Servile migration and seigniorial reaction in England: the serfs of Great Waltham and High Easter (Essex), *c.* 1336–1361

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Abstract

Migration was common in medieval England. Serfdom, however, in theory severely restricted the mobility of villeins. This article explores servile migration through a close study of the manorial court rolls of the manors of Great Waltham and High Easter (Essex). By doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates over the nature and decline of serfdom in medieval England and over the role of towns as destinations for migration, which has been seen as contributing to the 'Little Divergence'. Firstly, the article establishes the extent of servile migration as recorded in the manorial court rolls. In keeping with recent studies, almost half of recorded servile migrants stayed within ten miles of their home manor and, significantly, a sizeable majority (around two thirds) opted for rural destinations. The article then explores some dynamics of servile migration in detail. It suggests that enforcement of restrictions on the movement of villeins was attempted in the 1350s but that, in practice, the lord's coercive capacity was distinctly limited and ineffective.

Historians of medieval England have long since discarded the image of self-contained rural communities held by historians in the early twentieth century and have instead emphasised that ordinary people travelled frequently and sometimes far in their daily lives.[1] Indeed, migration – as distinguished from more transient movement – was common, and regularly took place between rural areas and between rural areas and towns. Historians of medieval migration have suggested that most migration was localised, with migrants settling within easy striking distance – often ten miles or so – of their home locations.[2] Nonetheless, although the study of migration has moved far beyond the image of the medieval village as isolated, much work remains to be done to establish patterns of migration in medieval England, examine how they changed over time, and assess their social and economic significance.

Around half of England's rural population were serfs at the start of the fourteenth century.[3] Serfdom should, in theory, have played an important role in governing the extent and nature of migration. It was built on the ability of lords to restrict the movement of servile people: those who were personally unfree were legally obliged to remain on their home manor unless they were granted express permission to live away by the lord in return for an annual payment known as chevage.[4] Serfs who wished to migrate therefore had two options: payment of chevage; or flight without their lord's permission, which could risk recapture and punishment by the lord's officials as well as the loss of landholdings and chattels in the home manor. If the theory of serfdom was actually implemented in practice, it would therefore have acted as a powerful restraint on migration. In turn, serfdom would have played an important role in shaping the economy by inhibiting the movement of serfs to locations where their labour would be most productive, reducing investment in agriculture, imposing costs on serfs who migrated illegally, and generally enabling the operation of 'an economy of privileges that hindered efficient resource allocation in land, labour, capital, and output markets'.[5]

The study of servile migration as evidenced in payments of chevage and unlicenced departures from the manor reveals much about the nature of migration and about the institution of serfdom in actual practice, rather than in legal theory. This article builds on recent attempts to utilise manorial records to track rural migration and contributes to recent debates about the nature of serfdom, when and why serfdom declined, and how this decline fitted into broader patterns of economic change in late medieval Europe (1300–1500). Section 1 outlines the historiography relating to servile migration in late medieval England. Section 2 outlines the case study manors of Great Waltham and High Easter (Essex) forming the core of this article, and notes the unusual level of detail provided by the court rolls of these manors about the destinations of servile migrants. Section 3 details the overall contours of servile migration from Great Waltham and High Easter, while section 4 explores some of the dynamics which underlay patterns of servile migration in more detail. Finally, section 5 draws out the implications of this case study for our understanding of the nature of English serfdom in the age of the Black Death.

1. Perspectives on serfdom and migration

There is an impressive body of work on servile migration in the late Middle Ages. In the 1960s and 1970s, J.A. Raftis and his students at the University of Toronto pioneered the intensive use of manorial court rolls to track the movements of bond tenants from particularly well-documented manors.[6] This approach was then further developed and refined in important studies by Christopher Dyer, Robert K. Field, and Ernest Jones, among others.[7] Taken together, these studies emphasised that servile migration was extensive, particularly in the fifteenth century, and, like much work on medieval migration more generally, showed that it was usually localised.

This work on servile migration formed part of a wider interpretation of the nature of serfdom in medieval England and the chronology of its decline. This was based on the idea that the radical change in the land to labour ratio resulting

from the loss of between thirty and fifty per cent of the population in the Black Death of 1348–1349 did not lead to the immediate dissolution of serfdom in the face of new market conditions. Instead, lords were supposed to have reacted to the challenges thrown up by post-plague labour conditions by vigorously enforcing a concerted 'seigniorial reaction' which strengthened the coercive powers they wielded over their villeins. This reaction was bolstered by a new legislative programme targeting the labour market which was enacted by the royal government in the form of the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers (1349 and 1351 respectively) which further increased the coercive capacity of lords over their servile tenants.[8] The 1351 statute, for instance, enabled a landlord to return a flown serf without being obliged to wait until the detainee's personal status had been established in court.[9] With the aid of the crown, landlords were understood to have maintained – or even tightened – the bonds of serfdom, including efforts to restrict movement, until at least the final decades of the fourteenth century when the edifice of serfdom eventually began to crumble in the face of market conditions.[10] For Raftis, a seigniorial reaction postponed the onset of high levels of servile migration – and with it, the dissolution of serfdom – until around 1400: it was only then that 'the trickle of emigration [before *c*.1400] burst into a veritable tide'.[11] Jones, meanwhile, emphasised that Spalding Priory (Lincolnshire) was highly efficient in tracking its serfs and in securing chevage payments from those who left the Priory's manors through the middle of the fourteenth century, and concluded that this vigilance only began to wane in the mid-fifteenth century.[12]

A corollary of this reading of the chronology of the decline of serfdom is that migrants would have overwhelmingly flocked to towns after 1349 because a serf who resided for a year and a day in either a royal borough or certain seigniorial boroughs could obtain *de jure* freedom in accordance with the common law.[13] In essence, towns might have offered an escape route for large numbers of servile tenants if serfdom was being upheld rigorously in the countryside. It has accordingly been suggested that urbanisation driven by the flight of servile tenants played an important role in shaping modern economic growth. Economists and economic historians have argued that a flow of migrants helps to explain the 'Little Divergence' – the gap in economic performance which opened up between the leading economies of north-western Europe, including England, on one hand and those of southern, central, and eastern Europe on the other.[14] This influx of servile migrants, and particularly female servile migrants, to cities in north-western Europe, for example, is supposed to have contributed to an increase in real wages per capita; to the emergence of agrarian capitalism; and to the incentivisation for the later marriage, reduced birth-rates, and intensive capital formation which characterised the European Marriage Pattern.[15] Servile migration could, therefore, have played a role in the even broader trajectory of economic change known as the 'Great Divergence', which saw the leading European economies grow faster and more sustainably than economies in other areas of the globe over the long run.[16]

There is no doubt that towns in medieval England depended on an influx of migrants.[17] The 1377 poll tax returns suggest – in line with the idea, associated with the European Marriage Pattern, that towns presented a particularly attractive destination for female migrants – that most towns contained a higher ratio of women to men than most rural areas.[18] Nonetheless, the extent of this influx

must have been more limited than has sometimes been suggested as the proportion of the population living in towns remained at roughly 20 per cent through the four-teenth century.[19] Furthermore, the assumption that serfdom was restrictive in practice both before and after the Black Death which underpins the conventional picture of servile migration has been challenged strongly by Mark Bailey. In works published in 2014 and 2015, Bailey surveyed serfdom after the Black Death in detail and argued that the idea of a post-1350 seigniorial reaction was, in large part, a myth.[20] Instead of a retrenchment lasting into the last decades of the century, Bailey suggested that serfdom quickly collapsed after the initial onset of the pestilence and that, while socially stigmatising, serfdom was not particularly disadvantageous to serfs economically or widely weaponised by land-lords.[21] This revisionist perspective built on a historiography suggesting that English serfdom was in practice moderated by custom and, in some ways, a weak institutional structure even before the Black Death.[22] Chris Briggs, for example, suggested that restrictions on servile movement were sporadic and limited even at the height of serfdom *c.*1300.[23]

Even more recently, Bailey buttressed his argument with a detailed analysis of servile migration between *c.*1249 and *c.*1500 as evidenced in manorial court rolls, with the bulk of the evidence discussed by Bailey dating to after 1349.[24] This tested a number of assumptions by exploring whether serfdom restricted migration either before or after the Black Death; whether towns were the favoured destinations of servile migrants; and whether female migrants disproportionately migrated to towns. Bailey found that around one third of all servile migrants in his sample went to urban destinations, suggesting that, while they were important centres for migration, 'towns were not as overwhelmingly attractive to servile migrants as postulated in some of the grand theories of social and economic development in late medieval Europe'.[25] Furthermore, while 59 per cent of female migrants in four Midlands manors travelled to towns as opposed to 34 per cent of male migrants, Bailey found that fewer women from his East Anglian case studies migrated to towns than men: 22 per cent of women to 28 per cent of men from one sample of five manors and 28 per cent of women to 30 per cent of men from another sample of twelve manors.[26] Nor, to Bailey, does a picture of serfs flying before a reinvigorated, arbitrary, and oppressive seigniorial regime map onto most of the manorial evidence. Serfs can, for example, be shown to have returned voluntarily to their home manor after their initial departure to take up landhold-ings; sometimes 'flown' serfs went to another of their lord's manors; and, if they wanted to leave for good, competition between landlords provided ample oppor-tunities for landholding and waged employment in other rural areas. So, overall, in practice serfdom 'was not sufficiently onerous or restrictive in economic terms to prompt widespread evasion or a determination to obtain personal freedom'.[27]

This recent work should serve as a prompt for further detailed studies. More research is needed to understand the extent to which lords attempted to impose restrictions on servile migration in the immediate post-plague period, to explore the extent to which migration was actually conditioned by these attempts when they were made and, more generally, to ascertain whether serfdom disintegrated in the 1350s or whether lords were able to enforce some of their rights over their servile tenants into the 1360s. This article takes up this challenge by providing

a close analysis of servile migration as evidenced in the manorial court rolls of the manors of Great Waltham and High Easter in central Essex to 1361. The manorial evidence suggests that servile migration from Great Waltham and High Easter usually took place over short distances and that migration was focused to a substantial extent on rural destinations rather than urban centres in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. By focusing on the middle decades of the fourteenth century in particular, this article also engages the vexed question of whether there was a seigniorial reaction in the immediate aftermath of the Black Death and, if so, whether seigniorial efforts were effectively implemented. It finds that migration was monitored to an extent, with a particular focus on male villeins, and that enforcement of the restrictions on the movement of serfs was attempted in the 1350s. It also finds, however, that in practice, this effort was usually unsuccessful and that the seigniorial administration on these estates lacked coercive capacity. This adds to our understanding of the ways in which lords and serfs reacted to the new conditions ushered in by the Black Death and contributes to the ongoing re-evaluation of the nature of English serfdom and the chronology of its decline.

2. The manors of Great Waltham and High Easter (Essex)

The manors of Great Waltham and High Easter in central Essex formed the heartlands of the English estates of the Bohun earls of Hereford and Essex, one of the realm's wealthiest and most powerful aristocratic families.[28] Between the late-thirteenth century and the late-fourteenth century, the earldom was headed by Earl Humphrey II (d. 1298), Earl Humphrey III (d. 1322), Earl John (d. 1336), Earl Humphrey IV (d. 1361), and Earl Humphrey V (d. 1373).

The social and economic characteristics of the region in which the manors of Great Waltham and High Easter were located have been traced by the invaluable work of Lawrence Poos.[29] Central Essex in the fourteenth century was densely populated and highly commercialised.[30] It was marked to an unusual extent by the presence of rural industry, particularly cloth working, by a highly active land market, and by a polarised landholding structure which facilitated a relatively large degree of economic and social differentiation. Smallholders were very common: in 1328, 43 per cent of tenants at Waltham and 27 per cent of tenants at High Easter held five acres of land or less, and Poos estimated that over half the population of this region were substantially dependent on waged labour in agriculture or work in industry or trade.[31] Although there was a general predominance of free rents across south-eastern England, unfree tenures were also common. It was, indeed, common for personally unfree people in both Essex and East Anglia to hold free land, which both complicated and diluted the distinction between customary tenure and personal status.[32] Furthermore, the manors were relatively close to London, a city of at least 70,000 people *c*.1300 and by far the biggest urban settlement in England throughout the fourteenth century, which offered a viable destination for those wishing to migrate to a genuinely large city.[33]

Both manors were very large: in 1328, Great Waltham contained 3,187 acres of cultivated land and High Easter contained 2,365 acres.[34] Both contained sizeable demesnes (areas of land managed directly by the lord's administration) but the majority of cultivated land on both manors was nonetheless held by tenants:

71 per cent of the land was tenanted at Great Waltham and 62 per cent at High Easter. Unfree tenures – full customary tenures and molland (an intermediate tenure with lighter customary services and cash rents) – were more prominent than free tenures: over 50 per cent of tenanted land at Great Waltham was held on unfree terms, as compared to 38 per cent on wholly free terms; and over 60 per cent of landholdings at High Easter were held on unfree terms, as compared to 27 per cent held on wholly free terms.[35] As was the case in other areas of Essex, though, villein tenants on the Bohun manors often held free land as well as customary holdings.[36]

Villeins on these manors were liable for a range of servile incidents. In addition to chevage, payable for permission to live beyond the manor, these included tallage-at-will (a fine imposed on serfs at the will of the lord), merchet (a marriage fine), millsuit (the obligation to grind grain at the lord's mills and no others), and heriot (a death duty of a best beast payable to the lord).[37] Furthermore, rentals compiled in 1328 detail the heavy labour services owed by those holding on unfree tenures.[38] At Great Waltham, a customary virgater (a tenant who held a virgate – reckoned at thirty acres – of land on unfree terms) was obliged to perform five works (instances of obligatory, unwaged work on the lord's land) per week and seven at the peak of the harvest, while tenants holding by molland were still liable for weeding, carriage, and harvest works even though their rent was largely paid in cash. At High Easter, customary virgaters and molmen owed eight, rather than seven, weekly works at harvest time. The customary services attached to these landholdings had not generally been commuted and would not be commuted until decades after the Black Death.[39] In sum, serfdom at Great Waltham and High Easter was extensive and, in theory, involved heavy obligations.

The manorial courts for both manors were held at Pleshy Castle, the administrative centre of the Bohun estates in Essex, which was situated roughly midway between Great Waltham (around two miles to the east) and High Easter (around two miles to the west). The survival rate of the fourteenth-century rolls is generally good.[40] Manorial court rolls have been criticised as sources for rural migration on the basis that many rolls do not specify the location of a departed serf, instead merely noting that the person in question was residing somewhere 'beyond the lordship'.[41] The court rolls for Great Waltham and High Easter do, however, provide information about the specific locations of departed serfs in both the pre- and post-plague period, although this information is far more abundant after 1349.[42] Although earlier evidence is integrated into the dataset, this article concentrates primarily on the period between January 1336 and October 1361, when the manors were held by Earl Humphrey IV. Court rolls are extant for a total of 228 sessions in this period, although there are gaps in the series for 1338–1339, 1340–1341, and 1355–1356.[43] The earl himself was an assertive lord; his vigorous management of his familial Marcher lordships, for instance, was noted by Rees Davies.[44] The period in which the earl was the lord of the manors of Great Waltham and High Easter spans the massive mortality inflicted by the Black Death. Earl Humphrey IV was therefore one of the lords who had to react to the fact that market forces in the 1350s were suddenly favouring his tenants and his workers. In theory, the enormous change in the ratio of land and labour should have incentivised more

of the earl's serfs to migrate in search of better opportunities and should have encouraged him and his administration to seek to restrict servile migration in order to retain tenants and labour.

3. Patterns of servile migration

A total of 52 people were recorded as servile migrants in the manorial court rolls of Great Waltham and High Easter between 1289 and 1361.[45] While this figure accounts for a small proportion of the hundreds of serfs who must have resided on these manors during this period, the distribution of observations of servile migrants by decade is broadly in line with the number of cases observed in other studies of servile migration in late medieval England.[46] After a concerted but short-lived attempt to track servile absence in 1291, the manorial court convened at Pleshy paid little attention to servile migration between 1327 and 1342. After sporadic interest was displayed in the mid-1340s, the manorial court became more systematically interested in the whereabouts of the lord's villeins in the 1350s when a total of 28 villein migrants were named in the court rolls (see Table 1).

   This increase in evidence needs to be set within the challenges faced by the Bohun administration after the plague. The land hunger which characterised much of the country before 1349 was eased and the proportion of the population living below the poverty line – a group characterised by land deficiency – fell from around 40 per cent in 1348 to under 20 per cent.[47] The end of 'rural congestion' meant that lords were faced with a sudden scarcity of tenants, declining rents, and diminishing land productivity.[48] The need to find tenants led landlords to convert customary tenures to leaseholds or to grant them to personally free tenants who refused to render the personal incidents due from those unfree by blood.[49] Earl Humphrey IV was no exception to this general rule and, even in Essex with its high population densities and prevalence of smallholders, there are signs that the earl's administration was aware of, and concerned about, the difficulties of finding bond tenants. In May 1349, numerous landholdings were taken into the lord's hand because of a lack of available heirs to fill them. This included a total of 155 acres of customary land.[50] The challenge of finding tenants willing to take up land on the old customary terms continued through the 1350s and plots of land were leased out in the 1350s, sometimes in return for a cash rent rather than performance of labour services.[51] The most dramatic indication of the need to fill holdings came in November 1355, when thirteen able-bodied villeins were ordered to take up vacant plots.[52] The information given in Table 1 should therefore be viewed as indicating seigniorial interest in servile migration within the context of the post-1349 alteration in the ratio of land to labour: it is very probable, for instance, that villeins migrated in the 1330s but that this was not recorded because servile migration in the 1330s did not result in empty holdings as it did two decades later.

   Before exploring the pattern of migration as revealed in these entries in more detail, the gendered nature of the evidence needs to be discussed. The desirability of gendering the discussion of late medieval migration has been emphasised recently by Maryanne Kowaleski and carried further by Bailey, who discussed instances of female migration in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the context of debate about the emergence of the European Marriage Pattern in England.[53]

Table 1. Distribution of instances of chevage and presentment for absence

Year	Total number (male and female)	Number of female migrants
1291	15	0
1342	1	0
1343	6	1
1346	2	0
1353	12	0
1355	5	2
1356	4	0
1357	1	0
1359	6	1

Source: TNA DL 30/62/766; TNA DL 30/63/796–801; TNA DL 30/63/803; TNA DL 30/64/806–808; TNA DL 30/64/810; TNA DL 30/64/812–817.

Only four of the 52 servile migrants named in the manorial court rolls of Great Waltham and High Easter between 1291 and 1361 were female. This evidence cannot therefore offer quantitative insight into the movement of female serfs or the nature of their employment. What the evidence does demonstrate, however, is that the attempt to monitor servile movement and enforce restrictions on migration at Great Waltham and High Easter was concerned overwhelmingly with male serfs. This probably constitutes a focus on customary tenants: men made up some three-quarters of the tenantry across both manors in 1328 and thus provided the bulk of the incidents associated with customary landholding and the bulk of labour services.[54] This article, then, illustrates how seigniorial efforts were sometimes qualified and partial due to a gendered focus on male serfs in the manorial court.[55] In turn, although it is impossible to substantiate, it is probable that women from servile families at Great Waltham and High Easter, particularly the young, landless women most likely to be employed as servants, could have left the manor without permission knowing that they were less likely than their male counterparts to be subjected to proceedings in the manorial court for doing so.

Thirty-two observations – 61.5 per cent of the total number – specify the whereabouts of the serf in question. Twenty-one observations – 40 per cent of the total number – note that the serf was residing at a specific geographical location, rather than with a person (this latter category is explored below in Section 4). This enables an analysis of the distances and destinations involved in servile migration from the Bohun manors. Many of those who migrated did so over very short distances. For instance, in 1355 John Sigor was noted by the manorial court as living at Takeley, five miles north-west of Great Waltham.[56] Some villeins, of course, chose to move further afield. In 1353, William Short was presented for living over fifty miles away at Cranfield, a Bedfordshire manor held by Ramsey Abbey, while Thomas Wecher was thought to be living in Northamptonshire, the nearest border of which was some seventy miles north-west of central Essex.[57] Such longer-distance migration was, though, atypical. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the data according to the

Table 2. Distances of servile migration

Distance	Number of observations	% of observations
0–9 miles	10	48
10–19 miles	5	24
20–39 miles	4	19
40 miles+	2	9

Source: manorial court rolls cited in Table 1.

distance divisions utilised by Bailey. This suggests that the examples of William Short and Thomas Wecher are the only cases of servile migrants travelling what might be considered a long way away from the Bohun manors in central Essex recorded in the mid-fourteenth century manorial court rolls. Almost half of recorded servile migrants moved within nine miles of their home manor, and almost three-quarters stayed within twenty miles.

How do these findings compare with other studies of servile migration? Jones found that a large proportion of servile migrants recorded as leaving the manors of Spalding Priory *c*.1250–1500 – perhaps 50–60 per cent of them – went further than 20 miles away from their home manor, but noted this tendency towards longer distance migration was unusual and may have been due to the priory's persistent tracking of its servile population.[58] Field concluded that over 60 per cent of the villeins of Hampton Lovett (Worcestershire) recorded as migrating between 1488 and 1526 stayed within 13 miles of their former home.[59] Similarly, Dyer found that around two-thirds of servile migrants who left the estates of the Bishops of Worcester in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries settled within a ten-mile radius of their home manor.[60] More recently, Dyer's study of servile migration in the Midlands counties of Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, and Worcestershire between 1400 and 1499 found that almost half of servile migrants remained within a ten-mile radius, 22 per cent moved between 10 and 19 miles, a further 22 per cent went between 20 and 49 miles, and around 7 per cent migrated to destinations over fifty miles away.[61] Likewise, Bailey found that just under half of the serfs who migrated from a sample of nine manors either in the southern Midlands or East Anglia between 1350 and 1500 stayed within a ten mile radius of their home manor, while around 25 per cent moved between 11 and 20 miles, and another quarter travelled over twenty miles in search of new places of residence.[62] Overall, the Essex data tabulated in Table 2 therefore corroborates the findings of modern research into patterns of migration in late medieval England. Migration from Great Waltham and High Easter was generally localised: almost half of recorded servile migrants moved within a ten-mile radius of their home manor, and almost three-quarters stayed within twenty miles.

Section 2 noted that the extent and significance of servile migration to towns has been a focus of previous research. Does the Essex evidence suggest that migrants flocked to urban areas after 1349 to escape the bonds of serfdom and secure personal freedom? Establishing the proportion of migrants with documented locations who moved to a town is methodologically complicated by the difficulty of

Table 3. Destinations of rural to urban migrants

Destination (county)	Number of Observations	Distance from Home Manor (miles)
Writtle (Essex)	3	8
Hatfield Broad Oak (Essex)	2	12
Stambourne (Essex)	1	19
Braintree (Essex)	1	12
Felsted (Essex)	1	6
Royston (Hertfordshire)	1	28
London (Middlesex)	1	*c*.35

Source: manorial court rolls cited in Table 1.

establishing which settlements should be categorised as towns since neither formal borough status nor the presence of markets and fairs provides a reliable guide to a settlement's level of urbanisation.[63] Essex did contain some settlements which can be categorised as urban without much ambiguity. The borough of Colchester probably had a population of around 3,000 in 1300 and (after an unusual period of post-plague expansion) around 8,000 by 1400.[64] Beyond Colchester, Poos noted Thaxted, Braintree, Rayne, and Bocking as unambiguously urban locations.[65] Dyer, meanwhile, suggested that Essex contained some fifteen 'small' towns of fewer than two thousand inhabitants *c*.1300.[66] In order to overestimate rather than underestimate the proportion of migrants who relocated to towns, a broad understanding of a town has been followed here and, where there is doubt about a settlement's urban character, it has been classified as a town.[67]

Ten of the thirty-two migrants (31 per cent) whose locations are recoverable were recorded as residing in towns. As Table 3 shows, most of these towns were within Essex itself and all were in the south-east of England. Information on the occupations of these individuals in their new homes is generally lacking. It was, however, noted in 1353 that two flown serfs in Braintree were working as smiths, while others in Writtle were working as tanners.[68]

How do these findings compare with the recent studies of Dyer and Bailey on levels of rural to urban migration? Dyer found that 38 per cent of servile migrants in his three West Midlands counties in the fifteenth century were reported as living in towns.[69] Bailey found a slightly lower rate of migration to urban centres of around 33 per cent in his study of nine manors in the southern Midlands and East Anglia.[70] Notably, though, this figure was higher for the southern Midlands manors (39 per cent) than for East Anglian manors (29 per cent). Both Bailey's East Anglian figures and the evidence for Essex migration offered here suggests that between a quarter and a third of servile migrants in the wider south-eastern region spanning Essex and East Anglia moved to towns.

Although it is impossible fully to recover the motivations behind migration, it may be that these villeins moved from the Bohun manors to urbanised areas because they were aware that residence in certain towns for a year and a day could confer personal freedom. Yet, while it is certainly possible that those who

headed to urban areas did so with thoughts of freedom from Bohun-enforced servitude in their minds, perhaps the most obvious point to make is that a substantial majority of these migrants do *not* seem to have headed to urban areas, let alone urban areas where prolonged residence could confer personal freedom. Thus the most striking thing about the findings recorded in Table 3 is that only one servile migrant is recorded as having moved from the Bohun lands to London, the flow of migration often assumed to have been common for Essex migrants.[71] Almost as striking is the fact that none are recorded as migrating to Colchester, the closest genuinely substantial town, even though both High Easter (ten miles away) and Great Waltham (five miles away) were located within Colchester's primary catchment area for migration.[72]

Institutional factors must have influenced the apparent differences between regions in the proportion of rural to urban migration. Unlike in many areas of the West Midlands, peasants in much of Essex and East Anglia had often in practice been permitted to hold free land. This not only complicated the distinction between personal and tenurial serfdom before 1349 but offered a wider spectrum of opportunities for serfs who wished to take up land in rural areas of Essex after the pestilence. Similarly, smallholdings were very common in both Essex and East Anglia and the sheer availability of numerous small plots of land may have provided more rural options for landholding on both free and unfree terms than in the West Midlands. Essex also had particularly plentiful options for waged labour in agriculture and employment in rural industries such as cloth-making and was therefore characterised by a local occupational framework which provided servile migrants with ample opportunities to stay in rural areas if they wished to find work.[73]

It has traditionally been assumed that the bulk of flown serfs migrated to urban centres to escape a vigorous and widespread seigniorial reaction and take advantages of opportunities for employment available in towns. A substantial minority of servile migrants did relocate to towns. They thus formed part of the more general influx of migrants which kept the proportion of the population residing in urban areas at roughly 20 per cent between 1300 and 1400. It is, though, significant that the Great Waltham and High Easter evidence indicates that around two-thirds of documented servile migrants seemingly chose to remain in rural areas, something paralleled by Bailey's study of other manors in the region. The evidence of manorial court rolls suggests that towns were far from overwhelmingly attractive to servile migrants in the decades following the Black Death even in the south-east of England. Theories of economic growth which presume a flood of migrants heading from the countryside to towns in order to escape the constraints of serfdom therefore need to be refined and revised in light of the evidence of servile migration on the ground.

4. Dynamics of servile migration

This section investigates, where possible, the dynamics lying behind patterns of migration in greater detail. The evidence relating to servile migration from Great Waltham and High Easter dating to the 1340s allows the mechanisms regulating servile migration in the decade before 'outside options' became much more

abundant to be investigated. At times, the regulation of servile mobility appears to have worked efficiently from the lord's point of view, as appears from two instances in 1343. On 30 May, Roger Goodman was amerced (subjected to a financial penalty) in a court session of the manor of High Easter for residing beyond the manor without the lord's permission.[74] His whereabouts were not stated but he was unlikely to be dwelling far away, as he appeared in the very next session of the court and rendered one capon (a type of fowl) to the lord as chevage.[75] Presentment for absence, therefore, resulted in a chevage payment being made within a matter of weeks. In a meeting of the court of High Easter held in November 1343, Geoffrey Eve was similarly charged with unlicenced absence.[76] In the next meeting of the manorial court, in January 1344, Geoffrey acknowledged his failure to render a yearly capon to the lord as chevage and made a heavy fine of 20s. along with a pledge to render his chevage annually in the future.[77] It is probable this fine was, in effect, a bond for paying chevage in future rather than a sum which was actually levied in 1344. In both of these cases, of course, servile migration had not been stopped but had rather been licenced by a swift undertaking to render chevage. This may have suited both lord and serf during the 1340s. From the lord's point of view, tenants were abundant and the legal underpinnings of his lordship over his bond tenants had been satisfied. From the tenant's point of view, they could live beyond the manor without the threat and uncertainty of retrieval by the lord's officers inherent in unlicenced absence and the risk that any chattels remaining on their home manors would be confiscated.

Paying chevage could be particularly beneficial for villeins who desired to maintain tenurial ties with their home manor which were legally legitimate in the eyes of the lord's officials.[78] This may well explain the choices of two men who appeared at Pleshy before the manorial court in 1346. First, Stephen Cavel transferred two acres of land held in his own right to Salkmus King, for which Salkmus paid an entry fine of 2s. to the lord.[79] Then – within the same entry on the court roll – Cavel agreed to give the lord the customary annual capon as chevage in addition to a one-off fine of 6s. 8d. Family ties and landed interests remained in Great Waltham even after Cavel's departure: a presumably related John Cavel was involved in litigation in the manorial court in 1348 and an Alice Cavel held seven and a half acres of bond land on her death in 1349.[80] William Poleyn also agreed to render a yearly capon to the lord for permission to migrate and rendered a one-off fine of 10s. for the privilege.[81] The Poleyns were a prominent family of customary tenants at High Easter, and remained so for the rest of Earl Humphrey IV's lifetime.[82] Such chevage payments meant that people like Cavel and Poleyn could move away from the manor while retaining legally valid interests in holdings which might descend to them according to manorial custom. Beyond this, rendering chevage safeguarded the security of family members remaining on the manor who might be at risk of distraint (a temporary confiscation of land or goods or both authorised by the manor court) if migration was undertaken without permission.

An interest in land in their home manor seems to explain why two other men, Richard Pondeluyt and Richard Coch, decided to pay chevage. They were both charged with leaving the lordship without permission in the manorial court of Great Waltham in 1343.[83] After several repeated orders for their arrest, Coch appeared on 19 November 1343 and acknowledged his obligation to render an

annual capon to the lord for permission to live beyond the manor and Pondeluyt followed suit on 20 May 1344.[84] Obtaining the lord's permission to live beyond the manor allowed both men to retain landed interests in Great Waltham. Thus, when Pondeluyt died in June 1349 he held half a virgate of customary land and seven acres of molland within the manor which, after falling into the lord's hand, were then leased to Roger Wether for a term of nine years on payment of a substantial entry fine of 13s. 4d.[85] In August 1349, meanwhile, Richard Coch surrendered a quarter virgate of customary land in an *ad opus* transfer to William Packing.[86] It appears this represented only part of his holding: in 1357, and presumably after Coch's death, his wife, Florence, transferred another quarter virgate of customary land to a family member, John.[87]

Nonetheless, there were numerous instances where serfs departed without leave and did not return to pay chevage quickly, or at all. In 1291, it was found that fifteen servile tenants were dwelling beyond the lordship without permission and yet none of these was subsequently recorded as returning and paying chevage.[88] Difficulties with the imposition of chevage on those who were reluctant to pay it grew after the Black Death: the increase in the quantity of evidence for villein migration after 1349 was driven by an increase in the number of people recorded as being absent without the lord's leave rather than an increase in the number of serfs paying chevage.

After 1349, most of those who left without seeking the lord's permission do not appear to have been found by the lord's officials and forced to return to the manor court, even when their absence was repeatedly noted. For example, twelve serfs were named in 1353 as absent without the lord's permission. Of these, only two are recorded as appearing to pay chevage. Geoffrey Coch, who had fled with three family members, returned to court to pay chevage four years after the initial presentment against him; and Geoffrey Wete, who retained familial links with Great Waltham, returned to do so after seven years.[89] An inquiry into the occupation of bond landholding at High Easter in October 1356 found that John and Richard Marhatch had abandoned the manor after the death of their father, Geoffrey, and so they were ordered to be attached (brought before the court to answer charges).[90] At the next court, it was found that the two men had been accompanied in their flight by John and William, sons of Henry Marhatch (presumably cousins), and it was ordered that all four should be detained and all their goods and chattels on their lands should be seized into the lord's hand in accordance with custom and with the law of villeinage.[91] This was – seemingly – to no avail and so the enforcement process was restated in 1357 and in 1360, again without producing any of the four Marhatches before court.[92] Nor was seigniorial knowledge of a serf's actual location any guarantee that the serf in question would be returned. In 1355, John Sigor was named as living at Takeley five miles away from Great Waltham, as noted above.[93] Repeated orders to attach him over the next two years were ineffective despite his known proximity to the heartlands of Bohun power.

In Poos's words, there is an 'almost whimsical quality to these repeated orders to return escaped serfs'.[94] Many entries might represent a tendency towards bureaucratic record keeping rather than an active effort to retrieve departed serfs.[95] Perhaps the most telling instances of the limits of coercion, when coercion was

attempted, are John Gibelot and William Russell, who were two of the thirteen villeins ordered to take up vacant plots of customary land in November 1355, an act which indicates how serfdom could be arbitrary, oppressive, and coercive.[96] The actual limits of coercive power, however, are also evident in the manorial court rolls. In 1359, it was recorded that Gibelot was absent without permission and that Russell had moved to Felsted, where he was working as a carpenter.[97] Their reactions to the challenge presented by Bohun attempts to use their servile status to compel them to take up land regardless of their own preferences was to leave and take advantage of outside opportunities and in practice there was nothing to prevent them from doing so.

The situation on Earl Humphrey IV's Essex manors was paralleled on the nearby manor of Aldham in southern Suffolk (35 miles north-east of Pleshy), which was held by John de Vere, earl of Oxford, the brother-in-law of Earl Humphrey IV's younger brother William, earl of Northampton. Bailey found that sixteen Aldham serfs were identified as being absent without permission from the manor between 1350 and 1361.[98] A significant amount of care was taken by the earl of Oxford's administration to track servile migration through the manorial court. Yet, as was the case at Great Waltham and High Easter, this compilation of knowledge did not often translate into effective enforcement of the lord's rights and only one of the sixteen servile absentees was recorded as paying chevage to the earl of Oxford after being presented for flight from the manor.

A serf's withdrawal from their home manor, whether with or without permission, was not necessarily permanent. Some serfs did return to the heartlands of Bohun landholding in Essex. Recent work has cautioned against the assumption that such instances represent serfs being compelled to return to their home manor by the twin powers of lordship and legislation. Instead, some instances of return adhere to a pattern of circular migration. Attention has been drawn to the possibilities open to young migrants, and particularly young female migrants, who left their homes to try to find domestic work as servants in their adolescence and then returned home to marry and take up more flexible casual work, such as brewing.[99] This life-cycle pattern may explain the movements of Alice Mon, who had left Great Waltham for Good Easter (some five miles away) by 1355.[100] She stayed there for over a year before returning to the manorial court of Great Waltham and swearing an oath to her servile status.[101] It seems, though, that coercion did not wholly explain her return, for she also made a fine to the lord for the right to marry whomever she wished. Initially levied at 6s. 8d., this was reduced to 3s. 4d. after the 'trustworthy tenants' at court testified to her poverty.[102] Alice thus returned to the manor, apparently poor and far from the beneficiary of a new economic 'golden age' in female work, to secure freedom to make her own marriage.[103] This suggests that she saw residence and the possibility of landholding on the Bohun manors as being preferable to continued absence, something which may have been influenced by her residence in a region where enforcement of the recent labour legislation was unusually vigorous.[104] The swearing of an oath testifying to her villein status may have been the price she had to pay to return without rendering a fine for her previous unauthorised withdrawal.[105]

The manorial focus on servile tenants means there is more evidence regarding the apparently voluntary return of male serfs to Great Waltham. John Stobat was

one of the tanners accused of living in Writtle without the lord's permission in 1353.[106] Stobat had, though, returned to Great Waltham – without any record of attachment or payment of a fine – within a few years. He appears to have employed wage labour himself, being sued by Ivo of Stanhurst in 1356 for 40d. of Ivo's salary, and was active in the land market in 1357, when John Haldane transferred a quarter virgate of customary land to him upon payment of an entry fine of 2s. to Earl Humphrey IV.[107] Stobat thus appears to have been able to take advantage of employment opportunities in Writtle before returning to his home manor and employing labour and holding land. Thomas Sawyne, part of a prominent servile family on the manor, is another who falls into this pattern. He was the subject of a presentment for unlicenced absence in 1355.[108] Unlike the examples of Richard Pondeluyt and others explored above, Sawyne was not recorded as returning to pay chevage. He had, however, returned by 1360, when he transferred one and three-quarter acres of customary land in the manorial court.[109] This was not the full extent of his holding and, when he died in 1370, Sawyne held a messuage (a small plot of land with a house) and a quarter virgate of customary land, and was survived by his wife Matilda and their young daughter, Cristina.[110] Such examples of circular migration are less colourful than, but perhaps analogous to, that of William Merre of Merrow (Surrey), who elected to be confirmed as a serf rather than be compelled to work as a servant under the terms of the Statute of Labourers.[111] It would seem that, for Stobat, Sawyne and perhaps Mon, serfdom at Great Waltham and High Easter was not so off-putting as to be avoided at any cost.

The role of Thomas Sawyne as an employer illustrates how competition for labour hindered the attempts of lords to enforce a seigniorial reaction in the 1350s. The long-established presence of extensive regional factor land and labour markets, with employers drawn from large sections of the population, including the likes of Sawyne, meant that 'outside options' for waged employment or landholding were widely available.[112] As a result, as Henry Knighton lamented in a well-known passage, after 1349 even great landlords were unable to turn back time and re-establish pre-plague conditions – they were forced, he wrote, to relax labour services and reduce rents 'lest their tenements should fall into utter and irredeemable decay, and the land everywhere lie wholly unworked'.[113] In practice, although they might cover it up, seigniorial administrations themselves sometimes offered terms in excess of the statutory wage limits. At the manor of Gussage (Dorset) held by Earl Humphrey V in the 1360s, accounting fictions formally hid the fact that the reeve had repeatedly paid harvest workers a daily wage of 7d. rather than the pre-plague rate of 4d.[114] The scarcity of tenants prompted competition between landlords, something facilitated by the fact that there was no legal obligation for landlords, before or after 1351, to return the flown serfs of other lords who had migrated to their manor. The ultimate failure of the extraordinary and novel legislative measures enacted by the crown after the Black Death owed much to the fact that, rather than presenting a united front to the lower orders, lords themselves encouraged migration by offering relatively favourable terms, whether in wages (in cash or kind), conditions, or tenurial terms in order to attract tenants and workers.[115]

An indication of the problems faced by lords is provided by those occasions when the manorial court rolls name a flown serf as staying with a third party.

This usually indicates that the serf in question was being employed in the service of someone of superior status.[116] The first instance comes in 1291, when a serf was named as staying with John Burdon.[117] It is possible, although not certain, this was Sir John Burdon, a Nottinghamshire knight who was appointed keeper of Berwick Castle in 1298.[118] The next example can be established with greater certainty. Thomas Sawyne was named as residing with John Berners while he was absent without leave in 1355.[119] This was Sir John Berners (d. 1361) who, in addition to manors in Surrey, Suffolk, and Middlesex, held the Essex manors of Berneston, Berners Roding, and Beaumont, all of which were under ten miles from Great Waltham.[120] Four years later, according to the manorial court of Great Waltham, John Gibelot was in the service of Thomas of Walmesford.[121] Walmesford owned the only surviving copy of Geoffrey Baker's chronicle.[122] More significantly here, Walmesford enjoyed close relationships with both Earl John Bohun and Earl Humphrey IV. He had been appointed as rector of Great Leighs (Essex) by the former and was both a beneficiary (for the sum of £40) and an executor of the latter's will.[123] Presumably, he was not aware that he was directly weakening the bonds of serfdom exercised by his own lord and patron by employing Gibelot. Lastly, Alice Welough was named as staying with the 'Lady of Camoys' in 1359.[124] This was presumably Margaret, who had married Sir Thomas Camoys (d. 1372) and who made her will in 1386.[125] The Great Waltham evidence thus suggests that competition between landlords offered serfs on the Bohun manors feasible options if they wished to migrate, especially in the 1350s. In turn, this both reduced the incentive for lords to attempt to enforce a seigniorial reaction and blunted these attempts when they were made.

5. Conclusion

The manorial court rolls of Great Waltham and High Easter bear witness to an increase in seigniorial anxiety over servile migration after the Black Death. The evidence of this anxiety allows the migration of villeins from the Bohun manors in the age of the Black Death to be tracked and set within the context of recent research on migration.

Migration from these manors was localised and mainly took place over short distances, with almost half of servile migrants staying within ten miles of their home manor. While around one third of recorded servile migrants went to towns, most opted for rural destinations. The patterns discussed here owe much, of course, to the specific institutional and tenurial characteristics of central Essex. Migration was, perhaps, particularly viable in this region because of the multiplicity of local opportunities for landholding and waged work, whether in agriculture, rural industry, towns, or service to other lords. Nonetheless, despite some distinctive regional features, the dynamics explored here formed part of a wider pattern of servile migration which has been traced across different regions of England. The conclusions reached here lend support to Bailey's arguments regarding the extent of servile migration to towns after the Black Death. For the serfs of Great Waltham and High Easter, migration to towns did not offer an escape to an oasis of freedom in a rural desert of servile oppression.[126] The history of the 'Little Divergence', which saw a gulf in long-run economic performance open up between different areas of

Europe after 1350, cannot rest on the assumption that the bulk of unfree migrants moved to towns after the Black Death.[127] The undoubted economic complexity of late medieval towns – with their distinctive demographic and occupational structures, growing divisions of labour, market orientation, and dense webs of commercial exchange – does not need to be seen as something contingent on the decline and then collapse of an older, 'feudal' economic order.[128]

The extent to which lords tried to strengthen serfdom after the Black Death and the extent to which they were successful if they did try to do so have been much debated subjects in recent years.[129] The Bohun administration did monitor the locations of some serfs, particularly male serfs, and did attempt to enforce regulations on servile migration in the 1350s. This indicates that Earl Humphrey IV's administration did try to implement the legal theory of serfdom on his estates in the wake of the Black Death, although in a heavily gendered, and therefore qualified and targeted, manner. While the 'seigniorial reaction' was not a myth on the Bohun manors, though, the evidence also indicates the limits of enforcement: although it was easy to proclaim the lord's rights over his villeins in the manorial court, it was far harder to enforce them in practice. The problem of enforcement was exacerbated by competition between lords for tenants and workers, which added to the multiplicity of 'outside options' available for servile migrants. The vast majority of serfs who were described as having left without their lord's permission were not forcibly retrieved, or tracked down and made to render chevage. Those flown serfs who did return were not apparently forced to do so. There is, therefore, little evidence that the administration's targeted attempt to enforce a seigniorial reaction was actually translated into the regulation of its ostensible targets, even though it was directed primarily at male villeins rather than the whole servile population and even though these manors comprised the heartlands of one of the realm's wealthiest and most powerful aristocratic families.

In sum, Earl Humphrey IV found that he could not tighten the bonds of serfdom and force his villeins to reside on the Bohun manors. The attempt to set out his legal rights over his serfs may nonetheless have had some impact. Although it is very difficult to test empirically, it is probable that publicly ordering the return of flown serfs acted as something of a deterrent even if these orders subsequently failed to produce the serfs in question.[130] In other words, some serfs may have decided not to move away from their home manors because, even if they knew that it was unlikely that they would be penalised for doing so, they did not want to risk being one of the 'unlucky few'. Peasant choices may well, therefore, have been constrained to some extent even by inefficient seigniorial efforts. Nonetheless, since the certainty of punishment is seemingly more effective as a deterrent than the severity of punishment, regular problems with the enforcement of restrictions on movement and, generally, with the imposition of the other incidents associated with personal servility must have quickly lessened their deterring effect.[131] The nature and workings of serfdom should remain a subject of huge importance within the economic and social history of the Middle Ages. It seems, on balance, increasingly apparent that the economic significance of serfdom in late medieval England stems at least as much from its ineffectiveness as from its constraining and coercive capacities.[132]

Notes

1 See W. Childs, 'Moving around', in R. Horrox and W. M. Ormrod eds., *A social history of England, 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 60–75; C. Dyer, 'Were late medieval English villages self-contained?', in C. Dyer ed., *The self-contained village: the social history of rural communities, 1250–1900* (Hatfield, 2007), 6–27; S. Drake, *Cornwall, connectivity and identity in the fourteenth century* (Woodbridge, 2019), 224–8. For an example of the superseded view, see G. G. Coulton, *The medieval village* (Cambridge, 1925), 65.

2 For a recent and authoritative study, see C. Dyer, 'Migration in rural England in the later Middle Ages', in W. M. Ormrod, J. E. Story and E. M. Tyler eds., *Migrants in medieval England, c.500–c.1500* (Oxford, 2020), 238–64. For older examples, see P. McClure, 'Patterns of migration in the late Middle Ages: the evidence of English place-name surnames', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. **32** (1979), 167–82; D. Postles, 'The pattern of rural migration in a Midlands county: Leicestershire, *c.* 1270–1350', *Continuity and Change* **6** (1992), 139–61.

3 M. Bailey, *The decline of serfdom in late medieval England: from bondage to freedom* (Woodbridge, 2014), 3, 4.

4 Ibid., 42–6.

5 For a clear overview, see S. Ogilvie, '"Whatever is, is right?" Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe', *Economic History Review*, new ser. **60** (2007), 649–84, at 663 (quotation), 668–9, 672.

6 J. A. Raftis, *Tenure and mobility: studies in the social history of the mediaeval English village* (Toronto, 1964); J. A. Raftis, *Warboys: two hundred years in the life of an English medieval village* (Toronto, 1974); J. A. Raftis, *Peasant economic development within the English manorial system* (Stroud, 1996); E. B. DeWindt, *Land and people in Holywell-cum-Needingworth: structures of tenure and patterns of social organization in an East Midlands village, 1252–1457* (Toronto, 1971).

7 C. Dyer, *Lords and peasants in a changing society: the estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680–1540* (Cambridge, 1980), 271–2; R. K. Field, 'Migration in the Middle Ages: the case of the Hampton Lovett villeins', *Midland History* **8** (1983), 29–48; E. Jones, 'Villein mobility in the later Middle Ages: the case of Spalding Priory', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* **36** (1992), 151–66. See also the early study of F. M. Page, *The estates of Crowland Abbey: a study in manorial organisation* (Cambridge, 1934), 136–7, 149.

8 The starting point for study of these acts is B. H. Putnam, *The enforcement of the Statute of Labourers during the first decade after the Black Death* (New York, 1908). See now J. Whittle, 'Attitudes to wage labour in English legislation, 1349–1601', in T. Lambrecht and J. Whittle eds., *Labour laws in preindustrial Europe: the coercion and regulation of wage labour, c.1350–1850* (Woodbridge, 2023), 33–54 (and studies cited there).

9 Putnam, *The enforcement of the Statute of Labourers*, 154–5, 205–6; Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 44.

10 For three particularly prominent examples, see R. H. Hilton, *The decline of serfdom in medieval England* (London, 1969), 33–4, 52–3; R. Brenner, 'Agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe', repr. in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin eds., *The Brenner Debate: agrarian class structure and economic development in pre-industrial Europe* (Cambridge, 1985), 10–63, esp. 26–7, 33, 35; and E. Domar, 'The causes of slavery or serfdom: a hypothesis', *Journal of Economic History* **30** (1970), 18–32, at 27–30.

11 Raftis, *Tenure and mobility*, 153. See also J. A. Raftis, 'Changes in an English village after the Black Death', *Mediaeval Studies* **29** (1967), 158–77, at 175 n. 32: 'A few villagers had left during the 1350s… But on the whole there is very little record of flight from the demesne after the Black Death…'; and DeWindt, *Land and people in Holywell-cum-Needingworth*, 176.

12 Jones, 'Villein mobility', 154.

13 P. Hyams, *King, lords, and peasants in medieval England: the common law of villeinage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries* (Oxford, 1980), 167–9. Recently, see e.g. J. Story, W. M. Ormrod, and E. M. Tyler, 'Framing migration in medieval England', in W. M. Ormrod, J. Story, and E. M. Tyler eds., *Migrants in medieval England, c. 500–c. 1500* (London, 2020), 5: 'In the later Middle Ages, too, mobility within England was a major phenomenon, especially after the Black Death when there was a widespread movement from the countryside into towns'.

14 For a recent and clear overview, see M. Bailey, *After the Black Death: economy, society, and the law in fourteenth-century England* (Oxford, 2021), 283–325.

15 Recent work linking economic development with migration to towns includes: S. Pamuk, 'The Black Death and the origins of the Great Divergence across Europe, 1300–1600', *European Review of Economic History* **11** (2007), 289–317, esp. 309–13; N. Voigtlander and H.-J. Voth, 'The Three Horsemen of riches: plague, war, and urbanization in early modern Europe', *Review of Economic Studies* **80** (2013), 774–811; D. Acemoglu and A. Wolitzky, 'The economics of labour coercion', *Econometrica* **79** (2011), 555–600; D. Acemoglu and J. A. Robinson, *Why nations fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty* (New York, 2012), 99–101; D. Acemoglu and J. A. Robinson, *The narrow corridor: how nations struggle for liberty* (New York, 2019), 177–8, 279; M. Fochesato, 'Origins of Europe's north-south divide: population changes, real wages and the "Little Divergence" in early modern Europe', *Explorations in Economic History* **70** (2018), 91–131; G. Alfani, 'Economic inequality in preindustrial times: Europe and beyond', *Journal of Economic Literature* **59** (2021), 3–44, at 29–30; R. Jedwab, N. D. Johnson and M. Koyama, 'Medieval cities through the lens of urban economics', *Regional Science and Urban Economics* **94** (2022), 1–11, at 8–9, M. Koyama and J. Rubin, *How the world became rich: the historical origins of economic growth* (Cambridge, 2022), 93–6. On the European Marriage Pattern, see, with extensive citations, M. Bailey, 'The Black Death, girl power, and the emergence of the European Marriage Pattern in England', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* **54** (2024), 493–528.

16 The literature is vast but see P. K. O'Brien, *The economies of imperial China and western Europe: debating the Great Divergence* (London, 2020); and S. Broadberry, 'Britain, the Industrial Revolution, and modern economic growth', in S. Broadberry and K. Fukao eds., *The Cambridge economic history of the modern world* (Cambridge, 2021), 21–44. For a review of work emphasizing the significance of the fourteenth-century shift in land:labour ratios, see P. Vries, *Escaping poverty: the origins of modern economic growth* (Vienna, 2013), 189–98.

17 See e.g. E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and population growth in early fourteenth-century Norwich: evidence from the tithing roll', *Urban History Yearbook* **15** (1988), 15–30. More recently, see S. Rees Jones, 'English towns in the later Middle Ages: the rules and realities of population mobility', in W. M. Ormrod, J. Story and E. M. Tyler eds., *Migrants in medieval England, c. 500–c. 1500* (London, 2020), 265–97. For Professor Dyer's most recent analysis of migration between towns and the countryside, see C. Dyer, *Peasants making history: living in an English region 1200–1540* (Oxford, 2022), 235–43.

18 M. Kowaleski, 'Medieval people in town and country: new perspectives from demography and bioarchaeology', *Speculum* **89** (2014), 573–600, at 579–81.

19 R. Britnell, 'Town life', in R. Horrox and W. M. Ormrod eds., *A social history of England, 1200–1500* (Cambridge, 2006), 134–78, at 145. See too S. H. Rigby, 'Urban population in late medieval England: the evidence of the lay subsidies', *Economic History Review*, new ser. **63** (2010), 393–417; the discussion of the weighting of urban demand as a proportion of national expenditure in R. H. Britnell, 'Urban demand in the English economy, 1300–1600', in J. A. Galloway ed., *Trade, urban hinterlands and market integration, c.1300–1600* (London, 2000), 1–22; and the earlier comments of R. H. Britnell, 'Commerce and capitalism in late medieval England: problems of description and theory', *Journal of Historical Sociology* **6** (1993), 359–76, at 362–3. For estimates of the urbanisation rate based on large towns, see S. Broadberry, B. M. S. Campbell, A. Klein, M. Overton and B. van Leeuwen, *British economic growth, 1270–1870* (Cambridge, 2015), 153 (Table 4.04); and B. M. S. Campbell, *The great transition: climate, disease and society in the late-medieval world* (Cambridge, 2016), 378.

20 Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*; M. Bailey, 'The myth of the "seigniorial reaction" in England, *c.*1350 to *c.*1380', in M. Kowaleski, J. Langdon and P. R. Schofield eds., *Peasants and lords in the medieval English economy: essays in honour of Bruce M.S. Campbell* (Turnhout, 2015), 147–72. See also M. Bailey, 'Tallage-at-Will in later medieval England', *English Historical Review* **134** (2019), 25–58.

21 See the summary in Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 305–11, 337.

22 For a historiographical overview, see J. Hatcher, 'Lordship and villeinage before the Black Death: from Karl Marx to the Marxists and back again', in M. Kowaleski, J. Langdon and P. R. Schofield eds., *Peasants and lords in the medieval English economy: essays in honour of Bruce M.S. Campbell* (Turnhout, 2015), 113–45.

23 C. Briggs, 'English serfdom, *c.*1200–*c.*1350: towards an institutionalist analysis', in S. Cavaciocchi ed., *Serfdom and slavery in the European economy 11th–18th centuries* (Florence, 2014), 13–32, at 28–31.

24 M. Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender in late medieval England: the evidence of manorial court rolls', *Past & Present* **261** (2023), 47–85.

25 Ibid., 50.

26 Ibid., 72, 82, 83.

27 Ibid., 73.

28 For the Bohun estates in Essex, see G. A. Holmes, *The estates of the higher nobility in fourteenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1957), 19–25.

29 L. R. Poos, *A rural society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350–1525* (Cambridge, 1991). This was developed out of his doctoral thesis: 'Population and resources in two fourteenth-century Essex communities: Great Waltham and High Easter 1327–1389' (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1984). The latter is cited when it provides detail omitted from the former. Poos's work on migration emphasised high levels of geographical mobility both before and after the Black Death. This work did not focus on servile migration in particular and primarily utilised the evidence of tithing lists and depositions made before the consistory court of the diocese of London, mainly dating to the second half of the fifteenth century: Poos, *A rural society*, 159–79.

30 Poos, *A rural society*, 33–4.

31 Ibid., 16 (Table 1.1), 17, 18.

32 C. Dyer, 'The social and economic background to the rural revolt of 1381', repr. in C. Dyer, *Everyday life in medieval England* (London, 2000), 191–220, at 200; Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 74, citing J. Whittle, 'Individualism and the family-land bond: a reassessment of land transfer patterns among the English peasantry, *c.*1270–1580', *Past and Present* **160** (1998), 25–63, at 49–59; P. R. Schofield, 'Tenurial developments and the availability of customary land in a later medieval community', *Economic History Review*, new ser. **49** (1996), 250–67. See too the evidence of the Ramsay Abbey estate, drawn from manors in Huntingdonshire and the surrounding counties, discussed in Raftis, *Tenure and mobility*, 81–92.

33 On London's size and agricultural hinterland, see Campbell, *The great transition*, 110; and for Essex and London in particular, see Poos, *A rural society*, 41–3.

34 The figures given here and those following are based on Poos, 'Population and resources', 20.

35 For the tenurial status of molland, see P. Vinogradoff, *Villainage in England* (Oxford, 1892), 183–6.

36 See numerous examples in The National Archives UK (hereafter TNA), DL 30/64/806, m. 4d (4 June 1346). See also Poos, 'Population and resources', 242.

37 British Library, Cotton Charter XIII.5 (rental of Great Waltham, 1328); TNA DL 43/2/32 (rental of Great Waltham, High Easter, and Pleshy, 1328).

38 British Library, Cotton Charter XIII.5; TNA DL 43/2/32.

39 See Poos, 'Population and resources', 29–30, 197–8; Poos, *A rural society*, 243 (using the rentals cited in n. 38).

40 For more detail on the extant court rolls, see Poos, 'Population and resources', 8–11.

41 See D. Postles, 'Migration and mobility in a less mature economy: English internal migration, *c.*1200–1350', *Social History* **25** (2000), 285–99, at 289–90 but cf. now Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 55–8.

42 Poos, *A rural society*, 246. The more general applicability of this trend in the chronological distribution of the evidence is demonstrated in Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 56–7, 78 (Table 1). Note that the rolls apparently deal with serfs who left the Bohun lands, rather than serfs who moved between them. Cf. Raftis, *Tenure and mobility*, 170.

43 TNA DL 30/62/766; TNA DL 30/63/796–801; TNA DL 30/63/803; TNA DL 30/64/806–808; TNA DL 30/64/810; TNA DL 30/64/812–817. The sequence of classmarks here is disrupted because of the presence of several rolls recording 'knight's courts'. This figure excludes these knight's courts and Pleshy town courts.

44 R. R. Davies, *Lordship and society in the March of Wales, 1282–1400* (Oxford, 1978), 92–7.

45 This is drawn from the court rolls referenced in n. 43. This body of evidence underpins the figures given in this section.

46 For instance, as tabulated in Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 140 (Table 8.4.), the numbers of villein migrants recorded in the manorial court rolls of Aldham (Suffolk) are: 12 (1350s), 21 (1360s), 4 (1370s), 5 (1380s), 1 (1390s). Dyer, 'Migration in rural England', 256 (Table 9.4.) used evidence relating to a total of 376 serfs drawn from a much larger group of forty-seven manors in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire for the period 1400 to 1499, an average of 37.6 migrated serfs per decade. More generally, where manorial evidence is extant the average number of serfs per decade recorded as absent from a manor in the second half of the fourteenth century is often between five and thirty: Raftis, *Tenure and mobility*, 145–50 (Table VI); DeWindt, *Land and people in Holywell-cum-Needingworth*, 177 (Table V); Raftis, *Warboys*, 145–7 (Table IX); Jones, 'Villein mobility', 154–6. The lists of absent Hampton Lovett villeins drawn up between 1488 and 1526 and studied by Field range from 1 villein to 35 villeins: Field, 'Migration in the later Middle Ages', 31. Note that Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 78 (Table 1) tabulates the total number of chevage payments and presentments for unlicenced absence on seven manors to chart the increase in attention paid to servile migration after 1349 – one villein presented multiple times therefore counts as multiple presentments in these totals. My thanks to Mark Bailey for discussing this with me.
47 Broadberry et al., *British economic growth*, 320–1 (Table 8.3).
48 For 'rural congestion', see B. M. S. Campbell, 'The agrarian problem in the early fourteenth century', *Past and Present* **188** (2005), 3–70, esp. 60–70.
49 On the conversion of tenures, see M. Bailey, 'The transformation of customary tenures in southern England, *c*.1350–*c*. 1500', *Agricultural History Review* **62** (2014), 210–30; Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 287–93, 316–26; A. T. Brown, 'Estate management and institutional constraints in pre-industrial England: the ecclesiastical estates of Durham, *c*.1400–1640', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. **67** (2014), 699–719. Most recently on the growing divorce of personal freedom and customary tenure, see Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 100–1.
50 TNA DL 803/64/806, m. 4, 4d.
51 TNA DL 30/64/807, mm. 1, 4d; TNA DL 30/64/808, mm. 3, 3d, 4d, 5d; TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 14; TNA DL 30/64/817, m. 1.
52 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7; noted in Poos, *A rural society*, 20 and n. 22. For similar attempts elsewhere, see R. H. Britnell, 'Feudal reaction after the Black Death in the Palatinate of Durham', *Past and Present* **128** (1990), 28–47.
53 M. Kowaleski, 'Gendering demographic change in the Middle Ages', in J. M. Bennett and R. M. Karras eds., *The Oxford handbook of women and gender in medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013), 181–96; Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender'.
54 Poos, 'Population and resources', 214 and n. 90. On other manors, it was sometimes stipulated that female tenants should find male workers to perform ploughing services on their behalf: S. Rigby, *English society in the later Middle Ages: class, gender and status* (London, 1995), 252–3. See too J. Whittle and M. Hailwood, 'The gender division of labour in early modern England', *Economic History Review*, new ser. **73** (2020), 3–32, at 16–17 (Table 9.A). Generally on the limited proportion of female tenants, see S. Bardsley, 'Peasant women and inheritance of land in fourteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change* **29** (2014), 297–324.
55 See Dyer, 'Migration in rural England', 258: 'The number of females would have been under-reported, because the male jurors and estate officials thought them less important'.
56 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 8. See also the examples of two female serfs, Alice Mon and Agnes Welnough, who moved to Good Easter, five miles west of Great Waltham: TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7d.
57 TNA DL 30/64/810, m. 1. For Ramsay Abbey and the manor of Cranfield, see W. Page ed., *A history of the county of Bedford: volume 3* (London, 1912), 275–9.
58 Jones, 'Villein mobility', 161–4.
59 Field, 'Migration in the later Middle Ages', 42.
60 Dyer, *Lords and peasants in a changing society*, 366.
61 Dyer, 'Migration in rural England', 256 (Table 9.4).
62 Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 71.
63 These difficulties are discussed in C. Dyer, 'Small towns 1270–1540', in D. Palliser ed., *The Cambridge urban history of Britain, volume I: 600–1540* (Cambridge, 2000), 505–38, at 505–6.
64 For the population of Colchester, see R. H. Britnell, *Growth and decline in Colchester, 1300–1525* (Cambridge, 1986), 15–16, 86–98, 159.

65 Poos, *A rural society*, 40.

66 Dyer, 'Small towns', 505–8. Dyer suggested that around 600 such places probably existed in England at any one time in the late Middle Ages.

67 In 1291, for example, two serfs are recorded as living on the fee of Robert Bruce at 'Hatfield'. This could be Hatfield Peverel or Hatfield Broad Oak. Hatfield Broad Oak was a locally significant town, ranked as the sixth largest settlement in Essex in 1334: W. R. Powell et al., *A history of the county of Essex: volume 8* (London, 1983), 175. I have therefore placed these two migrants as living in Hatfield Broad Oak.

68 TNA DL 30/64/810, m. 1.

69 Dyer, 'Migration in rural England', 256.

70 Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 71, 81 (Table 4), 82 (Table 5).

71 Broadberry et al., *British economic growth*, 14.

72 Evidence for Colchester indicates a usual catchment area of *c*.25 miles: J. A. Galloway, 'Colchester and its region, 1310–1560: wealth, industry and rural-urban mobility in medieval society' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1986), 276–8. For comparative figures on catchment areas, see Postles, 'English internal migration', 286; and S. H. Rigby, *Medieval Grimsby. growth and decline* (Hull, 1993), 20–2.

73 See the similarity here with John Hare's study of rural-urban dynamics in late medieval Wilshire: J. Hare, *A prospering society: Wiltshire in the later Middle Ages* (Hatfield, 2011), 124–9, 190–9. See also the more general tenor of S. R. Epstein, 'Rodney Hilton, Marxism and the transition from feudalism to capitalism', in C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham eds., *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: an exploration of historical themes*, Past and Present Supplement **2** (2007), 248–69, at 267–8.

74 TNA DL 30/63/800, m. 7d.

75 TNA DL 30/63/800, m. 8. As was the case elsewhere, annual render of a capon or capons was the customary form of chevage on the Bohun manors. This was sometimes accompanied by an initial fine.

76 TNA DL 30/63/801, m. 16d.

77 TNA DL 30/64/801, m. 17.

78 Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 65–6.

79 TNA DL 30/63/803, m. 3 for this and the following sentence.

80 TNA DL 30/64, 806, mm. 2, 4.

81 TNA DL 30/63/803, m. 3.

82 Their familial holdings in High Easter have been mapped by Poos, *A rural society*, 53.

83 TNA DL 30/63/800, m. 6.

84 TNA DL 30/63/800, mm. 8, 9; TNA DL 30/63/801, mm. 16d, 18.

85 TNA DL 30/64/813, m. 5d.

86 TNA DL 30/64/806, m 6d.

87 TNA DL 30/64/813, m. 1d.

88 TNA DL 30/62/766, m. 2.

89 TNA DL 30/64/810, m. 1; TNA DL 30/64/814, m. 14; TNA DL 30/64/815, m. 14; TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 15. For the continuing presence of the Wete family, see TNA DL 30/64/817, m. 11d.

90 TNA DL 30/64/813, m. 9. Geoffrey had been alive in 1351: TNA DL 30/64/807, m. 2.

91 TNA DL 30/64/813, m. 9d.

92 TNA DL 30/64/814, m. 6; TNA DL 30/64/817, m. 3.

93 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 8.

94 Poos, *A rural society*, 246.

95 My thanks to Alex Brown for this point.

96 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7.

97 TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 17.

98 For the following sentences, see Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 140–1 (including Table 8.4.).

99 Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 62–6. See too J. Whittle, 'Housewives and servants in rural England, 1440–1650: evidence of women's work from probate documents', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. **15** (2005), 51–74, and 'Servants in rural England *c*. 1450–1650: hired work as a means of accumulating wealth and skills before marriage', in M. Ågren and A. L. Erickson eds., *The marital economy in Scandinavia and Britain, 1400–1900* (Aldershot, 2005), 89–110.

100 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7d.

101 For this and the following sentences, see TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 5d.

102 For the intersection of gender and poverty, see J. Bennett, 'Women and poverty: girls on their own in England before 1348', in M. Kowaleski, J. Langdon and P. R. Schofield eds., *Peasants and lords in the medieval English economy: essays in honour of Bruce M.S. Campbell* (Turnhout, 2015), 299–323.

103 See Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 289.

104 See L. R. Poos, 'The social context of Statute of Labourers enforcement', *Law and History Review* **1** (1983), 27–52 noting that 7556 people – of whom *c.*20 per cent were women – were fined for violating the legislation in Essex in 1352 alone.

105 Cf. two oaths sworn by villeins on the manor of Aldham (Suffolk): Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*, 142–3.

106 TNA DL 30/64/810, m. 1.

107 Poos, 'Population and resources', 258–9; TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 8.

108 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7d.

109 TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 18.

110 TNA DL 30/65/826, as discussed in Poos, 'Population and resources', 174 n. 91.

111 Discussed in J. Bennett, 'Compulsory service in late medieval England', *Past and Present* **209** (2010), 7–51, at 24–5.

112 See e.g. B. M. S. Campbell, 'Factor markets in England before the Black Death', *Continuity and Change* **24** (2009), 79–106; Campbell, *The great transition*, 96–103, 184–7. Waged labour is estimated to have absorbed around 30 per cent of expended labour *c.*1340: Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 35, 38. See now too M. Bailey, 'The regulation of the rural market in waged labour in fourteenth-century England', *Continuity and Change* **38** (2023), 136–62.

113 *Knighton's Chronicle, 1337–1396*, ed. G. H. Martin (Oxford, 1995), 102–7 (quotation at 106–7).

114 J. Hatcher, 'England in the aftermath of the Black Death', *Past and Present* **144** (1994), 3–35, at 21–2. Hatcher drew on the initial scepticism about recorded remuneration rates expressed in J. E. T. Rogers, *A history of agriculture and prices in England*, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1866–1902), i, 300; J. E. T. Rogers, *Six centuries of work and wages* (London, 1884), 229–30; D. L. Farmer, 'Prices and wages, 1350–1500', in E. Miller ed., *The agrarian history of England and Wales, III: 1350–1500* (Cambridge, 1991), 431–525, at 470–2.

115 This is emphasised in C. Dyer, 'Villeins, bondsmen, neifs, and serfs: new serfdom in England, *c.* 1200–1600', in P. Freedman and M. Bourin eds., *Forms of servitude in Northern and Central Europe: decline, resistance, and expansion* (Turnhout, 2005), 419–35, at 432–33; Bailey, 'The myth of the 'seigniorial reaction'', 160–4; Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 14, 78, 86–7, 312; Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 67–8. For a perspective linking such competition to a reconfiguration of workers' rights to their labour, see D. D. Haddock and L. Kiesling, 'The Black Death and property rights', *Journal of Legal Studies* **31** (2002), 545–87, at 582–5.

116 As per Bailey, 'Servile migration and gender', 67.

117 TNA DL 30/62/766, m. 2.

118 *Calendar of the patent rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: 1292–1301* (London: H.M.S.O., 1893), 194; A. Beam, J. Bradley, D. Broun, J. R. Davies, M. Hammond, N. Jakeman, M. Pasin and A. Taylor (with others), *People of medieval Scotland: 1093–1371* (Glasgow and London, 2019), www.poms.ac.uk, no. 18886 (last accessed, 3 March 2023).

119 TNA DL 30/64/812, m. 7d.

120 *Calendar of inquisition post mortem: volume XIV* (London, 1952), no. 246.

121 TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 17.

122 *The chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook*, trans. D. Preest (Woodbridge, 2012), xiv.

123 M. M. Bigelow, 'The Bohun wills, II', *American Historical Review* **1** (1896), 631–49, at 635, 637; *Calendar of the close rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: 1360–1364* (London: H.M.S.O., 1909) 297; *Calendar of the fine rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: 1356–1368* (London: H.M.S.O., 1913), 176, 187.

124 TNA DL 30/64/816, m. 17.

125 *Calendar of the patent rolls preserved in the Public Record Office: 1327–1330* (London: H.M.S.O., 1891), 36; *Testamenta Vetusta*, ed. N. H. Nicolas, 2 vols. (London, 1826), I, 122.

126 I draw here on the famous remark by Postan that towns were 'non-feudal islands in a feudal sea': M. M. Postan, *The medieval economy and society: an economic history of Britain in the Middle Ages* (London, 1972), 212, the spirit of which seems to underlie the dichotomy of town and countryside put forward by some of the works in n. 15. See now the querying of the spread and benefits of the right to freedom

through urban residence in S. Alsford, 'Urban safe havens for the unfree in medieval England: a reconsideration', *Slavery and Abolition* **32** (2011), 363–75.

127 Above, n. 15.

128 Cf. a recent debate which is usefully emphasises how complex, high equilibrium economies can be approached in ways which try not to view them in light of later transitions to capitalism: C. Wickham, 'How did the feudal economy work? The economic logic of medieval societies', *Past & Present* **251** (2021), 3–40 (esp. 8); S. Ghosh, 'Chris Wickham on "the economic logic of medieval societies": a response', *Past & Present* **260** (2023), 269–86; C. Wickham, 'A reply to Shami Ghosh', *Past & Present* **260** (2023), 287–96.

129 Bailey, *The decline of serfdom*.

130 This point is made in S. Ogilvie, 'Choices and constraints in the pre-industrial countryside', in C. Briggs, P. M. Kitson and S. J. Thompson eds., *Population, welfare and economic change in Britain, 1290–1834* (Woodbridge, 2014), 269–306, at 279–83; and specifically with regard to migration in S. Ogilvie, 'Economics and history: analysing serfdom', in R. Bourke and Q. Skinner eds., *History in the humanities and social sciences* (Cambridge, 2022), 329–53, at 334.

131 For research on 'certainty vs. severity' in modern contexts, see D. S. Nagin, 'Deterrence in the twenty-first century', *Crime and Justice* **42** (2013), 199–263; M. Rosina, *The criminalisation of irregular migration in Europe: globalisation, deterrence, and vicious cycles* (Cham, 2022), 58–65.

132 I draw here on the wording of C. Dyer, 'The ineffectiveness of lordship in England, 1200–1400', in C. Dyer, P. Coss and C. Wickham eds., *Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages: an exploration of historical themes*, Past and Present Supplement **2** (2007), 69–86.

French Abstract

Migrer était pratique courante dans l'Angleterre médiévale. En théorie, cependant, le servage restreignait sérieusement la mobilité des vilains. Le présent article s'attache à la question de la migration des serfs, à travers l'étude d'une série de rôles archivés par les tribunaux seigneuriaux des manoirs de Great Waltham et de High Easter (Essex). Ainsi nous contribuons aux débats historiques en cours sur la nature et le déclin du servage au sein de l'Angleterre de l'époque et en particulier sur le rôle des villes comme destination des migrants, paramètre considéré comme contribuant à la 'petite divergence'. En premier lieu, l'article cerne l'ampleur de la migration des serfs telle qu'elle est perçue à travers ces dossiers de justice seigneuriale. Dans la ligne de recherches antérieures récentes, près de la moitié des serfs migrants enregistrés se sont établis à moins de dix miles de leur manoir d'origine et, ce qui est significatif, une large majorité d'entre eux (environ les deux tiers) ont opté pour une destination en milieu rural. En second lieu sont explorées en détail certaines dynamiques de cette migration. Il est suggéré qu'il fut tenté, dans les années 1350, de restreindre la mobilité des vilains, mais que, dans la pratique, la capacité coercitive des maîtres demeura clairement inefficace, limitant la réaction seigneuriale.

German Abstract

Migration war im mittelalterlichen England weitverbreitet. Die Leibeigenschaft schränkte jedoch, zumindest in der Theorie, die Mobilität von Leibeigenen stark ein. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Migration von Leibeigenen mit Hilfe einer genaueren Auswertung der Gerichtsrollen der Grundherrschaften von Great Waltham und High Easter (Essex). Er versteht sich als Beitrag zu den laufenden Debatten über das Wesen und den Rückgang

der Leibeigenschaft im mittelalterlichen England und über die Rolle von Städten als Zielorten der Migration, was auch als wichtiges Moment der Kleinen Divergenz angesehen worden ist. Der Beitrag ermittelt zunächst den Umfang der Migration von Leibeigenen, wie er in den grundherrschaftlichen Gerichtsrollen verzeichnet ist, und bestätigt den Befund jüngerer Studien, dass fast die Hälfte der migrierenden Leibeigenen innerhalb von zehn Meilen ihrer Heimatgrundherrschaft blieb und dass bezeichnenderweise eine beträchtliche Mehrheit (etwa zwei Drittel) ländliche Zielorte wählten. Anschließend werden in dem Beitrag einzelne Aspekte der Migrationsdynamik von Leibeigenen im Detail untersucht. Die These lautet, dass in den 1350er Jahren zwar massiv versucht wurde, die Bewegung von Leibeigenen einzuschränken, aber dass die Zwangsmöglichkeiten der Grundherren in der Praxis klar begrenzt und kaum wirksam waren.