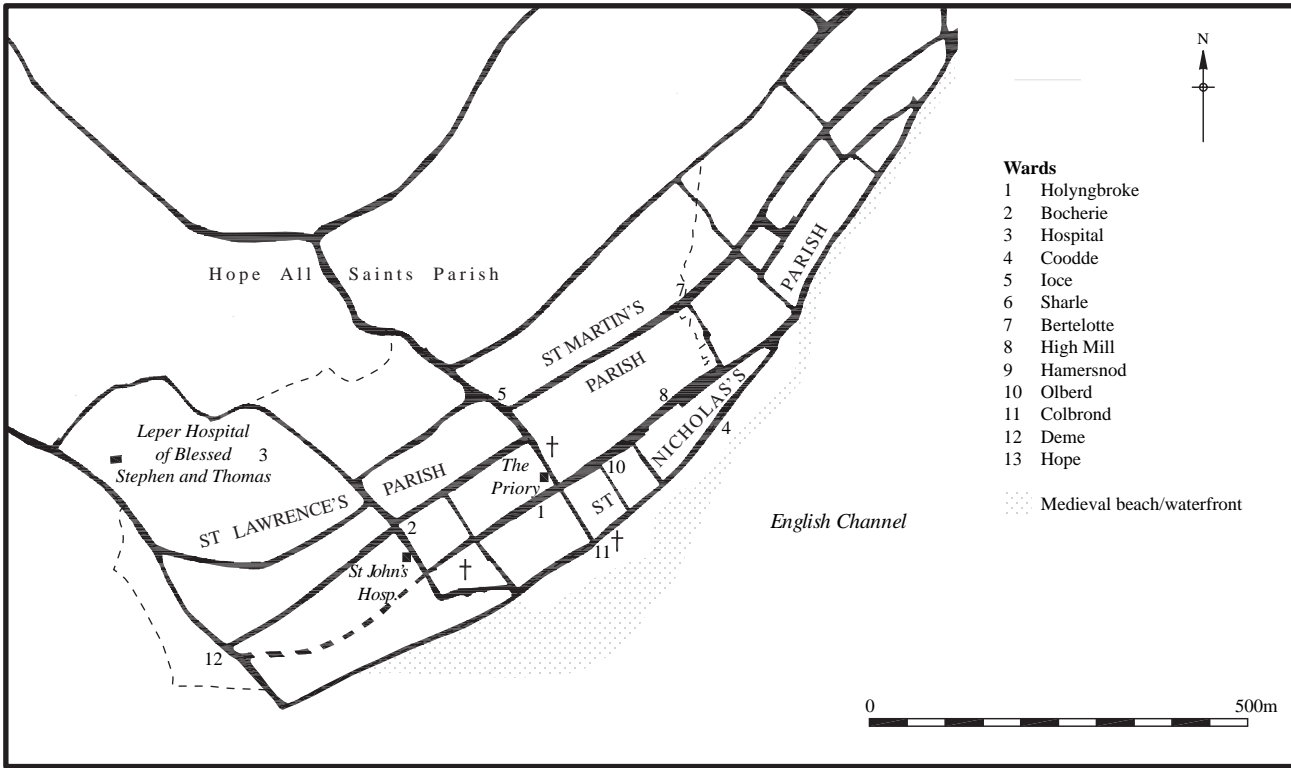


Fig. 1 Map of late medieval New Romney town showing parishes and approximate position of wards.

would have been resented among the middling and poorer citizens, the chamberlains' accounts give no hint of this feeling among the town officers (see above). Thus it may be reasonable to assume that this return can provide a sufficiently accurate figure of the taxpaying population to be able to rank it in the national list. The total sum collected from the wards was £48 9s. 6d. which at a rate of 12d. per person gives a figure of 970 persons in New Romney aged fifteen and over. This is slightly higher than the 912 persons listed in the returns discounting the damaged entries and, if an estimate is made for these, the figure increases to 941. Such figures place New Romney at 42/43 in Alan Dyer's town rankings.³⁹ It is conceivable that the other Kentish Cinque Ports were not too dissimilar in size, which would place them above Maidstone (population 844, ranked 50) and Rochester (570, ranked 70), but considerably below Canterbury (2,574, ranked 13).

From these it seems Derek Keene's assumption that New Romney had a population of a thousand taxpayers was remarkably accurate.⁴⁰ Moving from this figure to an estimate for the total population is more problematic for there are several methods and the multiplier used varies among historians. Caroline Barron notes that Professor Russell used a multiplier of 1.5 to take account of children under fourteen when he calculated Worcester's population from the total number of taxpayers on the 1377 enrolled account.⁴¹ Alternatively, Goldberg in his assessment of York's population, also from the 1377 poll tax, first calculated the mean household size because the returns are not complete and then used a multiplier of 1.65, though he did concede this might be somewhat generous.⁴² In the case of New Romney (1381) it has not been possible to ascertain a definitive figure for the total number of taxpayers, though taking the estimated figure of 941 (970) and applying Russell's more conservative multiplier, the town's total population ranges between 1,411 (1,455). Yet, if Goldberg's approach is adopted the calculated average household size of 2.27 (**Table 1**), which is remarkably close to the figures he produced for Dartmouth (2.28) and Hull (2.25) from the 1377 returns, gives a total population figure of 1,500 after applying the multiplier of 1.65, and a very similar figure of 1,502 if the same multiplier is applied on a ward basis.⁴³

Looking in more detail at the returns and again following Goldberg's analytical methods, it is possible to assess matters relating to gender, the proportions married or single, the proportions of servants and of older children and of the presence of these in households, both for New Romney and comparatively (see data set out in **Tables 2-5**). The arrangement of the returns also allows such issues to be investigated topographically, which in part may relate to occupational variation across the town. However the poll tax itself provides little information on this issue but Draper and Meddens have mapped the town's industry and trade from other sources.⁴⁴ For the New Romney returns, **Table 6** replicates Goldberg's calculations

TABLE 1. AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND TOTAL POPULATION BY WARD (NEW ROMNEY 1381 POLL TAX)

Ward	Taxed pop'n	No. house-holds	Av. house-hold size	Av. household size x 1.65	Total pop'n
Holyngbroke	127	46	2.76	4.55	209
Bocherie	79	30	2.63	4.34	130
Hospital	79	30	2.63	4.34	130
Coodde	47	24	1.96	3.23	78
Ioce	50	23	2.17	3.58	82
Sharle	60	30	2.00	3.30	99
Bertelotte	87	41	2.12	3.50	143
High Mill	83	43	1.93	3.18	137
Hamersnod	68	30	2.27	3.75	112
Olberd	69	30	2.30	3.79	114
Colbrond	59	24	2.46	4.06	97
Deme	40	19	2.11	3.48	66
Hope	64	31	2.06	3.40	105
<i>ROMNEY</i>	912	401	2.27	3.74	1,502

Source: EKA: NR/FAc 1.

and uses his figures for selected towns. The adult sex ratio (the number of males per 100 women) is the sex ratio of all non-servants (married and single persons – children, widows and other single people, that is all unmarried persons not specifically described as servants) because Goldberg considers servants are most likely to have been predominantly adolescents and so generally younger than the remaining taxpayers. The other ratios are self-explanatory: the service sex ratio is the sex ratio of all servants; the total sex ratio is the ratio of the whole taxpaying population. Even though the differing age criteria among the several taxes needs to be borne in mind, especially the impact of in-migration by young (mid-teens) unmarried persons from the town's rural hinterland, which, for 1377 in particular, would raise the proportion of unmarried in the total taxpaying population, the position is further complicated by the unknown and probably varying level of exclusion/evasion. As a consequence Goldberg suggests such figures should be used with caution and in his study of marriage patterns in late medieval York he was able to draw on other evidence. Such resources are not available for Romney but if he is correct and the York evidence does demonstrate a north-west European marriage pattern (that is women marrying later rather than in their late teens, or not marrying at all), then superficially, at least, the Romney evidence looks similar regarding the proportions of those married, single

TABLE 2. AMOUNT OF TAX PAID PER HOUSEHOLD BY WARD IN NEW ROMNEY

Ward	4 <i>d.</i>			6-10 <i>d.</i>			12 <i>d.</i>			14-24 <i>d.</i>			26-36 <i>d.</i>			38-48 <i>d.</i>			50-60 <i>d.</i>			60 <i>d.</i> +			Average tax (<i>d.</i>)
	c	s	o	c	s	o	c	s	o	c	s	o	c	s	o	c	s	o	c	s	o				
Holyngbroke	1	-	-	1	-	6	6	3	-	10	2	-	4	1	-	4	-	7	1	-	39.6				
Bocherie*	-	-	-	-	-	4	6	2	1	-	3	-	5	-	-	1	1	4	-	1	37.8				
Hospital	-	1	1	2	1	1	9	-	-	5	1	-	4	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	30.1				
Coodde	-	-	2	1	1	3	10	2	-	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19.5				
Ioce	-	-	-	1	1	1	11	3	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	25.3				
Sharle	-	-	2	-	1	3	13	2	1	4	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	24.4				
Bertelotte*	-	-	2	1	1	2	24	1	-	5	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	24.6				
High Mill	-	-	-	3	2	5	25	3	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	22.5				
Hamersnod	-	1	-	1	1	-	13	1	-	8	1	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	27.9				
Olberd*	-	1	-	-	-	5	12	1	-	4	-	-	1	-	-	3	-	1	-	-	26.4				
Colbrond	-	-	-	-	1	1	9	2	1	2	-	-	3	-	-	4	-	-	1	-	33.5				
Deme	-	3	1	-	-	2	8	-	-	1	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	22.5				
Hope	-	1	-	-	2	4	15	3	-	3	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	21.9				
Total	1	7	8	10	11	37	161	23	4	51	9	1	27	1	1	19	2	18	3	2	28.9				

Notes:

c: married couples with/without children/servants.

s: single persons with/without children/servants.

o: couple with other kin or 2 singles jointly.

* damaged return – missing figures.

Source: EKA: NR/FAc 1.

TABLE 3. SEX RATIOS AND PROPORTIONS MARRIED, SINGLE, AND IN SERVICE BY WARD IN NEW ROMNEY

Ward	Adult sex ratio	Service sex ratio	Total sex ratio	Married %	Single %	In service %	Taxed pop'n
Holyngbroke	127.5	111.8	119.3	50.4	21.2	28.3	127
Bocherie	89.6	300.0	125.7	50.6	19.0	30.4	79
Hospital	84.8	350.0	113.5	63.3	13.9	22.8	79
Coodde	155.5	-	161.1	72.3	25.5	2.1	47
Ioce	87.5	150.0	92.3	68.0	22.0	10.0	50
Sharle	119.2	-	106.9	76.7	18.3	5.0	60
Bertelotte	95.1	40.0	89.1	82.7	9.2	8.1	87
High Mill	105.1	200.0	107.5	74.7	21.7	3.6	83
Hamersnod	93.5	300.0	106.1	76.5	11.8	11.8	68
Olberd	86.7	333.3	109.1	66.7	14.5	18.8	69
Colbrond	92.0	57.1	84.4	64.4	16.9	18.6	59
Deme	94.7	-	110.5	70.0	22.5	7.5	40
Hope	96.8	50.0	93.9	71.9	23.4	4.7	64

Notes:

Sex ratio is number of males per 100 females.

Source: EKA: NR/FAC 1.

or in service.⁴⁵ Yet when the proportion of those marrying is considered by sex for Romney (men 64.6%, women 70%), the figures are outside Goldberg's urban society limits, being closer instead to his rural model.⁴⁶ Why this should be is unclear but a major contributory factor is the high service sex ratio (see below). Nonetheless, Romney does fit two of Goldberg's three urban characteristics: relatively low proportion of married adults and relatively high proportion of servants, but the third, a generally low sex ratio, diverges from his norm for the service sex ratio.

Exploring these sex ratios in Table 6, they show more variation, as Goldberg noted, than the percentage figures, and of special interest is the wide variation in the service sex ratio, and the absence of a relationship between it and the adult sex ratio.⁴⁷ This may be due to either the failure to record female servants, or the preponderance of certain occupations within a town resulting in the employment of one sex rather than the other, or a combination of these factors. For example cloth-producing towns and those heavily engaged in victualling probably offered far greater opportunities for female native and migrant workers and servants than those where metal and leather working were predominant. As a port, the mercantile and victualling trades might have been expected to attract women to Romney, but the importance of the butchery and linked trades

TABLE 4. COMPOSITION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY WARD IN NEW ROMNEY

	Married couples						Single-headed households										Total house- holds	Female headed %	
	Total no.	Nil children 15+	With children 15+	With servants	With both	With other kin	Total no.	Gender of head		Nil children 15+		With children 15+		With servants		Two singles jointly			
								M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M			F
Holyngbroke	32	10	1	16	5	-	14	7	7	5	4	2	2	1				46	15.2
Bocherie	20	8	-	9	2	1#	10	4	6	2	4	1		2	1			30	20.0
Hospital	25	15	3	7	-	-	5	3	2	2	1	1 ⁿ					1	30	6.7
Coodde	17	13	2	1	-	1	7	6	1	5	1	1						24	4.2
Ioce	17	14	1	1	1	-	6	3	3	1	1	1		1	1		1	23	13.0
Sharle	23	19	1	1	1	1	7	5	2	4	1			1	1			30	6.7
Bertelotte	36	31	1	4	-	-	5	3	2	1	2	1		1				41	4.9
High Mill	31	28	3	-	-	-	12	7	5	6	2	1	2		1			43	11.6
Hamersnod	26	19	2	4	1	-	4	2	2	1	1	1		1				30	6.7
Olberd	23	13	2	7	1	-	7	3	4	3	4							30	13.3
Colbrond	19	12	2	3	2	-	5	1	4		2			2	1*			24	16.7
Deme	14	10	-	3	-	-	5	1	4	1	4							19	21.1
Hope	23	16	3	4	-	1	8	3	5	1	4	2	1					31	16.1
Total	306	208	21	60	13	4	95	48	47	32	30	9	6	4	9	3	2	401	11.7

Notes: M Male single-headed household; F Female single-headed household.

* Henry Nowel with his mother.

ⁿ gender not known.

also 2 servants.

Source: EKA: NR/FAc 1.

SHEILA SWEETINBURGH

TABLE 5. SERVANTS AND CHILDREN (15 YEARS AND OVER), BY GENDER IN MARRIED HOUSEHOLDS

Ward	Married couples						with both children and servants [males]
	with children			with servants			
	M	F	B	M	F	B	
Holyngbroke	1	-	-	10	5	1	5 [2]
Bocherie	-	-	-	7	-	2	2 [1]
Hospital	-	3	-	2	1	4	-
Coodde	2	-	-	1	-	-	-
Ioce	-	-	1	-	-	1	1 [1]
Sharle	-	1	-	-	1	-	1
Bertelotte	-	1	-	1	2	1	-
High Mill	1	2	-	-	-	-	-
Hamersnod	1	1	-	4	-	-	1 [1]
Olberd	-	2	-	5	1	1	1 [1]
Colbrond	2	-	-	1	1	1	2 [1]
Deme	-	-	-	3	-	-	-
Hope	1	2	-	1	2	1	-
Total	8	12	1	35	13	12	13 [7]

Source: EKA: NR/FAC 1.

may have limited their options. Equally the town's need for crewmen to man the local boats and work in allied industries such as boat-building and repairs may partly explain the town's high service sex ratio. If these maritime activities are a significant issue regarding the greater presence of men over women in port towns, it is a pity the corresponding figures cannot be ascertained for Dartmouth because the findings for New Romney do not match the profiles seen at Hull and Lynn.

Another issue that needs to be considered in this context is the much higher proportion of older children in the New Romney returns, at least compared to Worcester, who remained in their natal home rather than entering the households of others.⁴⁸ In total 58 children had apparently not left the parental home compared to the figure of 135 servants in Romney. Looking at this by household (Table 4), eighty-seven (22%) of the households in Romney had at least one servant. Where the household was based on a married couple almost a quarter had at least one servant (24.2%), but the likelihood dropped considerably for the smaller number of single-headed households (13.7%). In contrast, fifty Romney households had an older adolescent daughter or son still living with one or both

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TABLE 6. SEX RATIOS AND PROPORTIONS MARRIED, SINGLE, AND IN SERVICE DERIVED FROM THE POLL TAX RETURNS OF 1377, 1379, AND 1380-1 FOR SELECTED TOWNS, INCLUDING NEW ROMNEY

	Adult sex ratio	Service sex ratio	Total sex ratio	Married %	Single %	In service %	Taxed pop'n
<i>1377</i>							
Dartmouth ¹	87.6	-	-	67.2	12.3	20.5	512
Hull	86.1	119.1	92.7	57.9	20.6	22.8	1,557
Canterbury ²	112.0	120.5	113.7	65.8	13.4	21.2	471
Rochester ²	-	-	106.9	59.4	23.4	17.2	128
<i>1379</i>							
Lynn ³	93.4	91.0	92.9	67.4	12.4	20.2	1,154
<i>1381</i>							
Beverley ²	99.1	54.2	93.4	74.7	15.2	10.2	1,259
Chichester ²	101.1	109.4	103.3	60.7	14.3	27.5	244
Romney ³	101.3	159.6	108.2	67.1	18.1	14.8	912
York ³	106.1	79.6	101.3	68.2	15.5	16.6	3,165

Notes:

¹ Return does not name servants.

² Partial return only.

³ Damaged return.

Sources: Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 199 Table 1, 200 Table 2; EKA: NR/Fac 1.

parents. The probability that such children would stay at home is difficult to assess but seemingly they were in 11.4% of households headed by married couples (at least one parent) and in 15.6% of the single-headed households. Overall a son aged fifteen and over was apparently as likely to remain in the natal home as his sister, assuming daughters were not under-recorded, so this does not seem to have contributed to the high service sex ratio at Romney compared to the other towns in Table 6.

The nuclear household was the predominant unit in late medieval Romney, the householder's brothers were present in only three households; none of the households in the town was composed of three generations; Henry Nowel lived with his mother and Lapin atte Welle had his wife and mother-in-law at home; and four households comprised either two men or two women.⁴⁹ Furthermore, over three quarters of the known households were headed by a married couple and of these two-thirds were just the couple themselves or had children under fifteen. Presumably life-cycle service is a major contributory factor, mature adolescents receiving training and wages away from their natal home before most married (see

above). Yet one in every ten parents kept an older son or daughter in their household, though the child's similar-aged siblings (if s/he had any) may have worked as servants in neighbouring households. Where married couples had servants, over half only employed one, less frequently two and more rarely three. Richard Sprot was truly exceptional having six male and one female servant. Such service generally extended to the workshop as well as to the domestic sphere for both men and women in households headed by married couples and single persons. Of the latter almost half in Romney were headed by women, representing 11.7% of the town's total households (Table 4). This proportion is lower than that found by Goldberg for several northern towns and the textile town of Colchester, which he believes is indicative of greater female economic opportunities in these areas and the consequent decline in the likelihood that a widow would remarry.⁵⁰ In contrast, as noted regarding the higher servant sex ratio, economic opportunities in Romney for women may have been more limited, though this may not have been the only issue. Nevertheless, there is no evidence to indicate opposition to all female households for as well as the thirty women apparently residing alone, another four lived with a daughter as the sole other resident, five more just had a female servant and two households were each composed of two women. In the later fifteenth century and early sixteenth century when the economic climate became harsher, some civic and guild authorities in Kent and elsewhere did raise objections to all female households or the employment of women in certain trades, but in New Romney this does not seem to have been a problem in 1381.⁵¹

Modest household size (average 2.27 aged fifteen and over) seems to have been matched by moderate prosperity in New Romney. Taking the simplest households of married couples and single persons, and the financial figures from Table 2, nearly half the couples (96) paid the standard tax of 2*s.*, and for the singles thirty-seven (58%) paid 12*d.* Of the seventy-nine married couples taxed at less than the standard, about a quarter were assessed at 12*d.* or less (only one couple at the minimum 4*d.*), though how many were classed as exempt paupers is unknown. However the majority of these seventy-nine couples paid between 16*d.* and 20*d.*, most at the lower figure. Similarly, of those aiding their poorer neighbours by paying above the prescribed rate, nearly all paid an extra 8*d.* at 2*s.* 8*d.* Very few paid even more and only one couple paid 5*s.*, the top rate for these basic households. Eight married couples within more complex households were assessed at this sum, but above that only two husbands were expected to find the highest rate in New Romney (6*s.* 8*d.*) to cover their wives and themselves.

In some ways there was greater disparity among the single households, though it was not just poor women living alone who were expected to pay the minimum, two men were also assessed at 4*d.* each. Again how

many fell below this and so were not counted is impossible to discover, especially as poverty was generally more likely among single persons than their married neighbours. Yet a couple of these solitaries were wealthy in New Romney terms: Johanna Holyngbroke was assessed at 3*s.* 4*d.* and Daniel Rowe, the town's common clerk, at 5*s.*; and both Stephen Adam, a vintner, and Johanna Colbrond were each expected to pay 6*s.* 8*d.* for themselves, their servants (Adam had two, Colbrond three) each paying 12*d.*⁵² Such differentials were a reflection of a range of factors including marital status, family prosperity, age, occupation and neighbourhood; and an exploration of the ward data seems an appropriate next step.

New Romney's wards – differences and similarities

In his study of the returns by street and parish for Hull and York respectively, Goldberg noticed that there were sometimes significant differences among these taxpaying units.⁵³ This is hardly surprising considering the size and complexity of these towns, but whether far smaller towns also exhibited such variation needs investigation yet seems less likely. The returns for New Romney offer this opportunity, though any explanation of these similarities/differences is somewhat hampered by the inability to map the wards accurately (see above). Consequently this assessment should be seen as a starting point for further research.

One of the striking features of Table 3 is, as Goldberg found for the northern towns, the inverse relationship between the proportions of married couples and servants. Married couples only comprised half the taxable population of the central and centre-west wards of Holyngbroke and Bocherie, while those in service accounted for a substantial 30%. At the other end of the spectrum in Bertelotte ward to the east of the town over 80% of those assessed were married, the proportion of servants being under 10%. The majority of the other wards were closer to Bertelotte than to Holyngbroke and Bocherie, but there were more differences concerning the proportion of single persons, the most extreme was Coodde, in St Nicholas' parish, where a quarter of those counted were single and the proportion of servants was barely 2%. The adult sex ratio was also high in this ward, indicative of the presence of a large male population – many of the town's fishermen perhaps including a sizeable number of single (crew)men.

In contrast, women (married and single) outnumbered men in Bocherie, Hospital, Ioce and Olberd wards, and even though the small number of servants in some wards means these findings should be treated with caution, it would appear that there were also differences among the wards regarding the servant sex ratio. Very high figures are seen for Bocherie, Hospital, Hamersnod and Olberd wards, whereas in Colbrond, Hope and Bertelotte women servants were comparatively more numerous. Bocherie ward is especially interesting, the figures in part reflecting the structure

of the ward's most important trade. From the maletote records for the same period at least six of the town's butchers were living and working there. Among these was Geoffrey Payn who had acquired a messuage in St Lawrence's parish. His household comprised himself, his wife and his two servants Robert and Hugh, who presumably worked with Geoffrey.⁵⁴ Another household that might be considered characteristic of this ward is that of the widow Agnes Clerk (one in five households were headed by women in Bocherie ward compared to fewer than 5% in Coodde – see Table 4). She continued to reside in the house with its hall, solar and kitchen in the marketplace opposite St Lawrence's church that she and her late husband William had purchased in 1360.⁵⁵ To support herself financially she may also have continued his chandlery business with the assistance of her two male and one female servant.

Looking again at household size (Table 1), the wards similarly demonstrate interesting differences. Average household size was greatest in Holyngbroke, Bocherie and Hospital wards, the least in Sharle, Hope, High Mill and Coodde (across these wards on average less than two people per household) that may in part reflect topographical variation between central and more peripheral areas of New Romney. Some measure of the relative complexity of the household structure can be seen in Tables 4 and 5, and from this the preponderance of larger/more complex households was apparently greatest in Holyngbroke ward, the smallest/simplest in Coodde, High Mill and Deme. Two examples will illustrate this: in Holyngbroke ward John Gervais lived with his wife, his son William and his two servants, another William and John, one of several households of this size. To the east in High Mill almost 20% of the ward's households comprised a single person, almost all male, whereas Matilda Tot with her three servants was exceptional.

The poll tax does indicate variation regarding the wealth profile of the wards, though in some ways this is difficult to measure. Using Table 3 the generally most prosperous households were in the central wards of Holyngbroke and Bocherie. The next most prosperous was Colbrond, which may reflect the growing importance of the area around St Nicholas' church.⁵⁶ At the other end of the scale the ward with the lowest average tax burden per household was Coodde, though several other wards had only slightly higher averages, such as Hope, Deme and High Mill. Household size was presumably a factor regarding this group, which was in part related to factors like life cycle stage: in Deme, for example, three taxpayers who were assessed at the minimum level of 4*d.* were all women living alone. Occupation was probably also significant, and whereas boat master were often prosperous, some of their crewmen were not, including members of Coodde ward. Peripheral wards were similarly more likely to be home to poorer households, though this is more difficult to test because of the problems regarding accurate ward location.

Also of interest is the degree of variation within a ward, those having the narrowest wealth profile were the wards of Coodde and High Mill, the widest Holyngbroke and Hospital. Several of Holyngbroke's most prosperous taxpayers were vintners, men such as William Seforde, his dwelling house and tavern located in St Nicholas' parish where he lived with wife Johanna and his two servants, the whole household assessed at 6s.⁵⁷ Yet the ward was also home to Stephen Modelief and his wife who were assessed together at 4d. Such disparity within what must have been a small area of the town (even if some wards were larger than others) suggests that even though broadly there seems to have been a degree of topographical stratification by wealth, the centre of New Romney, in particular, was home to a diverse group of households.

Although impossible to substantiate from the surviving sources, one issue that may have contributed to this widening of the social spectrum in certain neighbourhoods was the availability of rented property. Paying at the standard rate of 2s. for himself and his wife, John Turnour, a draper in Bocherie ward, rented a tenement and kitchen in St Lawrence's parish, the third member of the household being his servant Alexander.⁵⁸ Seemingly next door was Andrew Colyn and his wife, a far more prosperous couple who were together assessed at 5s., and they too had a man servant who presumably resided with them in their messuage opposite the pillory.⁵⁹

In conclusion, this article has sought to draw attention to the survival of an important document in the town's archive, for not only is it a valuable resource to expand our understanding of late fourteenth-century New Romney, but the collecting of such a tax in one of the Cinque Ports in 1381 might be usefully considered in the light of Butcher's assessment of conditions in Canterbury both in that year and during the preceding decades.⁶⁰ However, concentrating on its significance respecting New Romney's population and social structure, both as a whole and by ward, it has provided valuable evidence concerning the demographic profile of this port town that suggests, for example, it differed in gender terms quite considerably from Lynn, to a lesser extent from Hull, but was in some ways comparable to York. Another issue investigated was the relative wealth of the New Romney taxpayers, and notwithstanding the need to observe certain caveats respecting the use of round figures, there appear to have been differences between wards, and also in particular wards within that neighbourhood. Nevertheless, this article does represent a preliminary exploration of the 1381 New Romney poll tax returns, and further investigation of this and other aspects of the town's rich archival sources, in conjunction with continuing archaeological excavations and assessments of its standing buildings, will provide greater insights into the development of this regionally important urban centre.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Canterbury Archaeological Trust because the preliminary investigation of the New Romney poll tax was funded as part of the Trust's archaeological assessment of the town's sewerage scheme. She is also grateful to Dr Gillian Draper and Frank Meddens for the use of the parish map of Romney, and to John Hills for adapting it for this publication. The Town Council of New Romney kindly allowed the inclusion of the photograph of the poll tax and the Kent Archive Service provided the digital image.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hanley, H.A. and Chalklin, C.W. (eds), 'The Kent Lay Subsidy of 1334/5', *Documents illustrative of Medieval Kentish Society*, Kent Records 18 (Ashford, 1964), 60; Murray, K.M.E., *The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports* (Manchester, 1933), 236-7.

² Fenwick, C.C. (ed.), *The Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379 and 1381. Part 1: Bedfordshire-Leicester*. Records of Social and Economic History: New Series 27 (Oxford, 1998), xiii. Based on her doctoral thesis; 'The English Poll Taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381: a critical examination of the returns', University of London PH.D. thesis (1983).

³ *Ibid.*, xiii, xxii. Ormrod, W.M., 'An Experiment in Taxation: the English Parish Subsidy of 1371', *Speculum*, 63 (1988), 77-9.

⁴ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, 387, 415-18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 387, citing *Calendar Close Rolls 1377-81*, 504.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxii.

⁷ Teichman-Derville, M., 'The annals of the town and port of New Romney: with some extracts from the records of the town', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 41 (1929), 157. His was not the first mention in the Society's journal for that occurred in 1880; Walker, E.B., 'The Town and Port of New Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 13 (1880), 204-6; and again in 1887; Salisbury, E., 'Report on the records of New Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 17 (1887), 12-13, 14.

⁸ *Historical Manuscripts Commission, 5th Report* (London, 1876), p. 533. See the frontispiece of the accounts book; East Kent Archives [hereafter EKA]: NR/FAC 1. Almost a century before William Boys had mentioned the tax's existence, but wrongly dated it to 1340; *Collections for a History of Sandwich in Kent, with notices of the other Cinque Ports and Members and of Richborough* (Canterbury, 1792), 799.

⁹ Butcher, A.F., 'The Origins of Romney Freemen, 1433-1523', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 27 (1974), 25. A very recent study of the medieval town has opted for a range of other materials, with particular reference to the local taxation (maletote) records; Draper, G. and Meddens, F., *The Sea and the Marsh. The Medieval Cinque Port of New Romney* (London, 2009), 3-4, 18, 25-7, 38, 47-8.

¹⁰ The destruction of such records was high on the rebels' agenda; Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, 387, citing *Calendar Close Rolls 1381-83*, 27; *Rotuli Parliamentorum* III, 393.

¹¹ Ormrod, W.M., 'The politics of pestilence: government in England after the Black Death', in Ormrod, W.M. and Lindley, P. (eds), *The Black Death in England* (Donington, 2003), 165-7.

¹² Men from Appledore are known to have taken part in the rebellion and others from area were presumably also active; Flaherty, W.E., 'The Great Rebellion in Kent of 1381 illustrated from the Public Records', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 3 (1860), 66, 71-96.

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¹³ Butcher, A.F., 'English Urban Society and the Revolt of 1381', in Hilton, R. H. and Aston, T.H. (eds), *The English Rising of 1381* (Cambridge, 1984), 88-106, 108-111.

¹⁴ A foretaste of the problems likely to occur had come the previous year at Romney when the jurors were ordered to compel by distraint any in the town who continued to refuse to contribute towards ship-service; Murray, K.M.E. (trans. and ed.), *The Register of Daniel Rough, Common Clerk of Romney 1353-1380*, Kent Records 16 (1945), 203-4.

¹⁵ EKA: NR/FAc 1.

¹⁶ As Flaherty notes, opposition apparently began as early as 17 April and would continue into August and perhaps beyond, that is for quite some time after Tyler's death in London; 'Great Rebellion', 68.

¹⁷ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, xiii-xvi.

¹⁸ Goldberg, P.J.P., 'Urban identity and the poll taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 43 (1990), 195.

¹⁹ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, xvi-xvii, xx.

²⁰ Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 195; Slater, T.R., 'The South-West of England', in Palliser, D.M. (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain 600-1540, volume 1* (Cambridge, 2000), 604-5; Dyer, C. and Slater, T.R., 'The Midlands', in *idem*, 626-7; Kermode, J., 'Northern towns', in *idem*, 657; Brodt, E., 'East Anglia', in *idem*, 656.

²¹ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, xxiii, xxvi; Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 200.

²² Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, xxiii-xv.

²³ Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 203-6.

²⁴ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, xxxv-xxxvi.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, xxxv.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxiii, xliii.

²⁷ For example: Barron, C.M., 'The fourteenth-century poll tax returns for Worcester', *Midland History* 15 (1989), 1-29; Fletcher, W.G.D., 'The poll-tax for the town and liberties of Shrewsbury, 1380', *Trans. of the Shropshire Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 2nd series, 2 (1890), 1-28; Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 194-216; *idem*, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire c.1300-1520* (Oxford, 1992); Bridbury, A.R., 'English provincial towns in the later middle ages', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 34 (1981), 1-24; Rigby, S.H., 'Urban decline in the later middle ages: some problems in interpreting the statistical data', *Urban History Yearbook* (1979), 46-59.

²⁸ Fenwick, *Poll Taxes*, 411-33.

²⁹ EKA: NR/FAc 1, fols 1-7.

³⁰ Bocherie ward: 4 lines are completely or substantially lost; Hospital: 5 lines; Coodde: 1 line; Bertelotte: 1 line; High Mill: 1 line; Olberd: 5 lines; Hope: 1 line.

³¹ Although not complete, Rough listed the maletotes under the usage of Romney in his register; Murray, *Rough's Register*, 28-35.

³² It seems likely Teichman-Derville's 14th ward was the list for Old Romney; 'Annals of the town', 157.

³³ The term 'household' has come under increasing scrutiny by historians in recent years because of the problems of multiple-occupancy within dwellings, and of how to place servants, apprentices and others. This article follows the format used in earlier studies based on the pattern of entries and the designated relationships found in the documents.

³⁴ In 1359 Walter and Mabil had sold a piece of land in St Lawrence's parish and a stall in the hemp market in the same parish; Murray, *Rough's Register*, 151.

³⁵ In 1360, a W. Heyward (in an earlier document identified as William Heiward, a butcher of Romney) and Elicia his wife were the vendors of a piece of land with a grange and other buildings opposite St John's cemetery in St Lawrence's parish; *ibid.*, 41, 152.

³⁶ Holyngbroke ward covered an area within part of the three parishes; Bocherie (St Lawrence); Hospital (St Lawrence); Coodde (St Nicholas and St Lawrence?); Ioce (St Lawrence and St Martin); Sharle (St Martin and St Nicholas?); Bertelotte (St Martin); High Mill (St Nicholas and St Martin?); Hamersnod (St Nicholas and St Martin); Olberd (St Nicholas, St Martin and St Lawrence?); Colbrond (St Nicholas); Deme (St Lawrence); Hope (St Lawrence and St Nicholas). The liberty of Romney extended beyond the built-up area but for the purposes of this assessment is not considered here; Robertson, W.A.S., 'The Cinque Port Liberty of Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 13 (1880), 261-80. See also; Boys, *Sandwich*, 808-9; EKA: NR/Map 1 (dated 1683); see copy of town section; Draper and Meddens, *The Sea and the Marsh*, 34, Fig. 22.

³⁷ Using the returns for particular parishes in Worcester, Barron demonstrates the level of discrepancy that can occur, 'Returns for Worcester', 6-7.

³⁸ According to the chamberlains' accounts for 1381/2 the jurats answered for £48 9s. 6d. received from lay persons by way of a subsidy granted to the king at Northampton in 1380, a further 44s. 6d. received from men of Old Romney for the same. Another £31 16s. 3½d. from a general maletote for 1½ years and also several other sums; EKA: NR/FAc 1.

³⁹ Dyer, A., 'Appendix 5: Ranking of towns by taxpaying population: the 1377 poll tax', in Palliser, D. M. (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain 600-1540, volume 1* (Cambridge, 2000), 758-9. In his note of the New Romney tax Boys said there were 941 persons, and in 1792 the records were presumably in better condition; *Sandwich*, 799.

⁴⁰ Keene, D., 'The South-East of England', in Palliser, D. M. (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain 600-1540, volume 1* (Cambridge, 2000), 571.

⁴¹ Barron, 'Returns for Worcester', 7.

⁴² Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 305.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴⁴ Draper and Meddens, *The Sea and the Marsh*, 24.

⁴⁵ For a summary of the discussion regarding the prevailing marriage pattern in post-Black Death England; Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 8-20, 204-17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁷ Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 199-200.

⁴⁸ Barron, 'Returns for Worcester', 14.

⁴⁹ Among the latter were two Flemings, Diedrious and Gerard; EKA: NR/FAc 1.

⁵⁰ Goldberg, *Women, Work, and Life Cycle*, 310-2.

⁵¹ Jones, K., *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: the Local Courts in Kent, 1460-1560* (Woodbridge, 2006), 6-7.

⁵² For comparison two couples in York were assessed at 17s. 4d. and 18s. respectively; Goldberg, 'Urban identity', 206.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵⁴ EKA: NR/JBr 4.

⁵⁵ Murray, *Register*, 152.

⁵⁶ Draper and Meddens, *The Sea and the Marsh*, 17-18.

⁵⁷ EKA: NR/JBr 4. As one of the senior jurats, Seford's tavern was used by the civic authorities as a place to entertain important guests; EKA: NR/FAc 1.

⁵⁸ EKA: NR/JBr 4.

⁵⁹ Murray, *Register*, 197. Colyn's occupation raises certain difficulties, according to Murray he was a butcher and the maletote assessment of 17s. 5d. for 1381/2 is compatible with this; however in the previous year's maletote the sum was far less and he was also listed among the vintners; *ibid.*, xlv. EKA: NR/FAc 1.

⁶⁰ Butcher, 'English urban society', 100-11.