

COLCHESTER AND ITS REGION, 1310-1560: WEALTH, INDUSTRY  
AND RURAL-URBAN MOBILITY IN A MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

by

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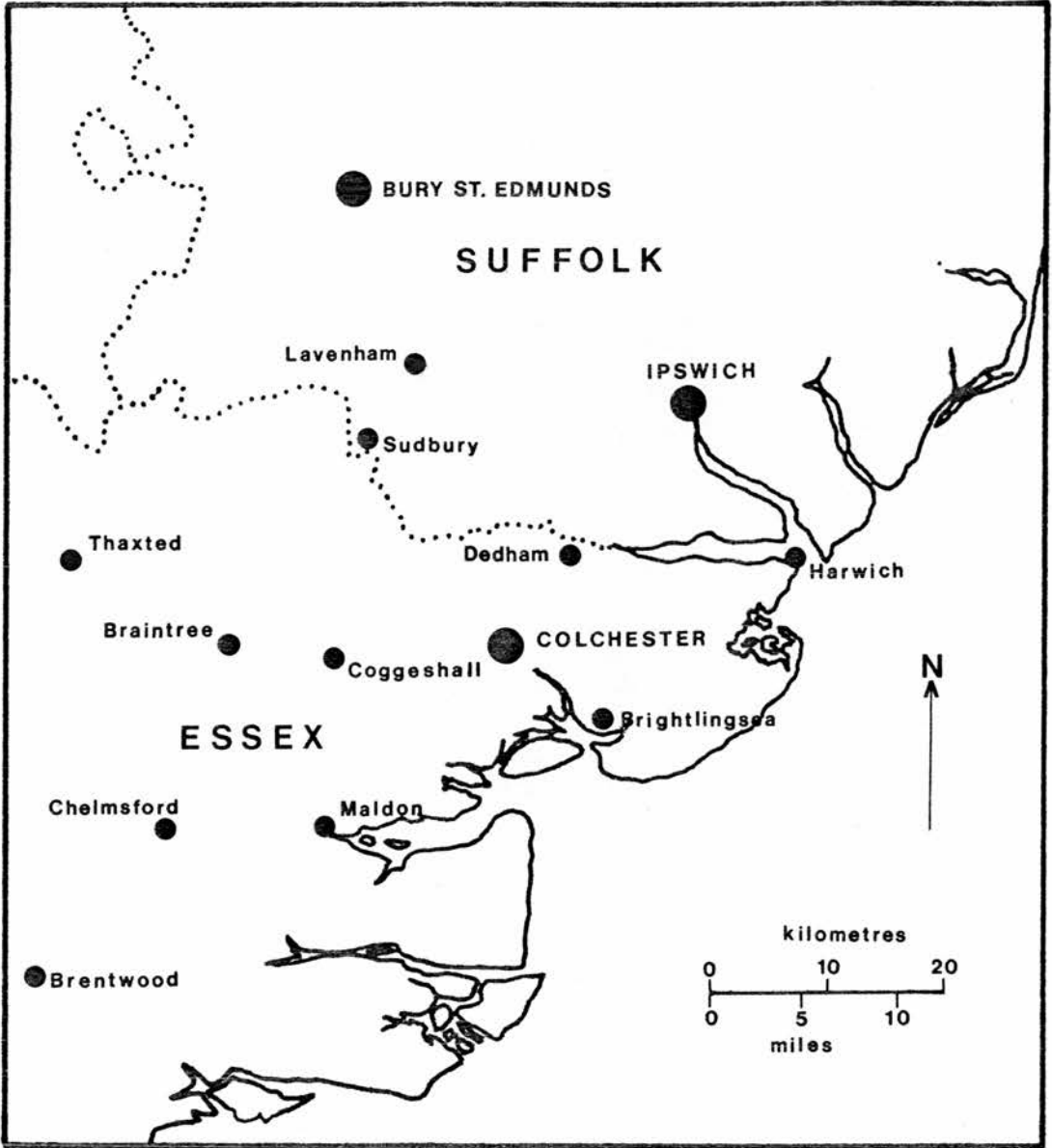
I declare that this thesis has been composed by me,  
and that the work is my own.

## Abstract

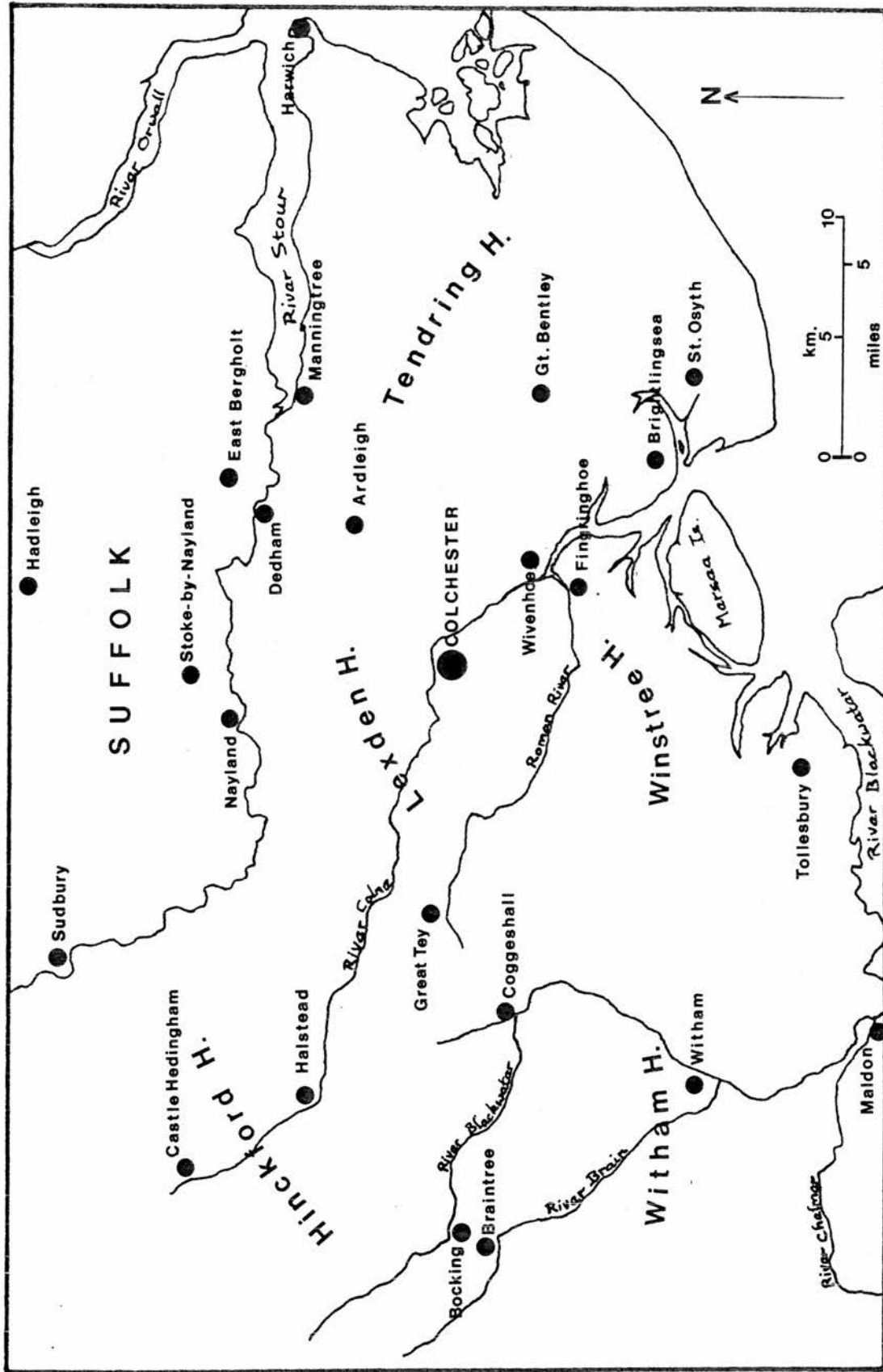
The development of the borough of Colchester between 1310 and 1560 is examined in its regional context, with special reference to firstly, the relative taxable wealth of town and country; secondly, the growth of commercial cloth manufacture and thirdly, the recruitment of free burgesses. The importance of these themes within the debate on the fortunes of the late medieval town is considered, and the sources on which they rest - lay subsidies, aulnage accounts and freemens' registers - are critically examined. The lay subsidies indicate a marked relative growth in Colchester's taxed wealth between 1327 and 1524 compared to the surrounding rural hundreds, but an examination of individual parish growth ratios shows that some other places grew as fast as, or faster than, the borough. Colchester's records suggest that while the borough was both larger and wealthier in the early sixteenth century than two hundred years earlier, a period of difficulty ensued marked by a growth in poverty and social unrest after c.1520. However, this appears less the culmination of a "crisis" than a hiatus between periods of growth. Furthermore, evidence of evasion of office and decay of bridges probably reflects problems of corporate revenue rather than impoverishment of the burgesses. Similarly, a downward trend in burgess admissions during the fifteenth century cannot be seen as a simple reflection of Colchester's fortunes, as admission fines were being pushed upwards at this time. An observed increase in the number of long-distance migrants amongst Colchester burgess recruits may result partly from



broad changes within the English economy, and partly from the borough's emergence as an important centre of cloth manufacture and trade. Colchester's industry "took off" in the second half of the fourteenth century, and remained a major source of wealth and employment thereafter. Rural industry does not appear to have posed a serious problem; indeed, the rural cloth industry appears to have stagnated or regressed during the fifteenth century. Increase in scale and complexity are characteristic of the urban rather than the rural industry at this time. The demographic factor may hold the key to these developments, with population stagnation inhibiting the full emergence of a 'protoindustrial' economy in the Essex countryside. Colchester's experience suggests that urban economies retained important advantages until, at least, the second quarter of the sixteenth century.



MAP 1: LOCATION MAP [A]



MAP 2 : LOCATION MAP [B]

## CHAPTER 1

### TOWN AND COUNTRY IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Writers on the later medieval economy in general, and on the later medieval town in particular, have often been reluctant to commit themselves to firm statements as to the health of England's urban system as a whole in the two centuries following the Black Death. This reticence stems from the apparently irreconcilable pictures produced by local studies; on the one hand there is Lincoln,<sup>1</sup> apparently sinking into economic ruin and physical dereliction, a travesty of its earlier glories, while on the other there is Exeter,<sup>2</sup> seemingly set on a course of exuberant growth and achievement.

The natural tendency when confronted with such striking contrasts (for the above pairing might be substituted Leicester and Worcester, or York and Salisbury) is to conclude that there was no general pattern of 'success' or 'failure', but rather a readjustment of the urban system, with each declining centre being compensated for by an expanding one better placed to take advantage of changing economic opportunities.<sup>3</sup>

However some students of the period have adopted a less circumspect approach. The most influential of these have been C. Phythian-Adams and R.B. Dobson. These authors have postulated what has almost become an orthodoxy; the concept of a general decay of town life in later medieval England, amounting to an 'urban crisis'.<sup>4</sup> They argue that the failures greatly outnumber the successes, and that many of the latter are in fact illusory, or confined to certain relatively short periods. It is contended that

the great majority of established urban centres either stagnated or contracted - sometimes markedly - in terms of population, and that this was associated with a widespread economic malaise; a loss of industrial importance, a failure to enforce chartered privileges and monopolies, and an inability to retain sufficient numbers of wealthy and able citizens.

This pessimistic view of the urban scene is not without its precursors. In the nineteenth century James Thorold Rogers had cited the Tudor re-edification statutes as evidence of a general decay of the towns.<sup>5</sup>

The Rev. H.E. Salter, in his study of medieval Oxford, opined that:

The three centuries of Oxford life from 1250 to 1550 were a period of decay in wealth and population. Mrs. Green in her book Town Life of the Middle Ages seems to assume that there was growth everywhere, but it will probably be found that it was only the seaport towns that prospered.<sup>6</sup>

An antecedent both more immediate and more important because of its association with a model of economic change is to be found in the body work on the medieval textile industry, much of it inspired by the writings of Eleanora Carus-Wilson. For Carus-Wilson the major feature of the later medieval industry was a tendency to shift from an urban to a rural location; the causes of this change were held to be firstly, the development of mechanical fulling mills more suited to rural than urban sites and secondly, a desire on the part of the 'entrepreneurs' who Carus-Wilson believed to have played a vital role in the industry from an early date to escape from the restrictive environment of the towns:

... when England's industry reached maturity the relative advantages of doing business in borough or manor were very different from what they had once been. The feudal society

was in dissolution; villeinage had all but disappeared; the borough with its battlemented walls was becoming as much of an anachronism as the baronial castle; its liberties had become privileges for the few, and its economy was more rigidly regimented and more heavily taxed than that of the manor had ever been.

Consequently:

The progressive manufacturer usually, though not invariably, kept away from the city, and developed his business unrestricted in the countryside, making his headquarters in some small market town or village.<sup>7</sup>

This picture appears to be confirmed by case-studies such as Bartlett's paper on York,<sup>8</sup> where the city's fifteenth-century difficulties are held to be associated with a decline in its cloth industry in the face of competition from the rural industry of the West Riding, where the manufacturer could find cheap labour, light taxation and water-power for fulling mills.

Other writers, such as Thirsk, placed stress on the importance of social factors in explaining the emergence of rural industries of all types. The link with the agricultural economy and the tenurial structure is stressed, but Thirsk also believed that the development of the fulling mill 'drove' the textile industry into the countryside in the fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> The mechanical background to the fulling mill was explained by Pelham who also attempted to map the location of known mills.<sup>10</sup>

The view that the towns became increasingly conservative and resistant to change during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, or that an intrinsic conservatism came more and more into collision with emerging forces for change at this time, is found in many places. Hibbert, in his review of European urbanism in general, concluded that a growing concern with regulation and restriction of competition meant that the towns forfeited their leading role in

economic change:

Like Mesozoic reptiles they speeded their decline by the very weight of their defences and by the entrenched specialization of their structure.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, for Salzman the loss of prosperity of many English boroughs in the fifteenth century was due in large measure to the "obstinate conservatism of the guilds" which resulted in industry being "more and more driven into the country" and the smaller "free-trading towns".<sup>12</sup>

For the Marxist scholar Maurice Dobb the towns had, by the sixteenth century, become "a conservative rather than a revolutionary force".<sup>13</sup> Although the development of town-based trade and merchant capital had, in its earlier phases, a profoundly disintegrating effect on feudal society, the institutions within which these forces had emerged had now become fetters on their further development:

the breakdown of urban localism and the undermining of the monopolies of the craft guilds is one condition of the growth of capitalist production, whether in the manufacturing or the domestic form.<sup>14</sup>

From all these perspectives, then, the initiative is considered to have passed from town to country. New forms of organization, it is argued, could only emerge in communities unfettered by the conservatism of the old-established boroughs. In addition to freedom from regulation, the country could offer cheaper labour - often family labour supported in part by agricultural holdings - freedom from allegedly onerous urban taxation, and access to water-power. The towns, apparently deserted by their key industry and becoming increasingly exclusive and conservative, present a

sorry picture. But were things really like this? On what types of evidence do the proponents of 'urban decline' base their case?

Dobson's 1977 article concentrates on largely non-quantifiable evidence; he consciously sets out to assemble a large range of types of evidence which, he acknowledges, generations of historians have been aware of, but have tended to discount or treat as unreliable; petitions to the crown for relief from fee-farm or tax payments, the accounts of contemporary travellers, architectural evidence. The petitions complaining of ruin and inability to pay are, of course, motivated by self-interest, but Dobson believes that the great number and persistence of such appeals points to a real economic malaise behind the rhetoric. Leland's Itinerary provides an explanation of this state of affairs "in terms still acceptable to the modern local historian", identifying the decline of clothmaking in the larger towns and the reduction or abolition of markets in the smaller as the key factors.<sup>15</sup>

Architectural evidence confirms the sorry story, Dobson believes, in an apparent decline in civic building after 1450 and in a 'record century' for the disappearance of urban churches between 1450 and 1550. Further corroboration is found in the 'flight from office' in the larger towns, with an increasing reluctance of men to take up the expensive and onerous burden of local government. The symptoms and the causes of decay should not be confused, however:

Too often the manifestations of severe population decline within and indeed without the fifteenth century provincial town - the supposed 'restrictive practices' forced on so many urban craft guilds by the decline of consumer demand for their products, the drift of the textile industry into rural areas, the gradual assumption of regional trading functions by the merchants of London - have been interpreted as the primary cause of urban decay. But only the existence of prolonged and remorseless demographic



attrition in England as a whole, an attrition emphatically not generally reversed at some unascertainable point in the fifteenth century, seems capable of explaining the persistence of the urban malaise.<sup>16</sup>

Dobson does not attempt to give any firm chronology of decline, but the following can be inferred; a differential reaction to the mid-fourteenth-century collapse of population, with the smaller towns being hit first while some of the larger centres, such as York, enjoyed an 'Indian Summer' of "remarkable affluence" before succumbing in their turn; the fifteenth century in general is seen as a period of recession, but more especially the decades after 1450, by which date decay had set in at virtually all the major towns; this decay was not arrested until well into the sixteenth century, after 1550 in most cases.<sup>17</sup>

A more detailed attempt at chronology is made by Phythian-Adams, but it is broadly similar to the above. A number of identifiable phases are suggested within the overall picture of later medieval decline. The general decay of the second half of the fourteenth century is somewhat alleviated by a revival of the largest centres between c.1380 and c.1430. This revival was, however, often achieved at the expense of weaker neighbours. It was also to be brief; by the mid-fifteenth century, Phythian-Adams contends, many of the more important towns were experiencing serious difficulty, and the malaise spread and intensified after 1450. Particularly striking, it is argued, is the decline of the eastern seaboard towns "from Ripon to Great Yarmouth". Economic difficulty was associated with serious demographic attrition in the larger centres, York's estimated population falling from c.12,000 in 1400 to no more than 8,000 in the mid-sixteenth century, while Coventry halved in size

between 1450 and 1550. There was to be no early remission; while "the first part of the sixteenth century ... represents the last stages of an unparalleled period of urban contraction", in many large boroughs it was also the most acute stage; for Coventry the 1520s represent the "climax of the crisis". Revival is not seen until as late as 1570 when a resurgence of inland trade and strengthening of urban monopolies over marketing mark the "rediscovery" of an economic role.<sup>18</sup>

The picture was not, Phythian-Adams concedes, unremittingly gloomy; there were exceptions to the general trend. London, as usual, was in a class of its own. Amongst the successful provincial towns, it is suggested, were ports with expanding industrial hinterlands, towns that "looked outwards". Newcastle, Colchester, Ipswich, Exeter and Chester are cited as examples, along with towns which commanded important lines of communication, such as Worcester and Reading. In addition, the emergence of newer centres such as Hadleigh, Lavenham and Long Melford in East Anglia is recognised, but these are held to be urban only in an "ambiguous sense". The successes cannot, according to Phythian-Adams, compensate for the lengthy list of boroughs whose decay is, allegedly, manifest; Lincoln, Warwick, Canterbury, Oxford, Kings Lynn, Boston, Leicester and Nottingham being but a few of the examples cited. This was no 'readjustment'; indeed "the relative and in some cases the absolute demise of a major sector of the late medieval urban network is ... incontrovertible".<sup>19</sup>

As to the cause of this decay, Phythian-Adams agrees with Dobson that the profound and prolonged decline in national population underlies everything else. However, the demographic factor is not

considered to be a sufficient explanation by itself; many of the larger towns fail to respond to the general recovery in population, and the culmination of the 'crisis' is dated by Phythian-Adams to just that period when, it is generally agreed, the upwards movement becomes manifest in the countryside. The crux of the problem, he argues, was the increasing expense of urban residence, a product of the top-heavy nature of urban society.<sup>20</sup> Over-elaborate office-holding structures, combined with heavy expenditure on secular and religious ceremony and a growing burden of fee-farm and direct taxation, in effect suffocated the towns. Evasion of office became common, with townsmen paying fines for exemption or fleeing the boroughs altogether, and taking up residence in the countryside or in smaller towns.

The theme of the 'distortion' of the social structure is developed in detail in Phythian-Adams' study of Coventry, Desolation of a City; the significance of the Reformation in sweeping away much of the elaborate structure of religious guilds is stressed. The key to the late medieval crisis is seen as lying in the structure of urban society itself, rather than in competition from the countryside. Coventry did suffer from rural competition in the textile industry, but this was "an effect not a cause of decline".<sup>21</sup>

This playing-down of the causal role of rural competition in urban decline is one of the major differences between the analysis presented by Phythian-Adams and Dobson and many earlier writers. Indeed, as we have noted, Phythian-Adams cites the existence of a developing industrial hinterland as being of assistance to some of the more successful towns, although the nature of this suggested link is not explained.

With the notable exception of Phythian-Adams' study of Coventry, the writings on urban decay are long on instances and examples but short of both detailed analysis and theory. Little attempt has been made, for example, to investigate the implications of the work produced by the so-called 'protoindustrialisation' school<sup>22</sup> who have drawn upon Marxist and classical political economy to construct models of the development of rural industries.

Similarly the work of 'monetarist' economic historians<sup>23</sup> raises issues of potential importance for the student of the urban economy, but these have been largely ignored. For example, the suggested 'Indian summer' of urban prosperity may in part be explicable by the dramatic increase in per capita wealth among the survivors of the fourteenth-century plagues and the correspondingly sharp rise in the levels of both artisan wages and the prices of manufactured goods, resulting in the accumulation of money in the towns. Miskimin writes of this temporary phenomenon that:

That part of urban prosperity which had been based upon the divergence between the prices of manufactured and of agricultural products could last only so long as it took to drain the countryside of funds.

This 'demonetarisaton' of the countryside then resulted in an undercutting of the demand for manufactures:

In England, there is evidence that this had happened by the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

While the theoretical perspective adopted affects the selection and interpretation of data, so does the time period chosen for study. Writers whose primary concern is with the 'early modern' period (usually taken as 1500-1700) tend to view the sixteenth-century town in a different way to those who concentrate on the 'medieval' or 'late medieval'. Thus, the decades which appear to

some as the culmination of a crisis may be interpreted by others as a temporary 'dislocation' or period of 'readjustment'. For Corfield:

there seems a good case for regarding the years from about 1520 to 1560 as ones of some economic dislocation. But in the long term these problems did not prove insuperable.<sup>25</sup>

Cases of "outright decline" as opposed to "relative eclipse" are, she argues, "very difficult to find in these years".<sup>26</sup>

Clark and Slack emphasise the reshaping of the urban hierarchy in the early modern period, with the late medieval dominance of 'medium-sized corporate towns' being "threatened" by the increasing prosperity of simpler 'market towns' during the sixteenth century, and then "overthrown" by the emergence of a small group of leading provincial centres, the increasing dominance of London, and the appearance of new types of town during the seventeenth.<sup>27</sup>

While the urban sector was still enjoying a period of "relative stability" at the end of the fifteenth century, the first half of the sixteenth was a time of "considerable difficulty" for most towns. For Clark and Slack, these "difficulties" are to be explained in terms of a "conjuncture" of factors; heavy taxation, changes in investment patterns, foreign trade difficulties, the dissolution of the monasteries.<sup>28</sup> Palliser has recently summed up this 'early-modernist' view, rejecting the concept of a general crisis while acknowledging the existence of serious temporary difficulties:

It was the conjunction in the early sixteenth century of population decay or stagnation, economic competition from the countryside and the heavy weight of civic government and ceremonial that had weakened the larger towns; and most of these problems were remedied by the end of the century.<sup>29</sup>

Rather than being the climax of a crisis, the earlier sixteenth-century 'difficulties' are here viewed as a hiatus, a slipping back, between the great days of the medieval town and the renewed development of the early modern period. However, only one writer in recent times has defended the later medieval town per se against its critics and argued that the English urban system prospered - indeed thrived - between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. The proponent of this controversial view is of course A.R. Bridbury.

Bridbury's arguments on the late medieval town are to be found principally in the following works: Economic Growth, first published in 1962 and reissued with a new introduction in 1975; 'English Provincial Towns in the later Middle Ages', a paper published in 1981; and Medieval English Clothmaking, which appeared in 1982.<sup>30</sup> In these three works, and in the briefer comments to be found elsewhere, his arguments on the towns are inseparable from his wider perspective on the later medieval economy:

for towns, being in the highest degree embodiments of specialization of function, are incomparable registers of the ebb and flow of economic life ... Towns were indispensable components of the economic system ... to study them is to study the entire system at a vital confluence of flows.<sup>31</sup>

The main thrust of Economic Growth is an attempt to 'rehabilitate' the century and a half after the Black Death in England, to present the late medieval period as one of innovation and advance rather than of stagnation or decay. The achievements of the 'high' middle ages are viewed with a jaundiced eye, and the parlous conditions of the thirteenth-century peasantry contrasted with the much improved living standards which followed the

demographic collapse of the mid-fourteenth. The "patronising and depreciatory treatment of the later period by historians is attacked, most vigorously in the introduction to the 1975 edition.<sup>32</sup>

Bridbury is strongly critical of the introduction of what he sees as "the fallacies of modern development theory" into the study of the past, particularly the "theories of technologically-linked growth". The achievements of the later middle ages lay rather in a slow but steady growth of markets and of the division of labour.<sup>33</sup>

Industry was buoyant; while tin production continued at levels similar to those achieved before the Black Death, and thus at much higher per capita levels, the textile industry emerged as a major employer of labour, with finished cloth replacing raw wool as England's leading export.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that, for Bridbury, these developments - increased living standards and industrial advance - could only imply urban prosperity, whatever the weight of historiography arguing the converse. Just as he remains unimpressed by the administrative achievements of thirteenth-century landlords in the countryside, so he is sceptical of the eulogistic treatment sometimes accorded the towns of the 'high' middle ages; communities whose dynamism and supposedly democratic characteristics are commonly contrasted with a scene of decay and oligarchic government in the later medieval period. The latter is as distorted as the former is elusive, he contends, noting with irony that "towns are forever declining from some golden age in the distant and undefined past".<sup>35</sup>

A major part of Economic Growth, and most of the 1981 paper, is concerned with marshalling evidence against the 'economic decay' school and in support of a quite different view; that of a



"fundamental buoyancy and resilience in the town-life of the later middle ages". This evidence is sought in three main types of record: in urban freeman admission lists, in the records of the textile industry, and in the lay subsidies of 1334 and 1524. In addition to a positive interpretation of these sources the alleged evidence of decay, particularly the towns' frequent protestations of poverty or ruination, are given a highly sceptical examination.<sup>36</sup>

It may be useful at this stage to be clear about what Bridbury does not assert. He does not claim that the towns remained generally as populous as formerly, nor does he deny that as a result of population contraction many may have contained abandoned houses, streets, possibly even quarters.<sup>37</sup> This reduction in size was, however, only to be expected given the drastic fall in national population. It can in no sense be taken as evidence of an urban crisis; on the contrary "the great size of many thirteenth-century towns had been a sort of elephantiasis caused by poverty and the workings of feudal law". The fall in numbers "may very well have been more of a boon than a misfortune".<sup>38</sup>

The vitality and importance of these urban communities, reduced in size as they might be, is demonstrated for Bridbury by firstly, their ability to continue to attract substantial numbers of newcomers into the ranks of the free burgesses, secondly their continuing importance as centres of textile manufacture as well as marketing and thirdly, by their increased share of the taxable wealth of the nation.

By graphing the figures derived from the published freeman's registers of various towns, including Colchester, Bridbury believed he had demonstrated that recruitment levels remained buoyant



throughout the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> This continuing ability to attract new members, he argues, is particularly striking when viewed in the context of the dramatically improved living standards in the countryside. Rural-urban movement in the later middle ages was "no longer in the spirit of ship-wrecked sailors struggling into a life-raft" but, rather, was inspired by "the lively expectation of exchanging good prospects for better ones".<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the evidence does not suggest any easing of entry conditions for urban freedom; on the contrary, entrance fines usually increase. This sustained recruitment in the face of population contraction implies that a larger proportion of the towns' populations was enfranchised. Bridbury's conclusion is that:

Town life was obviously offering something very worth while for it to be able to attract and hold so large a community of burgess tradesmen and artisans when other opportunities beckoned as temptingly as the wage-rates suggest they did.<sup>41</sup>

Bulking large in the attractions of urban life, in Bridbury's view, was the continuing vitality of the textile industry as a major employer of labour. This argument is set out in the third chapter of Economic Growth and refined in Medieval English Clothmaking. Bridbury does not dispute that the later medieval period saw the emergence of commercial clothmaking (as opposed to the ubiquitous domestic industry producing for household consumption) in places outwith the established corporate boroughs. He does, however, reject the interpretation of this phenomenon as a progressive de-urbanisation of the textile industry. Places such as Lavenham and Hadleigh should be counted as towns, whatever their legal

status, while fifteenth-century Stroudwater is to be viewed as an "urban district".<sup>42</sup>

However these newly emergent centres of production are to be classified, Bridbury's main point is that the established centres of the industry, the 'regional capitals', continued to dominate commercial clothmaking:

It would be wrong to credit the villages of medieval England with more than a small share in the commercial production of cloth. New Towns, in the sense of ancient settlements grown more complex, accounted for very much more. But it was the established boroughs, many of them places of antique privilege and importance, that made the largest single contribution of all.<sup>43</sup>

The aulnage accounts are cited as evidence of this; as new centres of production emerged the aulnagers added them to their lists, and yet the accounts still ascribe the lion's share of cloths sealed to the regional capitals. The assumption that most of the cloths sealed in these centres was made there is warranted, Bridbury asserts, by an examination of other types of record; the Salisbury civic records with their lengthy lists of cloth-workers, or the Norwich and York freemen lists with their steady recruitment of artisans in the textile trades.<sup>44</sup>

The tone in the later work, Medieval English Clothmaking, is somewhat more cautious; some of these assertions are moderated, greater emphasis being placed on the complexity and ambiguity of the aulnage evidence. It seems that a closer study of the surviving returns has made Bridbury aware of their inadequacy as a basis for making more than very generalised statements about the location of the later medieval textile industry. Thus, whereas in Economic Growth he concedes that "the cloth sealed in [the regional capitals] was not all made there"<sup>45</sup> but then goes on to assert that the bulk

of it undoubtedly was, in the later book he stresses that:

the aulnage accounts cannot do more than tell us where clothmakers, and the merchants for whom many of them worked, had elected to have their cloth examined and sealed ... We may not assume that most of the cloth made in a particular town or district was inevitably sold where it was made. Still less may we assume that it was examined and sealed where it was made.<sup>46</sup>

The tone elsewhere is decidedly defensive; the aulnage accounts, by their patchy survival, may lead us to underestimate the industrial importance of certain towns:

we must not allow the loss of records either in London or elsewhere in the towns of provincial England to create the false presumption that, on the whole, the urban contribution to English clothmaking in this period was of only secondary importance.<sup>47</sup>

This greater caution seems at least in part to be due to an awareness of the extremes to which a literal reading of the returns leads. Thus, Lincoln disappears into obscurity in the later fourteenth century aulnage accounts, yet the 1377 poll tax returns show that it was still a populous city - how did these people make their living if clothmaking had dwindled away to virtually nothing? Is it not at least probable, Bridbury asks, that cloth was still being produced but was being sealed and sold elsewhere?<sup>48</sup> The other 'extreme' is represented by Salisbury, and the realisation that, even if a very large section of the population was involved in clothmaking, they could not possibly have produced more than a part of the cloths sealed in the aulnage lists of 1394-8.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, the basic argument remains the same; the established centres continued to play a key role in the industry. The fulling mill is seen as a red herring, in that firstly, it was not an essential tool at this date as many successful centres, such as Salisbury, continued to use older methods and secondly, the

arguments about the mills' effects on the location of the industry are spurious, as they could be successfully used in urban and suburban settings, and throughout the 'Lowland' zone.<sup>50</sup> It is contended that, in fact, the industry developed principally in those areas in which it had long been established. Significantly, however, Bridbury concedes that:

the continuing preponderance of certain established cloth-making regions did not guarantee the continuing stability of the relationship of town to country cloth-making within such regions.<sup>51</sup>

The third main field within which Bridbury seeks to demonstrate the health of the urban system of later medieval England is that of taxable wealth. In Economic Growth he presents in tabular form<sup>52</sup> calculations which purport to show that the towns increased their share of the taxable, and by implication the real, wealth of the nation between the 1330s and the 1520s. The sources used in these calculations are the 'tenth and fifteenth' of 1334 and the lay subsidy of 1524. Bridbury's method is simply to compare the totals of 'town' and 'country' assessed wealth county by county at the two dates, expressing the former as a percentage of the latter.

The precise methods of deriving figures from these sources, and of comparing what were fundamentally different taxes are explored in Chapter 2. At present it is merely necessary to summarise Bridbury's findings and to demonstrate the use he makes of them. Appendix II to Economic Growth compares 'town' as a percentage of 'country' wealth in 1334 and 1524 county by county.<sup>53</sup> For almost every county these calculations indicate that the towns had a greater share of taxed wealth at the later date; in only one (Staffordshire) is there a decline in the 'urban' share.

Bridbury's faith in the reality of this apparent trend is strengthened by his belief that the 1334 tax over-estimated 'urban' wealth by including strictly 'non-urban' settlements in the category of places paying the higher proportion of their valuations (one-tenth), while the 1524 subsidy tended to underestimate the real wealth of the towns. For Bridbury the figures are indicative of a "seemingly irrepressible burgeoning of town life".<sup>54</sup>

A further set of figures is presented as Appendix III to the same book;<sup>55</sup> these represent ratios of actual payments 1334:1524 for a list of 50 towns. While conceding that the ratio of payments for a single town is in itself meaningless given the different nature of the two taxes, Bridbury contends that the comparison of ratios derived for many towns is revealing. The 'league table' of growth ratios seems "to bear out what the local historians have discovered" about the fortunes of individual towns, ranging from the 'negative' ratio of 2:1 for 'ruined' Boston, through Coventry's ratio of 1:6 implying "notable achievement" to the "astounding" ratio of 1:43 derived for Westminster.<sup>56</sup>

The highest rates of growth are achieved, Bridbury argues, by towns commanding main arteries of communication and by those of growing industrial importance; notable amongst the latter are the "new clothmaking towns such as Lavenham (1:18), Colchester (1:8) and Exeter (1:9)".<sup>57</sup> Plainly, in the case of these last two, 'new' is intended to apply to their industrial status rather than their urban identity.

The lay subsidies, then, are used by Bridbury to support his general argument about the health of the urban system, and to provide an approximate guide to the relative fortunes of its

components. In 'English Provincial Towns' this interpretation of the evidence is defended against the general and specific objections of the critics; the latter reject the subsidy evidence because it does not accord with what they consider to be the "historical facts", showing as Bridbury believes it does, that in 1524 England was making "more energetic use of its urban network of industries and services".<sup>58</sup>

Despite criticising others for rejecting evidence which does not fit in with their view of the 'facts', Bridbury does precisely this himself when dealing with one of the principal sources cited by the 'urban decline' school, the petitions to the crown for remission of fee-farm payments. These are dismissed as having been drafted by "conniving lawyers" on behalf of corporate clients.<sup>59</sup> Real difficulties arising from a diminished population - lower rents and consequently reduced revenue - were exaggerated out of all proportion in order to wring concessions from King and Parliament. The petitions "cannot possibly be taken at face value".<sup>60</sup> Bridbury argues that towns which claimed inability to meet fee-farm payments rarely had difficulty in raising money for civic building or gifts. Coventry, for example, continued to pay to the Crown as 'loans' sums it allegedly could not raise as fee-farm. Again, if the burdens of fee-farm were so onerous, why did a monastic borough such as Salisbury, with no farm to pay, continue to struggle for emancipation?<sup>61</sup> The expressions of dismay at the burden of corporate and personal taxation were "nothing but a calculated, trumpet-tongued and even, perhaps, at times, a systematically concerted campaign to defraud the king of his meagre dues".<sup>62</sup>

Architectural evidence is similarly dismissed; the chronology suggested by Dobson is simply not correct. Furthermore, the re-edification statutes passed in the reign of Henry VIII point not to the "incorrigible persistence" of urban decay, but were rather the means employed to solve the problem of long-term derelict property for which no clear title existed. The towns were increasing in size once again, but this does not mean that the preceding period had been one of decay or stagnation. Rather the re-edifying legislation signals "the end of a period of spaciousness and promise in the history of England's provincial towns".<sup>63</sup>

There are many criticisms that can be made of Bridbury's polemical mode of argument and of his use of source materials. Detailed assessments of the latter aspect will be found at relevant points throughout the present study. Despite the flaws, there is much to be said in Bridbury's favour. His is a rare attempt to develop a picture of the urban system as a whole, and to place it within the wider context of the overall economic and political scene. He makes a series of contentions, and identifies source materials which in his view back these up. In summary: the lay subsidies show that most towns did well between 1334 and 1524, increasing their share of the nation's taxable wealth; in large measure this prosperity rested upon the ability of the towns to retain a leading role in the expanding textile industry, as witnessed by the aulnage accounts and borough records; this continuing prosperity is reflected in a sustainedly high level of freeman admissions throughout the later medieval period despite increased entry fines and improved rural living standards.



It is the aim of the present study to investigate the appropriateness of this picture to one of the towns cited by Bridbury as a notable success, Colchester. While the sources used by Bridbury have been the subject of debate and criticism, this has generally been on an individual basis,<sup>64</sup> whereas the importance of Bridbury's work has been in suggesting a group of sources which point in the same direction; to a range of factors which go to make up "urban prosperity" in an age of "economic growth". The intention of the present study is to develop a critique of the sources and their interpretation without losing sight of their supposed inter-dependence; to establish whether the sources - subsidies, aulnage and borough records, and freeman recruitment data - individually tell the story which Bridbury would expect in the case of Colchester; and to establish the nature of the interrelation of the factors to which these sources relate - wealth, industry and population mobility - within the borough's hinterland of north-east Essex.<sup>65</sup>

Chapter 2 examines the lay subsidy returns for the region from 1327, 1334 and 1524-5. The nature of the taxes is discussed, and distorting factors assessed. By concentrating on the returns for north-east Essex a more detailed local picture is produced in an attempt to avoid the distortion inherent in 'county' studies. In Chapter 3 various other sources bearing on the wealth and population of the borough are examined: the leases of tolls and associated items of borough revenue, the returns of local taxes and levies, the evidence of office evasion and of 'decays' of civic property. The relation between the story told by these diverse sources 'internal' to the borough and the lay subsidy evidence is assessed.



Chapters 4 and 5 examine the evidence relating to the textile industry in later medieval Colchester and north-east Essex. The aulnage accounts are subjected to detailed scrutiny to establish what they can show as to the location of the industry, the emergence of rural clothmaking, and the structure of the industry in both town and country. The claims of earlier writers that the returns provide evidence of the emergence of 'rural capitalism' in Essex are critically appraised. Court roll evidence is used to shed further light on the organization of production within Colchester; an attempt is made to relate this largely unquantifiable information on day-to-day industrial organization to the picture derived from the aulnage returns.

In Chapter 6 the recruitment of freemen is examined. The nature of the Colchester franchise is explained, and an attempt is made to account for the trend in admissions in the light of wider factors and influences. The use of freeman data as an index of prosperity is assessed. Chapter 7 continues the examination of freeman recruitment by concentrating on geographical origins, an aspect for which Colchester has unusually detailed information. Changes in the recruitment field are tabulated and mapped, and their relation to the overall recruitment trend and the wider question of urban prosperity assessed.

Chapters 2 to 7 thus cover the three principal themes of wealth, industry and mobility. Each of these themes is introduced by a more specialised review of literature on the interpretation of sources than has been attempted in the present chapter. The final chapter attempts to bring together the findings of the preceding sections and to draw conclusions. The appropriateness of

Bridbury's formulation is considered both with regard to the particular case-study and, at a broader level, as to methods of employing source materials. Certain implications for the rival theories of urban 'decline' or 'growth' are suggested, and some underlying aspects of the rural-urban relation in the later middle ages stressed.

## CHAPTER 2

### LAY SUBSIDIES AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

The problems encountered in employing lay subsidy returns as evidence of the geographical and social distribution of wealth and population are many; amongst the most basic in looking at any given series of returns are the questions as to (i) who and what was liable for taxation, (ii) how were assessments made, (iii) who was exempt and who could most easily evade the tax, and (iv) how strictly and consistently were the collectors' instructions followed?

Difficulties of interpretation resulting from uncertainty as to the above issues are compounded when an attempt is made to compare lay subsidy returns of different dates in order to identify changes in wealth and population distribution; this is especially so when taxes of entirely different types are compared, the most common coupling being the 'fifteenth and tenth' of 1334 and the lay subsidy of 1524.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most hazardous of all is the attempt to use the subsidies as evidence of the changing relative wealth of town and country; this endeavour runs into the additional problem of the differential taxation of boroughs and rural vills, and uncertainty as to the relative effectiveness of the collectors' efforts in the two environments.

This rural-urban question has been the focus for much of the recent debate on the subsidies, the starting point being the calculations made by Bridbury which were discussed in the previous chapter. It will be recalled that Bridbury's principal argument is that comparison of the two taxes indicates that urban wealth

constituted a much larger proportion of lay wealth in 1524 than it did in 1334.<sup>2</sup> These conclusions have been contested on the grounds that firstly, they contradict the evidence of other sources and case-studies and secondly, that Bridbury's results are invalid because of his failure to appreciate the limitations of the lay subsidies as historical sources, and to make allowances for the same. It is with regard to the latter criticisms that Bridbury's case appears most vulnerable.

The lay subsidies of 1327, 1334 and the other early fourteenth-century taxations of moveables were profoundly different from those of 1524-5. The methods of assessing wealth at both periods is obscure, but whereas in 1524-5 it is plain that the collectors were generally endeavouring to place some value on total individual wealth, it is by no means clear that this was done in the fourteenth-century taxations; the question of what was taxed and what was exempt has occupied the minds of many scholars but substantial doubts remain. Items of clothing, and household goods were exempt in the towns; armour, horses and treasure in the countryside; the most vexatious problem, however, is the question of what grain and stock was taxable in the country, and whether realistic valuations were placed upon them. Willard first proposed the notion that, given the small amounts of produce listed in those returns which itemise the bases of assessment, only grain surplus to subsistence requirements, and thus saleable, was assessed.<sup>3</sup> This contention received support from Gaydon's study of the Bedfordshire rolls of 1297,<sup>4</sup> but it raises further problems which have been reviewed by Glasscock.<sup>5</sup>

It is not clear, for example, whether this 'surplus' principle applied to moveables other than foodstuffs; if so, it might be that a man of relatively substantial means, but with equally substantial commitments (e.g. a large family to support) would not appear in the tax rolls at all.

This situation might be thought likely to produce relative undervaluation of rural communities rather than urban; however the taxations of Colchester in the reign of Edward I show that agrarian interests were common among the townsmen at this date and similar considerations may apply.<sup>6</sup> The ways in which the assessors dealt with the stock and tools of urban craftsmen is equally obscure.<sup>7</sup>

These factors make the analysis of the early subsidies a matter of great complexity and ambiguity. The problems are compounded further when the attempt is made to compare these taxes with the quite different subsidy of 1524-5 which drew upon three distinct sources of wealth, namely goods, income from lands, and wages - as alternatives for any given individual, not as aggregated wealth - rather than being solely based upon moveable goods.<sup>8</sup> The exercise is thus intrinsically dubious, and can only be justified on the assumption that problems as to 'surplus' etc. were relatively uniform, and thus that differential 'growth' of taxable wealth has some relation to changes in the actual wealth of places and districts rather than being merely products of varying methods of assessment by the collectors. If this is allowed - and it is by no means beyond dispute that it should be - then the validity of the comparison is strictly limited to relative, rather than absolute terms. "Growth ratios" of 2, 8 or 45 are in themselves meaningless, and can only take on a debatable significance when

compared with each other. To claim that a town was, say, eight times as wealthy in 1524 as in 1334 on the basis of subsidy evidence<sup>9</sup> is utterly fatuous, and, given the problems rehearsed above, would be so even if allowance were made for differences in population, value of currency, living standards, etc.

The use of the dual rate in many of the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century taxations - fifteenth and tenth, ninth and sixth etc., with certain tax boroughs and areas of 'ancient demesne' paying the higher fraction of their assessed value - merely compounds the problems of interpretation. The question of whether the higher rate was applied in part to compensate for problems of under-assessment in urban communities has been raised and is one of the principal lines of attack used by the critics of Bridbury's analysis.

At the core of Bridbury's arguments is the belief that the urban share of taxable wealth was emphasised in 1334 but minimised in 1524, thus making its apparent growth between the two dates even more impressive, the ratios being likely underestimates rather than exaggerations. This view is based on the belief that the differential basis of the 1334 tax (tax boroughs paying a tenth of their assessed wealth as opposed to the 'rural fifteenth') would encourage the collectors to count as many places as possible as urban, in order to maximise receipts. Furthermore, Bridbury contends, the taxation of land and wages in addition to (or, more precisely, as an alternative to) moveables in 1524 probably emphasised rural rather than urban wealth at this date given the growth of wage-labour in agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

These assumptions have been questioned, however. Dobson has argued that the dual rate system of taxation used in 1334 (and on certain previous occasions) was designed to compensate for a general under-assessment of urban wealth.<sup>11</sup> This rests on the belief that the true wealth of urban traders and craftsmen with their debts, credits, circulating stock etc. would be much harder to assess than that of most country-dwellers. If true, this would in part undermine Bridbury's case, as he bases his calculations on 1334 valuations rather than payments. Furthermore, while Bridbury argued that many small communities were included in the 'urban' category in 1334 (without providing examples) Dobson points out that many true 'towns' were taxed at the lower rate, with only certain 'taxation boroughs' attracting the higher.<sup>12</sup>

In Rigby's metaphor, while Bridbury sees a child standing on a box in 1334, Dobson sees a child in a trench.<sup>13</sup>

Rigby adopts a similar position to Dobson on the question of under- or over-assessment at the two dates, in particular criticising Bridbury's failure to specify the towns included in his urban category; in some counties he appears not to have confined his figures to the higher-rate category in 1334. Again Rigby argues that the taxation of income from lands was unlikely to significantly inflate rural wealth in 1524<sup>14</sup> while the claim that the taxation of wages in 1524 favours rural communities is dismissed as a complete red herring; Bridbury adduces no evidence to show that wages were more important in the countryside, while the proportionate contribution of payments on wages to total tax is normally minimal.<sup>15</sup>

Having thus dismissed the rationale for using differential assessments as the basis for calculation, Rigby proceeds to calculate rural growth ratios on the basis of hypothetical payments at a uniform tenth, thus eliminating distortion arising from the inclusion of purely rural communities (e.g. ancient demesne) in the higher category in 1334. The figures thus produced are then compared with the ratios for growth in urban payments and the interpretation placed upon these last by Bridbury. The result is that only three counties (Devon 1:3.3; Essex 1:1.9; Surrey 1:1.7) have rural growth rates comparable to those towns whose growth rates are considered "sluggish" while the remaining 24 counties for which calculation is possible have ratios indicative of "decline", 14 being lower than that (recalculated) for "ruined" Boston (1:1). The lowest rural ratios are found for Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire (both 1:0.5) and Shropshire (1:0.4).<sup>16</sup>

These striking findings lead Rigby to two possible explanations: we either accept Bridbury's assumptions about the meaning of the growth ratios, and thus must visualise "the wholesale decline of England's rural economy in the later middle ages", or we must accept that rural growth is being minimised and urban growth maximised by the returns.<sup>17</sup> This latter is considered more plausible by Rigby, given the "stagnant" or "sluggish" figures achieved by a county such as Suffolk(1:1.5) known to have been experiencing rural "growth" in the textile industry. The corollary of this is a need to increase the figure indicative of "decline" for urban centres; a ratio of 1:2.1 for growth in urban share in taxed wealth is tentatively suggested as the 'decline' threshold, 14 out of the 27 counties falling below this figure.



Rigby's work thus appears to cast serious doubts on both Bridbury's methodology and his findings. A recent paper by J.F. Hadwin has, however, given qualified support to the latter's arguments. Hadwin points out that, if Bridbury's findings as to the growth in urban vis a vis rural taxable wealth are to be overturned, urban undervaluation in 1334 would have had to be of the order of 50% or more, "ie. the rural areas would have been facing average valuations twice as severe as the towns were";<sup>18</sup> while this is not beyond the bounds of possibility, Hadwin avers, it is an unproven assumption which is just as dangerous as the hypothesis of "equal cheating". Furthermore, it is necessary to explain why the problem of urban undervaluation should so "miraculously disappear" in 1524-5. Postulating an "urban crisis" in the early fourteenth century with towns close to their nadir in 1334 is also difficult to sustain on the basis of subsidy evidence, as the borough and ancient demesne share of taxable wealth was higher at this date than in 1294. Hadwin concludes that the evidence currently available "tends to blur the image Bridbury has projected of late medieval urban vigour, but does nothing to reverse it".<sup>19</sup>

Hadwin's argument is unsatisfactory in some respects, particularly in his failure to address the different nature of the 1334 and 1524 taxations.<sup>20</sup> Further, an urban crisis has indeed been postulated at this time, in relation to the purported crisis of the textile industry, but its commencement has been placed well before 1294 by some writers.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Hadwin's intervention serves to show that there is still a case to be answered, and that Bridbury's findings, however flawed, are deserving of serious attention.

## The Essex Evidence

When we turn to Essex, we find that in Bridbury's Appendix II,<sup>22</sup> town wealth as a percentage of country wealth is calculated as a mere 1.4% in 1334 (£261/£18003 'assessed wealth'). This, remarkably, places the county at the bottom of the league table; only one other county, Huntingdonshire, has a percentage figure below 2% (1.9%). The neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire both work out at 6.0% while Hertfordshire has a figure of 4.8%. Even a county such as Staffordshire, hardly thought of as an urbanised county in the early fourteenth century, has an urban percentage figure of 5.5. While it can be accepted that Essex was not a county in which town life was highly developed at this period - the 1377 poll tax returns confirm that Colchester was the only urban community of any great size - the exceptionally low relative figure is still surprising. How is it to be explained?

On examining the returns themselves, we find that only the borough of Colchester together with the ancient demesne villis of Newport and Havering were in fact taxed at the higher ('tenth') rate.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Bridbury's contention that the collector would be eager to include as many places as possible in this category is clearly false in the case of Essex. All the smaller communities with some claim to burghal status - Maldon, Harwich, Chelmsford, Saffron Walden etc. - are taxed at the lower 'rural' rate. Plainly the definitions of 'tax boroughs' varied widely from county to county, and thus comparisons of 'urban wealth' between counties are, at best, dubious on this basis.

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However, Bridbury is keen to emphasise that the same lists of places are used for his 1524 calculations, and so, notwithstanding the shortcomings of these lists, comparison of the two dates may still be revealing. In fact, the 1524 urban figure for Essex is given as 6.2%. While this plainly represents a marked increase in the 'urban' contribution to the county's tax, it still leaves Essex towards the bottom of the table. Only Staffordshire (5.1%), Huntingdonshire (5.7%) and Bedfordshire (3.8%) have lower figures. Suffolk is now credited with an 'urban' share of 18.0%, Cambridge 17.5% and Herts 13.0%. At one extreme of the spectrum, Warwickshire is calculated to have an 'urban' tax share of 69.9%.<sup>24</sup>

The scale and movement in 'urban' taxable wealth in Essex is, as we have seen, synonymous with the fortunes of Colchester.<sup>25</sup> When we turn to Bridbury's Appendix II we find that the borough stands out as having one of the higher 1334-1524 'growth ratios'. Its ratio of 8 in fact places Colchester in joint seventh place out of the 50 towns included in the table. What this means is that in 1334 the borough contributed £26.3s. to the subsidy, whereas in 1524 the figure was just under £216.

It can be argued that the 1334 returns are not necessarily the best of the fourteenth century taxes to use either for a synchronic analysis of the distribution of taxable wealth, or as a basis for comparison. They have tended to be used for these purposes because they are the last returns which exist before the payments became 'frozen' quotas, used for all subsequent levying of the 'fifteenth and tenths'. However they suffer from the drawback that they do not give individual assessments, and it is thus not possible to examine the structure and distribution of the tax-paying population.

Furthermore, in some counties while the 1334 tax raised more revenue than the 1327 it seems to have been less effective in terms of the total assessed wealth tapped. Thus, for Warwickshire it has been shown that the 1332 collection was superior to the 1334, and that the 1327 is better still, as it uncovered the greatest wealth.<sup>26</sup> Being levied at the rate of a twentieth, it generated less revenue than the 'fifteenth and tenth' 1334 collection, but as guide to assessed wealth it is superior.

The situation is somewhat different for Essex. Whereas in 1334 the total assessed wealth of the county was £18,276.11s.6<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d., in 1327 the figure was £17,246.18s.9d., rendering the sum of £862.6s.11 d. at the 'twentieth'. However, in contrast to the overall county picture, the assessed value for Colchester was lower in 1334 than in 1327, £261.7s.6d. as against £280.10s.10d. This is also true for the ancient demesne villis of Newport and Havering.<sup>27</sup> Thus it seems that the dual rate system of 1334 encouraged the assessors to reduce the assessed wealth of places within the 'tenth' category, probably to minimise the discontent which was no doubt felt in these places. This distortion, together with the lack of individual assessments, encourages the belief that the later tax has little to commend its use rather than the 1327 returns as a basis for analysis.

Colchester's share of the county's tax payment in 1327 was £14.0s.6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d., out of a total of £862.6s.11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d., or 1.63%. This is somewhat higher than the percentage for 1334, which, as we have seen, Bridbury worked out on assessments as 1.4%.<sup>28</sup>

## Taxable Wealth of North-East Essex, 1327 to 1524-5

Bridbury's calculations based on counties have, for all their drawbacks, proved useful in provoking thought and discussion. In assessing the meaning of the subsidy evidence for particular places, however, it may be useful to use different scales of analysis and areal units. County statistics inevitably conceal marked variations, and the differential development of localities. In addition to considering Colchester's contributions to county tax, then, calculations will also be made for the three hundreds of north-eastern Essex which surround the borough - Lexden, Tendring and Winstree.

The contribution of these three hundreds, and Colchester's share of their combined payments, will be examined for 1327 and 1524, and the payments of the individual parishes which comprise them studied in order to achieve greater insight into what the subsidies can in fact tell us, if they can tell us anything at all, about town and country at the two dates.

The figures for 1327 are presented in Tables I, II and III.

Variations between the three hundreds in 1327 as to density of taxpaying population, spread of taxable wealth and average per capita payments thus appear fairly slight. To a large extent, of course, this uniformity must be artificial, promoted by the obvious under-assessments of rich men, and the exclusion of most of the population from paying any tax at all. Poos, in his study of rural Essex, estimates that less than one-half of all household heads contributed to the 1327 subsidy.<sup>29</sup> Even when Colchester is excluded from the Lexden figures, that hundred has the highest density of taxpayers and of tax paid per square mile (Table III).

TABLE I: TAX PAYMENTS, 1327

	1327 Payments	% of 3 Hundreds and borough total payment
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	£ 53.14s.8d.	37.5
Tendring hundred	£ 62. 8s.9½d.	43.6
Winstree hundred	£ 13. 2s.3¾d.	9.2
Total, 3 hundreds (excluding Colchester)	£129. 5s.9¼d.	90.2
Colchester	£ 14. 0s.6½d.	9.8
Total including Colchester	£143. 6s.3¾d.	100.1

(Source: M.E.C., pp.7-26)

TABLE II: NUMBER OF TAXPAYERS, 1327

	No. of Taxpayers	% of 3 Hundreds and Borough Total Taxpayers	Average Payment
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	541	36.1	1s.11¾d.
Tendring hundred	679	45.4	1s.10d.
Winstree hundred	150	10.0	1s. 9d.
Colchester	127	8.5	2s. 2½d.
Total	1497	100.0	1s.11d.

(Source: as Table I)

TABLE III: TAXPAYERS AND TAX PAID PER SQUARE MILE, 1327

	Taxpayers/ sq. mile	Tax paid/sq. mile (nearest $\frac{1}{2}$ d.)
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	5.6	11s. 1d.
Tendring hundred	5.4	9s. 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Winstree hundred	4.0	7s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Colchester (town and Liberty)	6.9	15s. 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
3 hundreds + borough	5.4	10s. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
Essex	5.5	11s. 4d.

(Source: as Table I)

Winstree, by far the smallest of the three hundreds, emerges as the poorest by all the measures employed. However, the overall differences are not large, the most marked gap appearing in tax yield per square mile, as between Winstree and Lexden. The figures for Colchester cover both the borough and its large rural or suburban Liberty;<sup>30</sup> the inclusion of the extra-urban territory brings the figures for tax and taxpayer density down to remarkably low levels. The bulk of the taxpayers would have lived within the truly urban part of the borough.

The overall figures for the three hundreds, with Colchester, are marginally below the Essex average. Exclusion of the borough's contribution would serve to slightly stress the relative poverty of the north-east corner of the county.

The corresponding figures for 1524-5 can be presented similarly, without, at this stage, making any reservations as to the



comparability of the two taxes; the returns for 1524 are preferred where they survive as against the following year; for Essex as a whole there was a decline in payments between the two years of around 8%. For Lexden, returns for both years survive with a total of £226.18s.0d. being contributed by 1,271 payers in 1524, falling to £195.2s.0d. and 1,236 payers in 1525. Winstree is incomplete for the second year, and the number of taxpayers cannot be compared, but total tax paid again declines, from £80.5s.10d. to £70.11s.11d. Tendring unfortunately has no surviving return for 1524, and 1525 is incomplete; there is however a summa for the latter year.<sup>31</sup> Figures taken from the Commissioners Certificates could be used for those places missing from the 1525 return, but this is undesirable as there is a large discrepancy between the Certificates and returns totals. It has been thought preferable, therefore, to present no data for those places which have no record of actual payments, rather than to use figures which could be as much as 50% out. For the borough, returns exist for both 1524 and 1525; again there is a pronounced fall in payments, from £215.18s.1d. to £180.6s.1d., although the number of payers increased from 753 to 785.<sup>32</sup>

The decline between the two years in north-east Essex is thus larger than the county average, being 14% in the case of Lexden, 12% for Winstree and 16.5% for Colchester. The possibility that the Tendring figures for 1525 may be lower than the lost returns for 1524 by a percentage figure within this range must therefore be borne in mind; thus the figures have been presented for both years in Table IV, as appropriate.



TABLE IV: TAX PAYMENTS, 1524/25

	Payments		% of 3 hundreds + borough (1525)
	1524	1525	
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	£226.18s. 0d.	£195. 2s. 0d.	29.1
Tendring hundred	- - -	£222.16s. 4d.	33.3
Winstree hundred	£ 80. 5s.10d.	£ 70.11s.11d.	10.6
Total 3 hundreds (excluding Colchester)	- - -	£488.10s. 3d.	73.0
Colchester	£215.18s. 1d.	£180. 6s. 1d.	27.0
<b>Total</b>	- - -	£688.16s. 4d.	100.0

(Source: PRO, E179/108/154, 162, 169, 174, 178, 204)

The most noticeable thing about these figures is the increased share paid by the borough of Colchester and its dependent hamlets; whereas in 1327 this share amounts to 9.8%, in 1525 this has risen to 27.0%. This growth is, in percentage terms, at the expense of Lexden and Tendring hundreds, which each show falls of around one-fifth, while Winstree hundred slightly increases its percentage share.

Calculations for the three hundreds totals of number of taxpayers and taxpayers per square mile can not, unfortunately, be made for 1524-5 because the Tendring returns are defective. The available figures are shown in Table V.

TABLE V: NO. OF TAXPAYERS, 1524-5

	No. of Taxpayers	
	1524	1525
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	1,271	1,236
Tendring hundred	-	incomplete
Winstree hundred	392	incomplete
Colchester	753	785

(Source: as Table IV)

If, excluding Tendring from the arithmetic, the number of taxpayers in the borough is calculated as a percentage of taxpayers in Lexden, Winstree and the borough combined, then a figure of 15.5% is found for 1327, rising to no less than 45% in 1524. Whereas the borough has somewhat fewer taxpayers than Winstree hundred in 1327, in 1524 it had nearly twice as many as its rural neighbour. Similarly, compared to the larger Lexden hundred the borough had somewhat less than one-quarter the number of taxpayers in 1327 but in 1524 the fraction was nearly three-fifths.

Corresponding changes are seen in the density of taxpayers and the spread of taxable wealth (Table VI).

TABLE VI: TAXPAYERS AND TAX PAID PER SQUARE MILE, 1524-5

	Taxpayers/sq. mile		Tax paid/sq. mile	
	1524	1525	1524	1525
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	13.4	13.0	£ 2.7s. 8d.	£ 2. 1s. 0d.
Tendring hundred	-	incomplete	- - -	£ 1.13s.10½d.
Winstree hundred	10.5	incomplete	£ 2.3s.2½d.	£ 1.18s. 0d.
Colchester (town & Liberty)	40.9	42.7	£12.3s.11½d.	£10. 3s. 9d.

(Source: as Table IV)

Once again, the inclusion of the Liberty greatly reduces the Colchester figures. In fact, the hamlets of Lexden, West Donyland, Greenstead and Mile End account for no more than 10% of the taxpayers, the remaining 90% living in the truly urban and suburban parishes, the density of taxpayers in the borough proper might thus be of the order of 3-400 per square mile.

Apart from the striking advance of Colchester, the other feature of note is the overtaking of Tendring hundred by Winstree hundred in terms of taxed wealth/square mile.

The movements in tax payments are presented as ratios in Table VII; in addition to the 1327:1524-5 ratios, figures based on a uniform tenth have been given for comparison with the figures derived by Rigby and Bridbury using the 1334 returns.

TABLE VII: GROWTH RATIOS, TAX PAID 1327:1524/5

	A. 1327:1524 (20th)	B. 1327:1525 (20th)	C. 1327:1524 (adjusted as 10th)	D. 1327:1525
Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester)	4.2	3.6	2.1	1.8
Tendring hundred	-	3.5	-	1.8
Winstree hundred	6.1	5.4	3.1	2.7
Three hundreds (excluding Colchester)	-	3.8	-	1.9
Colchester	15.5	12.9	7.7	6.4
Three hundreds (including Colchester)	-	4.7	-	2.3

(Source: as Table IV)

Given the differences in the nature of the taxes it is not a valid question to ask which of these sets of ratios, those based on a twentieth or those based on a tenth, is the more "realistic"; interest lies in the relative movements indicated rather than in the absolute value of the ratios. The taxes are fundamentally different; the 1524-5 taxation is based on a sliding scale of payments rather than a fixed ratio, and is not solely based on moveables. The actual ratio between assessments and payments for any given place can, of course, be readily calculated. Thus, in the Colchester parish of All Saints - a middling parish by the borough's standards, with individual assessments ranging from 20s. (wages) to £21 (goods) - the 17 payers were assessed at a total of

£90, and paid tax of £3.4s.10d., a fraction of around one twenty-eighth.<sup>33</sup> This figure has no particular meaning; the point being, that given the lack of agreement on the question of under- or over-assessment at the two dates, no fraction can be considered more "realistic" than any other; the twentieth will do as well as any, and has the merit of representing actual payments rather than adjusted calculations. For all the ensuing calculations, then, the twentieth figures alone will be used; the caution is merely to be made that the ratios thus produced cannot be directly compared with those of Rigby for 1334-1524.

Clearly the most significant feature of all the above tables is the growing share of tax paid by the borough as reflected by its significantly higher ratio 1327:1524/5. While in terms of absolute monetary value no other movement in this part of Essex can be comparable, to what extent is the borough unique in the scale of its growth in tax payments? To answer this question it is necessary to change the scale of the analysis, and to examine the performance of individual parishes within the three hundreds.

Tables VIII-X present the relevant data, giving 1327 payments, 1524 payments (1525 in the case of Tendring hundred) and 'growth' ratios. The spatial dimension is illustrated by Map 4, which should be viewed in conjunction with Map 3, a guide to parish locations.

TABLE VIII: RATIO OF PAYMENTS 1327:1524, LEXDEN HUNDRED

Parishes	Tax Paid		Ratio ( $\frac{B}{A}$ )
	A. 1327	B.1524	
Wivenhoe	£1. 0s. 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	Town £ 2. 6s. 6d. Manor £24. 3s. 2d.	2.7 (town) 30.9 (town & manor)
Dedham	£2. 19s. 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£40. 2s. 5d.	13.6
Coggeshall ) (Gt. & Little) ) + Markshall )	£4. 6s. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£28. 12s. 0d. + £ 2. 0s. 2d.	7.1
Stanway ) (Gt. & Little)	£2. 3s. 6d.	£12. 1s. 6d.	5.6
Birch ) (Gt. & Little) ) + Easthorpe )	£2. 9s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£10. 13s. 10d. + £ 2. 17s. 6d.	5.5
Feering ) ) + Pattiswick )	£3. 11s. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£15. 10s. 0d. + £ 2. 4s. 7d.	5.0
Earls Colne	£2. 13s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£12. 0s. 3d.	4.5
Aldham	£1. 13s. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	£ 7. 13s. 5d.	4.3
Inworth ) ) + Messing )	£2. 8s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 3. 17s. 4d. + £ 4. 18s. 5d.	3.6
Mount Bures	£0. 17s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 2. 19s. 2d.	3.4
East Donyland	£0. 11s. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	£ 1. 17s. 10d.	3.4
West Bergholt	£1. 5s. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 3. 16s. 2d.	3.0
White Colne	£1. 4s. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 3. 8s. 3d.	2.8
Tey, Gt.	£3. 10s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	) £ 9. 16s. 2d. (2.8)	
Tey, Little	?		
Wormingford	£1. 11s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 3. 10s. 10d.	2.3
Horkesley, Gt.	£2. 8s. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 5. 0s. 4d.	2.1
Horkesley, Little	£1. 6s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 2. 13s. 2d.	2.0

TABLE VIII (contd.)

Parishes	Tax Paid		Ratio ( $\frac{B}{A}$ )
	A. 1327	B.1524	
Copford	£2. 2s. 1d.	£ 4. 4s. 0d.	2.0
Fordham	£2. 1s. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 3.18s. 6d.	1.9
Wakes Colne ) + Crepping )	£2.10s. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 4. 6s. 5d. + ?	1.7
Tey, Marks	£2. 1s. 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 3. 7s. 2d.	1.6
Boxted	£2.16s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 4.11s.10d.	1.6
Colne Engaine	£1.17s. 0d.	£ 1.16s. 6d.	1.0
Langham	£3. 3s. 1d.	£ 2.10s. 2d.	0.8

(Sources: M.E.C., pp.16-24; PRO, E179/108/154)

Note: Where parishes are grouped together, this reflects the layout of the returns.

TABLE IX: RATIO OF PAYMENTS, 1327:1524, WINSTREE HALF-HUNDRED

Parishes	Tax paid		Ratio ( <u>B</u> ) A
	A. 1327	B. 1524	
Abberton )		£ 3.14s.1d.	14.9
+ Peldon )	£1. 6s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	+ £13. 0s.9d.	
Layer de la Haye	£0.19s. 7d.	£ 8.18s.1d.	9.1
Wigborough, Gt. )		£14.15s.1d.	6.8
Wigborough, Little )	£1.15s. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	+ £ 0. 8s.10d.	
Langenhoe	£1.10s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 8. 2s. 2d.	5.4
Layer Breton )		£ 1.15s. 7d.	5.4
+ Salcott Virley* )	£1. 6s. 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	+ £ 1.15s. 6d.	
		+ £ 3.11s. 7d. (Gt. Salcott)	
Fingringhoe )		£ 8. 7s. 6d.	4.8
+ West Mersea )	£3. 4s.10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	+ £ 7. 5s.10d.	
Layer Marney	£1. 1s. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 3. 9s. 2d.	3.3
East Mersea	£1.15s. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 5. 1s. 8d.	2.8

(Sources: M.E.C., pp.25-6; PRO, E.179/108/154)

\* It is assumed that Salcott and Virley are indicated, although the form Salcott Virley was used to identify the latter place at certain periods (cf. Glasscock, p.82, note 1).



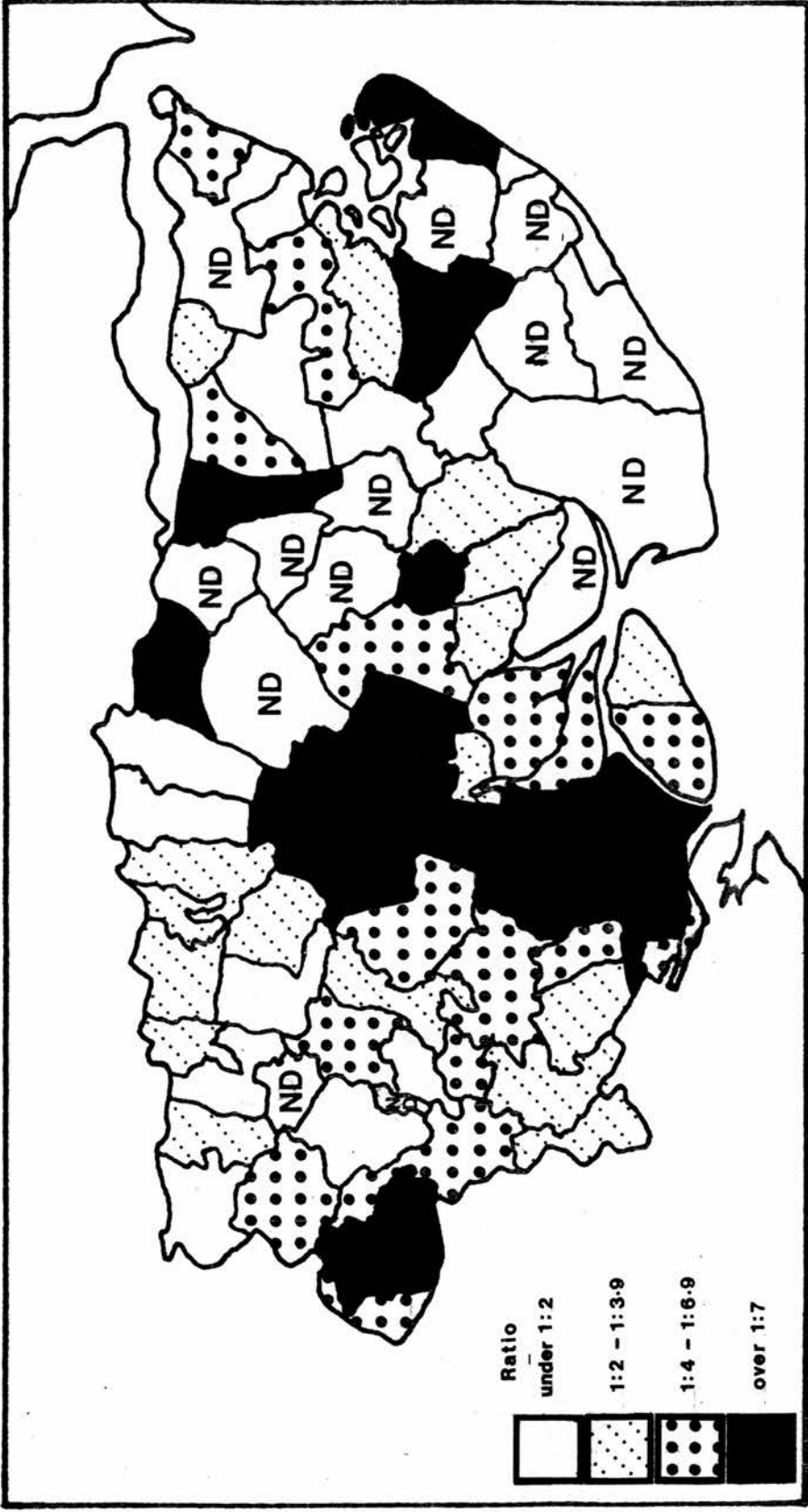
TABLE X: RATIO OF PAYMENTS, 1327:1524, TENDRING HUNDRED

Parishes	Tax paid		Ratio ( <u>B</u> ) A
	A. 1327	B. 1524	
Manningtree ) + Mistley )	£3. 1s. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£44. 3s. 2d. + £ 3.12s. 2d.	15.5
Harwich	£2.19s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£37. 4s. 5d.	12.6
Frating	£0.11s. 1d.	£ 5. 7s. 7d.	9.7
Thorpe	£1.16s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£15. 5s. 6d.	8.4
Walton	£1. 7s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£11. 7s. 6d.	8.3
Elmstead	£1.17s. 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£11. 3s. 3d.	6.0
Bradfield	£1.13s. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 8. 0s. 10d.	4.8
Dovercourt	£1.14s. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 7. 4s. 4d.	4.1
Oakley, Gt.	£2. 8s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 9.14s. 9d.	4.0
Bentley, Gt.	£1.14s. 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 4.18s. 6d.	2.9
Alresford	£1. 2s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 3. 6s. 6d.	2.9
Wrabness	£1. 1s. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 2.17s. 8d.	2.6
Thorrington	£1.12s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 4. 2s. 10d.	2.5
Beaumont	£1. 1s. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.	£ 2. 1s. 2d.	2.1
Weeley	£1. 5s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 2. 6s. 6d.	1.9
Moze	£1. 1s. 2d.	£ 2. 0s. 2d.	1.9
Tendring	£1.15s. 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 3. 1s. 4d.	1.8
Frinton	£1. 2s. 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.	£ 1.16s. 6d.	1.6
Wix	£1.17s. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 2.12s. 0d.	1.4
Oakley, Little	£1. 5s. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 1.15s. 8d.	1.3
Holland, Little	£1. 2s. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.	£ 0. 6s. 2d.	0.3

(Sources: M.E.C., pp.7-16; PRO, E179/108/169)

Note: Ardleigh, Bromley (Gt. and Little), Clacton (Gt. and Little), Holland (Gt.), Kirby, Lawford, no surviving returns; St. Osyth, fragmentary returns only; Brightlingsea, not taxed.





MAP 4: GROWTH RATIOS, TAX PAID 1327 : 1524

There are, of course, considerable hazards in analysing subsidy returns at this scale. By far the most serious is the fact that, whereas in 1327 a man having lands or possessions in more than one place might be listed and taxed in each of these places, in 1524/5 it was the practice, or at least the intention, that people should be taxed in one place only, their principal place of residence.<sup>34</sup> Thus, an illusion of rapid growth may be created for one parish, whereas the wealth taxed in 1524-5 may lie far afield. This appears clearly in the case of Wivenhoe where the wealth of the holder of the manor grossly swells the growth ratio. Less dramatic distortions no doubt affect many other parishes.

Fear of distortion would, however, probably rule out the use of lay subsidies for any purpose whatsoever, and the tables are presented for what they are, ratios of tax paid; the relationship between taxable and real wealth is not assumed to be straightforward. The returns for 1327 and 1524-5 were broadly similar for these hundreds in terms of the places included; there were, however, certain amalgamations of places at both dates, and these have been reproduced where possible. Brightlingsea in Tendring hundred was not taxed at all in the 1520's subsidies, apparently exempt because of its association with the Cinque Ports. In 1327 a combined figure is given for "Wakes Colne and Crepping"; in 1524 only Wakes Colne occurs, and it is assumed that Crepping<sup>35</sup> was at this date treated as part of this parish. Little Coggeshall was included in Lexden hundred in 1524, although the following year it was placed with Witham hundred.

It can be seen that Colchester is not unique in the growth ratio of its taxable wealth; the hundredal average figures conceal wide

variations in the status of individual parishes. Four other places or pairs of places in the three hundreds have 1327 - 1524/5<sub>36</sub> payment ratios of over 10: Dedham in Lexden hundred (13.6), Abberton with Peldon in Winstree hundred (14.9), and Harwich (12.6) and Manningtree with Mistley (15.5) in Tendring hundred. This last pair of places has a ratio identical to that of Colchester.

At the other end of the scale, some parishes paid little more tax in 1524/5 than they had done in 1327, and some even contributed less; e.g. Little Holland in Tendring hundred (0.3) and Langham in Lexden (0.8).

This clearly shows how disparate the fortunes of neighbouring parishes could be in terms of their taxpaying ability; thus to the north of Colchester and west of Dedham lie Langham (0.8) and Boxted (1.6). These sharp contrasts are important; they indicate how localised was "success" in tax-yield terms. Furthermore, it is often the case, as can be seen from the tables, that the higher growth ratios are found for places which were among the largest contributors in 1327. Thus, the high growth ratios of Dedham and Coggeshall take on even greater significance when it is realised that these were the fourth and first ranking payers respectively in 1327; by 1524 these two textile communities were paying 30% of the total tax of Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester). Coggeshall would probably have a greater growth ratio than 7.1 if it were not paired with Markshall in 1327; by 1524 it paid over 14 times as much tax as its neighbour.

This localisation of taxable wealth undermines Rigby's argument that "sluggish" county growth ratios may indicate that the subsidies minimise rural growth, and do not truly reflect the emergence of

industry in the countryside. The same phenomenon can be seen in the hundreds across the Suffolk border, in even more striking form;<sup>37</sup> in Cosford hundred Hadleigh contributed £106.6s.10d. out of a total of £163.7s.2d. in 1524, the next largest payment being £12.12.0d. from Bildeston; similarly in Samford hundred the two textile villages of Stratford and East Bergholt paid £55.0s.3d. and £50.9s.0d. respectively out of a total of £192.11s.0d. - all but one of the remaining places in the hundred paid less than £10 tax. Only in Babergh hundred is there a broader spread of contributors, with nine places paying over £20; but even here the four largest payers, Lavenham, Long Melford, Sudbury and Nayland - all famous textile centres - contributed some 60% of the hundred's total tax.

If involvement in cloth manufacture appears to be characteristic of the highest growth ratios and largest absolute contributors in Lexden hundred, other factors may have been involved in Tendring and Winstree. The front-runners in Tendring were Manningtree with Mistley, and Harwich; both Manningtree (which in 1525 paid 92% of the combined figure with Mistley used in the ratio calculation) and Harwich were small but busy ports on the river Stour handling merchandise from both Essex and Suffolk and further afield in the important coastal trade.<sup>38</sup> Both also had markets and some claim to burghal status, although they were never counted as tax boroughs. Manningtree was also the home of certain traders in textiles, if not a major seat of manufacture. Its tax quota was greatly boosted by the presence of one Jaques Darnell, assessed at 600 marks in Goods and who thus paid £20 out of the total for the town.<sup>39</sup> Had Brightlingsea been taxed we might have expected to find a similar picture of growth there, as this was another small but busy port,

handling coastal and sea-going vessels, and much traffic coming to and from Colchester. Early in the reign of Elizabeth a return relating to ships available for naval service showed that the only two vessels over 100 tons in Essex both hailed from Brightlingsea. In 1564-5 the port had 13 serviceable vessels, as against 17 from Harwich and 35 from Colchester.<sup>40</sup> Smaller in scale of contributions but also having impressive growth ratios, Thorpe, Walton and Frating appear to be sharing in a general rise in value of the coastal zone.

As was seen earlier, the small hundred of Winstree improved its relative position vis a vis its larger neighbours 1327-1524, and the rise in taxable value was fairly generally shared, the lowest growth ratio being 2.8. The area between Colchester and the sea derived much of its wealth from pasture, and thus the textile industry may have had some indirect influence on the growth in taxed wealth.<sup>41</sup> Certainly as far as commercial organisation is concerned the hundred seems to have been backward, with no record of chartered markets or fairs in the medieval period.<sup>42</sup>

Plainly Winstree hundred depended heavily on Colchester for its marketing, and the lack of such privileged centres within the hundred did not prevent its advancement in terms of taxable wealth. Indeed, possession of a market charter was no guarantee of prosperity or increase in taxable wealth; Wix, in Tendring, had possessed a market charter since 1204<sup>43</sup> but records a 1327-1524 tax payment ratio of only 1:1.4.



## Taxation of Wages and Lands

The most novel feature of the 1524-5 subsidy was the attempt to tax those who, having little or nothing in the way of possessions, lived on what they could earn as wages. It appears that this taxation was meant to take the form of a poll tax, whereby all those who earned wages in excess of £1 per year would contribute 4d., rather than being a pro rata or sliding scale payment like the Goods and Lands assessments. However, the collectors appear to have found their instructions difficult to follow, and in some parts of the country assessments of over £1 and correspondingly high payments are encountered. North-east Essex is one such area: in Coggeshall, for example, in addition to the 18 individuals assessed on wages of 20s., 11 had their earnings assessed at 26s.8d., and 4 at 40s.<sup>44</sup>

The overall number of wage assessments is high in this part of Essex; in some parishes over half the tax payers are assessed on wages. While it may be naive to assume, as does Hoskins,<sup>45</sup> that variations in the proportion of wage assessments between different parts of the country indicate important contrasts in social and economic structure, the distribution of these assessments within a more limited area, within which the collector may be assumed to have attempted to achieve some uniformity of practice, may yet be revealing.

The location of parishes with over 50% 'wages' assessments is illustrated by Map 5.<sup>46</sup> The actual values encountered are as follows: Dedham (52%), Langham (63.4%), Great Horkesley (51.9%), Stanway (54.1%), Wivenhoe (57.5%), Marks Tey (51.8%), White Colne (57%) and Earls Colne (50.1%). The first five of these eight





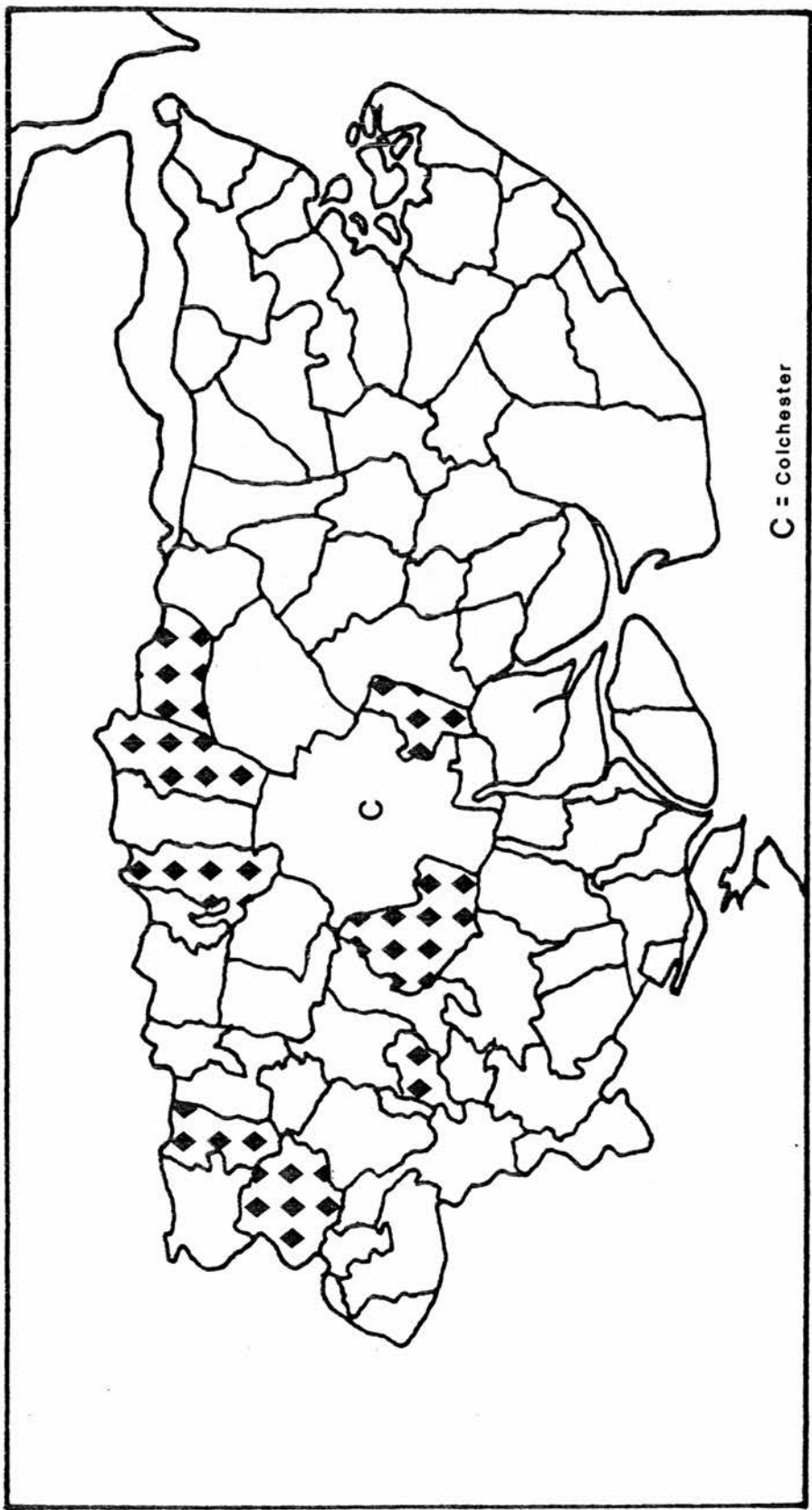
places, all in Lexden hundred, in which over one-half of the taxpaying population were assessed on wages, either border, or, in the case of Dedham, lie within two miles of the boundary of the Liberty of the borough of Colchester.

There is no statistical evidence to support a direct correlation between growth in taxable wealth and prominence of wage assessments; Spearman's Rank correlation tests applied to the data for Lexden and Winstree hundreds indicate no significant correlation at the 0.05 significance level. Such a test, of course, treats the parishes as discrete units; it is tempting to suppose, however, that the high levels of wage assessments in the parishes around Colchester might be associated with outworkers tributary to the borough's textile industry, with the wealth accruing in the centre.

The borough itself had a substantial number of assessments on wages; in 1524, 349 out of the 753 taxpayers were assessed on wages (46.3%). Of these, 103 had assessments other than the supposedly 'standard' 20s.; 78 were of 40s., 11 of 30s., 5 of 53s.4d., 2 of 46s.8d., 6 were "nil" assessments<sup>47</sup> and one has no value stated. The unusually high assessments at 46s.8d., and 53s.4d. were all made in St Leonard's parish, all but one on aliens. The distribution of wage assessments was uneven; individual parishes had between a quarter and two-thirds of their taxpaying population assessed on this basis. Appendix A illustrates this distribution, and also breaks the assessments by wealth categories for each parish; the order of parishes is that found in the original document.

Despite their large numbers, the wage-assessed individuals made only a modest contribution to the total assessed wealth of and tax paid by the borough; 20s. assessments paid 4d., 40s., 12d., as with

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MAP 5 : PARISHES WITH OVER 50% 'WAGES' ASSESSMENTS, 1524/5 LAY SUBSIDY

goods; 30s. paid 6d., 53s.4d., 16d. Aliens paid double rate, as they did also on goods assessments; the collectors seem to have had some difficulty working out the payments of the aliens with high wage assessments in St Leonard's parish. Thus while Denis Nyet paid 2s. on wages assessed at 53s.4d., John Lamberd paid 2s.4d. and Henry Petyrson 2s.8d.; this last would appear to be the correct sum as the only non-alien assessed on the same basis, Robert Lambe, paid 16d. Similarly, while Harman Frolyck was required to pay 2s.4d. on his wage assessment of 46s.8d., 2s.8d. was asked of Arnulph Newce. The total assessed wealth of the wage earning group was £436.10s., compared to the £600 assessment in goods of the town's richest man, John Crystmas of St James parish. The 32 individuals with assessments of over £40 had a combined taxable wealth of £2,418. It can thus be seen that, whatever the high relative tax-growth ratio of Colchester means it certainly did not mean a generally shared prosperity; the distribution of individuals amongst the taxpaying categories is little different in Colchester to that pertaining in a number of other boroughs with markedly inferior growth ratios.<sup>48</sup>

The question of the proportion of the borough's population who were not taxed at all will be tackled in the next chapter, where other indicators of the borough's wealth and changing fortune over the late medieval period are drawn upon.

It is of interest to compare the structure of the 1524 taxpaying population of Colchester with that of Dedham, a parish with a 1327:1524 growth ratio similar to that of the borough, and which, like Colchester, had a major interest in the textile industry. Although a much smaller community, with 153 taxed in 1524 as against

753 for Colchester (178 in 1525 as against 790)<sup>49</sup> there are certain broad similarities in structure as shown by Table XI.

TABLE XI: ASSESSED WEALTH, COLCHESTER AND DEDHAM, 1524

	No. of Individuals		Percentage	
	Colchester	Dedham	Colchester	Dedham
£100 +	6	2	0.8	1.3
£40-£99	26	2	3.5	1.3
£10-£39	82	8	10.9	5.2
£5-£9	75	8	10.0	5.2
30s-£4	308	60	40.9	39.2
20s/nil	256	73	34.0	47.7
Total	753	153	100.1	99.9
Wages	349	79	46.3	52.0

(Source: PRO, E179/108/154, 162)

Thus, the polarisation of wealth is just as striking in Dedham, and there is somewhat less of a middle-range of taxpayers: 10.4% assessed at £5-9, as against 20.9% at Colchester. The proportion of wage assessments is slightly higher at Dedham, and the percentage with 20s. or nil assessments more markedly so. Overall, given the differences in size and institutional structure between the two places, the similarities in taxpaying structure in 1524 might be thought more striking than the differences.

Taxation of income from lands and fees does not make a significant contribution to assessments or payments at either Colchester or Dedham. Of the ten people in the borough assessed on

this form of wealth, the highest payment was £2.15s. paid by Dame Elisabeth Baradyston, widow of St Mary at Walls parish, on an assessment of £55. William Breton, gentleman, of St Giles, paid 30s. on a £30 assessment. The other payments and assessments were two at 10s. (£10), one at 9s. (£9), three at 3s. (£3), one at 2s.4d. (48s.8d.) and one at 2s. (40s.). The total payment from this source, then, was £6.7s.4d., or 2.95% of the borough's total payment in 1524.

In Dedham, there were just three 'Lands' assessments in 1524, or 2% of the taxpayers, one of £4, paying 4s., the other two being 20s. assessments paying 12d. each. The total contribution was thus six shillings, just 0.75% of the parish's overall payment. The contribution of 'Lands' assessments to the tax of the rural parishes varied widely, but the numbers involved overall are higher than in Colchester; in Lexden hundred (excluding Colchester) a total of 56 people paid on Lands assessments, or 4.4% of the taxpayers. In Winstree the figure was 26, or 6.6% of the payers. Contributions of Lands assessments to the tax paid in those two hundreds range between zero in 13 cases and 34% at West Bergholt, where the only Lands and Fees assessment was one of £26.50

Two of the other prominent textile centres of northern Essex, Braintree (Hinckford hundred)<sup>51</sup> and Coggeshall (Lexden) have somewhat larger contributions from Lands/fees than does Dedham. At Braintree four payers on Lands contributed 18s.6d. out of the parish's total of £19.0s.6d., being 4.8%; at Coggeshall, however, 12 'Lands' payers paid £8, being fully 28% of the total payment of £28.12s.

The bandying about of such figures is meaningless without a clear understanding of the likely effect of 'Lands' assessments on the relative taxed wealth of places; if the 1327 and 1334 taxes were on moveable goods, by how much does the inclusion of Landed income in 1524 distort the comparison? In order to know this, we would have to know the value of the moveable goods possessed by the individuals on whom the collectors levied 'Lands' assessments. In the absence of such information one is thrown upon general observations; thus, a man taxed upon an annual income of 20s. from lands paid 12d., the same as one taxed upon moveables worth 40s.; similarly income from lands worth £10 per year paid 10s. tax, a payment which has no direct goods equivalent as £19 goods would pay 9s.6d., but £20, moving into the higher rate category, 20s. At £20 and above assessed value of goods and assessed annual income from lands paid at the same rate, 1s. in the £1.

Thus, if we hypothesise the existence of two parishes, one with ten taxpayers, each having goods worth £10 and lands with an annual value of £4, and another where each person had goods worth, again, £10 each, but annual income worth £6 each, it will be seen that a quite different picture will emerge. In the first parish the tax yield of the £10 goods at 5s. per head outweighs the £4 lands, which would yield 4s. per head; only the goods assessments will appear in the returns, giving a total assessed value of £100, and a total payment of £2.10s. In the second parish, the lands assessments yield 6s. per head; thus they alone will be given in the returns, the total assessed value will appear as £60 and the total payment as £3. Two parishes with identical values of moveable goods could

thus have markedly different total assessed values and payments, in theory at least.

In practice, such a concentration of landed wealth, spread throughout a taxpaying population, is rarely or never encountered. The distortion effect, such as it is, is likely to be confined to a slight inflation of payments and reduction of assessments for places where there is some concentration of 'Lands' assessments of under £20. This effect in north-east Essex is likely to slightly inflate the payments of the rural hundreds vis a vis the borough of Colchester.

A source does in fact exist which gives some clue as to the relative importance of income from 'Lands', but it relates only to the borough of Colchester itself, with its dependent hamlets within the Liberty. This document, contained within that part of the Morant collection incorporated into the Stowe Manuscripts in the British Library, appears to be the original collectors' book for the 1524-5 subsidy.<sup>52</sup> This identification can be made on the basis of content and organisation. Assessments are given on moveable goods, annual value of lands and tenements, and wages, this last being unique to the subsidy of 1524-5. The order of taxpayers follows to a large degree that found in the returns in the Exchequer, and alterations can be seen in the assessments of wealth which in many cases - though not in all - correspond to the revisions found in the 1525 Exchequer account compared to that for 1524. The document is incomplete, missing folios at the beginning and end - regrettably the wealthy parish of St James is not covered at all in the surviving folios - but each parish which is included has a



different number of names from that found in either the 1524 or the 1525 Exchequer returns.<sup>53</sup>

It is difficult to be precise about the figures in this 'collectors book' as there are many deletions, alterations and marginal notes of uncertain meaning, which probably reflect deaths, movement between parishes and into and out of the borough during the period of the 1524-5 subsidy. Some, however, are clearly individuals who were adjudged too poor to appear in the lists submitted to the Exchequer; names with 'nil' assessments, subsequently deleted; in Chapter 3 an attempt has been made to analyse the lists in order to shed some light on what proportion of the population was not taxed at all in 1525-5.

For the present purpose, the most interesting aspect of the document lies in the fact that for certain individuals the compiler included an assessment for more than one form of wealth. In some cases one of the assessments is deleted; this is most commonly so when moveables and wages are involved. In other places, both entries are allowed to stand. It appears that the compiler of the book was somewhat uncertain as to how to proceed; the folios are set out in columns, thus: 'Lands and Tenements by the yere', 'Goods, Moveables', 'Profytes for Wages', 'Takyng no Wage'. However, the entries are somewhat out of phase with the headings; the name is entered under the first column together with the value of Lands etc., if any, while in the last column is entered the amount paid.

The entries where both 'Lands' and 'Goods' assessments are found, or where the basis of assessment differs from that of 1524, are reproduced in Appendix B. It will be seen that there is a



heavy concentration of these dual assessments in St Peter's parish. Why this intra-mural parish should be prominent in this regard is not clear, and it seems probable that the sub-collectors here were less certain about their procedures. In any case, the list forms, at the least, an interesting (if biased) sample of urban taxpayers. The most noteworthy feature is the prominence of small incomes from property, hidden from view in the Exchequer returns by larger Goods assessments. In most cases, one may guess, these represent incomes from urban properties; many are likely to be annual rents bequeathed by testament, particularly in the case of the widows named.

In some cases, however, the assessments are much closer in value and it is by no means clear that the collectors have chosen the highest-paying source for the 1524 Exchequer list, as they should have done; thus the 5 marks income from lands of John Wheler of St Leonards parish should pay 3s.4d. tax, whereas the £4 goods assessment rendering only 2s. was preferred in 1524. Similarly, Richard Hardy of St Peter is assessed at 40s. on 'lands' and 40s. in 'goods' in the 'tax book', but the goods assessment, paying less, was used in the Exchequer return. In two cases (Widow Tolton, St Peters, and John Person, St Runwald) where 'goods' and 'lands' assessments would have yielded the same amount of tax, the goods assessments have been preferred in 1524. There thus appears to be a reluctance to tax on lands, perhaps because of the hardship the higher rate would have meant for some of the poorer taxpayers.

In only two cases, both from St Giles parish, do we see the assessed value of moveables hidden behind the 'Lands' assessments of 1524.<sup>54</sup> One of these illustrates the paradox outlined earlier:

had the tax been only on moveables, William Nicholl would have had a higher 'assessed value', but would have paid less tax (2s. as against 3s.). In the case of William Breton, however, both 'assessed value' and payment would have been two-thirds the actual figures used in 1524.

The position in the 'collectors book' as regards wages and goods assessments is much more complicated, owing to the many deletions, alterations and revaluations in evidence. This points to the fluidity of the categories, and warns against making too much of minor variations in the proportion of wage assessments. In Appendix C the variations and amendments found for one parish, St Leonards, are presented as an example. One implication which may be drawn is that some at least of the people who appear as recipients of wages owned goods worth more, sometimes perhaps significantly more, than the taxable minimum. Conversely, and perhaps less surprisingly, many of those taxed on moveables were in receipt of appreciable 'wage' incomes. What is not clear, however, and on the basis of names alone cannot be discovered, is whether the purported 'wages' of 40, 50, 60s. and more deleted from the 'taxbooks' represent actual salaries of servants, journeymen, labourers etc., or whether some may not represent the estimated receipts from the sale of products by small independent craftsmen.

### Conclusion

Plainly the problems of lay subsidy interpretation are legion; equally plainly, the questions raised by Bridbury and rephrased by

Rigby cannot be settled internally, e.g. solely by interrogation of the subsidies themselves. Too many questions remain unanswered, indeed unanswerable.

Perhaps the most important finding obtained from analysing the subsidy returns is the degree to which growth in taxable wealth was localised. The parish growth ratios suggest that, far from there being any clear pattern of regional development, there were a small number of places - of which the borough of Colchester was one - which experienced a very substantial growth of taxable wealth. Often such places adjoin parishes with extremely low growth ratios. While the nature of the 1524-5 subsidy may exaggerate these contrasts, it seems probable that they are in large part a reflection of real differences in economic fortunes. Similarly, the evidence suggests that the tapping of wages and landed income in 1524-5 has relatively little influence on the differential growth in taxable wealth shown in Tables VIII to X.

Prominent amongst the places with the highest growth ratios are small ports, and places known to have had interests in textile manufacture or marketing. Colchester is unique in the absolute growth of its taxed wealth, but not in the scale (ratio) of this growth. In order to discover the significance of this movement it is necessary to go beyond the taxation evidence. It is to other sources bearing on the prosperity of later medieval Colchester that we will now turn, in order to assess the validity of the story told by the lay subsidies.

## CHAPTER 3

### COLCHESTER, 1310 TO 1560: GROWTH OR DECLINE?

In the present chapter a range of sources - some quantifiable, others not - internal to Colchester will be examined to try to establish a clearer picture of the borough's fortunes between the earlier fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries; records of decays of civic property, the leases of tolls, evidence as to the evasion of office, and various sources which can be used to attempt to generate population estimates. While the evidence of these sources may sometimes appear to be mutually contradictory, a link between various developments in the later medieval period is suggested.

#### Decays

One of the most apparently suggestive indicators of changing economic fortunes lies in the record of decays and dilapidations of civic property which are found in the borough court rolls. On examination however this type of evidence, like so many others, appears less than clear cut. As usual we are at the mercy of records, and have always to heed the possibility that what appears at first sight a newly emerging or increasingly significant phenomenon may in fact be a product of a change in administrative or clerical procedure. Nevertheless, the evidence of 'decays' is sufficiently interesting in itself to merit serious attention.

From the earliest surviving record the Colchester court rolls contain numerous examples of individuals being presented before the

Lawhundred for having either allowed their own property to decay in such a manner as to endanger their neighbours or the community at large, or causing damage to civic property or amenities. The types of matters within the purview of the Lawhundred juries are set out within the borough's Oath Book, and include obstructions and encroachments in the highway and on the water, diversions of watercourses from their customary channels, unscoured ditches, unwarranted digging of gravel, clay and sand, removing stone from the town wall or the "lokks, keys or chenys longying to the gats of Colchester" and the keeping of "noyabill dunggills" within the town.<sup>1</sup>

Presentments of men and women for committing these and numerous similar offences are frequent, from the early fourteenth through to the mid-sixteenth centuries, and no doubt beyond. A new phenomenon emerges however, around the middle of the fifteenth century; alongside the presentment of these individuals, burgess and foreign alike, begin to appear regular presentments of town officers, namely the successive Chamberlains, for failure to maintain or repair certain items of civic property, most commonly the bridges of the town.

The real 'take off' point for the appearance of these decays in the court-rolls can be pin-pointed as the year 1455-6; in this year the Lawhundred jury present that "the Chamberlain ought to make a bridge called le Northbregg and not allow it to lie unrepaired."<sup>2</sup> This was not the first time the Chamberlain had been in trouble with the court - three years earlier a "tumble-down latrine" in the garden of the town hall had caught the eyes (and noses?) of the

jurors - but it marks the start of the regular appearance of unsound or ruinous bridges in the rolls.<sup>3</sup>

The next year, Northbridge is still "unrepaired at its foundation", and the Chamberlain's problems increase as the East Bridge is now said to be "broken in ruins". Furthermore, he is now required to "make a bridge called Fallyngbridge, near Milend, to wit with rails in the sides".<sup>4</sup> While we do not hear of East Bridge in 1457-8, North Bridge remains "in a state of ruin" and the Chamberlain is faced with a fine of 100s. for failure to repair it.<sup>5</sup> North Bridge is still in its sorry state (or re-broken?) in 1458/9 while 'Fallyngbridge' has not yet been made.<sup>6</sup> The following year we hear only of a bridge at "Dandhill" in a state of ruin and the Chamberlain appears to have some temporary remission from his troubles.<sup>7</sup> However, by 1463-4 North Bridge is again being described as "ruinous" while a quay held by the Chamberlain at New Hythe is also in "a state of ruin" and the Butterstalls are "destroyed";<sup>8</sup> at the second Lawhundred of this year the presentments against the Chamberlain are extended and all brought together by the clerk, thus:

The Town Chamberlain holds the bridge called Estbregge, the bridge called North-bregge, the bridge called Fallyngbregge, the stalls called lez Chesestalles and a gutter at the end of Stokwellstrete in a ruinous condition, in mercy, 6s.8d. <sup>9</sup>

A more or less similar list is found in the next surviving rolls, those of 1466-7.<sup>10</sup>

A temporary respite then ensues as to the bridges, but now the Chamberlain has to worry about the town gates; 'le Southgate' is "ruinous and destroyed" in 1470,<sup>11</sup> joined in this sorry state by Headgate in 1473-4; in this last year the jury contends that the

Chamberlain has failed to take proper care of the keys and bolts, iron bars and posts of East Gate and "the ports of Morestrete and Magdaleyn Lane" so that all have become "dilapidated".<sup>12</sup>

In 1477-8 East Bridge and North Bridge are once again described as being in a "ruinous condition" as is "a Bridge called Franchisbregge leading towards Neylond".<sup>13</sup>

As we move into the 1480s, matters do not improve; Northbridge remains ruinous, East Bridge needs repairing, and the wretched Chamberlain has, in failing to mend the North Gate, "thrown half the said gate into the King's Way".<sup>14</sup> An unrepaired Bridge at Milend comes to the notice of the jury in 1484-5, the last year for which court rolls survive until the reign of King Henry VIII.<sup>15</sup>

When, after a gap of 34 years the rolls resume, they still bear witness to the Chamberlain's recurring difficulty in maintaining corporate property to the satisfaction of the Lawhundred jurors. The Chamberlain in office in January 1510 "has not yet caused to be repaired" North Bridge and 'Fallyngbregge' which is "very hurtful to the people travelling there".<sup>16</sup> Presentments regarding these two bridges occur throughout the ensuing decade, together with East Bridge,<sup>17</sup> the bridge "beyond Milend Church",<sup>18</sup> the Town Houses,<sup>19</sup> and common passages.<sup>20</sup>

The regular presentments of the Chamberlain disappear in the years following 1520, whether because repairs were being adequately done or because the jury had given up hope is a matter for guesswork; however this may be, North Bridge and Fallyngbregge reappear in the rolls for 1533-4 because of "lake of Reparacyons";<sup>21</sup> but this proves to be an isolated appearance, rather than the start of a new series of presentments. Nothing more is heard of the town



gates in connection with the Chamberlain's responsibilities; it may not be entirely coincidental that William Thursteyn, an Alderman of the Borough was fined 40s. in 1540-1 for "selling the gate of the town at St. Botolphs" and in the same year "selling the gates [plural] of the town" for £10.<sup>22</sup>

There may be a connection between the fact that in 1544-5 the organisation of the borough courts is changed, with Sessions of the Peace taking over much of the work of the Lawhundred, and the reappearance, in the same year, of bridge presentments; "le Hethebredge and Estbredge" are ruinous; "the town of Colchester" ought to repair them, various gutters and the highway at St. Botolph's;<sup>23</sup> similarly, next year the Northbridge and 'Geyes Bredge' ought to be amended by the Chamberlain.<sup>24</sup>

Such presentments become sporadic again, however; in 1550-1 the stone walls in Hedward should be repaired.<sup>25</sup> In the middle of the 1550s bridges at 'Daundhyll' and 'Rovers Tye' are in need of repair, while the stone bridge at Milend is in a condition such that "neither horse-riders nor carts can pass by there without great danger".<sup>26</sup> "Dand Hill Bredge" is ruinous by 1559-60.<sup>27</sup>

The impression gained, then, from the court roll presentments is that decay of civic property, notably bridges, comes to be a serious problem in the mid-fifteenth century, that it continues to be such and possibly gets worse in ensuing decades, and is still a problem at the resumption of the rolls in 1509-10. After c.1520, however, presentments become sporadic and generally less dramatic in their language, suggesting that the situation was less serious.

Is this, then, evidence of economic difficulty or decline, an inability to maintain the urban fabric in the later fifteenth and



early sixteenth centuries? Plainly, there was a serious problem, but its explanation is far from simple.

The first point to be made is that the Chamberlain of the borough was not alone in his trouble with bridges. In 1451-2, some years before the Chamberlain began to make his regular appearances in the court rolls, we find Sir Thomas Cobham, the Lord of Lexden manor, which comprised lands within and without the Liberty of the borough of Colchester, presented at the Lawhundred court for not repairing a bridge. This is "the bridge called Park bregge near Lexden Park"; it is "ruinous and broken" and Cobham is fined 20s.,<sup>28</sup> increasing to 40s. in 1455-6.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, he holds a bridge "in a state of ruin and destroyed" between the mills of Lexden" and is charged 12d. for this offence.<sup>30</sup> Next year Parkbregge is still not fixed, and the jury impose a fine of 6 marks, while the Lexden mills bridge incurs 3s.4d.<sup>31</sup>

While the 'mills' bridge drops from sight, Park Bridge continues to appear regularly in the presentments of the jury, just like those for which the Chamberlain was responsible, and the jurors become more and more colourful in their depiction of its pitiable condition; in 1458-9 it is "in ruins and broken down to the grave nuisance of the whole people of the King passing the bridge, and of the whole country".<sup>32</sup> By the middle of the next decade the manor has a new incumbent and in 1466-7 it is asserted that the lady of the manor "ought by right to make and repair two bridges near Lexden Park".<sup>33</sup> It may be that the lady agreed with the jury, for the Lexden Park Bridges disappear from view after this date.

The coincidence of the appearance of regular presentments regarding the borough's bridges and those of Lexden manor in the

1450s seems to indicate one of two things. Either the Lawhundred jury were, for some reason, suddenly inspired with an interest in bridges which their predecessors had never shown, or bridges at various places within the town and Liberty really were in worse condition than previously. The first option seems unlikely; a broken down bridge would indubitably constitute an obstruction, either to the highway or to "the water", or both, and, thus fall within the purview of the Lawhundred. If the bridges really were deteriorating, the question is why?

Badly built stone bridges may fall down by themselves, wooden bridges have limited life-spans; the minor bridges within the Liberty would almost certainly have been fairly flimsy wooden structures like the one that Thomas Wynter, clerk, broke and "carried away" in 1474.<sup>34</sup> The more important ones, such as North and East Bridges were probably partly stone and partly wood at this date; when the leading inhabitants of St. Leonard's parish were given permission to erect a bridge over the river at New Hythe "for all maner people thereon to passe as well with hors and cartes as otherwise" it was to be "of Stone or Tymber, or bothe".<sup>35</sup>

The principal cause of such bridges becoming damaged or dilapidated might reasonably be thought to be heavy use, particularly by carts and pack-horses. The court rolls document a number of cases of such damage; in 1466-7 it is presented that "William Man with his two-wheeled cart broke the bridge called Le Northbregge";<sup>36</sup> in 1481-2 it is claimed that "Richard Frende, farmer of Bergholt halle and Robert Nicoll of Bergholt are in the habit of breaking the bridge called Northbregge with their wagons".<sup>37</sup> On these occasions the offenders were fined 12d, and

6d. respectively, but when Richard Frende was again charged with "bracking" North Bridge later in 1482, the more substantial penalty of 3s.4d. was exacted.<sup>38</sup>

In the words of Jusserand, "the chronicle of even the most important of English Bridges ... is a long tale of falls into the river, re-buildings and repair, and ever recurring catastrophes;" In the absence of proper maintenance "the arches wore through, the parapets were detached, not a cart passed but fresh stones disappeared in the river".<sup>39</sup> But why should the Chamberlain of Colchester have been unable to provide such maintenance?

#### The Office of Chamberlain

The Chamberlain was in overall charge of the finances of the borough; he had to account for all receipts and disbursements and all expenditure had to be approved by a majority of the Aldermen of the town, or by a minority plus the two Bailiffs, the town's principal officers.<sup>40</sup> In the event of a shortfall of income vis a vis expenditure, the Chamberlain seems to have been expected to make it good himself, and then to throw himself upon the generosity of the Aldermen.

Unfortunately virtually all the early Chamberlain's accounts are lost and it is necessary to reconstruct aspects of the borough's finances from the records of certain items of expenditure or receipt which appear, though sometimes intermittently, in the court rolls. The Chamberlain's account for one complete year, 1548-9, is however preserved among the Colchester documents in the Stowe manuscripts.<sup>41</sup>

The office of Chamberlain (earlier called 'Receiver') had been developed in the 1370s, in part as a check upon the abuses of power and unregulated expenditure of the communities' money by the Bailiffs; at the same time the body of 'Auditors', later Aldermen, was brought into being.<sup>42</sup> The borough exercised the right to raise levies, tallage, etc. on the inhabitants of the town and Liberty from time to time to meet special expenditure needs; in 1311-12 we hear of "a tallage assessed throughout the whole community for the repair of the Walls and Gates of the Borough".<sup>43</sup> While at this early date such a levy might have been handled, or overseen, directly by the Bailiffs, in later times the implementation of such a charge would be the concern of the Chamberlains. Two Chamberlains were elected each year from 1372 until the later 15th century, from which period a single office-holder was normal.

The account surviving from 1548-9, although for an isolated year, almost certainly an atypical one, indicates the range of matters to which the Chamberlain had to attend, and the resources available to him. First are listed the receipts; the rents of borough property, fines, and amercements of keepers of inns and alehouses, the lease of customs and tolls, rents from the borough fields, fines raised at Sessions of the Peace, the value of goods of fugitives.<sup>44</sup> Also listed is the receipt of fines from the three burgesses who paid for admission in this year. There then follows an extraordinary levy in aid of the harbour at the Hythe. This is considered in detail later, but suffice it to say that of the total receipts for the year £439.13s.9d., no less than £278.12.7d. appear to have been contributions towards this end.

Expenditure is again grossly inflated by work at the Hythe, but also includes payment of the borough's fee farm of £37,45 considerable expenses for food and drink, payments of stipends to certain borough officers, miscellaneous tasks including removal of dunghills and, mirabile dictu, bridge repairs. A payment to Thomas Carpenter was authorised on 29th November for "amendynge the Estbridge for 12 days of him and his man at 20d. the day, 20s."<sup>46</sup> A further 2s.4d. was expended on carrying 1,442 feet of 'plank' and 40 "foot square Tymbers" to the bridge.<sup>47</sup>

Total expenditure for the year was £456.11s.2½d. and the Chamberlain was thus obliged to note that the town owed him £16.17s.5½d. Plainly, the year 1548-9 was one of exceptional income and exceptional expenditure for the borough. Nevertheless there is reason to believe that the problem of budget deficit was by no means unusual. Evasion of office, which has often been cited as a symptom of urban decline in other towns, becomes prominent in Colchester by the early 16th century but was largely confined to the Chamberlainship.<sup>48</sup> The position could only be held for one year, non-renewable, and was, in effect, a spring-board to high office; virtually all the Aldermen of the town appear to have served as Chamberlain at earlier stages in their careers. Despite this, men seem to have been eager to avoid the position, being prepared to pay substantial fines in order to do so. Plainly, this must have been because the office was not only onerous but also highly expensive to the holder. There was clearly no guarantee that any shortfall made up from the Chamberlain's own pocket would be refunded and, even if it were, he would still have to wait until after the end of the financial year for repayment.

The run of regular refusals of office appears to begin in the year 1510-11; this, however, is only the second year for which court rolls survive after the quarter-century "break", and the previous year's rolls are missing the first membranes, which normally contain the record of elections to the various offices. Evasion could thus have started much earlier than 1510, but we cannot be sure.<sup>49</sup>

The first man in this sequence Peter Borough pleaded ill health for declining the office, claiming to be "troubled daily with various infirmities"; by the "mediation of his friends" he sought to be excused "for a reasonable fine". The Bailiffs and council decided that this should be allowed, and pitched the fine at 20s. However, they also adjudged that Borough should lose his freedom; only through renewed "mediation" on the part of his friends was Borough re-admitted a free burgess, on payment of a further 20s.<sup>50</sup>

One should perhaps not feel too indignant about this seemingly harsh treatment of a sick man however, as the court rolls for the following year contain an entry relating to the exemption of John Baddyng from the same office, phrased in exactly the same terms - infirmities, mediation of friends, expulsion and readmission to the freedom.<sup>51</sup>

There are no further avoidances of office until the end of the decade, and the ensuing ones are phrased in much more direct manner; it seems possible that simple rejection of office-holding was a new and somewhat strange idea, and that these early cases had to be "dressed up" for the record. Not so in the case of Thomas Nothak elected in 1519-20; "immediately after the election, on the same day came the aforesaid Thomas Nothak and refused the office of

Chamberlain". Nothak was fined 40s., which is of course is the same as the fine and "re-admission" payment of the earlier cases.<sup>52</sup>

The following year William Debenham, previously Bailiff, refused office as an Alderman, but this appears to have had more to do with political or personal enmity than economics; the court rolls record the details of Debenham's public quarrel with John Coll, Bailiff, in which insults were exchanged, including accusations of heretical relations and conspiracy; Coll accused Debenham of "jesting behind [the] backs of this Town" with some unnamed ally but Debenham retorted "thou lvest in thy face" and quit the council meeting. Subsequently Debenham was fined £5 for refusal of office, and imprisoned for his alleged slander.<sup>53</sup>

In 1521-2 John Mytche "renounced entirely" the Chamberlain's office. The record states that the Bailiffs and Aldermen, after considering the matter in the Council Chamber, decided that the fine for declining the office should henceforth be 100s.; Mytche himself, because of his "humble submission and previous good will" was to have 33s.4d. remitted, and thus paid £3.6s.8d.<sup>54</sup>

Despite these substantial fines, evasion of the office continued to occur; Table XII summarises all the recorded refusals between 1510 and 1560:-



TABLE XII: EVASION OF CHAMBERLAIN'S OFFICE, 1510-60

Year	Name	Fine
1510-11	Peter Borough	40s.
1511-12	John Baddyng	40s.
1519-20	Thomas Nothak	40s.
1521-2	John Mytche	66s.8d.
1526-7	Thomas Salman	unknown
1533-4	Rihard Shelbury	40s.
1534-4	Walter Vessy	unknown
1542-3	Robert Flyngaunt	£3.6s.8d.
1542-3	Robert Maynard	£3.6s.8d.
1543-4	John Archer	£3.6s.8d.
1544-5	John Archer of Lexden	£3.6s.8d.
1533-4	Robert Northon	£3.6s.8d.
1554-5	William Stache	£3.6s.8d.
1554-5	Nicholas Maynard	£3.6s.8d.
1554-5	John Foule	£3.6s.8d.
1555-6	Richard Godfrey	£3.6s.8d.
1555-6	William Cornewell	£3.6s.8d.
1555-6	Richard Lambard	£3.6s.8d.
1555-6	William Peverell	£3.6s.8d.
1557-8	Richard Stowers	£3.6s.8d.
1557-8	Jaques Thomson	£3.6s.8d.
1558-9	William Danyell	£3.6s.8d.

(Source: C.C.R., vols. 21-25).

Note: Court rolls lost for 1512-13, 1523-4, 1528-9, 1546-7, 1548-9, 1552-3, 1556-7.

It will be noted that the 100s. fine was never imposed and that the £3.6s.8d became standard with the exception of the year 1533-4. This standardisation meant, of course, a decline in real terms as inflation began to take hold towards mid-century; the Phelps Brown and Hopkins index for the price of a composite unit of consumables rises from around the 100 mark in 1510-11 to c.200 by the mid 'forties, and averages 289 during the 1550s.<sup>55</sup> The number of exemptions around mid-century might, perhaps, have been lower had the fine been raised accordingly; the next recorded evasions after



1560 were fined £6.13s.4d. in 1563-4, payable in instalments and £5 in 1578 and 1571-2,<sup>58</sup> £7, £6, and £10 in 1573-3.<sup>59</sup> By 1570 a major problem of Aldermanic evasion seems to have set in, punishable by much higher fines even than these.

Nevertheless, there was clearly recurring resistance to holding the office of Chamberlain, and the financial losses likely to be incurred were perceived to be worse than the fines imposed in those years. The revenues available to the Chamberlain in 1548-9 (a year for which, unfortunately, court rolls do not survive) might be thought slender enough for a town of several thousand inhabitants when the exceptional Hythe contributions are deducted; is there any evidence that they had been declining?

In the absence of Chamberlain's accounts it is not possible to build a complete picture of the town's revenues. The court rolls do, however, contain sporadic record of one of the principal sources, the leasing of the tolls and associated charges. These leases are far from straightforward, because of frequent re-organisation and changes in the recorded list of assets and customs leased.

### The Tolls

The right of the burgesses of Colchester to collect tolls or customs on all goods coming to or passing through their borough was rooted in its royal charters and grants, the earliest surviving being the charter of Richard I, dating from 1189; this gave them "the customs of the water and bank" [of the river Colne] to assist

in payment of their fee-farm, and refers to earlier grants and confirmations of customs and markets.<sup>60</sup>

Later charters confirmed or re-defined these privileges, and more closely defined the liberty or 'precinct' within which they were to pertain; in 1447 this was said to include "the vill ... of Colchester and ... the hamlets of Lexden, Milend, Grinsted and Donyland ... and from Northbrigge up to Westnesse", while "all the places called the creeks of the same water within the precinct aforesaid" were specifically included in 1462.<sup>61</sup> The Charter of this latter year emphasised that none should presume "to sell or buy any merchandizes coming by that water in ships or other vessels ... except at the Nowa Hethe of the borough aforesaid" under pain of forfeiting both cargo and vessel. The only exemption from this provision was to be for those who purchased victuals solely for household consumption.

The town felt the need to issue proclamations itself on occasion, as in 1256 and 1380, stating the right of the Burgesses to take tolls from "such merchants as are chargeable to payment of custom, buyers and sellers, within the Liberty".<sup>62</sup> Entries in the rolls at various dates further define the practices of toll collection, as in 1509-10 when it was asserted that "from time immemorial ... the Chamberlain of the town ... has been accustomed to accept the due and accustomed tolls and levy for each and all persons whatsoever who have ... recourse within and through the town either with carts with horses laden with packs".<sup>63</sup>

The Oath Book contains a list of customs payable on various goods "usinge by old tyme with owtyn ony mynde at the Burgh and Havene of Colchestre".<sup>64</sup> This itemises many different types of

timber, armour, provisions, leather cloth, etc., and the rates payable on each. For example, "delys" (deal boards) paid 6d. the hundred, wax 2d. per hundred pounds weight, "fressh cloth" or "brod wollcloth" 1d. per piece, but "cloth of gold" 4d. per piece; fullers earth paid 4d. "for the bolck", as did each "bolck" of grain.

It is stated that "a man that is free and be fela to a stranger and the good nouzt departyd it [is] cusumable". The implication of this is that the goods of a free burgess, if not intermixed with those of a 'foreigner', were exempt from payment of tolls. This accords with the frequently encountered assertion of the burgesses' toll-free status; e.g. in 1376 John Bryde, baker, claimed he was a burgess of the town and thus "free to buy and sell at Heth without custom"; while prosecutions for evasion of toll almost always specify that the offender is "a foreigner" or "not a Burgess".<sup>65</sup>

However Morant, quoting from later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, gives a list of "customs, rates and duties" to be paid by "every Free-burgess of this town" to the Water Bailiff at the Hythe, whose right thereto, he claims, had been "enjoyed by prescription ever since the reigns of King Henry the I and II".<sup>66</sup> It appears, though, that the free burgesses' payments relate not directly to custom or toll but to such specific fees as "measurage" and "crainage" payable for use (probably compulsory) of the borough's official weights and measures, lifting apparatus etc. The issue of payment or freedom from toll is, then, not clear-cut, but as regards custom sensu strictu it seems that burgesses were exempt, except when in partnership with non-burgesses (whether outsiders or inhabiting "foreigners").

The records we have of the Colchester tolls relate not to the actual amounts collected, but to their annual farm or lease to individuals for sums set in advance. It can be assumed, however, that the amount of the farm bears a reasonably close relation to the actual revenue; the borough wished to maximise its income while the 'farmer' would not willingly take on the job at a loss to himself.<sup>67</sup> However, for the greater part of the fourteenth century the sum paid for the lease appears to have been more or less fixed by tradition; after the 1380s fluctuation becomes normal and trends can be identified, suggesting a responsiveness to real changes in revenue.

There were three main components to the tolls during the period for which we have most information, the fifteenth century; the "town tolls", presumably collected on goods carried by land, the lease of the "wool hall" and certain market stalls in the borough, and the "Hythe tolls", representing the various charges levied on goods brought by water to the borough's harbour in St Leonard's parish. At some periods these categories are recorded separately, at others they appear to be amalgamated in a single lease, and sometimes the categories fragment further into their compound parts. These variations in the record mean that it is necessary to examine separately each year for which leases are noted, to attempt to ensure that unlike leases are not being compared and false trends thereby created. Appendix D presents all the recorded leases in tabular form.

The early records refer simply to the lease of the "tolls of Colchester", and are found at the level of £35 in 1310-11 and 1311-12.<sup>68</sup> In the first year the lease was to two men, who found a total of 12 pledges for performance of the office; in the second a

sole lessee is recorded, with eight pledges. It may be assumed that these leases covered all tolls on land and waterborne goods. The Oath of the Farmer, dating from the administrative reorganization of 1372, obliges that officer to collect, "or cause to be collected by other persons duly sworn before the Bailiffs", all customs and tolls "both by land and water".<sup>69</sup>

Further record of tolls lease is not found until 1345; the agreement enrolled in that year is worth quoting:

John atte Halle, senior, Farmer of the Bailiffs and Commonalty, swore that he would collect or cause to be collected the customs and tolls belonging to the King and Commonality of Colchester, that he will allow no-one to go free who ought to pay nor take from anyone who ought to go free, that no-one shall share the said farm without the Bailiffs' assent, and that he will pay for the said farm £35 on Exaltation of the Holy Cross Day [14 Sept.] or when ordered by the Bailiffs, and he finds pledges ... 70

The lease remains at the same level in 1351 and 1353 the first recorded demises after the Black Death; in 1356 however, the "customs and tolls of the town" are leased for £35.6s.8d.<sup>71</sup> Whatever the reasons for this modest increment, it was apparently not sustained, as the lease in 1359 was once again for £35.<sup>72</sup>

After 13 years of silence we find the tolls still at this traditional level in 1372. Two years later, however, the court rolls record that Augustine Plomer paid £35 plus an additional £6.13s.4d. An entry in the Red Paper Book sheds some light on this new development; it is recorded that, among a number of worthy deeds carried out by one of the Bailiffs, Wm Reyne, is the following act of persuasion:

On Monday next after the feast of St Michael the Archangel ... the sworn four and twenty elected Augustine Plomer as Farmer of the ... town, for the coming year; with whom the

aforesaid William Reyne ... dealt ... in so careful a manner and with such pleasant words that the same Augustine agreed to pay to the same Bailiffs and commonalty, for the said farm, the usual thirty-five pounds, and moreover at the end of the year a further one hundred shillings for the repair of the hall of the afore said commonalty, and not that he should increase the said rent to that extent. For all which matters the same Augustine gave sufficient security ... 73

The reference to the 'usual' £35 seems to confirm that this sum was indeed fixed by custom. It is hardly likely to be a coincidence that £35 was the amount of the borough's fee farm; the right to gather tolls was a privilege granted by the crown, and the sums thus gathered were used to meet the crown's exactions. An awareness that revenues had risen to an appreciable extent, or an exceptional need for money, would be needed to break this simple equation. The supplementary sum required in 1374 is thus made to appear an extraordinary augmentation for a specific purpose. However, a similar ploy was used again the next year when the Farmer, again Plomer, agreed to pay an additional £6.13s.4d. because of the "immense burdens and expenses of the town"; again the excess is payable "without any will or intention of increasing the receipts of his farm to a corresponding extent".<sup>74</sup>

Clearly, however, good will and "pleasant words" would be unlikely to have effected such an augmentation if the farm of the tolls had not been providing Plomer with a healthy income.<sup>75</sup>

By the use of "very honied words" Reyne (who may have written the account of these proceedings himself) also persuaded the newly elected 'Measurer at the Hythe' to pay 50s for holding his office in 1374-5; the following year this lease was increased to £3.16s.8d.<sup>76</sup>

This complicates matters; the Measurer extracted payment for the use of authorised weights and measures on goods brought to the

Hythe, but these payments are here clearly regarded as distinct from the tolls proper. Thus, these small sums cannot be seen as precursors of the much larger sums raised in later years from the farm of the New Hythe tolls, although the Measurage did at length become compounded with these tolls. References are found to a further office, that of Clerk of the Market; this official seems to have been responsible for weights and measures used in the town markets as opposed to the Hythe, but there is no record of lease of any independent town 'measurage'. The Clerk of the Market may have worked under the supervision of - or may sometimes have been identical with - the Farmer.<sup>77</sup>

Reyne had not yet finished his financial reforms; observing that a certain Thomas Deynes was accustomed to hold a wool sale for his own profit, without licence, Reyne decided that it should be transferred to the cellar of the common hall, suitably renovated, which he (Reyne) would rent for 50 shillings:

Not long afterwards it happened that the said William demised the said cellar to various merchants of the country in separate lets for one year next following for four pounds, which monies the said William allowed to be applied in full to the benefit of the whole commonalty. <sup>78</sup>

This was in 1374; the next year was not quite so successful, and the rent received from "various wool dealers" was £3.10s.<sup>79</sup> Whether or not the account of Reyne's part in this and the other matters can be regarded as strictly accurate, this does appear to be the origin of the regular leasings of the wool hall which appear in the court rolls around the turn of the century. At that time the lease takes the form of a farm of the whole hall to an individual, who would then presumably sublet stalls in the manner above described; it may be that the principal "farm" remained in the



hands of the Bailiffs until these regular leases commence.

After this eventful period there is no surviving reference to leases for 13 years (excepting a reference to Thomas Bateman's position as Measurer at Hythe in 1385-6, with no note as to the rent).<sup>80</sup> In 1387 the court rolls record that all the customs and tolls "as by land so by water" are leased to John Caperoun for £35. Immediately following this is noted a two-year lease for £14 (in the form of two 'moieties', one each to William Dod and Richard Smyth) of the "farm of the new crane", the "weighing of all merchandise at Heath ... except the place of John Seburgh" together with "the measuring at Heath".<sup>81</sup>

Thus we have lumped together at a lease of £7 per annum the 'measurage', weighing and 'Cranage' at the Hythe - all the 'service charges', in effect.

The next surviving court rolls, those for 1391-2, record "the tolls" (undifferentiated) being leased for £40;<sup>82</sup> whether this includes the measurage etc. is uncertain, but this appears to be the first increase in the 'basic' figure, excepting the instances from the 1370s where special reasons are adduced for temporary augmentation. The following year sees "the customs and tolls" leased to William Dod for £15, the "customs and tolls of New Heth" to Robert Haukelsere for £17. In addition the 'new crane' and measurage are granted to William Wytham, but no sum is specified.<sup>83</sup> Here then is proof that the measurage and cranage ~~is~~ distinct from the New Hythe tolls. It might be thought reasonable to assume that the 1391-2 lease included all these categories.

The situation is far from straightforward, however, as the records of the ensuing years show; we find on the one hand leases



of the tolls, either compositely or divided into 'land' and 'water', and on the other grants of the 'new crane', measurage and other items at the Hythe for very large sums. Thus, in 1395-6 "customs and toll at New Heath ... by water" are leased for £20, all "customs due by land" for £18, and the "custody of the New Crane and of Weights at New Hythe" is leased to William Wytham, who is "bound in £40".<sup>84</sup> In 1398-9 the tolls "by land and water" are leased compositely for £38, while "the custody of the New Crane and the crane of Robert Sewale" together with the "new houses at Heth", the measures and weights of meal, keyage and wharfage are farmed to Robert Aldewyne for £36.<sup>85</sup> Aldewyne has an almost identical lease, for the same amount, in 1399-1400, the only difference being that the second crane is said to be "of John Negemere", while the land and water tolls fetch £40.<sup>86</sup>

Thus it can be seen that, while the actual tolls remain at more or less the same level, the ancillary leases at the Hythe have been greatly augmented by the addition of new property and new rights - clearly the difference between the £7 paid for weighing, measuring and the new crane in 1387 and the £36 being demanded ten years later cannot be due solely to increased revenue from the same sources. 'Keyage' and 'wharfage' clearly relate to the moving of vessels; if the borough's lessee had an effective monopoly over this, together with the cranes for loading and unloading, he would plainly have control of a very valuable asset. The imponderable element is the "new houses" - one might assume them to be warehouses, but their number and value is unknown. It seems clear, however, that a major reorganization had been effected at the Hythe, connected with new

building or rebuilding, and the borough was intent on maximising its revenue therefrom.

The surviving rolls from the next few years contain no record of tolls or Hythe leases, but in 1404-5 there is noted a lease for 20s. of all the charges "called le Hevyng or Leftyng at Hithe of all corn, sea coal, salt, chalk etc. coming to New Hithe".<sup>87</sup> Why this is noted on its own is hard to say; the small amount of money involved suggests that this may relate to manual lifting of goods rather than to use of the crane(s).

The entry in the 1406-7 rolls brings together all the elements so far encountered; the land and water tolls are leased to William Mayhew 'of Heth' for £40, the same lessee takes the "profits" of the New Crane, the crane late Neggemere's, the weights and measures of merchandise, wharfage and quayage for £34, and also the 'Hevyng or Leftyng' for 20s.<sup>88</sup> This would seem to confirm the distinction between crantage and 'leftyng'. The leasing of all the known farmed-out revenue sources save the wool hall and stalls (for which see below) to one man was an experiment not to be immediately repeated. This William Mayhew may be the same man who had become a burgess the previous year for 20s. fine, stating his origin as Ramsay, Essex. If so, his career as a free burgess had an impressive start. We know that he held certain property at the Hythe, for the next recorded lease of the Hythe pertinents, in 1411-12, specifically excepts "the tenement in which William Mayhew dwells together with the great hall annexed to the said tenement and the garden, as are divided and enclosed by boundaries ..."<sup>89</sup> There is a further important change in the leases in this year, for the lessee, 'John Clare junior, of Hithe', not only takes the measuring,

weighing, keyage and wharfage, 'hevyng and leftyng' (the cranes are not mentioned) with the "quays and houses belonging to the commonalty", but also has "all the customs issuing from and belonging to New Hithe" lumped in with the foregoing, all for a composite payment of £48. Meanwhile the customs and tolls of the "town and suburbs ... excepting the customs belonging to the customer of New Hithe, of which he is to take nothing" are leased to John Lambherde for £15.

There is thus a reduction in the overall value of the leases as compared to the preceding years; the lease of the land and water tolls plus the miscellaneous Hythe assets and 'services' had raised a total of £74 in 1398-9, £76 in 1399-1400, £75 in 1406-7; now it totals only £63. This fall might be due, or partly due, to the exception of Mayhew's property; the 'great hall' could presumably be a large warehouse; it does not appear to be relevant that the cranes are not specifically mentioned, for they appear again in 1413-14 when the composite lease is once more for £48, but it is specified that £20 of this is for the Hythe customs, and £28 for the wharfage, cranes etc. etc. The 'town and suburb' tolls are leased for £16.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the Hythe assets and services have indeed been down-valued.

A similar format, and identical value of leases, is found in the next relevant record, that for 1418-19. The taker of the town tolls was Thomas Smyth, weaver, showing that the job was not restricted to members of the merchant class. The excepted property at the Hythe is now described as "lately inhabited" by William Mayhew.<sup>91</sup> The Hythe lease is taken by John Clefe, who is also the lessee in the next two years for which records survive, 1419-20 and

1422-3.<sup>92</sup> Whereas the lease had remained at £48 in 1418-19, in those two later years it falls to £40, and again the decline is due to downward valuation of the non-customs items - the split is £20/£20. One change in the last of these years is the apparent inclusion of the previously excluded properties formerly held by Mayhew in the subjects of the lease, "excepting what is responsible to the Chamberlains", whatever this means.

The town tolls remain at £16 in 1425-6, while the Hythe leases increase to £44, again specified as a 50/50 split between the tolls and customs and the rest; all the elements are rehearsed, and the ex-Mayhew property is again included, this time without proviso.<sup>93</sup> Plainly if the exclusion of this property had previously been responsible for the significant fall in value of the lease, its re-incorporation did not have a corresponding positive effect. The exactly half-and-half split between the tolls and the "others" looks like a merely formal rationalisation, and thus probably has little relation to the real relative values or revenues raised.

The lease of town tolls is identical in the next record, that for 1428-9, but the Hythe lease is now £45 and a "split" is not given.<sup>94</sup> The next year the town tolls decline to £14, while the Hythe lease increases to £46 (specified as £23 + £23 as previously);<sup>95</sup> the various components remain the same, except for a new description of the property included in the lease; the lessee (John Cartere, junior, Shipman, of Colchester) is to take and keep "that tenement in which Thomas Wode, beerbrewer, now lives and the great hall attached thereto with the garden adjacent and one gatehouse, one shop with solar built above the 'Warhous', also a

little garden and a house adjacent to the said tenement (excepting the things for which he is responsible to the Chamberlain)."

Four years pass before there is further record of leases, but the Hythe lease once again moves upwards, to £50 (£25 plus £25).<sup>96</sup> The town tolls stand at £18, but there is reason to suspect that this includes the lease of the wool hall etc., as the record of this is incomplete. For most of the 1430s the Hythe lease is found to be at the level of £52 (£26 + £26), but the tenement of Thomas Wode etc is now excepted from the lease, just as Mayhew's property (presumably the same) had been earlier; the entry for 1436-7 specifies that the "farm issuing" from the tenement, great hall etc. "belongs to the town chamberlain".<sup>97</sup> It seems, in effect that this property is regarded as a separate lease, sometimes included and sometimes excluded from the general "farm" of the Hythe, but without appearing to make much difference to the overall value. The town tolls revert to £12, increasing to £12.10s. in 1436-7, £13 in 1437-8<sup>98</sup> and 1438-9.<sup>99</sup> In this latter year, the Hythe tolls increase to £56 before falling back somewhat inexplicably to £44 in 1439-40, then recovering to £52 in 1442-3 and 1443-4<sup>100</sup> (town tolls, £12, £12 and £10). The mention of the tenements etc. at Hythe stops, whether because they have by this time exhausted the clerk's patience, or have finally been disassociated from the lease, or have fallen down, one can only guess.

After another gap, we find the Hythe lease again at £52 in 1447-8,<sup>101</sup> while there is no record of the town tolls. From this point onward the Hythe lease steadily declines, to £48 in 1448-9,<sup>102</sup> £42 in 1455-6,<sup>103</sup> recovering slightly to £44 in 1456-7,<sup>104</sup> £43 in 1458-9,<sup>105</sup> and then plummeting to £29 in 1460-1.<sup>106</sup>

The town tolls and the lease of the wool-hall had often been taken by the same lessee in earlier years, but from 1455-6 they are merged into one farm, acquired for a single sum. The value of the hall lease had fluctuated between £5.6.8d and £12 during the years of its independent existence, most commonly falling between £6 and £9 (see Appendix D).

Now, in 1455-6, the town tolls and wool-hall cellar are leased together for £17, a figure repeated in 1456-7; then there is an increase to £18 in 1458-9 and 1459-60.<sup>107</sup> However in this last mentioned year the lease is alleged to include "the tolls in New Hetha" which, since the end of the fourteenth century had always been excepted from the "town tolls" lease; an entry relating to the lease of New Hythe tolls, crannage, wharfage etc. follows, but the amount has not been filled in, and no sureties are named. It seems barely conceivable that the Hythe tolls were really to be included in this £18 sum; the next year is the one for which the Hythe valuation tumbles to £29, excepting "the tenement in which John Stannard now lives and the great hall attached thereto"; however, the exception of this property - or possibly more extensive properties - was seen to effect no real drop in valuation on past occasions, apart from the first time it features in the record. That the annual value of such property could approach the £14 by which the Hythe lease has declined seems highly unlikely.

The town tolls rise slightly to £19 in 1460-1, staying at this level in 1463-4, while the Hythe lease recovers slightly, to £33.6s.8d.<sup>108</sup> This is the last heard of the Hythe in this context for seven years, but a four year lease of the town tolls, wool-hall and butterstalls was enrolled in 1466-7 in favour of William

Bonefaunt, at £18 per year. The New Hythe is specifically excepted.<sup>109</sup>

After three more years for which the court rolls are lost, the town tolls and cellar etc. are found leased for a single year, again for £18, while the New Hythe occurs at £35.<sup>110</sup> For the year 1473-4 there is no lease of town tolls recorded, but two notes of the leases of the Hythe are entered;<sup>111</sup> both are for £32, payable quarterly, but one includes the tenement and hall lately Stannard's. This would again seem to indicate that the property was marginal to the Hythe lease, and its inclusion or exclusion was probably a result of negotiation between the Chamberlain and his colleagues and the farmer each year.

The town tolls and wool-hall lease vanishes from sight until 1484-5; it may be that some long-term arrangement had been effected of which the record is now lost. The Hythe lease is found again in 1476-7 at £35, the lessee, William Eden, being the same as in 1473-4;<sup>112</sup> it figures again, for an identical amount in 1480-1<sup>113</sup> and 1481-2,<sup>114</sup> being taken by William Roes.

Roes also holds the lease in 1484-5, and in the previous year-rolls there is a reference to him as "water-bailiff at New Hythe".<sup>115</sup> the use of this title may be indicative of an attempt to turn the lease from an annual affair into a long-term office, as Roes had apparently held it for five years, and perhaps longer. 1484-5 sees the last appearance of the town tolls and wool-hall lease as a separate entity, standing at £16.<sup>116</sup>

The major gap in court-roll coverage comprising the whole of the reign of Henry VII follows, and the practice of recording leases had changed by the time the rolls resume. We find, however, that the



Red Paper Book contains the record of a ten-year lease made by the Bailiffs and Commonalty in 1504-5 in favour of Ambrose Lowthe, of:

all custumez and Tolles and othir profytes ... to the New Hithe of Colchester beforesaid perteynyng, and their rightly and justly to be levied; also with cranage, wharfage, cariage, and all othir profytes ther ... togider with howsys and tenements to the seid Town of Colchester belongyng, sette in the New Hithe ... called the Town House, with renteres, and all thappartenaunces, to gedyr with a medowe in dewe time to the same houses and tenements perteynyng; to gedyr with the weights and measures of dyvaise merchaundizez theder comyng, arryvyng, and thereof befallyng; with lestyng under lestyng, halyng, or weying of all manner comys, and othyr profytez there of right and due manner, or in any time past to the office of the Waterbaillyship or any such maner wise belongyng, to be taken. 117

Plainly, this is intended to be a totally comprehensive lease; all the diverse dues mentioned from time to time in the annual leases are either set out here or included in the generality, together with the rents and profits from civic property. Nevertheless, the annual payment for all these considerations and assets is to be only £24; less than at any time in the past for which records survive.<sup>118</sup> We must be justified in seeing this and the downward trend of preceding decades, as a result of a real shrinkage of the revenues and customs at the Hythe. The institution of a ten-year lease is perhaps also indicative of difficulties experienced in finding takers year by year. Although the loss of records precludes a definitive statement, it seems that the end of the 15th century was a time of crisis as far as civic revenue was concerned.

The lease to Lowthe - an Alderman of the town - does not seem to have improved matters. A new type of entry concerning the Hythe is found in the court-rolls from 1515-16, couched in the form of a recognizance of debt owed to the Chamberlain; John Leveson,



James Godfrey, John Lawford and William Lawford acknowledge owing £26, but if they pay two instalments of £12 and if a certain John Coton lays out 100s. "about the repairs and construction of the machine, messuage, and houses situate and lying at New Hythe, belonging to the office of water-bailiff of the Town" as need shall be, then they will be quit.<sup>119</sup>

Secondly, and more explicitly, Lowthe himself acknowledged debt of 20 marks to the Chamberlain, void if he repair all the houses, 'rentaries' and crane at New Hythe "which he late had in farme", and deliver to the Chamberlain "all the weights and measures in as good and sufficient reparations as they were delivered to him at his first entry into the sayd farme".<sup>120</sup> Evidently the capital assets at the Hythe had been allowed to deteriorate during the term of Lowthe's lease.

The same four men plus John Ecton as above enter into a further recognizance with the Chamberlain in the following year, but this time the sum mentioned is £40, and it is made clear that £24 is to be paid for farm of the "office of Waterbayliffship", to be held by Ecton and William Lawford for one year; these two shall expend a further 40s. on repairs and shall render full account. It appears that if less than 40s. is spent, the difference is to be paid to the Chamberlain, thus making the effective price of the lease £26. The £40 in the recognizance appears to be a form of insurance by the town to prevent any repetition of the events of the 'Lowthe years'; if the facilities were not properly maintained the whole sum would presumably be forfeit. The three men named in addition to Ecton and Lawford are, in effect, 'sureties'.<sup>121</sup>

It seems clear that the town was attempting to 'stop the rot' at the Hythe, and to put things on a sounder, more organised basis.

An almost identical 'recognizance' was enrolled in 1517-18;<sup>122</sup> the same sums of money and provisions as to repairs are involved. Again, it is clear that the 40s., is, in effect, "maintenance money".

However, after this the record again becomes fragmentary; 1518-19 sees the same group of men minus William Lawford figure in a truncated entry, acknowledging themselves to owe £40, payable at Easter, "otherwise leviabie".<sup>123</sup> No mention is made of tolls etc., and no other clauses are appended. The following year's rolls have no relevant record, but those of 1520-1 contain an uncompleted recognizance, outlining a £24 lease of the 'Waterbaylyship' at Hythe; this is still described as "late in the tenure of Ambrose Louthe",<sup>124</sup> but blank spaces are left for the names of the previous year's and newly appointed lessees. A clause about 40s. for repairs is again inserted. The next year, 1521-2, is the last of these recognizances;<sup>125</sup> John Ecton, now described as 'yoman', and John Lawford acknowledge owing £40 each to the Chamberlain, void if £28 is paid for the tolls etc. at New Hythe and everything else pertaining to the Water-Bailiffship. No mention is made of a 40s. for repairs but even if included in the £28 this represents a modest increment over recent years.

Nothing more is heard of leases etc. until the middle of the century. The town tolls and wool-hall leases have not reappeared at all after the 'break'. There is some cause to suspect that the Chamberlains may, by the early sixteenth century, have ceased "farming out" the town tolls, and instead be supervising their collection directly; two 'Clerks of the Market' were included

amongst the officers elected in 1515-16, an office which, though mentioned in the fourteenth century, makes no subsequent impact on the record.<sup>126</sup> These clerks might, as part of their duties, have collected or appointed deputies to collect the 'town tolls', and accounted for these to the Chamberlain.

That someone was still collecting these dues is proved by the entry, quoted in full at the start of this section, asserting the Chamberlain's right thereto "from time immemorial" in reply to claims that he had taken toll "extortionately and fraudulently" in 1509-10.

The will, written and proved in 1520, of Thomas Cristmas (father of the John Cristmas who stood head and shoulders above all other Colchester contributors to the 1524 lay subsidy) contains an interesting clause relevant to the matter in hand. Cristmas bequeaths, to two persons to be named yearly as collectors by the Bailiffs, an annual rent of £4 from part of his extensive urban and extra-urban properties;

In consideration whereof I will the said bailiffs and commonalty shall discharge and acquire forever all the petty land - toll and custom used before time to be taken at the 4 gates of the town, of and for horses, carts, woods, corn packs coming and going. 127

Thus it appears that Cristmas expected the town to cease collecting tolls on goods carried by land, in return for a legacy of four pounds a year. If this figure represents a realistic estimate, then plainly there had been a drastic shrinkage in revenue, as the town tolls had stood at £18 and £16 jointly with the wool-hall cellar etc. in the 1460s and 1484-5 respectively. Earlier evidence would suggest that the 'tolls' normally accounted for around three-fifths to two-thirds of the total, and so serious

decline would be indicated.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps the mechanism of collection had broken down, and tolls were only being demanded fitfully, thus making for a minor and unreliable source of revenue, and provoking claims of fraudulent imposition. There is, however, no firm evidence to back-up such speculation. Neither can we say whether Cristmas's 'free-trade' legacy was accepted on these terms by the bailiffs and Aldermen.

Two entries in the court rolls, one oblique and one direct (though incomplete) from the end of our period of study, together with the Chamberlain's account for 1548-9, give some clues as to what was then happening with the lease.

As was noted earlier, the solitary Chamberlain's Account which survives for the year 1548-9 itemises receipts and expenditure for the year, and amongst the former is £28 from the farm of 'customs', apparently the Hythe lease;<sup>129</sup> if this is so then it stands at the same level as it had done some 25 years earlier, notwithstanding the general rise in prices over this period.

The court roll for 1553-4 has a note after the admission as burgess of Alexander Wryght, born at 'Alberewe, Suffolk' (Aldborough), "maryner" to the effect that half of his admission fine (20s.) is to go to the Chamberlain, and half to John Wode who has, by indenture, half the fine at the Hythe 'cum Cran' et Cust' *ibidem*".<sup>130</sup> Why Wode, who we can assume was 'water bailiff', got half of this fine (there is no similar note elsewhere) we cannot say as there is no trace of the 'indenture' referred to. Perhaps Wryght's occupation entitled Wode to share in his fine. At any rate, the tolls and crantage appear to still be being leased,

although not enrolled any more; it seems that the new incentives were being used to make the farm more attractive or less onerous.<sup>131</sup>

The 1557-8 rolls contain a remarkable entry,<sup>132</sup> which is unfortunately incomplete due to the damaged condition of the relevant membranes, relating to a combining of a wide range of civic functions in the hands of one man, a certain John Cole.<sup>133</sup> "For more speedy punishment of offenders" Cole is to be installed, by order of the bailiffs and Aldermen, in the office of 'Clerke of Markett' and "other necessary offices". This appointment is to be permanent, unless Cole seriously abuses his position. He is to have to his own use, without rendering "eny accompt", all profits, fines and forfeitures lawfully levied, and in addition is to receive an annual fee or pension from the Chamberlain of 40s. for exercising the office.<sup>134</sup>

But this is not all; Cole is also to gather yearly, on behalf of the Chamberlain, if the latter agrees, "all the small or pety rents" belonging to the town, as set out in 'the Chamberlain's formall' and to render annual account for the same. For this function he is to receive the "Aunciyent Fee" of 28s.4d. per annum due to the Chamberlain for his wages of livery.<sup>135</sup>

Furthermore, Cole is to be the 'Surveyor'; in this capacity he will have oversight of all new works and buildings and also must "from tyme to tyme as occasion shall Require ... diligently vew and serche all the decays and Faltes of Reparacons yn all and ev'ry the bridges, mylnes, edifices and other buyldings" belonging to the town, and repair the same for a yearly fee of 13s.<sup>136</sup>

This is not the end of the list, but the damage to the document makes it hard to identify the other functions; Cole is to have

the "ordering, bestowing and layeng up yn the towne markett house the Re[sidue?] ... of ... grayne[?] that shall happen wekely to be left unsold, and keep the same safely for the owners thereof";<sup>137</sup> he shall have 'oversight and sealing' of what may be all the Customs (?) of Colchester, "the new hythe of the same excepted" and may take certain sums of money as per the Laws and Statutes of the Realm.<sup>138</sup>

The latter part of the entry is fragmentary, and it is not clear whether "tolls" collection is included within Cole's remit; however, this extraordinary list of offices is clearly an attempt to tackle a severe administrative problem. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that in this same year two Chamberlains-elect had refused office; the previous year three had done so (see table XII above). The town was evidently hoping that one (presumably rich) man, could if given sufficient incentives, tackle the range of duties that the Chamberlains were finding increasingly onerous. It may have been politically impossible for a Chamberlain - an office hallowed by tradition - to have been allowed such concessions as keeping the profits of 'Clerk of the Market', but permissible in the case of a new hybrid post, nominally still subservient to the Chamberlain but obviously taking over a very large part of his duties.

How successful this experiment was we do not know, but it again is perhaps no coincidence that the evasion of the office of Chamberlain ceases for a period.

If the creation of Cole's position was one response to continuing difficulties, it is clear that these difficulties arose from a shrinking of revenue available to the town Chamberlains. Between the second and last quarters of the fifteenth century the

revenue accruing from the lease of tolls etc. fell by over 50%, and this trend, while more difficult to quantify due to the cessation of regular enrolments, may have worsened during the first half of the sixteenth century.

Furthermore, this was not the only source of revenue which shrank during the fifteenth century; the enrolment of fine-paying burgesses shows a protracted decline from the late fourteenth century, reaching a nadir in the 1480s and 1490s, and only beginning a real recovery after about 1530. While revenue from freedom admissions averaged between about £12 and £17 per annum in most decades from the 1370s through to the 1450s (reaching £26 in the 1400s), in the 1470s and 80s the average was little more than £5 per annum.<sup>139</sup> Although clearly not as important a revenue source as the leases this decline in admission money must have exacerbated the problems faced by the Chamberlains from the mid-fifteenth century onwards.

It can thus be strongly suggested that the twin problems of decays of borough property and evasion of office both had their roots in a crisis of corporate finance. From the middle of the fifteenth century money for routine maintenance of bridges etc. was increasingly scarce, leading to the regular presentments at the Lawhundred courts; furthermore, by the early sixteenth century this contraction of civic income had led to the office of Chamberlain becoming increasingly onerous and costly to its holders, and many men thus sought to evade the position.

If this interpretation is correct, the borough as a corporate body was clearly facing serious difficulties during the later fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth. Was it also



experiencing difficulty or decline as a trading community? Surely the fall in the value of the tolls indicates a contraction of the borough's trade, and consequently an attenuation of individual as well as corporate wealth?

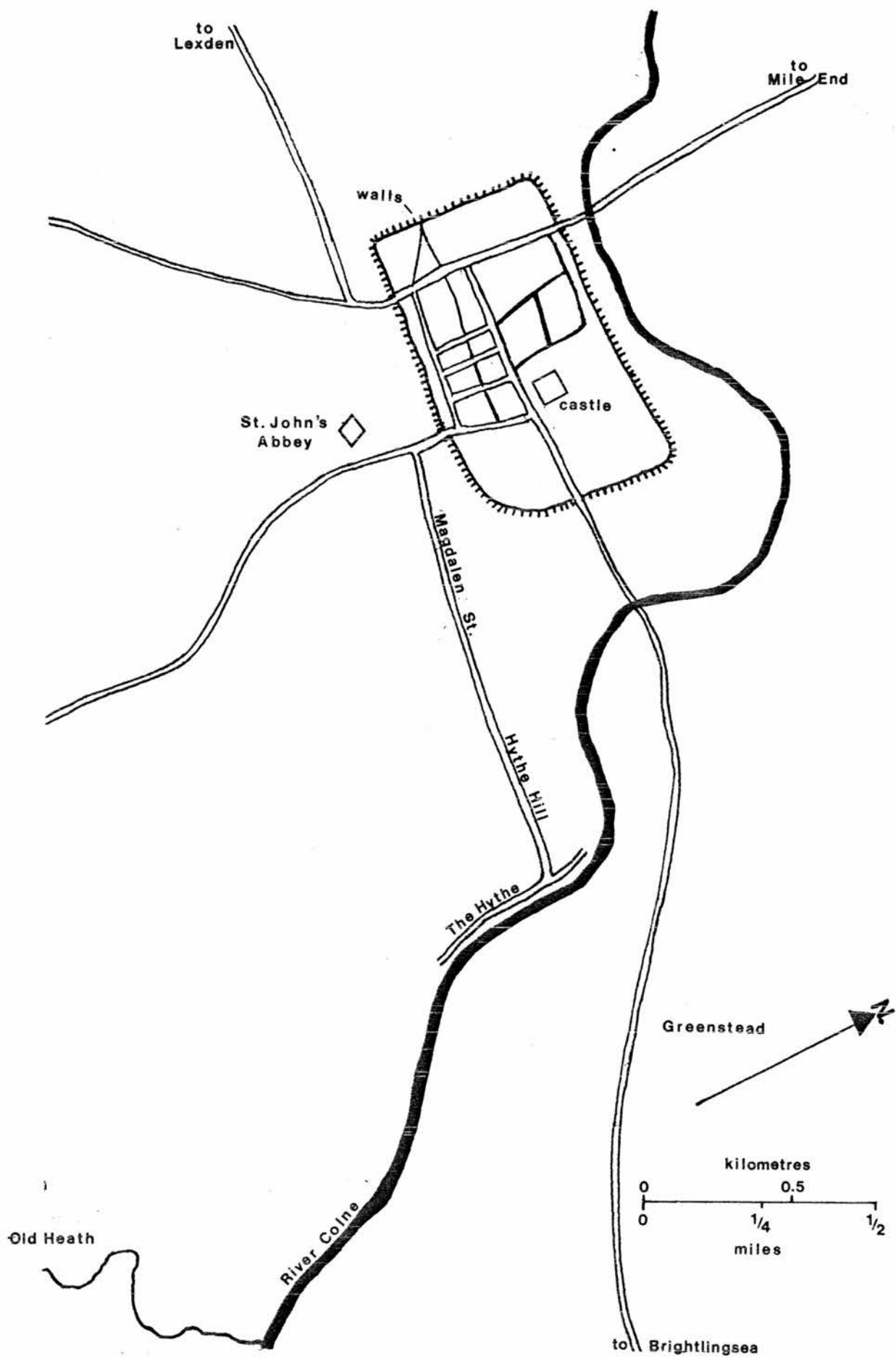
In order to attempt to answer this question, it is necessary to examine the background to the declining toll leases; in particular to consider what was happening at the Hythe, Colchester's port and, at one time almost certainly the largest source of corporate revenue.

### The Hythe

That part of the modern borough of Colchester known as the Hythe is, in records of the later middle ages, commonly referred to as the "New Hythe". This was to distinguish it from the old 'hythe' or landing place, today Old Heath, which it had supplanted as Colchester's principal haven before the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The precise date at which this change occurred is unknown; the older landing place, situated on a creek joining the river Colne at a point a mile nearer the sea than the 'new' hythe, was already referred to as 'Ealdehythe' by 1272.<sup>140</sup>

By the fourteenth century the New Hythe, situated in St Leonard's parish and joined to the rest of the borough by the long 'spit' of Magdalen Street and Hythe Hill (see Map 6) was an increasingly important part of the borough; many of the burgesses with mercantile interests chose to live on Hythe Hill, near to the





MAP 6: COLCHESTER AND THE HYTHE

parish church, while their warehouses were located at the quayside.<sup>141</sup>

While the fact that Colchester was reckoned a dependent port of Ipswich for customs purposes means that we have few independent figures of exports or imports, it is clear that from an early date small sea-going as well as coastal vessels visited the Hythe. Thus we hear of wheat from Bordeaux to be carried in La Leonard of Colchester in 1347; licence to John de Scotland to ship "in the port of Colcestre" thirty cloths of the "texture of Essex" and to take them to Gascony, Brittany, Prussia and Spain in 1364. Amongst the ships appearing in royal records are the Seintemarcog de Colcestre and La Rose de Colcestre (1311), La James, La Biene and La Nicholas, of Colcestre (1343), la Katrine (1339) and a ship called the Seinte Marie Bot of Colchester employed on royal business in 1325.<sup>142</sup>

It is equally clear that Colchester merchants often used other ports; in a case from 1344 we hear of cloths belonging to Colchester men being placed on a ship called La Catalyne of Mersea to be taken to Flanders.<sup>143</sup> The ports of Wivenhoe and Brightlingsea also shipped goods belonging to men of the borough.

The degree to which these other ports were used depended in large part upon the condition of the Hythe haven. There were recurring difficulties arising from silting; such problems were common to most of the rivers of Essex - and indeed much of East Anglia - a combination of shallow silting river mouths, and shifting sand-belts to seaward making navigation hazardous. The Colne remained unimproved into modern times, largely because of a desire not to damage the river's valuable Oyster beds.<sup>144</sup>

It has been argued that the post-1300 period saw a deterioration of conditions in the Eastern counties, with silting up of harbour entrances becoming an increasingly serious problem. In his study of these ports, Wren states that the Hythe was accessible only to small coastal vessels until c.1600, and that Wivenhoe acted as Colchester's principal port throughout the medieval period, with goods being trans-shipped for the short journey up river to the borough.<sup>145</sup> That this is false - or at least overstated - seems clear, but the problems of the Hythe were real enough, and a major source of concern to the burgesses.

As we have seen, the record of leases suggests that some major reorganisation seems to have been effected at the Hythe in the latter part of the fourteenth century, and this may have been more than merely administrative. The "new crane" appears in the leases from the 1380s, and "new houses" are included in the next decade (see above). While we should be wary of a literal interpretation of the word 'new' - the Hythe itself illustrating the longevity of the appellation in some circumstances - the coincidence of these entries with the refashioning of the leases suggests that the borough may indeed have been investing in new capital assets.

A hundred years later an 'aide and contribution' was levied on the townsmen "for the making of a new Crane at the hithe and other charges necessary", showing that the Hythe was still a working port in the reign of Henry VII.<sup>146</sup> A total of £8.16s.1d. was raised for this purpose, from 184 contributors.

There are, however, indications that during the course of the fifteenth century difficulties had arisen at the Hythe. The evidence is hard to evaluate. There are complaints and

presentations for decayed wharves, or "hurt to the channel", and "obstructions", and fines for the use of other ports and markets, forestalling the Hythe etc. Such problems were no doubt, part of the life of any medieval port, and do not on their own constitute evidence of long-term decline. They should, perhaps, be taken seriously when a longer-term perspective is used; for there is no question but that the Hythe was seriously imperilled in the sixteenth century.

The fact that the 1462 Charter granted by Edward IV specifically forbids the creation of unlicensed "wharfs, cranes, weirs or kiddels", or buying and selling water-borne goods other than at the "Nowe Hethe" suggests that these problems may have been becoming more acute.<sup>147</sup> Forestalling the Hythe was nothing new; Richard Paccard and Geoffrey Daws were fined for sailing out to meet vessels heading for the Hythe, and forestalling the market of grain in 1351;<sup>148</sup> illegal markets were detected at Fingringhoe and Rowhedge in the 1370s, and their keepers fined.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, the proclamation made in 1382 refers to "certain persons" entering "our Water" and meeting boats heading for the borough and also for Maldon, and forestalling the market thus purloining "the customs due to our ... lord the king and to us".<sup>150</sup>

Presentments from the 1430s onwards, however, appear to have more urgency about them. Oyster sellers have established markets at Rowhedge, Fingringhoe, Alresford, Brightlingsea and other places "to the very great prejudice of the market of New Heth"; similarly, a group of merchant burgesses forestall the market at Wivenhoe and Rowhedge, meeting vessels with soap, garlic, salt, fish and other commodities.<sup>151</sup> In 1451-2 Seman Whitefote and Richard Plomer are

fined for forestalling, and making ports "in places where before there were no ports" in deterioration of the port of Colchester". Four years later the poacher turned gamekeeper when Whitefote took the Hythe lease.<sup>152</sup>

Towards mid-century dilapidations at the Hythe become noticeable; e.g. a 'ruinous Quay' in 1439, a 'quay in a ruinous state' in 1451,<sup>153</sup> a quay "destroyed and ruinous to the detriment of the channel" in 1455.<sup>154</sup> John Rouge is fined in 1448 for "keeping a great ship lying in le Chanel of water at New Heth, to the hurt and destruction of the port".<sup>155</sup>

Foreign trade remained important, but it is not always clear whether the Hythe was being used. Thus ships of the Hanse wrongly arrested in 1452 had been taken "in the water of Colwater by Colcestre"; vessels robbed by pirates in 1454 were "at anchor by Colcestre".<sup>156</sup>

Plainly, if the Hythe were deteriorating due to silting, and the town's merchants were thus being obliged to use other ports, the pronounced decline in the value of the Hythe lease during the course of the fifteenth century could be explained without postulating a wholesale collapse of the town's trade. If burgesses were trading out of, say, Wivenhoe and bringing their goods to and from the borough by land, there would be a collapse in the Hythe lease - reflecting loss of revenue from crantage, wharfage, measurage, etc. - without any corresponding increase in the value of the town tolls, from payment of which free burgesses were exempt.

Lack of unambiguous evidence means that this hypothesis cannot be tested further for the fifteenth century. By the middle of the following century, however, there are unmistakable signs of

deterioration of the port. Not only had the corporately owned machinery and houses etc. deteriorated while in the tenure of Ambrose Lowthe, but there are increasing numbers of presentments of individuals for allowing their property at the Hythe to become dilapidated. Amongst those presented were some of the richest men in the town, who, had it been of profit to them, would surely not have failed to maintain their property; thus Alderman Thomas Cristmas was fined in 1512-13 for "not making his quay by the common channel, to the grievous injury of his neighbours". In the same year it is stated that the channel is much obstructed with weirs.<sup>157</sup>

'Master Lowthe' is presented for a wharf "great decayed" in 1533-4,<sup>158</sup> while two years later his house at 'le wharfe' is "almost ruinous".<sup>159</sup> The shore of the quay has been broken by boats tied there in 1541, and in 1542-3 the key, broken "to the impeding of the Chanell"<sup>160</sup> should be mended by the bailiffs under the pain of a £10 fine.<sup>161</sup> The "wall and keye agenst the Chanell" had been broken by John Joones, senior, in 1545-6.<sup>162</sup>

Such presentations might be merely routine matters of maintenance at a port in constant use, but events of the late 1540s point to serious underlying difficulties. In his will drawn up in 1520 Thomas Crystmas left £20 "to the amendment of the creek in Colchester heath", suggesting a perceived need for improvement at this date, although, in the event, this money was not used until the mid-century restoration work when it was duly accounted for as handed over by Thomas's son, John.<sup>163</sup>

A lengthy, but unfortunately imperfect entry on loose folios in the Red Paper Book, dating from 1548<sup>164</sup> outlines the decay of the borough's haven, and measures to be taken for its restoration: the

"water of the haven of Colchester leading fro the sea" is "very moche fylled, dowed up and landed"; whereas a ship of 50 or 60 (tons?) could formerly be brought to the quay "nowe a [gap] cannot be brought or conveyed withyn one myle of the same key".

For lack of aid:

the said havan is very shortly like to be utterly foredon, lost and decayed, to the great losse in tyme to come of the kyng's majestie, his heirs and successors, in that yerely custumes and fee farme of the said towne, which fee farm the said Corporacion Shall not be able to pay or beare by want of the seid havan and to the extreme hynderance and undoyng of the seid auncyent towne and of the inhabitants and dwellers withyn the same and withyn the Suburbes, Hamletts, precynct and libertye theroff, and apparant losse and damages of the moost part of the Townes and inhabitants in thoo partyes situat, as well in the Countye of Suff., as in the Countye of Essex ... 165

The borough was evidently aware of the regional importance of its port.

The Bailiffs and common council of the town had, however, approached a certain Shakelwell to undertake the amendment of the channel, he being a "connyng and an expert man in suche thyngs", but this could not be done for less than £280. This sum could not be met out of the common goods and chattels, these being "of very small valewe", and so the most substantial citizens of the borough had been approached "for their honest and indifferent contribucion". While some had offerred substantial sums, others had offerred "moche under their duties and substance", and many had refused to contribute anything at all. Wherefore the Bailiffs, Aldermen and Common Council had decided that a compulsory levy should be raised, based upon individual assessments which were to be recorded in a paper book, open to public view. Collectors were to be appointed



for each parish, and would gather the assessed sums by two instalments, in March and April.<sup>166</sup>

The book, or a copy thereof, has survived annexed to the 1548-9 Chamberlain's account in the Stowe manuscripts; this is the "aide" receipted in the said account.<sup>167</sup> The target appears to have been virtually achieved; although the arithmetic is a little obscure, the Chamberlain accounts £278.12s.7d. as money received "towards the hythe". How the valuations were made is unknown, but not surprisingly St Leonard's parish had the heaviest and most numerous assessments; 96 people from this parish contributed to the first instalment, and whereas in other parishes the poorer men and women paid 8d. or 6d., in St Leonard's no-one named in the book got away with less than 12d. The highest payments were by John Stevyn (£10) and Richard Godfrey (£7.5s.). Altogether St Leonards paid £67.19s.6d. in the first contribution, compared to £33.16s.6d. from St James and £25.6s.8d. from St Peters. At the other end of the scale Greenstead paid a total of 9s.8d. and Milend 7s. The total number of contributions to the first part of the assessment was an impressive 447.

The town authorities succeeded in their ambition to get contributions from outwith the borough; sums ranging from 40d. to £2 were donated by individuals from Boxted, Peldon, Burstled and 'Barndon Park' and, corporately, by the parishes of Braintree, Bures, Glemsford, Long Melford, Boxford and Stoke Nayland. The receipt of these contributions from landward parishes and individuals suggests that Colchester's harbour had a perceived regional value, one which could not be wholly replaced by other ports in Essex or Suffolk, or by land links with London. The



raising of the substantial total sum shows, firstly, the seriousness with which the Hythe's problems were viewed, and the value placed upon the maintenance of direct access to water-borne traffic; the linking of the matter with the tolls and fee-farm is of obvious significance. The money found was in fact eight times the value of the annual fee-farm. Secondly, it can be argued that this episode demonstrates that the townspeople were by no means destitute at this date, whatever problems the borough as a corporation may have faced.

It seems however, that the bottom of the barrel may have been reached as far as goodwill and 'civic responsibility' were concerned if not in absolute financial terms. The financing of the purchase by the borough of certain chantry lands for £284.5s. in 1551 appears to have proved very difficult, and a substantial part of the land acquired was sold off to three wealthy townsmen (two mercers and a draper). The mutilation of parts of the court rolls for 1551-2 may have been done to destroy entries of a compromising or controversial nature.<sup>168</sup>

It has been suggested above that the decline in the value of the Hythe lease might reflect an increased use of other ports by Colchester and other merchants as the Hythe became less accessible due to silting. Wivenhoe, Brightlingsea and Mersea were all better placed than Colchester to receive sea-going vessels.

In later times Wivenhoe appears to have been treated as a dependent port of Colchester, with a customs house, warehouses etc., apparently under burghal control. Thus, Morant writes: "It has ever been a rule ... that all wares and merchandises ... should be loaded and unloaded at Wivenhoe or the Hythe, and nowhere else".<sup>169</sup>

There is no evidence that this was the case in earlier times; all the fourteenth to sixteenth century references are to the monopoly of the Hythe; Wivenhoe, outwith the Liberty, is never mentioned in the leases of tolls. Rather, it crops up as a site of illegal markets and trading. It seems, then, that the borough had to come to terms with the fact that the Hythe was of limited usefulness and was periodically unusable. Morant cites seventeenth century episodes where the channel was "choked" between Hythe mill and Rowhedge (1623), and when goods had to be carried from Wivenhoe to Colchester (1699).<sup>170</sup>

Some sixteenth century merchants held tenements in Wivenhoe, such as Thomas Cock of St Leonard's parish, owner of a ship the Mary Grace of Colchester, who bequeathed a tenement called "the howse at the Stane" in Wivenhoe in his will dated 1544.<sup>171</sup>

The town of Brightlingsea, a non-corporate 'member' of the Cinque Ports, may have taken some of the borough's trade. There was certainly no novelty in this; as early as 1233 we hear of a certain Warin of Colchester petitioning the King regarding his merchandise, which had been lost when jettisoned by a ship of 'Bridlingsea'. There appears to have been friction between the two places during the fifteenth century, a time when Brightlingsea was attempting to define and publicise its Cinque Port privileges and freedom from toll. Letters were written by the Court of Brotherhood of the Cinque Ports at Easter 1499, one to the Earl of Oxford regarding his help "touchyng the variance between them and Colchester", and one to Colchester's Bailiffs requiring them to allow the inhabitants of Brightlingsea to enjoy "such privilege as they heretofore hath enjoyed".<sup>172</sup>

A few months later the same Brotherhood required the Bailiffs of Yarmouth to intercede between Brightlingsea and Colchester, the Bailiffs of which had "grately trubled, vexed and sued in grate munyssyng" of the privileges of the smaller community. Dickin believed that these disputes concerned questions of tolls and quays, or the fishery in the Colne, or both.<sup>173</sup>

It is possible that this dispute lies behind one of the most remarkable and intriguing entries in the Colchester court rolls. Following the routine record of the first Lawhundred Court of the year 1531-2 is found the following entry:

Item; all suche thyngs as longyth to the water we wyll speke no more of such defaults as we have spoken of here before. ye knowe well inowe whyche defaults be usyd styll And whan we knowe that ye have gaderyd up the said mercyments that we have mercyd here before this tyme than we wyll do our duetyes. For we fynd in our myndes that the Kyngs Towne decayeth and the lords town amendyth. We wold go further in this mater yf ye wold execute ytt and the town have profyte of ytt for we know well that ye have no thyng of the last mercyments.<sup>174</sup>

This passage appears to be a complaint by the Lawhundred jurors, frustrated by the failure of the borough officers to collect fines which they have imposed for offences that 'longyth to the water', presumably forestalling the Hythe, illegal markets etc. The identity of the 'lords town' is the most puzzling issue; the 'Kyngs Towne' is clearly the borough, and is seen to decay by the jurors. The 'lords town' might be one of the manors surrounding the town, perhaps Wivenhoe. Alternately, it could be the town of Brightlingsea; the Abbots of St John's, Colchester, were lords of the manor of Brightlingsea up until the dissolution of the House. Given the context and the background, the identification of the 'lord' with the Abbot and Brightlingsea with the 'lords town' seems at least plausible.

The entry points to a failure of the borough to defend its privileges against encroachments by other communities or individuals. There may be more to this than the difficulty of enforcing chartered privileges; it may be that as most of the leading townsmen had mercantile interests of some sort they were increasingly unwilling to enforce regulations which restricted their freedom of manoeuvre, including the use of other ports. In other words, the interests of individual burgesses may have been becoming increasingly incompatible with the interests of the borough as a corporate entity.

#### Population and Wealth

Few undertakings are more problematic than estimating population from medieval sources, and few more misguided than making a simple link between population and prosperity. Taxation records are most commonly drawn upon in this context, but it must always be borne in mind that these were compiled for purposes quite different from those of the modern scholar.

Perhaps the most valuable returns for estimating population are those of the poll tax of 1377. A recent study of the population of rural Essex in the later middle ages, based on the analysis of tithing lists, has suggested that the poll-tax provides much more acceptable figures than the early fourteenth-century or Tudor subsidies.<sup>175</sup>

The 1377 return for the borough of Colchester enumerated 2955 men and women over fourteen years of age.<sup>176</sup> In order to produce

an estimate of total population it is necessary to add a figure for those under fourteen, and a further figure to compensate for evasion. If evasion of 10% is assumed, and 35% added for the under-fourteen element, an estimated total population of almost exactly 5000 results, while 15% evasion and 40% under fourteen would give 5664. While Russell allowed only 2½% for evasion, Postan considered that the figure could be perhaps ten times higher. The work of Poos suggests that an evasion factor lying towards the middle of this range might be more appropriate.<sup>177</sup> Thus, we may not be too far out if we place the population of Colchester in 1377 at about 5-5,500.

This is our 'safest' estimate - looking forwards and backwards from 1377 is more problematic. Most early fourteenth-century subsidies, it is clear, taxed only a minority of heads of households; only 8,326 people are listed for the whole county in the 1327 returns for Essex, before the ravages of plague, compared to the 47,962 in the 1377 poll-tax. Others taxed a greater number; the return for Colchester in 1301, the most detailed surviving for the borough, enumerated 390 taxpayers plus ten assessors, as compared to only 127 in 1327.<sup>178</sup> If this were considered a reasonably comprehensive survey - covering say 80% of household heads - and an average household size of five assumed, then a total population of about 2,400 would be indicated. Rickword compared the borough's returns for 1301 and 1296 and concluded that in the later year the tax was likely to have been very thorough; in 1296 255 names are found (including assessors) but no assessments of under 7 shillings were made, and this is very close to the number which would be obtained by removing the under 7s. assessments from

the 1301 list. Allowing for such untaxed groups as the religious houses and their retainers, most of the parish clergy, the castle garrison, and those too poor to pay, Rickword estimated that the 1301 population was "not far short of 3,000". These estimates are, however, subject to a very high margin of error, as not only the degree of evasion is unknown (as in 1377) but the intention of the taxers as to inclusion is not clear (unlike 1377).

The sixteenth-century subsidies have been widely used as a basis for population estimates, national and local, but once again the major problem concerns lack of knowledge as to the proportion of the population untaxed. In a study of Norwich, one of the largest towns of later medieval England, J.F. Pound, arguing that in 1525 as many as one third of household heads were too poor to pay the minimum levy (4d.), used a multiplier of six for household size.<sup>179</sup>

If these perhaps generous assumptions are used with the Colchester figures - 790 taxed in 1525 - then an estimated total population of c.6320 would be produced. There are indications that this may be too high.

The purported "collectors book", described in the previous chapter, contains names which are found in neither the 1524 nor the 1525 Exchequer returns. It is difficult, however, because of the number of deletions and amendments, to be confident about the total number of individuals counted in the respective parishes. In some cases it is clear that individuals are deleted because of their inability to pay; thus, in St Giles we find the following names scored through and 'nul' noted in the margin: 'John Rystrak, servant with Smyth, carpenter'; 'John Copland, bocher'; 'Thomas Gard, servant'; 'Phyllipp Appyre, capper'.<sup>180</sup>

The total number of names, including deletions, found in St Giles parish is 93 compared to 99 in 1524 and 85 in 1525. In St Mary Magdalen, however, 20 names are found in the tax book compared with 15 in 1524 and 19 in 1525, while Holy Trinity has 28 in the book compared to 21 and 25, Lexden 29 as against 23 and 25. In another of the larger parishes, St Nicholas, 69 are included in the Book as against 66 in 1524, 70 in 1525. St Leonards by contrast has 116 as against 95 and 113.

The other figures are St Botolph, 95 as against 84 and 80; St Peter, 91 as against 85 and 85; St Mary at Walls, 45 as against 42 and 44; All Saints 25 as against 17 and 24; St Runwald 31 against 28 and 31 number. There is thus a variation, with sometimes a surplus over the Exchequer lists and sometimes none.<sup>181</sup>

The total number of names in the 'collectors book' for these 11 parishes is 642, compared to 578 in 1524 and 598 in 1525; thus there are 7.4% more names in the book than in the 1525 exchequer return. There is no reason to believe that the collectors book was in any sense comprehensive, however. If we take the largest number found for each parish from any of the three documents we should have a figure closer to the real number of potentially taxable individuals. This, however, only increases the number involved to 649, and the percentage excess to 8.5. Applying this figure to the whole town, including the parishes not covered in the book, would produce a total figure of 857.

Adding 15% to this figure for individuals who escaped any or all of the assessments, and then using a multiplier of 5 produces an estimated total population of 4,928. Plainly this figure is noticeably lower than that obtained by using Pound's assumptions.



Perhaps it is too low; the increasing number of bequests to the poor in the sixteenth century (see below) might suggest that there was a larger residue of households unable to contribute and who never make an appearance in the documents.

A figure of about 5-5,500 might thus not be unreasonable; if this is valid, it would appear that the population of Colchester stood at a level almost identical to that which it had attained by 1377.

This does not imply, naturally, that there had been stability between these two dates. Rises and falls in the 150 years might be expected to have occurred in response to periodic outbreaks of plague and fluctuations in rural-urban migration. Moreover, national population was almost certainly smaller in the 1520s than in the 1370s. Such fluctuation in the borough's population is extremely difficult to document, however.

An indicator which might be thought to bear a direct relation to population movements can be derived from the regular ameracements of brewers who contravened the assize of ale. Lengthy lists of these individuals occur in the Lawhundred records, and it seems clear that the fines were, in effect, the product of a 'licensing system' rather than punitive impositions. Decadal averages of the numbers thus amerced are presented in Table XIII.



TABLE XIII: BREWERS AMERCED AT COLCHESTER, MICHAELMAS LAWHUNDRED

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Decade beginning	Av. No. Amercements	Years with Data
1310/11	56	2
1320/21	68	1
1330/31	102	2
1340/41	97	2
1350/51	118	4
1360/61	123	2
1370/71	136	3
1380/81	177	5
1390/91	176	4
1400/01	234	3
1410/11	235	5
1420/21	213	3
1430/31	199	6
1440/41	184	4
1450/51	194	6
1460/61	175	2
1470/71	164	4
1480/81	149	2
1490/91	-	-
1500/01	-	-
1510/11	103	5
1520/21	94	4
1530/31	75	6

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(Source: Court Rolls, vols. 1-23)

Note: Figures rounded up or down to nearest whole number. After 1530s a change in recording procedures precludes comparison with earlier decades.

The problem with these figures is their failure to show a close relation to population estimates derived from other sources. Thus the figures for the 1370s are approximately 40% higher than those for the 1520s and yet there seems no reason to believe that the actual population differed to this extent; if the figure of about 5,000 in 1525 is valid, then a population of about 7,000 would have to be postulated in 1377, well above the most generous estimates. Alternatively, 5,500 in 1377 would imply only 3,300 in 1525, which is unacceptably low - even with no allowance made for an untaxed element the 1525 figure would be about 4,000.

Thus while the trend derived is interesting - a direct relation brewers:population would indicate a population in the early fifteenth century some 50% larger than in 1377 - it must be viewed sceptically. We know too little about the nature and scale of brewing operations, and whether these changed over time, to be confident about its meaning. Clark has suggested that alehouses and taverns, and the brewing operations which supplied them, may have been growing in scale and complexity during the late medieval period.<sup>182</sup> We find an increasing number of tavern names in the Colchester court rolls suggestive of the rise of larger and more permanent establishments. Any such development would cast serious doubt on the significance of the number of brewers per se.

The 'internal' tax documents of the late fifteenth century are of little direct value in estimating population, because here the bases of assessment and inclusion are even more obscure than in the case of the national (e.g. Exchequer) tax returns. Nevertheless they give certain interesting indications as to the general condition of the borough at this period.

The most detailed of these lists are those compiled for the raising of a 'fifteenth' in 1495.<sup>183</sup> The levy was raised in two 'half fifteenths' and detailed lists of contributors, arranged by parish, were drawn up. This administrative feat was undertaken despite the fact that the levy was by now a 'fossilised' sum, and a relatively small one at that; the two 'halves' each amounted to £14.19s., and yet no fewer than 530 townsmen and women were drawn into the 'tax net' to raise these sums. Individual contributions range from 2d. to 2s.6d. for individuals, and religious houses holding land within the borough were also asked to pay their share, St John's Abbey 3s.4d. and the Abbey of St Osyth's 6s.8d. for holdings in Mile End.

Comparison of the two lists shows how inter-parish migration was kept trace of, newcomers to the town added, and dead or 'ex-villata' individuals deleted. The impression gained from these lists is of a highly organised community, in which the burden of even a small imposition like this was distributed amongst a wide spectrum of the population; the 530 taxed here to raise in total less than £30 compares interestingly with the 750/790 drawn upon to raise a much larger sum in 1524/5. One is decidedly not left with the impression of a shrunken or impoverished community. The town was not being "carried" by its wealthiest citizens in the matter of taxation; on the contrary, the rich paid - in relative terms - next to nothing towards these 'fifteenths'.

A further source which may have some bearing on total population is a list of men swearing fealty to the king in 1534,<sup>184</sup> following the marriage of Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn. This list contains 1,135 names, but how comprehensive it is likely to be is open to

doubt. Doolittle assumed it counted males over 18 years of age, and thus produced a total population estimate of 3,880 assuming 45% of the population was under this age.<sup>185</sup> This is low enough, but it might be necessary to reduce the figure further - there seems no good reason to assume that 18 was the age used, rather than 14 or 12, the age at which males were commonly sworn into tithing. Plainly this would reduce the estimated total population from an implausibly low level to one which, in the absence of a disastrous pestilence or similar calamity since 1525, seems quite impossible to accept. It must be probable that a list such as this has an extremely high level of omissions, with the more prosperous or politically cautious townsmen keen to prove their loyalty while many of the poor and disaffected disclaimed such performances.

#### Bequests to the Poor, 1495-1554

Amongst the acts of piety and charity found commonly in wills of the late medieval and early modern period are gifts to the poor people of the testator's community. Jennifer Ward, in a study of Colchester wills has noted an increase in the number of these bequests to the poor over the period 1528-58;<sup>186</sup> further, she concludes that this trend has little to do with the growth of protestantism and is more likely to be related to economic recession.

In order to verify the existence of such a trend, a larger collection of wills - 262 in all, covering the period 1495<sup>187</sup> to 1554 - has been examined. The results obtained are as follows:

TABLE XIV: BEQUESTS TO THE POOR, COLCHESTER WILLS, 1495-1554

	No. of Wills	No. with Bequests to the Poor	%	
1495-1504	45	4	8.9	)
1505-1514	45	2	4.4	)
1515-1524	39	1	2.6	)
1525-1534	42	3	7.1	)
1535-1544	57	7	12.3	)
1545-1554	34	10	29.4	)

(Source: 1) E.R.O., D/ACR and D/ABW; 2) Wills).

Only specific bequests to the poor have been included in this table; generalised bequests of money for the performance of "deeds of charity" are excluded, as these might cover a variety of other ends. Related bequests such as gifts to prisoners are also excluded; so only cases where the testator expresses specific concern for the relief of poverty are counted. These are thus minimal figures. As can be seen there is, in this sample, movement from a situation where only a very small proportion of testators made specific provision for the poor to one where nearly 30% did so; there appears to be increasing concern for the poor from about 1535, and a marked increase after 1545.

Although the numbers involved are necessarily small, the wording and value of these bequests would appear to confirm that the perceived trend represents a real increase in concern about poverty

in the town. Most of the early bequests are either of small or unspecified sums, sometimes to be disbursed on the day of the testator's burial; later bequests are more ambitious. Alderman William Becket made provision in his will in 1537<sup>188</sup> for bequests to the poor in every parish of the town, specifying the amount each parish was to have, the largest sums being for St Giles and St Botolph's parish. Joan Callowe (1535)<sup>189</sup> wished her house to be sold in order to provide bread, flesh, fish and wood for the poor, in addition to a 10s. bequest for bread and a desire that the residue of her goods should also be devoted to the poor. In the 1550s William Cornewell<sup>190</sup> 'gentleman' left 26s.8d. specifically for the poor of his own parish - St Leonards - plus £20 for the poor of the whole town. In 1550 the residue of Henry Taylecott's<sup>191</sup> goods are to be sold to raise money for "the poore mens box" of St Botolph's parish.

In addition to cash and food bequests there are references to the existence of alms houses. Ambrose Lowthe refers to "my almes house" in 1545,<sup>192</sup> while in 1526 Robert Crakebone had bequeathed a tenement to be an almshouse where the tenants should have no charge "but only to keep the reparacons and to pray for me".<sup>193</sup>

Poverty was always a feature of town life, but there seems reason to believe that as the mid-sixteenth century approached it had become a more noticeable feature of everyday life in Colchester. By 1557 it was found necessary to implement a poor-rate, and the court and assembly books of the early part of the reign of Elizabeth include lists of those qualifying for relief thereunder.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusions

The 'internal' evidence of changing wealth of the borough is not easy to evaluate. Some of the evidence which might be thought to indicate difficulty or decay is capable of bearing a different interpretation. The decline in the value of the tolls, while certainly indicating a serious problem of civic revenue, cannot be proved to attest to a real collapse in the borough's trade in the fifteenth century. The sixteenth-century evidence shows that serious problems of blockage of the channel at the Hythe were occurring, and it seems clear that in these circumstances Colchester merchants would retain the option of trading through other ports.

The decays of civic property, notably the bridges, may point to the inadequacy of revenue rather than to overall decline; the bridges were damaged by use rather than idleness. There is thus no convincing evidence of economic decay before the sixteenth century; on the contrary, it seems clear that the borough was larger at the end of the fifteenth century than it had been in the early fourteenth, and also contained more wealth, at least at an individual level. The major factor in Colchester's development was undoubtedly its emergence as an important centre of textile manufacture, a topic dealt with at length in the following two chapters.

The sixteenth century, more particularly the decades after 1520, provides more compelling evidence of economic difficulty; it may be, however, that this 'difficulty' should be seen as the result of a previously buoyant urban economy 'running out of steam' rather than as the culmination of a protracted 'crisis'. A growth of



poverty, impeded navigation, complaints of 'decay' and apparent difficulty in defending the privileges of the urban franchise point to a community in a state of retrenchment, unable, perhaps to sustain the momentum of economic development. The explanation for this malaise must be sought in the context of national development, and in the position of the borough as an industrial and commercial centre within the clothmaking zone of northern Essex and southern Suffolk.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY DOWN TO 1400 A.D.

#### Introduction

The importance accorded to the textile industry in the various schools of thought regarding urban 'crisis' or 'growth' was discussed at some length in chapter 1. However, some recent writers have reacted against this long-established emphasis on clothmaking, stressing the significance of other industries in both town and country, or arguing that the numbers employed in, or dependent upon the textile crafts constituted only a small fraction of the total national population.<sup>1</sup>

In general though, the textile industry continues to be accorded a key role in most discussions of later medieval economic change and particularly in the area of the rural-urban relations. Despite the increasing complexity of terminology employed, most of the theories of rural industrialisation<sup>2</sup> continue to postulate a basically simple opposition between urban economies characterised by restriction and conservatism and a countryside where new social and economic forms could take root, growing, in Marx's words, out of "the entrails of feudalism".<sup>3</sup> These new forms might include the appearance of 'free' wage-labour on an increasing scale, harbingers perhaps of the development of industrial capitalism, or the emergence of a family-based 'proto-industrial' economy open to 'super-exploitation' by merchant capital.<sup>4</sup>

For the medieval period, however, there is a distinct shortage of studies which demonstrate the real nature of the organisation of

the clothmaking industry, either in its social or its workplace aspects. For the rural industries this is due to a chronic shortage of source materials; our knowledge of the textile industry at such places as Lavenham or Coggeshall is gleaned from a few wills, occasional references in manorial court rolls, the aulnage accounts, and the sporadic appearance of the wealthiest clothiers in central records. The very absence of regulation which, it is argued, promoted the development of industry would also tend to minimise the volume of systematic records produced.<sup>5</sup> It is in consequence surprising to find that there is also a distinct shortage of detailed information on the organisation of urban cloth manufacture. Certainly, there is a wealth of literature relating to civic and gild regulation of standards;<sup>6</sup> this is, however, almost entirely normative material. It is relatively easy to discover what the various types of authority wished the textile industry to be like, but far harder to discover its real nature and the characteristics of day-to-day work relations and procedures. To what extent did the urban craftsman of the late middle ages resemble the ideal of the independent master? Was capital incapable, as the rural industrialisation models assume, of making any real inroads into the urban textile industry? Were urban and rural industries inevitably in competition or were there possibilities of co-existence or symbiosis?

Definitive answers to these types of question are of course elusive. However, the Colchester records are sufficiently voluminous and, sometimes, detailed to make an attempt at addressing them worthwhile. While it is impossible to reconstruct a satisfactory overall picture of the Colchester textile industry,

certain aspects can be investigated, albeit indirectly, through the sources that survive; in particular, through the record of cases heard in the borough court. Where detailed records of hearings exist, information can be obtained bearing upon work procedures, division of labour, mechanisation, ownership of materials and means of production, trade and marketing, and interaction with the country industry. We never learn as much as we would like about any of these areas; sometimes it is necessary to draw upon highly fragmentary and ambiguous evidence; always the data beg as many questions as they answer. Nevertheless, the court roll data, partial and un-quantifiable as they are, provide evidence to be found in no other source. It therefore complements the type of evidence termed 'normative' above, the regulations and ordinances of the urban government, to be found especially in the Red Paper Book.

The other major source available is a difficult and controversial one, the aulnage accounts. A review of the literature relating to this source is included in the next section. Miscellaneous information can also be derived from state records, such as the Patent Rolls; these will be drawn upon where relevant. The aim of the present chapter and the one which follows is to exploit this range of sources in an attempt to uncover the structure of the textile industry at Colchester. Was it dominated by large producers and merchants, or was it the preserve of small, independent artisans? Did the borough's industry remain prosperous throughout the later medieval period, as Bridbury contended urban clothmaking in general did, or was it gradually undermined by rural competition, as appears to have been the case at York in the fifteenth century?<sup>7</sup>

There follows an enquiry into the origins and early growth of commercial clothmaking in the borough and in rural Essex, after which a more detailed study of conditions at the end of the fourteenth century is presented, based upon the evidence of the court rolls and the major aulnage account of 1394-5. In Chapter 5 fifteenth-century developments are reviewed and an assessment is made of the situation in the mid-sixteenth century, prior to the transformation wrought by the immigrant influx and associated rise of the 'New Draperies'. The emphasis throughout is on the scale and organisation of production, and upon the industry's regional context. Less attention is necessarily paid to the questions of marketing and the export trade, which have been the principal areas of interest for so many scholars.<sup>8</sup>

### Origins

At the beginning of the fourteenth century commercial cloth-making had already been in existence at Colchester for some time, but both the precise origins and scale of the early industry are obscure. Miller notes the borough's appearance in royal records from the 1240s onwards as a source of low-priced cloth.<sup>9</sup> It may be assumed that the supplying of more humble markets had been going on for some time before this documented emergence. In the fifteenth century the town asserted that the making of woollen cloth had been its chief industry "from time beyond memory".<sup>10</sup>

The developing wool trade no doubt provided a stimulus to the growth of manufacturing. The Abbey of St John's within the Liberty

was engaged in this trade from an early date, and appears to figure in a mid-thirteenth-century list of religious houses involved in the export of wool.<sup>11</sup> By the reign of Edward I the borough was sending woollen cloths overseas; the 1282 'Domesday' of Ipswich, of which place Colchester was generally reckoned a dependent port for customs purposes, makes mention of the export of Colchester cloths, together with those of Coggeshall in Essex and Sudbury in Suffolk.<sup>12</sup>

While there is thus evidence of early involvement in textile manufacture - and hence reason to be sceptical about Bridbury's characterisation of Colchester as a "new clothmaking town" in the later middle ages - it seems plain that the borough's industry was on a much smaller scale than that found in such centres as York, Lincoln or Winchester in the thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

A study of the names of thirteenth- and twelfth century-Colchester burgesses contained in the Chartulary of St John's Abbey concluded that there was little to suggest widespread involvement in cloth-making.<sup>14</sup> Again, the mention of 'Colchester cloths' may indicate cloths marketed but not necessarily manufactured within the borough. (Such a reservation, of course, applies to all periods and places for which corroborative evidence is lacking.)

Nevertheless, while the borough may not have experienced the early industrial prominence enjoyed by some towns, it has been suggested that neither was it seriously affected by the 'depression' of the late thirteenth century. Andrew Woodger argues that this latter was a crisis of the English broadcloth industry, and that it was both deep and protracted, "a disaster of the greatest magnitude".<sup>15</sup>

The broadcloth-making towns, Woodger contends, were still using an archaic type of upright, warp-weighted loom - referred to in the records as the burel loom - essentially unchanged since Anglo-Saxon times. The adoption of the much more efficient double horizontal loom in the Flemish towns revolutionised the industry, being capable of working perhaps ten times faster than the warp-weighted device, and spelled ruin for the English broadcloth makers. The towns which escaped disaster, Woodger argues, were those which themselves used some form of horizontal loom; Colchester, Ipswich and Norwich are cited as examples. As the double horizontal loom is not documented in England before 1363 the implication is that these towns' clothmakers used the single horizontal, which could not produce broadcloth, and must thus have made the narrow panni stricti - 'straights' or 'Kerseyes' - for which the East Anglian industry was later noted.<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the validity of this argument, it cannot be said that Colchester's industry appears particularly prominent at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The borough's early subsidy lists contain varying numbers of names suggestive of involvement in textile manufacture or trade. The largest numbers are found in the returns for the 1301 subsidy; on the basis of both surnames and inventories of taxable possessions, Rickword identified 11 dyers and fullers, and 16 weavers out of a total taxed population of 390.<sup>17</sup>

Other craft names feature in the returns for the 'twentieth' of 1327, where we find one 'cissore' (generally taken as 'tailor', but possibly shearman), one 'chaloner' (blanket-maker), plus two

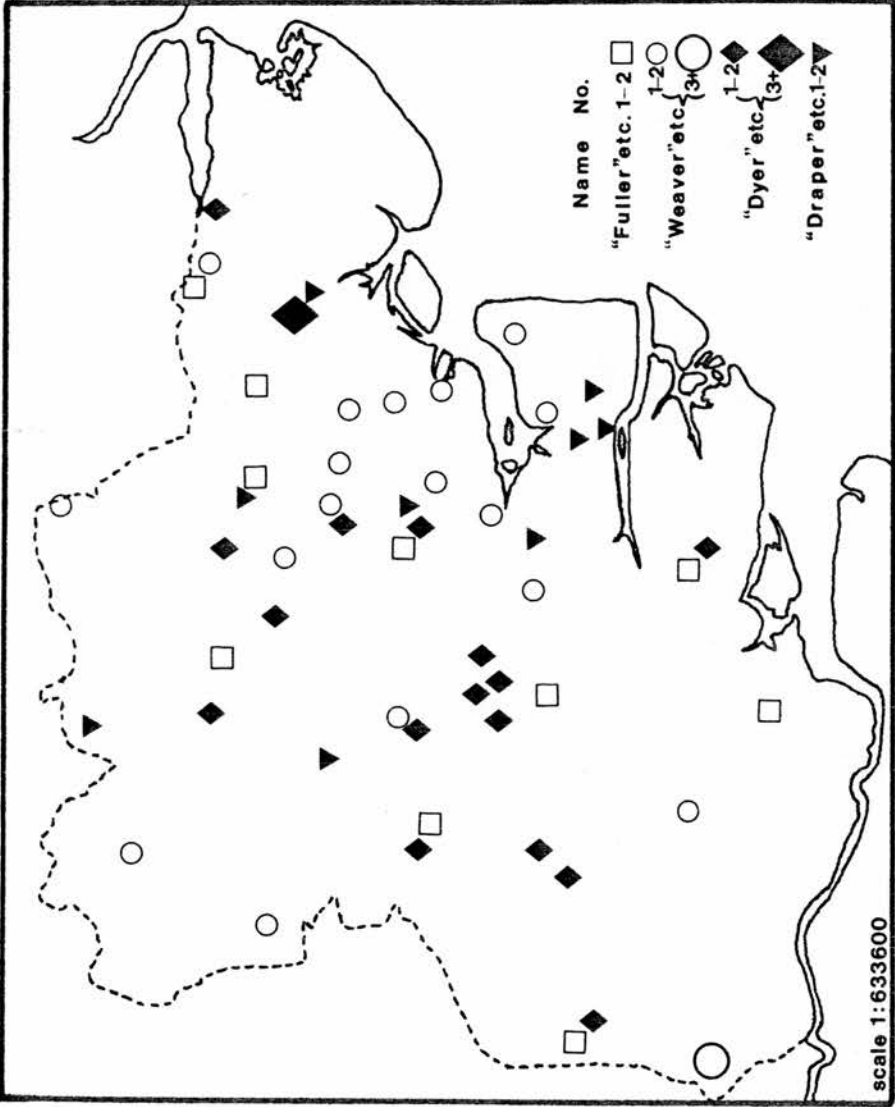


tinctore', one 'deyere' and one 'List(er)', all indicative of dyeing.<sup>18</sup>

Plainly, surname evidence, can only provide the barest picture of a place's occupational structure; many craftsmen might be concealed by other types of surname, e.g. topographical. Again, it might be contended that as the purpose of a surname is to design and define individuals there would be little point, for example, in calling someone 'John the Webbe' in a town full of weavers.<sup>19</sup>

Such a criticism would have less force with regard to the more specialised crafts - dyeing, fulling, shearing etc. - which would be expected to employ far fewer people than, say, weaving and spinning. In the absence of other evidence occupational names remain valuable pointers to the location of commercial clothmaking prior to the Black Death. The returns of the 1327 subsidy survive for virtually the whole of Essex, and have for this reason been used to produce Map 7, illustrating the distribution of certain textile surnames. It can be seen that whereas names indicative of fulling are fairly evenly spread, there are concentrations of 'dyer' names at Colchester and around Chelmsford in the centre of the country. More 'weaver' names are found in the north-eastern than the south-western half of Essex, while the 'draper' names occur unevenly. This map may thus reflect in a very limited way the patchy emergence of textile crafts in the Essex countryside.

The origins and early history of this rural industry are as shadowy as those of the borough's; Bruges cloth-makers are supposed to have landed at Harwich in 1304, and to have established their crafts at Bocking and Shalford, the industry later spreading to Braintree, Coggeshall and Dedham, and East Bergholt in Suffolk.<sup>20</sup>



MAP 7: TEXTILE SURNAMES, 1327 LAY SUBSIDY

However, as noted earlier, the Ipswich Domesday suggests that cloth was being made commercially in or around Coggeshall over 20 years before this date.

The scale of rural cloth-making at this period is, of course, impossible to estimate; nevertheless, it is clear that Colchester acted as a market for country cloths from an early date. When the wool market and fair were reorganised<sup>21</sup> in the 1370s, the Red Paper Book makes it clear that both had been in existence for a long time. The market - principally for the sale of wool itself - had been held in the hall and precincts of St Runwald's church, to the personal benefit of one Thomas Deynes "and his predecessors" in the tenancy of the hall; similarly, the Fair - which was concerned with the sale of "woollen wares" - had "in former times" been held at the Feasts of St John the Baptist and the Blessed Mary Magdalene, and the orderly nature of these earlier marts is contrasted with the chaotic contemporary scene, where trading takes place "in taverns, corners ... and houses", with no profit accruing to the commonalty.<sup>22</sup>

The suspicion that in the earlier fourteenth century the borough's role as a market had been perhaps more important than its manufacturing role is not weakened by an examination of the early court rolls, and of national records. The decades preceding the Black Death, and particularly before 1340, have a dearth of evidence relating to cloth manufacture compared to later periods; indeed the surviving court rolls from the first half of the fourteenth century are totally lacking in the records of litigation arising from cloth making which later are so abundant.

Again, we may turn to the evidence of names; a will of John le Dyere is recorded in 1329-30;<sup>23</sup> Martin Textor was fined in 1310-11 because "a servant and not a burgess."<sup>24</sup> The records of early freedom admissions in the court rolls and the Oath Book similarly contain names suggestive of involvement with textile manufacture or trade.<sup>25</sup> The need for caution in the use of such names is well illustrated by a new burgess from 1330-1, one William Deyer, 'shoemaker'. The other relevant names found are: 1311-12, Philip Cissor; 1340-1, Geoffrey Webbe; 1341-2, Roger le Webbe; 1345-6, John Blacchestere ('one who blacks cloth');<sup>26</sup> 1349-50, William Lavender ('one who washes' - probably cloth).<sup>27</sup> Also, Nicholas Caperoun, entering in 1338-9, may be a 'caperoner', maker of chaperons.<sup>28</sup> Indicative of trading interests in cloth and wool are Thomas Draper (1345-6), William Wollemonger (1333-4) and Roger Wollemonger (1336-7).

On firmer ground, some new burgesses are given specific occupational designations in addition to surnames. However, only 40 burgesses are described in this way prior to 1350, and of these only five are textile workers; two weavers (admitted in 1331-2 and 1342-3) and three fullers (1340-1, 1343-4 and 1345-6).<sup>29</sup> Thus, fewer identifiable cloth workers take up their freedom than do leather-workers, victuallers or sailors in the period prior to 1350.<sup>30</sup> While the dealings of such workers as there were in the town are not visible in the records, the borough's continuing role as a market for wool, and also for woollen cloths, is slightly more prominent. Thus, the second earliest court-rolls, those for 1311-12, contain the record of a grant by "the commonalty of the burgesses" to William de Sartria of a stall "newly constructed for

sale of woollen cloth" at a rent of 4s per annum;<sup>31</sup> the grantee was one of the Bailiffs in the previous year. Engagement in the export of cloth is witnessed by a case from 1344 recorded in the Close Rolls; Walter de Ilye and John de Peldon, both of Colchester, joined with Roger Angel of Kersey and certain others in a complaint concerning goods arrested overseas; the three had placed 408 ells of cloth, price £27.5s., 306 ells, price £21, and 300 ells, price £13.10s. respectively on board a ship called La Catelayne of Mersea (Essex) to be taken to Flanders, but the ship was arrested at 'Middleburgh'.<sup>32</sup>

The values placed on the impounded cloths are interesting; the Colchester merchants' cloths are valued at approximately 1s.4d. per ell (de Ilye's; 1.32 shillings/ell, de Peldon's; 1.37 shillings/ell) while the Kersey (Suffolk) merchant's are valued at under 1ld. per ell (0.9 shillings). In other words, the cloths owned by the men from Colchester are valued at approximately half as much again per unit of length as the Kersey merchant's. Although estimates of value put forward in the context of legal disputes can hardly be regarded as purely objective assessments, the difference is suggestive. While such a variation might be due to differing quality of cloth, or to a different degree of 'finishing' (dyed or undyed, for example), it might also reflect a difference in breadth of fabric; Kersey, of course, gave its name to one of the most famous types of narrow cloth; the implications as regards the breadth of the Colchester cloths at this date, with reference to the 'Woodger argument' discussed above, are obvious. Naturally, we cannot say whether the cloths were made in the places of residence of the merchants who exported them.

Colchester merchants' interests in the wool trade also make their mark in central records of the 1340s; in 1342 we hear of 320 sacks of wool detained in the borough, 28 of which were to be sent to Bruges.<sup>33</sup> Three years later we find a royal undertaking to pay two Colchester men the value of five sacks of wool taken from them.<sup>34</sup>

Overall, the most striking impression gained from an examination of the records of the pre-1350 period is of the paucity of evidence bearing on the manufacture of woollen cloth within the borough. While some textile craftsmen undoubtedly resided in Colchester, there is little to suggest that their numbers were large or their industry extensive. The contrast between the first and second halves of the century is, as will be seen, great, with a blossoming of evidence in the decades after the Black Death. The question to be answered is whether this contrast is real, or a mere trick of the records; at this stage it will simply be observed that the second possibility - concealment of the industry in both local and national records in the first half of the century - seems highly implausible.

#### After the Black Death

The borough's court rolls resume in 1351-2, and from this year onwards the manufacturing and marketing of woollen cloth begin to make their mark in the records. Many of the early presentments are concerned with the irregular purchase or sale of wool and cloth, forestalling the established markets. Thus, the 1351-2 rolls record a charge against John Somenour, 'woolman', of buying wool in

Colchester that had not been publicly displayed, "to the dearth of the whole market".<sup>35</sup> In the same year's rolls three men are fined for buying woollen cloth in the borough unfulled; one of the offenders is 'Roger Petit de la Neylond (Nayland, Suffolk), draper'.<sup>36</sup>

This last is of particular interest; a similar presentment is found in the rolls for 1366-7, when John Alsy of Dedham was charged with buying two 'decene' of cloth unfulled.<sup>37</sup> Both these cases show men from places known - or later to be known - as centres of rural clothmaking purchasing unfinished cloths in the borough, presumably with the intention of fulling them in the country. If common, this practice could have had an interesting effect on the aulnage returns for the places involved. Cloths were sealed when finished, and therefore cloths sold unfulled - which may have been manufactured in the borough - might be expected to appear in the aulnage accounts for those places where fulling and the various stages of finishing took place. This would effectively reverse one common criticism of the aulnage accounts, that they exaggerate the role of towns in cloth manufacture by including rural cloths in urban totals.<sup>38</sup>

Fullers were almost certainly active within the Liberty. A breach of covenant case from 1360 saw William Pope claiming that Edward Thormad had failed to work for him as agreed "at his fulling mill" from Michaelmas until Midsummer.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the location of the mill is not given, and indeed there is no unambiguous evidence of mechanical fulling in Colchester before around 1380. Complaints of bad fulling at later periods generally relate to mechanical working, and this may also be true of the case,



also from 1360, in which William Buk claimed that four cloths fulled by John Pylay had been so badly worked that on being sent to Bordeaux they could only be sold for a derisory sum.<sup>40</sup>

That some fullers were operating on a fairly large scale and taking more than a craftsman's part in clothmaking is suggested by the designation of 'Thomas Clerk, fuller, merchant'.<sup>41</sup>

Other textile crafts begin to make an impression in the court rolls after mid-century. In an enrolled indenture dated November 1357 we find John Sage, weaver, taking as apprentice John Vyn of Rattlesden, Suffolk.<sup>42</sup> The weavers also appear in complaints of shoddy workmanship; the cloth woven by Robert Webbe from 17 lbs of wool in 1356-7 was "not sufficient". Contractual difficulties could also lead to court actions; John Webbe was taken to court by John Wylemot in 1360 for failing to weave a cloth within 15 days.<sup>43</sup>

While some weavers were thus working to specified short-term contracts, others were salaried journeymen; thus we find John Claveman claiming 8s.8d. for a year's wages as weaver in North Street.<sup>44</sup>

The shearer's craft figures in a case of conspiracy from the 1370s. Robert Byssshop and William Mosp were fined 6s.8d. for conspiring "to prevent any outside shearer of cloth to dwell at Colchester to work his trade", and with interfering with a certain John Boyn and his associates. The same two offenders are also charged with forcing entry to the shop of William atte Coumbe in East Stockwell Street, and "spoiling the sharp end of his fuller's tongs to the damage of £10".<sup>45</sup> The implication of these entries, if the latter is not merely the result of a personal grudge, is that Byssshop and Mosp were using menacing or violent behaviour against



both shearers and fullers; it seems not unlikely that they were themselves fullers who sheared their own cloths and wished to resist the development of a specialist shearing craft within the borough.

Craft designations can in themselves be deceptive, particularly in the absence of organised guilds which would at least attempt to prevent the amalgamation or blurring of crafts. If some fullers may have been involved in more general 'finishing' work, and, perhaps, marketing, there also occur in the rolls the names of individuals designated as 'clothiers'. Thus, in 1374-5 it is presented "that John Kervyll, clothier, causes to be stretched inadequate decennas pannorum and sells them for 14 ells".<sup>46</sup>

Other branches of the clothmaking industry appear fleetingly in the court records of the 1350s, 60s and 70s; Margery Skynnere, a threader, is accused of detaining a pound of wool in 1360; in 1357 a spinning wheel is valued at 18d; in 1374-5 there is litigation over failure to deliver three hundred 'thromes'; a dyer's servant appears in court in 1377 accused of detaining white wool delivered to him for dyeing.<sup>47</sup>

The listing of occupations for new burgesses continues to be the exception rather than the rule after 1350. Only fifty-two craftsmen or traders are identified between 1350 and 1379;<sup>48</sup> of these eleven are involved in cloth making or trading, being one weaver, three dyers, two fullers, two cardmakers, one woolmonger and one mercer. In addition, some or all of the six men described as 'merchants' may have had textile interests. Despite the small size of this sample one or two interesting points arise; it is noteworthy that there are three dyers and only one weaver although the latter craft appears much more important in the court records

than the former; dyeing, of course, was generally a much wealthier and prestigious trade than weaving. The appearance of cardmakers amongst the burgesses suggests that the early stages of wool preparation were of some importance within Colchester.

The three decades following the Black Death witness the emergence of the clothmaking industry at Colchester from the shadows into the light of documentation. Where earlier there had been only indirect references or problematic evidence (such as surnames), there now appears a growing body of evidence in the court rolls, litigation arising from the day-to-day problems of a developing urban industry; for there can be little doubt that the industry was indeed growing fast, and is not merely made to appear so by the nature of the records. There is no major change in the form of the court records between the first and second halves of the fourteenth century, and the records of central government tell a similar story.

The growth in evidence continues in the closing decades of the fourteenth century, and this relative abundance makes it possible to attempt to construct a more detailed picture of the borough's <sup>cloth-</sup>industry at this date; a picture which can be further developed by examination of the important series of aulnage accounts which exist for the mid-1390s.

### Colchester's Industry in the Later Fourteenth Century

In the textile industry, as in other crafts and trades, the Colchester civic authorities of the fourteenth century attempted to enforce burgess monopolies, particularly with regard to retail

trading. The ordinances concerning fulling and weaving recorded in the Red Paper Book and aimed at preventing those who were not free masters from following these crafts were probably echoing or codifying older practices and policies.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in 1383 we find John Calle, fuller, presented for selling cloth "in retail" although not a burgess.<sup>50</sup> 'Foreigners' like William Ede in 1384 and John Pavy in 1391 appeared in court for buying and selling cloth without paying custom.<sup>51</sup> The authorities were not naive enough to believe that they could totally exclude non-burgesses from the cloth industry; they were less concerned with absolute monopoly than with restricting the sphere of operation of the non-free, and ensuring that they paid for any trade they engaged in.

It is to be noted that Colchester had no true craft guilds of the type found in the majority of English towns; there were no corporate, chartered bodies responsible for the supervision and regulation of commerce and industry. Instead, the borough government had direct - or, at the least, delegated - oversight of economic life. The ordinances aimed at regulating the textile and other crafts were framed not in the name of the masters and brethren of various guilds, but on behalf of the 'Bailiffs and commonalty' of Colchester. This accounts in part, no doubt, for the wealth of the civic records; many cases which in other towns would be heard by gild authorities came to the borough court at Colchester. As we shall see, provision was made for the election of 'Masters' of various 'arts' within the town, these masters apparently having the power to settle minor disputes; however, these individuals were borough officials, accountable to the

Bailiffs; they had no corporate structures behind them. Indeed, they are shadowy figures who make little impact on the town records, and it seems probable that in the absence of the social and economic prestige vested in the masters of corporate guilds they were little more than inspectors and executive officers of the borough court (see below).

The extent to which this constitutional peculiarity influenced the economic development of Colchester is hard to assess. As has been suggested, the borough administration involved itself directly in the oversight of economic life, and attempted to intervene in precisely those areas which the guilds of other towns sought to control. It might be maintained that economic thinking in Colchester was governed by wider considerations of civic good rather than the narrow self-interest usually attributed to late medieval craft guilds. However, individual and trade rivalries were bound to erupt in the arena of oligarchic town government, and to be reflected in the enactment and attempted enforcement of town ordinances.

Craft amalgamation, the following of two or more occupations, seems to have been fairly common, but so it was in some towns with elaborate gild systems.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in 1388 we find William Okle, "webbe", claiming money from Matilda Wastener for weaving and fulling.<sup>53</sup> Okle was evidently involved in a range of textile crafts - earlier in the same year he had been prosecuted by Matilda Isakners who alleged that she had given him 28 lbs of wool for dyeing. It was alleged, however, that Okle had confiscated the wool and "violently assaulted" Matilda when she tried to recover it. Okle is again described as a "webbe" in this case, and it thus seems

likely that he took an active part in cloth manufacture rather than playing a purely entrepreneurial role. The amounts of money and wool involved in these cases also suggest a small scale of work.<sup>54</sup>

The fullers may also have been expanding their sphere of operations at this period; in 1384 William Pakke, fuller, was taken to court by John Male who claimed 3s. for hire of a dye-house.<sup>55</sup> In 1391 two fullers are recorded as buying sticks of teasel; they must thus have carried out the process of raising, or employed other people to do so.<sup>56</sup>

As elsewhere, it was customary for the craftsmen to be assisted by apprentices and/or journeymen. The term 'journeyman' is an ambiguous one, being used to denote individuals of a variety of statuses; it will be used here to label those individuals who had served apprenticeships but, unable or unwilling to become masters, worked on a contracted medium- or long-term basis for others. It will thus exclude the casual or non-apprenticed wage-worker, although it must be conceded that the literal meaning of the term 'journeyman' is a day-worker. There is, as we shall see, evidence of the employment of this type of casual labour in the Colchester textile trades.

It is worthwhile at this stage to consider Unwin's simple model of division of labour within urban crafts (Table XV).

TABLE XV: URBAN DIVISION OF LABOUR

		Craftsman				
Stage 1	=	Workman + Foreman + Employer + Merchant + Shopkeeper				
		Trading Master		Journeyman		
Stage 2	=	F + E + M + S			=	W
		Large Merchant	Large & Small Shopkeeper	Merchant Employer	Large Master	Small Master Journeyman
Stage 3	=	=	=	=	=	=
		M	M + S	M + E	E + F	F + W W

(Source: Unwin, 1904, pp.11-12, adapted)

Stage 1 is supposed to represent the situation in the thirteenth century, stage 3 that in the seventeenth, stage 2 being intermediate; for the purposes of this discussion stage 2 could be termed 'late medieval'. The functions originally united in the independent gild craftsman are seen to gradually become separated with the growth of merchant capital, the development of various middleman groups and the emergence of a depressed journeyman class.

How were these functions divided up in Colchester's textile industry; did the craftsmen buy materials independently and then sell the (finished or unfinished) product of their labour, or were they in a dependent position vis a vis merchant capitalists who exercised overall control of production and marketing?

To address first of all the question of labour organisation within the workshop; employment of labour inevitably brought

problems of supervision and organisation; the traditional forms of apprenticeship had the merit, from the master's point of view, that they were recognised by the civic authorities and thus the apprentice who failed to work satisfactorily during his (normally seven-year) term could be prosecuted. Thus, in 1387-8 William Wytham sought the judgement of the court on the behaviour of his bound apprentice John atte Lane who had spent his time, in the words of the presentment "playing at dice, spoiling cloth, and committing fornication with William's maid".<sup>57</sup>

John Grove of 'Brystede' was prosecuted in 1400 for failing to complete his period of apprenticeship with Geoffrey Gest, fuller, in contravention of the agreement made the previous year in the house of John Pod, a Colchester merchant.<sup>58</sup> Competition for labour is evidenced by periodic cases of alleged 'abduction' of apprentices; in 1399, for example, John Rosse was accused of taking away the servant and apprentice of his fellow fuller, Nicholas Cook.<sup>59</sup>

Numerous cases of claims being made for wages owed indicate that more or less casual wage-labour was commonly drawn upon by masters in the textile crafts to supplement their own and their apprentices' efforts. Thus, we find Thomas Holdefelde claiming 40d. "for wages due when working in the handicraft of fulling with John Wynlefeelde";<sup>60</sup> William Dyche claiming 15s. from John Cook "of which 11s.8d. are due to him for wages as weaver";<sup>61</sup> and Henry Branktre seeking 2s.2d. from John Miche "as wages when in the latter's service in his trade of weaving".<sup>62</sup> These presentments replicate the form of case relating to the country industry; for example, we find William Buk attached to reply to Peter Fretheman "claiming 18s. due to him when in his service at East Bergholt,



Suffolk, in the trade of fulling".<sup>63</sup> How many of these wage-earners were technically 'journeymen' in the sense outlined above is impossible to tell in the absence of comprehensive apprenticeship records from this period.

Valuable information can be gained from the court rolls on the question of ownership and exchange of the materials involved in the production process. It is apparent from even a cursory inspection of the rolls that there are two principal types of transaction involved, at least as far as weaving and fulling are concerned. In the first, the craftsman is given materials to work and then return to the owner in exchange for a money payment (or, against the regulations, a payment in goods). The second type of transaction places the onus of sale of the product on the craftsman; he completes his labour and then sells the product on behalf of the owner. Both of these forms are compatible with - they may indeed be seen as aspects of - some form of 'putting-out'. What we definitely lack is evidence of large numbers of totally independent craftsmen buying and selling materials on their own behalf; it might be that this is an illusion created by the documentation, with the type of transactions exemplified below being more liable to produce the kind of difficulties that led to legal action. All types of buying and selling would seem, however, to offer many potential pretexts for litigation.

Some cases of fulling from the 1380s may be used as initial examples of the two types of transaction. In 1384 John Coupere was accused by Robert Bresyngham of detaining blue, tawny and red cloths; it was alleged that the cloths had been given to him by Breslyngham's wife, Agnes, at the tenement of a third party, William

Cristemasse of Holy Trinity parish, for fulling and return. Coupere had, however, failed to redeliver (a charge he denied).<sup>64</sup>

In the next year's rolls we find Richard Payn coming to court claiming 20s., stating that he delivered to Laurence Ganger two 'decene' and 4 ells of woollen cloth of 'russet barkyd' for fulling and sale; Ganger appears not to have completed his side of the bargain.<sup>65</sup> Also in 1385-6 is a more detailed case:

Peter Heyward is attached to reply to Rose Waterne who claims 5s., stating that she delivered to the said Peter some woollen cloth of 'brown tequeling', price 27s., for fulling and to be sold, which he did, but has kept back 5s. from the price to be paid on the Feast of St. Gregory next following.

The defendant subsequently acknowledged owing the stated amount.<sup>66</sup>

A similar case, involving the alleged detention of part of the sale price of a cloth occurs in 1388; Robert Parlement claimed to have delivered a 'decena' of russet and white cloth to William Dod for fulling, which the latter did; Dod then sold the cloth for 21s.6d., it was claimed, but afterwards gave Parlement only 13s.4d., thus owing the balance of 8s.2d.<sup>67</sup> Plainly, in a transaction such as this, payment of the fuller must have been arranged separately from the main business; Dod might even have been retained by Parlement, but it is likely he would in this case have been described as 'his fuller' or 'servant'.

Workers in other branches of the textile industry also appear in the court rolls charged with failure to 'redeliver' materials. Thus, we find John Doreward called to answer to a charge of detention of goods brought by Edmund Melneman who stated that he had "delivered" to the former in Northward, about All Saints Day, 1404, 15 lbs of tawny thread at 8d. per lb. for weaving and making into

cloth and to redeliver immediately which he has failed to do"; 20s. damages were claimed on this charge, and a further 10s. for breach of contract, for "the former agreed with the latter to put in his loom a whole cloth of Greyrusset and weave it immediately, but did not do so".<sup>68</sup>

Plainly, most contracts were reached on more definite terms than "immediate" return. It is common for a specific date to be named; thus, John Fryday was prosecuted for allegedly failing to release a cloth of narrow grey russet "delivered to him for fulling and to be returned by Christmas". Fryday, however, denied all knowledge of such a contract, claiming that the cloth had been given to him as a pledge of debt.<sup>69</sup> Threaders and spinners also worked on similar terms; in 1400 Margaret Goggere was presented for failing to return wool delivered to her by William Pryour's wife for threading and return within 14 days.<sup>70</sup>

Cases of legal action resulting from damage done to cloth during fulling or dyeing are also clearly indicative that the craftsmen are working on cloth owned by someone else. In a typical case from the year 1391, with few details given, John Warwell was accused by John Bisshop of breaking contract, in that he undertook to dye a piece of tawny cloth "which he did so badly that it was spoilt".<sup>71</sup>

It is difficult from the records we have to find out much in detail about the activities and scale of operations of the individuals who were 'putting out' materials in this way at the end of the fourteenth century; men like John Belte, 'merchant', who charged John atte Wode, fuller, with detention of goods in 1403.<sup>72</sup> Some suggestive details are found in a case from 1391 involving one William Golofre. John Cok claimed 19s.8d. from Golofre, 16s. of

which was for 'four large pounds' of white wool sold, plus 10s. for 'mellehere' at 'Hethemelle' and 18d. for 'thykkyng' six decene of woollen cloth at 'Stokkes mell', and minus 6s.8d. received from John Curteys and the (unspecified) value of a piece of cloth to make shoes, received from Golofre.<sup>73</sup> Golofre occurs elsewhere, paying for fulling (see below). The present case suggests that John Curteys, described elsewhere as a fuller,<sup>74</sup> was either working for Golofre as a retained agent or craftsman, or was in some way indebted to him. (In the next year's rolls Curteys was charged by John Basslebrok, webbe, with owing 20s. in respect of a cloth for resale; he allegedly sold the cloth for 40s. but gave Basslebrok only 20s.)<sup>75</sup> Cok, who is probably the 'John Koc of Eststret, fuller' found later in the rolls for 1391,<sup>76</sup> appears to be selling wool to Golofre, the man he is fulling for.<sup>77</sup> It thus seems likely that Golofre was a small 'clothier' or 'mercier' of some sort, indirectly involved in various stages of the manufacturing process. Unfortunately no note of occupation is included in the record of his entry to the freedom of the town in 1387-88 when he paid a fine of 20s.<sup>78</sup>

The amounts of materials and money involved in most of the cases found in the court rolls of the late fourteenth century suggest a fairly small scale of operations. By far the biggest transactions were those with London and London merchants; these transactions have left a mark in both the borough records and national sources such as the Patent Rolls. Thus, in 1388 we find John Trumpton and Thomas Neweman, citizens of London, claiming that they are owed £392 by John Kempston, together with Richard Bacon of 'Hadley' and Robert Pitebeef, citizen and mercer of London. In the same year three

Colchester burgesses were called to reply to charges of debt (£43 each) brought by London citizens.<sup>79</sup> During the 1390s we find Simon Deyere and John Pod, dyer, separately pardoned for not appearing to answer charges of debt to London citizens.<sup>80</sup> William Dodd, 'burgess of Colchestre-hithe' was similarly pardoned in cases of debt to a London citizen and Robert Cook of Lavenham.<sup>81</sup> Again, in 1403 and 1404 John Pake and John Dawe, Colchester drapers, were pardoned for not appearing to answer charges of owing £75 each to Nicholas Bacon and John Glanville, citizens and merchants of London.<sup>82</sup>

The case involving William Golofre, outlined above, raises the question of mechanisation of the work process; at this period the only textile process using a non-human power-source to any extent was fulling, with the harnessing of water power.

As rehearsed in Chapter 1, Bridbury has attacked the view, put forward by Carus-Wilson, that the introduction of mechanical fulling was a key factor in the development of the textile industry in later medieval England. He argues rather that the widespread introduction of fulling mills in the thirteenth century was an imprudent fashion adopted by landlords "in a chronically overpopulated country where labour-saving devices were more likely to have raised costs than to have lowered them"; furthermore, the supposed relocation of the cloth industry evidenced by the introduction of fulling mills in the upland areas of the north and west is illusory because "water-mills worked satisfactorily in all the lowland areas in which historians have found that 13th century clothmaking was concentrated". Indeed, Bridbury argues, there is no evidence of substantial relocation associated with the later

fourteenth-century expansion; on the contrary, the later medieval history of the cloth industry is characterised by the "continuing preponderance of certain established cloth-making regions".<sup>83</sup>

Bridbury's argument against the fulling mill thus in part rests on his contention that it was not generally adopted in the established cloth-producing areas of Lowland England, despite the fact there was no real technical difficulty in doing so; if corn mills could operate on lowland rivers and streams, so could fulling mills. Turning to the urban industry, Bridbury examines the situation at Salisbury, a major provincial capital and a centre of cloth manufacture and marketing. Apart from dealings with a few - apparently unprofitable - mills in the surrounding countryside, the Salisbury fullers appear to have spurned the opportunity of mechanisation; ideal sites were available on the banks of the Avon, but there is no evidence that they were utilised. No references to fulling mills are found in the surviving wills of Salisbury fullers, nor in the borough records. Bridbury concludes that "if we want to visualise the fullers of Salisbury at work then we must imagine them trampling the cloth they were fulling, in troughs, to the rhythms of Wiltshire airs now long lost".<sup>84</sup> A similar lack of evidence of mechanical fulling is found at Coventry.<sup>85</sup>

The situation at Colchester was rather different; there is enough evidence to suggest that fulling mills were in quite common use here in the late medieval period. Again, the court rolls are the principal source; we find fullers being taken to court over debts relating to mill-hire, for detention of goods, shoddy workmanship and other offences relating to mechanical working of cloth.



In 1400 John Luseley, fuller, was taken to court by Roger Melneman claiming 2s.10d. "for mill-hire lent to him".<sup>86</sup> The fullers did not generally own or hold the principal lease on mills, rather they made special hiring arrangements. The principal leases of the mills within the jurisdiction of the town were held by a small number of individuals; in 1405 we find John Cotton presented for charging excess toll at either three or four mills within the Liberty.<sup>87</sup> Some of the mills were probably solely used for corn, but others, as we shall see, had been adapted to take fulling stocks.

In 1386 John Sebern, senior, had several claims outstanding against individuals for the cost of "washing and thickening of wool" which he had carried out either "at his mill" or "at Northmill in Northward". From the context, these might have been one and the same.<sup>88</sup>

Sometimes the evidence for mechanical fulling is of an indirect kind. Thus, in 1391 Robert Nel claimed 2s.11d. from William Golofre for fulling and for the hire of a horse to the mill of 'Cruddemelle'; it seems reasonable to suppose that these were directly related expenses.<sup>89</sup> In other cases there is no ambiguity; in 1400 Richard Mykeman accused his one-time servant, John de Eyk, of trespass, in that the latter took a dozen of grey russet cloth, worth 24s., to North mill "to be well and decently thickened and to be kept securely at the said mill". North mill must thus, presumably, have had facilities for storing as well as fulling cloth. Mykeman alleged that his servant had disobeyed his orders by removing the cloth from the mill; de Eyk replied that he had returned home with it, as he had been told to do.<sup>90</sup> The case



involving William Golofre mentioned above refers to 'thykkyng' of cloth at 'Stokkes mell' and 'Hethemelle'; the latter, the mill at New Hythe, is of particular interest and will be discussed further in the following section dealing with fifteenth-century developments.

It is impossible to estimate what proportion of Colchester's fulling was carried out mechanically. It is unlikely that the older techniques of 'walking' or trampling cloth had been abandoned; when we come across references to fullers working in their 'shops' we must assume that these were the methods employed. Thus, in 1391-2 there is a court roll entry referring to cloth delivered for fulling in Richard Joynour's shop at 'Cornhell'.<sup>91</sup> In the same year rent was claimed on a shop in East Ward let to John Bertelot, fuller.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, it is plain that in at least one urban centre in Lowland England the fulling mill had taken root; a major plank in the theories of rural industrialisation is thus removed, or at least undermined.

Direct evidence of interaction of urban and rural textile industries is frustratingly scarce. The Colchester rolls do, however, contain records of routine cases of debt, indicative of commercial relations, with, in addition, a handful of more detailed entries which give tantalising glimpses of the substance of rural-urban interaction.

The first type of entry, where no details are recorded, is exemplified by the following: in 1392 John Bulbeck was attached to reply to Thomas Kentissh, acting on behalf of John Gardener of Coggeshall, fuller, on a charge of debt.<sup>93</sup> From the same year comes another case, this time involving a Colchester fuller, John

Koc of East Street, who acknowledged a debt of £4 to Thomas Hauste of 'Bergholt' (West Bergholt, Essex or East Bergholt, Suffolk) and John Ronkyn of Colchester.<sup>94</sup> This type of presentment may be indicative of partnership between urban and country clothiers. A larger sum of money was involved in a 1383 case in which Alan Abot of Lavenham produced a bond by which John Lane, merchant of Colchester, was bound to him in the sum of £20.<sup>95</sup> The presumption must be made, in the absence of details, that debts of this type were related to the cloth trade - Lavenham had by this period started its rise to eminence as a textile centre - but there is, of course, no way of proving this.

There is some evidence to suggest that Colchester was involved in the 'finishing' of cloths made in the villages and 'semi-urban' centres of Essex and Suffolk. In 1384-5 Henry Lacy of 'Hadley' claimed 25s. for woollen cloth sold to John Bertelot, fuller, at the 'Berestake' in Colchester.<sup>96</sup> Hadleigh, Suffolk, was, of course, a major centre of cloth manufacture and marketing at this period, with many urban features; elsewhere we hear of red, green and black narrow cloth purchased there.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, in 1398-9 John Coupere of Nayland was called to answer to William Wyberd, who claimed 2s.4d. for fulling various cloths.<sup>98</sup>

Plainly the urban fullers were still able to compete successfully against the mills operating in Lexden, Hinckford and Witham hundreds, and on the Suffolk side of the Stour. Cooperation may have been as important as competition; Robert Abel, a Colchester fuller, seems to have been farming out work in the late 1380s. Thomas Basset of 'Hadleye' came to court at one point claiming 9s. for fulling cloth given to him for that purpose by

Abel; the latter acknowledge the transaction but disputed the amount, which he put at 6s.99. Obviously, a case like this can be interpreted in more than one way. One could speculate that the Colchester fullers were working at full capacity, and that rather than allow cloth makers or merchants direct access to the country fullers Abel was adopting the role of middleman. Alternatively, it might be that the country industry was capable of undercutting urban prices, and Abel was moving away from direct involvement in fulling and towards a mercantile putting-out role.

In 1395-6 the suggestively named John Fuller of Dedham was attached to reply to William Nep concerning a quantity of cloth.<sup>100</sup> Definite correspondence between surname and occupation cannot, however, be assumed at this date.

In a very interesting case from the end of the fourteenth century John atte Woode, a Colchester fuller, was called on to reply to John atte Fen of Aldham (Essex or Suffolk), the latter claiming 14s3d. for two 'decena' of narrow woollen cloth delivered to atte Woode for fulling, and to be sold at Kersey. According to atte Fen the money was never paid.<sup>101</sup> Thus, apparently, we have a country cloth being sent to Colchester for fulling, then leaving the town again and crossing the Suffolk border to be marketed at Kersey, a famous cloth centre itself.

What we have are mere fragments of evidence relating to the interaction of town and country in the spheres of cloth manufacture and marketing. Cases cited above suggest that Colchester had some role, but perhaps a limited one, as a finishing centre for the Essex and Suffolk industry. What proportion of the cloths accredited to Colchester and its dependent hamlets in the aulnage accounts were

made elsewhere, then sent to the town for finishing, sealing and marketing? Finishing is a vague term; it is not certain at what stage a cloth was considered to be 'finished' and thus saleable. Furthermore, as we have seen the process might be reversed, with cloths moving from the town into the country for fulling. The aulnage accounts of the 1390s are examined in the next section.

The picture that emerges from the evidence reviewed so far might be characterised as one of relative flexibility. Labour appears in a variety of forms, with more or less casual wage work existing alongside the more formal apprenticeships. It has been suggested that there were two principal types of contract entered into by craftsmen and merchants, but both were forms of putting out, in that the materials were owned by the merchant before, during and after the period in which they were worked on by the craftsman. The merchants appear to have been operating on a relatively small scale at this period, judging by the transactions which provoked litigation in the borough court. It has been argued that the adoption of mechanical fulling is indicative of a certain flexibility on the part of town craftsmen, perhaps encouraged by the absence of craft guilds. Flexibility and variety are also to be seen in the interaction of town and country; although the evidence is sparse, it does not suggest that town and country industries were in deadly competition in the late fourteenth century. Colchester appears, in fact, to have had a relatively self-contained cloth-making industry at this date; small-scale operations predominated, and all the major processes could be undertaken within an urban or suburban environment.

## The Aulnage Accounts

The aulnage accounts, generated by the taxation of woollen cloth, are undoubtedly one of the most controversial sources with which the student of the medieval English economy has to deal. They have been viewed by some as an invaluable source of quantifiable data bearing on the rise and structure of the textile industry, and dismissed by others as at best misleading and at worst fraudulent.

The former view was commonly held by early twentieth-century writers such as Lipson, who cited the returns for Suffolk and Essex in support of his contention that by the later fourteenth century "capitalism had already established a footing in the cloth trade".<sup>102</sup> Salzman used the same accounts to suggest a contrast in organization between the two counties.<sup>103</sup> In their studies of the clothmaking dynasties of Lavenham and Coggeshall, McClenaghan and Power<sup>104</sup> also drew freely upon the aulnage returns. H.L. Gray used the accounts to compile statistical tables of cloth production in fourteenth-century England.<sup>105</sup> Herbert Heaton's classic account of the textile industry of the West Riding of Yorkshire made considerable use of aulnage accounts to illustrate the location of the industry at both regional and national scales.<sup>106</sup>

Grave doubts were cast upon the reliability of the aulnage accounts by Eleanor Carus-Wilson, in a paper published in 1929.<sup>107</sup> Carus-Wilson found evidence of widespread fraudulence and manipulation in some of the later fifteenth-century accounts surviving for the west of England; the aulnager was found to have copied earlier lists, rounded totals and even introduced fictitious

names into his accounts. It thus seemed clear that these accounts could provide valuable evidence on little except the corruptability of officials and the administrative difficulty of taxing cloth production. Later writers tended to steer clear of the source altogether, or to cite it briefly and dismissively.<sup>108</sup>

It is unfortunate that another work, published just before Carus-Wilson's paper and addressing itself to the same theme, should have been much less widely noticed. This is G.A. Thornton's History of Clare, Suffolk (1928) which traces the development of the textile industry in one Suffolk village, but encompasses also a review of wider developments in East Anglia and the sources available to the historian. Thornton was aware of the doubts which were about to be expressed in print as to the reliability of the aulnage accounts, and took care accordingly to scrutinise the source for signs of manipulation; the results of her study were generally encouraging: "A careful examination has been made of these detailed accounts for the district of south-west Suffolk in the second half of the fifteenth century, and there seems no reason to doubt them until 1473". Whereas the late fifteenth century returns show definite signs of fraudulence ("the farmer was ready to alter any Christian name to suit his purpose, and sometimes seems to have invented names for the sake of variety"), the earlier accounts are much more convincing; detailed accounts compiled by local collectors, they show no sign of rounding of totals and comprise names of clothiers identifiable from wills and other sources. Thornton concludes that the aulnage accounts can be used, albeit with caution, to illustrate the relative contribution of the various

towns and villages to the county totals for East Anglia before 1473.<sup>109</sup>

Some more recently published studies have also incorporated a more positive view of the source, notably Dymond and Betterton's work on Lavenham<sup>110</sup> and Bridbury's Medieval English Clothmaking. Bridbury, as we have seen, has many reservations, about the interpretation of the aulnage accounts, and in particular stresses the danger of assuming that cloth was made in the place where it was sealed and taxed by the aulnager.<sup>111</sup>

### The Essex Accounts

The aulnage accounts which survive for Essex are, like those for other counties, of a very mixed nature. The Public Record Office classification E101/343 includes detailed lists and complete accounts as well as fragments and summary returns, lists of forfeitures etc. Some accounts ascribe cloths and individuals to certain places, while others are undifferentiated and may cover the whole county. For the present purpose, that of investigating the scale and organization of the Colchester textile industry, and of comparing it with what can be learnt of the rural industry and suggesting the nature of the relations between the two, only those detailed lists which are subdivided by place will be employed.

The earliest surviving aulnage accounts for Essex date from the 1350s. The coverage is, however, limited, and the condition of many of the surviving documents poor, so the picture we have of the cloth industry at this date is necessarily patchy. No individual returns survive for the borough of Colchester, which appears to have



been grouped together with a number of other East Anglian towns for aulnage purposes at this date. The most prominent centres which do make their appearance are the villages of Coggeshall and Braintree.

The figures of cloths sealed are very low. Reference to Gray's tables<sup>112</sup> indicates annual sealings of cloths of assize running at less than a 100, making Essex appear a less important county for commercial cloth production than such counties as Shropshire and Surrey, never reckoned as textile country. The lowness of these figures also serves to magnify the apparent surge forward of the Essex industry between the middle and end of the fourteenth century; Gray's tables show a roughly thirty-fold increase in cloths sealed in Essex between the 1350s and 1390s, compared to a less than six-fold increase for neighbouring Suffolk, an only marginal increase in the county of Kent, and an actual decline in the case of Lincolnshire.

These 1350s figures must, however, be treated with suspicion. Reference to the surviving detailed returns shows that the cloths accounted were sealed at a handful of identified places; these may be all the commercially-produced cloths of the county, but it must be unlikely. Thus, one account<sup>113</sup> appears to include only cloths sealed at Braintree and Coggeshall, although some of the individuals are identified as being from other places, e.g. 'John le Red de Twynsted' had one half-cloth sealed 'apud Branktre'. Twinstead lies some 15 km north-east of Braintree, close to the Suffolk border. The other places from which people came to have their cloths sealed were Kelvedon, Lamarsh, Alphampston; the first of these lies some 4 km south of Coggeshall; the other two, like Twinstead, are to the north, in the valley of the Stour.

In total, 94 assize-dimension cloths were accounted, paying 4d. subsidy each. Nothing in the document makes it seem likely that these were all the cloths sealed in Essex at this date. Similar considerations apply to the 1360-1 account<sup>114</sup> which enumerates 75 assize cloths sealed at Braintree and Bradwell.

Thus, it seems that the early aulnage accounts can tell us little of the overall level of cloth production in Essex, nor do more than pinpoint some of the places in which cloths were sealed. While there can be little doubt that there was a great increase in commercial clothmaking between the middle and end of the fourteenth century, the thirty-fold augmentation suggested by Gray's figures is highly implausible.

#### The 1394-5 Account

The account E101/342/9 consists of thirteen membranes contained in a leather pouch; the period covered by the account, 18-21 Ric II is divided into two parts, the first extending from 20 July 1394 until 30 November 1395. The second part extends from the latter date until 29 September 1397. As the document exists today the first membranes relate to the latter period, the later to the earlier. The chronologically later part of the account consists of continuous lists of names, quantities of cloth, and amounts of subsidy and aulnage paid, undifferentiated by place. By using the chronologically earlier part, which is divided under place-names, many of the names from the later list can be recognised, but as an independent source its geographical value is minimal. Therefore only the 1394-5 account will be examined in detail here.

It has been suggested above that the production of cloth in Colchester was a major source of employment by the late fourteenth century, and that it appeared to be dominated by small- and medium-scale operators rather than large putting-out merchants.

This picture appears to receive some support from an examination of the 1394-5 aulnage account. Membranes 10 to 13 contain six separate lists, all headed 'Colchester', and containing in all 161 different names of men and women; some of these names recur in several of the lists (though none occurs in all), while others appear in only one. It may be reasonable to guess that the aulnager visited the town six times during the period in question, roughly once every three months, and that people with cloths to be measured and sealed could bring them to him on any of these occasions. The figure of 161 must represent a minimum figure for individuals having cloth taxed and sealed in Colchester, as the same name could of course refer to two different people, perhaps father and son. Of the 161, 8 are women. Many of the names are recognisable from the borough court rolls and other documents. Thirty-six of the names are those of men acquiring burgess status by payment of fine in the period 1380 to 1400.<sup>115</sup>

Two types of cloth are identified in these Colchester lists: 'doss' panni de ass' and 'doss' panni stricti'', both sine grano, without grain. A single cloth of the first type paid 2d. subsidy and  $\frac{1}{4}$ d aulnage, the second 1d subsidy and also  $\frac{1}{4}$ d aulnage. Thus, neither were accounted as true "cloths of assize", as these should pay 4d. subsidy.<sup>116</sup> The first type must thus have been reckoned as equal to one half of a cloth of assize, on the basis of proportionate payment.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the 'stricti' or straights

must have been reckoned as a quarter of a cloth of assize, and were presumably similar to the Suffolk 'dozens' and 'kerseys' which measured 12 yards x 1 yard.<sup>118</sup> The purported 'half-cloths' are predominant in the Colchester lists, the total taxed being 1,568½ compared to 242 'straights'. The borough contrasts in this regard with most other Essex and Suffolk textile centres which, as will be shown presently, were dominated by the production of the smaller cloths.

An analysis of the account confirms the importance of the small operator (whether manufacturer or dealer) in the Colchester industry. Table XVI summarises the data relating to the 'half-cloths'.

TABLE XVI: HALF-CLOTHS TAXED AT COLCHESTER, 1394-5

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	%	Total Cloths	%
100+	1	0.7	102	6.5
50-99	2	1.4	154	9.8
40-49	6	4.3	255	16.3
30-39	7	5.1	230	14.7
20-29	4	3.0	97	6.2
10-19	25	18.5	321	20.5
Under 10	91	67.0	409½	26.1
Totals	136	100.0	1,568½	100.1

(Source: PRO, E101/342/9)

Thus, of all the individuals bringing cloths to the aulnager during the period covered by this account, fully two-thirds brought less than 10 half-cloths each. Of the cloths sealed, 46.6% were credited to individuals bringing fewer than 20 each. Only one person is credited with over 100 cloths, John Dawe, who appears in five of the six lists<sup>119</sup> with a total of 102 cloths.

The relatively unimportant production of the smaller 'straight' cloths was again dominated by individuals bringing small numbers of cloths to the aulnager, as can be seen from Table XVII below. The largest number produced for sealing by one person was 23, 90% of the cloths being accounted to individuals bringing less than 20 cloths. A larger percentage is found in the 10-19 class than the under-10, but it will be remembered that these are cloths of approximately half the size (area) of those listed in Table XVI.

TABLE XVII: 'STRAIGHT' CLOTHS TAXED AT COLCHESTER, 1394-5

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	%	Total Cloths	%
20-29	1	3.1	23	9.5
10-19	10	31.3	142	58.7
Under 10	21	65.6	77	31.8
Totals	32	100.0	242	100.0

(Source: PRO, E101/342/9)

Specialisation in one or other of these sizes of cloth was evidently normal, as only 3 of the 32 individuals bringing 'straight' cloths to be taxed were also credited with 'half cloths'

of assize. This is interesting from two points of view; it suggests that the assumption made above about the sizes of the cloths listed in this account is correct - that the cloths paying 2d. subsidy were of assize breadth but half assize length, while those paying 1d. were narrow cloths - as presumably only a difference in breadth, and hence of the size of looms involved, would account for such a small overlap between the two types. If this argument is accepted, then a further and more important proposition may be advanced - that most of the individuals named in the account were directly involved in the manufacture of the cloths they are credited with, rather than being wholesale dealers or 'clothiers'. Someone fulfilling a purely mercantile role would have no need to restrict their interests to one size of cloth, whereas the clothmaker would need different sizes of looms, a considerable investment for a small producer.

The question arises as to what scale of production could be achieved by an independent craftsman, working perhaps with the assistance of one apprentice or journeyman servant and/or the members of his family. Statistics are hard to come by on this topic, and are difficult to evaluate given the variety of the technical, commercial and social factors which could directly affect production times. Clearly, however, familiarity with the mass production techniques of modern industry should not lead us to underestimate the significance of the relatively tiny output of the medieval textile industry. The production of one cloth represented a significant input of labour; it is estimated that in the 1580s in Yorkshire the production of one 'northern dozen' (short broad-cloth, relatively simple and undyed, measuring 12 yards by  $1\frac{3}{4}$  yards, and

thus very similar to the suggested size for the Colchester 'half-cloths') would occupy 15 people for one week.<sup>120</sup> This figure covers workers throughout the clothmaking process, including five or six spinners. Larger and more elaborate cloths naturally absorbed even more labour time. The following figures are quoted by Cipolla<sup>121</sup> for the process of weaving in early seventeenth-century Florence:

no. of weavers per loom:	1.6 - 2
no. pieces @ 35 yds long per loom per annum:	10
no. pieces produced per weaver per annum:	5-6

Plainly a comparison between seventeenth-century Florence and fourteenth-century Colchester cannot be taken too far, but the figures are illustrative of the low productivity levels per worker and per loom in pre-industrial economies. Thus, the apparently small total production figures - Colchester's 1,568½ 'half-cloths'<sup>122</sup> over 16 months representing c.1150-1200 per annum - in fact represent very sizeable labour inputs; furthermore, the aulnage figures clearly represent a minimum figure for cloth production - evasion has been reckoned to be easier in the case of aulnage than for customs payments.<sup>123</sup> Again, the tax was applicable only to commercially produced and marketed cloth, and did not affect the sizeable production for household and local consumption.<sup>124</sup> The key question, as to what proportion of the cloth credited to Colchester in this account was actually made within the borough, will be addressed after a review of the evidence contained in the 1394-5 account for the textile industry in the rest of Essex.



The most striking feature of the whole account - and the one that has been most frequently remarked upon by historians - is the prominence of certain villages, notably Coggeshall and Braintree in the aulnage figures. Not only do these non-urban places make impressive contributions to the county total of taxed cloths, but they appear to contrast strongly with the picture outlined above for Colchester with regard to organisation. Both the Coggeshall and Braintree lists<sup>125</sup> are dominated by a handful of individuals, who it has been customary to think of as 'putting-out' merchants or clothiers.<sup>126</sup>

At Braintree a total of 2,524 'straight' cloths were credited to only nine men; Stephen Davy and Edmund Godway paid subsidy and aulnage on 600 cloths each, William Crux on 480 and Richard Eustace on 308. Although these are small cloths, paying 1d. subsidy and  $\frac{1}{4}$ d aulnage each, all four of these men are credited with considerably more cloth in real terms than the largest Colchester operator.

In Coggeshall, later to be famous as the home of the Paycocke clothier family, things appear to have been on a more modest scale, but the tendency towards the concentration of taxed cloth in a few hands is again marked. Nine men account for a total of 1,326 'straights' plus 60 assize breadth cloths paying 2d., the type which was characterised as 'half-cloths' in discussing the Colchester lists. This 60 were all credited to Henry Dygon, while the remaining seven men have between 30 and 400 'straights' to their names, with two accounting for 200 each. The contrast between these two villages and the borough of Colchester is shown by Table XVIII which shows average payment of subsidy, a figure which allows direct comparison incorporating both sizes of cloth.<sup>127</sup>

TABLE XVIII: SUBSIDY ON CLOTH, 1394-5

Place	No. of Individuals credited with Cloths	Total Subsidy paid	Average Payment
Braintree	9	£10.10.3d	£1. 3.4½d
Coggeshall	9	£ 6. 0.6d	£0.13.4½d
Colchester	161	£14. 3.3d	£0. 1.9d

(Source: PRO, E101/342/9)

This clearly illustrates the almost total absence in the Coggeshall and Braintree lists of the 'small' individuals who dominate the Colchester account. Is this a reflection of dramatically different forms of organization, or of shortcomings in the record? On the one hand, all the weavers and other textile workers may have been totally subordinated to the mercantile interests who organised production and owned all the cloths produced; we know that there were, or were to be, rich merchant dynasties in these communities. On the other hand, is it likely that this hegemony would be so complete that no small producers remained to bring cloths to the aulnager on their own account? The suspicion must be that the aulnager, for administrative ease or for more suspect motives, subsumed the production of some individuals under the names of their wealthier neighbours. However, these lists belong to the same account as those for Colchester and were submitted to the Exchequer by the same aulnager (although employing different clerks to judge by the handwriting, and perhaps also different sub-collectors).

A further detailed list exists, for Dedham another rural centre some 9 km north of Colchester, close to the Suffolk border. At first sight this list appears to consist of a large number of individuals credited with small numbers of cloths each. However, closer examination reveals that, while the list is not subdivided as in the case of Colchester, there is considerable duplication of names; 182 entries can be reduced to 29 different names. The cloths are of the 'straight' variety, paying 1d. subsidy. The total of 763 cloths is accounted for as shown in Table XIX.

TABLE XIX: 'STRAIGHT' CLOTHS TAXED AT DEDHAM, 1394-5

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	%	Total Cloths	%
50+	3	10.3	234	30.7
40-49	2	7.1	80	10.5
30-39	5	17.2	155	20.3
20-29	8	27.6	163	21.4
10-19	8	27.6	107	14.0
Under 10	3	10.3	24	3.1
Totals	29	100.1	763	100.0

(Source: PRO, E101/342/9)

While there are perhaps more 'middling' individuals in the Dedham list than at Colchester - although when both 'straights' and 'half-cloths' are taken into account the difference is slight - this village plainly resembles the borough more than it does Braintree or Coggeshall. This is shown also in Dedham's average

subsidy payment, which amounts to 2s.2d. (cf. Table XVIII). The largest individual total in the Dedham list is 95 'straights', credited to John atte Brook; the aulnage account thus appears to give some credence to Rendall's<sup>128</sup> contention that the textile industry at Dedham was not dominated by large monopolists.

Thus, what we are seeing is either inconsistent recording procedure by the aulnager, or a contrast in organisation of the textile industry between rural communities, as well as between rural and urban. Faith in the reliability of the document is not increased by an examination of the return for Chelmsford, which immediately follows the sixth Colchester list. A total of 721 'straight' cloths are credited to nine men. This is surprising, as it appears to put Chelmsford among the more important Essex centres at this date, not far behind Dedham, although it is not normally considered a textile town.<sup>129</sup> In itself, of course, this is no reason to reject the evidence; Chelmsford may have been industrially important in the 1390s or may have been the home of clothiers who paid subsidy and aulnage on cloths made elsewhere. The quantities of cloths credited to the individuals on the list are, however, highly suspicious. Seven out of the nine 'clothiers' paid on exactly 80 cloths each, one on 81 and one on 86 cloths. Plainly this regularity is highly implausible.

A further difficulty lies in the seeming incompleteness of the account. There is an additional list covering Dengie hundred; it is difficult to give a precise summary, as the account does not subdivide precisely under place headings but rather identifies individuals by residence, e.g. 'William Chapman de Suthmynster', 'John Mory de Burnham' etc. However, some names are not so

identified; others appear to be bracketed together. The contrast with the other lists is interesting. At the head of the membrane is the place-name 'Maldon'; the list is then identified as the account of John Fynch of Southminster, carrier of the King's seal in the hundred of Dengie. It thus appears that this list may be of cloths sealed in the ancient borough of Maldon, but brought from the various places within Dengie and the neighbouring hundred, indicated as described above. It may thus be a potentially truer guide to the geography of cloth-making within its province than are the lists described earlier; how many of the cloths made in the lists headed Braintree, Colchester, Coggeshall or Chelmsford were actually made in those places?

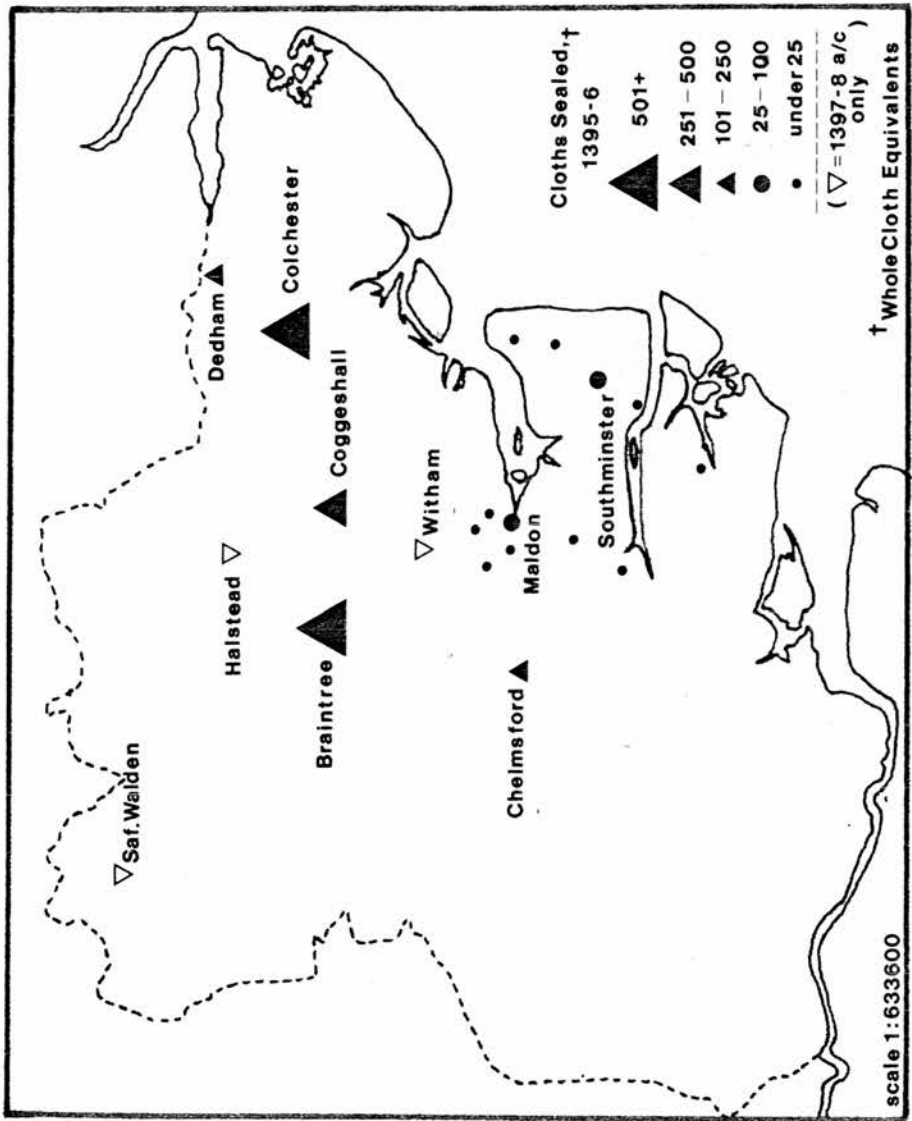
As stated, it is not possible to give exact figures for each place, but minimum figures can be given, leaving a miscellaneous or 'unknown' residue; in fact this residue, unascrivable by place, amounts to just five people and a total of 46 cloths, and is thus no real barrier to producing approximate figures. The total subsidy paid was 6ls.11d., indicating that the south-east of the county was not important in cloth production as this figure is less than one half that ascribed to the village of Coggeshall. Altogether 54 different names can be identified, the average subsidy payment being 1s1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d each. The compiler of the list also appears among the payers; 'John Fynch, seler', is credited with 14 straight cloths. Of the cloths brought, all but a handful were of the 'straight' variety, paying 1d. each; both the 'straight' and assize cloths are described as 'blanket' (white).

TABLE XX: CLOTHS TAXED, DENGIE HUNDRED, 1394-5

Place	No. of People	No. of 'Straight' Cloths	No. of Assize 'Half-Cloths'
Maldon	15	194½	32
Southminster	17	163	0
Rochford	4	48	0
Bradwell	2	14	0
Ulting	3	52	0
Burnham	2	12	0
Woodham Ferrers	1	6	0
Woodham Walter	1	16	0
Heybridge	2	18	0
Langford	1	16	0
Purley	1	52	16
Tillingham	1	4	0
Unknown	6	46	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>641½</b>	<b>48</b>

(Source: PRO, E101/342/9)

The striking thing about this list is thus not the volume of cloth taxed - only Maldon and Southminster emerge as centres of any importance - but the geographical extent of its coverage; its inclusion of handfuls of cloth credited to individuals from villages where commercial cloth production is likely to have been either a minor by-occupation or the specialist concern of a very few craftsmen, but not an important part of the local economy. Where,



MAP 8 : PLACES INCLUDED IN ESSEX AULNAGE ACCOUNTS, 1394 - 98



it must be asked, are the returns for the similar communities which must have existed in the north and west of Essex, contrasting with their famed neighbours?

Map 8 illustrates the patchiness of the coverage of the account. It is clear from the summa however that the document is not incomplete; the county total agrees with the sub-totals pertaining to the various parts of the account which have been discussed above. If the document was intended as a complete enumeration and taxation of all cloths intended for sale in the county, then - notwithstanding the fact that the aulnager doubtless failed in this task - there must clearly be a degree of amalgamation of figures; the subsumption of the output of smaller centres under that of their larger neighbours. This, of course, is what Bridbury argued to be an inevitable feature of aulnage accounts - cloths were not necessarily made where they were taxed. How important a factor might it be in the 1394-5 account for Essex, and to what degree may it distort our picture of the textile industry of Colchester and its region?

This is of course a very difficult question to answer without engaging in circular argument or tautology. We can put forward names of places known to have engaged in cloth manufacture on the evidence of other - and mostly later - sources but which do not appear in the account; for example, Boxted, Halstead and West Bergholt.<sup>130</sup> Their absence from the account could be explained in a variety of ways: 1) they were not in fact engaged in commercial cloth production in the 1390s; 2) cloth production in these places was totally controlled by merchants who either lived, or chose to have their cloth sealed, in other places; 3) cloths produced in

these places were entered under other place-names in the account through either a) laziness, carelessness or b) administrative procedure - e.g. the aulnager visited only a certain number of places, and all cloths brought to these 'collection centres' would be entered accordingly in the account; 4) cloth producers in these places simply escaped the tax; the aulnager did not see any of their cloths through either deliberate or accidental omission.

It may not be possible to rule out 1) altogether, although it seems highly unlikely; and what seems unlikely for one place becomes virtually impossible to believe when extended to the total number of 'missing' places; (in addition to those already suggested, one might reasonably add Witham, Langham, and Bocking among the 'front-runners').<sup>131</sup>

Option 2 - the suggestion that the cloth industry in the 'missing' villages was completely controlled by outsiders - again seems prima facie unlikely; were there no independent cloth-makers in Halstead? The possibility that producers chose to have their cloth taxed elsewhere seems more plausible; and yet more likely, perhaps, is the suggestion, made under number 3 above, that they were obliged to do this because of the nature of the aulnager's operation and his mode of working. In Yorkshire, at a much later date, complaints arose when the farmers of the aulnage discontinued their previous practice of keeping deputies in the various villages and hamlets around Wakefield, who would go to the clothiers' houses and seal their cloth on the spot; whereas now the clothiers were compelled to travel "some a myle, some two myles, some three, some fowre, some seven myles from their dwellinge houses, since the sealers gave over to come to the said clothiers' houses to seal

their cloth".<sup>132</sup> Similarly, in mid-sixteenth-century Lancashire, the aulnager's seal appears to have been kept in Manchester, causing great inconvenience to "above nine hundreth poor householdes, havinge a greate part of them living by the sayd trade and dwellinge distant from the towne where the sayd seale is kepte, eight to nineteen miles".<sup>133</sup>

As to option 4 - the exemption of whole towns and villages, or their accidental omission - it is difficult to accept; under the legislation of 1393-4 all saleable cloth, of whatever dimensions, was liable to taxation. Thus, the specialisation of a village or district in small or non-standard cloths would not explain its absence from the account. Deliberate omission - perhaps in return for the payment of a collective bribe - can not be ruled out. We have no supporting evidence pointing to such widespread corruption at this period however and it seems unlikely that places - as opposed to individuals - would have managed to evade the subsidy in such a manner.

Thus, we are once again thrown back on the suggestion of amalgamation as the most plausible explanation of the apparently patchy coverage of the account. What form might this amalgamation have taken? Some of the later accounts for Essex indicate administrative pairing or grouping of places. While these accounts will be considered in detail presently, it will be worthwhile at this point to examine these groupings.

In the 1469-70 account<sup>134</sup> we find the following groups: Dedham/Bergholt/Stratford; Colchester/St Osyth 'et eorum membris'; Coggeshall/Halstead/Braintree e.e.m.; Chelmsford/Maldon e.e.m.; Thaxted/Walden e.e.m. In the portion of the same account covering

the county of Suffolk we find the Essex port of Harwich, grouped together with Ipswich, Beccles(?), Bungay and Harlesworth cum membris.

The first of these groupings seems extraordinary if Stratford in Essex is intended; however an account from the following year<sup>135</sup> includes the grouping 'Dedham in Essex with Bergholt and Stratford in Suffolk'. The Bergholt referred to is thus East Bergholt, and the account groups together rural textile communities on either side of the River Stour.

These accounts thus include four Essex places absent from the 1394-5 account; as we shall see, later accounts from dates between these two include more new names, but our interest at the moment is in possible amalgamations in the 1394-5 account. Might Halstead, St Osyth, Thaxted and Harwich be concealed by similar but unspecified groupings of places in this account?

For Halstead and Thaxted 1381 poll tax returns survive, of interest because of the information they provide on occupations.<sup>136</sup> Although scarcely legible in parts, the Halstead account does not appear to include identifiable textile workers, although some could be included in a miscellaneous category of 'craftsmen'. However, in other villages weavers, fullers and the like are often specifically identified. Thus, it may be that Halstead's later role in the textile industry misled us as to its role in the late fourteenth century. The Thaxted poll tax list is famous for the prominence of the metal trades; 79 cutlers appear plus a number of smiths, sheathers and goldsmiths; many other minor occupations are listed, but we find only one textile worker, a shearman.

As far as St Osyth is concerned, there is some pertinent evidence in a list within the 1395-7 section of E101/343/9; this list, ostensibly covering a single month from Michaelmas (September 29) to October 28th 21RicII, gives, unusually for this part of the account, some place designations for the individuals credited with cloths. Five men are designed as being 'of St. Osyth'<sup>137</sup> John Scherman, John Stonhach, John Lyghtfoot, Thomas Straw and Thomas Fuller, credited with 4, 8, 26, 13 and 13 'straight' cloths respectively. Of these names, two, Scherman and Fuller, occur in the 1394-5 Colchester lists; this identification is hardly convincing, however, as both surnames are naturally common among textile workers. Furthermore the John Scherman of the Colchester lists paid only on assize cloths, not on 'straights'. The idea that St Osyth was subsumed under Colchester in 1394-5 thus receives no real support from this list.

The survival of a short six-month account covering October to May 1397-8<sup>138</sup> gives further clues. The total quantities of cloth accounted are smaller than would be expected, and the numbers of individuals named are derisory compared to the 1394-5 account. The document thus appears of little value as a guide to industrial organization, but is of interest in that it includes four places not named in 1394-5: Witham, Halstead, Walden and 'Brydwode' (?unidentified; possibly Brentwood).

All the cloths in this account are rated as 'half-cloths', and converted into assize-cloth equivalents in the subtotals and total. One must assume that narrow 'straight' cloths were similarly converted into broad-cloth equivalents. Table XXI summarises the account:

TABLE XXI: CLOTHS TAXED, ESSEX, OCT. 1397 - MAY 1398

Place	No. of 'half cloths'	No. of Individuals
Colchester	333	18
Braintree	136	6
Dedham	126	5
Coggeshall	94	5
<u>Witham</u>	91	4
Chelmsford	83	4
Maldon	73	3
<u>Halstead</u>	38	2
<u>Walden</u>	37	3
<u>'Brydwode'</u>	11	3

(Source: PRO, E101/342/13)

Note: Places underlined are not found in 1394-5.

It can be seen that the most important of the 'new' places in this list is Witham, which is here credited with nearly as many cloths as Coggeshall. Witham is almost equidistant from Coggeshall and Braintree, and it seems probable that clothmakers who in 1397-8 had their cloths sealed in Witham had three years earlier gone to one of these more famous cloth villages, or perhaps to Chelmsford. The names, unfortunately, give no clue as to whether this was so. Similarly, the cloths of Halstead, which, if this account gives any clue at all as to relative output, were fewer in number than those of Witham, may have gone to Coggeshall or Braintree, the places with

which the village was amalgamated in the 1460s. Those of Saffron Walden may have gone to Chelmsford, if they were sealed in Essex at all.

This account thus strengthens the supposition that the output of more than one place was frequently lumped together in the aulnage returns. In most cases, however, the output of the 'concealed' places was probably very small, Witham being an exception to this generalisation. The situation which pertained in Dengie hundred in 1394-5 may have been fairly typical of the county as a whole; many parishes producing a small number of cloths for the market, made by 'part-time' textile workers. The 'giants' of the aulnage accounts, however, were probably genuinely the most important production centres, as their prominence in the lay subsidy returns would suggest.

What then are we to make of the 1394-5 account? The problems of interpretation are real and many, yet disregarding the information it contains would surely not be justified. Neither outright rejection nor a simplistic and literal reading of the document can be accepted; rather, a sliding scale of scepticism may be appropriate. Thus it seems logical to treat the return for Chelmsford, with its suspiciously rounded figures, with much less credulity than the detailed and distinctly un-rounded returns for Colchester and Dedham. Similarly, reservations have been expressed about the returns for Coggeshall and Braintree which appear to show a marked concentration of production/marketing in a few hands. It can be argued that a 'detailed' account featuring a large number of names, and irregular amounts of cloth and subsidy payments, is less likely to be fraudulent (or 'manipulated') than an account which has



only a few names, particularly where these are credited with large and rounded numbers of cloths; such a contention rests on the view that faking a 'detailed' account would be a waste of effort.

This does not mean, of course, that a return in which a few large individuals are found - even where the quantities are rounded - was certainly fraudulent or manipulated; it does however mean that we should be wary of citing this type of aulnage account as definite proof of the appearance of 'capitalism' in the rural textile industry.

Returning again to the Colchester industry; to what extent do the 1394-5 aulnage lists reveal the organisation and output of the urban as opposed to the regional textile industry? The evidence of the borough court rolls reviewed in an earlier section suggested that, as might be expected, some rural cloth was being marketed and in some cases 'finished' in Colchester, and that the interests of both town and country clothiers extended beyond the confines of their own environments. It is thus certain that some of the cloths sealed by the aulnager in Colchester and appearing in the 1394-5 account were made elsewhere. However, the converse is also likely to hold true - cloth made in Colchester could be sealed and taxed elsewhere, preeminently, one may guess, in London.

Furthermore, there is no real evidence that any important rural textile centre was amalgamated with Colchester in the returns. Many of the names are familiar from other borough sources; while such identification does not form definite proof, and is not amenable to statistical analysis in the absence of additional information or designations, the appearance of recognisable individual and family names adds to the belief that at the core of

the lists is a genuinely urban textile industry. From the court roll evidence it is evident that Colchester's cloth industry was vital, and employed many townsmen and women at the end of the fourteenth century; it is not difficult to believe that the situation at this date was similar to that prevailing some 50 years later when the bailiffs of the town averred that "the art or mystery of weaving woollen clothing" was exercised there "and more so than any other arts or mysteries".<sup>139</sup>

This being the case, it can be contended that, if the aulnage figures bear any relation to the total volume of commercially produced cloth, the bulk of the cloths sealed in Colchester in 1394-5 must have been made there. It is instructive to compare the situation with that at Salisbury; in 1394-5 Salisbury is credited with 5,039 assize cloths, in 1395-6 with 6,749 and in 1397-8 with 7,044.<sup>140</sup> These totals were credited to 186, 158 and 288 individuals respectively. Colchester and Salisbury were similar in population,<sup>141</sup> and the numbers of people bringing cloths to the aulnager in the 1390s was also similar. (It will be remembered that the figure for Colchester in 1394-5 was 161.) The great contrast is in the total volume of cloth taxed; Colchester was credited with  $1568\frac{1}{2}$  cloths which were taxed as half assize cloths, and a further 242 'panni stricti', taxed at one quarter the rate for a whole cloth. If we calculate this as  $\frac{1568\frac{1}{2}}{2} + \frac{242}{4}$  then we arrive at an equivalent of 845 whole cloths. In other words the aulnage accounts credit Colchester with no more than one-eighth to one-sixth of the Salisbury totals.

Bridbury is in no doubt that a large proportion of the cloth sealed and taxed at Salisbury was made elsewhere, in rural Wiltshire and Somerset.<sup>142</sup> An analysis of the names in the aulnage lists indicates to him that the bulk of the people credited with cloth were Salisbury citizens, suggesting that the city acted either as an entrepreneurial centre, the home of clothiers who financed and organised manufacture in distant villages, or as a finishing centre for the west country industry. (It may of course have fulfilled both roles.)

At the risk of putting more weight on the aulnage statistics than they may comfortably bear, the following suggestion may be put forward; that whereas at the end of the fourteenth century Salisbury seems to have played a central role in a regional textile industry, its merchants handling large numbers of cloths made elsewhere, Colchester may have been more a 'self-contained' manufacturing town; its 'clothiers' dealt in relatively small quantities of cloth, most of which probably originated within the town. If large-scale organisation of production or 'putting-out' existed in Essex at this date its focus lay not in the borough of Colchester, but possibly (and given the reservations expressed above we can not be more positive) had emerged in some of those villages which are known to have been the homes of rich clothier families at a later period.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY, 1400-1560

#### The Fifteenth Century: Court-Roll Evidence

In the previous chapter it was argued that the Colchester textile industry, so far as it can be reconstructed from the evidence of the aulnage accounts and borough records, was characterised by a relatively small scale of production units and mercantile operations at the close of the fourteenth century; that it was nevertheless a vigorous industry which must have employed a substantial proportion of the town's population; and that interaction with the rural industry appears to have been fairly limited, although cooperation was probably at least as important as competition. An attempt will now be made to set this picture into a longer-term perspective by reviewing the evidence from the following hundred years.

The borough court rolls continue to be the major source in the fifteenth century but there is a major break in the sequence after 1484-5; all the rolls from the reign of Henry VII have been lost, leaving a 25 year gap until 1509-10. There is also a gradual reduction in the quantity and quality of the evidence contained in the rolls, a trend which continues into the sixteenth century, although this is partially offset by the survival of court and assembly books. The rolls, however, continue to supply interesting and revealing information not found elsewhere, which can again be supplemented by aulnage accounts, material from the Red Paper Book and Oath Book, and national records.

To turn firstly to the institutional setting; it was noted earlier that there is some evidence - albeit minimal - of the existence of 'masters' of the textile crafts (and also of other occupational groupings). In the court rolls for 1418-19 it is recorded:

that Roger Doget unjustly and contrary to the proclamation and ordinance of the town prosecuted John Sebern and John Sewet, fullers, of Colchester, until they were outlawed for making a very small trespass in the making of cloth, and whereas it is ordained in the ordinance that if anyone should find himself aggrieved in the making of cloth he shall make complaint to the masters of the aforesaid art and have correction there or to the bailiffs of the town where better correction could be made.

The law-hundred jury adjudged that Doget should lose his freedom and be fined 40 shillings.

It seems quite likely that the "proclamation and ordinance" referred to should be identified with the undated "Constitutions and Ordinances" found in the Red Paper Book. These provide for the election of two master fullers each year to oversee the craft, "to that extent that mennys clothe be well, sufficiount, and truly fulled, as the craft askyth". They are to ensure that no journeyman should full cloths without his master's leave, and no-one should hold the crafts of fulling and weaving jointly, unless they had done so for a long period prior to the Ordinance; the object was to prevent bad workmanship by those who "never had techying ne informacion in the craft of fullyng". Fullers' apprenticeships were to last not less than five years, and when completed the fuller should be encouraged to take up his freedom. Those found guilty of breaking these rules are to be fined - the bulk of the money going to the town, a smaller portion to the masters - and those aggrieved in the matter of fulling should take the cloth concerned

to the "master and governour" of the craft. The wording of this last provision is very similar to that found in the above presentment.

It is not clear how a "small trespass" was defined, and how it was to be decided whether a case should be heard by the 'masters' or by the Bailiffs of the town; cases relating to cloth manufacture continue to occur frequently in the routine records of the borough court. In any case, it seems clear that the masters were simply officers of the borough administration.

In 1448-49 occurs a list of swearings of officers; John Randulf and William Sagore were to be "masters of the art of Clothiers", William Sherman and John Sewhale junior, "masters of the art of Shermen", William Bele, John Russel and John Foote, "Alnagers of woollen cloth", and John Lowys "Measurer of Woad".<sup>3</sup> Whether these were regular and enduring offices rather than transient creations or experiments is impossible to tell; if there were regular appointments or elections they were not recorded in the court rolls. It may be inferred in connection with the remarks made in the previous chapter, that the shearman's craft was inconspicuous rather than non-existent in Colchester if it required the attentions of a "master".

As in the earlier period there is a range of information on forms of labour organization. Formal apprenticeship indentures are rarely found in the court rolls; it must be probable that such records once existed, perhaps in a special book, and have been lost. Apparently it was the less formal type of agreement which was considered to require the sanction of enrolment in the records of the borough court itself. Men and women might contract to work for

others for periods ranging from a few days to many years. In 1457-8 John Moys covenanted to "dwell with and serve Walter Moys, draper" - presumably a relative - "in the duty of clothier for seven years".<sup>4</sup> In contrast is a case in which Robert Sayer charged John Ody with detaining five shillings in respect of salary, "viz., that on 20th March 2 Edw IV in Nortward the plaintiff was retained in the said John's service in the occupation of fulling for 6 days for a salary of the above amount".<sup>5</sup>

Workers in the preparatory stages of the industry might also be retained as residential servants. In 1457-8 an indenture occurs in the court rolls whereby Alice Courtman agreed with William Lalleford "to dwell with him and serve him in the office of Spynstrye" for a year "taking for her salary according to the form of the statute".<sup>6</sup>

Limited service contracts often appear in the court records because something has gone awry. Thus, in 1418 Richard Brewer was attached to reply to William Foster on a charge of trespass. Foster stated that Brewer had undertaken "to stand in his service and work with him in his art of weaver, which William commonly exercised", from Christmas to Easter. However, during that period, he "so burnt and badly worked and wove one cloth of Tany Russet of Geoffrey Hardhead of Fordham with a candle called 'candelresshe' through his negligence that the 'lome' stood empty for three weeks to the said William's loss of 10s."<sup>7</sup> This case is also of interest in that it appears to show a country clothier sending wool or thread into the borough to be woven. Fordham, Essex, lies some 7.5 km from Colchester.

The 'servants' employed by masters in the Colchester textile crafts were undoubtedly 'journeymen' in the sense used in the



previous chapter. Most masters probably retained one such servant and/or an apprentice, if they did not depend wholly on their own labour. It certainly cannot be assumed that there was always a large difference in wealth between 'employer' and 'employee'. Sometimes cases occur which show a workman or woman to have been their employer's creditor; in 1426-7 John Pensford was summoned to reply to Margaret Lassh on a charge of owing 15s.6d., 6d. of which was for combing wool and the remainder having been lent by the latter to the former. Pensford acknowledged the debt.<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, evidence of larger-scale organisation. The will of Richard Chamberlyn, dyer, of St Peter's parish, dated 21st February 1438 and enrolled, is a case in point, and is also suggestive of a penetration of urban interests and capital into the countryside. Chamberlyn's bequests included money to Thomas, his apprentice, and to six 'servants' including "Richard, his servant in Le Werkhouse" and "Robert, his servant and workman at Neylond" (Nayland, Suffolk, an important centre of cloth production). He also bequeathed a number of tenements and money to "the house to be built for the poor".<sup>9</sup>

Larger mercantile operators may have been becoming more numerous; men like Augustine Bonefaunt whose will, enrolled in the 1440s, included numerous bequests of property including a building called "le Warehous".<sup>10</sup> In 1432-3 William Notyngham, merchant, left lands, tenements, shops and 35 acres of land in the borough fields plus 2 acres of meadow.<sup>11</sup>

The wealth of records of litigation produced by the borough court can once again be drawn upon to investigate the forms of labour organisation; often relevant information is thrown up by

cases relating to non-payment of salary. Thus, in 1456 John Bowden prosecuted William Dowale on a charge of owing 16s.8d.:

viz., that when on 7th May 33HenVI in la Estward the said John stood in the service of the said William for 3 weeks in his office of Dyerscraft taking for his salary that time for dyeing of 100lbs of wool in mader 20s.<sup>12</sup>

Bowden claimed that he had received only 3s.4d., but in reply Dowale would only acknowledge owing a further 25d. Such disagreements no doubt arose from unwritten and unwitnessed agreements; Bowden's claim seems high for three weeks work, but he may have had to supply the dye-stuffs used. It seems to have been more common, however, for the merchant to provide all the materials needed in the work-process; a true 'putting-out' form of organisation. In 1477-Robert Sympson was attached to reply to William Smyth, 'cordener'; it was alleged that Smyth had "retained the defendant to himself and had delivered to him 400lbs of white wool with 500lbs of 'waide' to be dyed ..." Sympson was to receive 20s. for his labour in dyeing the wool; however, through his negligence "the wool and the waide were totally ruined" to the complainant's loss of £12. Sympson denied the charge, claiming that he had "well and sufficiently dyed the wool ... in a certain house of the same defendant situated in the same Northward called a 'wode house'".<sup>13</sup> Thus, while the 'putter-out' owned the materials, the dyer had his own workshop and (presumably) equipment.

A constant fear for the working master who employed fully-trained journeymen must have been that the servant would attempt to deceive his employer by carrying out work on his own behalf, contrary to the town ordinance. That this could indeed happen is illustrated by the following case from 1458-9, again

involving the craft of dyeing; Peter Warner was accused of trespass and fraud by John Craton, in that when retained by the latter "in his office of dyer", Warner "knowing all the men within the town with whom the plaintiff in his office was wont to serve, scheming to defraud cunningly the plaintiff of his profits from these men" approached Richard Hery and John Umtlays "with whom the plaintiff usually traded" and received from them in his master's name 14 yards of woollen cloth to be dyed. Warner proceeded to dye the cloth "profits therefore accruing to his own use".<sup>14</sup>

This case provides further illustration of a constantly recurring theme; the attempt to defend the urban franchise from encroachment, both from without and from within urban society - to defend the enfranchised craftsman or trader from the competition of the 'foreigner' and the outside merchant. Among the groups on whom special attention was focused were the aliens, already a significant presence in the town by the early decades of the fifteenth century. In 1458-9 it was presented "that Aillewin Goldsmyth's wife is an alien born merchant and is accustomed to sell linen cloth by retail and not in gross, contrary to the statute".<sup>15</sup> Five years later the court heard that "Peter Herrieson keeps a common market in his house for sheets, 'flex' and other merchandise of alien merchants", and fined him 12d. for the offence.<sup>16</sup> Merchants from Germany, 'Colonia' and the *Manse* were trading directly with Colchester men in the fifteenth century, and the borough's role as a port at this period should not be forgotten despite the fact that its individual contribution to east coast trade is obscured in the customs accounts, where it is treated as a dependent port of Ipswich.

The number and value of commercial contacts with alien merchants appears to reach a peak around 1450. In 1448-9 William Stode, fuller, and John Wylmot, dyer, were each summoned to reply to John and Roger Ryng "merchants of Germany", charged with owing debts of £17.13s.4d. and £112 respectively. Wylmot was obviously far from being a humble artisan - the craft designation here as elsewhere concealing substantial mercantile interests - and in the same year he was called to reply to Thomas Cook touching a debt of £82.<sup>17</sup> John Ryng "merchant of Cologne in the Hanse, Halman" appears in the Patent Rolls of 1452; a commission was issued reciting that the master and crew of a Portsmouth barge had seized "in the water of Colwater by Colcestre 3 vessels called 'fates' full of woad worth £22 shipped in a ship of Robert Wodecok in the port of London by John Ryng"; the ships and their contents had been taken to Portsmouth and order was now made for their restitution and the arrest of the perpetrators.<sup>18</sup>

A further case of piracy against foreign merchants occurred in 1454. Five "merchants of the Hanze" stated that when they were endeavouring "to carry to Seland certain woollen cloths in 4 packs, all customs and subsidies having been paid, in a ship of Seland late at anchor by Colcestre, certain pirates took the packs, which the petitioners had put in a boat to carry to the ship, in the water of Colwater and brought them to Sandwich ...". Subsequently a commission was issued to the Bailiffs of Colchester to arrest Thomas John as one of the pirates.<sup>19</sup>

Despite such hazards the alien merchants continued to visit Colchester; in 1456-7 cloth was produced in court in the case of Andrew Slotkyn, "merchant of Colonia" versus Thomas Sebright of

Colchester, mercer.<sup>20</sup> Colchester also acted as a meeting place for alien merchant and country clothier; a 1459 enquiry found that Thomas Peverell, junior, of East Bergholt, Suffolk, had breached an agreement with Edmund Cryte, merchant of Germany, by failing to deliver certain woollen cloths.<sup>21</sup> In the same year we hear of woollen broad cloths called "murrigreys" which John Horndon was accustomed to make and sell to the merchants of the Manse.<sup>22</sup>

Plainly, the overseas trade in cloth was highly lucrative and important to the prosperity of the borough; the concern of the town authorities was that it should be properly regulated, and that the burgess monopoly in retail trading should not be infringed. The growing role of London merchants in the trade of the town may have been perceived as a more serious cause for concern. In 1424-5 the jury presented that:

John Elvysh of London, now dwelling at New Heath, Colchester, sells there openly in his shop and retails various merchandize, to wit woollen and linen cloth ...

A range of other goods was also specified, including dye-stuffs.

Furthermore, Elvysh

keeps a common Tron, weighing etc ... contrary to the liberty of the burgesses, and he is not a burgess; in mercy 40s ... and let it be levied at the instance of assessors, because it is seriously hurtful to the whole commonalty, without condonation. <sup>23</sup>

In the next year he was fined a further 6s.8d.<sup>24</sup> It is probable that the keeping of a tron was Elvysh's most serious offence in the eyes of the borough authorities, representing not only a challenge to civic dignity and privilege but also a threat to the borough's revenue.

London citizens appear in the borough records as residents; John Hollewood, "citizen and sherman of London" had a house in the

North ward. In 1448 he accused John Marchal of breaking in "and raping his wife Alice to his [sic] loss of £100".<sup>25</sup> Trading links with the capital are indicated by the numerous actions for debt recorded in the borough court rolls and in the Patent Rolls. One of the Colchester fuller John Nicole's many creditors in the 1450s was William Burton, citizen and clothier of London.<sup>26</sup> In the same year's rolls John Workman, fuller, acknowledged a debt to William Dodde of London, haberdasher.<sup>27</sup> John Edrych of Colchester, dyer, was pardoned in 1446 for failing to appear to answer a plea of debt of £22.6s.8d. brought by Henry Bray and Thomas Cook the younger, citizens and drapers of London.<sup>28</sup> Many more such examples could be cited; in almost every case the debt involved was claimed by the Londoner from the Colchester merchant or artisan.

In addition to penalising trading offences the borough authorities sought to defend the franchise against the activities of unfree and non-apprenticed craftsmen. In 1425-6 Robert Hikeman, chaplain, "a common fuller", was fined for practising the craft "although he was never an apprentice".<sup>29</sup> In the previous year \_\_\_\_\_ Prat, fuller, and Peter Fuller had been fined for teaching Thomas Bosse "the art of fulling and not as an apprentice, to the derogation of the artisans of that art and against the town statute, and if any spoke to them about it they immediately threaten to kill them with a dagger".<sup>30</sup> It is tempting to see a connection between these cases and the actions over inadequate fulling and damage to cloth which are found in the court rolls around this period.

Alien artisans were also liable to be fined; Peter William paid 3d. for making woollen cloths within the town although an alien.<sup>31</sup> As in other cases, however, such as the fining of brewers and



bakers, this may be a de facto system of licensing or taxation rather than a serious attempt to prevent the practice.

It is difficult to generalise about wage rates and forms of payment in the textile crafts; it seems probable that the absence of corporate craft guilds promoted more variety in this as in other aspects of economic life, although town ordinances and national legislation at least set certain norms of conduct. The cases cited in this chapter indicate wide variations in levels of payment to 'servants' or 'journeymen'. Dual occupations can complicate the issue; in a case from 1434 which serves as a reminder of the continuing agricultural interests of Colchester burgesses John Stone claimed a debt of 4s. from Richard Hursted, relating to a period in the previous year, between 20th September and 6th October, when he claimed to have been in the latter's service in the "occupation of fullerscraft and husbandry".<sup>32</sup>

Town legislation was principally aimed at controlling the abuse of 'truck', the paying of goods, usually foodstuffs, instead of money wages to craftsmen. In 1411 it was ordained that "no Weaver shall be compelled to take any merchandise or victuals for his wages against his will, but only gold and silver".<sup>33</sup> Attempts were made to enforce this; in the court rolls for 1463-4 there is a long list of people fined for exposing to threaders and weavers "merchandize for their own labour, contrary to the form of the statute".<sup>34</sup> Similar offences are described in 1476 as being "contrary to the ordinance and proclamation of the town".<sup>35</sup> Twenty years earlier John Payn paid 8d. "for commonly exposing to his weavers and threaders for their salary linen cloth at an excessive price".<sup>36</sup> Payn was described as a fuller and the case may be symptomatic of



the hegemony which some members of the craft seem to have been exercising over other branches of the industry in the fifteenth century. Other fullers, however, themselves fell victim to sharp practice; a more detailed account of the sort of abuses that might occur is found in a presentment from 1483-4:

Richard Plomer is in the habit of buying one bushel of wheat flour for 9d. and sells it to fullers for their labour for 15d [and also] the said Richard buys one weight of cheese for 10s. and sells it to fullers and weavers for their labours for 16s.<sup>37</sup>

The unscrupulous merchant could of course find many ways of deceiving the craftsman or woman. Another ordinance from the year 1411 attempted to standardise the weights used for wool to be spun.<sup>38</sup> Inevitably, however, abuses occurred; in 1448-9 we hear of non-statutory weights of wool being given to pluckers and spinners.<sup>39</sup> A lengthy entry dating from 1452 in the Red Paper Book, evidently a response to a royal enquiry, indicates that the borough authorities took the control of such abuses seriously. After a preamble reciting how "Colchester is and has been an ancient borough of the King and his ancestors from time beyond memory, and ... the art or mystery of weaving woollen clothing is exercised there, and more so than any other arts or mysteries", the Bailiffs define the lawful weights to be used in the town:

any inhabitant exercising the aforesaid art or mystery, and desiring to expose before his own dwelling wool, either for combing or spinning, ought to expose such wool according to certain weights ... namely for comen combers of wool by the weight there commonly called a Kembyngston of five pounds and not more, and for women spinners by the weight there called a Spynnynston of four pounds and a half and not more; and that for each kembyngston the price for combing be 2d. and for each spynnynston 6d for spinning.<sup>40</sup>

It is then rehearsed how offenders against this custom should be examined by the Bailiffs and if convicted, fined or imprisoned and

deprived of the freedom of the town. William Godfrey had been found guilty in this way, because he had delivered to Agnes Willys and Joan Burgeyn 30 lbs of wool, claiming that it amounted to four 'kembyngstones' and gave 2d. for the combing of each weight "whereas each lot contained  $7\frac{1}{2}$  lbs of wool, to the deception of the women and the evident weakening of the custom aforesaid". Godfrey was thus imprisoned, pending payment of a fine imposed.<sup>41</sup>

More straightforward crime might also enter the production process; in 1418-19 we hear of the unscrupulous Robert Poynaunt who "unjustly incited and procured certain rival women who thread woollen thread to steal the wool, then he weaves it and exposes it to market" and was fined 3s. for his misdeeds.<sup>42</sup>

As was suggested in reviewing the late fourteenth-century evidence, there is considerable variety in the details of the form of economic organisation characterised as 'putting-out'; this can be characterised a 'system' in as much as its characteristic feature is the circulation of materials which are not owned by the craftsmen who work upon them, while the owners have only a limited influence on the conditions and pace of production. In detail, however, each transaction is unique.

The two forms of organisation identified in the earlier period, work and return of materials or work and sale by the craftsman, are still found in the court rolls, but the latter form appears to be much less common than previously. Cases such as that of John Meldre, accused of detaining russet cloths given to him for fulling and return within one month, seem more characteristic of the fifteenth century than do actions brought over cloths to be sold, like the one brought by Thomas Yates, who accused John Bieste of

failing to honour an undertaking to full a piece of cloth and then sell it on his behalf.<sup>43</sup> The latter type of arrangement must have been difficult to organise and supervise and it is perhaps not surprising to find the mercantile community tending to abandon it. This change, if real, may be related to the increasing wealth of some merchants and perhaps also to an increase in the size and power of the mercantile community as a whole. An increase in numbers could be partly accounted for by elevation of craftsmen and small operators into organisers of production, but could also be a result of the recruitment of outsiders into the borough community through the mechanism of the franchise. This process is exemplified by the case of John Sparwe, mercer, whose will, dated 25th March 1422, is recorded in the court rolls for 1422-3. Sparwe had obtained his freedom in 1416-17, his place of origin being given as Thaxted, Essex. He paid the fairly substantial fine of five marks for entry into the burgess community, sureties being provided by John Dyere, 'merchant', Augustine Bonefaunt, a merchant who died in 1438, and William Notyngham and John Taselere, also men with mercantile interests. In his will Sparwe is described as belonging to St Runwald's parish, Colchester, and he held a tenement in East Street. His bequests included several tenements in Thaxted, including one called 'Sparwes' "in which the testator formerly lived". Money was also left to churches in both Colchester and Thaxted. We see here a dealer in textiles (and perhaps other goods) moving from the small borough of Thaxted to the preeminent centre of the Essex cloth industry, retaining links of sentiment and property, and also, perhaps, trading contacts. As a man of some substance, a relatively large entry fine is extracted from him, but the action of

the Colchester merchants in standing surety suggests a willingness to recruit new members to their ranks at this period, rather than exclusiveness.

There is some evidence to suggest that commercial organisation was tending to become more complex, with more sophisticated forms of accounting being introduced; increasing reference is made in court cases to 'settlements of account' between individuals, relating to a number of separate transactions. In 1452-3 we hear of arrears of 4s. claimed on settlement of account between Robert Audymer and John Beste, "especially with respect to the fulling of six woollen cloths".<sup>46</sup> A settlement of account between Henry Jaks and Thomas Synger in 1455-6 gave rise to a claim of 6s.8d. in respect of the lease of Lexden mill.<sup>47</sup> Payment for cloth and materials was commonly made in instalments; this practice gave rise to many instances of litigation over outstanding sums of money. Walter Ballard was summoned to reply to John Bretoun in 1457-8, charged with owing 49s.8d. for "ten linen cloths called Kerseys bought for 5 marks 4s8d in la Hedward".<sup>48</sup> Similarly John Aunger was charged by John Craton, dyer, with owing 10s., the amount outstanding on 13 yards of grey woollen cloth.<sup>49</sup>

Witnessed bonds could be produced to settle such disputes; William Godfrey, fuller, and John Vertue, dyer, had to acknowledge a charge brought by William Bonefoye, esq., in 1459-60, that they owed £12 on two bonds drawn up on June the first 37HenVI.<sup>50</sup>

'Agents' and 'Bailiffs' make their appearance in the textile trades in the fifteenth century. William Smyth, 'cordener' has already been seen organizing dyeing, above. In 1476-7 he was called to reply to Elizeus Tendryng who required that Smyth should:

render him his reasonable account of the time that he was bailiff to Elizeus in Colchester. The complainant states that on 2nd August 9Edward IV until 20th February next following the defendant was bailiff for him in Colchester, having during that time care and administration of one quarter of woad, 160 lbs of wool of colour 'marrey', 200 lbs of black wool, 100 lbs of red wool, 100 lbs of white wool, 19 nets called 'Wolnetts' and one quarter of wheat, the goods of the plaintiff ... The defendant has given no account. 51

The craft of shearing becomes more visible in the fifteenth century; perhaps because of increased autonomy of its practitioners. In 1455-6 John Sewhale, named as one of the 'masters' of the craft in 1448, acknowledged a joint debt with Edmund Shipman of five marks owed to John Lak, mercer.<sup>52</sup> William Colchester, 'sherman', makes a number of appearances in the rolls, while Elizeus Roger, 'sherman', was summoned to reply to three charges of debt in 1470.<sup>53</sup> Six years later Thomas Brook was accused by Thomas Vyncent of taking and unjustly detaining "a pair of tongs called shermansheris in ... Colchestersrenter in the Northward".<sup>54</sup> The social status of the shearmen is hard to ascertain; certainly, not all prospered. In the court rolls for 1484-5 is an inventory of the goods of George Swordbrake, 'cissor', of St Botolph's parish, who died intestate and "oppressed with poverty".<sup>55</sup>

Fifteenth-century evidence confirms that the holding of more than one occupation was not unusual, although it could have unfortunate consequences. Simon Polleye had to answer to William Cook in 1423 concerning 72 lbs of grey russet yarn, worth 30s., delivered to him to be "well and sufficiently woven and fulled and made in due manner into good cloth". However, it was alleged that "both he and his servants unknown in the operation of weaving and

fulling unjustly and maliciously spoilt and tore the same".<sup>56</sup> This is just the sort of abuse that the town ordinances contained in the Red Paper Book were intended to combat.

Complaints of bad workmanship occur with respect to all the major processes of cloth manufacture and often shed incidental light on forms of organisation. Clement Fen alleged in 1477 that he had retained Laurence Oliver in the Head Ward and had delivered to him "11 score pounds of white wool of his goods and chattels" to be dyed red with madder but Oliver did his work so carelessly that the wool was ruined, to Fen's alleged loss of £10.<sup>57</sup> Unsatisfactory work could necessitate repeated dyeing; in 1426-7 John Tassell delivered to John Juell a quantity of 'blod' cloth to be dyed "a better blod".<sup>58</sup>

The most frequent complaints, and perhaps the most significant from the information they yield on the state of the urban cloth industry, relate to the craft of fulling. Evidence was presented in the previous section suggesting that the fulling mill was an established element in the Colchester industry by the later fourteenth century, and there is a wealth of material to indicate its continuing use during the succeeding hundred years. In the court rolls for 1423 Thomas Bakere charged John Heldre with trespass, in that he had given the former a quantity of cloths worth 53s.4d. to be fullled at the mill called 'Stokkesmell'. 'Stokkesmell' had evidently been out of service, for Heldre enquired "if it was sufficiently repaired for thickening, which Thomas indeed knowing that the said mill was not fit guaranteed the said mill to the same John as sufficiently repaired for thickening at this own risk"; but it cut and tore the cloth.<sup>59</sup>



Damage could result from human error or incompetence as well as from mechanical failure. In 1470 John Symond was accused of trespass by John Tripelowe:

On March 6th ... in le Estward within the liberty when the plaintiff had put two woollen cloths in a certain place called Middelmelle in le Stok there for fulling, the said defendant ... put two pieces of woollen cloth of his own in the said Stok and so overloaded the said Stok, whereby the plaintiffs two cloths were [damaged] and he lost his profit.<sup>60</sup>

There was a fulling mill at the New Hythe, owned by the borough and leased out together with a corn mill in the same place. In the court rolls for 1439-40 'the bailiffs and commonalty' of Colchester are recorded as having leased to John Peverell, fuller, "all their mill in New Heth" together with an attached croft ('Mellecroft'), for a term of ten years, at an annual rent of 20 marks. The lease states that:

the said John Peverell shall have in le Cornemell one 'axtre' newly made, and one mill stone. And in le Fullyngmelle one 'axtre' and one 'stokke', new and sufficient. And he shall keep in good repair the wheels and all the moving work of the mill with timber of the bailiffs and commonalty, and at his own expense all duties and services and tithes in the mill.<sup>61</sup>

It seems clear that the corn mill and fulling mill were parts of one building, an arrangement encountered elsewhere in Essex.<sup>62</sup>

In 1442-3 "John Peverill in Hethemell" was among the millers fined for taking excess toll.<sup>63</sup> He seems not to have completed the term of his lease for in 1446-7 the incumbent of the mill is named as John Chapman.<sup>64</sup> Later, in 1460-1 we hear of John Miller, fined for flooding land "in his mill called le Hethemell".<sup>65</sup> This appears to be the last mention in the court rolls before the sequence is broken; at some date in the following 30 years the mills at New Hythe fell into disuse and decrepitude. An undertaking



to rebuild the "two mills, one for corn and the other for fulling, belonging to the borough" and situated at the New Hythe, is recorded in the Red Paper Book, and dated 1489.<sup>66</sup> The preamble states that these mills had existed "from time out of memory", and had been farmed out "for a large sum of money" paid annually to the Treasurer, "not only to the welfare of the said borough, but also to the great advantage and convenience of the craft of fulling in the town, and of all other inhabitants on account of the facilities and opportunities thereby occasioned". The mills had however been "destroyed and broken down" for a period prior to the present undertaking, to the detriment of the town; a blank space is left in the entry for the insertion of a precise period of time. The fact that it was not filled suggests that a fairly lengthy lapse of time may have been involved.

At any rate two of the Aldermen, Thomas Cristmas, senior, and Richard Barber, "moved with tenderness by the prayer of the commonalty" now undertake to rebuild the mills; they are to pay an annual rent of four marks for the site, and to surrender the reconstructed mills to the borough at the end of a 20 year period.<sup>67</sup> The work seems to have been speedily carried out. An entry from the following year, granting the rent of the site to Thomas Jopson for his expenses as borough M.P., refers to the mills as "newly built". In a further agreement, made in March 1494, whereby the tenancy was readjusted solely in favour of Richard Barker, mention is made of the labour expended in building and maintaining the mills.<sup>68</sup> In an undated entry the Abbot of St John's complains of flooding caused by the "great miln" lately "rered up" by the burgesses.<sup>69</sup>

Why had these mills been allowed to fall into desuetude and decay? Does it imply that mechanical fulling was not vital to the urban cloth industry, or did demand for the facility drop in the second half of the fifteenth century? Alternatively, were there recurrent technical problems in the operation of the mills? The middle decades of the century witnessed a stagnation of English cloth exports.<sup>70</sup> However, the aulnage accounts do not suggest any diminution in the amount of cloth sealed in Colchester; rather the converse would seem to be true (see below). Moreover, the corn mill had become derelict as well as the fulling mill; as St Leonard's at Hythe was one of the most populous and wealthy parishes in Colchester,<sup>71</sup> it seems unlikely that lack of demand was a factor.

The suspicion that technical problems may have been the major factor in the abandonment of the mills is reinforced by the fact that further difficulties within half a century of this rebuilding; a Royal Grant of 1551 includes bestowal of authority for "building and reconstructing" the watermills at 'Le New Hithe'.<sup>72</sup> By the eighteenth century the mills had long vanished. Morant writes:

There was anciently a Water-mill here, consisting of Two corn-mills and two Fulling-stocks; which being found a hurt to the Channel, was taken down. <sup>73</sup>

As the Hythe Mill is shown on the siege plan of 1648, its final abandonment - deliberate dismantlement if Morant is correct - must have taken place sometime between mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century, probably in the earlier part of that period, and perhaps earlier still if the siege plan was based on Speed's plan of 1610.<sup>74</sup> Other mills, such as the close neighbours North Mill and Middle Mill, may also have encountered technical difficulties, and Benham opines that "it would seem that the

sluggish Colne running through a flat flood-plain could not power all the mills the town needed".<sup>75</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of the whole episode of the Hythe mills is that it illustrates a perceived need for fulling facilities within the town at the end of the fifteenth century; furthermore, wealthy burgesses, who could doubtless afford to send their own cloth further afield to be fulled if necessary, were prepared to invest money to attempt to secure these facilities; and perhaps in this instance we need not be too cynical about their claims to be acting in the interests of the borough community as a whole.

### The Aulnage Accounts

After the 1390s there is a considerable gap until we again find series of aulnage accounts which comprise detailed lists, divided geographically, and thus of value to the present study.

Contained in PRO E.101/342/21, primarily a collection of certificates, indentures and summaries, are two detailed accounts: one relating to Lavenham in Suffolk,<sup>76</sup> and the other, dated 3rd March 1461 to 18 April 1462, relating to Colchester.

Even a cursory examination of this Colchester list reveals striking contrasts with those of 1394-5. Firstly, the cloth output is now accounted entirely in whole cloths of assize, paying 4d subsidy and  $\frac{1}{2}$ d aulnage. Whether this represents a real change in the borough's products, rather than a change in clerical practice, must be doubtful.<sup>77</sup>

The second contrast is in the volume of cloth taxed and sealed in the borough, which has increased to 1,784 whole cloths over 13½ months, as against the 1,568½ half cloths and 242 'straights' (effectively = quarter of a whole cloth) sealed in slightly over 16 months in 1394-5. There thus appears to have been an increase in cloth sealed of the order of 150% in the 65 years separating the two accounts.

The third, and perhaps the most significant contrast is in the composition of the lists, and a radical change in the balance of large and small individual totals. Whereas in 1394-5 small 'producers' or 'dealers' appeared to dominate the Colchester industry, the 1459-60 account seems to show a marked shift towards larger-scale organisation. Nearly two-thirds of the total is credited to individuals bringing over 50 whole cloths to the aulnager (equivalent to the 100+ class of the 1390s, without taking the difference in time-period into account). Very few small 'producers' remain; only two men are credited with less than 10 cloths each. However, there are two aggregated entries in the list which plainly conceal some smaller operators; the first attributes 120 cloths to Thomas Smyth, William Cowper, John Aleyn "and diverse other persons"; similarly, towards the end of the list four named individuals and "diverse others" are credited with a further 115 cloths. How many individuals are concealed by these composite entries is impossible to guess; nevertheless, the general picture of the distribution of cloths sealed is hardly affected, as the 235 cloths in these entries amount to just 13.2% of the total.

Table XXII summarises the data.

TABLE XXII: CLOTHS TAXED AT COLCHESTER MAR. 1461 - APR. 1462

No. of Cloths (whole cloths of assize)	No. of Persons	%	Total Cloths	%
50+	14	(36.8)	1,144	64.1
25-49½	6	(15.8)	218	12.2
20-24½	5	(13.2)	115	6.4
15-19½	3	( 7.9)	49	2.7
10-14½	1	( 2.6)	12	0.7
5-9½	1	( 2.6)	8	0.4
under 5	1	( 2.6)	3	0.2
amalgamated	7+	(18.4)	235	13.2
Total	38+		1,784	

(Source: PRO, E101/343/21)

Despite the differences in time period, measure of cloth and volume, the contrast with figure ~~XVI~~ (1395-6) is clear; at the earlier period 67.5% of the cloths sealed were credited to individuals bringing less than 40 half-cloths each (= 20 cloths of assize). At the other end of the spectrum, only one person in 1395-6 had more than 100 half-cloths (50 cloths of assize) sealed, and this accounted for just 6.5% of the total cloths.

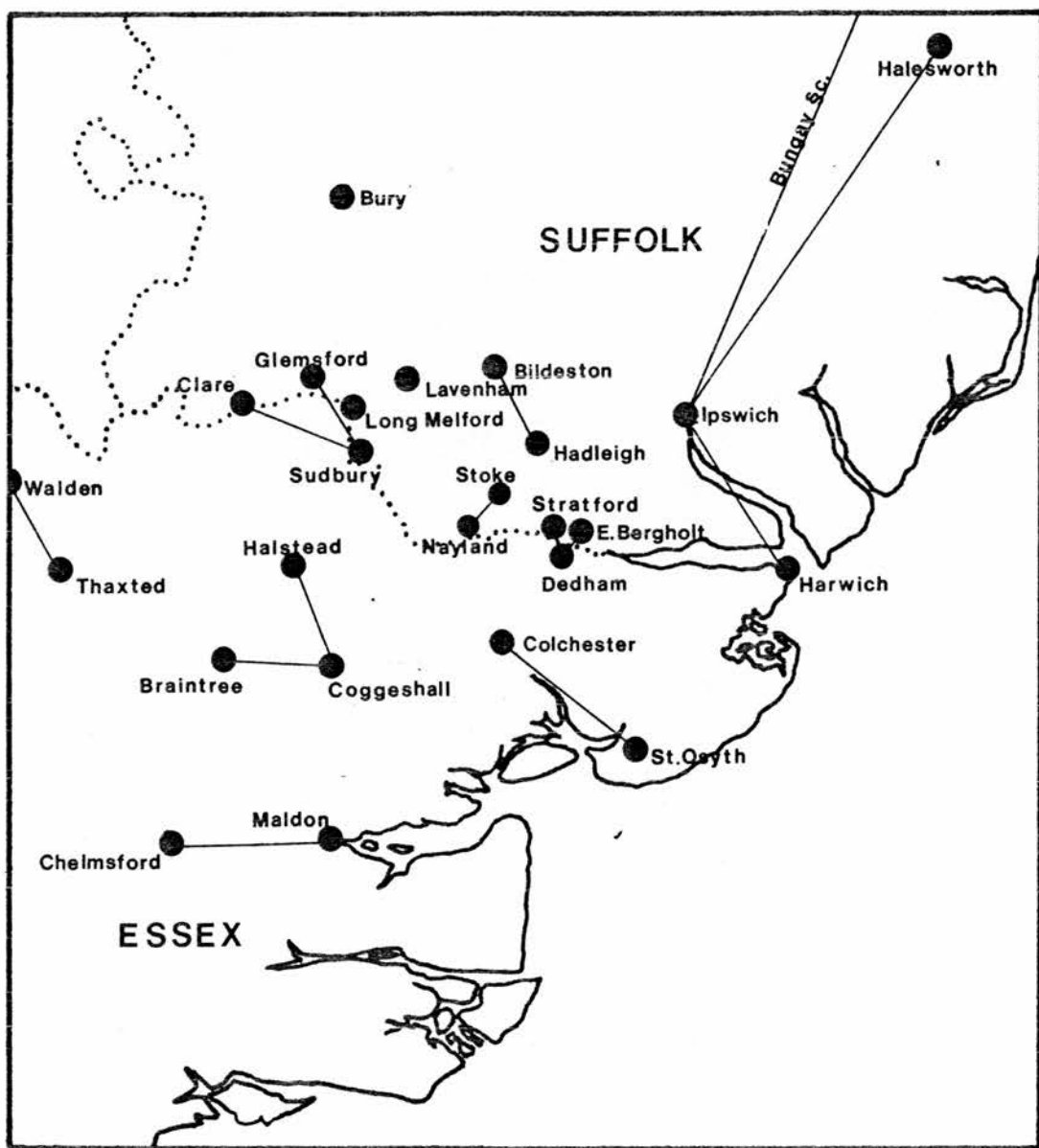
Is this change - the dominance of large rather than small producers/marketers - real or illusory? With the exception of a few of the larger totals (120, 110, 100, 3 @ 80) there is little evidence of rounding of totals. The fact that the compiler of the account sign-posts two places where he has amalgamated individual

totals might perhaps lead us to believe that the other entries genuinely represent the cloths brought by the named men;79 why bother to indicate these aggregations if others are silently concealed?

Fortunately it is not necessary to view this account in isolation. A number of detailed accounts survive from the 1460s and early 1470s, both for Colchester and other Essex towns and villages. The drawback of these particular accounts is their use of groupings of two or more places in the Essex returns. The nature of these groupings was outlined in the previous chapter; Dedham joined with the Suffolk villages of East Bergholt and Stratford, Colchester with St Osyth etc., Coggeshall with Braintree and Halstead etc., Chelmsford with Maldon etc., and Thaxted with (Saffron) Walden. Map 9 illustrates the most common groupings encountered.

Table XXIII summarises the accounts between 1467 and 1478. It can be seen that the totals tend to become fossilised in the 1470s; either identical totals are found, as at Coggeshall etc., and Chelmsford etc., or there are very small and perhaps merely cosmetic fluctuations. The exception to this appears to be the lists for Dedham etc., where slightly more marked fluctuations are found up until the end of the sequence.

Normally it is not possible to de-construct the amalgamated lists with any degree of confidence, but there are some variations in organisation which shed light on the contribution of individual places. Thus, in 1467-8, unlike subsequent years, Dedham is listed separately from Stratford and East Bergholt; it can be seen from the table that the Essex community contributed some two-thirds of



MAP 9: COMMON AMALGAMATIONS, AULNAGE A/Cs OF THE 1460s



TABLE XXIII: AULNAGE ACCOUNTS, ESSEX, 1467-78: NUMBERS OF CLOTHS TAXED

Year	Colch./St.O.	Dedham/Strat./E.B.	Cogg./Br./Hal.	Ch./Mald.	Thax./Wald.		
1467-8	1,405	322	214	534	96	27	
1468-9	1,390	531	510	161½	161½	35	
1469-70	1,297	( 268 + 1,029 <sub>a</sub> )	474	( 90 + 384 <sub>a</sub> )	( 72 + 360 <sub>a</sub> )	( 25 + 112 <sub>a</sub> )	( 9 + 25 <sub>a</sub> )
1471-2	1,388	-	-	-	-	-	-
1473-4	1,366	517	524	163	163	35	
1476-7	1,389	503½ <sub>b</sub>	524 <sub>b</sub>	163 <sub>b</sub>	163 <sub>b</sub>	35½ <sub>b</sub>	
1477-8	1,389	533½	524	163	163	36	

(Source: PRO, E101/343/4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11)

Notes: a Figures for 3 months (343/6) and nine months (343/7).

b Headings missing - places identified from position in document.

the total in this year, and it seems reasonable to assume that a similar proportion obtained in the other years.

In 1467-8, one of the contributors from Colchester/St Osyth is specifically identified as being 'de St. Ositha'. The likelihood that this was the only St Osyth person in the list is strengthened by the fact that the next individual - the last in this list - is described as 'de Colcestre', whereas all the others had merely been 'de eadem', presumably referring back to the principal place in the list's heading, Colchester. This would seem to confirm what might in any case be assumed, that the contribution of St Osyth to these joint lists is negligible; the St Osyth man in 1467-8 had 12 cloths sealed out of a total of 1,405.

The grouping of Braintree, Coggeshall and Halstead is difficult to break down, although it seems certain that Halstead was always a 'junior partner' to the other two villages; it will be recalled that in the six-month account for 1398-9 Halstead had 38 half-cloths sealed as against 136 at Braintree and 94 at Coggeshall (see Chapter 4).

If we take one of these year's accounts, that for 1468-9, and compare the Colchester and St Osyth list with the Colchester list for 1461-2, we find that there is an increase in the number of named individuals but a reduction in the amount of cloth sealed, even given the shorter time period (12 months as against 13½). Forty-seven named individuals account for 1,390 cloths of assize, and there are no noted aggregations. The 1461-2 figure for Colchester calculated for 12 months would come to c.1,586. Table XXIV shows the breakdown of the later list by category:

TABLE XXIV: CLOTHS OF ASSIZE TAXED AT COLCHESTER, ST. OSYTH  
'ET EORUM MEMBRIS' 1468-9

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	% of Total Individuals	No. of Cloths in Category	% of Total Cloths
50+	9	19.1	510	36.7
25-49	14	29.8	516	37.1
20-24	9	19.1	198	14.2
15-19	4	8.5	67	4.8
10-14	5	10.6	64	4.6
5- 9	3	6.4	25	1.8
Under 5	3	6.4	10	0.7
Totals	47	99.9	1,390	99.9

(Source: PRO, E101/343/5)

Even allowing for the shorter time period there is a noticeable fall in the largest individual totals; thus, in 1461-2 seven individuals had 80 or more cloths sealed, but in 1468-9 the largest single total is 70 cloths. This is reflected in the lower percentage in the over-50 cloths category in the above table.

Given the fluctuations in actual production which no doubt occurred, however, together with the vagaries of record compilation, it might be thought more notable that there is a broad similarity between Tables XXII and XXIV; thus in 13½ months in 1461-2 76.3% of cloths sealed were credited to individuals bringing more than 25 cloths each, and in 1468-9, over 12 months, the corresponding figure is 73.8%. Adjusting the 1461-2 figures to give comparable 12-month

statistics makes only marginal difference to these percentages - the over-25 figure would be 73.4%,

Thus, the 1468-9 list, although differing in detail to that for 1461-2, appears to show a broadly similar picture - a dominance of medium to large totals, and an insignificant contribution from small individual totals.

When we turn to the returns for the other Essex communities we find other striking contrasts with the fourteenth-century accounts. Coggeshall and Braintree, which, it will be remembered, were dominated by large individual totals in 1394-5, are grouped together with Halstead cum membris in the present document. Table XXV summarises this list:

TABLE XXV: CLOTHS OF ASSIZE TAXED AT COGGESHALL, BRAINTREE AND HALSTEAD c.m., 1468-9

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	% of Total Individuals	No. of Cloths in Category	% of Total Cloths
50+	0	0	0	0
25-49	3	8.8	96	18.8
20-24	5	14.7	108	21.2
15-19	8	23.5	136	26.7
10-14	10	29.4	117	22.9
5- 9	6	17.6	45	8.8
Under 5	2	5.9	8	1.6
Totals	34	99.9	510	100.0

(Source: PRO, E101/343/5)

Whereas in 1394-5 the volume of cloth sealed at Braintree and Coggeshall combined had exceeded that for Colchester - total subsidy paid by the two villages being £16.10s.9d as against £14.3s.3d for the borough - in 1468-9, with Halstead added, the villages paid only 37% of the amount paid by Colchester and St Osyth, £9.11s.4d subsidy and aulnage as against £26.1s.3d. While the volume of cloth sealed in the borough has increased, there has been an absolute decline in these villages. Moreover, it can be seen that there is a striking difference between the structure of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century lists; there are no large individual totals in the 1468-9 list (even allowing for the fact that these are assize cloths rather than 'straights'). Rather, small to medium totals predominate, with some two-thirds of the individuals bringing between 10 and 25 cloths to the aulnager, and these categories accounting for some 70% of the total cloths sealed.

The village of Dedham, together with East Bergholt and Stratford, Suffolk, accounted for a similar volume of cloth to the above grouping, distributed as shown in Table XXVI.

It will be seen that again there are no large individual totals, no person having more than 50 cloths sealed, while the 25-49 category contains nearly one half of the total cloths.

TABLE XXVI: CLOTHS OF ASSIZE TAXED AT DEDHAM, E. BERGHOLT  
AND STRATFORD, 1468-9

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	% of Total Individuals	No. of Cloths in Category	% of Total Cloths
50+	0	0	0	0
25-49	8	28.6	256	48.2
20-24	5	17.9	114	21.5
15-19	4	14.3	68	12.8
10-14	5	17.9	61	11.5
5- 9	3	10.7	21½	4.0
Under 5	3	10.7	10½	2.0
Totals	28	100.1	531	100.0

(Source: PRO, E101/343/5)

Using somewhat broader categories, the three groups of places examined so far can be compared thus:

TABLE XXVII: PERCENTAGE OF CLOTHS IN CATEGORIES, 1468-9

No. of Cloths	Colch./St.O. c.m.	Cogg./Br. c.m.	Dedham/E.B./ Str. c.m.
over 50	36.7	0	0
25-49	37.1	18.8	48.2
10-24	23.6	70.8	45.8
under 10	2.5	10.4	6.0

(Source: PRO, E101/343/5)

The other two Essex lists contain much smaller volumes of cloth; Chelmsford and Maldon c.m. account for 161½ whole cloths brought by 16 people, while Thaxted and Walden c.m. account for a mere 35 cloths, credited to 8 people.

In terms of total and per capita subsidy and aulnage payment the Essex returns for 1468-9 can be summarised as follows:

TABLE XXVIII: PER CAPITA PAYMENTS, 1468-9 AULNAGE ACCOUNTS

Places	Total Subs. + Aulnage	No. of Individuals	Per Capita Payment
Colchester, St Osyth, c.m.	£26. 1.3d	47	11s1d
Coggeshall, Braintree, Hals. c.m.	£ 9.11.4d	34	5s7½d
Dedham + Stratford & E. Berg., Sf., c.m.	£ 9.19.1½d	28	7s1½d
Chelmsford & Maldon, c.m.	£ 3. 0.6½d	16	3s9½d
Thaxted & Walden, c.m.	£ 0.13.1½d	8	1s7½d

(Source: PRO, E101/343/5)

This provides another index for demonstrating the contrast between these returns and those of 1394-5; at the earlier period the borough's per capita payment had been lower than any other place while Coggeshall and Braintree had by far the highest per capita figures (see above).

If the aulnage accounts were to be taken as a literal guide to the progress of the textile industry then, far from seeing an exuberant growth of rural cloth production, the first two-thirds of the fifteenth century in Essex would appear to witness a stagnation or decline of the industry in the countryside while the urban share



of production increased markedly. This would of course be a very striking finding, contradicting much of the received wisdom on the progress of cloth manufacture at this date; is there any reason to believe it is true?

Before attempting to answer this question in its broadest terms some further evidence bearing on the faith of the record will be reviewed. The aulnage return for 1469-70 consists of two separate accounts, one covering the period 29 October to 25 December, the other the ensuing nine months.<sup>80</sup> This unusual format - the other accounts for the later 1460s and early 1470s are for complete years - gives the opportunity to check for signs of fraudulence. The three-month account has been compared with that for the preceding year (1468-9) in order to answer the following questions; do the overall figures for these three months bear a plausible ratio to those for the preceding 12, and do individual figures seem 'reasonable' - is there any evidence of 'fixed' figures in the form of implausibly recurring ratios etc.?

To take the Colchester and St Osyth list first: 24 names are found in the three-month account, as against 47 in the year-long account, and the total number of cloths sealed is 268 as against 1390, or 19.3%. Of these 24 names, 21 are found in the earlier list. There is no fixed ratio between number of cloths in the three-month and twelve-month accounts. For the 21 individuals who occur in both lists, the comparison can be summarised thus:

TABLE XXIX: RELATION BETWEEN AMOUNTS OF CLOTH, SEALED BY IDENTIFIABLE INDIVIDUALS, E101/343/6 & 5

Amount of Cloth Sealed during 3 Months as against 12 Months	No. of People
same or more than	4
between $\frac{3}{4}$ and same	3
between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$	1
between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$	5
less than $\frac{1}{4}$	8

This spread of individual totals and ratios between the three- and twelve-month accounts might be thought to strengthen the plausibility of the accounts - there is no obvious fraudulence here. On the other hand, the absence of certain of the 'larger' individuals of the 1468-9 list from the three-month list - for example Robert Hyndelsham who had 70 cloths sealed in 1468-9, or Robert Best and William Halbuteyn (60 cloths each) - might be thought curious.

The returns for the other place groupings are summarised below (Table XXX), and comparison with the 1468-9 account effected by means of percentage figures for cloths sealed.

TABLE XXX: COMPARISON OF E101/343/5 (1468-9, 12 MONTHS) AND  
E101/343/6 (1469, 3 MONTHS)

	No. of People		No. of Cloths		No. of Cloths $\frac{343/6}{343/5}$ as %age
	343/5	343/6	343/5	343/6	
Colch., St Osyth, c.m.	47	24	1390	268	19.3
Cogg., Br'tree & Hals., c.m.	34	17	510	72	14.1
Chelmsford, Maldon, c.m.	16	9	161½	25	15.5
Dedham + E.Berg. & Strat., Sf.	28	11	531	90	16.9
Thaxted, c.m.	8	4	35	9	25.7

Note: Thaxted appears here alone, without (Saffron) Walden.

Thus, it can be seen that all the groupings save the insignificant Thaxted show a percentage figure lower than the 25% one would expect on a purely proportionate basis. This phenomenon, which is also to be seen in all but one of the Suffolk places covered by the account,<sup>81</sup> might be attributed to the difficulties experienced in tentering cloth in autumn and winter. It is also tempting to speculate that the lower figures found for the 'rural' communities might be in part a product of the continuing influence of the rhythms of agricultural life, and the intensive labour demands of the last quarter of the year, resulting in a withdrawal of labour from cloth manufacture. However, this is to go beyond that which may be inferred legitimately from a difference of a few percentage points.

Nevertheless it is clear that these accounts provide no support for the belief that there was a 'rural capitalism' flourishing in Essex in the fifteenth century. Even more striking is a return for the village of Coggeshall from some four years earlier.<sup>82</sup> This account covers a period of one year and 79 days from 26 January 1464 to 14 April 1465; a total of 289½ assize cloths or equivalent are credited to no less than 70 named individuals. The breakdown of this account is given in Table XXXI below.

TABLE XXXI: CLOTHS OF ASSIZE TAXED AT COGGESHALL, 1464-5

No. of Cloths	No. of Individuals	% of Total Individuals	No. of Cloths in Category	% of Total Cloths
50+	0	0	0	0
25-49	1	1.4	26	8.8
20-24	0	0	0	0
15-19	0	0	0	0
10-14	8	11.4	96½	32.8
5- 9	13	18.6	85½	29.0
Under 5	48	68.6	86½	29.4
Totals	70	100.0	294½	100.0

(Source: PRO, E101/342/24)

Who then are all these "small" men and women? It seems clear that they are quite simply the small-scale, domestic producers of cloth living in and around the village of Coggeshall. (The only individual identified as belonging to another place is John Clerk de Ferynge; Feering, two miles to the south east of Coggeshall.) In

the case of most, the  $\frac{1}{2}$ , 1, 2, 3 or 4 cloths sealed - if it truly represents the extent of their commercial cloth-making - could only be the product of a by-occupation, a minor (although no doubt financially important) adjunct to agricultural work.

As for the 'capitalist clothiers', they are nowhere to be seen. The largest individual total of cloths sealed in this account was a modest 26. In her study of the Paycockes, Eileen Power made no reference to the fifteenth-century aulnage accounts, citing only the late fourteenth-century ones which pre-date the arrival of the Paycocke family in Coggeshall by some two generations. Furthermore, the first two generations of Paycockes have no clear link with cloth-making, being primarily victuallers. It is not until after the beginning of the sixteenth century that a clear link between the family and the industry is demonstrated, most strikingly in the will of Thomas, the 'wealthy clothier', who died in 1518, where many bequests are made to people whom the testator describes as "my" weavers, shearmen, spinners etc. Power argues backwards from this sixteenth-century evidence and forwards from the 1390s aulnage returns, which she believed showed "capitalist clothiers keeping large numbers of workmen employed" in the village, to claim that the fifteenth century was also characterised by a thriving clothier-dominated industry. However, direct evidence is not produced: "There were certainly a number of wealthy clothiers in the village during the fifteenth century ... but their names have not come down to us".<sup>84</sup>

In fact, it may be that Power underestimates the achievements of 'the wealthy clothier', Thomas Paycocke; rather than being the culmination of a lengthy process of growing involvement of merchant

capital in cloth manufacture, Paycocke may in truth have been an innovator, the founder of a business tradition rather than its heir.

The possibility exists, of course, that large merchants did organise work in Coggeshall, but had their cloths sealed elsewhere, perhaps at Colchester, or at Sudbury across the Suffolk border. Of these two, Colchester would seem the more likely, the Suffolk town being further away and generally less accessible. Moreover the quantities of cloth aulnaged at Sudbury were small; the 'giants' of the Suffolk returns were Hadleigh (1707 cloths in 1468-9) and Lavenham (1001½),<sup>85</sup> but both these places are over twice as far from Coggeshall as is Colchester.

Colchester's returns for the 1460s, as we have seen, indicate a larger volume of cloths being sealed than in the 1390s, and a concentration in fewer hands, but the totals involved are still not huge, and surely not large enough to be suspected of concealing or incorporating the production of a burgeoning 'industrial hinterland'.

London was undoubtedly growing in importance as a market for Essex and Suffolk cloths but this is hard to quantify because of the fragmentary nature of the London and Middlesex aulnage accounts. We know, for example, that East Anglian 'stuffs' marketed in Toulouse in the earlier fifteenth century tended to be loaded in either London or Colchester.<sup>88</sup> Again, it has long been known that London experienced a dramatic 'take-off' of cloth exports from the 1450s.<sup>87</sup> The possibility that large numbers of cloths were marketed and exported unsealed must also be borne in mind. Evading the scrutiny of the aulnager was, no doubt, always possible, but the value put upon the official sealing of cloths, both in England and

on the Continent, must make it unlikely that a large-scale operator dealing in quality cloths would make no appearance in the aulnage accounts at this date.<sup>88</sup>

To persist with this scenario - large-scale clothiers organising production at Coggeshall, but having the cloth sealed elsewhere - would necessitate belief in a dual, or rather triple-layered industry. Firstly, a purely household-oriented production for use of coarse cloth, the type of industry which Bridbury argues was ubiquitous;<sup>89</sup> secondly, the small-scale commercial production of better quality cloth such as is evidenced by the Coggeshall account; thirdly, superimposed, a large-scale clothier-controlled industry based either on putting-out or the direct employment of labour - the workforce comprising either the same individuals as the first two categories, including those who appear in the aulnage account, or an additional body of people, invisible in the accounts, who co-existed with the independent small producers in the village.

This complicated picture might be thought implausible, although not necessarily impossible. What can be stated is that the aulnage accounts provide no support for a belief in large-scale, 'capitalist' production of cloth in the Essex countryside. Rather they point to a continuing small-scale, domestic-based production, significant financially for the individuals and communities involved certainly, but evidencing no revolution in scale or organization. This much might be argued on the basis of the 1468-9 accounts; the 1464-5 account for Coggeshall indicates that there were even more, smaller-scale marketers of cloth in the village than are revealed in the later document; if this were true for Coggeshall, why not for



the other communities? This suggestion can of course be applied to town as well as to country.

### 1500 to 1560

After the third quarter of the fifteenth century we can no longer draw upon aulnage accounts to provide a statistical basis - however problematic - for the study of the textile industry.

Instead, we are left with the evidence of borough court and central government records to attempt to answer the question: did cloth manufacture remain important within Colchester during these decades which in other towns have been seen as "the culmination of the crisis" of the urban economy?<sup>90</sup>

The court-rolls resume after the "break" in 1509-10. Unfortunately the rolls themselves become less informative, partly, it may be, because of a tightening up of administrative or clerical procedure, and partly, perhaps, because of the increasing use of books for court records; very few of these early volumes have survived. The picture that we can construct for the early sixteenth century is thus markedly less detailed than is possible for the fifteenth and later fourteenth centuries.

There seems good reason to believe, however, that the trend towards a larger scale of organisation, in which the industry became increasingly dominated by a few wealthy merchant "clothiers", continued after 1500. The richest of these were undoubtedly the Cristmas family. Thomas Cristmas the elder, in addition to his interest in the Hythe fulling and corn mills (see above), had

acquired a twenty-year lease of Lexden mills (again, one fulling and one corn) in 1496.<sup>91</sup>

The will of Thomas Cristmas the younger, drawn up and proved in 1520, makes mention of two mills, one apparently in Lexden, suggesting that a renewal of this lease may have been effected; the other is "my mill called Newbridgemill", in West Bergholt. This will also includes bequests to "every of my tenants that be fullers, weavers and shearmen" and "every of my long-time spinners", in terms reminiscent of the paternalistic tone of the wills of Paycocke of Coggeshall and Spring of Lavenham. Four weavers and two shearmen are mentioned by name, but one may assume that many more individuals who were not "tenants" of Cristmas were kept in regular employment by him.<sup>92</sup> Thomas's son John appears in the subsidy of 1524 as one of the richest provincial merchants of England, assessed on goods of £600.<sup>93</sup>

The benevolence of the town's wealthy clothiers and merchants was strictly limited, however, as is shown by events of the 1520s, a bad decade in many respects. The heavy taxation of the subsidies struck at a community already stretched by difficulties in marketing its cloth, and on top of these problems came a serious dearth of grain in 1527-8. In a letter dated 1 December 1527 Norfolk writes to Wolsey of the scarcity of grain in Colchester, Ipswich, Manningtree and the villages of the Stour valley; despite the shortages, the "most substantial men" of the communities were "loth to lay out money" to import grain; "the substantial people have provided for themselves, and would rather the poor should buy for themselves than lay out their money at a venture". Colchester and Bergholt, however, "are in great necessity", and he thinks they will

"shift for the money".<sup>94</sup> (As a sequel to this episode we find in the court rolls an account of "corne that came to the Hythe", wheat and barley, dated 9 June 1528. Money was allowed to 'Mr Flyngaunt' (presumably Thomas Flyngaunt, Bailiff this year) for his expenditure on wheat bought at Harwich.<sup>95</sup>

A shortage of money amongst the clothiers after the payment of the various instalments of the subsidies was popularly blamed for problems of the textile industry in the 1520s, but a short-term failure of demand is the most plausible explanation of this period of depression. Clothiers in Essex and Suffolk began to put out less work, causing widespread underemployment and consequent unrest. In the Babergh hundred of Suffolk, a large gathering of clothworkers alarmed the government in 1525, but the incident ended without violence.<sup>96</sup>

There are indications that the spirit of unrest was abroad in Colchester also at this time. In 1528 one John Boswell the younger, clothmaker, of Colchester, was examined concerning a letter written by him to a certain Thomas Sames to whom, inter alia, he owed money for wool, and hoped to be granted a longer period to pay. It is recounted how he had been at a hall within Blackwell Hall in London, known as Colchester Hall, having three or four cloths to sell. John Tyndall, a London merchant and presumably Boswell's usual outlet for his cloth, would not buy them because he would not be able to re-sell them. What remedy was there? He (Boswell) saw none "unless the commons arose and complained to the King that the people were not half set to work".<sup>97</sup>

It seems clear that London was becoming increasingly important as an outlet for Colchester cloth; the existence of a "Colchester

Hall" demonstrates that this must have been a regular and sizeable trade. The capital's share of England's export trade in woollen cloth has been shown to have grown from a position of importance to one of total dominance during the first four decades of the century.<sup>98</sup>

In 1530 we hear of cloth belonging to William Ede taken by carrier to a William Cowper of "Grascherchestreet", London. The cloth was passed on to one John Smyth, who said to Cowper "com for your mony sone and ye shal have it". Cowper came to Colchester, and was confronted in another merchant's house by Ede, who had evidently not yet received any payment for his cloth. Cowper told Ede, "John Smyth wyl be here next weke and paye you for ytt or elss I wyll pay you my self". Dealing through the capital evidently did not guarantee Colchester men prompt payment for their cloths.<sup>99</sup>

Direct involvement of the town's most substantial men and office-holders in the manufacture of cloth can be easily demonstrated at this period; these men commonly describe themselves as "clothmakers" rather than the more equivocal "clothier". Thus, in 1511-12 John Clare, Alderman, was fined for causing grievous nuisance in Magdalen Lane with "le past" of his dye-house.<sup>100</sup> In mid-century is found an enrolled grant by John and George Cristmas to Nicholas Maynard allowing him to run a water conduit "on certain pipes of lead or wood joined together" to the house where he works "dyeing and washing wool" in his trade of "clothmakynge".<sup>101</sup> John Maynard - later a Bailiff - was robbed of £106.17s.6d. cash by one of his fullers in 1540.<sup>102</sup>

As well as these prominent townsmen we find celebrated country clothiers having business or acquiring interests in the borough.

Thomas Spryng of Lavenham appears in the court rolls of 1515-16 pressing a lawsuit against John Lyard "plomer" and Thomas Fox "clothmaker" of Colchester; the defendants were attached by five and six rolls of cloth respectively.<sup>103</sup> In 1541-2 Thomas Paycok of Coggeshall, clothier, acquired a capital tenement and three acres of land beyond East Bridge in Colchester.<sup>104</sup> Wider contacts are suggested by the acknowledgement of debt in 1531 by John Blakborn of Colchester, draper, to Thos. Heybour, "clothman" of "Elslak in the county called Yorkeshyre".<sup>105</sup>

Of the small craftsman and trader we hear next to nothing in the sixteenth century; four- and seven- year terms of apprenticeship to clothmakers are found in the 1520s;<sup>106</sup> in 1516 we hear of a servant earning 1s. per week in the occupation of "shermanscraft".<sup>107</sup> Cases involving craftsmen in pleas of debt, detention of goods etc. are conspicuous by their absence. It seems probable that this is, at least in part, indicative of a reduction of the status of small masters and artisan-traders to the level of journeymen, wage-earners whose lack of independence hides them from view in the records.

The national aulnage system may have been moribund at this date, but local initiative in trying to implement and maintain standards of work is indicated by reference to a town office of "examiner of cloth"; this office had been leased by Mathew Rede for a year in 1515, but he had only paid £4.16s.8d. of the £20 required; perhaps the office was not a successful one.<sup>108</sup>

The survival of wills enables to add a little more detail to this somewhat sparse picture of the sixteenth-century industry. At a general level, the importance of cloth as a transferable form of wealth is shown by its appearance in pious bequests; two such are

found in wills from the year 1500, in which John Breton, gentleman, willed 24 yards of cloth to his parish church, St James's, and Nicholas Clere instructed that 24 yards of russet cloth should be given to the same church to buy a new cross.<sup>109</sup>

Details as to the equipment and stocks of cloth workers is disappointingly sparse due to the absence of detailed inventories, such items normally being included on a general bequest of "all that longyth to my occupation" or similar. However there are a number of references to looms, as in the will of Thomas Nicoll (1539),<sup>110</sup> while a 'slaye' for a loom is mentioned in Henry Thorpe's will (1528).<sup>111</sup> Robert Thorpe's broad loom is to be sold in 1528,<sup>112</sup> while William Allesfeld bequeaths "my brode lome, as it is" in 1544.<sup>113</sup>

Narrow looms are not mentioned in any of the wills examined, but the fact that sometimes it was considered necessary to specify that broad looms are intended, as in the above wills, suggests that they may have still retained some minor role in the Colchester industry.

A shearing board is mentioned in the will of Thomas Jeny (1538),<sup>114</sup> while John Webbe bequeaths his "leest pair of sheres" (1538).<sup>115</sup> William Holyer, 'cardmaker' drew up his will in 1525,<sup>116</sup> while the 1502 will of Richard Ynge<sup>117</sup> includes a bequest of half a stone of wire, price 5 shillings to Richard Whittryke, cardmaker.

As might be expected, the 'clothiers' or 'clothmakers' figure much more prominently than mere artisans in the surviving Colchester wills. The interest of these men in all stages of the clothmaking process is suggested by the reference in the testament of Robert Barker,<sup>118</sup> dated 1503, to a gate through which his son is to have

access to the pasture "to drye woll and to teyntour his owen clothes". A tenter ground is also mentioned by Robert Northon the elder, Bailiff, in 1525,<sup>119</sup> along with bequests of 3½ bales of woad, 3 long woollen cloths and 6 long cloths, "ready made of assur color". It would be wrong to suppose that interest in several stages of the clothmaking process was entirely confined to those who called themselves clothmakers, however; John Mace, 'weaver', bequeathed woad and oil as well as stocks of cloth and wool in 1532.<sup>120</sup>

The growing interest of the clothiers/clothmakers in both urban and rural real estate can also be seen in the wills of the sixteenth century. While few approached the great landed wealth of the Cristmas family who, by the death of Thomas Cristmas in 1520, had acquired numerous manors and other holdings throughout Essex and further afield,<sup>121</sup> most had some property to bequeath. Robert Barker, mentioned above, willed five tenements in 1502; John Forster, whose goods included bales of woad and packs of wool, bequeathed a mill called 'Strode mill', tenements, groves and a house in West Bergholt in his 1516 will. Robert Norten held woodland and other land in Rivenhall and a lordship in Boxted;<sup>123</sup> Richard Weston, who bequeathed "merchandise and implements of the occupacion of cloth makingg" in 1541 held the 'manor of Perstonall' in the parishes of Feering, Messing, Easthorpe and Marks Tey, and other lands in Wix and elsewhere. Henry Webbe, clothmaker, held, in addition to the lease of Lexden mill, an unspecified farm, and his bequests include quantities of grain.<sup>124</sup>

The increasing wealth and power of the clothiers is attested by the well-known 'Petition of the weavers of woollen cloth in Suffolk



and Essex' dating from 1539.<sup>125</sup> The weavers of various towns and villages within the two counties - Colchester and Dedham are among the places specifically mentioned - complain of their difficulties in complying with the statutory requirements regarding the dimensions of cloth, and of the actions of "their masters, the clothiers" who "have their own looms and weavers and fullers in their own houses so that the petitioners are rendered destitute; for the rich men the clothiers be concluded and agreed among themselves to hold and apply one price for weaving of the said cloths", which price is too low for the weavers to support their households upon, "even by working day and night, holy day and work day". As a result, many of them have been "reduced to become other mens servants".

Such petitions are naturally to be treated with caution, and may overstate the position, but the situation here described seems entirely compatible with what evidence we have as to the sixteenth-century industry in Colchester; a disappearance of small independent artisans from the records, and increasing evidence of the wealth of clothiers or cloth-makers exercising direct control over the manufacturing process. It is also at this period that the rural clothier dynasties appear to have been most successfully amassing their fortunes.<sup>126</sup>

The increasing polarisation of society in the cloth-making region between clothier and dependent craftsman produced tensions which periodically threatened to generate more than petitions to Parliament. The unrest in the Stour valley in the 1520s has been referred to above, but this was not the only disturbance to involve textile workers. Weavers and fullers were often prominent in the

popular disturbances and riots which shook Colchester at intervals in the first half of the sixteenth century, although other grievances - notably enclosure of parts of the borough fields - were the ostensible causes. One such "assembly of malefactors" is described in the court rolls for 1537-8, and it is perhaps not without significance that the target of this gathering's anger included the property of John Cristmas. Around one half of the individuals named, who collectively caused the whole of Colchester "great terror, trembling and perterbation", appear to have been cloth-workers or traders.<sup>127</sup>

The whole cloth-making region appears to have been in a potentially volatile condition on the very eve of the arrival of the 'strangers' from the Low Countries, an event which was ultimately to lead to a transformation in Colchester's economic fortunes, taking the borough's textile industry to a new peak of prosperity.<sup>128</sup> A certain John Broke was alleged to have said publicly in Colchester on 31st May 1566:

Wevers occupacion is a deade science nowe adayez and ytt will never be better before we make a rysynge. I will get a horse and ryde into a towne in Suffolke and so come from thence to Bockyng and Brayntree and Coxsall and so straight thorough to Colchester and crye They are uppe, they are uppe ...

A fortnight later, Edward Whyte is supposed to have said, also at Colchester:

Wee can gett noe worke nor have we no monye ... [but] we wyll have a remedy ... for the commons will rise ... then wyll up twoe or three thowsande in Colchester and aboute Colchester.<sup>130</sup>

There is thus evidence of periodic difficulties, perhaps severe difficulties, in the borough's textile industry during the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century. There are, however, few

grounds for believing that Colchester experienced a crisis of a magnitude comparable to that which has been suggested elsewhere. Statistics and details of the organisation of production are sparse, but it seems clear that the 'clothiers' were tightening their control of an industry which continued to be a major source of employment.

The increasing dominance of the clothiers, of course, was not only a local phenomenon, as the preamble to the Weavers Act of 1555 makes clear, referring to the "ingrossing of looms" and impoverishment of the artisan weavers. The Act sought to assuage the weavers' grievances by the wholly impractical means of restricting cloth-making other than by possessors of a single loom - to the inhabitants of "city, borough, market town or corporate town", and by tightening restrictions on apprenticeships, holding of more than one occupation etc.<sup>131</sup>

The provisions to the geographical restriction of clothmaking were repeated in the 'Act towchyng the making of Woollen Clothes' two years later, and caused great consternation amongst the clothmakers of rural Essex. By a special Act of 1558 the villages of Bocking, Dedham, West Bergholt, and Coggeshall were specifically exempted from these restrictions, on the grounds that they had been "inhabited of a long time withe Clothe-makers, which have made and dalye doo make, good and trewe Clothe, to the great Common Weale of the Countrye there".<sup>132</sup>

## Textiles: Some Further Considerations

The evidence reviewed suggests that there was no clear 'victory' for either town or country in the textile industry of Essex in the later middle ages. Rather, there are certain periods when the rural industry appears more prominent and others when town-based manufacture seems to have done better.

It is not convincing, however, to postulate a general 'regional' development within which the rural-urban distinction is ultimately irrelevant. It seems clear that the numerous factors influencing industrial development - nature and organisation of the labour force, demand, prices, regulation etc. - interacted in different ways in a corporate, urban environment and a less controlled rural one.

Rural industry did not merely escape urban restrictions, it drew upon an essentially different type of labour - the domestic or family-based producers who retained agrarian interests; men like William Mildnall of Dedham, whose will, proved in 1500, included bequests of sheep, 'beasts' and a horse as well as a loom, three pairs of shears and a shear-board.<sup>133</sup>

Such a labour-force had disadvantages as well as advantages for the country clothier. The advantages are well known; workers who supplied much of their own subsistence needs could be paid less for their labour - in terms of either wages or piece-rates - than a 'full-time' urban work-force. This is the 'super-exploitation' described by the theorists of protoindustrialisation.<sup>134</sup>

The other side of the coin is the fact that such a labour-force was not irrevocably committed to industrial employment. When their

need for money was less acute, such producers could simply withdraw from, or scale-down their involvement in, commercial clothmaking. This process could operate not merely at an individual or family level in response to changing fortunes, but on a wider scale, when fluctuations in the overall economic parameters might promote the disengagement of whole communities from the commercial sphere.

The key to these movements, and thus to the differential development of urban and rural industries, might be thought to lie in the relative movement of industrial and agricultural prices and to their differing impact upon the labour-forces of town and country. Whereas high prices for manufactures and low prices for foodstuffs might provide a general stimulus to industrial development, this effect would be much more pronounced in an urban environment. Low food prices would mean that the urban craftsman could be paid less than, or, where civic or guild regulation precluded this, the same as previously, while the price obtained by the clothier for finished products had increased. In the country, wages or piece-rates were already relatively low; attempts to lower them further or to hold them steady would merely result in many of the producers who had adequate holdings dropping out of commercial production; the clothier, in effect, would be obliged to 'bid up' wages if he wished to maintain or increase his production.

The converse situation - high food prices and low industrial prices - would hit the town industry far harder than the rural; the 'reproduction of labour' costs had to be met almost entirely out of wage/piece-work rates, and profits would thus slump. The country clothier only had to meet a part of these costs and could

thus, in theory, weather this particular type of economic storm more easily.

This line of argument leads to a somewhat unexpected - indeed ironic - conclusion; that rural industry was in a fundamental respect inflexible, and poorly equipped to respond to changing market conditions. The country clothier, on this interpretation, faced a continual struggle to retain his labour-force; until such time as a substantial reserve of labour divorced from direct means of subsistence came into being, rural industry was critically limited in its ability to expand. What expansion there was would tend to be based on an extension of the labour force rather than on an intensification of production. Population growth and a resultant marginalisation of sections of rural society, or large-scale expropriation of the small-holding population, would need to occur before such intensification could take place in the countryside. By and large, such circumstances did not exist prior to the sixteenth century. Growth beyond a certain point was thus impractical in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, no matter how favourable the wider economic and political climate might be.

Table XXXII illustrates the broad movements in the prices of textiles and farinaceous foodstuffs, derived from the Phelps Brown and Hopkins indices.

TABLE XXXII: PRICES OF TEXTILES AND FOODSTUFFS

	1.Textile Index	2.Farinaceous Index	$\frac{1.}{2.}$
1330-9	64.9	99.8	0.65
1340-9	53.9	92.1	0.59
1350-9	136.9	120.7	1.13
1360-9	125.8	131.2	0.96
1370-9	125.0	127.5	0.98
1380-9	92.1	93.6	0.98
1390-9	86.1	100.8	0.85
1400-9	94.1	106.6	0.88
1410-9	106.3	111.8	0.95
1420-9	103.4	94.1	1.10
1430-9	99.8	130.8	0.76
1440-9	98.1	89.1	1.10
1450-9	98.7	98.2	1.01
1460-9	103.5	103.8	1.00
1470-0	105.1	101.4	1.04
1480-9	112.0	128.6	0.87
1490-9	111.8	106.6	1.05
1500-9	111.9	116.4	0.96
1510-9	118.6	111.9	1.06
1520-9	127.8	152.3	0.84
1530-9	142.3	167.0	0.85
1540-9	154.6	169.4	0.91
1550-9	189.7	317.1	0.60

(Source: Phelps Brown and Hopkins, 1981, pp.46-51)



This is, of course, a fairly crude measure, concealing as it does the great annual fluctuations in the price of cereals. Nevertheless, it provides a broad outline of movements, and can be compared with a similar series of calculations produced by Phelps Brown and Hopkins themselves, using their composite 'Industrial' and 'Foodstuffs' indices.<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps the most striking feature is the relative stability of the derived textile/farinaceous index between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. The fourteenth-century demographic collapse brought about a new balance between industrial and foodstuff prices, a balance which was not decisively overthrown until population recovery had been under way for several decades in the sixteenth century.

Within this period of relative stability, however, it will be seen that there are modest decadal fluctuations in the derived index. It has been argued above that - within the population-land balance prevailing in the later middle ages - the higher the price of industrial products relative to foodstuffs, the greater the relative advantage of urban industry. The fifteenth century appears, on this basis, as a broadly favourable period for urban manufacture, interrupted by decades, e.g. the 1430s and 1480s, when this relative advantage would be reduced or reversed. As we have seen, the aulnage accounts appear to show Colchester's industry expanding, at least during the first two-thirds of the century - while rural production stagnated or declined. Again, the 1390s and 1400s show relatively high cereal prices at a time when the rural industry appears most prominent in the aulnage returns. The borough records and the aulnage accounts point to a movement from an

urban industry based on small semi-independent producers to one increasingly dominated by larger 'clothiers' or 'clothmakers'. The rural industry of the mid-fifteenth century appears to be based on small-scale domestic production, with no positive evidence of the rise of wealthy clothier dynasties until the close of the fifteenth century and the early decades of the sixteenth. Thus, rather than being 'conservative' and archaic the urban industry appears to have moved towards large-scale 'putting-out' production earlier than that of the countryside.

CHAPTER 6  
THE COLCHESTER FRANCHISE

Urban Freedom

The urban franchise in medieval England displays a wide variety of manifestations. In different towns it implied different rights and entitlements, and a bewildering variety of terms is encountered - freemen, portmen, burgesses, hanasters, gildsmen, citizens to name but a few. The basic function of the institution, however, was everywhere the same; to differentiate between the 'free' members of the urban community, who enjoyed a range of economic, social and legal privileges, and the 'foreigners' who did not.

In The Gild Merchant Charles Gross attempted to trace the development of the urban franchise, and to explore its relationship to the gilds merchant which existed in many twelfth- and thirteenth-century towns. Originally separate institutions, Gross argued, gild and borough tended to amalgamate in the fourteenth century; thus

... the later freemen occupied the same position [as brethren of the ancient Gild Merchant] in most towns, comprehending all who were allowed to trade freely. 1

James Tait argued that Gross underestimated the closeness of town and gild from a very early date in many towns, and the role of gild organization in the emergence of borough offices and corporate identity. However, he recognised that the municipal history of London, Norwich and Colchester, none of which had a Gild Merchant, showed that the gild "was not the indispensable nucleus round which everything else gathered".<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the precise history of its emergence in different towns, the urban franchise was, by the fourteenth century, a 'gild-like' institution, with formal procedures for the admission of members. This character had gradually eclipsed the tenurial basis of the urban community; the franchise of liberties of the borough were no longer enjoyed automatically by all freeholders.<sup>3</sup>

The development of this 'gild-like' character encouraged the keeping of written registers in which the names of new freemen were entered, sometimes with a note of any fine paid, occupation or place of birth. Methods of entry varied; there was usually some provision for inheritance of the freedom, apprenticeship could lead to enfranchisement, while those who did not qualify by these means could often become free by payment of an entry fine. Such fines varied greatly between towns, and often within them, ranging from a few shillings to many pounds.

Dobson has suggested that the varying of admission fines was an important means by which towns could regulate economic life. In his study of the York freedom admissions he argues that:

... the system of urban freedom admissions in late medieval England was less an organic growth from the economic and political aspirations of the citizens than a mechanism deliberately designed to subserve the policies of the city oligarchies.<sup>4</sup>

It is not difficult to find examples of this manipulation in other boroughs. In sixteenth-century Northampton the authorities sought to prevent amalgamation of crafts by imposing entry fines of four times the normal level on men who held more than two occupations.<sup>5</sup> Large numbers of freemen might be admitted simply to raise revenue; this appears to have been the case at Beverley in 1409-10 when a new town gate was being built,<sup>6</sup> and at Exeter in May

1429, a time of abnormal expenditure on new shops.<sup>7</sup> Some towns, however, placed a ceiling on the number of freemen permitted at any one time, others enacted temporary moratoria on admissions; these practices appear to have been common in the Cinque Ports.<sup>8</sup>

It is not logical to regard such things as 'abuses' or 'distortions'. It is only to be expected that the ruling bodies of later medieval towns would have a variety of considerations before them in permitting admissions to the ranks of the free population. However, these factors must always be borne in mind when examining admission trends.

A further important issue bearing upon the use of freeman admission data is that of residence. Phythian-Adams has suggested that non-residence was a widespread phenomenon in the later middle ages, with urban privileges being exploited by men who chose to avoid the costs of actually living within the borough of which they were freemen.<sup>9</sup> It is not difficult to find examples of non-resident burgesses in many towns; in Cambridge,<sup>10</sup> Oxford<sup>11</sup> and Leicester<sup>12</sup> the existence of such burgesses appears to have been officially tolerated, although their entry fines appear to have been higher and their privileges more circumscribed.

Less flexible attitudes appear to have been the rule at York. Dobson contends that residence "was a practical qualification for enfranchisement" beyond the end of the fifteenth century, while leaving the city automatically endangered the freeman's status.<sup>13</sup> Most towns seem likely to have shared the attitudes prevailing at fifteenth-century Worcester; a disapproval of non-residence, but recognition that burgesses with trading interests could not be expected to be permanently resident. Temporary absence was thus

permitted; anyone leaving the borough but returning within a year should keep his freedom. These temporary non-residents were, however, obliged to continue to contribute to town charges and taxes.<sup>14</sup>

Phythian-Adams<sup>15</sup> makes much of the situation at Norwich in the middle of the sixteenth century where, the Assembly Books' record, "of late daies" many "evyll disposed personnes" have dwelt in the town for a short period, obtained their freedom, and then "departed out of the same and have dwelt in dyvers places in the County of Norffolk adioyning to the cittie". These people had then proceeded to frequent the markets of Norwich, buying and selling "as frelye as any persone of the inhabitautes doo, w<sup>t</sup>out payeng anye maner skotte or lotte" or any other charges, "to the utter undoing of the inhabytautes".<sup>16</sup>

While Phythian-Adams appears to regard this as exemplifying a characteristic problem of late medieval towns,<sup>17</sup> there seems good reason to view it, rather, as a most unusual situation. Firstly, the problem is specifically stated to be of recent origin rather than being a longstanding one. Secondly, the non-residents are paying nothing towards urban charges; there was clearly no system of making them contribute, and this in itself is unusual. Thirdly, the problem is evidently one of numerous small traders using the town markets, perhaps dealing in victuals. These are precisely the sort of people who would be unlikely to be able to afford the luxury of non-resident freedom in towns where charges were levied or a property qualification enforced. It thus seems that the problem at Norwich was caused by a lack of effective local legislation of the type found in other towns; the city's response was immediately to

introduce new rules providing for the expulsion of non-residents from the freedom. The outsiders could continue to trade "only as forreners" under the disadvantages that this implies.<sup>18</sup>

We can agree with Bridbury that "non-residence was nothing new in urban experience" in the later middle ages.<sup>19</sup> In most towns, however, the vast majority of freemen must have been resident. Non-residence was a recognised and controlled aspect of urban life, but one which could only be enjoyed by a restricted number of people; a luxury which most could not afford and probably did not desire.

#### The Freedom at Colchester

The freemen<sup>20</sup> of Colchester enjoyed a range of privileges within the legal, political and economic spheres. The first two of these can be dealt with very briefly, for they can have been of little real importance to the majority of the free burgesses.<sup>21</sup> The freeman had the right to be tried in the borough court and not elsewhere; when a burgess pursued an action against another in an outside court this was regarded as a serious injury to the community, and could result in expulsion from the freedom. Attempts by other civil or ecclesiastical courts to curb the powers of the burgesses were vigorously resisted.<sup>22</sup>

Real political power was always restricted to a small section of the free burgess population, and the tendency towards oligarchic rule became even more pronounced in the later medieval centuries.<sup>23</sup> The accounts in the Oath Book show how the paper rights of the



burgesses to elect their rulers and officers were increasingly hedged and blocked. Frustration with these manoeuvres produced periodic disturbances and riots at election time.<sup>24</sup>

The privileges which meant most to the ordinary burgess were undoubtedly economic ones. The free burgesses enjoyed a monopoly on hunting and fishing within the Liberty of the borough, and could graze their livestock freely in the borough fields.<sup>25</sup> Foreigners who usurped these privileges were presented in court and fined, and such entries occur in every surviving court roll from the early fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup>

Only burgesses could freely establish themselves as craftsmen within the borough; foreigners who did so were fined in court or obliged to purchase 'licences' for temporary periods. In the matter of tolls, the burgesses had important advantages over the foreigner; many commodities could be bought and sold toll-free by a burgess; on others a reduced toll was levied. Examples of the rates of tolls were given in chapter 3. The burgess could buy goods in bulk at the Hythe, to be retailed in the town markets. These privileges were jealously guarded, and any burgess who took a foreigner as a partner "under colour" of his freedom could expect to answer for it in court.<sup>27</sup>

There is no doubt that the privileges of free status were vital to anyone who wished to make headway as an independent craftsman or trader within the borough. The Patent Rolls record a licence granted to George Byger permitting him to sell wine by retail in Colchester "as he dares not sell the same by retail without the King's licence because he is not a freeman of the town".<sup>28</sup>

Who, then, were the free burgesses of Colchester? It was noted in Chapter 1 that A.R. Bridbury believed that Colchester's burgess admission data was flawed by a change in recording procedure after the third or fourth decade of the fifteenth century. Town-born burgesses were, he asserts, omitted from the record after this time, thus obscuring the true long-term trend in admissions. The implication is that the graph of admissions for Colchester, which appears to show a clearer decline during the fifteenth century than those presented for a further four towns in Economic Growth<sup>29</sup> (Exeter, Kings Lynn, Leicester and Norwich), is misleading, exaggerating the fall in numbers, if, indeed, there was a fall.

However, Bridbury is mistaken on two counts; he is wrong about the admission trend, and this error stems from his failure to understand the nature of the Colchester franchise. These misapprehensions result from using the Oath Book in isolation, without reference to the surviving court rolls, of which the former is in part a summary. When both sources are examined, a number of important facts emerge.

Firstly, in Colchester, unlike the great majority of English boroughs, it was the custom automatically to admit all males born within the town and Liberty as freemen, irrespective of the status or origins of their parents. Secondly, these freemen-by-birth were normally admitted either free of charge or for a nominal sum, contrasting strongly with the fines levied on outsiders. Thirdly, it was never normal practice before the mid-sixteenth century (when certain fundamental changes were effected) to record the admission of town and Liberty born burgesses in the court rolls (and subsequently the Oath Book), at any rate not in the regular and

standardised form used in the case of fine-paying entrants. The implication is that the graph of admissions represents not a flawed measure of total admissions to the freedom, but instead indicates the trend in the admission of outsiders, immigrant freemen.

The free admission of males born within the town and Liberty can be readily documented from the court rolls of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, and from additional matter in the Oath and Red Paper Books. In 1356-7 John Dauber sought to be admitted as a free burgess "without paying custom to the farmer of the town" on the grounds that he had been born within the Liberty; his plea was successful and he was admitted free.<sup>30</sup> Some twenty years later an enquiry sat to consider the case of John Organer, an apothecary; a jury found that he

was born in the year preceding the first mortality in England, in the house which was afterwards William Buk's, in Whytfootelane; his mothers name was .....<sup>31</sup> and he was christened at St. Runwald's church, and his mother died a short time after, and so, according to the custom of the town, he is a free man.<sup>32</sup>

It is noteworthy that no mention was made of Organer's father. This is consistent with the custom of the town; what mattered was the place where his mother gave birth, the identity, status and whereabouts of the father being immaterial. In the same year's rolls (1374-5) are recorded the findings of an enquiry into the entitlement of John Note, a weaver; it was accepted that Note had been born 27 years previously, in East Street, and christened in St James's church, and was therefore a free man.<sup>33</sup> The entry further notes that he was "admitted to his freedom"; whether this was merely a form of words, or whether Note had to go through some further ceremony of admission or swearing is not clear.<sup>34</sup> It is

significant that neither Organer nor Note appear in the Oath Book's list of burgess admissions for the year.

Identifying who was and who was not entitled to enjoy the benefits of freedom by birth was plainly of importance both to the individual and to the borough. Confusion could lead to wrongful prosecution or distraint on the one hand, or to loss of revenue on the other. In 1376 it was 'discovered' that John Bryche, baker, "commonly buys and sells victuals within the Liberty without paying custom". On being summoned by the Serjeant, Bryche appeared and deponed that he was "a burgess of the town, and free to buy and sell without custom at Heth [Hythe] within the liberty, by reason of his free birth and baptism at the church of La Hethe".<sup>35</sup>

That the sons of freemen enjoyed no privileges if they themselves were born outwith the Liberty of the town is demonstrated by a case in the court rolls for 1404-5;<sup>36</sup> John Popelote, a burgess of Colchester, but evidently a non-resident one, being described as 'potter of Horkeslegh' (Gt. Horkesley, outwith the Liberty) was in trouble with the borough on at least two counts. Not only had he caused two inhabitants of Mile End, within the Liberty, to be taxed in the township of Horkesley, but he was also employing his sons John and Thomas to buy and sell grain and other goods at the Hythe and Cornhill, "saying by way of caution that they are [their] father's goods, whereby no custom or profit accrues". This evidently cut no ice with the borough, and the case appears to have been judged as just another instance of 'foreigners' trading 'under colour' of another man's freedom. For his trading offences Popelote was fined 6s.8d., in addition to the 10s. levied for the

even more serious taxation offence, which clearly represented a threat to the integrity of the free burghal community.

Fifteenth-century evidence shows that it was indeed required - at any rate in principle - that freemen by birth should be formally sworn in, so as to be recognised as free by their fellows, and should have their duties and responsibilities impressed upon them. Periodically, however, this practice seems to have been allowed to lapse, no doubt because it was not a direct source of revenue to the town, unlike the admission of outsiders. Thus in 1406 the Lawhundred jury learnt that a certain Thomas Herde, who had been born within the Liberty, had confessed to Thomas Haddeleghe that, not being sworn, he took no heed of the regulations forbidding overloading of the common pasture, and had contravened the same with eight bullocks and ten pigs. Furthermore, Herde confided that he knew of "various goods and profits" owing to the town, but he was not bound to say what they were. The jury, on considering these disturbing allegations, presented that Herde, "and all others of that sort" should be sworn "for the convenience and utility of the whole liberty".<sup>37</sup>

An entry in the Red Paper Book indicates that identifying the freeborn population was still causing concern in the mid-fifteenth century, and that steps were being taken to systematise the swearing process:

Whereas according to the custom of the Borough of Colchester hitherto ... all men within the said borough or Liberty ... ought to enjoy the liberties and franchise of the same borough ... on Friday following the feast of St. Lucy the Virgin in the 31st year of Henry [VI] in the time of Thomas atte (Wode) and William Saxe, Bailiffs, it was ordained, established and determined by advice of the Bailiffs, Aldermen and Council of the town that whosoever shall in future be born within the Borough or its Liberty,

or has been born before these times, if he shall be of the age of thirteen years or more, and shall wish to enjoy the liberties and franchises, he shall ... at the feast of St. Hilary next following the proclamation of this ordinance ... attend before the Bailiffs for the time being and take his oath to the King and to the town, as Burgesses were wont of old to do, under pain of forfeiting his freedom. 38

Immediately following this ordinance in the Red Paper Book are found a number of lists of men 'sworn in tithing' or 'swearing fealty to the King', and it seems highly likely that these are connected with the attempt to regularise the swearing of freeborn burgesses, although the earliest list is dated 1451, the year before the ordinance was drawn up. Some of the lists are lengthy, others consist of only two or three names; this may be a further indication that the 'swearings' were only fitfully carried out, resulting in 'backlogs' of unsworn men; renewed bouts of concern or administrative enthusiasm might then lead to these periodic 'mass swearings'.<sup>39</sup> In the absence of supporting evidence it is unwise to make too much of these lists, however, or to assume that they are all of the same type.

The court rolls provide instances of men being fined for failing to be sworn in tithing, or not doing 'fealty'. Robert Doker was fined 6d. in 1458-9 for "not being sworn in the King's tithing according to the proclamation of the town";<sup>40</sup> in 1461 a Robert Doget, perhaps the same man, appears in a tithing list.<sup>41</sup> A John Tyler paid 2d. fine in 1461 for failing to do fealty "having had his dwelling within the town of Colchester for a year and a day and more". John Love and William Fuller paid 12d. each for similar offences in 1473-4, although their period of residence had only been "40 days and more".<sup>42</sup>



Included amongst the fealty and tithing lists in the Red Paper Book are a number of records of unambiguous burgess swearings, e.g. in 1493 John Sayer, born in St Peter's parish and Richard Pope, born in St James, were sworn.<sup>43</sup> In 1487 John Lelywhite, son of Walter Lelywhite, "being thirteen years and more" was sworn a burgess.<sup>44</sup> Why such cases appear here is uncertain.

That freedom by birth continued to be the custom into the sixteenth century is shown by a number of cases from the court rolls. In the first rolls after the 'break', those for 1509-10, we find a Richard Brown, the son of Thomas Brown, fuller, and born in St James's parish, sworn a burgess with no note of fine or sureties.<sup>45</sup> In 1514-15 John Squyer, born at Greenstead within the Liberty, was sworn a burgess "according to the custom of the town".<sup>46</sup> In the next year John Culpak produced witnesses to prove that he was born in the hamlet of Mile End, on account of which "he ought to enjoy the privilege of the liberty of the town"; because the Bailiffs were "credibly informed" Culpak was sworn and admitted to his freedom.<sup>47</sup>

The most detailed and revealing case, however, is found in the rolls for 1511-12.<sup>48</sup> The Bailiffs had been given to understand that:

Thomas Douglas, alias Stobber, dwelling at New Hythe, 'turnour', represents himself as one of the co-burgesses of the town and has and may enjoy all the privileges of the same town ... and he has been placed on the Inquisitions, as in Lawhundreds and others of the like sort, whereas in fact he is not a co-burgess of the town, in contempt ... and injury to the bailiffs and commonalty.

Douglas was summoned to appear in the Moot Hall and was then required to answer this charge of falsely claiming and enjoying the freedom. He replied that he was fully entitled to enjoy the



privileges of a burgess

because ... he was born in the 'hamlette de Lexden' within the Liberty; and he says further that all those who are born in the town, or in any 'hamlette' of the same, or within the Liberty ... have been accepted and have been as a co-burgess of the town from time beyond the memory of man.

Duglas asked to be allowed to verify his claim of birth within the Liberty and duly appeared at the next Lawhundred court with an impressive array of witnesses, "divers trustworthy persons", local gentry and 'husbandmen'; these men swore on oath that Duglas had indeed been born in Lexden, a certain Roger Draper, late of Aldham, being his godfather. The witnesses had all in the past served the said Roger "and they heard and saw on divers occasions that ... Roger [sic] Duglas alias Stobber sought a blessing from his aforesaid godfather Roger, and he gave him his benediction". On other occasions Draper was heard to say that he was indeed Duglas's godfather, and that the latter had been born and baptised in Lexden. The Bailiffs accepted this testimony as true, and judged that Duglas might have and enjoy his liberties, "the words of John Ayaston against him in no way withstanding".<sup>49</sup>

The full record of this case takes up a considerable amount of space in the court rolls, an indication of how seriously the freedom was treated and valued. It also shows beyond doubt that freedom by birth, without free parentage, was still being upheld in the early sixteenth century. We have traced the custom back to the fourteenth century, and there seems no reason to doubt the claim made by Duglas that it had pertained "from time beyond memory of man".

Duglas himself appears to have enjoyed his freedom for only a few more years. His will was enrolled in the Archdeacony registers in 1516, still with his customary alias (here 'Stubber'). He is described as of St Botolph's parish, but wished to be buried in St Giles churchyard "amongst his father, mother and friends". Duglas bequeathed his two tenements to his widow and their son and daughter; the son was old enough to act as a witness, and this together with other evidence in the will suggests that Duglas was probably of mature years; it seems likely that he had been enjoying his rightful privileges for many years before the charge of a spiteful neighbour brought him to court.

The middle years of the sixteenth century saw radical changes in the nature of the Colchester franchise. The most significant of these was the abolition of the custom of universal male freedom by birth. An Ordinance was enacted which stated that the children of 'foreigners' (e.g. non-freemen) should not in future become free through birth within the town or Liberty, but would be "adjudged for ever a forener ... any [constitution], use or custom heretofore frequented and usid to the contrary notwithstanding".<sup>51</sup> Foreigners' children born before the date of the ordinance, however, were to be allowed their freedom if brought before the Bailiffs with adequate proof of their birth, and paying a fine of 4d. All others were ineligible, even if their fathers had lived in the borough "by never so long a tyme".

The ordinance is not given a precise date in the Red Paper Book, but examination of the court rolls suggests that it must have been enacted in the latter half of Edward VI's short reign. In 1549-50 John Warner, labourer, who had been born at Mile End, was created a

burgess "gratis, according to the custom of the town", as was Robert Wyour, born in St James's parish.<sup>52</sup> The next year "William Buck, son of William Buck, of the age of five years, born within the town of Colchester" is found at the end of a list of new burgesses, with a fine of 2d. noted beside the entry.<sup>53</sup> Plainly, the child was not sworn at such a tender age, and the note must be taken to be a memorandum for future reference, similar to those accompanying burgess admissions in previous years; (thus, in 1543 the entry of William Cutler, born at 'Hadlegh', and paying fine of 20s [plus 6d to the Chamberlain] was followed by the memorandum that "Laurence Campion, his son, now ten years of age was born within the borough".<sup>54</sup> William Buk junior's appearance on the rolls may have been prompted by the enactment of the new ordinance; the 2d. probably represents a 'Chamberlain's fee', similar to the 6d. normally exacted from new burgesses at this period in addition to any proper entry fine.

The first definite example of a town-born man paying a full entry fine is in 1555-6.<sup>55</sup> William Molde, tailor, born in St Nicholas parish, was sworn a burgess on payment of a twenty shilling fine.<sup>56</sup> Thereafter such fines are common: in 1557-8 Thomas Roose, weaver, was charged 15s. for his admission, to be paid in three annual instalments of 5s.; Thomas Pepper, born in St Giles parish, was to pay his fine of 20s. in two instalments, while Peter Webbe and Robert Nichol of Mile End paid 20s. each for 're-admission'.<sup>57</sup> The town-born men - or the bulk of them - thenceforth not only pay entrance fines, but commonly provide sureties, as outsiders had always been obliged to do. There is no evidence that the fines were in any way concessionary either; when Robert Barrington,

'laborer', born in St Giles parish, purchased his freedom in 1558-9 his fine of 30s. was the same as that levied on Francis Reynold, clothier hailing from East Bergholt, Suffolk and John Rippington, 'sherman', born at 'Dreyghton', Buckinghamshire.<sup>58</sup> It was not the community of natives who now enjoyed free access to the privileges of the borough, but rather the gentry of the surrounding countryside who, seen as useful patrons and political allies, and potential customers for town products, were being enrolled with the note "fine remitted".<sup>59</sup> Office-holders were also sometimes rewarded (or bribed) with free admission.

The ordinance refers specifically to the sons of foreigners as losing the right to free admission, the implication being that the sons of burgesses might be treated differently. Free admissions are indeed still found, e.g. in 1562-3 while William Halsenothe, born in Colchester, paid 30s. for admission. Robert and John Lambert and John Roberd, also town-born, were admitted with no recorded payment, the last-named it is noted, "without fine because free-born".<sup>60</sup> Some such cases may be accounted for by the fact that the ordinance was not retrospective in its provisions; those born prior to its enactment were to be allowed their freedom if brought before the Bailiffs before the Martinmas next following. It may be that it was considered appropriate that, as these young males came of age, they should be formally sworn in to their freedom and record made in the court rolls. As we have seen, the entry of town born burgesses was not normally noted in the rolls prior to the passing of the ordinance, but in the new and potentially troublesome state of affairs that now existed, enrolment may well have seemed

desirable; it may be that the onus lay with the individual who wished his free birth ratified and made public.

An examination of the names of those admitted without payment, however, suggests that many were indeed the sons of burgesses; thus, in 1564-5 Ralph Northey, "son of Richard Northey", was created a burgess free "because born in Colchester". Richard Northey was one of the bailliffs in that year. Similarly, of the names of free entrants found in the next year's rolls many can be matched with the names of known burgesses and office-holders.<sup>61</sup> While this does not constitute proof, it is certainly suggestive. Unless serious rule-bending was going on - always a possibility - it seems that the situation at Colchester had come to resemble that prevailing in many other English boroughs; only those sons of burgesses born after their fathers were themselves free would be entitled to inherit their status without payment; moreover, it appears that birth within the town or liberty continued to be a requirement for this restricted group.

Whether the admission system was now being administered in an even-handed and consistent way is, of course, questionable. What is clear, however, is that the old-established - and unusual - custom of free admission to burgess status for all males born within the town and Liberty had gone for good. The inevitable result of this must have been that a broadly-based and numerically large community of free burgesses was in time replaced by a smaller privileged group; the freedom was becoming the property of an elite.

Table XXXIII summarises the situation; the appearance of town-born burgesses paying fines from the middle 1550s is clearly indicated. Also noteworthy is the flood of free admissions in

1565-6; this was presumably the product of one of the periodic bouts of administrative enthusiasm, perhaps an attempt to enrol all the outstanding cases of freedom deriving from 'pre-ordinance' entitlement. In most years it can be seen that the largest single category of enrolled burgesses remains that of outsiders paying fine for admission.

TABLE XXXIII: BURGESS ADMISSIONS, 1547-70

	Town & Liberty Born						Outsiders						
	Paying Fine		Admitted Free		Off	NR	Paying Fine		Admitted Free		Off	NR	
	FN	FNN	FN	FNN			FN	FNN	FN	FNN			
	FN	FNN	FN	FNN	FN	FNN	FN	FNN	FN	FNN	FN	FNN	
1547-8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	1
1549-50	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	18	0	0	1	0	0
1550-1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	10	0	0	0	0	1
1551-2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
1553-4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	13
1554-5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
1555-6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
1557-8	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	26	0	0	0	0	1
1558-9	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	2	0	0	0
1559-60	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	1	1	0	0
1560-1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	9	0	0	1	0	0
1562-3	1	0	1	0	2	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0
1563-4	0	3	0	3	1	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0
1564-5	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	0
1565-6	0	6	14	16	0	19	0	7	0	1	0	0	0
1566-7	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
1567-8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0
1568-9	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	9	0	4	0	0	0
1569-70	0	1	0	2	0	0	1	9	0	0	1	0	0

(Source: Court Rolls, 24/117 to 26/135)

Notes:

1. FN = Father named
2. FNN = Father not named
3. Off = Office Holders (specified in record of admission)
4. NR = Fine not recorded, but 'free admission' not specified
5. No court rolls survive for 1548-9, 1552-3, 1556-7, 1561-2.  
The rolls for 1551-2 and 1562-3 are incomplete.

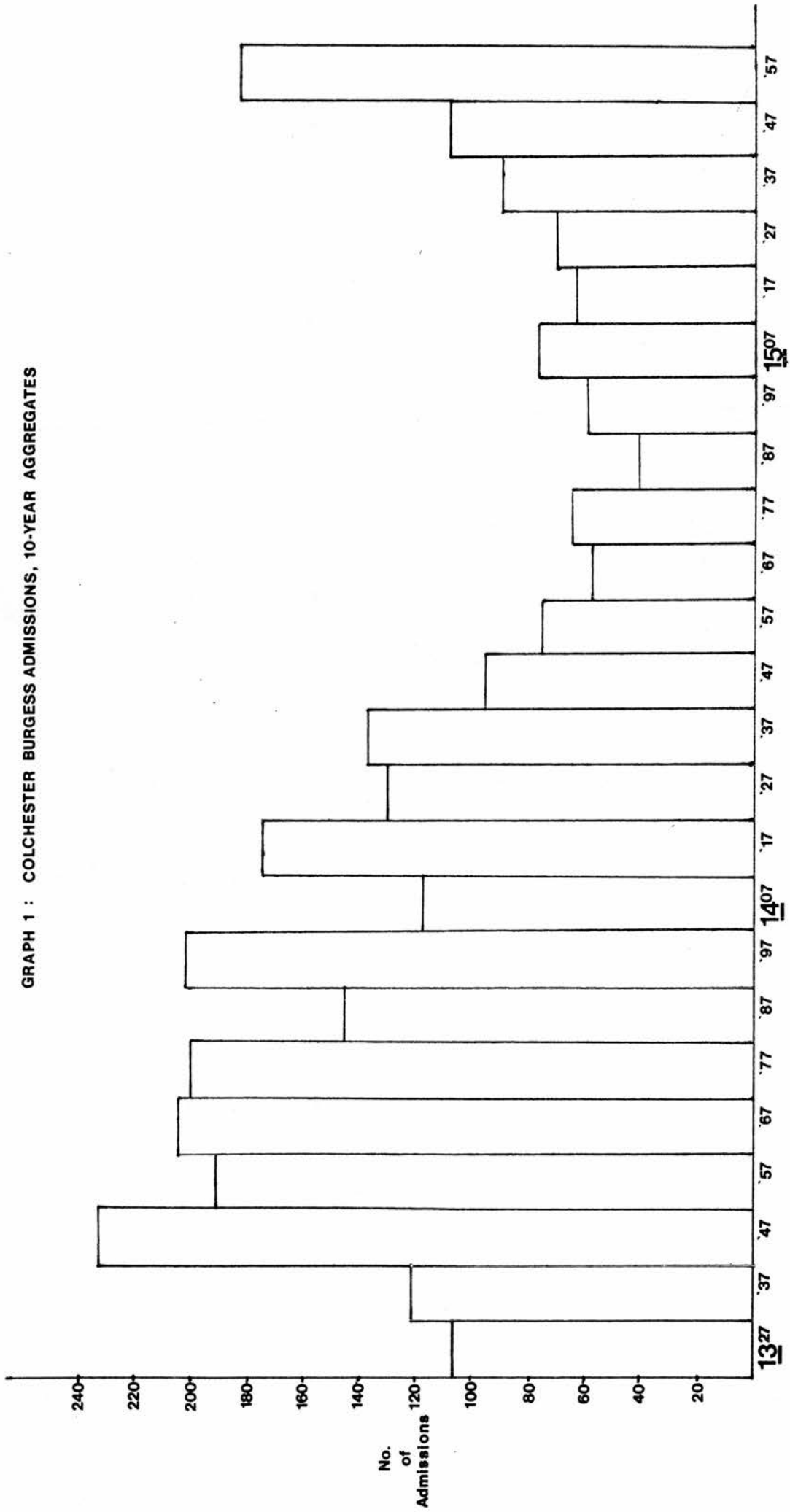
## The Trend in Admissions

We are now in a position to do what Bridbury could not, and could not be expected to have done; to examine the burgess admission trend in the light of the foregoing account of the true nature of the Colchester franchise. The Oath Book provides a substantially accurate summary of the admission of fine paying burgesses originally recorded in the court rolls, and the trend is not distorted in the way Bridbury believed it to be. It is in fact, until the middle of the sixteenth century, a record of the admission of outsiders to the freedom of the town. Graph 1 summarises the trend in terms of ten-year aggregates beginning in 1327-8, the start of the Oath Book's coverage.<sup>62</sup> The figures for the last ten year period are completed from the rolls, the Oath Book summary ceasing in 1563-4. The figures for individual years are presented in Appendix E.

It is tempting to postulate a simple relationship between burgess admissions and urban prosperity, and thus to take the graph as evidence that Colchester shared in the so-called 'urban crisis' of the later middle ages. Admissions rise steeply after the Black Death; the peak ten-year figure falls in the decade 1347-8 to 1356-7, but admissions remain at a high level throughout the second half of the fourteenth century with the exception of a dip in the decade beginning in 1387-8. Is this not perhaps indicative of an 'Indian summer' of prosperity at this time? Thereafter we see a protracted decline in the number of outsiders admitted, a trough being reached in the latter part of the fifteenth century. At this time average annual admissions were running at less than one-third



GRAPH 1 : COLCHESTER BURGESS ADMISSIONS, 10-YEAR AGGREGATES



Ten-Year Period Beginning :

the level of a century earlier. This depression lasts well beyond the end of the fifteenth century, with no real recovery evident until after 1537; thereafter the number of admissions climbs rapidly, even when adjusted for the inclusion of town-born burgesses, and by the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth it was again approaching the peak levels of the later fourteenth century. Could this not be interpreted as a direct reflection of reviving urban fortunes associated with a national recovery in population and commerce?

Such an interpretation would be, at best, premature. Certainly the trend is not illusory. Year by year admissions fluctuate markedly, as can be seen from Appendix E. For example, in the 1350s, annual admissions range between 7 and 53. Nevertheless, the long-term trend emerges clearly even when individual years are graphed, rather than aggregated figures; this can be seen in Bridbury's graph in Economic Growth.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it is notable that in no year between 1455 and 1549 does the number of fine-paying admissions exceed 20, a figure which was commonly surpassed in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. However, it cannot be assumed that burgess admission operated on a simple supply and demand basis; indeed, everything we know about medieval urban communities makes it improbable that this was ever the case, save in times of particular crisis. Thus, the generally high level of admissions in the 1350s may reasonably be interpreted as a response to demographic crisis, the need to replace dead members of the burgess community; it is at this time that the exceptional admission of women burgesses is found.<sup>64</sup>

Before attempting any explanation of the long-term trend on the basis of demographic or economic factors, however, it is necessary to look further into the institutional background, beginning with the levying of admission fines.

### Admission Fines

The record of the admission of 'outsiders' as free burgesses is, in the most detailed entries in the court rolls, accompanied by an occupational designation, information on place of origin, record of entry fine paid and names of men acting as 'pledges' for the new entrant. However, one or more of these pieces of information is often absent: occupation is only sporadically noted at some periods; place of origin is not generally given until after c.1380; the pledging system lapses at certain dates. The most consistently entered piece of information, not surprisingly, is the amount of fine paid. By analysing changes in the average level of fine it should be possible to shed more light on the significance of the long-term trend in the level of admissions.

At any given period there tends to be a variation, sometimes marked, in the level of individual fines. Within this fluctuation, however, it is at most dates possible to identify what will here be termed a modal fine; the most common amount levied as entry fine in any given year, a 'standard' or 'normal' fine against which other payments - the larger fines exacted from the better off, or the concessionary payments of the favoured - can be measured. Moreover, these modal payments remain stable for protracted periods;

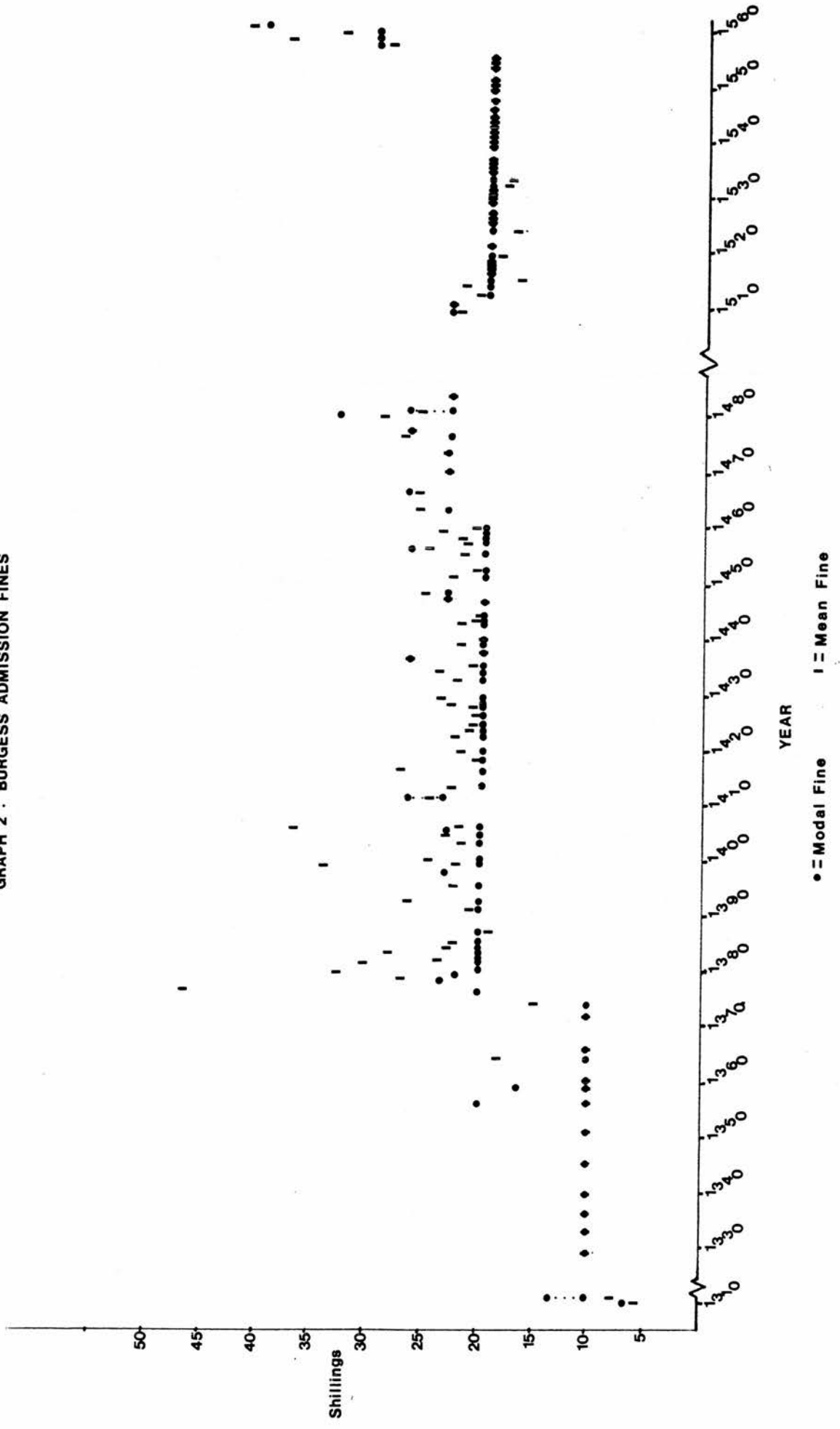
thus when changes do occur, it can be inferred that they represent significant and considered reactions to prevailing conditions by the borough administration.

Graph 2 shows the changes in the levels of mean and modal payments from 1310-11, the year of the first surviving court rolls, to 1570. While the rolls from the reign of Edward II show a considerable variety - ranging from 2s. to 13s.4d. with  $\frac{1}{2}$  mark (6s.8d.) the most common payment - by the 1330s 10s. had become established as the normal level of fine. Indeed, in the four decades following 1330 admission fines were more truly standardised than they were to be at any period until the second quarter of the sixteenth century. It can be seen from the graph that in every year for which court rolls survive between 1329-30 and 1372-3, with the single exception of 1364-5, the mode and the mean coincide, all fines being at the 10s. level. The 1364-5 mean figure is inflated by the inclusion of one exceptional entry at 60s.

Thus, the demographic upheavals of the mid-fourteenth century had no short-term impact on the level of fines, despite the great variations in yearly admission numbers at this time. Ten shillings was evidently regarded as the proper price to pay for the freedom of the town, regardless of the status or means of the entrant.

This stability breaks up, however, in the mid-1370s. An increase in the mean payment in 1374-5 is, as in 1364-5, caused by the inclusion of one large fine - £4 - the other payments remaining at 10s. each. In 1376-7, however, the situation has radically altered; the modal payment doubles to 20s., while the mean is boosted by the unprecedented fine of £10, this being the

GRAPH 2 : BURGESS ADMISSION FINES



• = Modal Fine    | = Mean Fine

payment asked of Ralph Algar, evidently a man of substance, who subsequently served five terms as bailiff.

The mode rises further, to 23s.4d. in 1378-9, falling back to 22s. in 1379-80 and 20s. in 1381-2; a modal 'plateau' (broken by isolated 'peaks') then ensues at this last amount, the general stability lasting for over 60 years.<sup>65</sup> The mean, however, shows dramatic fluctuations, unlike in the earlier period of modal stability, but it is notable that in only one year during the fifteenth century for which data survive does it fall below the mode.

What is the significance of these changes? As we have seen, the record level of admissions in the years after the first outbreak of plague were not accompanied by any change in the level of fines. With admission levels remaining high, however, it may be that the rise in fines in the 1370s indicates that by this time the burgess population (or more accurately perhaps, the substantial, charge-bearing burgess population) had been replenished, plague losses made good, and the town was in a position to ask for, and get, higher payments from new entrants. The increased standard of living of the socially and geographically mobile section of the artisan population in the wake of the general demographic collapse may form the wider context of the changes.

As can be seen from the graph, the mean payment fluctuates considerably in the decades on either side of the year 1400, but after 1420 it tends to settle around or slightly above the modal level, perhaps indicative that a pool of potential entrants with money to spare was beginning to dry up. It seems, however, that the borough administration was not satisfied with the doubling of

the modal level of fines to 20s., as there is evidence of attempts to raise it further to 23s.4d.; in 1398-9 this figure was achieved, although only five admissions are recorded in the court rolls. It was again reached in 1405-6, however, a year of 19 recorded admissions. In 1411-12 the modal level is split between 23s.4d. and the even higher figure of 26s.8d. (two marks). After this, however, the mode settles back to 20s. once again, and remains at that level until mid-century.

In the 1440s and 1450s further fluctuation ensues, the details of which can be read from Graph 2, before a longer-term change is finally effected; 20s., 23s.4d. and 26s.8d. alternate as the mode in these years. After 1463-4 the 20s. level is at last transcended. Between that year and the 'break in the rolls, 23s.4d. forms the most common modal payment, alternating with 26s.8d. and, in 1480-1, a high of 33s.4d.

The foregoing may appear chaotic, but one point of significance clearly emerges; at a period of plummeting burgess admissions the borough administration was repeatedly attempting, and ultimately succeeding, in raising the general level of fines paid.

A marked decline in burgess admissions is evident by the 1440s, and this trend continues, as we have seen, towards a trough in the last decades of the fifteenth century. Had the town authorities wished to counter this trend and to encourage admission of outsiders to the freedom they would presumably have lowered, or at least held steady, the level of entry fines, and offered concessionary terms to those of limited means. The opposite is true however, with the modal level of fine pushing towards new heights while the decline in admissions gathers pace.



Does this, then, indicate that the decline in admissions is 'artificial', in the sense that the council was deliberately seeking to restrict entry by raising the level of fines? To argue this would, perhaps, be to go beyond the available evidence. It can be seen from the graph that, as the fifteenth century proceeds, the gap between the modal and mean payments tends to narrow. From the mid-1440s it is very slight, and in many years mean and mode coincide. This would seem to suggest that there was no great reservoir of potential freemen of substance waiting to be enfranchised; if there were, the town would surely have maximised its income by exacting large fines from such individuals, thus boosting the mean. It seems, rather, that the pool of potential fine-paying freemen was indeed contracting, but that at this period the council was not concerned to keep numbers up. If we cannot assert that the town administration was actively promoting the decline in admissions, it is clear that neither was it concerned to halt or reverse the trend.

Any analysis of long-term trends which uses monetary indices must of course be placed within the context of the wider movement of wages and prices. When we turn to the well-known indices produced by Phelps Brown and Hopkins<sup>66</sup> and view them alongside our own graph of the trend in burgess admission fines, a number of significant points emerge.

Phelps, Brown and Hopkins' figures indicate that, in the period after the Black Death, while craftsmen's monetary wages show an almost immediate increase, a significant rise in real income, in purchasing power, does not take place until the 1370s. As we have seen, it was towards the end of the 1370s that the Colchester

burgess admission fines moved markedly upwards after a long period of stability. The increased affluence of the skilled craftsman, the potential free 'master', must at the least have been an important factor in facilitating the town's adjustment of the fine level at this time.<sup>67</sup>

The fifteenth century emerges in the Phelps Brown indices as the golden age of the craftsman and the labourer. Money wages remain stable or increase while the price of consumables falls. It might, then, be considered entirely predictable that the borough administration should seek to cream off some of this money by attempting to push fines to yet higher levels. However, general levels of wages and prices do not alone dictate the economic environment of particular places. The proponents of urban decline argue that the newly prosperous and mobile artisans tended to shun the established corporate towns in part because of their attempts to regulate wages and conditions of work.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it was argued above that the decline in the mean level of fine indicated a contracting pool of potential entrants, despite the fact that the mode was being pushed higher in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the trend in wages and prices forms an essential backdrop to the movement in admission fines, even if it cannot explain the precise timing and scale of changes. It is even more important to have this backdrop in view when considering the movement of entry fines in the period after the resumption of the court tolls, in 1509-10.

Here, as in other matters, the loss of 25 years' court rolls is a grievous loss. The record of burgess admissions found in

the fragmentary Monday and Thursday Court Books from the reign of Henry VII are too few to enable any generalisation about the level of fines at this period to be made. Thus, the Monday Court of 1497-8 records only one admission at 23s.4d., the modal payment in the years before the 'break', and one at 46s.8d.<sup>69</sup>

When the court rolls resume in 1509-10, 23s.4d. is still the identifiable mode; eight out of the ten new burgesses for whom payment of fine is noted paid at this level. One entry though is significant as a precursor of future developments. Beside the record of the entry of Thomas Keball, born in Coggeshall, it is noted that his fine was to be "23s.4d., 3s.4d. of which is excused",<sup>70</sup> whereas in the next year all fines are at 23s.4d. and in 1512-13 the mode falls back to 20s., with two entries again being of the 'part excused' type.<sup>71</sup>

For the next 40 years the mode remains at 20s. The frequency of 'part excused' entries in the earlier part of this period suggests that the borough administration was attempting to retain 23s.4d. as the standard payment, but that circumstances would not allow this. Thus in 1517-18, while all the eight new entrants actually paid 20s. for their admission, the court rolls maintain that for five of these the fine was to have been 23s.4d., but 3s.4d. was again "excused" in each case.<sup>72</sup>

The evidence suggests a shortage of men of substance prepared to purchase the freedom in the first half of the sixteenth century; despite the slight upturn in numbers of new fine-paying burgesses' admissions, a trend which accelerates after 1540, the level of fine remains static.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the mean clings doggedly to the 20s. mode during this period, the only exceptions being the three years

in which it actually drops below the mode, a phenomenon which had occurred only once in the previous two centuries.

This stagnation seems the more striking when viewed in the light of the increasingly inflationary trends in the national economy. If we refer again to the Phelps Brown and Hopkins' statistics we see that the index of prices of their unit of consumables (for which 1451-75 = 100) effectively doubles from around the 100 mark in the years astride 1510 to 200 and over in the late 1540s.<sup>74</sup> However, wages by no means kept pace with the increase in prices, and by 1550 the real wages of craftsmen had already markedly declined from the levels of the 'golden age' of the fifteenth century, and were perhaps at between one-half and two-thirds the level of the beginning of the sixteenth.<sup>75</sup> With the real wages of the craftsmen on the decline and their monetary income not yet having markedly increased (the customary 6d. per day of the fifteenth century rising only to 7d. or 8d. by 1550), it is after all not so surprising to find that the borough was unable to increase the monetary, let alone the real, level of admission fines before mid-century.

The period of stagnation in the level of admission fines comes to an abrupt end in the later 1550s. The years of uniform 20s. payments are over and both mean and modal payments surge upwards. In 1557-8 there were 31 new entrants (plus one re-admission) paying an average of 28s.10d.; the mode was even higher at 30s., a fine paid by 20 of the new burgesses. The number of fine-paying burgess entrants is the highest recorded in a single year for over a century. We learn from the Oath Book that a substantial number - 28 - had been enfranchised in the previous year, but the loss of

the year's court rolls makes it impossible to say whether the upward surge in fines began then too.<sup>76</sup>

While the number of entrants does not continue at quite such a high level, the mean and modal fine figures remain high, and indeed increase, in succeeding years. The mode is again 30s. in 1558-9 and 1559-60, the mean for these years being 37s.11½d. and 33s.1d. respectively. In 1560-1 there is a further increase, the mode jumping to 40s., the sum paid by seven out of the year's 14 entrants, and the mean to 41s.3½d. Thus, the close of our period of study is marked by substantial increases in the monetary level of entrance fines.

Reference once again to the Phelps Brown and Hopkins' indices shows the relation to the general movement of prices and wages; craftsmen's wages begin to move upwards after 1530, rising from the 6d. per day level, which had been characteristic of the previous 120 years, to 10d. per day by c.1560.<sup>77</sup> From the end of the second decade of the century, however, real wages show a progressive and clear downward trend.<sup>78</sup> Although figures are not available for many years around mid-century it is clear that the general level of real wages had fallen by this time to between one half and two-thirds that prevailing 50 years earlier. This situation was, of course, brought about by the much faster rise in the price of consumables than the wage rate. Thus, the mid-century surge in admission fines, if it is to be related to wider movements, would appear to be a belated response to the general inflationary trend at work in the national economy; effected at a time when the skilled craftsman had a smaller proportion of his income available than

previously to spend on things other than the immediate necessities of life, despite the increase in its monetary value.

How, then, is the long-term movement in admission fines to be viewed? Table XXXIV illustrates the changing cost of purchasing the freedom of Colchester in terms of working days for a craftsman.

TABLE XXXIV: WAGE/DAY COST OF FREEDOM ADMISSION

In 1310 purchase of freedom @ modal payment of 6s8d = 23 days wages	
In 1330	10s = 30
In 1340	10s = 40
In 1360	10s = 24
In 1380	20s = 48
In 1420	20s = 40
In 1470	23s4d= 46.66
In 1480	33s4d= 66.66
In 1510	23s4d= 46.66
In 1520	20s = 40
In 1540	20s = 37
In 1550	20s = 32
In 1560	40s = 48

(Source: Court Rolls; Phelps Brown and Hopkins, 1981, pp.3-5)

The movement in real wages must be constantly borne in mind when assessing these figures. Thus, the lowest figures in terms of wage-days tend to occur at those times when the standard of living of the craftsman was at its lowest, e.g. in the earlier fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries. The highest figures occur in the fifteenth century when craftsmen would have had a relatively larger share of their income available for purposes other than subsistence. The exception to this would appear to be the period after 1550 when

the wage-day cost of the freedom begins to move upwards while the real wage of craftsmen steeply declines. The 'Tudor inflation' clearly brought in a new situation.

In general the price and wage evidence suggests that the civic authorities were indeed pitching the level of admission fines towards the level they felt the 'market' could support. The fines asked of new entrants in the later fifteenth century were not outrageous given the markedly improved living standards of the craftsmen at this time. Increasingly, then, the slump in annual admissions looks like a contraction of the pool of potential entrants, perhaps exacerbated but certainly not caused by the raising of admission fines (remembering that the figure for 1480 was exceptional).<sup>79</sup> This contention rests in part on the assumption that most entrants to the freedom by purchase were craftsmen or small retail traders of similar status. It is to the matter of occupations that we will now turn.

### Occupations

As was noted earlier, the recording of occupations was, unfortunately, one of the less consistent practices of the clerks who compiled the lists of burgess admissions in the court rolls and subsequently the Oath Book. At most periods only a minority of the new entrants had an occupational designation appended to their names. In the later fourteenth century there are indications that a man's trade was noted in cases where his place of origin was not specified but this does not hold good for other periods. Rather,



the inclusion of information as to occupation appears at most dates to be a matter of clerical whim rather than of policy.

If this last assumption is correct, then the occupational data that does exist should be a reasonable sample, and, scanty though it is, at least a rough guide to the trades followed by those who purchased the freedom of the borough. Only 510 new freemen enrolled between 1310 and 1560 have a recorded occupational or status designation, approximately 15% of the total, with over one-third of this number coming from the last 40 years of the study period. The mid-fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries have a very sparse sprinkling of occupational designations, even allowing for the greatly reduced level of admissions at that period. The small numbers involved mean that there is little value in dividing the data into numerous time periods; the point at issue is whether the occupational data, viewed as a sample, confirms the status of the bulk of the new burgesses as craftsmen or small traders.<sup>80</sup>

It can be seen that the non-craft/trade element is relatively small, and confined to the latter part of the study period. In fact, no 'gentleman' is recorded before 1500, and the 'yeoman' element in the agricultural category is also restricted to the sixteenth century.

If the sample is indeed representative, however, this inclusion of gentlemen and landed individuals after 1500 would be sufficient to produce some distortion in the trend of admissions; although reflecting what were undoubtedly real changes in the structure of borough society, the inclusion of these individuals would necessitate some reappraisal of the sixteenth-century recovery in admission numbers. However, it may be thought that, of all

designations, those indicative of social rank were most likely to be noted by the Town Clerks, themselves often men with aspirations to genteel status. These non-craft/trade entrants may thus be somewhat more rare than the 'sample' suggests.

TABLE XXXV: OCCUPATIONAL/STATUS CATEGORIES, COLCHESTER BURGESSES ENTRANTS, 1310-1560

	Number of Individuals			Total
	pre-1400	1401-80	1481-1560	
Textiles	34	29	21	84
Clothing	12	2	19	33
Leather	22	8	25	55
Metal	15	15	12	42
Building	8	5	6	19
Woodwork	4	1	10	15
Food & Drink	25	26	37	88
Transport	10	3	17	30
Distributive	15	7	24	46
Professional	25	11	8	44
Gentlemen etc.	0	0	25	25
Agricultural	2	0	16	18
Miscellaneous	3	3	5	11

(Source: Court Rolls, Oath Book)

Note: The occupations within the above categories are listed in Appendix F.

As far as the remainder is concerned, the 'sample', small though it is, shows an occupational structure very similar to that which one would expect. As in all towns, the food and drink trades are prominent and account for over one-sixth of the total entrants. Textiles emerge as clearly the most important of the crafts, although leather- and metal-working also emerge as significant; these crafts, indeed, appear to have had an important place in Colchester's economy as early as the thirteenth century.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusions

The cause of the decline in burgess admissions remains enigmatic. The great majority of burgess entrants were clearly artisans and traders of modest means, for whom the entry fine would have been something more than a formality. The level of fines was being pushed upwards during the fifteenth century, suggesting that the borough was not particularly worried by the trend; however, neither is this upward tendency sufficiently marked to suggest a clear policy of restricting entry, particularly at a time of relatively high living standards. Deliberate action is more in evidence in the next century when the appearance of "allowances" on fines, the more common references to payment of fines by instalments and the decline in the rigour with which the pledge requirements were applied are all indicative of a desire to encourage men to take up their freedom. The possibility of a 'generation' effect may be worth considering; a shortage of young men taking up their freedom

in 1480 might not have been perceived as a major problem, whereas a consequent dearth of mature burgesses of 'substance' in 1510 almost certainly would.

There would appear to remain three possible explanations of the admission trend: firstly, the freedom as an institution fell into decay during the later fifteenth century, and thus fewer men saw any advantages in becoming burgesses; secondly, the changing structure of the borough's economy restricted opportunities for advancement, and thus fewer felt able, or felt it worthwhile to become burgesses and instead remained as 'journeymen' or retained servants of free masters; thirdly, the downward trend reflects a real decline in the power of the borough to attract new recruits, either because it was no longer as prosperous as formerly, or because potential recruits had diminished due to reduced mobility in the countryside or increasingly attractive alternative destinations.

The first of these possibilities can be rejected fairly readily; all the evidence reviewed in this and earlier chapters suggests that the franchise remained a 'living' institution throughout the period under consideration, and that the privileges and monopolies of the burgesses continued to be upheld in the borough courts. The second and third possibilities, which are to some extent compatible, raise broad and important issues as to the role of the town in the regional economy, and these themes will be examined in more detail in the concluding chapter of the present study. First, however, there follows an examination of burgess recruitment as rural-urban migration, in order to discover more about the spatial context within which these changes were taking place.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE ORIGIN OF COLCHESTER BURGESSES

Colchester is unusually well supplied with information as to the places of origin of its fine-paying burgesses. Before 1380 the habit of noting this was somewhat haphazard, but after this date the majority of new entrants are ascribed to a place of birth or 'origin'.

It is thus possible to study the pattern of recruitment with more confidence, and over a longer time-period, than is the case for most towns. The majority of such migration studies have been based upon the analysis of surnames, a method which is both of limited applicability and fraught with difficulties; effectively, it is restricted to the period before 1350 in southern England or 1400 in the north.<sup>1</sup> Inheritance of surnames is generally held to invalidate their use for studying population mobility after these dates; however, even at earlier periods it is clear that inheritance of surnames was by no means uncommon.<sup>2</sup>

While surname studies have helped to demolish any remaining belief in the 'static' nature of medieval society by showing that, in Raftis's words, "migration was a normal facet of everyday domestic and economic life"<sup>3</sup> in the countryside as well as in the towns, they have been able to contribute little to our knowledge of the direction or scale of such mobility. Thus Carus-Wilson's study of Stratford, while suggesting the general importance of immigration in the formation of a new urban community, has little to say about the precise nature or extent of this migration field other than to suggest that the bulk of the burgesses came from within 16 miles.<sup>4</sup>

Similar reservations apply to most other published place-surname studies, the findings of many of which are summarised by Platt, and subjected to critical appraisal by McDure.<sup>5</sup>

Studies of some English boroughs have, however, been able to draw upon burgess and apprenticeship registers for further information on the geographical origins of townsmen. In some cases this once again depends upon the identification of place-surnames, but in others places of origin are specified in the records, as at Colchester. Sometimes only a crude summary of the evidence has been attempted, ascribing migrants to a country of origin (e.g. Billson's<sup>6</sup> observations on Leicester freemen), but other writers have undertaken a more detailed analysis of the data available to them. Thus, Butcher has studied the origins of some 400 freemen enrolled at Romney between 1433 and 1523. He shows that, while local migration was the most numerically significant during this period - 133 coming from within five miles of the town in addition to a 'core' of 44 townsmen - there was also an important longer-distance element, with around a quarter of the new freemen coming from over 50 miles away. Interestingly, there is a dearth of 'middle-distance' migrants, with only one person having a place of origin lying between 31 and 50 miles of Romney.<sup>7</sup>

In the much larger city of York it has been shown by Palliser that during the 1530s middle- and long-distance migrants formed a substantial proportion of the new freemen who entered by purchase; whereas some 42% originated within 20 miles of the borough, over 29% came from between 20 and 50 miles, while 28.5% were from over 50 miles away. Palliser stresses that there is no simple pattern of distance decay in evidence; of the freemen originating within

Yorkshire, few came from the West Riding, virtually none from the East Riding, the great majority from the North Riding. It is suggested that the poverty and overpopulation of the dales produced the large influx from the North, while the other areas had their own centres of attraction: the growing textile centres in the West Riding, and the borough of Hull in the East.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of established 'channels' of population movement is also stressed in Patten's study of apprenticeship records from Norwich, Ipswich and Great Yarmouth. Although this relates to the later sixteenth and the seventeenth century, it is probable that many of the features identified would have been applicable at an early period. Thus, while as few as ten apprentices can be identified as having moved from Essex to Norwich during the period 1500-1700, no fewer than 157 came to that city from Yorkshire. Similarly, coastal communications are shown to have been important in the case of Yarmouth, with relatively large numbers of apprentices coming from Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland although the importance of the local hinterland appears more pronounced than at Norwich. Ipswich is shown to have had the most restricted recruitment field of the three places.<sup>9</sup>

London, as usual, stood in a class of its own as regards recruitment of freemen and apprentices, its attractive power far outweighing that of any other English town. However, it has been shown that the capital's recruitment field underwent a marked contraction between the late fifteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> This was not merely a product of institutional changes, and of the increasing ability of the growing city to provide its own apprentices and freemen, but rather appears to



reflect a real change in population mobility at a national level. There was a remarkable decline in the proportion of freemen and apprentices coming to London from the northern counties, while Midlands and Home Counties' migrants became increasingly important. It has been suggested that changing demographic patterns - a disappearance of surplus births in the north and west of England - together with the growth of alternative employment opportunities in these regions helped to promote these trends. Taking both apprentice and non-apprentice migrants into consideration, Wareing concludes that "an overall contraction was clearly the trend".<sup>11</sup>

Leaving the capital aside as a special case with its own demographic and institutional dynamic, it can be said that a fairly simple relation between changes in migration field and economic fortunes has usually been postulated. Platt suggests that "special circumstances of growth" would tend to widen a town's recruitment field, albeit temporarily. On the other hand, a "sluggish trading situation", such as prevailed in mid-fourteenth century Canterbury, would be reflected by "a rising total of locally recruited freemen".<sup>12</sup> The only real challenge to this simple model has come from Clark, who has suggested a distinction in the early modern period between a basically local 'betterment' migration and long-distance 'subsistence' migration of the poor.<sup>13</sup> The applicability of this formulation to the conditions of the later middle ages is a matter for debate, but it is clear that the great bulk of freeman and apprentice recruits would fall into the category of 'betterment' migrants.

In turning to the Colchester evidence, then, the questions that may be posed are these; how great was the borough's 'drawing power'

- from what distances did new burgesses come; is there evidence of any change in the 'recruitment field' over the period 1310-1560, indicating a strengthening or weakening of this drawing power; if so, to what extent might such changes relate to changes in economic fortunes? It can be further enquired, from what type and size of settlements did the borough recruit its freemen?

### Freedom Admissions as Migration Data

While the Colchester evidence is of high quality compared to many boroughs, it is not without its problems. These problems, indeed, might, if not recognised and compensated for, be sufficient to invalidate the findings of the proposed study, or at least seriously distort such findings.

There are, as documented in Chapter 6, two sources containing the record of free burgess admissions, the court rolls and the Oath Book, the latter being in part a summary of, and in part a commentary upon, the former. In neither source are all the fine-paying burgesses given a place of origin, although the rolls frequently supply information omitted from the Oath Book; more rarely the converse is true. In both sources, in surveying the whole period from 1310 to 1560 we find a variety of forms of entry relating to place of origin. Sometimes we are told that X is 'of' Y, at other times that X was 'born at' Y; or again the new burgess may be described as 'drawing his origin from' Y. Such variations might be thought very damaging to the aim of studying geographical origins if they imply that in some cases place of birth is being

noted, while at others the immediate origin, prior to coming to Colchester, is intended.

There is reason to think, however, that this problem is largely illusory. The earliest entries are always in the 'of' form: e.g. "Philip Rokele of Wykes entered the burgage" etc. (1310-11).<sup>14</sup> This continues to be the rule until the 1420s, when the 'born at' form appears. Thus of the 13 fine-paying burgesses recorded in 1423-4, two are in the 'of' form, the remainder 'born at' or 'brought up in'.<sup>15</sup> After this year the entries revert to the 'of' form until 1428-9, when eight admissions of this type are recorded alongside those of Alex Northern "born in Dedham" and John Sharp "living in Wyvenho".<sup>16</sup> The two principal forms alternate throughout the rolls of the 1430s and early 1440s,<sup>17</sup> until "born in" takes over as the standard form from 1444-5 onwards, with 'of' entries disappearing.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that after a couple of decades of fluctuation the change becomes complete suggests that either there has been a total change in the information that is considered pertinent, or that there has in fact been no change of substance, merely in the form of words, i.e. 'of', as used up to the 1440s, was always intended to mean 'born at'. That the latter is the more probable explanation is shown by an entry from 1422-3, where we find the admission of "John Pkerell, of Bergholt, co. Suffolk, and now living in Dedham, co. Essex".<sup>19</sup> In this case 'of' does not denote current or immediately preceding place of residence, but rather place of origin, e.g. birth.

The identification of 'of' with 'born at' would mean that there would be no change in the data, and thus no problem of comparing

earlier and later periods. In addition to the evidence adduced above, it can be seen that this identification has probability on its side, given what we know about the Colchester franchise. All men born within the town and Liberty became free-burgesses without payment, and therefore it would be logical to add a note to the records of the admission of those who did pay fines to explain why this was the case, e.g. to show that their place of birth was outwith the Liberty.

A final point which can be cited in support of this view is that the Oath Book does not follow the court rolls exactly during the 'transition' period. Thus, in 1423-4 while the rolls design most of the new burgesses by place of birth, the Oath Book still uses the 'of' form. Conversely in 1428-9 and 1429-30 in several cases the Oath Book uses 'born at' for admissions in which the rolls merely use 'of'.<sup>20</sup> This again points to the identity of the two terms.

The next question to be asked is, how confident can we be that we are dealing with genuine migration data? As noted in the previous chapter, some authors have suggested that non-residence was a major and growing problem for the urban communities of later medieval England. Plainly widespread non-residence would have serious implications for the study of burgess origins as evidence of migration and for analysis of the overall admissions trend. It was contended, however, that widespread non-residence had not been proved, and that various factors and circumstances made it ex facie implausible as a general phenomenon. What evidence is there as to this matter at Colchester?

The model Oath for a burgess at his admission found in the Red Paper Book, and apparently dating from the reign of Richard II,

contains a declaration that the entrant "shall remain [in the borough and liberties] for a full year next following, in the best manner as now, under pain of loss of his freedom".<sup>21</sup>

References to a one-year mandatory residence are also found in the court rolls, as in 1353-4 when, after the admission of Roger Bolthood, it is noted that he swore "to be resident in the town during the next year".<sup>22</sup> Bolthood is the only entrant from this year's admissions who has such an undertaking noted, perhaps because he is "of Stisted"; a new arrival, it may be assumed, rather than an established resident.

Later entries sometimes refer to the entrant undertaking to observe all the conditions contained in the Oath in the Red Paper Book, and it can be assumed that this is the surviving form, cited above, including the residence provision.<sup>23</sup>

A year's residence was thus asked of new entrants. It was argued in Chapter 6 that dual residence would be beyond the means of the great majority of medieval townsmen. Similarly, the idea of the new entrant uprooting home and household for a mandatory year's residence in the borough and then returning home to exploit urban privileges without sharing urban expenses seems fanciful except for a tiny wealthy minority; and those already possessed of wealth would surely be reluctant to endure the disruption of livelihood such a manoeuvre would entail.<sup>24</sup>

A year's residence might thus be considered a sufficiently major commitment - and this was clearly the intention of the provision - to imply an intention to dwell permanently, or at least long-term, within the borough. So much for the intention - was the residence requirement enforced? An entry in the Oath Book,

dating from c.1377, indicates problems in the decades following the Black Death:

Whereas it is accounted by inspection of the Rolls of the time of John atte Foorde and Richard Dyere of the 31st Edward III (1357-8)<sup>25</sup> ... that all burgesses sworn before the Bailiffs ... shall take their oath upon the accustomed articles under condition that they reside within the liberty of Colchester during one year next following the time of such oath, under penalty of loss of their freedom in that behalf; and whereas it appears that several burgesses thus sworn have not been careful to keep their oath in that behalf, and are not careful, to the present forfeiting of their freedom aforesaid, therefore it is decided that in future they shall retain their custom and toll as long as they reside in the form aforesaid.<sup>26</sup>

The last sanction appears to mean that non-residents must henceforth pay tolls etc. as foreigners.<sup>27</sup> It seems clear that some of the post-plague influx of new burgesses had disregarded the residence rule; we are told that 'several' burgesses have offended in this way; given the usual medieval taste for rhetoric and hyperbole 'several' might be assumed to refer to a small group rather than to a large-scale problem.

That non-residence was either uncommon, or was not considered to be of particular harm to the borough, may be inferred from the absence of complaints or legislation relating thereto after this period. We do not encounter the complaints of gentlemen "flying to the country" or of craftsmen withdrawing from the town, such as are encountered at York.<sup>28</sup>

### The Pattern of Recruitment

Between 1310 and 1560 the place of origin of 1,932 'immigrant' burgesses admitted at Colchester is recorded. Of this number, it

has not been possible to identify 32 place-names. Between 1381 and 1560 1,801 of these burgesses were admitted. Thirty-seven can be identified as coming from continental Europe, two from Ireland and the remainder from England and Wales.

Of the 1,861 burgesses from England and Wales, 1,395 have places of origin in Essex or Suffolk. The remaining 466 are drawn from every county of England, from Cornwall to Northumberland, plus five individuals from Wales. Prior to 1381 only five burgesses can be shown to have originated from outwith Essex and Suffolk, but this is obviously an underestimate produced by the sparse and undetailed nature of the data before the 1380s.

In the following table and graphs the origin of Colchester burgesses is summarised in terms of distance from the borough. Six distance categories have been employed, and the data divided into thirty-year segments. First the basic data.

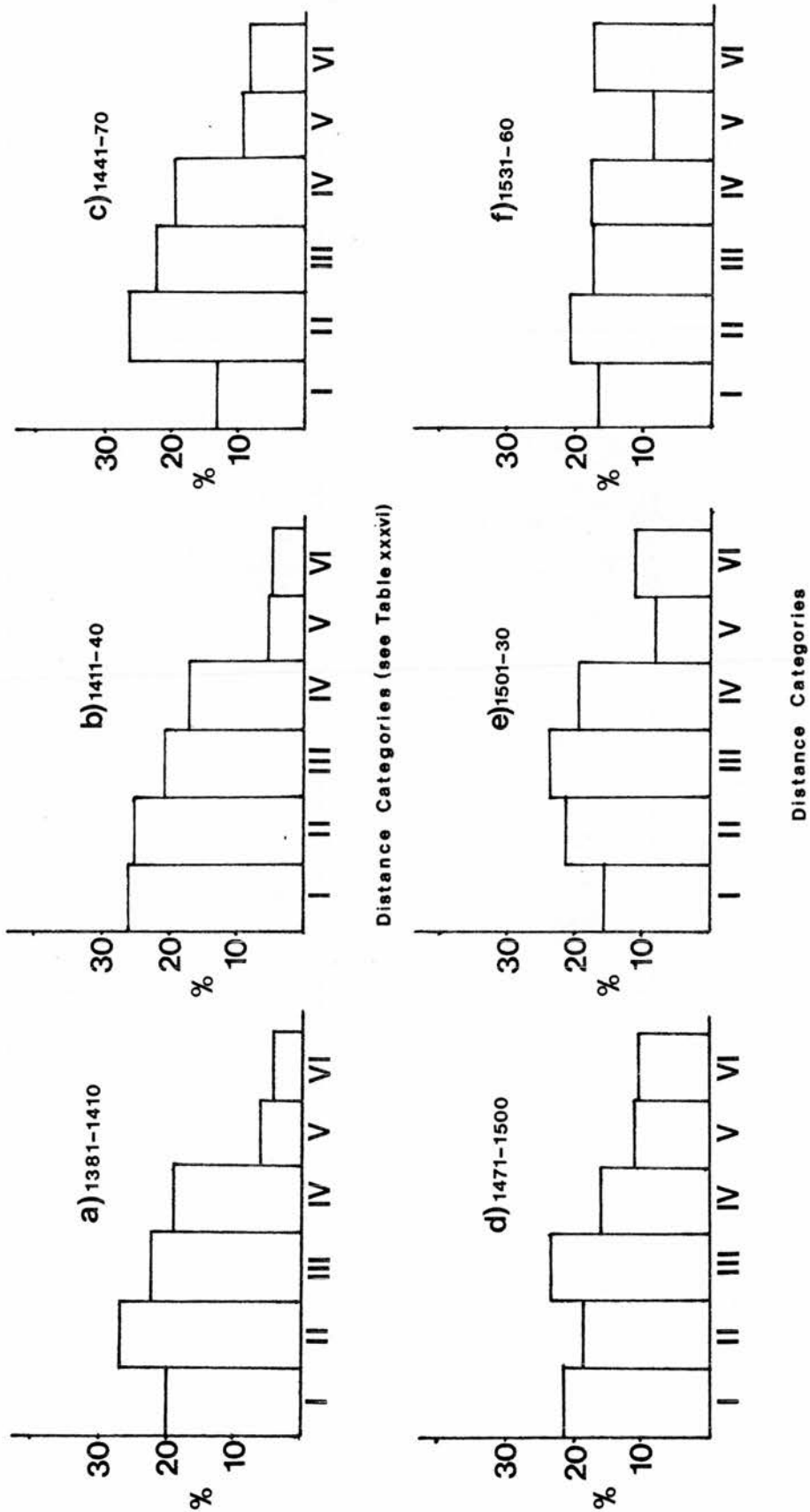
TABLE XXXVI: ORIGIN OF COLCHESTER BURGESSES - DISTANCE OF PLACE OF ORIGIN

Period	Kilometres from Colchester						Total
	1-10	11-20	21-40	41-100	101-200	201+	
	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)	(V)	(VI)	
Pre-1350	30	23	8	5	2	0	68
1351-80	10	14	4	2	0	1	31
1381-1410	87	115	97	81	27	18	425
1411-40	111	109	88	73	25	22	428
1441-70	38	74	63	56	26	24	281
1471-1500	33	29	36	25	17	16	156
1501-30	30	41	46	38	16	22	193
1531-60	47	59	49	50	25	49	279
Totals	386	464	391	330	138	152	1,861

(Source: Court Rolls, Oath Book)



GRAPHS 3 a)–f): ORIGIN OF COLCHESTER BURGESS: % BY DISTANCE CATEGORIES



Thus, it will be seen that whereas the bulk of the immigrant free burgesses came from places within 40 km of Colchester (66.7%), there is a significant element of longer-distance migrants. Indeed, this element becomes increasingly important as a proportion of the total in the later period (see Graphs 3(a)-(f)).

In relative terms, then, there is a noticeable rise in the longer-distance element, a decline in migration from the borough's immediate hinterland and a remarkable stability in the 'middle-distance' categories. The county of origin of burgesses from outwith Essex and Suffolk is summarised in Appendix G.

It will be seen that whereas there is a broad spread of recruitment from all parts of England, certain counties have a particular prominence at different periods. Thus, while Norfolk was the origin of a larger number of burgesses than any county save Essex and Suffolk, more than two-thirds of these were recruited before 1470. By contrast the next most 'productive' county, Yorkshire, shows a fairly steady trickle of migrants prior to 1530 followed by a notable increase in the ensuing 30 years. These two counties together with Lincolnshire and Kent no doubt owe much of their prominence to coastal communications and the movement of population along the trade routes. Taken together, Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Kent provided 212 known burgesses, almost 45% of the total of those from outwith Essex and Suffolk.<sup>29</sup>

The east-coast link also helps to explain the 14 burgesses from Northumberland, only four fewer than from Essex's western neighbour, Hertfordshire. The modest but steady recruitment of burgesses from southwest England may owe something to that region's interest in the

cloth trade, while the Midland and Northwestern counties taken collectively show a tendency towards a late rise in burgess numbers, as with Yorkshire. It may be that men from these regions were tending to look to towns other than London for personal advancement in the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Of the burgesses from the continent, the majority appear to have originated in the Low Countries; 'Geldyr' or 'Gyldlond' is given as the origin of several. Bruges, Antwerp and Maastricht are among the towns identified. Others came from northern France - Calais, Normandy and Brittany. That these overseas burgesses were only a part of a larger foreign community can be seen from the various lay and alien subsidies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup>

In the 1524 lay subsidy, 66 men and women paid at the double 'alien' rate, and the 'collectors book' suggests an even larger presence.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, there were Scots in the borough at certain periods, but there is no evidence that any became burgesses. Those who appear in the 1524-5 subsidy were probably temporary visitors, like many of the aliens, who had no incentive to become burgesses, or were too poor to do so. Robert Broun "of Scottish origin", who obtained a letter of protection from Edward IV in 1480 to allow him to live peaceably in Colchester,<sup>33</sup> was undoubtedly a more substantial citizen, but again there is no evidence of his acquiring burgess status. It is likely, however, that the John de Scotland who was a burgess in the earlier fourteenth century came from the country his surname suggests.<sup>34</sup>

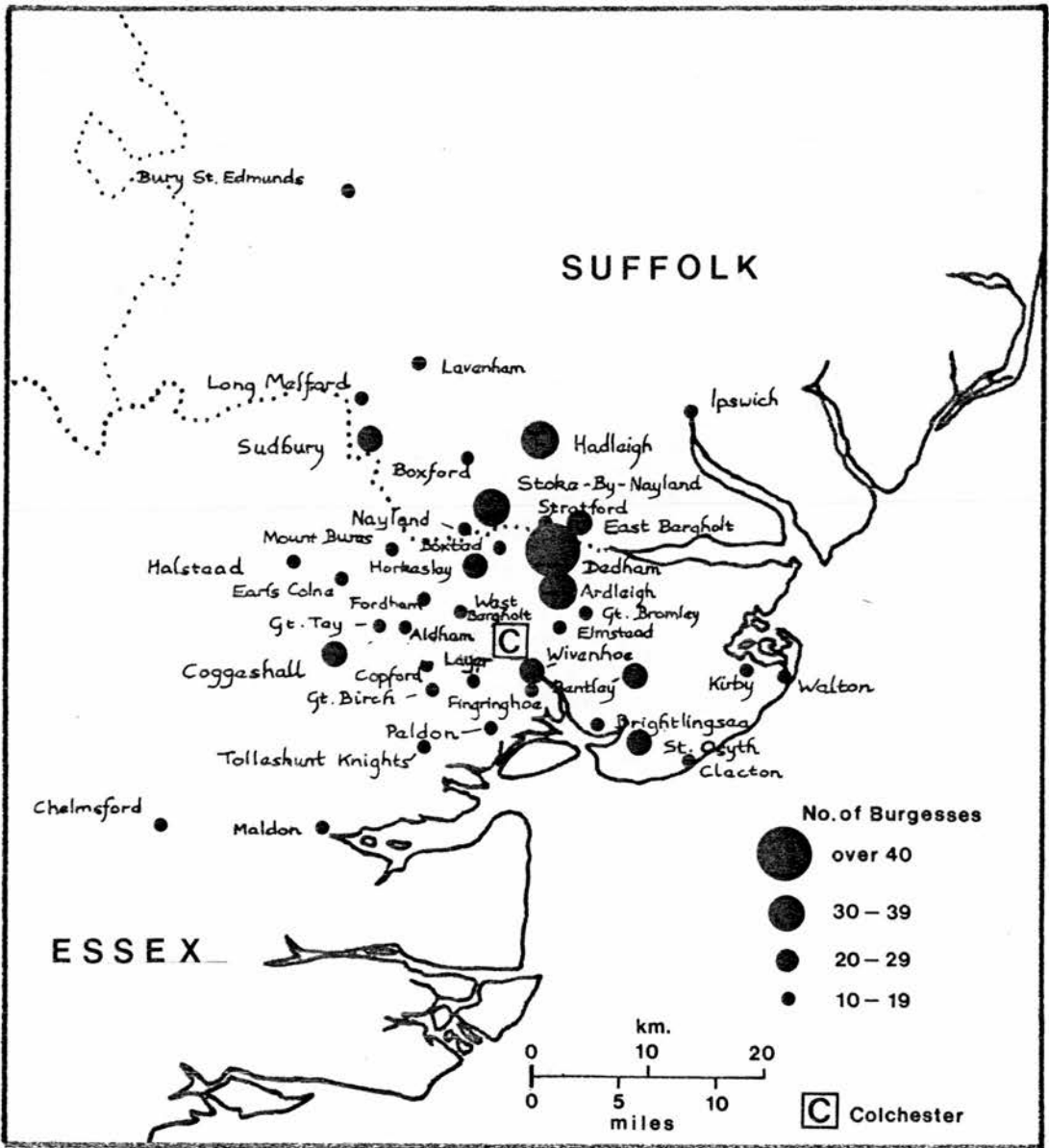
The special political considerations which might apply in such cases were, of course, exceptional. In general, we can say that

the longer-distance element in the recruitment of Colchester burgesses was always significant during the period for which we have adequate records, becoming more so in relative terms during the fifteenth century, and in absolute numbers after 1530.

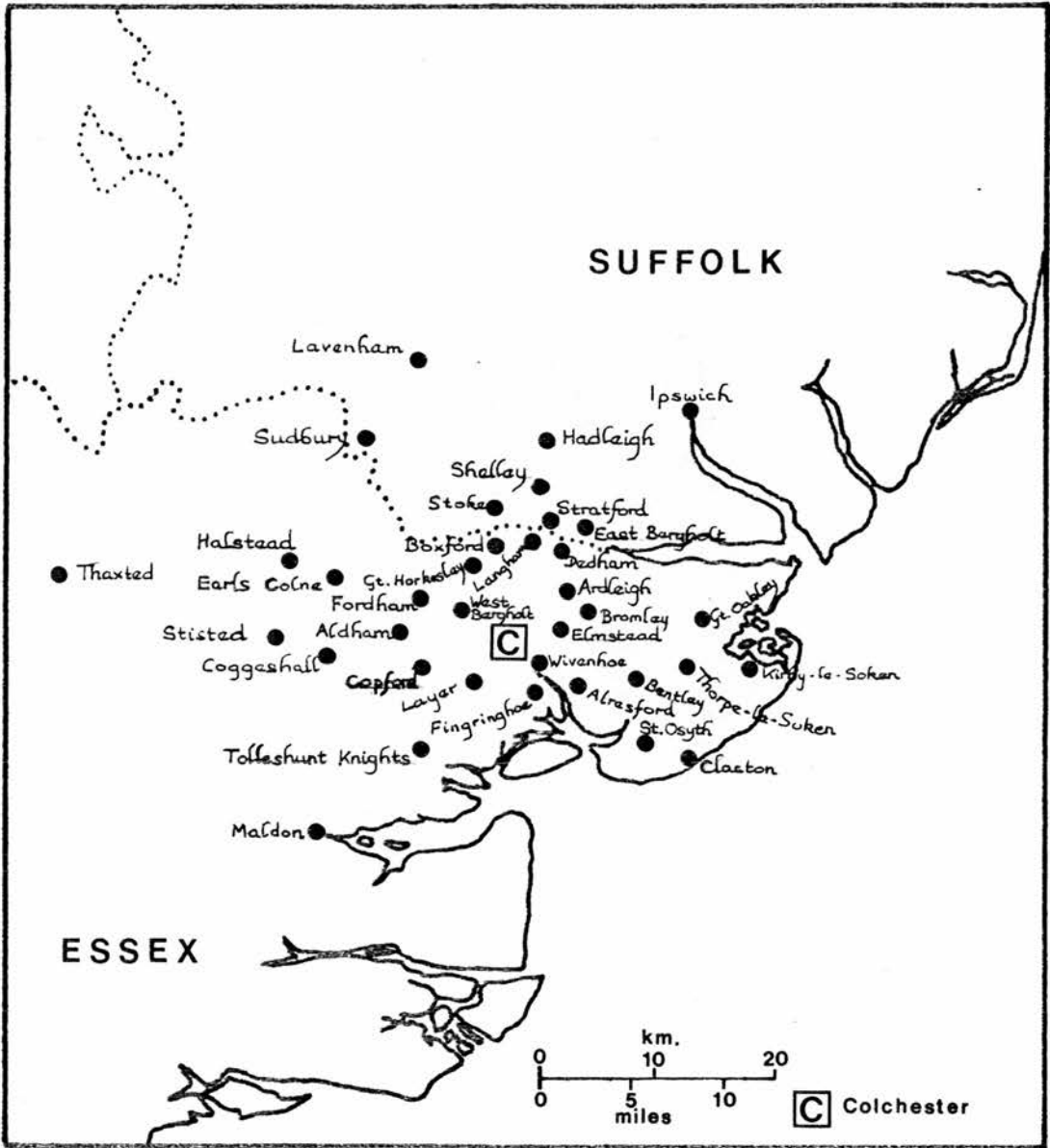
It is plain that the overall trend in burgess admissions, with its pronounced decline during the later fifteenth century, is largely a product of a diminution of the numbers of more local recruits. The distance statistics can only tell part of the story however; in order to understand what was happening it is necessary to map the available data, and to enquire as to what type of places provided Colchester with its immigrant freemen.

It is notable that the contribution of the 60<sup>35</sup> market towns of the two counties is relatively insignificant; over the whole period 1310 to 1560 there are only 285 documented admissions of men from these places. Indeed, if the ten most important of these<sup>36</sup> are removed from the calculation, the remaining 50 supplied only 112 burgesses in all. Plainly, then, the presumably more commercialised society of the market town did not in itself promote the type of mobility involved in burgess recruitment; rather, these places may have themselves provided the opportunities for economic and social advancement which others sought in the urban franchise. Ipswich and Bury, of course, were themselves sizeable boroughs and would have offered an important counter-attraction to the inhabitants of mid and eastern Suffolk.

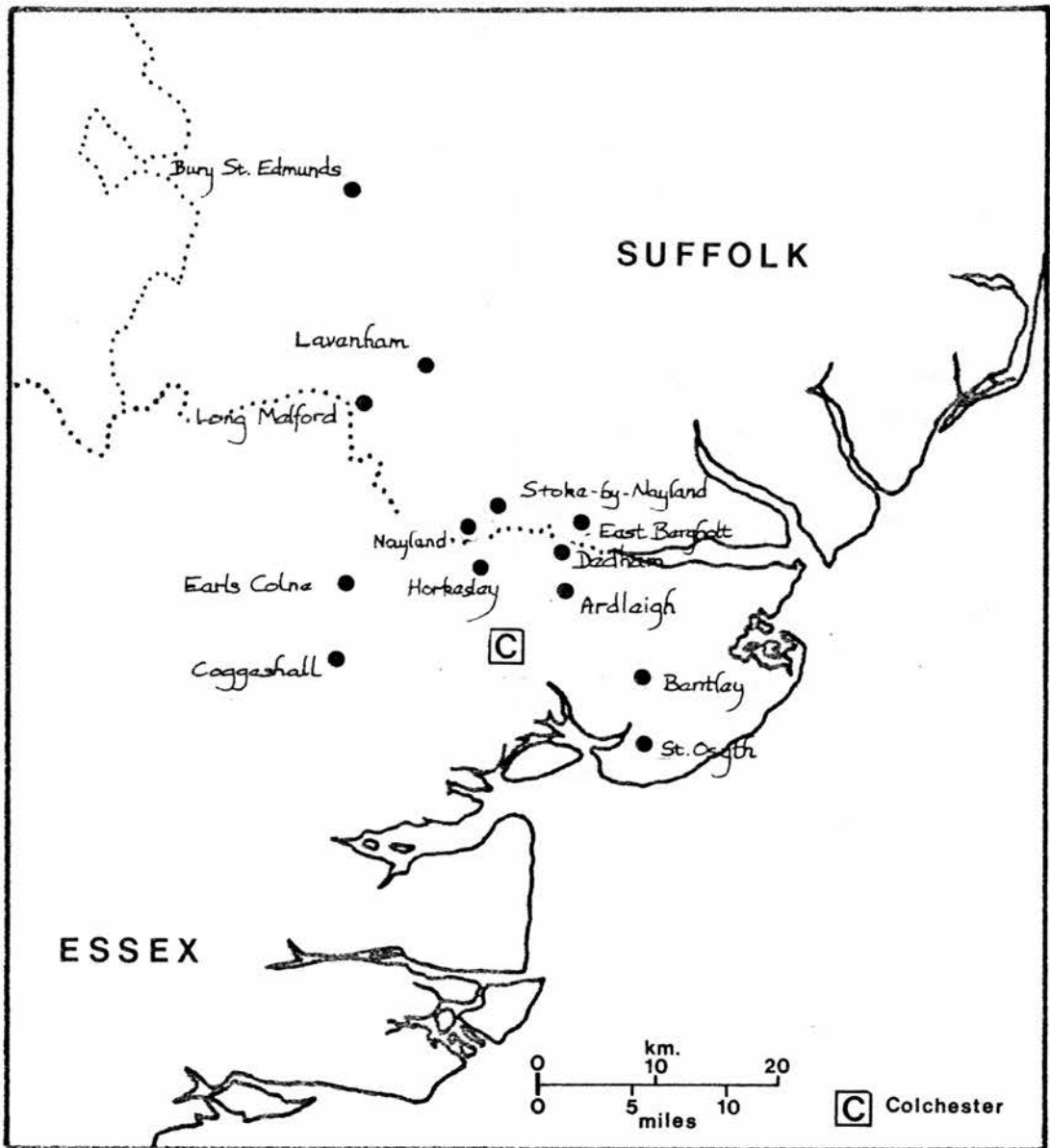
Map 10 shows those places which supplied more than ten Colchester burgesses over the whole period 1380 to 1560; only two places outwith the map area fall into this category, namely London and Norwich. In all, 42 places are included, from which 713



MAP 10 : PLACES SUPPLYING MORE THAN 10, 20, 30, 40 BURGESSES,  
1381 - 1560

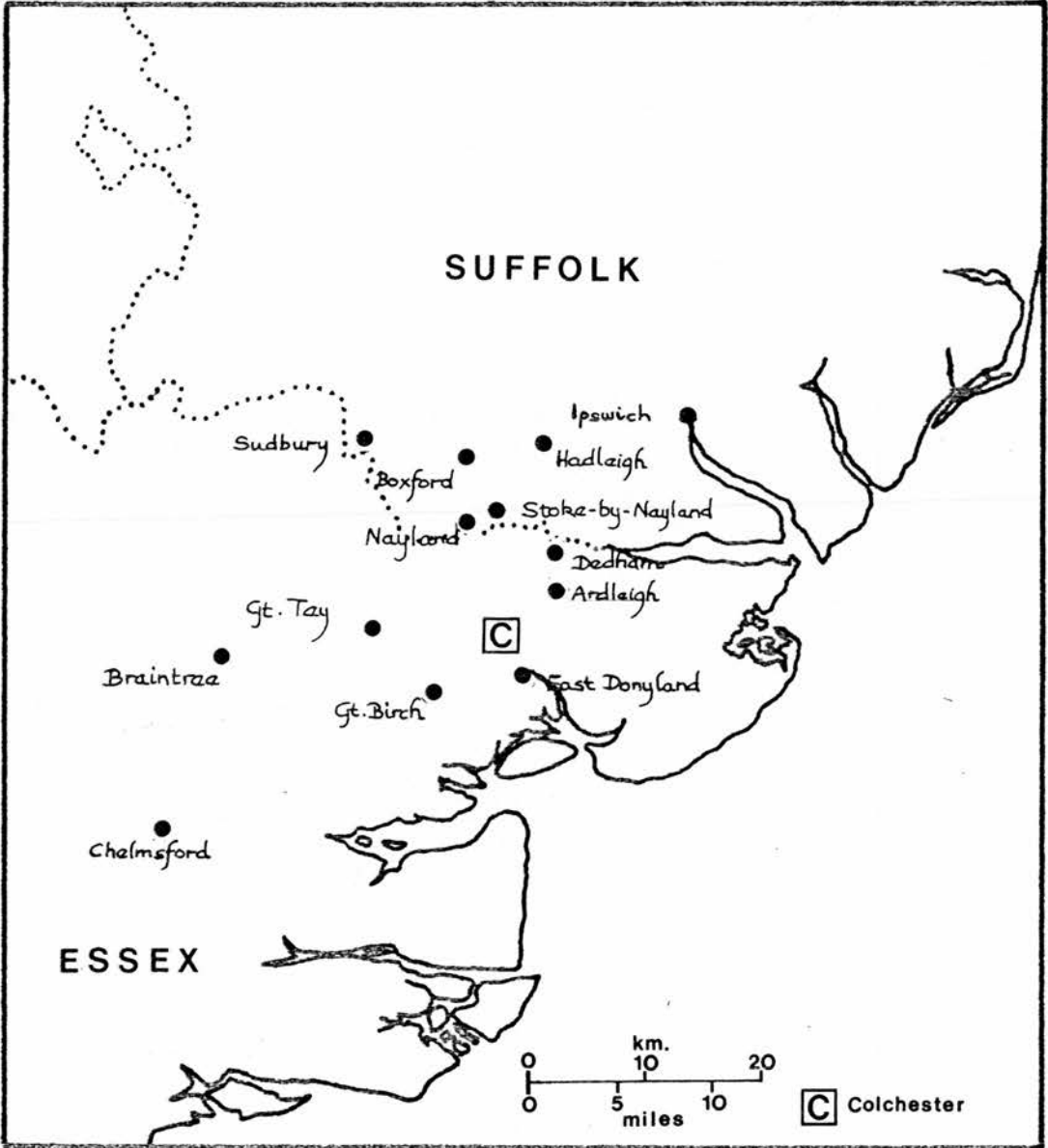


MAP 11: PLACES SUPPLYING MORE THAN 5 BURGESSES, 1381 - 1440



MAP 12 : PLACES SUPPLYING MORE THAN 5 BURGESSES, 1441 - 1500





MAP 13 : PLACES SUPPLYING MORE THAN 5 BURGESSES, 1501 - 1560

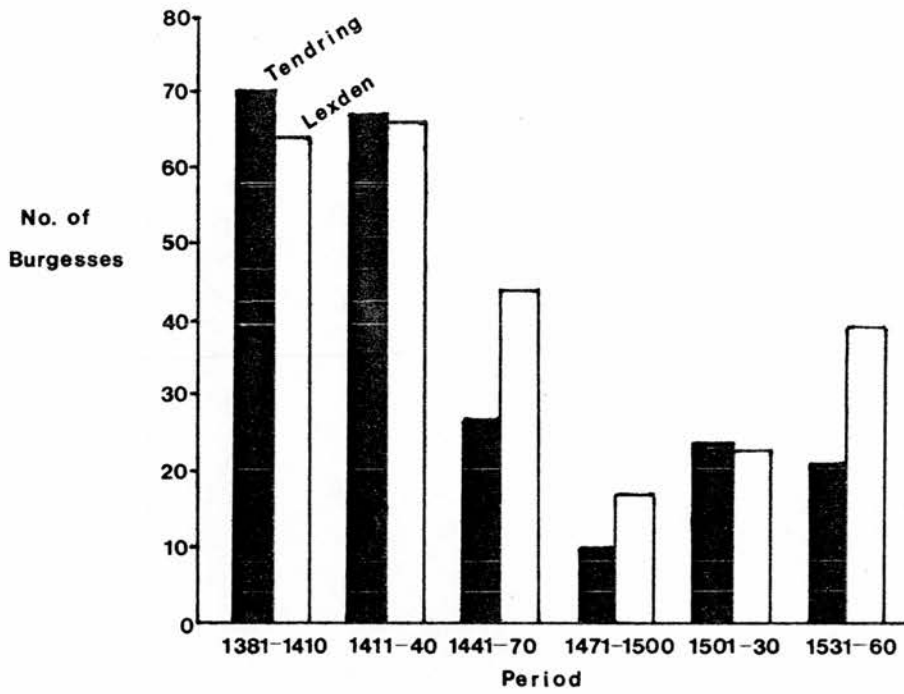
burgesses can be identified as having originated. The 40 mapped places in Essex and Suffolk were the stated origin of 681 burgesses, 48.8% of the total from these two counties. Of this 40, only 13 were market towns or boroughs.

In Maps 11-13 the changing pattern of recruitment from the more important tributary communities is illustrated. It is notable that only three places within the map area<sup>37</sup> have more than five documented burgess recruits in each of the 60-year periods: Ardleigh, the principally agricultural parish to the north-east of the borough, together with Dedham and Stoke-by-Nayland, the Stour valley textile communities.

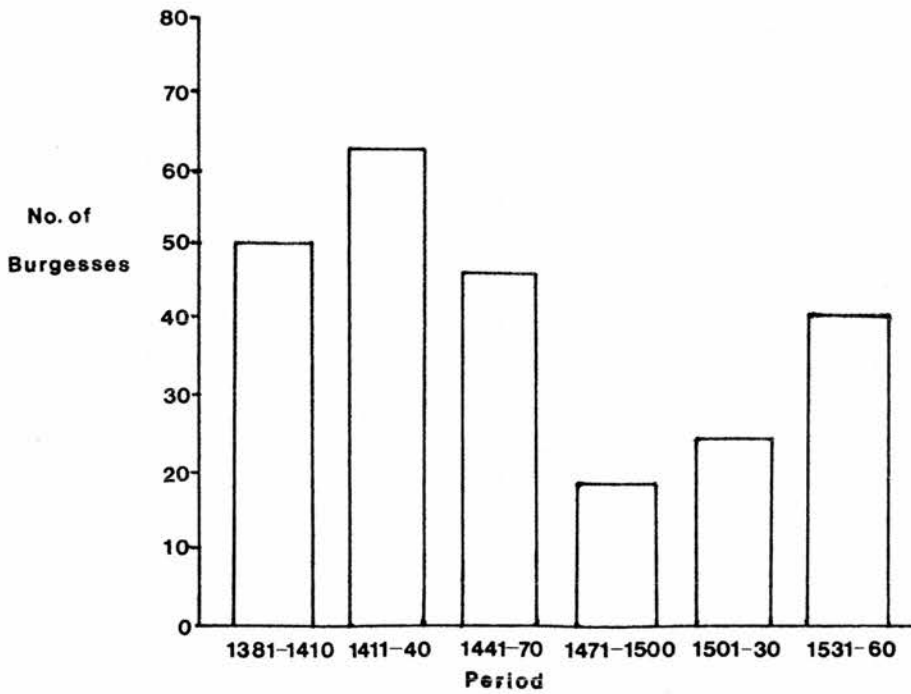
The significance of the contribution of the textile communities to Colchester's immigrant freeman population emerges clearly from the maps. Seventeen of the 42 places in Map 10 appear in the aulnage accounts of 1460s. Furthermore, this link appears less affected by the 'recession' in burgess recruitment of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; of the 13 places from which over five burgesses were recruited between 1441 and 1500, nine appear in the aulnage accounts as places where cloths were sealed; in the period 1501 to 1560 the figure is nine out of twelve.

It thus appears that the decline in burgess recruitment may have been due to a reduction in numbers from the more purely agricultural communities, rather than to any loosening of ties within the textile region. To test this hypothesis, recruitment from the industrially important Lexden hundred has been compared with that from Tendring hundred, and the results are presented in Graph 4.

It can be seen that, in fact, both hundreds shared in the general admissions trend, falling to very low levels after 1470.



GRAPH 4 : BURGESSES FROM LEXDEN AND TENDRING



GRAPH 5 : BURGESSES FROM 13 TEXTILE COMMUNITIES

However, the trend in Tendring is more pronounced; the drop in recruitment is more sudden and more dramatic than in the case of Lexden. Moreover, while the number of burgesses from Tendring recovers somewhat in the period 1501-30 it stagnates in the following 30 years, while the Lexden figures continue to climb back towards earlier levels. It is plain, though, that while some of the textile centres continued to supply as many burgesses as before - Coggeshall in fact reaches a peak in this respect during the period 1441-70 - overall the clothmaking region did not buck the general trend. The same factor emerges when 13 of the most important textile centres<sup>38</sup> are taken in isolation (see Graph 5). The decline in numbers is delayed, with 1441-70 seeing nearly as many burgess recruits from these places as 1381-1410, but the decline after 1470 is equally pronounced.

If the decline in burgess recruitment was due to the changing nature of Colchester's economy - larger scale operations reducing the opportunities for small independent craftsmen, and thus the incentive to take up the freedom - how is the recovery after 1530 to be explained, given there is no reason to believe that this trend did not continue or increase?

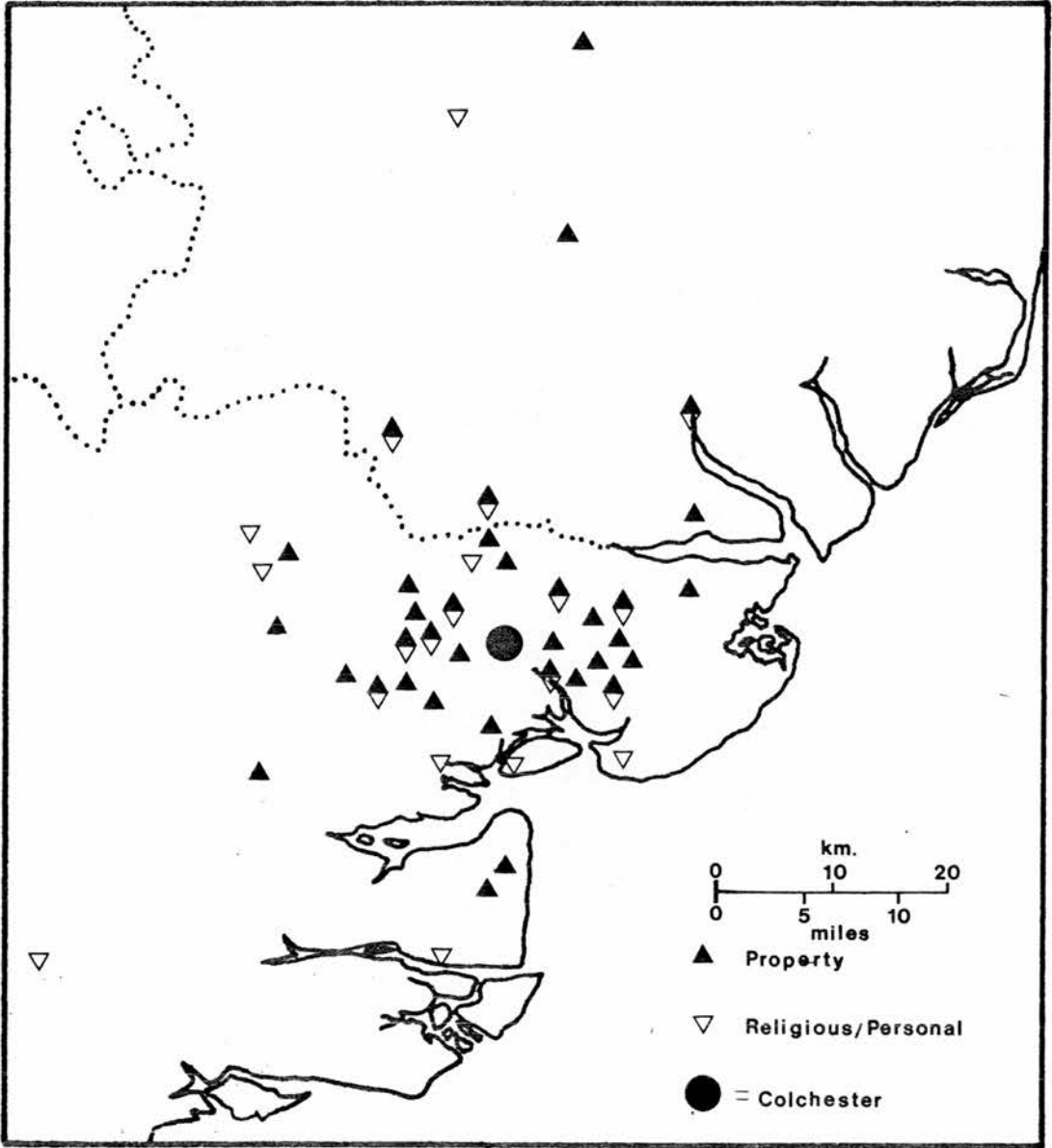
The recruitment of burgesses from without the borough represents far more than simple population mobility; it was an essential part of the creation of a regional pattern of economic and social interaction. Some impression of the richness of this pattern can be gained from the wills of Colchester burgesses, which unfortunately do not survive in large numbers before the end of the fifteenth century. Economic contacts, ownership of extra-urban

property and ties of sentiment and kinship can all be seen in the bequests and other references found in these documents.

In some cases the role of burgess recruitment in the creation of these rural-urban linkages can be documented at an individual level. The case of John Sparwe, born in Thaxted and becoming a burgess of Colchester in 1416, has been cited in an earlier chapter as an example of this type of continuing contact. Similar cases are not hard to find later in the fifteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth. Thus the John Briche of Birch, Essex, who became a burgess in 1492-3 is probably identical with the John Byrch whose will, dating from 1501, included bequests of a croft and other lands in Birch and a gift to the high altar of that parish's church.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, we may identify the John Turnour, 'mercier', who in 1525 bequeathed money to the parish church of Messing and held various 'lands and tenements' in the same place, with the John Turnor who became a burgess in 1517-18.<sup>40</sup>

Similar examples can be cited to show that movement to the borough often did not mean the end of rural interests. Mostly, these are found in the form of pious and personal bequests, and bequests of property; sometimes more details is found. A certain John Leveron, 'husbandman' born at Ardleigh, became a burgess of Colchester in 1544; a will made by an individual of the same name in 1547 included bequests of lands at Ardleigh, oxen in the same parish, a brown cow at Colchester and wool at shearing time.<sup>41</sup>

Retention of property in rural parishes was, as might be expected, largely restricted to Essex and Suffolk; the wills examined from the first half of the sixteenth century do not suggest that many of the longer-range immigrant burgesses retained lands or



MAP14: EXTRA-URBAN INTERESTS, COLCHESTER WILLS 1495-1555

other interests in their place of birth. Map 14 shows the places in which lands or houses mentioned in Colchester wills are located, and the location of beneficiaries of extra-urban pious and personal bequests not involving property. The concentration of property interests in parishes to the immediate east and west of the borough is notable. This feature is even more pronounced when multiple occurrences are taken into account; thus of the wills examined, six include bequests of holdings in Ardleigh, four in Elmstead, and four in Great Birch.<sup>42</sup>

Extra-urban property ownership and ties of sentiment or kinship must have been at once effect and cause of rural-urban migration. If the decision to migrate is ultimately an individual one, it is a decision reached within a framework of knowledge and contact. The existence of links between village and town, or the knowledge that people from one's own village were already established in the larger community, must have been important considerations. Sometimes this manifests itself in the records of the pledges which new burgesses were obliged to find in addition to paying their entry fine. For example, when in 1419-20 Sawyer Potard from Bentley became a burgess, two of his four pledges appear to have been men also born in Bentley; William Sandre, who entered the burgage in 1399-1400 and John Sandre, 1402-3.<sup>43</sup>

On occasion more than one member of a family might become burgesses of Colchester at the same time. Thus, in 1406-7 we find three men, apparently father and two sons, all born at Stisted in Essex, entering the burgage together. All three are described as weavers, and this may represent the removal of an entire family 'business' from a rural to an urban environment.<sup>44</sup>



## Conclusions

Like most boroughs of any size, Colchester attracted burgess recruits from both its immediate hinterland and from further afield. All the burgesses recorded as paying fines prior to the mid-sixteenth century must have been born outwith the borough, and after c.1380 a place of origin is stated for the majority of these individuals. It seems clear that the great majority were resident burgesses; however, many of those originating in southern Suffolk and Northern Essex retained links with their home communities.

Long-distance recruits form an increasingly important part of the total, in relative terms during the fifteenth century, and in absolute numbers towards the middle of the sixteenth century. The most striking factor emerging from the graphs and table presented above, however, is surely the collapse in local recruitment in the middle and later fifteenth century, with the number of new burgesses born within 10 km of Colchester declining from 111 in 1411-40 to 38 in 1441-70. How is this to be explained? It seems implausible to suggest that the attractive power of the borough had diminished to this extent, as it is clear that its major industry, the manufacture of woollen cloths, continued to be vital and may indeed have been faring better than its rural counterpart. If changes in the structure of the borough economy had lessened the prospects for the advancement of the small artisan and trader, why should this produce a disproportionate drop in the number of local recruits?

One obvious explanation would be that the local burgess recruits were typically 'small' traders and craftsmen; victuallers, workers in the cloth-making, leather or building trades. The corollary

would be that longer-distance recruits tended to be men of greater substance who could still find opportunities for advancement in a society increasingly dominated by merchant capital. The sparse nature of the information as to occupation of new burgesses makes it difficult to assess the validity of this suggestion. In the previous chapter it was, however, shown that what occupational data there are confirm the importance of the small-scale trader and artisan. If this is true overall, it seems probable that such individuals were even more strongly represented in burgess recruitment from the borough's immediate hinterland, the area where everyday contacts between town and country promoted a type of mobility born out of firsthand experience of markets and commercial opportunities.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

It now remains to attempt to draw together the findings of the present study, and to place them within a broader setting. The objective, set out in Chapter 1, was to examine three aspects of the economy and society of a late medieval town within its regional setting, namely the relative wealth of town and country, the development of the textile industry, and rural-urban mobility as evidenced by the recruitment of free burgesses. These three themes were chosen because of their central place within A.R. Bridbury's theory of later medieval urban prosperity, which rests upon a certain reading or interpretation of three corresponding groups of documents: the lay subsidies, the aulnage accounts supplemented by borough records, and burgess-admission registers. The present study has examined these sources as they exist for the borough of Colchester and its region in order to assess their value as guides to urban fortunes; to see whether the stories they tell are consistent one with another; and to evaluate the support they give to either the views of Bridbury or those of the proponents of 'urban decline'. In developing this critique, it has been found necessary to draw upon other, related sources to the extent that these shed light upon the central sources and the central themes.

Examination of the lay subsidy evidence together with sources internal to the borough suggested that, while the general direction of change indicated by a comparison of the fourteenth- and sixteenth-century returns was entirely plausible, the nature and extent of this change was more complex than Bridbury's use of the

statistics might suggest. Thus, while it is clear that Colchester was both larger and wealthier in 1524 than it had been in 1327 or 1334, the question of its growth relative to the countryside is less clear-cut. In part, of course, this arises from the sweeping equation of quite different types of places as 'countryside' for calculation purposes. It was shown that, in fact, Bridbury used only Colchester in his 'urban' category for Essex, the smaller boroughs and market towns all falling within the 'countryside' category. However, when the performance of individual parishes within north-east Essex was examined, it was seen that there was a very wide range of growth ratios, with some growing faster in terms of taxable wealth than Colchester itself. While some of these 'successful' places were small ports or market towns with some burghal characteristics, others were essentially 'rural', although the known centres of clothmaking appear prominent. It seems clear that there was no single rural experience which can usefully be compared with the urban.

Again, the 'internal' indicators of changing wealth are not easy to interpret. Certain types of evidence, such as the records of decays and the decline in toll receipts, appear to point to stagnation or decline in the borough's economy. However, it was argued that these phenomena were probably in part a reflection of changing patterns of trade promoted by the navigational difficulties encountered at the Hythe and in part a product of institutional changes. That there was a serious problem in the field of corporate finance - as witnessed by the evasions of the office of Chamberlain - is clear, but it is much less certain that there was any real economic crisis in the community, as opposed to the

institutions, of the borough. On the contrary, there seems to have been no shortage of money in the community at the end of the fifteenth century.

True, the borough had probably virtually reached its peak medieval population by the 1370s, with the subsequent period seeing the retention of population and increasing economic and institutional complexity, rather than physical growth. While there may have been some further increase in numbers in the decades after the 1377 poll-tax, the period of peak burgess recruitment, this is likely to have been a matter of marginal increment rather than sustained large-scale growth; there is no evidence of the sorts of phenomena which one would associate with a rapid rise and subsequent contraction of population between 1377 and 1524, such as abandonment of parts of the urban area, decayed streets or abandoned parish churches. What evidence there is of decay or stagnation dates from the decades following the 1524 subsidy rather than those preceding it. Thus, we find Colchester among the numerous boroughs named in the re-edification statutes of the 1540s, allegedly suffering from "vacant spaces" and "tottering houses".<sup>1</sup>

This period of stagnation in the mid-sixteenth century thus appears less the culmination of a crisis than a hiatus between two major phases of industrial growth, the one covering the second half of the fourteenth century and most of the fifteenth, and the other beginning after 1570 with the establishment of the 'Stranger' community and associated rise of the New Draperies. In absolute terms the borough had grown in wealth and population between the 1320s and the 1520s, having perhaps twice as many inhabitants, although, as we have seen, most of this growth probably took place

in the earlier part of this period. During the same period many rural parishes had shrunk to perhaps one-half their former size, with recovery postponed until well into the sixteenth century, as Poos has shown. If Colchester was larger in, say, the 1420s than it was in the 1520s - and there is no convincing evidence that it was - this might reasonably be ascribed to the abnormally high levels of population mobility in the later fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries,<sup>2</sup> to a disruption of rural life which could not provide the basis for sustained urban growth.

Indeed, to expect sustained urban growth at a period when national and local population levels were at their nadir seems absurd. Only a city with exceptional attractive powers, such as were unlikely to be found outside a national capital, could reasonably be expected to have achieved this. To have first experienced a period of growth and then remained relatively stable in population terms might be thought a success in this context. The dividing line between 'success' and 'failure' seems to have been drawn in a rather peculiar way by writer's such as Dobson who account failure to grow as one of the features of urban decline while accepting that the later middle ages were a time of "prolonged and remorseless demographic attrition in England as a whole".<sup>3</sup>

How, then, is Colchester's apparent "success" to be explained? Pythian-Adams thought Colchester exceptional, one of a small group of English towns which escaped recession through a combination of advantages; principally, the possession of an "industrialising hinterland" and access to coastal trade.<sup>4</sup>

The precise nature of these positive factors is not spelled out, and indeed both might be thought rather curious "advantages" within

the context of the 'urban decay' debate. Port status would not appear a major advantage in the light of the same author's belief that most of the major towns of England's eastern seaboard were experiencing decline during the later middle ages.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the grounds for viewing rural industrialisation as a positive factor for urban prosperity rather than as a prime cause of urban decay - a role which it is more usually allotted - are not brought out by Phythian-Adams; some form of symbiotic development is implied, but not specified.<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, Colchester's major achievement during the course of the later middle ages was in emerging as an important centre of commercial cloth manufacture. Taken together, the aulnage accounts and the borough court rolls show convincingly enough that the industry took off from a very low level of activity in the first half of the fourteenth century, and grew rapidly in the decades following the Black Death. In this rapid fourteenth-century growth the rural industry seems to have emulated the urban, although the overall pace of development is probably exaggerated in Gray's presentation of the statistics.<sup>7</sup>

There is no doubt that at Colchester we are dealing with an industry which was truly urban, and which remained urban. The countryside did not lure away Colchester's clothworkers and entrepreneurs. The rural industry which leaps to prominence in the aulnage account of 1394-5 does not appear to have advanced in scale or organization for perhaps a hundred years thereafter. Indeed, if the accounts of the 1460s are to be taken as seriously as those of the 1390s - and there is no reason why they should not be - then stagnation or regression is indicated rather than development.



Increase in scale and complexity of organization seems to have been characteristic of the urban rather than the rural industry during the course of the fifteenth century.

Clearly, there was interaction between urban and rural industries in the processes of manufacture as well as in the field of marketing, but there is little to suggest that this amounted to anything in the nature of symbiosis. Indeed, the wills of townsman and women from the early sixteenth century suggest that extra-urban interests were agrarian rather than industrial (Chapter 7).

There thus appears to be a contrast between the industrial development of Essex and, say, the West Riding of Yorkshire in the later medieval period. Aulnage evidence suggests that in the West Riding, unlike in Essex, there was a marked advance in the rural industry between the 1390s and the 1460s, most notably in the valleys of the Aire and Calder.<sup>8</sup>

If it is accepted that this is not merely a reflection of the defective nature of the records, how might such a contrast be explained? Three types of factors may be involved: the nature of rural society, the nature of the urban communities in the two areas, and the interrelation of nature and technology. Smith has suggested that the West Riding population was recovering more readily in the upland than the lowland areas during the fifteenth century; it thus may be that the upland areas with their restricted arable land were tending to produce smaller, less viable holdings even in an era of general population decline or stagnation.<sup>9</sup> Such a tendency would be exacerbated by partible inheritance customs, furthering the process of fragmentation. Essex, by contrast, shows no sign of any population up-turn until well into the sixteenth

century at any of the villages studied by Poos.<sup>10</sup> A mixture of partible and impartible inheritance seems to have been characteristic of the county; some impression of the diversity of Essex inheritance customs can be gained from Emmison's examination of sixteenth-century wills.<sup>11</sup>

Chambers writes that "the differential advantage of labour supplies was crucial in the distribution of textile industries especially in the periods of labour shortage". In the long run "the hard-thrusting petty clothiers of the West Riding" were to triumph over the "gentleman clothiers of East Anglia",<sup>12</sup> and the foundations for this late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century eclipse may have been laid in the medieval period.

In an important sense rural industry organized on a commercial rather than a 'subsistence' (production-for-use) basis was peculiar, atypical, in an era of general labour shortage. It was only in areas where certain social or natural factors prevented full-time employment in agriculture that such industries arose. Thirsk has shown that areas characterised by a pastoral economy, as much of northern Essex was, were particularly suited to the emergence of by-employments which sometimes took the form of engagement in commercially-orientated industry. The great fluctuations in labour demand within the annual cycle of a pastoral economy allowed this to happen on a part-time or periodic basis.<sup>13</sup> However, in the absence of sustained demographic growth producing a fragmentation of holdings in an area of partible inheritance, or of a social/political movement producing a similar effect (such as expropriation of the peasantry), there was little impetus for such industrial employment to be other than a sporadic - though doubtless welcome

- supplement to family income. In such circumstances 'protoindustrialisation' remained a "system" rather than, as Schlumbohm would have it, a "process".<sup>14</sup>

The question of technology returns us once again to the fulling mill. Bridbury has shown that Salisbury thrived as a textile centre without mechanical fulling.<sup>15</sup> Colchester's experience indicates that fulling mills could operate within a lowland, urban setting (see Chapters 4 and 5 above). However, whether these mills were as efficient - based as they must have been on the undershot rather than the overshot wheel - as those located in upland areas, such as the West Riding, must be doubtful. The mills at the Hythe fell into disrepair on several occasions and it seems likely that this was due to the technical problems in operating a mill on a sluggish lowland river prone to silting. It will be noted that there is a coincidence between the difficulties with the Hythe mills and the obstruction of navigation in the Colne. Morant opined that the mills were themselves a "hurt to the channel".<sup>16</sup>

What of the 'urban' factor, and its relation to the development of rural industry? The present study indicates that neither symbiosis nor deadly rivalry necessarily result when cloth industries, both urban and rural, emerge within a given region. The Essex evidence indicates that, in fact, the industrial development here was not 'regional' if this term is taken to mean evenly spread, coherent and based upon a clearly defined spatial division of labour. On the contrary, the industry tended towards local concentration and relative self-containment. This character must not be exaggerated, but the spatial concentration of clothmaking - although clearly over-emphasised in the aulnage

accounts - is reflected in the prominence of the important centres in the 1524 lay subsidy returns, in terms of both absolute payments and relative growth ratios over the period 1327-1524.

The patchiness of rural development and the continuing health of Colchester's own industry show that urban 'constraints' were not critical before c.1500, and perhaps considerably later. There was no real reserve of cheap labour in the Essex countryside during the fifteenth century in the form of either 'free' wage labour or marginalised smallholder families, and this allied to the relatively small scale of overall production and size of markets, meant that urban advantages - concentration of labour and capital, established methods of work and training, ready access to markets - had not been significantly undermined.

Furthermore, it is clear that the urban economy could accommodate a variety of forms of industrial and commercial organization rather than being uncompromisingly conservative by nature. To what extent the absence of corporate guilds in Colchester promoted this relative flexibility is hard to assess. Some 'guild-like' institutions and offices did emerge, but these were in no sense independent; rather, they were limbs of the borough administration. This lack of 'true' guilds was by no means unique to Colchester however. Medieval English towns present a continuum in this respect, from the gildless, through undeveloped pseudo-gild structures to the corporate chartered guilds which in some boroughs succeeded in imposing their will on urban policy.<sup>17</sup>

The degree to which conservative craft guilds were a cause rather than a consequence of contraction in the urban economy was in any

case questioned by Thrupp, who also criticised the implications of uniformity in the use of terms like 'the Gild System'.<sup>18</sup>

If the textile industry at Colchester appears to have grown in terms of both total output and in the scale of individual enterprises during the fifteenth century, it was nonetheless very modest in comparison with later developments,<sup>19</sup> or with contemporary and earlier industries in some continental cities.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, it was a long way from anything which could be described as industrial capitalism. If it was not capitalist and yet not gild-based, how is it to be categorised?

A recent study of industrial organization at Lille and Leiden<sup>21</sup> has suggested that these cities were characterised by "small commodity production" in the early modern period, a form of organization which was neither feudal nor capitalist. Based on independent master artisans and their households augmented by skilled and semi-skilled employees it was not conservative or inflexible but was "responsive to a constellation of specifically urban forces". In particular, it was responsive to the growing need for capital in an export-oriented industry and to the periodic need for additional labour inputs or technological innovation. This system was flexible enough to allow for such developments and yet contained sufficient social and institutional checks to prevent industry coming under the hegemony of the large merchant-capitalist.<sup>22</sup>

This formulation would appear to owe something to the 'petty commodity production' which Marx considered to have emerged during the period of the disintegration of feudalism as a mode of production.<sup>23</sup> This concept was discussed by the various

contributors to the 'Transition Debate' in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>24</sup> A basic disagreement emerged between those who considered this petty commodity production a true 'mode of production' in the Marxist sense, and those who viewed it as merely a transitional phase, an aspect of the dissolution of feudal society.

This discussion forms part of the wider debate on the rise of capitalism, and the role of towns within this movement. The emphasis in recent years has tended to shift away from the "revolutionary" or "dissolving" effect of towns upon feudal society, a position which is most closely identified with the writings of Paul Sweezy,<sup>25</sup> towards a view of the medieval town as a component of feudalism. Thus, Merrington argues that feudal town growth "was in the closest correlation with the development of the seignorial economy".<sup>26</sup> Anderson goes even further; throughout western Europe, he writes, "medieval towns represented an absolutely central economic and cultural component of the feudal order".<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, while some solvent role is allowed to the towns, the prime movers in the decline of feudalism are sought elsewhere by these writers; in the development of class antagonisms within the social structure as a whole and in the emergence of new forms of organization outwith the established corporate towns. This again echoes Marx's assertion that "wherever [capitalist production] appears ... the highest development of the middle ages, the existence of sovereign towns, has been long on the wane".<sup>28</sup>

This would appear to leave the urban economy at the end of the middle ages as, in effect, an evolutionary dead-end. Du Plessis and Howell would strongly disagree with such a conclusion. For them the 'small commodity production' system was:



not a stagnant hold-over from earlier days found in declining sectors, [but] was instead a system appropriate both to growing market-oriented industries and to traditional urban societies. Competition and investment were intrinsic to this mode; at the same time, they were circumscribed in accordance with certain firmly defended values. 29

To what extent is such a model appropriate to describe the situation at Colchester? For the later fourteenth and much of the fifteenth centuries it would appear to fit the evidence remarkably well. An increase in scale and complexity appears to have occurred without any significant input of large merchant capital. While forms of 'putting-out' were commonly used, the scale was small and the producers had a significant role in the organization of work and in the marketing of the products. A variety of forms of organization co-existed, with a gradual movement towards more 'professional' forms of contract and accounting.

That this was a system of production sustainable in the long-run is, however, less likely. The opportunities for 'journeymen' or 'servants' to become free masters in their own right seem to have shrunk as the scale of operations increased. By the latter part of the fifteenth century the 'clothmakers' were coming to dominate Colchester's industry, a tendency which increased in the sixteenth. Certainly, many of these men remained actively involved in the manufacture of cloth - the use of the term 'clothmaker' rather than the more usual 'clothier' may be more than a local peculiarity - but it is clear that their mercantile interests were becoming increasingly important. The institutional and social constraints at Colchester seem to have been insufficient to prevent merchant capital gradually extending its influence over the sphere of production.



It may be that in formulating their model of 'small commodity production' Du Plessis and Howell have exaggerated the stability of the system and its 'democratic' nature. It is clear that not all sections of urban society retained economic independence. Women appear to have been gradually edged out of active participation in the running of industry at Leiden;<sup>30</sup> the same process can be seen at work in Colchester. This seems to have been the result of two mutually reinforcing tendencies; as the scale of production grew, the majority of women, having 'domestic' as well as 'commercial' demands upon their labour, were unable to compete, while the craft and burghal institutions which began to increasingly influence the organization of industry were exclusively male.

The number of men who could attain the status of free masters also declined, however, and this would appear to be one of the factors behind the fall in burgess admissions at Colchester. Were burgess admissions to be viewed as a simple index of prosperity, the trend would be very difficult to reconcile with other evidence, but it is clear that the situation is more complex. Again, the change may be partly due to economic and partly to institutional factors; increase in scale of enterprises and emergence of the 'masters' organizations, which although clearly not corporate and having no independent existence outwith the context of the borough franchise, yet had the powers to search and fine. It seems probable that this increased scrutiny of work standards and practices inhibited men from becoming their own masters and freemen of the borough; many must have chosen instead to remain journeymen and servants within an economy which was shifting markedly into the hands of the larger 'clothmakers'. Furthermore, the institutional developments of the

fifteenth century were by no means confined to the textile crafts. The leatherworkers, victuallers, chandlers and other groups also acquired masters' organizations, under the jurisdiction of the bailiffs, with powers to regulate standards and training procedures.<sup>31</sup>

That the decline in admissions of immigrant, fine-paying burgesses was not seen as a problem during the fifteenth century is implied by the borough's action in not lowering fines, but in fact attempting to push them upwards at this time. Maximising revenue from those who did take up their freedom seems to have had priority over maximising admissions by relaxing the entry terms. However, the upwards drift of fines was modest and can hardly be adduced as a prime cause of the decline in admissions.

If there was a policy on admissions it is likely to have been to encourage men of substance to come to Colchester and, once resident, to take up their freedom and play a full part in running and financing the borough. The decline in the overall number of recruits, most of whom were far from rich, was probably of little concern to the borough's rulers during the fifteenth century. On the contrary, so long as the borough's economy remained strong they may have viewed the trend as a natural and not unwelcome development. It is in the following century, when economic difficulties become evident and poverty a noticeable problem, that the borough, faced with growing demands on a static or shrinking corporate revenue, shows indications of wishing to encourage men to become free; fines with "part excused", instalment payments and an increasingly cavalier approach to the pledging system. While there were still men of great wealth within the borough, it seems that the

overall pool of burgesses of 'substance' had contracted, endangering the institutional structure and necessitating action.

The lay subsidies, aulnage accounts and burgess admission records all offer that rare commodity for the medieval period, statistical data. Economic historians and historical geographers have naturally been tempted to draw upon these sources in order to compare places and regions, and to study change over time. All three sources are used in A.R. Bridbury's Economic Growth; graphs and tables are produced to illustrate the relative performance of counties and boroughs and to support one central line of argument.

The present case-study indicates how fraught with danger such an enterprise is. Each of the sources has its own peculiarities and difficulties of interpretation; many factors may interact to produce supposed 'trends' or patterns in the data. It is, in fact, virtually impossible to restrict examination to the sources in question; in order to assess their meaning and value, other types of evidence must be drawn upon, evidence which is often unquantifiable. In other words, the interpretation of the sources is highly context-dependent. Furthermore, the use of different scales of analysis may produce widely differing results or emphases.

The use of these sources for comparative purposes is thus something to be undertaken only with the most extreme caution. The types of figures presented by Bridbury can only provide a starting point for more detailed analysis; they can never, by themselves, prove or disprove an argument.

If the comparative method founders on the limitations of the data, it is equally clear that an individual case-study, however detailed, cannot settle an argument as complex and wide-ranging as

that concerning late medieval urban fortunes. However, certain observations may be made by way of conclusion.

The question of chronology would appear to be crucial. Although the term 'late medieval urban decline' is commonly used, it was seen in Chapter 1 that the proponents of decline recognize that there were periods of stability or even growth in the two centuries after the Black Death. According to Phythian-Adams, the larger towns enjoyed a general recovery c.1380-1430 before entering a protracted period of decline, culminating in the 'acute crisis' of c.1520-70. However, in his own detailed study of Coventry, the same writer identifies a period of rapid demographic growth and economic prosperity following the Black Death, and considers that the borough was "still flourishing" around 1450; there then followed a period of recession, but a "remarkable" end of the century recovery ensued, with abandoned houses being reoccupied.<sup>32</sup> The 'desolation' of Coventry is thus pushed firmly into the sixteenth century.

When faced with Dyer's counter-hypothesis of 'urban undulation', a continual rise and fall of individual boroughs within an urban system which overall was neither growing nor declining,<sup>33</sup> Phythian-Adams' response is again to push the whole weight of the argument into the Tudor period; the urban failure is in an inability to recover at the same pace as rural communities when the demographic upswing came. Indeed, "it seems to me ... that a rural population recovery is an essential pre-condition of an urban population revival at this period".<sup>34</sup>

On this basis, the supposed 'failure' of the towns over the later medieval period needs to be reassessed. Indeed, barring the

examples of apparently unquestionable decline such as Lincoln and Boston, the idea that the fifteenth century saw a general decay of the urban system is hard to accept. Where the sources exist we may be granted a glimpse of a borough such as Gloucester, supposedly stagnating in the mid-fifteenth century and appealing for its fee-farm to be reduced; in fact the rental of 1455 shows a town full of life and business, with many of its people crowded together in subdivided or extended buildings.<sup>35</sup>

Colchester would fit happily into such a reappraisal of the fifteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the difficulties of its port, and the possible redirection of its trade, it plainly remained a prosperous industrial and market centre at this period. The latter part of the reign of Henry VIII does seem to have seen the emergence of more serious difficulties however, and while these were in part problems of corporate finance, they may also reflect the fact that, at last, rural competition in the textile industry was beginning to 'bite'.

Medieval urban communities were, for their time, highly complex social and economic units. It is natural that such bodies should have periodically experienced problems in the running of their institutions and in the regulation of their trade. There does seem to be sufficient evidence to suggest, however, that many of the larger boroughs experienced a period of particular difficulty in the second and third quarters of the sixteenth century. Colchester would appear to have shared in this experience, but it does not seem reasonable to view it as the culmination of a long-developing crisis in the borough's economy. Rather, as Palliser argues, the larger towns were suffering from a 'conjunction' of negative factors at

this period; population stagnation, rural competition and the weight of civic government.<sup>37</sup>

The onset of this period of difficulty coincides with the ending of the era of labour shortage and high living standards which had begun in the 1350s and become marked in the 1370s. It was these conditions which had most marked the course of economic development and the relative development of town and country for a century and a half, a 'golden age' for the labourer who avoided the curses of pestilence and warfare. It was a scene within which merchant capital had had only limited success in taking control of production and within which industrial capitalism was virtually non-existent. The conditions for the emergence of the latter - a sizeable labour force stripped of the means of subsistence and production - simply did not exist. Similarly, it seems clear that the marginalised families on whom the 'protoindustrial' system relied for its expansion were not found in substantial numbers in northern Essex until the demographic and social upheavals of the sixteenth century were under way.

APPENDIX A: LAY SUBSIDY, COLCHESTER, 1524

<u>Parish</u>	<u>No. of individuals assessed at:</u>						<u>Total</u>	<u>assessed on:</u>	
	<u>£100+</u>	<u>£40- 99</u>	<u>£10 39</u>	<u>£5- 9</u>	<u>£1.10s -£4</u>	<u>20s- nil</u>		<u>wages</u>	<u>lands</u>
St James %age	4 4.4	4 4.4	8 8.9	8 8.9	31 34.4	35 38.9	90	37 41.1	0 0
St Leonard %age	0 0	6 6.3	15 15.8	6 6.3	48 50.5	20 21.1	95	40 42.1	0 0
St Giles %age	0 0	1 1	6 6.1	4 4.0	39 39.4	49 49.5	99	65 65.7	5 5.1
St Peter %age	0 0	5 5.9	10 11.8	8 9.4	26 30.6	36 42.4	85	41 48.2	2 2.4
St Botolph %age	1 1.2	2 2.4	8 9.5	12 14.3	33 39.3	28 33.3	84	35 41.7	0 0
St Nicholas %age	0 0	3 4.5	13 19.7	5 7.6	35 53	10 15.1	66	33 50.0	0 0
St Mary at Walls %age	0 0	1 2.4	2 4.8	6 14.3	21 50.0	12 28.6	42	15 35.8	2 4.8
All Saints %age	0 0	0 0	3 17.7	1 5.9	9 52.9	4 23.6	17	4 23.6	0 0
St Runwald %age	1 3.2	2 6.5	4 12.9	3 9.7	11 35.5	10 32.3	31	12 38.8	0 0
Holy Trinity %age	0 0	1 4.8	1 4.8	5 23.8	10 47.6	4 19.0	21	9 42.9	0 0
St Mary Magdalene %age	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 6.7	8 53.3	6 40.0	15	7 46.7	1 6.7
Lexden %age	0 0	0 0	7 30.4	5 21.7	7 30.4	4 17.4	23	6 26.1	0 0
Greensted %age	0 0	0 0	0 0	6 28.0	8 30.3	10 41.7	24	12 50.0	0 0
Mile End %age	0 0	1 5.3	0 0	2 10.5	6 31.6	10 52.6	19	11 57.9	0 0
West Denyland %age	0 0	0 0	0 0	1 9.1	4 16.4	6 54.5	11	6 54.5	0 0
St Martin %age	0 0	0 0	5 16.1	2 6.5	12 38.7	12 38.7	31	16 51.6	0 0
Total %age	6 0.8	26 3.5	82 10.9	75 10.0	308 40.9	256 34.0	753 100.1	349 46.3	10 1.3

(Source: PRO, E/179/108/162)



APPENDIX B: LANDS AND GOODS ASSESSMENTS, 'COLLECTORS BOOK'

Parish	Name	Annual Value of Lands	Value of Moveables	Assessment in 1524
St Leonard	John Wheler	5 marks	£4	£4, goods
"	John Lawford	£4	£8	£9, goods
St Giles	Wm. Brenton, gent.	-	£20	£30, lands
"	Wm. Nicholl	-	£4	£3, lands
St Peter	Phil Heyward	£3	£40	£40, goods
"	Wm. Beckett	£5	£43	£43, goods
"	Thos. Nothak, sen.	40s.	£45	£45, goods
"	Agnes Bryan, widow	26s.8d.	£40	£40, goods
"	Widow Porman	20s.	£3	£3, goods
"	Richd. Hardy	40s.	40s.	40s. goods
"	Wm. Pykeerell	20s.	£18*	£20, goods
"	Thos. Myller	40s.	£18	£18, goods
"	Richd. Casour	40s.	£14	£14, goods
"	Widow Sayer	20s.	£14	£10, goods
"	Widow Tolton	20s.	40s.	40s. goods
"	John Bosfeld	20s.	£5	£5, goods
"	Robert Thorpe, sen.	20s.	£6	£6, goods
"	Wm. Clerke	26s.8d.	£3	£3, goods
"	John Stone, fuller	26s.8d.	£3.10s.	£3, goods
"	Wm. Gryffyth	£3	£20**	£35, goods
"	Thos. Preston	40s.	£20	£20, goods
"	John Turnour	26s.8d.	£20	£20, goods
All Saints	Katherine Sweyn, widow	36s.8d.	£20	£20, goods
"	Robert Stephyn	10 marks	£20	£21, goods
"	John Cooke	5 marks	£16	£18, goods
St Runwald	Wm. Buxston	20s.	£27	£30, goods
"	John Person	20s.	40s.	40s goods
Lexden	John Archer	40s.	£30	£30, goods
"	Wm. Ryche, sen.	£6	£20	£20, goods
"	John Newton	£3,6s.8d.	£30	£30, goods
"	John George	20s.	£13.6s.8d.	£14, goods
"	Giles Pylgrym	26s.8d.	£3	40s, goods
"	Richd. Gosward	20s.	-	4 marks, goods
"	John Holbroke	20s.	-	£3, goods

(Source: B.L., Stowe MSS., 831, folios 1-27; PR0, E179/108/162)

\*£20 deleted; \*\*£35 deleted.

APPENDIX C: GOODS/WAGES ASSESSMENTS, ST. LEONARD'S PARISH,  
'COLLECTORS BOOK'

Name	Assessment	Deleted Assessments	1524 Assessment
Richard Tye	goods, 40s	goods, 20s/ wages, 20s	goods, 20s
Michael Shergose	goods, 40s	wages, 40s	wages, 40s
James Person	wages, 20s	-	goods, 40s
Mathew Parker	goods, 40s	wages, 40s	goods, 40s
Robt. Spencer	goods, 40s	wages, 40s	goods, 40s
Richd. Scotte	goods, £4	wages, 40s	goods, 40s
Wm. Bealde	wages, 40s	wages, £3	wages, 20s
Wm. Abell	goods, £5	wages, £4/ wages, 50s	wages, 40s
John Nicholson	goods, 40s	wages, 40s	-
John Bende	goods, 40s/	-	-
Lancelot Lukes, alien	goods, £3	wages, 40s	-
Wm. Thomson	goods, 40s	wages, 40s/ wages, 20s	-

(Source: B.L., Stowe MSS, 831 folios 1-3; PRO, E/179/108/162)

APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF LEASES

Year	Woodhall etc. Town Tolls	Water (Hythe) Tolls	Hythe Leases (other than tolls)
1310-11		£35 <sup>a)</sup>	
1311-12		£35	
1345-6		£35	
1351-2		£35	
1353-4		£35	
1356-7		£35.6s.8d.	
1359-60		£35	
1372-3		£35	
1374-5	£4	£40	£2.10s.0d.
1375-6	£3.10s.0d.	£41.13s.4d.	£3. 6s.8d.
1385-6			£4
1387-8		£35	£7
1388-9			£7
1391-2		£40	
1392-3		£15	£17
1395-5		£18	£20
1398-9	£5.6s.8d.	£38	£40
1399-1400	£5.6s.8d.	£40	£36
1400-1	£6.13s.4d.		£36
1404-5	£7.6s.8d.		£1 <sup>b)</sup>
1405-6	£6.13s.4d..	£40	
1406-7	£7.6s.8d.	£40	£35
1411-12	£9.6s.8d.	£15	£48
1413-14	£9.6s.8d.	£16	£20
1418-19	£9	£16	£20
1419-20	£9	£16	£20
1422-32	£8	£16	£20
1425-6	£8	£16	£22
1428-9	£8	£16	£45
1429-30	£6	£14	£23
1432-3		£18	£25
1434-5		£12	£26
1435-6	£6	£12	£26
1436-7	£6.10s.0d.	£12.10s.0d.	£26
1437-8	£7	£13	£26
1438-9	£7	£13	£28
1439-40	£6	£12	£44
1442-3	£8	£12	£52
1443-4	£12	£10	£52
1447-8			£52
1448-9	£8	£10	£48
1455-6	£17		£42
1456-7	£17		£44

a) "the tolls of Colchester"

b) 'levyng or leftyng'

APPENDIX D (contd.)

Year	Woodhall etc. Town Tolls	Water (Hythe) Tolls	Hythe Leases (other than tolls)
1458-9	£18		£43
1459-60	£18		
1460-1	£19		£29
1463-4	£19		£33.6s.8d.
1466-7	£18 <sup>c)</sup>		
1470-1	£18		£35
1473-4	£18		£32
1476-7			£35
1480-1			£35
1481-2			£35
1484-5	£16		£35
1504-5			£24 <sup>d)</sup>
1515-16			£24 + 100s. <sup>e)</sup>
1516-17			£24 + 40s. <sup>e)</sup>
1517-18			£24 + 40s.
1520-21			£24 + 40s.
1521-2			£28
1548-9			£28

(Source: Court Rolls, Red Paper Book, B.L. Stowe MSS, 829, folio 28)

- c) Lease for four years at £18 per annum
- d) Ten-year lease at £24 per annum
- e) 'repairs' (see Chapter 3)

APPENDIX E: BURGESS ADMISSIONS AND FINES

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1310-11	-	9	6s.8d.	5s.7d.
1311-12	-	14	10s./13s.4d.	7s.10d.
1327-8	7	-	-	-
1328-9	12	-	-	-
1329-30	15	11	10s.	10s.
1330-1	11	-	-	-
1331-2	13	-	-	-
1332-3	14	-	-	-
1333-4	13	8	10s.	10s.
1334-5	20	-	-	-
1335-6	4	-	-	-
1336-7	8	8	10s.	10s.
1337-8	4	-	-	-
1338-9	9	-	-	-
1339-40	10	-	-	-
1340-1	22	19	10s.	10s.
1341-2	9	-	-	-
1342-3	20	-	-	-
1343-4	9	-	-	-
1344-5	16	-	-	-
1345-6	23	22	10s.	10s.
1346-7	*	-	-	-
1347-8	10	-	-	-
1348-9	18	-	-	-
1349-50	37	-	-	-
1350-1	17	-	-	-
1351-2	11	12	10s.	10s.
1352-3	20	-	-	-
1353-4	53	47	+	+
1354-5	30	-	-	-
1355-6	23	-	-	-
1356-7	14	15	10s.	10s.
1357-8	12	-	-	-
1358-9	7	-	-	-
1359-60	22	22	10s.	10s.
1360-1	36	3	10s.	10s.
1361-2	21	-	-	-
1362-3	13	-	-	-

\* No Oath Book entry  
+ No fines specified

APPENDIX E (contd.)

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1363-4	27	-	-	-
1364-5	12	12	10s.	18s.4d.
1365-66	29	-	-	-
1366-7	14	15	10s.	10s.
1367-8	9	-	-	-
1368-9	30	-	-	-
1369-70	26	-	-	-
1370-1	9	-	-	-
1371-2	24	-	-	-
1372-3	25	21	10s.	10s.
1373-4	44	-	-	-
1374-5	16	15	10s.	15s.
1375-6	12	-	-	-
1376-7	11	11	20s.	46s.3½d.
1377-8	19	-	-	-
1378-9	18	17	23s.4d.	26s.8d.
1379-80	18	11	22s.	32s.6½d.
1380-1	18	-	-	-
1381-2	23	18	20s.	30s.2½d.
1382-3	15	14	20s.	23s.7d.
1383-4	28	5	20s.	28s.
1384-5	22	20	20s.	22s.9¾d.
1385-6	18	18	20s.	22s.3¾d.
1386-7	23	-	-	-
1387-8	16	11	20s.	19s.1d.
1388-9	12	-	-	-
1389-90	14	-	-	-
1390-1	9	-	-	-
1391-2	10	8	20s.	20s.10d.
1392-3	15	14	20s.	26s.8d.
1393-4	23	-	-	-
1394-5	18	-	-	-
1395-6	20	16	20s.	22s.6d.
1396-7	9	-	-	-
1397-8	8	-	-	-
1398-9	6	5	23s.4d.	34s.
1399-1400	11	11	20s.	22s.1½d.
1400-1	12	13	20s.	24s.7½d.
1401-2	12	-	-	-
1402-3	31	-	-	-
1403-4	11	6	20s.	21s.8d.
1404-5	18	18	20s.	23s.4½d.

## APPENDIX E (contd.)

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1405-6	22	19	23s.4d.	36s.8 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.
1406-7	71	72	20s.	21s.10 d.
1407-8	10	-	-	-
1408-9	7	-	-	-
1409-10	10	1	(26s.8d.)	(26s.8d.)
1410-11	7	-	-	-
1411-12	13	12	23s.4d./26s.8d.	24s.2d.
1412-13	18	-	-	-
1413-14	18	18	20s.	22s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1414-15	23	-	-	-
1415-16	12	-	-	-
1416-17	9	8	20s.	27s.6d.
1417-18	5	-	-	-
1418-19	25	25	20s.	20s.1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1419-20	16	16	20s.	21s.10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1420-1	9	-	-	-
1421-2	33	-	-	-
1422-3	21	21	20s.	22s.6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1423-4	13	12	20s.	21s.1 $\frac{1}{4}$ d.
1424-5	20	19	20s.	20s.9 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1425-6	26	26	20s.	20s.1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1426-7	8	8	20s.	20s.11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1427-8	8	7	20s.	20s.11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1428-9	16	10	20s.	23s.
1429-30	17	16	20s.	23s.8 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.
1430-1	34	-	-	-
1431-2	11	-	-	-
1432-3	10	10	20s.	22s.4d.
1433-4	9	-	-	-
1434-5	15	15	20s.	24s.
1435-6	7	7	20s.	20s.11 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1436-7	5	1	(26s.8d.)	(26s.8d.)
1437-8	13	13	20s.	20s.
1438-9	16	16	20s.	22s.2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1439-40	7	7	20s.	20s.
1440-1	12	-	-	-
1441-2	19	-	-	-
1442-3	13	12	20s.	21s.10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1443-4	9	9	20s.	20s.9d.
1444-5	18	17	20s.	20s.5d.
1445-6	12	-	-	-
1446-7	19	2	20s.	20s.
1447-8	7	7	23s.4d.	23s.4d.
1448-9	9	10	23s.4d.	25s.4d.



## APPENDIX E (contd.)

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1449-50	7	-	-	-
1450-1	1	-	-	-
1450-1	16	16	20s.	22s.8d.
1452-3	18	18	20s.	20s.7 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.
1453-4	6	-	-	-
1454-5	21	-	-	-
1455-6	8	8	20s.	21s.8d.
1456-7	4	4	26s.8d.	25s.
1457-8	15	4	20s.	21s.8d.
1458-9	10	10	20s.	22s.
1459-60	10	10	20s.	23s.8 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1460-1	5	5	20s.	20s.8d.
1461-2	0	-	-	-
1462-3	7	-	-	-
1463-4	9	9	23s.4d.	25s.11d.
1464-5	6	-	-	-
1465-6	7	-	-	-
1466-7	8	8	26s.8d.	25s.10d.
1467-8	11	-	-	-
1468-9	6	-	-	-
1469-70	6	-	-	-
1470-1	3	3	23s.4d.	23s.4d.
1471-2	4	-	-	-
1472-3	6	-	-	-
1473-4	1	1	(23s.4d.)	(23s.4d.)
1474-5	3	-	-	-
1475-6	6	-	-	-
1476-7	12	12	23s.4d.	27s.2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d.
1477-8	1	1	(26s.8d.)	(26s.8d.)
1478-9	15	-	-	-
1479-80	5	-	-	-
1480-1	5	5	33s.4d.	29s.4d.
1481-2	5	5	23s.4d./26s.8d.	26s.
1482-3	5	-	-	-
1483-4	2	-	-	-
1484-5	3	3	23s.4d.	23s.4d.
1485-6	11	-	-	-
1486-7	13	-	-	-
1487-8	5	-	-	-
1488-9	13	-	-	-
1489-90	9	-	-	-
1490-1	5	-	-	-
1491-2	2	-	-	-

## APPENDIX E (contd.)

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1492-3	8	-	-	-
1493-4	1	-	-	-
1494-5	0	-	-	-
1495-6	5	-	-	-
1496-7	4	-	-	-
1497-8	2	-	-	-
1498-9	5	-	-	-
1499-1500	7	-	-	-
1500-1	1	-	-	-
1501-2	4	-	-	-
1502-3	7	-	-	-
1503-4	11	-	-	-
1504-5	11	-	-	-
1505-6	3	-	-	-
1506-7	9	-	-	-
1507-8	9	-	-	-
1508-9	9	-	-	-
1509-10	5	11	23s.4d.	22s.8d.
1510-11	1	5	23s.4d.	23s.4d.
1511-12	1	-	-	-
1512-13	10	9	20s.	20s.9d.
1513-14	18	-	-	-
1514-15	12	12	20s.	22s.2½d.
1515-16	9	10 <sup>a</sup>	20s.	17s.2½d.
1516-17	4	4 <sup>b</sup>	20s.	20s.
1517-18	8	8 <sup>b</sup>	20s.	20s.
1518-19	2	2	20s.	20s.
1519-20	10	11 <sup>c</sup>	20s.	19s.4d.
1520-1	3	2 <sup>d</sup>	(13s.4d.)	(13s.4d.)
1521-2	6	6 <sup>d</sup>	20s.	20s.
1522-3	13	13	20s.	20s.
1523-4	4	-	-	-
1524-5	4	3	20s.	17s.9¼d.
1525-6	7	7	20s.	20s.
1526-7	6	6	20s.	20s.
1527-8	6	9	20s.	20s.
1528-9	3	-	-	-
1529-30	6	6	20s.	20s.
1530-1	1	1	(20s.)	(20s.)
1531-2	11	11	20s.	20s.
1532-3	10	6	20s.	18s.8d.
1533-4	6	7	20s.	18s.4d.
1534-5	10	10	20s.	20s.

a includes 3 re-admissions

b includes 1 re-admission

c includes 1 re-admission

d includes 1 re-admission

APPENDIX E (contd.)

Year	No. of Admissions		Fines	
	Oath Book	Court Rolls	Mode	Mean
1535-6	9	9	20s.	20s.
1536-7	9	9	20s.	20s.
1537-8	11	11	20s.	20s.
1538-9	0	0	-	-
1539-40	8	8	20s.	20s.
1540-1	4	4	20s.	20s.
1541-2	17	13 <sup>a</sup>	20s.	20s.
1542-3	8	8	20s.	20s.
1543-4	11	8 <sup>b</sup>	20s.	20s.
1544-5	12	9 <sup>c</sup>	20s.	20s.
1545-6	8	7 <sup>d</sup>	20s.	20s.
1546-7	13	-	-	-
1547-8	5	6	20s.	20s.
1548-9	5	-	-	-
1549-50	24	19 <sup>e</sup>	20s.	20s.
1550-1	15	11 <sup>f</sup>	20s.	20s.
1551-2	4	3	20s.	20s.
1552-3	8	-	-	-
1553-4	9	19	20s.	20s.
1554-5	11	7	20s.	20s.
1555-6	8	8 <sup>g</sup>	20s.	20s.
1556-7	28	-	-	-
1557-8	32	32 <sup>h</sup>	30s.	28s.10d.
1558-9	15	15	30s.	37s.11½d.
1559-60	21	21	30s.	33s.1d.

(Sources: Oath Book, Court Rolls)

Note 1: Major discrepancies between Oath Book and Court Roll admission figures (e.g. 1361-2, 1446-7 etc.) result from damaged or incomplete rolls.

Note 2: Dates given in the style found in the original documents, based on the accounting year Michaelmas to Michaelmas.

a. plus 6 town-born swearings  
 b. plus 3 town-born swearings  
 c. plus 3 town-born swearings  
 d. plus 1 town-born swearing

e. plus 3 town-born swearings  
 f. plus 3 town-born swearings  
 g. plus 1 town-born swearing  
 h. includes 1 readmission

APPENDIX F: BURGESS OCCUPATIONS

The recorded occupations of new burgesses within the categories employed in Figure XXXV are as follows:-

<u>Textiles</u>		<u>Clothing</u>	
Weavers	25	Tailors	23
Fullers	16	Cappers	5
Clothiers	12	Pelterers	5
Dyers	12		
Shearmen	11	<u>Leather</u>	
Cardmakers	3	Shoemakers	14
Woolmongers	3	Glovers	13
Heyrer	1	Cordwainers	9
Clothmaker	1	Tanners	6
		Barkers	4
<u>Metals</u>		Saddlers	2
Smiths	21	Skinner	2
Plumbers	4	Curriers	2
Pewterers	4	Pouchmakers	2
Goldsmiths	3	Cobbler	1
'Ferours'	2		
Pewterers	3	<u>Building</u>	
Armourer	1	Carpenters	14
Lokeyer	1	Glaziers	2
Spurrier	1	Tiler	1
Brasier	1	Mason	1
Ironmonger	1	Joiner	1
<u>Woodwork</u>		<u>Food and Drink</u>	
Coopers	4	Butchers	46
Bowyers	2	Bakers	25
Turners	2	Beerbrewers	5
Sawyers	2	Innkeepers	5
Fletcher	1	Millers	3
Joiner	1	Cooks	2
Wheelwright	1	Fishmongers	2
Woodsetter	1		
Woodwright	1	<u>Professional</u>	
		Clerics	20
<u>Transport</u>		Clerks	9
Sailors	25	Barbers	7
Carriers	3	Apothecaries	2
Waterman	1	Surgeons	2
Carter	1	Apparitors	2
		Scrivener	1
		Town Clerk	1

APPENDIX F (contd.)

Agricultural

Yeoman	9
Husbandman	6
Shepherd	2
Town Cowman	1

Distributive

Merchants	20
Mercers	9
Grocers	6
Haberdashers	4
Chandlers	3
Spicers	2
Linen Draper	1
Draper	1

Miscellaneous

Labourers	4
Pedders	2
Corkmaker	1
Wright	1
Town Minstrel	1
Wait	1
Bookbinder	1

(Source: Oath Book, Court Rolls)

APPENDIX G: BURGESSES FROM OUTWITH ESSEX AND SUFFOLK  
(ENGLAND AND WALES)

County	1381 to 1410	1411 to 1440	1441 to 1470	1471 to 1500	1501 to 1530	1531 to 1560	Total
<b>ENGLAND</b>							
Beds.	2	1	2	0	0	0	5
Berks.	1	1	0	0	0	1	3
Bucks.	2	2	1	3	1	3	12
Cambs.	8	11	3	0	0	1	23
Ches.	0	2	0	0	0	3	5
Cornwall	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Cumb.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Derbys.	0	1	0	2	0	4	7
Devon	1	1	2	0	3	3	10
Dorset	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Durham	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Gloucs.	3	1	1	1	1	1	8
Hants.	2	2	0	0	1	4	9
Heref.	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Herts.	2	4	3	1	3	5	18
Hunts.	2	0	0	0	1	0	3
Kent	7	7	3	4	8	2	31
Lancs.	1	1	3	0	0	6	11
Leics.	1	1	1	0	0	6	9
Lincs.	9	5	6	9	9	2	40
Middx.	8	3	5	4	5	6	31
Norfolk	22	15	27	10	9	7	90
N'hants.	2	2	2	0	0	1	7
Northumb.	2	1	1	2	3	5	14
Notts.	2	1	1	2	1	2	9
Oxfds.	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
Rutland	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Salop.	1	1	0	1	1	2	6
Somerset	2	4	1	1	2	0	10
Staffs.	1	1	0	0	2	5	9
Surrey	2	3	0	0	0	0	5
Sussex	1	4	3	0	0	1	9
Warw.	1	0	0	0	1	3	5
Westm.	0	0	1	0	1	3	5
Wilts.	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
Worcs.	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Yorks.	4	5	10	5	6	21	51
WALES	0	1	1	0	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>466</b>

(Source: Oath Book, Court Rolls)

## Notes and References

### Chapter 1: Town and Country in the Later Middle Ages

1. Hill, especially chapters 12 and 13.
2. Carus-Wilson, 1963, p.31.
3. See, e.g. Bolton, p.253; Platt, pp.112-4.
4. Dobson, 1977; Phythian-Adams, 1978, 1979.
5. Thorold Rogers, p.41.
6. Salter, p.87.
7. Carus-Wilson, 1952, pp.422-3; cf. 1941, passim.
8. Bartlett, p.29.
9. Thirsk, p.74.
10. Pelham, 1958.
11. Hibbert, p.228.
12. Salzman, 1931, p.88.
13. Dobb, pp.121-2.
14. *ibid.*, p.161.
15. Dobson, *op. cit.*, p.5.
16. *ibid.*, pp.19-20.
17. *ibid.*, p.20.
18. Phythian-Adams, 1978, pp.167-9; 1979, p.7ff.
19. 1979, p.17.
20. 1978, pp.173-4; 1979, pp.47-8, 251-2.
21. 1979, p.40.
22. e.g. Mendels; Kriedte et al.
23. e.g. Miskimin.
24. *ibid.*, p.90.
25. Corfield, p.225.



26. *ibid.*, p.226.
27. Clark and Slack, p.158.
28. *ibid.*
29. Palliser, 1983, p.231.
30. Bridbury, 1975; 1981; 1982.
31. Bridbury, 1975, p.40.
32. *ibid.*, p.xvi et seq.
33. *ibid.*, pp.xix-xx.
34. *ibid.*, p.25ff.
35. Bridbury, 1981, p.1.
36. 1975, p.82, *passim*; 1981, *passim*.
37. 1981, pp.3-17; 1975, pp.52, 74.
38. *ibid.*
39. Colchester appears the least impressive of Bridbury's graphed examples; he argues that the apparent decline in numbers here was attributable to a change in recording procedures, with a progressive omission of town-born men after c.1400 (Bridbury, 1975, p.65; cf. Chapter 6, below).
40. Bridbury, 1981, pp.3-4.
41. 1975, p.64.
42. *ibid.*, p.44.
43. *ibid.*, p.47.
44. *ibid.*, p.48ff.
45. p.47.
46. 1981, p.73.
47. *ibid.*, pp.83.
48. *ibid.*, p.82.
49. *ibid.*, p.70.
50. *ibid.*, p.24.
51. *ibid.*, p.59.

52. 1975, pp.111-3.
53. *ibid.*, p.111.
54. *ibid.*, pp.79-80.
55. *ibid.*, pp.112-3.
56. *ibid.*, p.81; what many local historians have 'discovered', or believe they have discovered, in the years since the publication of Economic Growth is of course less welcome for Bridbury, with the multiplication of instances of alleged decline.
57. *ibid.*
58. 1981, p.22.
59. 1975, p.42.
60. *ibid.*, p.75.
61. 1981, pp.5-6.
62. *ibid.*, p.16.
63. *ibid.*, p.24; on civic building, see the comments of Tittler (1984) and rejoinder by Bridbury (1984).
64. R.H. Britnell's Growth and Decline in Colchester, 1300-1525 (Cambridge, 1986) appeared when the text of the present study was substantially completed. No attempt has been made to compare Britnell's findings or arguments with those presented here.

Chapter 2: Lay Subsidies and the Distribution of Wealth

1. see, for example, Darby et al. and discussion by Stanley, 1980.
2. Bridbury, 1975, p.79, and see the numerous citations in Chapter 1 above.
3. Willard, 1934, pp.84-5.
4. Gaydon, p.xxi.
5. Glasscock, pp.xiv-xxvi.
6. Rotuli Parliamentorum, vol. I, pp.228-265; Rickword, 1906, p.126f.
7. Willard, *op. cit.*, p.85.

8. Sheail, pp.112-3; Cornwall, p.12ff.
9. As does, for example Higgs in an otherwise admirable review of the economy of Tudor Colchester. Bridbury, of course, does not fall into this obvious trap.
10. Bridbury, 1975, pp.78-9.
11. Dobson, 1977, p.19.
12. *ibid.*
13. Rigby, 1979, p.48.
14. *ibid.*, p.50; the findings of Schofield (p.492) that of c.6,200 individuals taxed in Buckinghamshire, Sussex and Suffolk, only 2% were assessed on lands, paying 7% of the total tax, are cited in support of the argument. It must also be borne in mind that taxation of land was an alternative rather than addition to taxation of moveable goods.
15. *ibid.*, p.49.
16. *ibid.*, pp.51-4; cf. Bridbury, 1975, pp.111-3.
17. *ibid.*, p.54.
18. Hadwin, 1983, p.212.
19. *ibid.*, p.213.
20. In fairness it must be recognised that the 1524-5 subsidy is beyond the scope of Hadwin's paper, which concentrates on the Edwardian taxes. A recent renewal of the debate by Rigby, Bridbury and Hadwin (all 1986) reiterates the arguments without breaking much new ground.
21. Miller, p.70; see Chapter 4 below.
22. *op. cit.*
23. Willard, 1933 (p.431) shows that Colchester stood alone as a tax borough in all the previous dual-rate taxes, with the exception of 1306, when Newport was also given this status (as opposed to 'ancient demesne'). The inconsistency of the practices is shown by the fact that Cornwall had at various dates no fewer than 23 tax boroughs (*ibid.*, p.430).
24. Bridbury, 1975, pp.111-3.
25. In fact Bridbury uses Colchester alone and does not include the other two wills taxed at 1/10th in his calculation.
26. Stanley, 1982, p.237ff.

27. 1327 figures calculated from M.E.C., pp.16-17, 51, 104, 107; for 1334 see Glasscock, op.cit., pp.79-89.
28. Bridbury's figure is for 'town' as a percentage of 'country' rather than of county total. It seems more sensible to use the county total and this will be done here; in 1334 the figure was 1.43%. Assessments and payments are interchangeable in 1327 for the purposes of calculation, as only the single rate was operative. Actual payments in 1334 work out as 2.17% of the county total. (M.E.C., op. cit., Glasscock, op. cit.).
29. Poos, pp.527-8.
30. 11,333 acres.
31. PRO, E179/108/154, 174, 178, 204.
32. PRO, E179/108/162, 169.
33. PRO, E179/108/162.
34. Cornwall, op. cit.
35. 'Crepping Hall' in modern times; see E.P.N.S., Essex, p.383.
36. or five if Wivenhoe is counted.
37. PRO, E179/180/132, 134, 136.
38. V.C.H., Essex, II, pp.259-66; Emmison, pp.59-60.
39. PRO, E179/108/154; Darnell features in a Star Chamber petition, accused of threatening a mercer of the town (PRO, STAC2, 19/87).
40. V.C.H., Essex, II, p.276.
41. Rackham, pp.103-7.
42. Walker, p.6.
43. *ibid.*
44. PRO, E179/108/154.
45. Hoskins, 1963, pp.83-4.
46. The incompleteness of the Tendring returns - 1525 is again used for this hundred - must be borne in mind. Sources as at notes 31 and 32 above.
47. How the collectors decided that a person had no wages, rather than no goods, is by no means clear.

48. Hoskins, pp.81-2.
49. The total of tax paid at Dedham increases by only £1 between 1524 and 1525. The earlier year's returns are again used as more realistic assessment although less comprehensive.
50. see 31 and 32 above.
51. PRO, E179/108/163.
52. B.L., Stowe MSS, 831, folios 1-27; a note in Morant's handwriting ascribes the document to 'taxation temp. Hen VIII'.
53. Also lost are Greenstead, Mile End, West Donyland and St Martins.
54. The other eight 'Lands' assessments in the 1524 Exchequer account either have only 'Lands' assessments in the 'collectors book', or cannot be located there.

Chapter 3: Colchester 1310-1560: Growth or Decline?

1. O.B., pp.2-4.
2. C.C.R., 16/67, p.67.
3. *ibid.*, 15/66, p.4.
4. *ibid.*, 16/68, pp.7, 11.
5. *ibid.*, 16/69, p.51.
6. *ibid.*, 17/70, pp. 4, 7.
7. *ibid.*, 17/71, p.10.
8. *ibid.*, 17/72, p.61.
9. *ibid.*, 17/72, p.103.
10. *ibid.*, 18/74, pp.4, 129.
11. *ibid.*, 18/75, p.11.
12. *ibid.*, 19/76, pp. 8, 9, 11.
13. *ibid.*, 19/78, p.55.
14. *ibid.*, 19/79, p.79; 20/81, p.67.
15. *ibid.*, 20/82, p.23.

16. *ibid.*, 20/83, p.27.
17. *ibid.*, 21/88, p.54.
18. *ibid.*, 21/89, p.4.
19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*, 20/84, p.6.
21. *ibid.*, 22/104, p.5.
22. *ibid.*, 23/111, pp.5, 7, 35.
23. *ibid.*, 24/115, pp.3, 7.
24. *ibid.*, 24/116, p.4.
25. *ibid.*, 24/119, p.29.
26. *ibid.*, 24/122, pp.7, 9.
27. *ibid.*, 25/126, p.15.
28. *ibid.*, 15/65, p.70.
29. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.5.
30. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.89.
31. *ibid.*, 16/68, pp.5, 9.
32. *ibid.*, 17/70, p.4.
33. *ibid.*, 18/74, p.130.
34. *ibid.*, 19/76, p.107.
35. *ibid.*, 19/76, pp.34-5.
36. *ibid.*, 18/74, p.88.
37. *ibid.*, 19/80, p.5.
38. *ibid.*, 19/80, p.153.
39. Jusserand, 1889, pp.66, 64.
40. O.B., pp.43-4.
41. B.L., Stowe MSS., 829, folio 12ff.
42. O.B., pp.31-6.
43. C.C.R., I, p.81.

44. Including one Nicholas Moore, a source of trouble in the town for some time, who had been committed at Brentwood "for beyng of counsell to the insureccone" (Stowe MSS, op. cit.).
45. £35, plus augmentation for the possession of Kingswoodheath to the north of the borough (cf. Charters, p.62).
46. B.L. Stowe MSS, 891, ff28-9; it will be recalled that East Bridge was described as ruinous in 1544-5.
47. *ibid.*
48. Evasion of the office of Alderman became a regular feature of Colchester life early in the reign of Elizabeth (C.C.R., 26/137, p.1; 26/138, p.1).
49. The fact that a single Chamberlain now held office, instead of two, obviously must have exacerbated whatever financial problems there were.
50. C.C.R., 20/74, p.8.
51. *ibid.*, 20/85, p.8.
52. *ibid.*, 21/92, p.2.
53. *ibid.*, 21/93, pp.38-9.
54. *ibid.*, 21/94, p.3.
55. Phelps Brown and Hopkins, p.29.
56. C.C.R., 26/129, p.1.
57. *ibid.*, 26/136, p.1.
58. *ibid.*, 26/137, p.2.
59. *ibid.*, 26/138, p.2.
60. Charters, p.2.
61. *ibid.*, pp.37, 47-8.
62. R.P.B., p.70; O.B., p.6.
63. C.C.R., 20/83, p.37.
64. O.B., pp.6-10.
65. C.C.R., II, p.105.
66. Morant, vol. II, App. V.



67. There is no evidence to suggest that the takers of the lease of tolls were 'pressed' into the position in the manner that Chamberlains clearly sometimes were; they are often, in the early rolls, described as having been "elected" but no record of refusal to serve as Farmer is found; whether 'competitive tendering' for the farm was invited is also unknown.
68. C.C.R., I, pp.3, 61.
69. R.P.B., p.5.
70. C.C.R., I, p.191.
71. *ibid.*, p.219, II, p.4.
72. *ibid.*, II, p.37.
73. R.P.B., p.6.
74. *ibid.*, pp.11-12.
75. This is assuming that the Farmer kept, for his own payment and for that of his deputies, any sums collected over and above the amount compacted with borough. The system of 'farming' would have had little point had this not been the case.
76. R.P.B., pp.6, 12.
77. *ibid.*, pp.157-8.
78. *ibid.*, pp.6-7.
79. *ibid.*, p.12.
80. C.C.R., 5/25, p.10.
81. *ibid.*, 6/26, p.39.
82. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.9.
83. *ibid.*, 7/28, p.9.
84. *ibid.*, 7/29, p.30.
85. *ibid.*, 7/30, pp.13, 16.
86. *ibid.*, 7/31, p.14. The regular leases of the wool-hall and stalls commence in the 1380s, but are discussed separately below.
87. *ibid.*, 8/34, p.2.
88. *ibid.*, 8/36, p.2.
89. *ibid.*, 8/38, p.3.

90. *ibid.*, 8/39, p.2.
91. *ibid.*, 10/41, pp.3-4.
92. *ibid.*, 10/42, pp.3-4; 10/43, pp.4-5.
93. *ibid.*, 11/46, pp.2-3.
94. *ibid.*, 11/49, pp.3-4.
95. *ibid.*, 11/50, p.4.
96. *ibid.*, 13/56, pp.3-4.
97. *ibid.*, 14/57, pp.2-3.
98. *ibid.*, 14/58, p.3.
99. *ibid.*, 14/59, 2.
100. *ibid.*, 14/60, p.2.
101. *ibid.*, 15/63, p.2.
102. *ibid.*, 15/64, pp.2-3.
103. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.2.
104. *ibid.*, 16/68, p.3.
105. *ibid.*, 17/70, p.2.
106. *ibid.*, 17/72, p.3.
107. as 103-5.
108. as 106.
109. *ibid.*, 18/74, p.3.
110. *ibid.*, 18/75, p.3.
111. *ibid.*, 19/76, pp.3-4.
112. *ibid.*, 19/77, p.3.
113. *ibid.*, 19/79, p.3.
114. *ibid.*, 19/80, p.3.
115. *ibid.*, 20/82, p.3.
116. In 1483-4 an annual rent of £10 was granted "receivable of and from" the cellar and hall, the town tolls etc., to a total of £40 (*ibid.*, 20/81, p.46).

117. R.P.B., p.57.
118. *ibid.*, p.58.
119. C.C.R., 21/88, p.17.
120. *ibid.*, p.50.
121. *ibid.*, 21/89, pp.18-19.
122. *ibid.*, 21/90, pp.2-3.
123. *ibid.*, 21/91, p.2.
124. *ibid.*, 21/93, p.3.
125. *ibid.*, 21/94, p.4.
126. *ibid.*, 21/88, p.2.
127. PRO, 28 Aylofffe.
128. Unless the town tolls had declined much earlier and the woolhall lease come to make up the bulk of the joint valuation; this is not impossible to believe, but is impossible to prove. Costs of collection would, of course, have been saved by accepting Cristmas's legacy.
129. B.L., Stowe MSS 29, folio 14.
130. C.C.R., 24/121, p.102.
131. A John Wode still held the office of Water Bailiff in 1567-8, when half the entry fine of three of the nine fine-paying burgess was said to be due to him; there seems no reason for the distinction - these three came from Yorkshire, Fingringhoe (Essex) and Hadleigh (Suffolk) (C.C.R., 26/133, pp. 9, 20).
132. C.C.R. 25/124, p.58.
133. Described as 'John Cole, tailor' in the note of this agreement in the Oath Book. A John Cole, tailor, born at 'Colnes Walton Suffolk' (?Walton) entered the burgage in 1552-3. (O.B. p.171).
134. C.C.R., 25/120, p.55;
135. *ibid.*
136. *ibid.*
137. *ibid.*
138. *ibid.*, p.59.

139. For full treatment of the admission trend, see Chapter 6 below.
140. E.P.N.S., Essex, p.376; Morant, II, p.23.
141. McCallum, p.7.
142. Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1324-7, p.119; 1338-40, p.206; 1345-8, p.282; 1350-4, p.130; 1361-4, pp.487, 511, 52; Cal. Close Rolls, 1307-13, p.161; 1334-43, p.132.
143. Cal. Close Rolls, 1343-6, p.478.
144. V.C.H., II, p.259ff.
145. Wren, 1976, p.192. Wren perhaps fails to take into account the small size of sea-going vessels in the later middle ages, the period of the "ascendancy of the small ship", when craft of 30-50 tons regularly undertook long-distance voyages (Scammell, pp.332-4).
146. B.L., Stowe MSS., 828, folio 67.
147. Charters, p.48.
148. C.C.R., I, p.234.
149. C.C.R., III, pp.63, 94.
150. O.B., pp.28-9.
151. C.C.R., 15/55, p.13.
152. *ibid.*, 16/65, p.7; 16/67, p.2.
153. *ibid.*, 14/57, p.10.
154. *ibid.*, 15/65, p.79.
155. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.6.
156. Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1446-52, p.579; 1452-61, p.223.
157. C.C.R., 20/86, pp.40-1.
158. *ibid.*, 22/104, p.58.
159. *ibid.*, 22/106, p.5.
160. *ibid.*, 22/112, p.8.
161. *ibid.*, 23/113, p.16.
162. *ibid.*, 24/116, p.3.

163. PRO, 28 Aylofffe, B.L. Stowe MSS, op. cit.
164. Benham incorrectly dates this entry to 1536, apparently on the basis of the surnames of the Bailiffs therein referred to; Benjamin Clare and Robert Flyngaunt were bailiffs in 1548, John Clare and Thomas Flyngaunt in 1536. (R.P.B., p.164).
165. *ibid.*, pp.164-5.
166. *ibid.*
167. B.L. Stowe MSS, 829, folios 26ff.
168. C.C.R. 25/120, pp.42-8.
169. Morant, II, p.25.
170. *ibid.*
171. E.R.O., D/ABW, 8/83.
172. Dickin, p.81.
173. *ibid.*
174. C.C.R., 22/102, p.37.
175. Poos, p.529.
176. PRO, E179/107/54.
177. Russell, p.142; Postan, p.33; Poos, op. cit.
178. Rickword, 1906, p.149; M.E.C., p.iii.
179. Pound, 1966, p.49.
180. B.L., Stowe MSS, 831, folios 1-27.
181. *ibid.*
182. Clark, p.32.
183. B.L. Stowe MSS, 828, folios 14-27.
184. R.P.B., pp.87-92.
185. Doolittle, p.31.
186. Ward, pp.87-8.

187. Few Colchester wills survive before this date, not sufficient to form a satisfactory sample. All the pre-1555 Colchester wills at the Essex Record Office (classes D/ACR and D/ABW) have been examined.
188. E.R.O., D/ABW, 3/59.
189. E.R.O., D/ABW, 8/39.
190. E.R.O., D/ABW, 8/245.
191. E.R.O., D/ABW, 37/64.
192. E.R.O., D/ABW, 23/42.
193. E.R.O., D/ABW, 2/197.
194. E.R.O., Lawhundred and Foreign Court Book, Colchester, 7-13 Eliz., folio 367d ff.

Chapter 4: The Textile Industry down to 1400 A.D.

1. e.g. Lander, p.9.
2. For a review of the often contradictory literature on the urban-rural dichotomy, see Langton and Hoppe.
3. Cited in Althusser and Balibar, p.279. The most recent English translation renders this more prosaically as "the economic structure of feudal society" (Marx and Engels, p.145).
4. Kriedte et al., pp.6-7.
5. see e.g. Power; McClenaghan; Heaton; Dymond and Betterton.
6. e.g. Salzman; Kramer; Toulmin Smith; Lipson; Unwin.
7. Bridbury, 1982, passim; Bartlett, p.29.
8. Gray; Power and Postan; Carus-Wilson, 1967, inter alia.
9. Miller, p.70.
10. R.P.B., p.59.
11. Reaney, p.69; Cunningham, p.640
12. V.C.H., Suffolk, II, pp.254-5.
13. Bridbury, 1962, p.81; Miller, op. cit.
14. Rickword, 1900, p.125.

15. Woodger, p.72.
16. *ibid.* Narrow cloths continued to be made at later periods in Colchester, but appear to have been much less important than broadcloths (see below).
17. Rickword, 1906, p.50.
18. M.E.C., pp.14-17.
19. Furthermore, surnames could be inherited by the early fourteenth century, and name inheritance was by no means rare even in the thirteenth (Fransson, p.33ff).
20. V.C.H., Essex, II, p.381.
21. Reaney, *op. cit.*, is clearly wrong to state that the wool fair was "established" in 1373.
22. R.P.B., pp.6-7, 9-10 and see Chapter 3 above.
23. C.C.R., I, pp.101-2.
24. *ibid.*, p.19.
25. C.C.R., I, pp.55, 97, 197, 212; O.B., pp.46, 49, 50, 52, 54, 55.
26. Fransson, p.109.
27. *ibid.*, p.110.
28. *ibid.*, p.116.
29. O.B., pp.49-54.
30. See Chapter 6 below.
31. C.C.R., I, p.75.
32. Cal. Close Rolls, 1343-6, p.478.
33. *ibid.*, 1341-3, p.204.
34. Cal. Patent Rolls, 1343-5, p.539.
35. C.C.R., I, p.234.
36. *ibid.*
37. C.C.R., II, p.203.
38. see below.

39. C.C.R., II, p.78.
40. *ibid.*, p.80.
41. *ibid.*, p.68.
42. *ibid.*, p.50.
43. *ibid.*, p.97.
44. *ibid.*, p.127.
45. C.C.R., III, pp.130, 132.
46. *ibid.*, p.69. The 'decena', or half broad-cloth, appears to have been Colchester's specialism at this period.
47. C.C.R., II, pp.102, 163; III, pp.86-138.
48. see Chapter 6 below.
49. R.P.B., pp.18-20, 23-5.
50. C.C.R., 6/27, p.116.
51. *ibid.*, 5/24, p.59; 6/27, p.116.
52. Bridbury, 1982, pp.77-8.
53. C.C.R., 6/26, p.103.
54. *ibid.*, p.35.
55. *ibid.*, 5/24, p.134.
56. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.73.
57. C.C.R., 6/26, p.33.
58. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.68.
59. *ibid.*, 7/31m p.112.
60. *ibid.*, 8/33, p.12.
61. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.100.
62. *ibid.*, p.128.
63. *ibid.*, pp.83-4.
64. *ibid.*, 5/24, p.114.
65. *ibid.*, 5/25, p.67.



66. *ibid.*, pp.79, 96.
67. *ibid.*, 6/26, p.143.
68. *ibid.*, 8/35, p.136.
69. *ibid.*, 8/33, p.66.
70. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.25.
71. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.84.
72. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.19.
73. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.37.
74. e.g. *ibid.*, 7/28, pp.52, 59.
75. *ibid.*, p.144.
76. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.38.
77. In 1387-8 a John Koc leased the "new mill" at the Hythe for two years for 20 marks; one of the sureties was provided by John Curteys (C.C.R., 6/26, p.39.).
78. *ibid.*, 6/26, p.4. One self-styled 'mercier' was William Rokele, who had to answer a charge, in the same year, of owing payment for £44.16.8d cloth "by two tallies made and sealed" (*ibid.*, 6/26, p.158).
79. *ibid.*, p.157.
80. Cal. Patent Rolls, 1391-6, p.26.
81. *ibid.*
82. *ibid.*, 1401-5, pp.337, 341.
83. Bridbury, 1982, pp.24, 52.
84. *ibid.*, p.81.
85. Phythian-Adams, 1979, p.49.
86. C.C.R., 8/32, p.65.
87. *ibid.*, 8/35, p.14.
88. *ibid.*, 5/25, pp.110-117.
89. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.73.
90. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.132.

91. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.118.
92. *ibid.*, 6/27, p.167.
93. *ibid.*, 7/28, p.57.
94. *ibid.*, 7/28, p.16.
95. *ibid.*, 5/23, p.39.
96. *ibid.*, 5/24, p.62.
97. *ibid.*, 8/32, p.29.
98. *ibid.*, 7/30, p.107.
99. *ibid.*, 6/26, p.179.
100. *ibid.*, 7/29, p.100.
101. *ibid.*, 7/31, 24.
102. *op. cit.*, p.43.
103. 1923, p.223.
104. *op. cit.*
105. *op. cit.*
106. *op. cit.*, pp.68-88.
107. *Economic History Review*, 1929, pp.114-23.
108. With notable exceptions, such as Pelham, 1936, 1952, and Mitchell. Pelham believed fraudulence to be a fifteenth century problem, and produced distribution maps from the later fourteenth century returns (1936, 248ff). Similarly, Mitchell compared some fifteenth century returns with other evidence including wills, *Inquisitiones Post Mortem* and lay subsidies, and concluded that these told a broadly similar story as to the location of the textile industry (pp.240-5).
109. Thornton, pp.148-9.
110. *op. cit.*
111. 1982, p.73.
112. Gray, p.34; table reproduced in Bridbury, 1982, p.114.
113. PRO, E101/342/6.
114. PRO, E101/667/10.
115. PRO, E101/342/9; O.B., pp.72-85.

116. Statutes of the Realm, vol. ii, p.175. A cloth of assize was to be 2 yards by 1 yards.
117. *ibid.*, 27 Edw III, Stat. 1, c.4; cf. 17 Ric II, c2. The half-cloth was known in Colchester as a 'decena', being half-length but of assize breadth.
118. Gray, *op. cit.*, p.28.
119. Although in the fourth list Dawe's name appears three times; there are a number of these multiple appearances, particularly in the fourth list.
120. Coleman, p.78.
121. Cipolla, p.176.
122. Although this figure represents nearly eleven miles of cloth.
123. Bridbury, 1982, p.58.
124. *ibid.*, pp.23-4.
125. PRO, E101/342/9.
126. Lipson, *op. cit.*; Power, *op. cit.*
127. Subsidy is used for these calculations, as these payments bear a constant relation to number of cloths, whereas alunage proper (aulnager's fee) shows occasional eccentricities.
128. Rendall, p.25ff.
129. cf. V.C.H., Essex, vol. ii, pp.380-401.
130. *ibid.*
131. *ibid.*
132. cited by Heaton, p.181.
133. cited by Lowe, p.89.
134. PRO, E101/343/5.
135. PRO, E101/343/6.
136. PRO, E179/107/68, 49.
137. The other places named are Kirby, Clacton and Manningtree, all in Tendring Hundred.
138. PRO, E101/342/13.
139. R.P.B., p.59.

140. Bridbury, 1982, p.67.
141. In the 1377 poll tax 2,955 individuals over 14 years old were taxed at Colchester, compared to 3,226 at Salisbury (Russell, p.142).
142. op. cit., p.70ff.

Chapter 5: The Textile Industry 1400-1560

1. C.C.R., 10/41, p.66.
2. R.P.B., pp.23-5.
3. C.C.R., 15/64, p.12.
4. ibid., 16/69, p.24.
5. ibid., 18/73, p.151.
6. ibid., 16/69, p.120.
7. ibid., 10/41, p.66.
8. ibid., 11/47, p.22.
9. ibid., 14/57, p.19.
10. ibid., 15/63, p.14.
11. ibid., 13/52, p.60.
12. ibid., 16/68, p.38.
13. ibid., 19/78, p.76.
14. ibid., 17/70, p.41.
15. ibid., 17/70, p.73.
16. ibid., 18/73, p.10.
17. ibid., 15/64, pp.21, 15, 28.
18. Cal. Patent Rolls, 1446-52, p.579.
19. ibid., 1452-61, p.223, 4.
20. C.C.R., 16/68, p.19.
21. ibid., 17/70, p.93.
22. ibid., 17/70, p.100.

23. *ibid.*, 11/45, p.109.
24. *ibid.*, 11/46, p.8.
25. *ibid.*, 15/64, p.15.
26. *ibid.*, 17/70, p.18.
27. *ibid.*, p.49.
28. Cal. Patent Rolls, 1441-6, p.383.
29. C.C.R., 10/46, p.13.
30. *ibid.*, 10/45, p.108.
31. *ibid.*, 16/69, p.93.
32. *ibid.*, 19/82, p.51.
33. R.P.B., p.17.
34. C.C.R., 18/73, p.32.
35. *ibid.*, 19/77, p.120.
36. *ibid.*, 16/69, p.138.
37. *ibid.*, 19/51, pp.25-6.
38. R.P.B., p.17.
39. C.C.R., 15/66, p.47.
40. R.P.B., p.59.
41. *ibid.*, p.60.
42. C.C.R., 10/41, 119.
43. *ibid.*, 19/80, p.129.
44. *ibid.*, 10/43, p.93.
45. *ibid.*, 9/40, p.148.
46. *ibid.*, 15/66, p.72.
47. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.40.
48. *ibid.*, 16/69, p.137.
49. *ibid.*, 15/66, p.51.

50. *ibid.*, 17/71, p.106.
51. *ibid.*, 19/77, p.163.
52. *ibid.*, 16/67, p.91.
53. e.g. *ibid.*, 14/58, p.37; 18/75, p.68.
54. *ibid.*, 19/77, p.79.
55. *ibid.*, 19/82, p.17.
56. *ibid.*, 10/43, p.168.
57. *ibid.*, 19/74, p.144.
58. *ibid.*, 11/47, p.22.
59. *ibid.*, 10/43, p.152.
60. *ibid.*, 18/75, p.45.
61. *ibid.*, 14/58, p.17.
62. Benham, 1976, p.93.
63. C.C.R., 14/59, p.7.
64. *ibid.*, 14/62, p.32.
65. *ibid.*, 17/72, p.56.
66. R.P.D., pp.103-4.
67. *ibid.*
68. *ibid.*, p.127.
69. *ibid.*, p.118.
70. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, pp.118-9.
71. see Appendix A.
72. engrossed in C.C.R., 24/120, p.80f.
73. Morant, II, p.25.
74. Benham, p.98.
75. *ibid.*, p.93. It seems probable that the difficulties with the mills and the navigational problems described in Chapter 3 had a common cause in the silting up of the Colne.
76. Published in Dymond and Betterton, Appendix I.

77. Thus, the Sandwich customs accounts of 1465-6 refer to "Short cloths of Colchester, without the grain", presumably identical to the 'half-cloths' found in the 1394-5 aulnage account, as well as to "narrow cloths of Essex" (cited by Burwash, pp.202-3).
78. Naturally, it would be of considerable interest to know whether the 'others' comprised a dozen or so men with perhaps 10-15 cloths each, or 50 or more really small-scale operators.
79. All the individuals named are male, unlike in 1394-5 when several women appear; this points, perhaps, to the phenomenon, observed elsewhere, of the progressive exclusion of women from industry as it grew beyond 'domestic' scale and moved into the arena of capital, regulated by institutions from which women were generally debarred (cf. Howell, M.C., abstract).
80. PRO, E101/343/6, 7.
81. e.g. Hadleigh, 12.5%; Lavenham, 14.0%; the exception is Nayland with Stoke, 34.5%.
82. PRO, E101/342/24.
83. A very few cloths in the account are entered as 'straights' paying 1d subsidy plus aulnage; these have been covered into assize-cloth equivalents for the purpose of tabulation.
84. Power, pp.22-3.
85. PRO, E101/343/5.
86. Wolff, p.292.
87. Coleman and Carus-Wilson, p.98ff.
88. see Endre<sup>a</sup>i and Egan, passim.
89. op. cit.
90. see Chapter 1.
91. Cal. Patent Rolls, 1494-1509, p.60.
92. PRO, 28 Aylofffe.
93. PRO, E179/108/162.
94. Letters and Papers, Hen VIII, 4(ii), no. 3265.
95. C.C.R., 22/99, p.77.
96. McClenaghan, pp.53-7.

97. Letters and Papers, Hen VII, 4(ii), no. 1831.
98. Carus-Wilson and Coleman, op. cit.; Clay, vol. 2, p.108ff.
99. C.C.R., 22/101, p.82.
100. *ibid.*, 20/85, p.5.
101. *ibid.*, 24/118, pp.29-31.
102. *ibid.*, 21/88, p.20.
103. *ibid.*, 23/112, p.19.
104. *ibid.*, 22/102, p.90.
105. *ibid.*, 21/89, p.26; 21/93, p.65.
106. *ibid.*, 21/94, p.80.
107. *ibid.*, 21/89, p.11.
108. Wills, pp.242-2, 245-6.
109. E.R.O., D/ACR, 4/51.
110. *ibid.*, 2/200.
111. *ibid.*, 2/208.
112. *ibid.*, 4/138.
113. *ibid.*, D/ABW, 21/14.
114. *ibid.*, 39/79.
115. *ibid.*, D/ACR, 2/192.
116. *ibid.*, 1/36.
117. Wills, p.238.
118. E.R.O., D/ACR, 2/190.
119. *ibid.*, 2/258.
120. see note 92; Thomas Cristmas was said, in 1517, to have enclosed land in Fingringhoe parish so that the hamlet of 'Darson', which had formerly supported two ploughs and 50 or 60 people was "returned to pasture and grasyng and but a man and his wife kept on yt" (D.O.I., vol. I, p.220).
121. E.R.O., D/ABW, 39/51.



122. see note 118.
123. E.R.O., D/ACR, 2/44.
124. Letters and Papers, Hen VIII, 14, i), pp.408-9.
125. Power, McClenaghan, op. cit.
126. C.C.R., 23/108, pp.5-8.
127. see Pilgrim, pp.255-9.
128. Cal. Assize Records, Essex, Eliz I, p.291
129. ibid.
130. E.E.H., pp.320-2.
131. V.C.H., Essex, II, p.385.
132. E.R.O., D/ACR, 1/2.
133. Kriedte et al., p.45.
134. Phelps Brown and Hopkins, p.77.

Chapter 6: The Colchester Franchise

1. Gross, vol. I, p.124.
2. Tait, pp.232-4.
3. see Maitland, p.196.
4. Dobson, 1973, p.15.
5. Markham and Cox, vol. II, p.313.
6. Leach, p.28.
7. Rowe and Jackson, 1973, p.xviii.
8. Murray, p.224.
9. Phythian-Adams, 1978, p.179.
10. Cooper, vol. I, p.213.
11. Salter, p.44.
12. Hartopp, vol. I, p.xii.
13. Dobson, op. cit., p.15.

14. Toulmin Smith, p.390.
15. 1978, p.179.
16. Hudson and Tingey, vol. II, p.131.
17. as note 15.
18. Hudson and Tingey, op. cit.
19. Bridbury, 1981, p.10.
20. In normal times women could not become free of the town in their own right. Wives and widows of freemen shared in the privileges of the franchise, however, and many women played an active role in the borough economy by this means. The Oath Book records the enrolment of women as burgesses in the years following the first outbreak of plague. This was clearly a response to an unprecedented crisis, and occurs at no other period. Loss of court rolls from these years makes it impossible to tell whether these women paid entry fines, or found pledges in the normal way. (O.B., pp.56-7, 61-2).
21. The terms 'freeman', 'burgess' and 'freeburgers' are interchangeable in later medieval Colchester.
22. e.g. C.C.R., 23/110, p.5; 24/121, p.56.
23. Tait, pp.333-5.
24. O.B., pp.31-6, 39-43.
25. Charters, p.2.
26. e.g. C.C.R., 16/67, p.61.
27. e.g. C.C.R., 8/34, p.8.
28. Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1374-7, p.3.
29. Bridbury, 1982, pp.61, 65-9.
30. C.C.R., II, p.47.
31. name illegible in manuscript.
32. C.C.R., III, p.63.
33. ibid., p.88.
34. 'Admission' seems hardly appropriate, since he was already free and an adult; some form of 'recognition' may have been effected.
35. C.C.R., III, p.105.

36. C.C.R., 8/34, p.50.
37. *ibid.*, 8/36, p.16.
38. R.P.B., p.79.
39. *ibid.*, p.79ff.
40. C.C.R., 17/70, p.17.
41. R.P.B., p.80.
42. C.C.R., 18/74, p.129; 19/76, p.10.
43. R.P.B., p.85.
44. *ibid.*, p.84.
45. C.C.R., 20/83, p.67.
46. *ibid.*, 20/87, p.61.
47. *ibid.*, 21/88, p.26.
48. *ibid.*, 20/85, pp.61-4.
49. *ibid.*, p.64.
50. E.R.O., D/ACR, 2/49.
51. R.P.B., p.138.
52. C.C.R., 24/118, p..25.
53. *ibid.*, 24/119, p.28.
54. *ibid.*, 113, pp.65-6.
55. Excepting the anomalous entry of William Bate in 1536-7.
56. C.C.R., 24/123, 80.
57. *ibid.*, 25/124, pp. 4, 6, 43 and 49.
58. *ibid.*, 25/125, pp.32-3, 51.
59. *ibid.*, 25/125, p.3.
60. *ibid.*, 25/128, pp.32, 46, 48.
61. *ibid.*, 26/131, pp.4, 6, 7, 8ff.
62. It is plainly better to use the more or less continuous record of admissions found in the Oath Book for the purposes of

graphing than the fragmented court roll sequence, given that the former can be seen to be a generally accurate summary of the data contained in the latter for the years where complete rolls survive. On the subject of the compilation of the Oath Book, see Britnell, 1982. The year-by-year data from which the graph is compiled can be found in Appendix E.

63. Bridbury, 1975, p.65.
64. Similarly, the peak figure for admissions in a single year, 73 in 1406-7, may be related to the national outbreak of plague in the years 1405-7 (Shrewsbury, p.143).
65. All such assertions naturally have to be qualified by once again pointing out that the court roll sequence, from which the data as to fines comes, is far from complete.
66. *op. cit.*
67. *ibid.*, pp.27-31.
68. see Chapter 1.
69. E.R.O., Monday Court Book, Henry VII, folios 74 and 125.
70. C.C.R., 20/80, p.50.
71. *ibid.*, 20/86, p.39.
72. *ibid.*, 21/90, pp.4, 3, 45 and 52.
73. Furthermore, the system of pledging was now becoming moribund. While it had previously been the case that new burgesses found four pledges for payment of their fines and fulfilment of their oaths, now we find only one or two, and in many cases the Chamberlain acts as the sole pledge for entrants (e.g. C.C.R., 21/9, pp.55-56; 21/93, p.50).
74. *op. cit.*, p.50.
75. *ibid.*, pp.28-9.
76. O.B., p.175.
77. *op. cit.*, p.4.
78. *ibid.*, p.29.
79. Thus it is noteworthy that the level of admission fines in the early sixteenth century takes a downward turn, reverting to the 20s. mode, at the first sign of a downturn in the Phelps Brown and Hopkins real wage index.

80. For a defence of the use of freemens' lists as guides to urban occupations, see Pound (1981), when many of the arguments of Dobson (1973) and Patten (1977) are refuted.
81. Rickword, 1906, p.150.

Chapter 7: The Origin of Colchester Burgesses

1. see McClure, passim for a review of the problems of surname analysis.
2. Fransson, p.33ff.
3. Raftis, p.398.
4. Carus-Wilson, 1965, p.53.
5. Platt, p.115ff; McClure, op. cit.
6. Billson, pp.144-5.
7. Butcher, p.20ff.
8. Palliser, 1979, p.128.
9. Patten, 1976, p.111ff.
10. Wareing, pp.241-9.
11. *ibid.*, p.249.
12. Platt, op. cit., p.117.
13. Clark and Slack, pp.92-3.
14. C.C.R., I, p.24.
15. *ibid.*, 11/44, pp. 1, 2, 61.
16. *ibid.*, 12/49, p.115.
17. *ibid.*, 13/52 to 14/59, passim.
18. *ibid.*, 14/60, p.7.
19. *ibid.*, 10/43, p.17.
20. O.B., pp.102-6.
21. R.P.B., p.15.
22. C.C.R., II, p.18.
23. e.g. C.C.R., 8/32, p.6; 8/33, p.84.

24. The 'expense of urban residence' argument is, in any case, generally taken to apply principally to the 'men of substance' who would be eligible for office or fined for exemption. The Colchester 'tax-books' indicate how it was attempted to means-grade payments for routine levies (see Chapter 3 above).
25. This year's court rolls are, unfortunately, lost.
26. O.B., p.38.
27. cf. the the case of John Popelot referred to in Chapter 6 above.
28. Bartlett, p.29; cf. Kermode, *passim*.
29. Excluding those from the Continent and Ireland.
30. cf. Wareing, *op. cit.*
31. e.g. PRO, E179/108/113, 114.
32. PRO, E179/108/162; B.L., Stowe MSS, 831.
33. C.C.R., 19/79, p.50; Cal. Pat. Roll, 1476-86, p.200.
34. C.C.R., I, p.171.
35. as listed by Everitt, pp.456.
36. Coggeshall, Halstead, Chelmsford and Maldon in Essex; Bury, Hadleigh, Ipswich, Lavenham, Nayland and Sudbury in Suffolk.
37. London also falls into this category.
38. Bocking, Braintree, Coggeshall, Dedham, East Bergholt, Halstead, Hadleigh, Lavenham, Long Melford, Nayland, Stoke-by-Nayland, Stratford and Sudbury.
39. O.B., p.139; E.R.O., D/ACR, 1/17.
40. E.R.O., D/ACR, 2/185; C.C.R., 21/90, p.34.
41. C.C.R., 24/115, p.52; E.R.O., D/ABW, 23/50.
42. E.R.O., D/ACR, D/ABW.
43. C.C.R., 10/42, p.17.
44. *ibid.*, 9/36, p.86.

## Chapter 8: Concluding Discussion

1. Cunningham, p.507; for the political context of the re-edification legislation, see Tittler, 1980, pp.76-7.

2. cf. Howell, p.122.
3. Dobson, 1977, p.19; for the persistence of population stagnation, and its impact on the rural economy, see Blanchard.
4. Phythian-Adams, 1978, pp.169-70.
5. Phythian-Adams, 1979, p.16.
6. *ibid.*
7. *op. cit.*; see Chapters 4 and 5, above.
8. Lister, p.47ff; Rimmer, p.106.
9. Smith, pp.8-9.
10. Poos, *op. cit.*
11. Hallam, pp.72, 214; Emmison, pp.107-9, 311.
12. Chambers, pp.136-7.
13. Thirsk, pp.73-6.
14. J. Schlumbohm, in Kriedte et al., p.94ff.
15. 1982, pp.23-4.
16. Morant, *op. cit.*; see Chapters 3 and 5, above.
17. see citations in note 6 to Chapter 4 above.
18. Thrupp, pp.167-8.
19. It seems clear that in the seventeenth century much larger numbers of people had come to depend upon the cloth industry for their livelihood, even if we may be sceptical of the claim by the 'depressed weavers of Braintree and Bocking' that, in 1629, "the number of those which live upon weaving in our neighbour towns about us amounteth to the value of 30,000 persons and upwards" (E.H.E.S., p.84).
20. Pounds, pp.300-19.
21. Du Plessis and Howell.
22. *ibid.*, pp.50-1.
23. Marx and Engels, p.158f.
24. see Hilton, *passim*.
25. *ibid.*, pp.33-57.

26. J. Merrington, in Hilton, pp.170-195.
27. Anderson, p.195.
28. Marx and Engels, p.146.
29. op. cit., p.51.
30. See note 79 to Chapter 5, above.
31. C.C.R., 15/64, p.15.
32. Phythian-Adams, 1979, pp.42-9.
33. Dyer, pp.60-72.
34. Phythian-Adams, 1979A, p.74.
35. Langton, p.259ff; even at Boston the picture is less clear-cut than might be imagined; see Rigby, 1985, p.55.
36. Hadwin, 1986, refers to "the phenomenon of urban vigour amidst demographic decline" (p.426).
37. Palliser, 1983, p.231.



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Colchester Court and Assembly Books, Hen VII - Eliz. I.

Court of Archdeacon of Colchester, Registered Probate Wills (class D/ACR).

Commissary Court of Bishop of London, original and registered wills (class D/ABW).

#### 2. Public Record Office (P.R.O.)

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#### 3. British Library (B.L.)

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