

Socio-economic and land inequality in pre- industrial England: The case of Kingston Lacy (Dorset)

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Socio-economic inequality in pre-industrial England is still a topic as relevant as unexplored. Previous works have not fully succeeded to provide a quantitative yet qualitative insight of the issue. In this field, the structure of sources has prevented the development of detailed quantitative analysis in both macro and micro level.¹ This PhD research project aims to address this issue by focusing on access to land, which was the principal source of wealth and income, through a micro level analyses of Kingston Lacy manor (Dorset) in the eighteenth century.

In this paper, I present the first results derived from the research phase I am currently working on, where I examine how the changes in tenurial arrangements, which are a feature associated with the transition towards agrarian capitalism, defined the transformation of land occupancy patterns in Kingston Lacy. That requires a twofold methodological approach that enables me not only to link up different manorial and national sources, but also, to deal with the issues aroused from examining land inequality from different perspectives in a multi-layered analysis.

Unlike other countries, research based on archival material in England on socio-economic inequality is affected by the lack of a) national data sets of taxes, b) a uniform regional administration and c) a reliable procedure of registering information at manorial level. Regarding the first point, English national taxation at the individual level is absent, since the Crown taxed villages rather than individuals.² In fact, in the two centuries before the industrial revolution only two main taxation sets provide individual information. On the one hand, the hearth tax, which was levied between 1662 and 1689, was a property tax assumed to approximate to the householder's wealth, measured by the number of fireplaces their houses possessed.³ On the other hand, the land tax, which survived from 1693 until 1963 assessed the rental value, although since 1697 fixed quotas for each county were established. This dearth of national sets impedes long term examination of inequality based on taxation.

In relation to the second point, parochial and manorial administration varied regionally. The tax base on which taxes were assessed differed from county to county, and even affairs such as poor relief were decided independently in each parish. In the case of some sources, such as the land tax, local and regional variation in the relationship between payments and acreage make any comparison across country impossible.⁴ Finally, information registered in manorial sources often presents issues. Tenants recorded in manorial surveys do not always reside in the parish where the manor is located, so its absence from parochial registers makes comparison of sources and tracking of individuals very complicated. Likewise, the existence of sub-letting practices, which is often not reflected in the records, complicates the reconstruction of land occupation patterns. Therefore, the absence of consistent sources and

¹ Alfani, G. 'Inequality unperceived: the emergence of a discourse on economic inequality from Middle Ages to the age of revolution', *Journal of European Economic History*, 45, n.1 (2016). Broadberry, S. & Campbell, B. (2015). *British Economic Growth, 1270-1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Stoate, T.L (1982). *Dorset Tudor Subsidies: granted in 1523, 1543, 1593*. Bristol: T.L. Stoate.

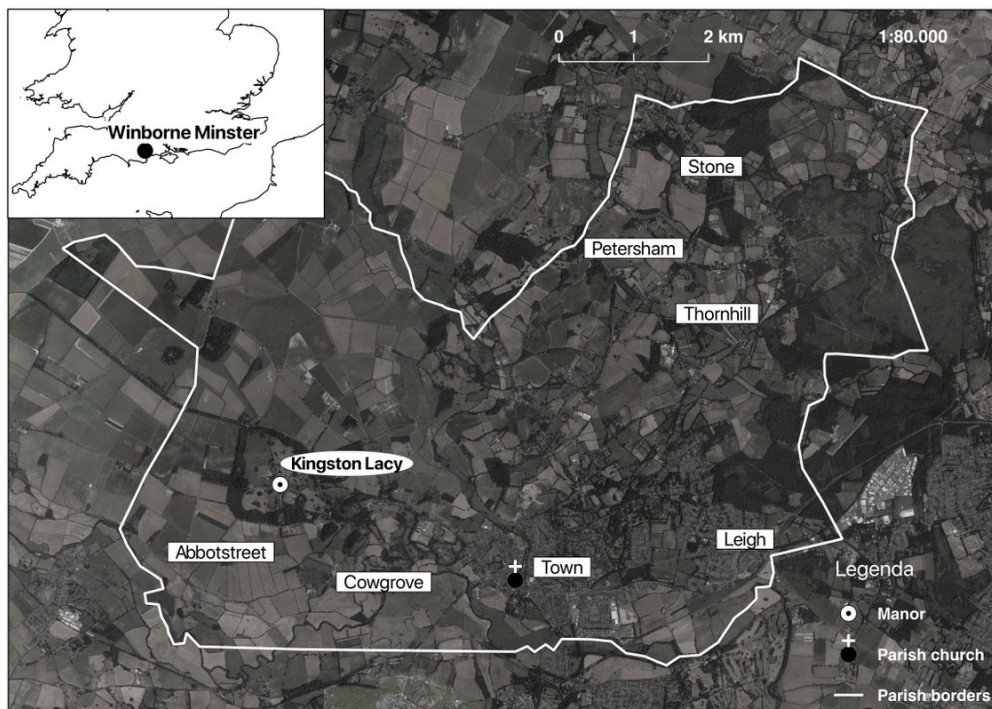
³ Barnwell & Airs (eds) (2006). *Houses and the hearth tax: the later Stuart house and Society*. York: Council for British Archaeology.

⁴ Wilson, G.C. 'Land tax problem', *Economic History Review*, August 1982, vol.35(3), pp. 422-426.

reliable data hinder the research on socio economic inequality in England, both national and regional, and forces us to look for an alternative strategy.

As a possible solution to deal with the aforementioned issues, I have opted for a cross-source methodology to reconstruct occupiers of land and track changes in the land market in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. French and Hoyle developed this methodology to compare parish ratepayers in eighteenth century Earls Colne with their database on manorial tenants.⁵ More recently, it has also been applied with the scope of reconstructing not only the occupation of land, but also the spatial distribution of holdings. Likewise, a multi-layered analysis was implemented to approach the issue of agrarian capitalism from the combined perspectives of tenure, farm size and labour. Three factors have inspired me to replicate this methodology of record-linkage in this current step of my research: a) the question of agrarian capitalism is closely related to my research in socio-economic inequality, b) the available sources for my study case favoured such approach and c) reconstructing the occupiers of land in Kingston Lacy is vital to study the changes in access to land and land holding, and its possible influence in inequality development.

The case study is formed by five tithes (Abbstreet, Barnsley, Cowgrove, Stone and Thornhill) and a town borough (Wimborne Minster Borough) that were part of the manor of Kingston Lacy (Dorset) which belonged to the Bankes family from 1636 until 1980.



Map 1. Map of the boundaries of Wimborne Minster Parish with the town and tithes indicated.

In the eighteenth century the landscape of this area was marked by the geographical features and mixed farming characteristic of Dorset; a mixture of chalk down land, heath land, pastoral land and forest, where a sheep-corn husbandry was practised. While the dominant activity was agriculture, growing both cereals and crops, the livestock of the tenants consisted of cattle, sheep, pigs, chicken and poultry, and horses.⁶ The eighteenth-century manor experienced a progressive transformation towards agrarian capitalism, which

⁵ Rhodes, J. (2018). *Agrarian Capitalism in England c.1700 to c.1850: A new methodological approach*, PhD thesis, University of Exeter, Exeter.

⁶ Thirsk, J. (1984) *Agrarian history of England and Wales: 1640-1750. Regional farming systems. Vol 5.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

is reflected in various aspects. Firstly, the evolution of tenurial patterns; although at the end of the seventeenth and start of the eighteenth century the old feudal tenures were already substituted by new forms of tenures, in which tenants held land by agreement with the lord, and ancient taxes and services transformed into payment rents, through this century, there was still a progressive change from copyhold tenures into lease hold.

Kingston Lacy is also characterized by the disappearance of small holders. From the seventeenth century surveys, a progressive decline of small tenements and the enlargement of bigger tenements can be detected. This is not only due to the economic decline and fall of population, but also by the transformation of tenurial patterns and the process of enclosure and enlargement that boosted the absorption of smaller tenement by larger ones. Finally, like other places, Kingston Lacy also experienced a process of enclosure and engrossment. Although the enclosure transformation took place in Dorset during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, at Kingston Lacy, major enclosures were also taking place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Data from national, manorial and parochial sources has been processed into individual databases in order to reconstruct the dynamics of the study case; a) the land occupation, b) changes in the tenure of land, c) changes in the size of tenements, d) patterns of inheritance e) existence of subletting, and f) assessment of taxes. Among all those sources in this paper I will focus on three of them to test the record- linkage methodology. First, the manorial surveys of 1714 and 1772 which contain information about tenants and types of landholdings, size and composition of the tenements, amount of the sums assessed and notes relating to land transactions. Second, the poor rates from 1772, 1777 and 1796, which were collected among the parishioners of Wimborne Minster at 2 pence per pound to pay for the cost of poor relief of the parish.⁷ Poor rates were stated to be levied on occupiers rather than owners of land,⁸ so they become a useful source to reconstruct land occupation.

Thirdly, land taxes for our study case exist for 1772, and then from 1780 until 1800 and at this period they were assessed at 4s per pound. Historians have stated that tax data are unreliable sources when use alone, but when used along with tithe and manorial surveys they can be useful for cross parish occupancy.⁹ Unfortunately, not for every tithe both proprietor/occupiers are recorded but the information they provide can be contrasted with the other sources.

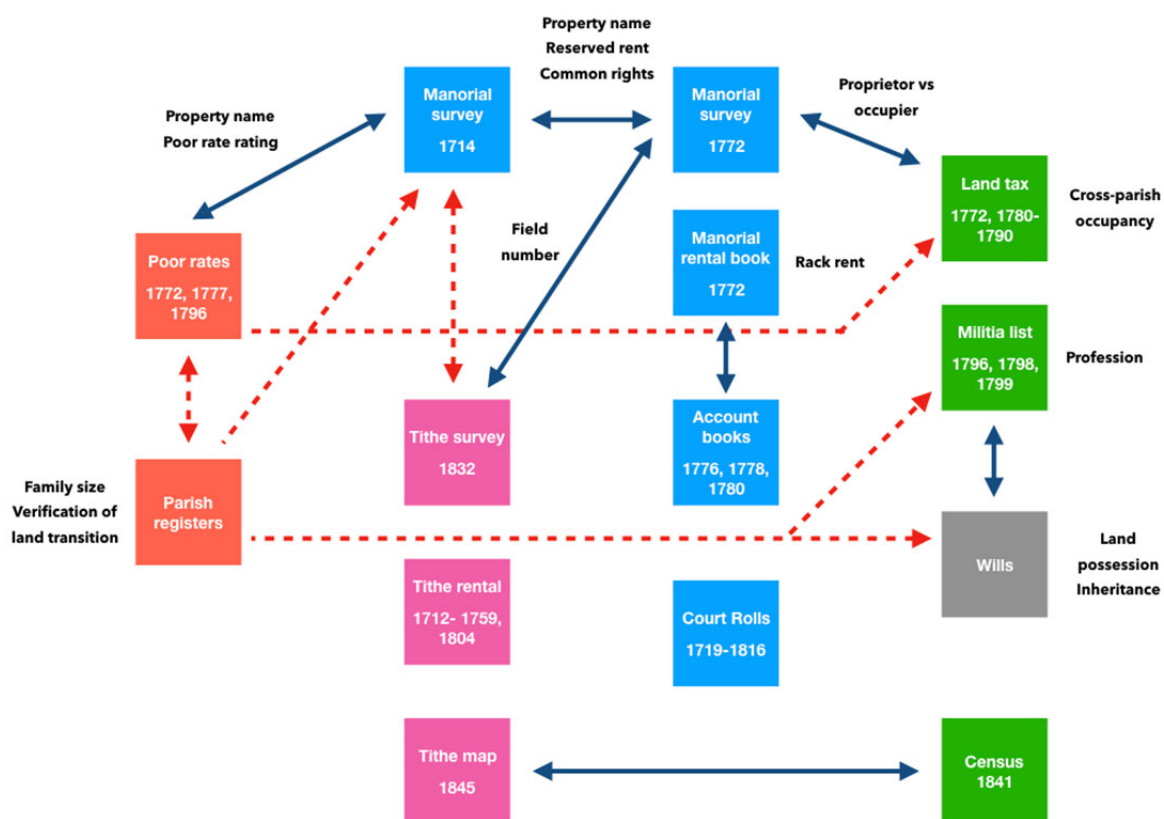
Even though I will only focus on three sources, in figure n.1 I present the proposed structure of the record- linkage which displays how sources of different nature entwine with each other and how links can be established between them in order to reconstruct land occupancy.

⁷ Barker, J.D. (2013) *The emergence of agrarian capitalism in early modern England: a reconsideration of farm sizes*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom.

⁸ Barker, J.D (2013).

⁹ Ginter, D. (1992), *A measure of Wealth: The English Land Tax in Historical Analysis*. London: Hambledon Press. French, H.R & Houle, R.W (2007), *The character of English rural society: Earls Colne, 1550-1750*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Figure 1. Structure of record linkage for Kingston Lacy



Note. Solid lines indicate direct lines between connections, dashed lines indicate 'created' links established through connections with one or more additional sources.

Linking the sources and combining the information they provide enables me a) to reconstruct the land occupancy patterns of manorial land in Kingston Lacy, b) to identify and examine the sub-letting practice, c) to establish the patterns of inheritance among the tenants, d) to observe how land market for freeholders behave compared to that of copy/lease holders, and e) to explore how labour occupations interrelated with holding of land. Before attempting the record linkage, I expected to get straight forward results. I expected to find all copyholders, leaseholders and freeholders in both the manorial survey, poor rates and land taxes, and I anticipated it would be simple to reconstruct the land occupancy patterns. I assumed that the great majority of the tenants would hold the same piece of land in an interval of 25 years (1772-96). However, the results I have obtained so far are far removed from my forecasts.

Table 1. Poor rate/ Land tax information recorded in every tithe.

	Abbstreet		Barnsley		Cowgrove		Stone		Thornhill	
	1714	1772	1714	1772	1714	1772	1714	1772	1714	1772
Copyhold	12	2	3		13	8	31	18	20	8
Leasehold		5		1		19	4	76	1	39
Indenture	10				16		65		30	
Copy/lease		1				1		4		5
Indenture/ copy	1				1		10			

Other	1	1			6	1	1	2		
	24	9	3	1	36	29	111	100	51	52

Source. Kington Lacy manorial database.

Firstly, between the five tithings of Kingston Lacy there are a total of 233 properties recorded in the manorial survey for 1772, excluding all freeholds, tenements at will and demesne land. Nevertheless, there is information about poor rates and land tax assessments just for roughly 25 per cent of the total. Around 12 per cent of the tenements record only the land tax, while poor rates are assessed for circa the 15 per cent. This means that around 117 land properties do not provide any information on poor relief or national taxation for Kingston Lacy. Among the possible explanatory reasons, there is the fact that some of those tenements were held by people residing in the surrounding parishes. Recent research on settlement examinations has demonstrated that at the end of the eighteenth century around 78 per cent of the non-residents of Wimborne Minster lived within the county of Dorset.¹⁰ For example, the widow Susannah Green held a copyhold tenement in Cowgrove after the death of her husband, who was a grocer from Poole. Information about the tithe rental paid by the previous owner is known, but nothing is recorded about the land tax or poor rates of Mr. Green, as he would pay them in his place of residence. Another explanation is the fact that small tenements tended not to be recorded, not only because their value was low, but also because, often, the holders were labourers too poor themselves to contribute to poor rates. In fact, out of the 52 properties in the tithe of Thornhill, 37 were cottages which less than 0.25 acres of land, and many of them were erected from the waste without license. Regarding the possible connection between land holding and other types of occupation, some up-and-coming results are thrown. From the hundred tenants of Stone, there is information recorded for the occupation of sixty-four. Among them, thirty made a living working in the secondary (bricklayer, carpenter, etc), while 33 per cent gained their income as labourers. Only two individuals had an occupation in the tertiary sector. On the contrary, in Thornhill, the second most populated tithe of the manor, the proportion of tenants engaged in the secondary sector was under 50 per cent, and the number of labourers and yeomen was similar.

Subletting practices hinder the identification of the owner of any piece of land at any point in the period of study, but is a key element in the reconstruction of the land market. The use of land taxes with double column and the name of properties are useful resources to examine sub-letting in Kingston Lacy. For example, from the 11 tenements in Thornhill that contain both poor rates and land tax for 1772, none of them is recorded under the same tenants' name as in the manorial survey. This is probably due to the fact that the survey was made after the land tax was assessed. E.g., Mary Pinton is listed as a copyholder for a tenement called Late Burts, which formerly belonged to a certain Robert Burt, who is in fact, the taxpayer of the land tax in 1772. Tracking the name of the property is which allows us to identify changes in the occupation of land.

In conclusion, record-linkage may encounter methodological issues. On the one hand, not all the tenants of Kingston Lacy were residents of the parish of Wimborne Minster, and therefore do not appear in the land tax nor in the poor rates. On the other hand, some individuals appear in all series of sources, but holding different plots of lands, which shows that people had the right to hold land not belonging to the lord. Also, some of the land recorded in the manorial survey does not appear in the land tax or poor rates because it did not meet the minimum to be assessed, as for example the cottagers. Finally, it can be observed that the name recorded is not the official one mentioned in other documents, which reflects the issue of sub-letting.

¹⁰ Rigdway, A. "Reconsidering settlement examinations: Evidence from Wimborne Minster, Dorset, 1713-1835", presented at EHSAC, Queen Belfast University, 5-7 April 2019.

This paper has outlined some of the sources I have used to produce a detailed reconstruction of landholding in the manor of Kingston Lacy. Despite the issues and problems, I am confident this methodology will succeed in providing information on different aspects necessary to complete a reconstruction of landholding. Moreover, the preliminary results have corroborated the added value of combining manorial surveys, poor rates and land tax assessments as records of land occupation. In a next step, these sources will be cross-referenced with rentals and accounts of the manor, as well as wills, which will reinforce the observation of changes in the occupation of land and the land market. The aim is to reconstruct how this evolution determined the development of socio-economic inequality in pre-industrial Kingston Lacy.