

MANORIAL OFFICEHOLDING AND SELECTION PROCESSES: PARTICIPATION OR RESTRICTION?

A vital part of the narrative of the rise of the middling sort has rested on the argument that institutions of local government were controlled by a set of ‘chief inhabitants’ in early modern England. Historians have attempted to show this in two ways. The first has been to demonstrate the relationship between wealth and officeholding by using a range of tax, landholding and rate-paying records.¹ Secondly, and more pertinent for this study, several historians have established that parochial officeholding and vestry attendance in many early modern communities were monopolised by select groups.² Steve Hindle has demonstrated this from an institutional perspective, demonstrating the spread of the ‘select’ or ‘close’ vestry in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century that formally restricted membership to a small number, along with the more informal oligarchic tendencies of the so-called ‘open’ vestry.³ Wrightson and Levine identified monopolisation through their detailed study of Terling, demonstrating that parochial office, quarter-session jury service and manorial jury service were dominated by ten to fifteen men in any quinquennium, and in turn five of these were especially prominent.⁴ Studies of early modern manor courts have often similarly argued that manorial jury service was concentrated in the hands of wealthier tenants, suggesting that middling sorts operated through a wide variety of institutions in the early modern era.⁵

Other studies have tended to downplay the degree of elite control of early modern local institutions. Several have argued that churchwardens

¹ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, 103–6; French, *Middle Sort of People*, 111–19; French and Hoyle, *Earls Colne*, 254–66; Kent, ‘Rural “middling sort”’, 24; Kent, *Village Constable*, 82.

² French, *Middle Sort of People*, 119–24; French and Hoyle, *Earls Colne*, 253–66; Wood, *Faith*, 220–3.

³ Hindle, *State and Social Change*, 207–15. ⁴ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety*, 106–7.

⁵ Healey, ‘Northern manor court’, 227; Shaw-Taylor, ‘Management of common land’, 65; Winchester, ‘Upland commons’, 40; Winchester, *Harvest*, 40–2; Harrison, ‘Manor courts and governance’, 50; M.K. McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: the Manor and Liberty of Havering-ate-Bower, 1500–1620* (Cambridge, 1991), 364–6.

and collectors of the poor were not the wealthiest men in the parish, especially before the Reformation.⁶ Jan Pitman has argued that local traditions of inclusion prevented parochial offices being controlled by oligarchies in several communities in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Norfolk.⁷ Mark Goldie has emphasised that officeholding was 'remarkably socially extensive', although this assessment is made as part of a larger contrast of the 'republicanism' of officeholding with monarchical authority, rather than in terms of the communities themselves.⁸ Therefore, while historians of early modern villages generally stress the concentration of officeholding in the hands of select groups of wealthier residents, local studies emphasise significant regional and temporal variations within this wider schema.

Medievalists of all stripes have noted a degree of concentration in the community-governing structures of the late Middle Ages. While the early studies of manorial structures associated with the Toronto School recognised that some 'A class' families monopolised officeholding, they interpreted this as community-minded leadership by experienced managers rather than domination of government by an oligarchy.⁹ However, other studies have challenged this idea of open village governance, as part of the process of a 'toughening up' in the historiography discussed earlier.¹⁰ Although historians of fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century parishes have outlined significant local differences in the balance of power and responsibilities of officials such as churchwardens, on the one hand, and larger groups of masters and entire parish assemblies, on the other, they have generally stressed that small rural parishes in particular were dominated by elites who made decisions about church building and the distribution of charity.¹¹ In his study of trustworthy men as another organ of church government, Forrest has demonstrated through quantification that these individuals both typically represented a very small part of the

⁶ Carlson, 'Office of churchwarden', 194–200; Kümin, *Shaping of a Community*, 32–8; McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, 279–8.

⁷ J. Pitman, 'Tradition and exclusion: parochial officeholding in early modern England, a case study from north Norfolk, 1580–1640', *Rural History*, 15 (2004), 27–45, at 37–43.

⁸ Goldie, 'Unacknowledged republic', 153–4, 161.

⁹ Raftis, 'Concentration of responsibility', 92–118; DeWindt, *Land and People*, 206–33; DeWindt, 'Peasant power structures', 244–58; Olson, 'Jurors of the village court', 238–54; Olson, 'Families have their fate and periods', 410–28, 436; Olson, *Chronicle of All that Happens*, 104–61, 228–9. 'A class' refers to the Toronto School's methodology of dividing families into three hierarchical categories based on a range of attributes including officeholding. See the above literature for a more detailed explanation.

¹⁰ See p. 17–18.

¹¹ G.T.G. Byng, *Church Building and Society in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2017), 22–4, 137–9, 172–3, 212–13, 278–80; K.L. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001), 77–81, 97–8; Dyer, 'Poverty and its relief', 55–8; Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 164–5.

population in pre-Black Death England and tended to be drawn from the wealthier inhabitants of the villages they represented across the late medieval period.¹² From a manorial perspective, a statistical study by Peter Larson has shown that juries in two Durham manors after the Black Death were characterised by little turnover and long tenures of service, suggesting concentration of this office in the hands of a local elite.¹³

This shift towards seeing medieval villages as controlled by a narrower set of elites has also been the result of a more sceptical conception of the language of broad-based community representation found in sources associated with the instruments of late medieval local governance.¹⁴ Johnson has recently emphasised that fifteenth-century courts were deployed by rural inhabitants in a process of community building.¹⁵ However, this was a process that was largely led by the local elites who controlled courts and sought to maintain the 'rhetoric of corporate unity' while wielding their authority 'in ways that reinforced the patriarchal and oligarchical tierings of village society'.¹⁶ Thus, while the rhetoric of community undeniably does show that elites could certainly not ignore a culture of communal decision-making without threatening the legitimacy of governing institutions, and this did give the potential for more marginalised voices to exercise limited power, in reality much day-to-day control of governing institutions is seen to have rested in relatively few hands.¹⁷ In summary, the scholarship has increasingly edged towards the position that governing institutions in the medieval village were controlled by an elite of local inhabitants, and that the situation was similar to that of early modern England.

Much like studies of the function of manorial courts and their officers explored in Chapter 1, the key limitation of the pre-existing historiography is the lack of long-term studies, and particularly those that cross the boundary between medieval and early modern. This chapter explores manorial officeholding through examining both the processes by which officials were chosen and patterns of service in office. Specifically, it asks whether manorial officeholding regimes were characterised by wide participation, with offices spread equitably among those who served and accessible to large parts of the population living in the village community, or characterised by restriction to elite groups, with officeholding concentrated in a few hands. Furthermore, how did this change over time? For this analysis, officials are split into two types. The first are 'selected officials' who were explicitly chosen in court rolls and served for terms of a year or longer,

¹² Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 138–89. ¹³ Larson, 'Village voice', 706.

¹⁴ Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 166. ¹⁵ Johnson, *Law in Common*, 51–4. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Law in Common*, 33–45; Johnson, 'Soothsayers', 10; G. Rosser, 'Going to the fraternity feast: commensality and social relations in late medieval England', *JBS*, 33 (1994), 430–46, at 443–6.

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such as reeves, beadles, messors, tasters and bylawmen. The second type, 'empanelled officials', are the presentment officials who were named for a single session, such as jurors and capital pledges.

The results demonstrate that communities of tenants typically had significant power over the selection of officials. This provided a capacity for 'political' activity within the community itself to shape tenure in office as lords and their representatives played a limited role in deciding who would serve. In practice, this led to a two-tier system of participation and restriction: while a large proportion of adult males would serve in office during their lifetime, a core subset of frequently serving individuals dominated manorial offices, suggesting that manorial institutions were to some extent monopolised by an elite. Moreover, there is no clear evidence for a greater degree of restriction in manorial office in the early modern period, challenging the narrative of the emergence of a new middling sort in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

The first section of this chapter explores evidence for the systems by which officials were chosen, to see how far these allowed for monopolisation by elites. Next, the actual patterns of service at the case-study manors are examined in two ways. Firstly, the second section reconstructs the proportion of the residents in a village community who participated in manorial office, by examining numbers serving in relation to population estimates. The subsequent section considers inequality among those who served in office. This allows for the exploration of how equitably opportunities to serve were distributed among those who served, and how this changed between manors. Finally, the last section directly investigates the formation of elite groups within the officeholding community, by looking at the most prominent individuals for well-documented periods.

SELECTION METHODS

An examination of selection systems reveals substantial variety in the way manorial officials were chosen. However, within this variety, manorial customary obligations frequently led to official positions being concentrated in the hands of wealthier individuals owing to tenancy being a criterion for service. Moreover, cultures of collective liability often gave communities a significant role in choosing who served and also helped create a corporate identity among those who were regularly empanelled as presentment jurors and especially capital pledges. This allowed for the potential for monopolisation of office and to create a division between an officeholding elite and an excluded majority.

Manorial Officeholding and Selection Processes

Selected Officials

The key criterion to be a candidate as a selected official was to hold certain lands as a tenant. Manorial customals provide early evidence for the pool of individuals liable to serve. As part of larger statements of the various obligations of tenants associated with certain parcels of land, these documents make clear the association of particular types of holding with the requirement to serve in office. On manors throughout England, tenants of standard virgates or ferlings were liable to serve as reeves, messors and beadles.¹⁸ Sometimes different types of officials were associated with different sizes of lands, with liability to serve as reeve associated with full virgates or ferlings, and messor or beadle associated with half virgates.¹⁹

Court rolls reveal the persistence of these systems of connecting holdings with serving in particular offices.²⁰ At Downham, three selections for 1484–7 indicate that the obligation to act as reeve was linked to holding half and full virgates. In 1484, John Dunstable and Simon Jenny were selected ‘for one full virgate of land formally Colsens’ and Richard Tailour and Simon Jacob ‘for one full virgate formally John Bateman’. In 1485 Robert Burdon, Richard Tailour and Simon Jacob were selected ‘for a full virgate of land called Bukkys’, along with John Jennys, with Burdon and Jennys sworn for a half virgate each. The sole candidate in 1487, Clement Clidehowe, was selected ‘for one double customary virgate of land which he holds of the lord called

¹⁸ For examples, see the customals of the manors of Willingdon, Amberley, Bishopstone and Preston (Suss.), Stokes under Hamedon and Taunton (Som.), Brixton Deverill and Ogbourne St Andrew (Wilts.), Felsted (Essex), Minchinhampton (Glos.), Wantage, Swyncombe and Islip (Oxon.), Quarley (Hants.), Ruislip (Middx.), Combe (Berks.). *Customals of the Manors of Laughton, Willingdon and Goring*, ed. and trans. A.E. Wilson, Sussex Record Society, 60 (Lewes, 1961), 27; *Two Registers Formerly Belonging to the Family of Beauchamp of Hatch*, ed. H.C. Maxwell-Lyte, Somerset Record Society, 35 (London, 1920), 17–19, 37–40; *The Medieval Customs of the Manors of Taunton and Bradford on Tone*, ed. T.J. Hunt, Somerset Record Society, 60 (Frome, 1962), 41–76; *Thirteen Customals of the Sussex Manors of the Bishop of Chichester: And Other Documents from Libri P. and C. of the Episcopal Manuscripts*, trans. and ed. W.D. Peckham, Sussex Record Society, 31 (Cambridge, 1925), 47, 90; *Charters and Customals of the Abbey of Holy Trinity, Caen*, ed. M. Chibnall, *Records of Social and Economic History*, 5, 22 (Oxford, 1982), 99, 109–26; *Select Documents of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec*, ed. M. Chibnall, Camden Society, 73 (London, 1951), 38–9, 50, 59–60, 72, 75, 85, 87, 91; B.F. Harvey, ed., ‘Customal [1391] and bye-laws [1386–1540] of the manor of Islip, *Oxfordshire Record Society*, 40 (1959), 80–119, at 85. Owen has recently highlighted that the connection between landholding size and liability for officeholding was very flexible on some Glastonbury Abbey manors, with smallholders liable to serve. Owen, ‘Rural and urban manorial officialdom’, 39–40.

¹⁹ For example, at the manors of Ogbourne St Andrew (Wilts.) and Hevingham Bishops (Norf.). *Select Documents*, ed. Chibnall, 38–9; M. Forrest, ‘Women manorial officers in late medieval England’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 57 (2013), 47–67, at 51.

²⁰ For instance, at Haddeston in Bunwell (Norf.) the court rolls state the landholdings for which tenants served as reeves. CUL, Buxton Papers, 68/9, 18 Oct. 1347, 18 Oct. 1348.

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Purdies Ground'.²¹ The names of two of the virgates reflect the surnames of former reeves. Thomas Colleson and John Colleson were selected frequently between 1385 and 1435 and Robert Buk and John Buk Bateman were selected between 1378 and 1435, suggesting a level of continuity between these virgate holdings and the selection of reeves.²² Similar evidence can be seen at Cratfield, where landholdings were chosen whose tenant, or sometimes tenants, were liable to serve as reeve. That the size of a potential officer's landholding was significant is seen in the consistent recording between 1414 and 1489 that those chosen held at least 16a of customary land, the size of a half virgate.²³ As at Downham, the chosen tenements shared the names of former reeves, demonstrating continuity in selection patterns.²⁴

The connection between land and serving as an official had significant advantages from a seigniorial perspective. Firstly, officials who were tenants rather than simply inhabitants of village communities could be rewarded through rent reductions, incentivising those holding office to perform their tasks effectively.²⁵ For instance, at manors of the Abbey of Glastonbury, rent quittances were one of the most common forms of official remuneration.²⁶ Secondly, while officials were typically punished through amercement, land seizure represented an ultimate sanction against failure in official roles, and tenants with greater landholdings had more to lose.²⁷ For instance, at Wakefield (Yorks.) in 1316, Thomas de Wadesworth was rejected as grave (the equivalent of the reeve) because he had 'not sufficient property to serve in that office', and instead paid a 40s fine, showing seigniorial reluctance to have officials who did not hold enough land and thus for whom seizure was presumably less of a threat.²⁸ Tenant-officials

²¹ CUL, EDR, C11/3/8, m.1, 29 Jan. 1484; C11/3/10, m.2 [date indecipherable]; C11/3/10, 24 Feb. 1487.

²² CUL, EDR, C11/1/3, C11/2/4–6. ²³ CUL, Vanneck Box/3.

²⁴ For example, the tenement of Flyntard: CUL, Vanneck Box/3, Henry VI roll, m.30, 24 Oct. 1442; Edward IV roll, m.5, 12 Oct. 1465; Henry VII roll, m.15, 17 Dec. 1498.

²⁵ Briggs, 'Monitoring demesne managers', 180. SA, P314/w/1/1/1350–5, P314/w/1/1/1356, P314/w/1/1/1359–60; CUL, EDR, D10/3. See, for example, the customals of the manors of Bishopstone, Brightwalton and Alciston (Suss.), Bromham (Wilts.), Islip (Oxon.), Felsted (Essex). *Thirteen Customals*, ed. and trans. Peckham, 90; *Abbey of Holy Trinity*, ed. Chibnall, 99; *Customals of Battle Abbey, in the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II (1283–1312): from MSS. in the Public Record Office*, ed. S.R. Scargill-Bird, Camden Society, 41 (London, 1887), 27, 66–7, 81; Harvey, 'Customal', 85.

²⁶ Owen, 'Rural and urban manorial officialdom', 155.

²⁷ CUL, Davidson 33, Grey Box 3, Document 33, 4 Jul. 1308; SA, P314/w/1/1/775, 25 Oct. 1571; CUL, EDR, C11/2/6, m.25, 14 Jan. 1434; C11/3/11, 9 May 1571; *Monks Eleigh Manorial Records, 1210–1683*, ed. V. Aldous, Suffolk Record Society, 65 (Woodbridge, 2022), 130; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, 61; Owen, 'Rural and urban manorial officialdom', 38–9, 85.

²⁸ *Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield*, ed. W.P. Bailey, J. Lister and J.W. Walker, 5 vols. (Leeds, 1901–45), vol. III: 1313 to 1316, and 1286, ed. J. Lister (Leeds, 1919), 110.

provided some benefits over alternative outsiders, such as salaried bailiffs, who needed to be paid a wage and were less tied to the manor and its community so more likely to abscond.²⁹ However, this connection between large tenancies and officeholding also restricted official positions to a socio-economic elite within the village community, creating a link between status and access to governing authority. This can be seen at Fordington, where a fealty list from 1441 allows named reeves to be connected to their landholdings. Unfortunately, the names of Fordington's reeves are not consistently recorded in the same period, but of the names of eight individuals who either served as reeves or were candidates for this office recoverable for 1440–5, all but one were recorded as holding a full virgate.³⁰ Before the Black Death, holding a virgate would undoubtedly put a tenant in the economic elite of most villages and these tenants could likely make a surplus.³¹ After the Black Death, with land being more abundant, a greater proportion of tenants would hold a virgate, or even multiple virgates through engrossment, but holding this amount of land would still typically place a tenant within the wealthiest half of the village community.³²

The process by which any particular individual was drawn from a manor's pool of substantial tenants to serve in office varied between communities and even between types of official at the same manor. While systems were localised, five archetypes can be identified.³³ The first, selection by specific landholding, was a relatively uncommon method and was generally used for lower-status officials such as collectors, beadles and pinders.³⁴ In this system, the tenant of a specific single piece of land performed the office as a part of their rent, meaning that the same person served in the role continuously. For instance, the 1353 customal of Drungewick (Suss.) describes the 'Beddellond . . . which [Richard de] Malham was wont to hold for doing the office of Bedell'.³⁵

²⁹ Evans, 'Merton College's control of its tenants', 211–19.

³⁰ TNA, SC 2/169/43, m.1, 22 Nov. 1440, m.5, 13 Jun. 1441, m.8, 4 Oct. 1441, m.22, c.1445. The final man, Thomas Dewfyt, cannot be found holding any land in the fealty list. As he was a candidate for the reeveship in 1445, and thus four years after the fealty list was made, it is possible he had taken on a virgate in the intervening period.

³¹ C.C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England, c.1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), 110–20.

³² *Ibid.*, 141–3; L.R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350–1525* (Cambridge, 1991), 18–20; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, 182–3.

³³ This typology of selection methods and their prevalence is based on both primary sources and use of the secondary literature. It is important to note that secondary works are not always entirely clear on selection processes.

³⁴ This practice was used at the manor of Climsland (Corn.) and in the Palatinate of Durham. J. Hatcher, *Rural Economy and Society in the Duchy of Cornwall, 1300–1500* (Cambridge, 1970), 41–2; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, 61.

³⁵ *Thirteen Customals*, ed. Peckham, 66.

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A second more common land-based system of selection was that of rotation. For lower-status officials, rotation was often effectively an extension of selection by specific landholding, as candidacy was restricted to a subset of tenants, often drawn from one settlement within a larger manor. At Worfield, providing the beadle was incumbent on Hallon, one of the manor's constituent townships.³⁶ Tenants of relevant lands were required to serve, and in 1380 an inquisition determined that Roger Aldith had to serve for land he held in the township.³⁷ As documented in a 1557 note detailing 'the appoytin\g/ & true cessyng of the byddell of halon by the consent of the township for ev(er) aft(u)r', the office rotated around twelve lands in a fourteen-year cycle.³⁸ For higher-status positions such as reeves, rotations generally included a large set of lands on the manor.³⁹ Much like the general connection between landholding and service, rotational systems were persistent over time. For instance, at three manors centred at Ufford (Suff.) a rental dated to 1441/2 states the office of collector would rotate annually among eleven to forty-two separate holdings per manor.⁴⁰ This system persisted across time as identical lists of holdings were made for the manors of Ufford and Kettleborough in 1431 and 1470/1, respectively.⁴¹

The third system, selection by lord alone (in reality by the steward as the lord's representative), was often implied in customals, which emphasise that the lord could select any tenant holding the requisite type of tenancy to serve.⁴² For instance, the 1292 customal of Laughton (Suss.) stated that the 'lord can choose from all the aforesaid customaries of Leighton anyone he shall wish for the office of reeve and beadle', while that of Felsted (Essex) noted that 'each man who holds half a virgate of land to work ought to be reeve if the lady abbess will desire it'.⁴³ In reality, however, lords and their estate managers rarely seem to have actually selected their officials directly from the full pool of tenants. This practice

³⁶ SA, P314/W/1/1/246, 2 Nov. 1417; P314/W/1/1/289, 3 Oct. 1438; P314/W/1/1/292, 1 Oct. 1440.

³⁷ SA, P314/W/1/1/121, 2 May 1380. ³⁸ SA, 2028/1/5/8.

³⁹ This practice was used at the manor of Ash (Surr.) and Wynondham Grishagh (Norf.). Forrest, 'Women manorial officeholders', 54; Workman, 'Manorial estate officials', 227 n. 24. Rotation for significant officials may have been more common in East Anglia, but certainly not all manors in this region used a rotational system.

⁴⁰ SAI, HA96/5/1, m.36. ⁴¹ SAI, HA96/5/1, m.23.

⁴² See, for examples, the customals of the manors of Brightwalton and Rackham (Suss.), Stokes under Hamedon (Som.), Ogbourne St Andrew (Wilts.), Felsted (Essex), Minchinhampton (Glos.), Wantage and Swyncombe (Oxon.), Quarley (Hants.), Ruislip (Mid dx.), Donden and Milburne (county/ies unknown). *Two registers*, ed. Maxwell-Lyte, 17–19, 37–40; *Thirteen Customals*, ed. Peckham, 109–21; *Abbey of Holy Trinity*, ed. Chibnall, 99, 109–23; *Select Documents*, ed. Chibnall, 38–9, 50, 59–60, 75, 87, 91; *Customals of Battle Abbey*, ed. Scargill-Bird, 66–7.

⁴³ *Customals*, trans and ed. Wilson, 20; *Abbey of Holy Trinity*, ed. Chibnall, 99.

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is only noted for a few officials at select manors, such as choosing the reeve at Cuxham (Oxon.) and the bailiff at Havering (Essex) prior to 1465, the latter of whom performed some functions more typical of a manorial reeve but was paid a salary rather than granted a remission of rent.⁴⁴

The fourth and fifth methods of selection were most common. In these systems, tenants had significantly more influence over the choice of officials. In the simplest of the two, the community of tenants had entirely free choice over who served. While this choice was seemingly always from a set of tenants holding larger landholdings, there was a variation between manors where an individual was selected⁴⁵ and those where a specific landholding was selected whose tenant then served.⁴⁶ The fifth system allowed lords more control. In this mixed system, tenants would choose either two or three candidates for an office, and the lord would choose one of them to be sworn.⁴⁷ The concept behind this system was presumably to allow the lord more choice over the officer, and perhaps to prevent the same people being selected year on year if the lord was unhappy with their performance. The 1309 election of the reeve at Coltishall describes this well, stating that the lord could choose 'the better' of two candidates to act as reeve.⁴⁸ In some places, this system seems also to have developed as a way to monetise the selection process for lords, with the candidates who were not chosen paying a fine.⁴⁹ At Horstead, even once reeves were no longer used, the tenants of three landholdings continued to be selected as 'nominal reeves', with all paying a fine not to serve.⁵⁰ Paying a fine may also have been a tactic by lords to maintain their right to compel service in office by selected tenants if they chose to exercise this later, with annual payment serving as a regular customary recognition of this right.

⁴⁴ Harvey, *Medieval Oxfordshire Village*, 65; McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community*, 205.

⁴⁵ This method is found at Thormcroft (Surr.), the Palatinate of Durham and the Duchy of Cornwall. Evans, 'Merton College's control of its tenants', 221; Larson, *Conflict and Compromise*, 59; Hatcher, *Rural Economy*, 38.

⁴⁶ This method was used at Cratfield along with Hevingham Bishops and Cattes (Norf.) and Thorpe (Surr.). Forrest, 'Women manorial officeholders', 52–3.

⁴⁷ This method was used at Upwood and Ellington (Hunts.), Buckby (Northants.) and Alrewas (Staffs.). Thornton, 'Lord's man', 213–14; Olson, *Chronicle of All that Happens*, 115; J. Birrell, 'Confrontation and negotiation in a medieval village: Alrewas before the Black Death' in Langdon, Goddard and Müller (eds.), *Survival and Discord*, 197–211.

⁴⁸ KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/360, 6 Aug. 1309.

⁴⁹ Bailey, *After the Black Death*, 88. This practice was used at the manors of the Abbey of Tavistock (Devon), the Duchy of Cornwall and Hevingham Bishops (Norf.). H.P.R. Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey: a Study in the Social and Economic History of Devon* (Cambridge, 1951), 80; Hatcher, *Rural Economy*, 38; Whittle, *Agrarian Capitalism*, 51; Forrest, 'Women manorial officeholders', 51–2. In Cornwall, tenants on some manors appear to have entered a bidding process not to serve.

⁵⁰ See pp. 130–31 for more detail. A similar practice developed at Wymondham Grishagh (Norf.). Workman, 'Manorial estate officials', 227.

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While mixed systems can be found at some manors from the early fourteenth century,⁵¹ at other places, including Worfield and Downham, the process of selection switched from purely tenant selection to a mixed system in the post-Black Death period.⁵² At Worfield, this system first appears in 1393, when two candidates were chosen and one was sworn.⁵³ It then became the more common form of choosing the reeve for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, although there continued to be occasional years when only one individual was named and then immediately sworn, and the manor returned to choosing a single individual in the seventeenth century.⁵⁴ At Downham, the system appears in the first surviving courts after the Black Death, with two candidates for the reeveship and messorship selected in 1364.⁵⁵ This was replaced with a three-candidate selection for both officers from 1378 onwards, a system largely maintained down to the 1510s, and thus across the break in selections occasioned by the use of bailiffs in the mid-fifteenth century.⁵⁶ It also heralded a change to an annual selection system. The reason for the switch is not clear from the records, but the lord insisted on three candidates. When, in 1410, only two candidates for reeve and one candidate for messor were chosen, the whole homage was amerced 20s for refusing to choose three candidates for each office as they had been ordered.⁵⁷ One potential explanation may be provided by the economic dislocation of the Black Death and the ‘crisis of management’ which put pressure on demesne farms.⁵⁸ This may have led lords to seek greater control over the choice of officials and to have multiple options every year to replace failing agricultural managers.

Unfortunately, the actual mechanics of the process by which tenants chose the individuals who would serve or be candidates is obscure. Worfield’s custumals are typical of the level of detail. That of 1602 states that ‘the homage ought yearly to choose a reive’ and that of 1403 claims

⁵¹ For example, at the manors of Coltishall and Hevingham Bishops (Norf.), Alrewas (Staffs.) and Worlingworth (Suff). KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/360, 6 Aug. 1309; Forrest, ‘Women manorial officeholders’, 51; Birrell, ‘Confrontation’, 197–211; SAI, HA116/3/19/1/2, m.20, 16 Sep. 1325, m.37, 15 Oct. 1332.

⁵² For example, at the manors of Fordington, Crowland Abbey (Cambs.), Holywell-cum-Needingworth (Hunts.) and Wakefield (Yorks.). TNA, SC 2/169/26, m.17, 4 May 1346; SC 2/169/37, m.8, 13 Dec. 1390; Page, *Crowland Abbey*, 69–70; DeWindt, *Land and People*, 220 n. 142; *The Court Rolls of the Manor of Wakefield*, ed. S.S. Walker et al., 21 vols. (Leeds, 1974–2021), vol. 111: 1331 to 1333, ed. S.S. Walker (Leeds, 1983), 4, 146; vol. XV: 1433 to 1436, ed. C.M. Fraser (Leeds, 2011), 4–7, 72; vol. IX: 1537 to 1539, ed. A. Weikel (Leeds, 1993), 104.

⁵³ SA, P 314/W/1/1/187, 29 Oct. 1393. ⁵⁴ SA, P 314/W/1/1/187–837; 5586/1/257–306.

⁵⁵ CUL, EDR, C11/1/2, m.11, 28 Sep. 1364.

⁵⁶ CUL, EDR, C11/1/3, m.2, 21 Sep. 1378; C11/1/3, C11/2/4–6, C11/3/7–10.

⁵⁷ CUL, EDR, C11/2/4, m.25, 22 Sep. 1410.

⁵⁸ Stone, *Decision-Making*, 168–9, 216–24; Briggs, ‘Monitoring demesne managers’, 195.

that the tenants yearly ought to choose from among themselves a reeve.⁵⁹ Court rolls rely on routine and terse formulas, but show some variation in the bodies choosing officials. Examples include phrases stating that the whole community chose (such as ‘all the customers’ or ‘all the tenants’,⁶⁰ ‘the soke’,⁶¹ ‘the vill’,⁶² ‘the homage’ or ‘the whole homage’⁶³) and those suggesting presentment officials (such as ‘the jury’ or ‘the capital pledges’).⁶⁴ On some manors, electors seem to have included tenants who held relatively small amounts of land along with larger tenants. In an exceptionally detailed example from Rickinghall (Suff.) in 1336, fifteen men were presented for refusing to ‘attend the choosing of the reeve’, as ‘all who hold by the rod’ were meant to attend by custom. The presentment details each man’s customary holdings, which ranged from seven men who held three to four acres and a messuage to Bartholomew Natyl who only held half an acre, suggesting that even the smallest customary landholders were involved in some capacity with the process of selection.⁶⁵

The court rolls of both Worfield and Downham suggest a transition from a wider body to a more select franchise over time, as selections typically made by the ‘homage’ in the earlier period were replaced by choices decided by the jurors or capital pledges.⁶⁶ At Worfield, this transition occurred between the periods 1328–1407 and 1409–1599. At Downham, it occurred between 1316–1440 and 1472–1574, although a paucity of information about selecting bodies after 1411 may mean it started at an earlier date.⁶⁷ A similar pattern may have occurred at

⁵⁹ SA, 2028/1/5/8; 5586/2/1/42.

⁶⁰ See Aldham (Suff.), Haddeston in Bunwell (Norf.) and Wimbleton (Surr.). CUL, Vanneck Box/1, 29 Dec. 1329; CUL, Buxton Papers, 68/7 m.3, 9 Oct. 1335; *Extracts from the Court Rolls of the Manor of Wimbleton Extending from 1 Edward IV to AD 1864*, ed. P.H. Lawrence (London, 1866), 33–5.

⁶¹ See Coltishall (Norf.). KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/362, 26 Mar. 1303; KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/360, 17 Jul. 1307.

⁶² See Redgrave (Suff.). UoCL, SCRC, Bacon MS 1, m.4, 4 Aug. 1260

⁶³ See Fordington, Haddeston in Bunwell (Norf.), Holywell-cum-Needingworth, Upwood and Ellington (Hunts.), Buckby (Northants.), Foxton (Cambs.), and Rickinghall and Worlingworth (Suff.). TNA, SC 2/169/27, m.11, c.1348; SC 2/170/6, m.10, 30 Sep. 1568; CUL, Buxton Papers, 68/7, m.19, 1 Aug. 1329; Olson, *Chronicle of All that Happens*, 115–16; Thornton, ‘Lord’s man’, 220; DeWindt, *Land and People*, 220 n. 142; BL, Add. MS 63437, 21 Sep. 1326, Add. MS 63439, 31 Aug. 1328; SAI, HA 116/3/19/1/2, m.21, 8 Nov. 1323.

⁶⁴ See the manors of the Abbey of Tavistock (Corn.), Bradford (Yorks.), Accrington (Lincs.), Havering (Essex) and Crowland Abbey (Cambs.). Finberg, *Tavistock Abbey*, 80; Page, *Crowland Abbey*, 69; McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community*, 202; *The Court Rolls of the Honor of Clitheroe in the County of Lancaster*, trans. and ed. W. Farrer, 3 vols. (Manchester, 1897–1913), vol. III, 135; TNA, DL 30/129/1957 m.48, 6 Nov. 1359.

⁶⁵ BL, Add. MS 63449, 4 Sep. 1336.

⁶⁶ At both manors, the bodies selecting the officials were named in about half of election presentments. This transition mirrors the wider change from presentments by the ‘whole homage’ to jurors outlined by Beckerman. See Beckerman, ‘Procedural innovation’, 242–3.

⁶⁷ SA, P 3 14/W/1/1/5–837; CUL, EDR, C 11/1/1–3, C 11/2/4–6, C 11/3/7–11.

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Wakefield.⁶⁸ However, care needs to be taken in interpreting this evidence of increased restriction. At Cratfield, the terms jury and whole homage seem to have been used interchangeably with no clear chronological pattern.⁶⁹ It is possible that statements that the homage selected officials were simply used to give an impression of consent to decisions made by a more influential subgroup of tenants, or, equally, that stating selections were made by the jury was used to give a more official slant to a decision made communally before the court session took place.

The seigniorial logic behind collective selection by tenants is more easily uncovered. The key principle was that of collective liability: by making the tenants choose the official, they could also be held responsible for their actions. *Walter of Henley* suggests that reeves should be chosen 'by the election of your homagers <tenants> for if they doe amysse you shall recover it of them'.⁷⁰ That these ideas informed actual selection processes is seen in customals. For example, at the manor of Bradford-on-Tone (Som.), the tenants had to 'choose a reeve from amongst themselves competent at their own peril . . . for whose acts they should accept responsibility'.⁷¹ Similarly, the customal of Stoneleigh (Warks.) describes how 'each sokeman is to be reeve when he is elected by his equals . . . And if . . . the same reeve will be in arrears or withdraws the lord's rent the same equals and electors of him will satisfy the lord by distraint for the total rent of that . . . year'.⁷² Occasionally court rolls provide similar details.⁷³ An early election of 1260 at Redgrave (Suff.) states that William Ogod was elected 'by the whole vill' and that 'if he in any way should transgress, the aforesaid vill will respond openly for his deeds'.⁷⁴ Communities of tenants could be made liable for shortfalls in demesne managers' accounts, and allowing them to select the official was a way of justifying this practice.⁷⁵ This notion of collective liability also drew on early practices in royal justice, where tithings and communities were made liable for the behaviour of their members through practices such as the hue and cry.⁷⁶

From a more positive perspective, lords and tenants actually had many of the same objectives in ensuring officials performed their roles correctly,

⁶⁸ *Wakefield: 1331 to 1333*, ed. Walker, 4, 146; *Wakefield: 1433 to 1436*, ed. Fraser, 4–7, 72; *Wakefield: 1537 to 1539*, ed. Weikel, 104.

⁶⁹ CUL, Vanneck Box/3.

⁷⁰ *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, ed. D. Oschinsky (Oxford, 1971), 316–17.

⁷¹ *Medieval Customs*, ed. Hunt, 89.

⁷² *The Stoneleigh Leger Book*, ed. R.H. Hilton, Dugdale Society, 24 (Oxford, 1960), 106.

⁷³ For example, those of Aldham (Suff.). CUL, Vanneck Box/1, 29 Dec. 1329.

⁷⁴ UoCL, SCRC, Bacon MS 1, m.4, 4 Aug. 1260.

⁷⁵ Thornton, 'Merton College's control of its tenants', 211, 219–20; Page, *Crowland Abbey*, 70.

⁷⁶ Duggan, 'Limits of strong government', 409–10.

and thus allowing tenants to choose officials actually helped in selecting competent officers.⁷⁷ As Briggs has highlighted, the key value of a tenant-official over an externally hired bailiff was that they were acquainted with local conditions and their ability was known by their neighbours.⁷⁸ Again this idea can be seen in estate literature. The *Seneschaucy* states that the reeve 'ought to be . . . presented by the common assent of the whole township as the best husbandman . . . and as the most suitable person'.⁷⁹ Allowing tenants to choose officials also had the effect of potentially incentivising the community to help monitor the officials' activities and ensure the person selected fulfilled the role without protest. Tenant inquests provided an important system by which lords could scrutinise the work of officials and these inquests may have been better motivated to collaborate with the lord if they chose the official.⁸⁰

Similarly, refusals to serve could be presented as offences against the community rather than against the lord. This is well demonstrated in a dispute in which Robert Rote was chosen but refused to act as messor at Downham. Rote's first refusal occurred in a court of January 1434.⁸¹ He maintained this refusal to serve in the following session and that this was perceived as an affront to seigniorial authority is clearly noted, with the clerk stating that this took place 'in the presence of Walter Grene steward . . . and the supervisor of the lord and others of the lord's council'.⁸² However, the communal nature of Rote's selection is also heavily emphasised in presentments surrounding his refusal to serve, with it noted in the same session that he had been 'selected by the whole homage to do office', a phrase echoed in the statement that Rote had 'refused to do the office . . . just as he was chosen by the homage' which was repeated in the following two sessions.⁸³ While Rote was ultimately not compelled to serve, this series of presentments implies that his censure was as much due to his refusal to follow the role given to him by the tenants as to his failure to serve the lord.

The ways in which tenants were also heavily invested in their right to choose officials and how this could cause tensions with the lord are seen in an unusual petitionary letter written by the lord of the manor of Stokenham (Devon) to Star Chamber in 1556.⁸⁴ This describes a dispute in which the manor's jury choose one of their number, Thomas Cole, as reeve. The steward refused to confirm this choice, claiming that it was the lord's

⁷⁷ Gibbs, 'Lords, tenants and attitudes', 161–5. ⁷⁸ Briggs, 'Monitoring demesne managers', 180.

⁷⁹ *Walter of Henley*, ed. Oschinsky, 274–7. ⁸⁰ Briggs, 'Monitoring demesne managers', 194–5.

⁸¹ CUL, EDR, C111/2/6, m.25, 14 Jan. 1434. This incident is discussed in detail on p 128.

⁸² CUL, EDR, C111/2/6, m.25, 7 Apr. 1434.

⁸³ CUL, EDR, C111/2/6, m.26, 30 Sep. 1434, m.27, 13 Jan. 1435.

⁸⁴ W.A. Roberts, ed., 'Up roar in court, 1556', *Stokenham Occasional Papers*, 2 (1981), 43–7.

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prerogative alone to choose officeholders. The jury responded by causing a mass walkout of tenants of the court which continued into the following session. The resistance is presented as being largely led by a coercive set of jurors, the tenants leaving ‘partly through menacing and threatening and partly through fear of Thomas Cole and his complices’, these men ‘having daggers and other weapons’.⁸⁵ This suggests that it was the local elite that selected officials, rather than necessarily the community as a whole, who were committed to maintaining tenant selection of office. However, this evidence needs to be treated carefully, since the forum of Star Chamber incentivised the lord to emphasise the public order threat of this event, a tactic seen in the claim that Cole and his accomplices ‘set an evil and naughty example of wrongful behaviour and assembly’.⁸⁶ Moreover, it seems likely that the right to select the reeve may have been a flashpoint in part of a larger dispute. Arthur Stourton, the relevant lord, was leasing the manor from the crown and that this may have been at issue is seen in Cole’s apparent justification of the protest: ‘We have another lord, and therefore we will pay Stourton no rent.’⁸⁷ Despite these important caveats, this incident at least shows that the tenants who selected officials did see this right as important, and were willing to disrupt the running of the manor to defend it.

Empanelled Officials

Examining evidence available for presentment jurors reinforces some of the trends seen for selected officials, in terms of both restriction of office to an elite group and also significant diversity between manors. This section asks whether presentment jurors should be understood as individuals empanelled for specific sessions or do they represent more of a body of men with a corporate identity? Uncovering this is important, as it is crucial to considering how far juries represented a closed elite of officers in a qualitative sense.

Despite presentment jurors being the officials whose role is most easily investigated through court rolls, contemporary sources are reticent concerning how jurors were chosen.⁸⁸ It is clear that jurors were typically empanelled in the session preceding that at which they would present, so

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 45–6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 47. B. McDonagh, ‘Disobedient objects: material readings of enclosure protest in sixteenth-century England’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 45 (2019), 254–75, at 259.

⁸⁷ Roberts, ‘Uproar’, 46; C.C. Cross, *The Puritan Earl: the Life of Henry Hastings, Third Earl of Huntingdon, 1536–1595* (London, 1966), 85–106.

⁸⁸ Beckerman, ‘Procedural innovation’, 228 n. 138; Mulholland, ‘The jury’, 68; Larson, ‘Village voice’, 685–6.

they could hear the set of articles to which they would respond and swear to present honestly.⁸⁹ This is seen in guidance literature on how to hold courts. For example, in the St Albans *Modus Tenendi Curias*, the first charge ordered the ‘presenters’ at the court leet to return ‘whether the presenters be all here as they should be’, suggesting a designated group was operative prior to the session’.⁹⁰ Similarly, court rolls reveal punishments for capital pledges who were not present to hear the charge or did not appear at a future specified session.⁹¹ At Horstead, in 1437 Nicholas Charles was punished as a capital pledge ‘of the last leet’ who did not come to make his verdict and had not done his perambulation, suggesting he had been selected in the previous session but then had failed to perform his role in the intervening term.⁹² A clear statement about the mechanics of this system, at least by the seventeenth century, is seen at Fordington in 1639. Here it is noted that individuals were ‘yearly sworne to be of the grand jury’, suggesting that individuals were selected to this group outside the specific panels recorded at each session.⁹³ Those chosen were then to ‘give there attendance to make there p(re)sentm(en)t att such tymes and places as the foreman shall appoynt w(i)thin one houre after the tolling of the bell’ and those who failed to attend were to be amerced 3s 4d.⁹⁴

While panels were separately created for each court session, the work of jurors stretched across multiple sessions. Presentments were frequently delayed as jurors and capital pledges asked to be allowed to have until the next session to respond to a charge, and therefore there must have been ways to ensure continuity of information between courts. Partly this was achieved by the fact that while the entire set of jurors was not usually the same between sessions, many individuals did serve session after session, meaning that there was a core of continuous jurors. For instance, at Worfield, Downham and Horstead, from the 1360s to 1590s on average typically four out of every five individuals who served in either type of jury in a given year had served in the preceding year, and an even higher seven out of every eight had served at some point in the preceding three years.⁹⁵ Sometimes jurors from a previous session presented specific cases even if they were not a member of the jury in the current session. Thus at Worfield, in 1477, Richard Billingsley, a juror of the previous leet, incurred a pain of 20d for not coming with his fellows to render a verdict verifying the presentments made by two vills, as they had been ordered at the last leet

⁸⁹ Beckerman also finds evidence that some presentments were immediately made by jurors in the session in which they were empanelled. See Beckerman, ‘Procedural innovation’, 228–9.

⁹⁰ Bailey, *English Manor*, 223. ⁹¹ KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, 14 Sep. 1424.

⁹² KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, 11 Jun. 1437. ⁹³ TNA, SC 2/170/15, m.11, 2 Apr. 1639.

⁹⁴ TNA, SC 2/170/15, m.14, 22 Oct. 1639. ⁹⁵ See Gibbs, “Open” or “closed”.

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when they had made their presentments.⁹⁶ Therefore, jurors had a role in making presentments in courts even when they are not mentioned in the jury list, suggesting a continuity in office that went beyond a single session. At Horstead, and less continuously Cratfield and Downham, this became the norm for capital pledges through the development of 'residual' leets, where the court baron session directly following the annual leet would include presentments made by capital pledges which they had not been able to present in the preceding 'full' leet. While occasionally a second list of capital pledges would be given, on most occasions the rolls refer to the capital pledges as those of the previous leet, suggesting a panel serving over two consecutive sessions.⁹⁷

Thus the evidence suggests that empanelled officials formed a distinct group. However, the pool from which these men were drawn, and how far they represented a collective, varied across manors as a result of different institutional structures. While evidence of the mechanics by which jurors baron were chosen is lacking, these men were clearly drawn from among the lord's tenants. As emphasised by John Beckerman, presentment juries represented an innovation by lords in enforcing their lordship on the manor, and therefore the individuals filling these panels were drawn from among the tenantry.⁹⁸ Similarly to the selected officials explored above, land seizure could also be used as an ultimate sanction against individuals who refused to serve or present.⁹⁹

Some more detail is provided about Fordington's suitors. These panels of officials were selected on an annual basis between 1483 and 1588, rather than being named at each session, and were replaced by jurors baron in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁰ The suitors' role was supervisory, much like this manor's jurors leet, in that they were 'to determine all and singular things presented in the same place by the tithings',¹⁰¹ but they were specifically to attend every three weeks rather than just at leet sessions.¹⁰² While there is very little record of their activities, interestingly they were specifically 'chosen by the steward' on the two occasions when a selecting body is mentioned.¹⁰³ This may suggest limited choice by the community over their appointment, although alternatively the steward

⁹⁶ SA, P3 14/W/1/1/384, 10 Apr. 1477; P3 14/W/1/1/387, 7 Oct. 1477.

⁹⁷ See, among many examples, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/32, 10 Aug. 1405; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, 9 Sep. 1427; CUL, Vanneck Box/3, Edward IV roll, m.3, 9 Dec. 1463; m.15, 11 Nov. 1474.

⁹⁸ Beckerman, 'Procedural innovation', 231–6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 234; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, 21 Sep. 1428.

¹⁰⁰ TNA, SC 2/170/2, m.11, 24 Oct. 1541; SC 2/170/4, m.4, 22 Oct. 1548.

¹⁰¹ TNA, SC 2/169/46, m.5, 7 Oct. 1483; SC 2/169/47, m.1, 24 Oct. 1486; m.19, 1 Dec. 1505.

¹⁰² TNA, SC 2/170/1, m.3, 16 Nov. 1518; m.4, 28 Oct. 1523

¹⁰³ TNA, SC 2/169/46, m.5, 7 Oct. 1483; SC 2/169/47, m.19, 1 Dec. 1505.

may have officially confirmed a selection process undertaken by the manor's tenants.

The differences between the various types of jury seen in courts leet also have significance in considering selection processes. Jurors leet at Worfield and Fordington, owing to their supervisory role, seem to have acted more like jurors baron, with relatively free choice over their selection. Conversely, capital pledges had their origins in the tithing system, a structure for criminal responsibility where males over twelve were placed into groups, who were then collectively responsible for ensuring their members obeyed the law.¹⁰⁴ Capital pledges were the heads of these tithings, who had traditionally represented the other men in legal assemblies, a system that informed the way views of frankpledge had been set up in places where lords had been granted the franchise.¹⁰⁵ The policing and surety aspects of the tithing system were undoubtedly in abeyance in the late Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶ However, collective tithing payments continued to be made and men were still sworn into tithings on many manors.¹⁰⁷ Thus the twelve capital pledges listed in any session should theoretically be drawn from the subset of tithing heads.¹⁰⁸

The case-study manors reveal differences in how this operated in practice. At Horstead, there is no indication that a system of tithing heads was being maintained from which juries of capital pledges were drawn. However, at Downham and Cratfield tithings do seem to have been maintained rigidly in the fifteenth century, creating a specific, collective group of capital pledges. At Downham, for the period 1379 to 1446, lists of the names of capital pledges were not given in the court rolls, but instead this body of individuals was described with the formula 'whose names are put in the tithing rolls'.¹⁰⁹ The existence of such rolls suggests that full tithings of twelve men, each headed by a capital pledge, were being maintained. Moreover, that the capital pledges acted as a collective is seen in an arrangement of 1447, in which the twelve capital pledges, and those who would be capital pledges in future, collectively rented a watercourse from the lord for an annual rent of 12d along with an

¹⁰⁴ These were theoretically groups of ten, although in reality numbers varied significantly. See Duggan, 'Limits of strong government', 4; D.A. Crowley, 'The later history of frankpledge', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 48 (1975), 1–15, at 1–5.

¹⁰⁵ P.R. Schofield, 'The late medieval view of frankpledge and the tithing system: an Essex case study' in Razi and Smith (eds.), *Medieval Society*, 408–49, at 408; Bailey, *English Manor*, 178–9.

¹⁰⁶ Duggan, 'Limits of strong government', 4–11; Crowley, 'Later history of frankpledge', 8–11.

¹⁰⁷ See pp. 56–7; Crowley, 'Later history of frankpledge', 15; Schofield, 'Late medieval view', 408–9, 426–7; Schofield, *Peasant and Community*, 167.

¹⁰⁸ Poos, 'Rural population', 518–19.

¹⁰⁹ See, among many examples, CUL, EDR, C11/1/3, m.14, 19 Dec. 1385; C11/2/5, m.3, 7 Dec. 1414.

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agreement to clean and maintain it.¹¹⁰ This lease presupposes significant longevity, suggesting a collective identity for capital pledges that existed beyond the panels given at the heading of any court. At Cratfield, in all leets between 1402 and 1461, between nineteen and thirty-five men were named as capital pledges in each session, suggesting a full set of tithing heads made the presentments. However, from 1462 onwards, this was replaced by a set of twelve men, suggesting that now only a subset of tithing heads were presenting in court as capital pledges.¹¹¹ Yet, tithings themselves were seemingly maintained, as men continued to be sworn into them.¹¹²

How were tithing heads chosen? Much like with selected officials, capital pledges seem to have been chosen through either landholding or selection by the tenants. Before the Black Death, although it was linked to the peacekeeping system rather than directly to lordship, the liability to serve as capital pledge or tithingman was associated either with specific landholdings or generally with being a tenant on some manors.¹¹³ Crowley suggests this process intensified after the Black Death, but argues that it was more common on manors where the importance of courts leet diminished faster owing to manors not being coterminous with villages or generally being small. Schofield found that any tenant who owed suit of court for their land could act as a capital pledge at Birdbrook.¹¹⁴ On larger manors with more powerful leets (much like those at the core of this study), capital pledges were selected according to principles similar to those employed before the Black Death. While these men were typically landholders, this was because of the status tenancy gave through being a permanent and powerful member of the community rather than because they were tenants in and of itself.

On some manors, capital pledges appear to have been chosen by the tenants.¹¹⁵ At Alrewas (Staffs.), the custumal explains that ‘the tenants . . . are to be frankpledges . . . when they are chosen. And there shall be in the manor 16 frankpledges of whom one shall always be for the tenants of the church; they shall present at two views [of frankpledge].’¹¹⁶ Selections are also occasionally recorded in court rolls. At Cratfield, a hint is given in the

¹¹⁰ CUL, EDR, C11/2/6, m.39, 3 Jan. 1447. ¹¹¹ CUL, Vanneck Box/3–4.

¹¹² See, for example, CUL, Vanneck Box/3, Edward IV roll, m.5, 27 May 1466; Henry VII roll, m.24, 13 Jun. 1508; Edward VI and Mary I roll, m.6, 11 Jul. 1552.

¹¹³ Crowley, ‘Later history of frankpledge’, 7. This is seen in the custumals of Brixton Deverill (Wilts.), Minchinhampton (Glos.) and Alrewas (Staffs.). *Select Documents*, ed. Chibnall, 72; *Abbey of Holy Trinity*, ed. Chibnall, 110, 126; ‘An Alrewas Rental of 1341’, ed. J. Birrell and D. Hutchinson, in *A Medieval Miscellany: Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 4th ser., 26 vols. (Burton upon Trent, 2004), vol. xx, 59–81, at 81.

¹¹⁴ Schofield, ‘Late medieval view’, 427–8. ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 432–3.

¹¹⁶ ‘Alrewas rental’, ed. Birrell and Hutchinson, 71.

presentment made against Thomas Walsh, who was 'rebellious and disobedient' against the steward through refusing to be sworn as capital pledge, highlighting that capital pledges were sworn to their office in court like other manorial officials, although this is never again recorded in the rolls for the manor.¹¹⁷ At Downham, a single selection survives for September 1465, when on the day of the court, Richard Whitepayn was described as chosen and sworn as capital pledge in the place of Richard Cok.¹¹⁸ Cok's last appearance as a capital pledge was in the previous leet and he was deceased by April 1465.¹¹⁹ Thus Whitepayn's election suggests that being a capital pledge was confined to a relatively small group, with the possibility to serve only emerging with the death of an officer, when another man from his tithing perhaps took his place.

While the origins of capital pledges in the tithing system sets them apart from jurors baron and leet, the distinction between them and jurors baron increasingly broke down from the fifteenth century onwards at Horstead and Downham. While previously courts leet had separate juries for capital pledges and jurors baron, at Horstead in 1472, 1482 and 1484 the two juries were elided into a single panel. This became the norm in leets from 1539 onwards, recognising the breakdown of the division between functions performed by both officers.¹²⁰ A similar process began to occur from the mid-sixteenth century at Downham, with a single list entitled 'capital pledges and homage'.¹²¹ This was accompanied by a change in nomenclature from 1574 onwards, when the term capital pledge was replaced by 'capital pledges and jury for the lady queen', and from 1575 onwards, just 'the jury for the lady queen', suggesting an end date for the tithing system determining jury selection.¹²²

Three key conclusions can be drawn from this study of the processes of selecting manorial officials. The first is that the very nature of the pool from which officials were drawn restricted officeholding to those of higher economic status. Linkage with landholding seems to have largely arisen for selected officials owing to lords requiring service as a tenurial obligation and had the added benefit from a seigniorial perspective of providing the carrot of rent remission, and the stick of land seizure, to try to ensure officials performed their roles correctly. However, from the perspective of the village community and governance, restricting office to

¹¹⁷ CUL, Vanneck Box/3, Henry VI roll, m.48, 23 May 1458.

¹¹⁸ CUL, EDR, C11/3/7, m.8, 27 Sep. 1465.

¹¹⁹ CUL, EDR, C11/3/7, m.7, 16 May 1464; C11/3/7, m.9, 1 Apr. 1465.

¹²⁰ KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/39, m.26, 4 Aug. 1472, m.42, 11 Jun. 1482; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/40, m.2, 3 Aug. 1484; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/48-54, KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/376.

¹²¹ CUL, EDR, C11/3/10, c.1553; C11/3/11, 12 Apr. 1570; C11/3/11, 21 Sep. 1579.

¹²² CUL, EDR, C11/3/11, 24 Mar. 1574; C11/3/11.

Officials in the Wider Population

landholdings of a particular size had the effect of limiting office to wealthier and more powerful tenants. While the connection between landholding and office was not as strong for empanelled officials, jurors baron were chosen from among tenants, and on many manors, candidacy for capital pledge and juror leet was *de jure* or *de facto* linked to landholding.

Secondly, selection processes varied between manors and officers. These have important *a priori* implications for how far officeholding could be monopolised by elites, with rotational systems suggesting that office by necessity had to be spread widely. However, on many manors, tenants, or at least a subgroup of them, did have significant potential to choose who would serve in office. Much like with the connection to landholding, this arose at least in part as a result of advantages to lords. By making the community of tenants choose officials, lords could hold them collectively liable for official failures, much as the crown created collective responsibility for peacekeeping through the tithing system. Lords could also draw on tenants' knowledge of who would be an effective manager and co-opt their authority to ensure the individual selected actually served or else risk alienating the wider community. However, from the perspective of the community of tenants, collective responsibility presumably allowed more freedom in choosing officers, allowing dynamics below the level of lord–tenant relationships to shape this decision, and plausibly making it more 'political'.

Thirdly, while the exact process by which empanelled officials were selected is more opaque, it is clear that these offices did have a somewhat corporate identity. The work of jurors extended across multiple sessions and turnover was slow. Capital pledges had their roots in the tithing system, which created a distinct group of tithing heads. This corporate identity created further potential for some monopolisation of power in the manorial officeholding system.

OFFICIALS IN THE WIDER POPULATION

The previous section focused on qualitative evidence about how officials were selected. This section turns to considering the results of these selection processes by examining what proportion of the population resident in any community served in manorial office. It argues that while officeholding was by no means democratic, with women and the landless being excluded, a relatively wide range of adult males living in a given community likely served in their lifetime, meaning that at this level office was not restricted to a narrow elite.

Manorial Officeholding and Selection Processes

The connection between officeholding and substantial landholding already excluded a proportion of the population who either held smaller pieces of land or may have been entirely landless. Moreover, increasing subletting of customary land in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created a group of subtenants who did not hold their land directly from the lord and thus may have been excluded from serving in official positions.¹²³ A culture of patriarchy also prevented women serving. At Downham and Horstead, no woman ever appears in office. On the other manors, where there was a connection between certain holdings and service in some offices, women are more apparent, but even here their agency was limited. At Fordington, women who were chosen for any office on the basis of their landholdings were always replaced with a deputy.¹²⁴ When their lands were chosen, women did actually serve as reeves on five occasions at Cratfield and similarly on two occasions as beadle at Worfield.¹²⁵ However, they continued to be excluded from all other offices, reflecting Mark Forrest's argument that while service in these positions did give women political authority, this very rarely gave them access to the most powerful roles such as constable, capital pledge and juror.¹²⁶ This in turn reflects a wider trend of excluding women from official positions in the royal courts and episcopal visitations.¹²⁷

Even among the body of men liable to serve in particular offices, there was the potential for certain individuals to be excluded, a pattern that explains the frequent selection of the same candidates for positions at manors such as Downham. A dispute over the selection of the messor at this manor in 1434 provides a rare insight into the population 'at risk' of being messor in the selection of that year. On this occasion, the rolls name eleven tenants of full and half virgates who 'out of antiquity did the office of lord's messor', although as men not on this list were selected as candidates for this office in 1435 and 1439, this may not be a complete list of all potential messors.¹²⁸ Table 2.1 shows the number of times each

¹²³ See Gibbs, "'Open" or "closed"."

¹²⁴ TNA, SC 2/170/6, m.5, 8 Oct. 1567; SC 2/170/14, m.15, 1 Oct. 1633; SC 2/170/15, m.6, 2 Oct. 1637; SC 2/10/16, m.13, 6 Oct. 1646. While deputies also served when men were chosen, the consistency of this practice when women were selected for any office reveals a pattern of gender discrimination.

¹²⁵ CUL, Vanneck Box/3, Henry VI roll, m.4, 16 Oct. 1425; m.12, 9 Oct. 1431; m.22, 9 Oct. 1438; m.51 30 Oct. 1459; Henry VII roll, m.5, 13 Dec. 1490; m.23, 7 Nov. 1505; Henry VIII roll, m.6, 22 Feb. 1518; P 3 14/w/1/1/284, 1 Oct. 1433; P 3 14/w/1/1/782, 6 Sep. 1574.

¹²⁶ Forrest, 'Women manorial officers', 49–52, 59, 62–4. Forrest only notes two examples of manors with women jurors in his study: Sutton Poyntz (Dors.) and Hanley (Berks.).

¹²⁷ Masschaele, *Jury, State and Society*, 128–31; Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 182, 199–200.

¹²⁸ CUL, EDR, C 1 1/2/6, m.25, 14 Jan. 1434.

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Table 2.1 *Reconstruction of careers as messor for individuals named in presentment of 1434 at Little Downham*

Name	Number of times chosen as messor	First appearance in any office	Last appearance in any office
John Buk jnr	7	1423	1438
John Jennnys	6	1423	1450
John Colleson jnr	2	1422	1434
Nicholas Bateman	2	1394	1434
John Wright	1	1434	1474
Thomas Stephenson	0	1426	1434
Nicholas Colleson	0	1428	1434
Henry Warrener	0	1415	1434
Thomas Wright	0	1429	1450
John Warener	0	1432	1444
Robert Rote	0	1434	1434

Sources: CUL, EDR, CII/1/3, CII/2/4–6, CII/3/7.

of these men is visible as a messor candidate through the surviving court rolls.¹²⁹ The pattern is striking, with six of these eleven men never being recorded as candidates for the messorship. These included individuals such as Henry Warrener and Thomas Stephenson, who first appear as officers in 1415 and 1426, respectively, and thus have a similar longevity to John Colleson jnr and John Buk jnr. The evidence hints at the possibility that there was a large group of half- and full-virgaters who were never selected as candidates for the office of messor although they clearly did serve in other offices.

Exploring the relationship between those who served in office compared with the wider population from which they were drawn involves calculating a participation rate, considering the number of individuals serving in office as a proportion of those living within the community

¹²⁹ This data must be treated carefully as the rolls for 1435–8 are very fragmentary for Downham, meaning that the selection of messors is only recorded in 1435 and 1439, before the office of messor was removed in exchange for a bailiff. This means that some of the messor candidatures of these individuals may be missing, and others may never have had the potential to serve, with the candidates recorded being biased towards those who had begun serving in office at an early date.

these officers governed. This approach has been used in several studies of officeholding in both medieval and early modern England. However, studies have differed significantly in methodology, making it hard to draw comparisons across time and space.

Utilising rich lists of male ratepayers and households from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, Henry French suggests figures ranging from 23% of male ratepayers serving as officers and vestrymen at Beaminster (Dors.) to 63% of male resident household heads serving at Newport Pond (Essex), arguing that around 40–50% of resident male householders typically served in parochial official roles in seventeenth-century communities.¹³⁰ Medievalists have taken two distinct approaches. Those drawing on family reconstitution approaches, such as the Toronto School, have examined the proportion of families who supplied at least one manorial official. As a rule, these have suggested relatively high rates of participation. This methodology produces figures ranging from 51% of families serving as jurors (rising to 56% if looking at all officials) at Holywell-cum-Needingworth (Hunts.) to 39% and 40% at Upwood and Ellington, respectively, for the late thirteenth to mid-fifteenth century.¹³¹ Concentrating purely on the period before the Black Death, Britton also suggests a relatively high 47% of families produced at least one juror.¹³² A more recent study by Larson of the Durham manors of Norton and Billingham in the post-Black Death period suggests a smaller proportion of the population served as jurors, estimating that a minimum of 27% and 37% of families on these manors respectively were represented by at least one juror.¹³³ The limitation of this methodology is that it only considers families that can be reconstructed and therefore may ignore parts of the population who do not appear in manorial records. Furthermore, it makes an assumption that surnames are stable identifiers of families and that one family member serving in an official role represents inclusion of the whole family in the officeholding group.¹³⁴

A second approach involves comparing lists of individuals serving in office for a specific period against reconstructed population estimates from taxation sources. Using this methodology, Forrest has demonstrated that individuals acting as trustworthy men between 1337 and 1349 represented between 16% and 88% of households and between 4% and 20% of

¹³⁰ French, *Middle Sort of People*, 119–21.

¹³¹ DeWindt, *Land and People*, 229; Olson, *Chronicle of All that Happens*, 150.

¹³² Britton, *Community*, 73–4.

¹³³ Larson's figures represent minimum estimates as they are based on families recorded in one land survey rather than a full reconstitution. See Larson, 'Village voice', 696.

¹³⁴ Razi, 'Toronto School's reconstitution'.

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the total population of seven villages in Lincolnshire.¹³⁵ The approach adopted here employs very similar techniques to Forrest, but uses average numbers of individuals serving in all offices over specific periods to allow comparison across time.¹³⁶

Table 2.2 presents the results of this analysis. It shows the number of officers recorded as serving over a year, and over a five-year period, as a proportion of the adult male and total population of the case-study communities. Data availability improves over time, with more estimates for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than for the fourteenth century. However, a clear set of chronological patterns emerges, which can be described over three phases of transition in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Firstly, before the Black Death, the limited evidence suggests that manorial officeholding was at its least inclusive level. At Downham and Worfield, only around one in ten adult males served in any year and this rises to only one in six over five years. However, the later fourteenth century saw a dramatic increase in the proportion of the population serving, with around a third to a half of men serving per year (rising to between a half and four-fifths over five years) by c. 1400 at Downham and Horstead.

Secondly, the fifteenth century saw varying trends between manors. Downham saw a small reduction in the proportion of men serving in any year, to around one in four, with a concomitant decline in men serving over five years to one in three. Fordington, which first provides data in 1524–5, saw an even lower level of around one in seven men serving in a year and one in four over five years. However, the other manors saw higher levels and different trends. At Cratfield, which again only has sixteenth-century data, around two in five men served in a year and more than half over five years. Worfield saw a dramatic increase from its pre-Black Death level, with around three in ten men serving annually, rising to more than half over five years. Horstead also saw a continued increase from the early fifteenth century, with around six in ten men serving annually and an estimation that nearly all men on the manor would have served in a five-year period.

Thirdly, the sixteenth century again saw differing trends. The most common pattern was a moderate decline in participation rates. At Worfield, around one in five men served annually, and one in three served over five years, by 1563. By c. 1600, at Cratfield, around one in four men served annually, and two in five over five years, a pattern also

¹³⁵ Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*, 169–70.

¹³⁶ For more on this methodology as applied to jurors, see Gibbs “Open” or “closed”.

Table 2.2 *Individuals serving in manorial office as a proportion of the population*

Manor	Period	Officials recorded	Annually serving		Mean		Mean	
			Proportion adult males %	Proportion total population %	individuals	total individuals	adult males %	total population %
A Population estimate of 1327								
Little Downham	1325-30	Capital pledges, reeves, messors, tasters, bylawmen, constables	15	9-12	3	28	16-21	5-6
Worfield	1327	Jurors leet, reeves, beadles, affeerors	22	6-9	2-3	-	-	-
B Population estimate of 1377-9								
Little Downham	1384-95	Jurors baron, reeve candidates, messor candidates, tasters, bylawmen	18	29-32	9-10	32	53-8	16-17
Horstead	1412-17	Capital pledges, jurors baron, tasters, affeerors	29	50	20-2	49	85	35-8
C Population estimate of 1524-5								
Little Downham	1494-1503	Capital pledges, jurors baron, reeve candidates, messor candidates, tasters, bylawmen, constables	27	19-26	6-8	39	27-37	8-11
Horstead	1512-38	Capital pledges, jurors baron, constables, affeerors	21	55-74	17-22	33	86-116	26-35
Cratfield	1514-34	Capital pledges, jurors baron, reeve/collector candidates, tasters, constables	25	36-48	11-15	40	56-75	17-23

Worfield	1514-35	Jurors let, jurors baron, reeve candidates, beadles, tasters, constables, affeerors	40	26-34	8-10	69	44-60	13-18
Fordington	1538-45	Jurors let, suitors, tithingmen, representatives of hermitage, constables, affeerors	22	13-18	4-5	39	23-31	7-9
D Population estimate of 1563								
Little Downham	1554-77	Capital pledges, jurors, constables	27	22-3	7	49	41-3	12-13
Worfield	1561-73	Jurors let, jurors baron, beadles, tasters, constables, affeerors	38	19-20	6	62	31-3	9-10
E Population estimate of 1603								
Horstead	1587-99	Capital pledges, jurors baron, constables, affeerors, pig reeves	17	29-37	9-11	27	45-59	14-18
Cratfield	1592-1620	Capital pledges, jurors baron, constables	24	20-6	6-8	41	34-45	10-13
Fordington	1626-40	Jurors let, jurors baron, tithingmen, representatives of hermitage, reeves, messors, fieldreeves, constables, affeerors	38	18-23	5-7	59	29-35	9-11

Sources: CUL, EDR, C11/1/1-3, C11/3/10-11; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/33-35, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/45, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/53-54, KCAR/6/2/38/1/1/COL/376; SA, P314/W/1/1/1-4; P314/W/1/1/514-649; P314/W/1/1/725-799; CUL, Vanneck Box/3-4; TNA, SC 2/170/2-3; SC 2/170/14-16; Table A 3.1.

seen at Horstead, where one in three men served annually and around half of men served over five years. However, Downham and Fordington buck this trend, with an increase in the proportion of individuals serving. While the proportion of men serving annually at Downham remained the same by 1563, at just less than one in four, the proportion serving over five years grew to half. At Fordington, the change was even more dramatic, with an increase to one in five men serving per year and one in three over five years.

These trends reveal a significant amount of variation in terms of both trajectories over time and absolute differences in proportions of the population serving in office between localities. For instance, throughout the three centuries under study, Horstead saw around twice the proportion of men serving in office that Downham and Cratfield did. However, despite this high degree of local idiosyncrasy, four inter-related conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, there is no clear trend of a new level of social exclusivity in officeholding in the early modern period. While some manors did see a decline in the proportion of the population serving over the sixteenth century, other manors saw the opposite trend. More importantly, participation rates throughout the era after the Black Death remain higher than those seen in the early fourteenth century. This suggests it was the years around 1300, rather than around 1600, which saw the most restricted, and ‘oligarchical’, period of local governance.

Secondly, much of the change over time and between communities seems to have been driven by differing population sizes around fixed requirements to fill all offices on the manor. All the communities examined saw at least twelve men regularly empanelled for each type of jury, following the legal principle that twelve men were required to make a lawful judgement.¹³⁷ The minimum requirement to staff these juries, as well as other offices, did not change significantly across time or between different sizes of communities, even as underlying population numbers varied. This helps explain the dramatic increase in the proportion of the population serving after the Black Death, with populations at the manors explored declining by more than half by the late fourteenth century or remaining at half their pre-Plague level by the early sixteenth century. It similarly explains the decline in the proportion of the population serving over the sixteenth century at several of these manors as part of the demographic recovery of this era.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Gibbs, “Open” or “closed”.

¹³⁸ S. Broadberry, B.M.S. Campbell, A. Klein, M. Overton and B. van Leeuwen, *British Economic Growth, 1270–1870* (Cambridge, 2015), 29–30.

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Thirdly, however, it would be inaccurate to see proportions of the population serving as being entirely a result of demographic dynamics. Proportions serving were a function not just of the population denominator, but also of changes in the numbers-serving numerator. Both Downham and Worfield saw increases in the average number of individuals serving over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which in part explains the rise in the proportion of men serving after the Black Death and why this did not dramatically decline even as population recovered in the later fifteenth century. Similarly, even though Fordington's population grew over the sixteenth century, the number of individuals serving grew faster, in part owing to the emergence of new officers such as jury baron and fieldreeve in the 1570s. Conversely, while at Horstead the proportion of the population serving increased even as numbers serving declined over the fifteenth century, thanks to an even sharper demographic decline in this community, in the sixteenth century the drop in proportion serving was a factor of not only population growth but also a continued fall in numbers serving. This suggests some role for human agency to affect entitlement to office, and that these trends show an aim to adjust officeholding in relation to population changes.

Finally, in absolute terms, after the Black Death it is hard to see manorial officeholding as highly restricted in terms of the proportion of the *adult male* population serving. Even at an absolute minimum, one in eight men served in office in any given year, and this rises to one in five over five years. This broadly suggests that many men living in village communities would have served in manorial office at some point during their lifetimes. While drawing comparisons with other estimates is difficult owing to the wide range of methodologies utilised, the evidence for officeholding seems to compare favourably with French's estimates for seventeenth-century parochial officials: if 40–50% of male householders would serve at least once in their *whole lifetime*, similar proportions for manorial office over *only five years* suggest a more open institution. Similarly, greater proportions of the population served as manorial officeholders after the Black Death at approximately 7–38% *over five years* than served as trustworthy men in Lincolnshire at 4–20% *over the twelve years between 1337 and 1349*. Before the Black Death, manorial officials at Downham seem more in line with the estimates for trustworthy men at 5–6% over five years. In summary, post-Black Death manorial officeholding, from the viewpoint of the proportion of men serving, seems to have been a relatively open institution.

Examining officeholding against population provides evidence of a pattern of relative openness after the Black Death. However, even if a large proportion of adult men could expect to serve in office across their lifetimes, suggesting widely dispersed access to manorial office, it is important to consider inequality in officeholding among this wide pool of individuals. Doing so provides a corrective to an optimistic picture of wide participation. While many men may have served, a core group held office a disproportionate amount of times at several of the case-study manors.

Selected Officials

Firstly, the distribution of service is explored for selected officials who served year-long terms after being chosen in court. For this analysis, these officials are divided into three different categories. The first, including reeves, messors and beadles, encompasses officials whose role was to meet seigniorial requirements and obligations, such as managing the demesne and collecting rents. The second, including bylawmen and fieldreeves, encompasses officials created through the efforts of the community of tenants (or at least an elite subset of them) to monitor specific rules about common resources and agriculture. The third category is made up of tasters and tithingmen, who had their origins in meeting royal obligations around peacekeeping and the assize of ale. This division is very loose, with reeves, messors and beadles often enforcing restrictions around communal concerns, and the tithingmen at Fordington also presenting business connected to the lord and community.¹³⁹ However, categorisation provides a crude way to assess whether officers meeting different purposes saw different patterns of selection. It reveals that patterns seemingly varied more by locality than by type of office, but that even at the same manor, different types of office could see radically different inequality in selection. This suggests local cultures around officeholding, rather than the function or selection method of specific offices, governed how far they were dominated by a few individuals.

The graphs in Figures 2.1–2.3 look at the distribution of officeholding in various roles among individuals who served at least once in these roles. All individuals are divided into quartiles, with those serving the most times in quartile 1 and those serving the least number of times in quartile 4. This

¹³⁹ See p. 64.

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provides a graphical representation of the equality in the distribution of office: the more equal the bars, the greater the equality.

Figure 2.1 shows the distribution in service in the reeveship and messorship at Little Downham, the reeveship at Cratfield, and the reeveship and beadleship at Worfield. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this evidence relates to the dramatic differences in patterns of selection between different manors. While at Worfield (Figure 2.1d) there was some inequality in those chosen to serve as reeve, with the top quartile of servers representing 40% of selections, this largely disappears when examining those who were actually sworn in office, with the top quartile accounting for only 29% of selections. Selections to the beadleship in the same manor saw slightly more inequality, in terms of those chosen to be beadles and those who actually served in the office either for their own lands or as deputies. In both cases, the top quartile accounted for 47% of selections (Figure 2.1e). Similarly, the top quartile of both those chosen to serve and those who were actually sworn as reeve at Cratfield represented 41% of selections (Figure 2.1c). Unfortunately, while Cratfield's and Worfield's court rolls record both those chosen as

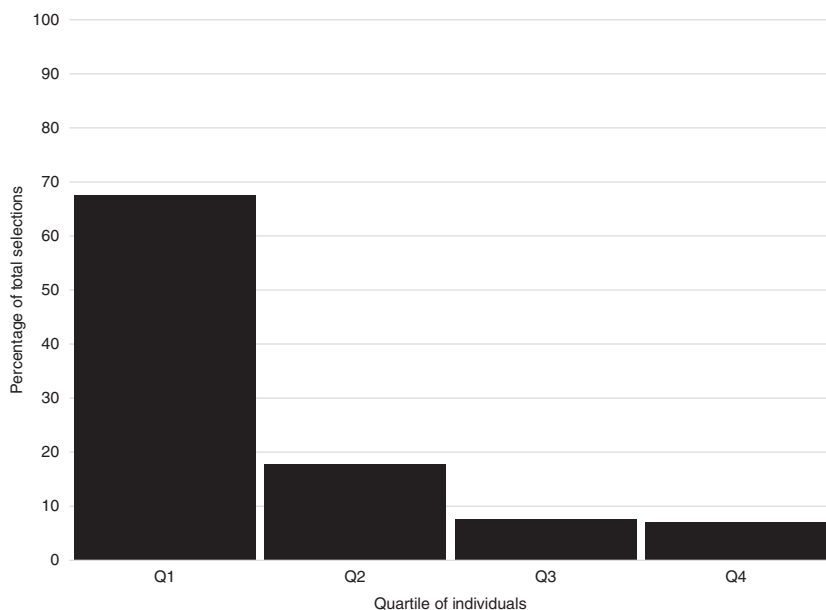


Figure 2.1 Distribution of reeve and messor selections by quartile of individuals

Figure 2.1a Little Downham reeves, 1316–1508

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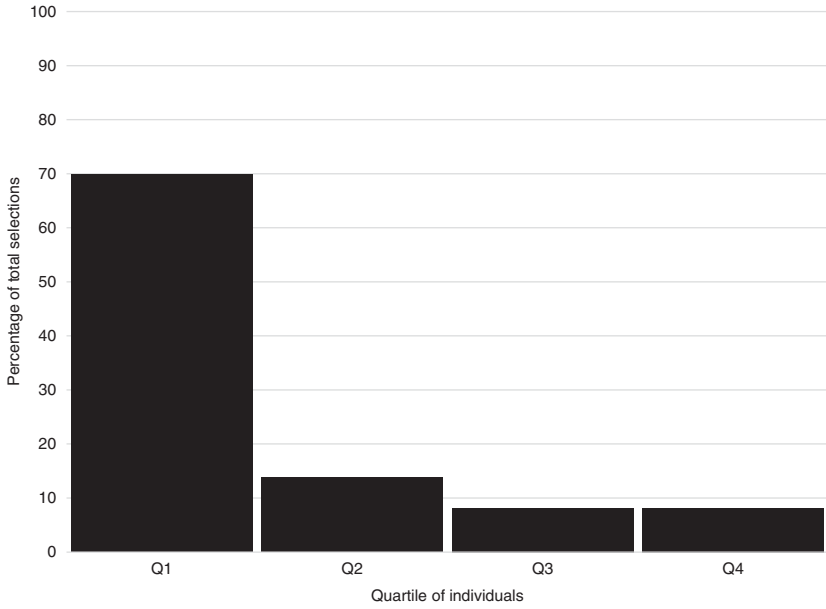


Figure 2.1b Little Downham messors, 1316–1503

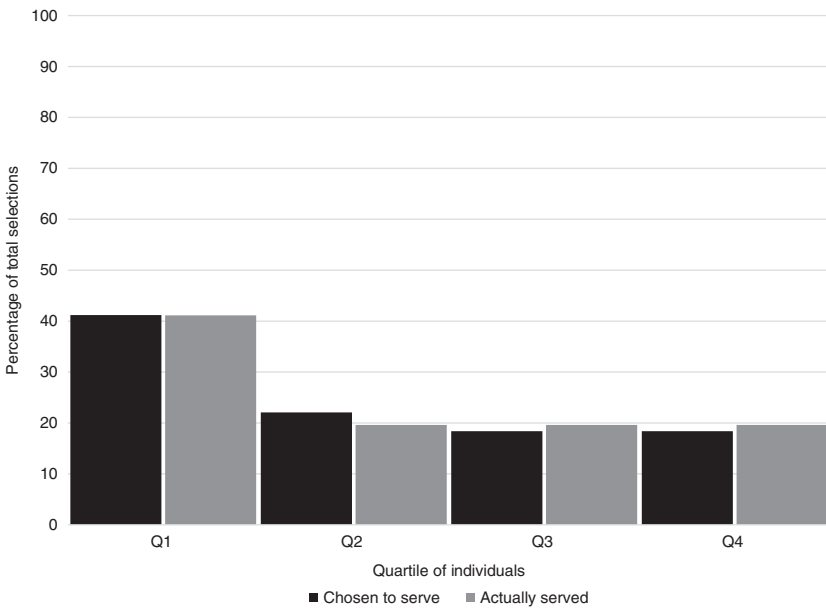


Figure 2.1c Cratfield reeves, 1402–1527

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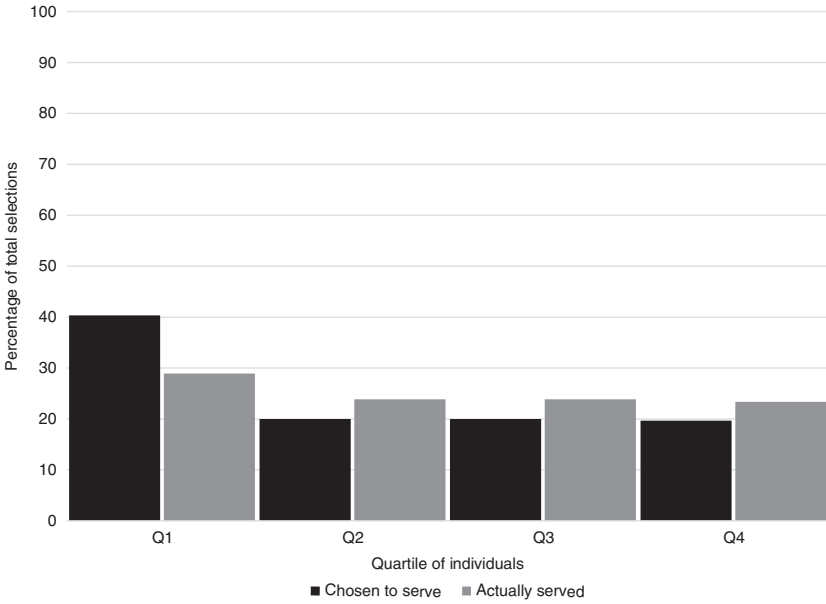


Figure 2.1d Worfield reeves, 1328–1649

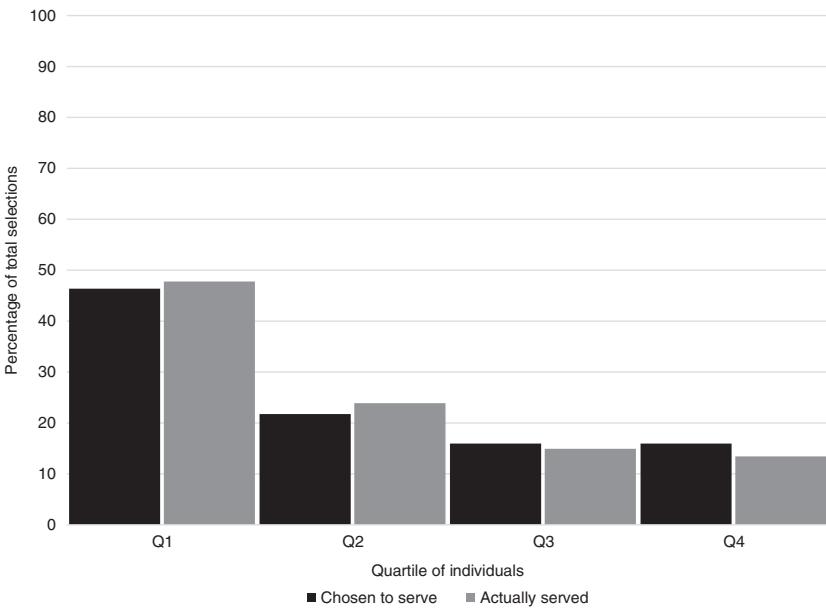


Figure 2.1e Worfield beadles, 1571–1649

Sources: CUL, EDR, C111/1/1–3, C111/2/4–6, C111/3/7–10; CUL, Vanneck Box/3, SA, P314/w/1/1/5–837, 5586/1/257–306.

candidates for these offices and those who actually served, Downham's records do not consistently record those who actually served as reeve in a given year. However, looking at candidates alone (Figure 2.1a–b) shows a significantly more unequal pattern compared with the other manors, with the top quartile of candidates representing 68% of reeve candidates and 70% of messor candidates. Moreover, the combination of evidence from Downham's surviving account rolls, along with the names of reeves in incidental entries within court rolls, suggests that frequent selection as a candidate often led to frequent actual service as reeve. Simon Kede served at least five times, from among his eleven candidate selections, while Thomas Colleson served at least eleven times, from among his forty-one selections.¹⁴⁰ These are minimum figures, and the actual number of times these men served was likely significantly higher.

What explains these different patterns? In the case of Cratfield, selection via choice of different tenements seems to have been significant in constraining the number of times any individual tenant could serve. For example, Robert Teysard, the most frequently serving reeve at four selections, was chosen for three different tenements.¹⁴¹ Two of these, named as 'Teysard' and 'Spynk', he held directly, while in 1502 he was chosen in conjunction with William Cook and Robert Smyth as an executor of the tenement of 'Boches', whose tenant had just died. While Teysard was chosen twice for the same tenement of 'Spynk', these selections in 1489 and 1503 were fourteen years apart, suggesting that generally an effort was made to distribute service widely among the different tenements which owed this office. This prevented monopolisation, and that Teysard served frequently was due to his longevity rather than ability to dominate the office. At Worfield, there is no evidence that serving as reeve was linked to particular tenements, but there was a similar effort to distribute office widely. Here, the most frequently selected reeve (at three selections) was John Bradeney, who served when selected in 1427 and 1429, and then again in 1445, suggesting longevity was significant in him serving more than twice.¹⁴²

Slightly higher levels of concentration of service for Worfield's beadle-ship are linked to the fact that candidates were supplied by rotating the

¹⁴⁰ Kede: CUL, EDR, D10/3 m.4, 1428–9; D10/3 m.5, 1429–30; D10/3 m.9, 1430–1; D10/3 m.10, 1431–2; D10/3 m.11, 1434–5; Colleson: C11/2/4, m.2, 7 Jul. 1400; C11/2/4, m.33, 27 Jun. 1407; C11/2/4, m.23, 22 Nov. 1409; C11/2/4, m.26, 4 Dec. 1410; D10/3 m.1, 1411–2; D10/3 m.2, 1412–3; D10/3 m.6, 1414–5; D10/3 m.7, 1415–6; D10/3 m.8, 1418–9; D10/3 m.3, 1423–4.

¹⁴¹ CUL, EDR, Vanneck Box/3, Edward IV roll, m.7, 7 Oct. 1467; Henry VII roll, m.4, 26 Oct. 1489; m.19, 3 Dec. 1502; m.21, 10 Nov. 1503.

¹⁴² SA, P314/w/1/1/272, 3 Oct. 1427; P314/w/1/1/275, 4 Oct. 1429; P314/w/1/1/297, 9 Oct. 1445.

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office among the landholders within the specific hamlet of Hallon. This meant that the same individual was often selected as beadle multiple times in succession (as they had engrossed several lands which owed the obligation) and with gaps of a few years (as they were selected across multiple rotations). For instance, William Davenport was selected annually in 1612–14, and then again in 1620, 1627 and 1635.¹⁴³ Concentration was also seen among those actually sworn in office owing to the frequency of deputisation, sometimes for specific reasons such as being ‘deaf’ or ‘beyond the seas’, but also in many cases because tenants with honorifics such as gentleman presumably did not want to serve.¹⁴⁴ The deputies chosen to replace such men were frequently other landholders in the vill, and perhaps even subtenants of these men who created engrossed holdings through a combination of direct tenancy and subtenancy.¹⁴⁵ For example, William Warter was selected twice in respect of his own half virgate in 1580 and 1596, presumably reflecting one complete cycle of the beadleship rotation.¹⁴⁶ However, he also served as deputy in 1582, 1583 and 1590, holding the office three times more in the rotation.¹⁴⁷ While earlier selections of the beadle are only patchily recorded, the longevity of a pattern of more concentration is evident in three periods in the rolls when beadle selections are well recorded, namely 1326–9, 1429–54 and 1506–20, with at least one individual serving twice in each of these time-frames.¹⁴⁸

At Downham, a more extreme pattern emerges, with a few men dominating the offices of reeve and messor. Most prominent is Thomas Colleson, who appeared an outlying forty-one times as a reeve candidate, thus accounting singlehandedly for 21% of total selections. Year-on-year selection of the same individuals for the reeveship and messorship facilitated this pattern. For instance, Thomas Colleson was a candidate for reeve forty-one times between 1385 and 1435, in forty-four recorded selections, while William Scut was a candidate in every recorded selection for 1386–1407.¹⁴⁹ Thus, for certain periods, the same candidates were chosen in an overwhelming majority of years.

¹⁴³ SA, 5586/1/271, 15 Oct. 1612; 5586/1/272, 11 Oct. 1613; 5586/1/273, 10 Oct. 1614; 5586/1/279, 2 Oct. 1620; 5586/1/285, 4 Oct. 1627; 5586/1/294, 8 Oct. 1635.

¹⁴⁴ SA, P3 14/w/1/1/797, 14 Oct. 1579; 5586/1/296, 6 Oct. 1636.

¹⁴⁵ J. Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming: the Agrarian History of Lincolnshire from Tudor to Recent Times* (London, 1957), 14; S. Hipkin, ‘The structure of landownership and land occupation in the Romney Marsh region, 1646–1834’, *AgHR*, 51 (2003), 69–94, at 93–4.

¹⁴⁶ SA, P3 14/w/1/1/799, 27 Sep. 1580; P3 14/w/1/1/831, 16 Sep. 1596.

¹⁴⁷ SA, P3 14/w/1/1/804, 27 Sep. 1582; P3 14/w/1/1/806, 3 Oct. 1583; P3 14/w/1/1/818, 14 Oct. 1590.

¹⁴⁸ SA, P3 14/w/1/1/1–8, 275–309, 502–659. ¹⁴⁹ CUL, EDR, C11/1/3, C11/2/4–6

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While Fordington's reeve and messor selections are recorded too infrequently for a thorough quantitative analysis to be undertaken, reeve selections here look to have been similar to those at Worfield and Cratfield, with little evidence of year-on-year selection until the end of the period examined, when William Miller was chosen four times between 1643 and 1647.¹⁵⁰ However, messor selections at the same manor were radically different, with year-on-year selection of Robert Cosens for 1626–32 and 1644–7 and William Dilly for 1633–43.¹⁵¹ This warns against a simple classification of manors into more restrictive and more distributive regimes, suggesting both types of selection patterns could exist for different offices at the same manor.

Shifting attention to officials instituted by bylaws, a different pattern might be expected. Such officers were more focused on tenants' requirements rather than on those of the lord, and thus may have been subject to more inclusive selection practices. Figure 2.2 shows distribution patterns for the two best recorded of these types of offices, namely bylawmen at fourteenth-century Downham and fieldreeves at late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Fordington. The results suggest that, despite their more communal focus, bylaw offices were also unequally distributed, with a few prominent officials monopolising opportunities to serve. While at Downham patterns of service were slightly more equal than for Reeves and messors, the most prominent quartile of servers still accounted for 54% of total selections (Figure 2.2a). Again, this pattern was largely the result of repeated selections of the same individuals to office. John Rote was selected in nine of fifteen selections for 1398–1414, and William Scut was chosen in eight of sixteen selections for 1376–1402.¹⁵² Changes in the number of bylawmen operative also concentrated the office. While between 1311 and 1328 eight to twelve bylawmen were chosen in selections, preventing extreme concentration, from 1334 onwards this dropped to between two and six bylawmen.¹⁵³

The patterns of selection of those chosen to be fieldreeves at Fordington saw a more equal distribution, with the top quartile representing 38% of total selections (Figure 2.2b). However, when looking at the patterns of those who actually served, a more inequitable pattern emerges, with the top quartile representing 49% of total selections. The reason for this difference is a process of deputisation in which those chosen to serve were replaced by another tenant. While selection to the

¹⁵⁰ TNA, SC 2/170/14–16. ¹⁵¹ TNA, SC 2/170/14–16.

¹⁵² CUL, EDR, C11/1/3, C11/2/4–5.

¹⁵³ CUL, EDR, C11/1/1–3, C11/2/4–5. In 1402, the whole jury were named bylawmen, increasing the number serving to twelve, but this was not a permanent change. CUL, EDR, C11/2/4, m.7, 25 Jul. 1402.

Patterns of Service

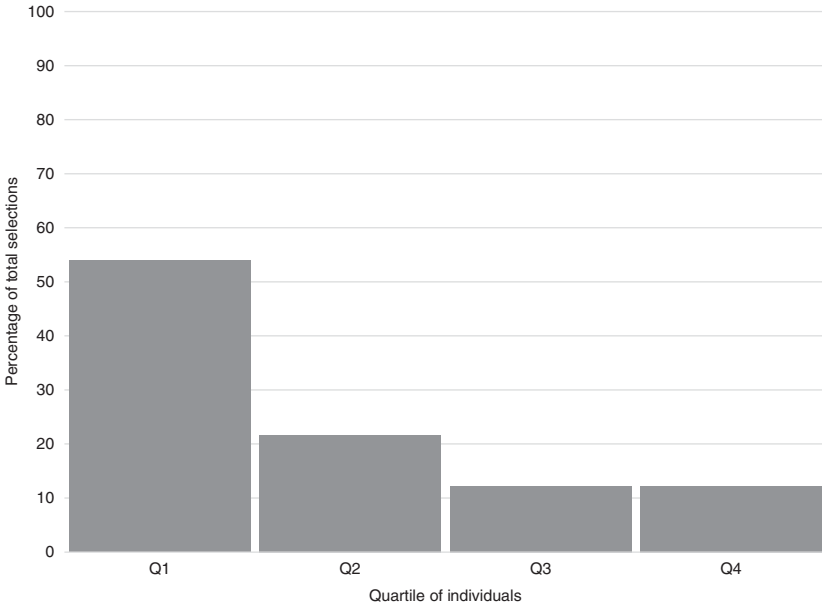


Figure 2.2 Distribution of bylawmen and fieldreeve selections by quartile of individuals

Figure 2.2a Little Downham bylawmen, 1311–1414

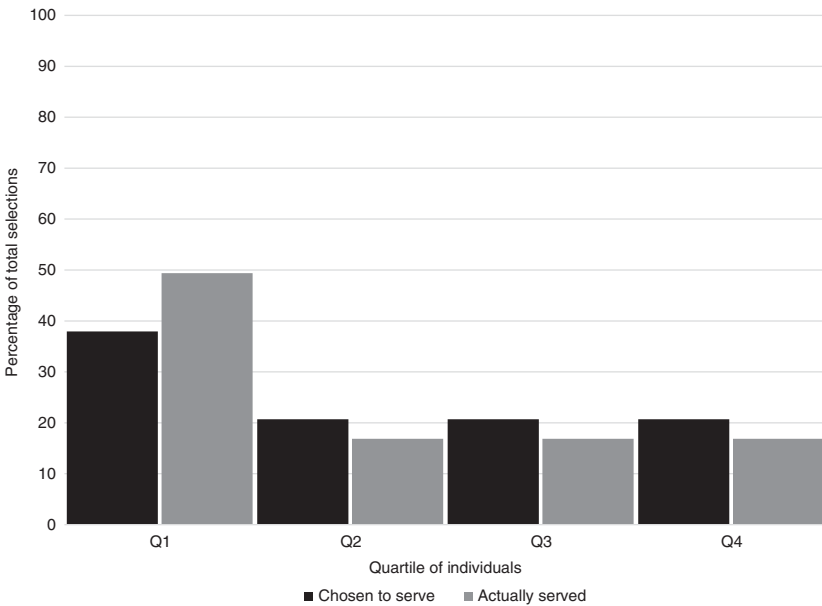


Figure 2.2b Fordington fieldreeves, 1574–1648

Sources: CUL, EDR, C11/1/1–3, C11/2/4–5; TNA, SC 2/170/9–16.

position of fieldreeve was relatively widely distributed among eligible candidates, with only two individuals being chosen three times (the maximum of any individual), deputisation was far more concentrated. For instance, Robert Cosens acted as deputy for one of the two fieldreeves in nine of seventeen recorded selections between 1625 and 1646, and William Dilly acted as deputy in six of ten selections between 1633 and 1643.¹⁵⁴ While this process of deputisation did concentrate the position of fieldreeve in fewer hands, this is likely not an example of monopolisation of office by an elite, as it occurred through the preference of a wider set of appointees not to serve. Instead, especially as those deputised frequently served simultaneously as reeves, this is probably more a sign of professionalisation in officeholding as would occur for various parochial offices in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century.¹⁵⁵

Finally, examining the selection of tasters at Downham, Cratfield, Worfield and Horstead reinforces the same picture of differences in distribution of service across manors seen for the other sets of officials (Figure 2.3). Despite the fact that, at least in theory, tasters performed their office to meet royal obligations, patterns mirror those of other manorial offices. Cratfield, Horstead and Worfield (after 1409) saw a similar pattern of largely equal distribution of service, with the highest serving quartile only accounting for between 33% and 37% of all selections (Figure 2.3b–d). This was due to a wide rotation of office, and those who served multiple times tended to do so several years apart. For instance, at Cratfield, Robert Walhaugh was sworn in 1437, 1442, 1450 and 1461, while at Horstead, John Humfrey was sworn in 1452, 1468 and 1473, with neither of these relatively prominent tasters serving more than once in five years.¹⁵⁶

This pattern can be contrasted with Downham, where the top quartile of servers represented 49% of total selections for this office (Figure 2.3a). Again, this was due to continuous year-on-year service.¹⁵⁷ For example, John Gysles held office in two near-continuous periods of service, being chosen four times in 1409–14 and a further eight times in 1418–26.¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, before 1409 the method of selection at Worfield followed a similar pattern to Downham, leading to a similar concentration of

¹⁵⁴ TNA, SC 2/170/14–16.

¹⁵⁵ Goldie, 'Unacknowledged republic', 169–70; J. Miller, 'Touch of the state: stop and search in England, c.1660–1750', *History Workshop Journal*, 87 (2019), 52–71, at 62.

¹⁵⁶ CUL, EDR, Vanneck Box/3, Henry VI roll, m.18, 23 May 1437; m.28, 22 May 1442; m.40, 26 May 1450; m.51, 26 May 1461; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/37, 11 Jun. 1452; KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/39, m.17, 11 Jun. 1468; m.29, 11 Jun. 1473.

¹⁵⁷ CUL, EDR, C11/1/2–3, C11/2/4–6. ¹⁵⁸ CUL, EDR, C11/2/4–6.

Patterns of Service

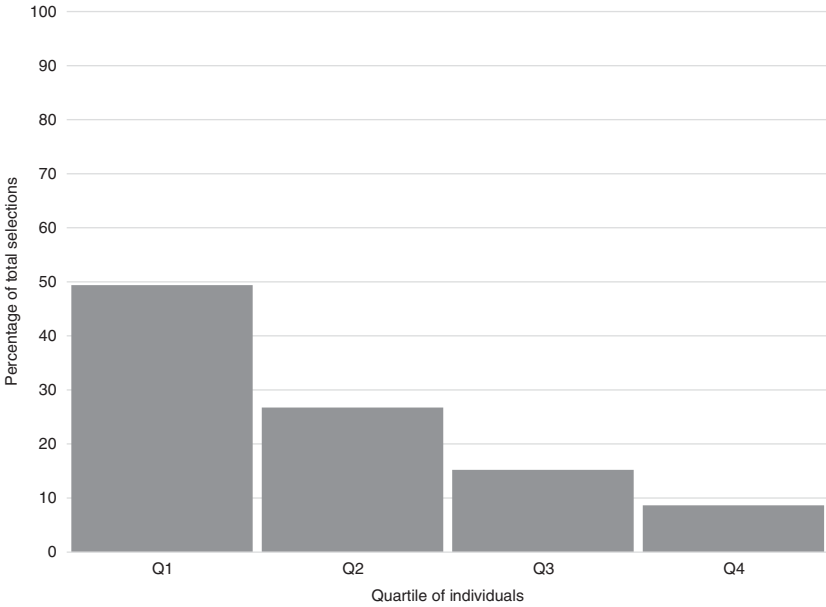


Figure 2.3 Distribution of taster and tithingman selections by quartile of individuals

Figure 2.3a Little Downham tasters, 1311-1508

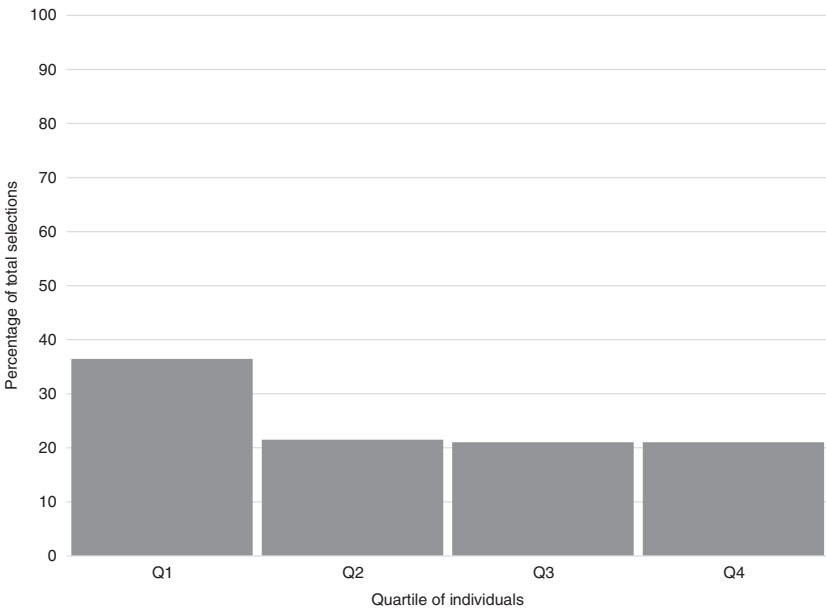


Figure 2.3b Cratfield tasters, 1401-1531

Manorial Officeholding and Selection Processes

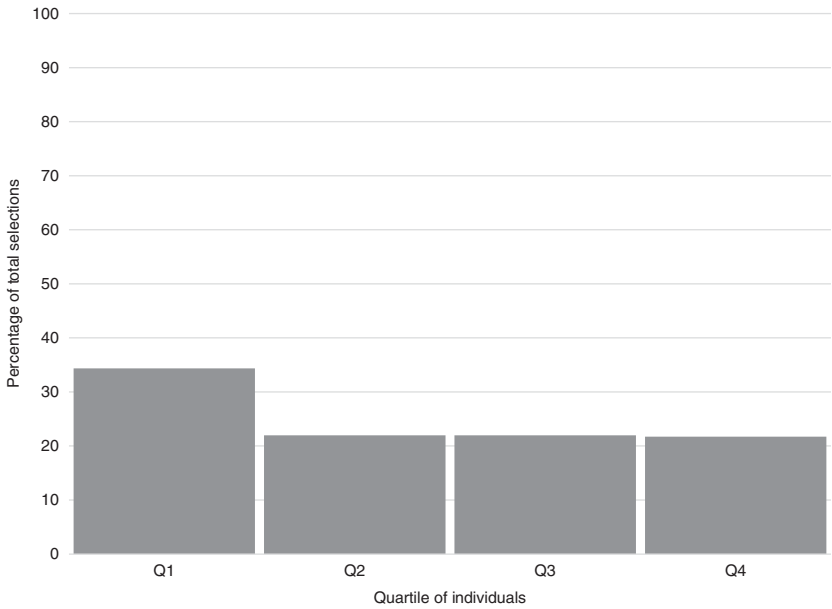


Figure 2.3c Worfield tasters, 1409–1649

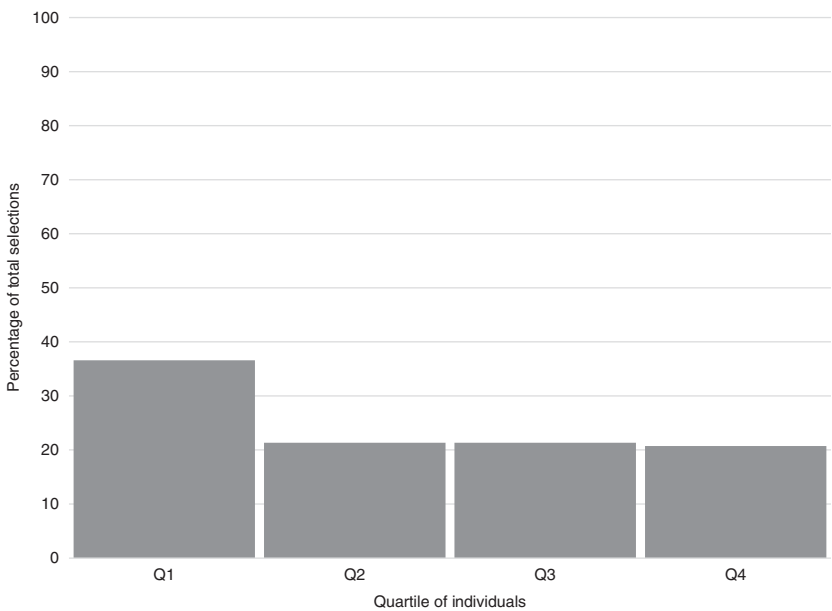


Figure 2.3d Horstead tasters, 1395–1491

Patterns of Service

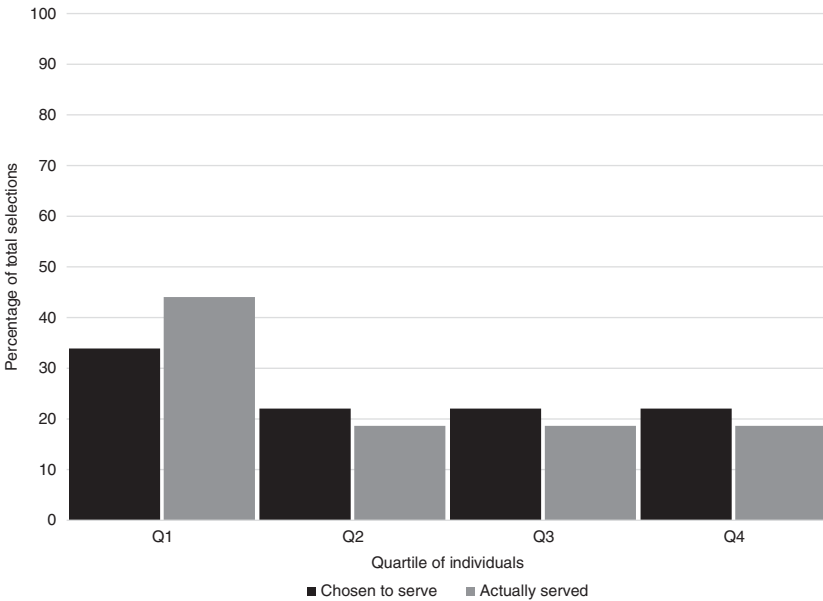


Figure 2.3e Fordington tithingmen, 1566–1647

Sources: CUL, EDR, C11/1/1–3, C11/2/4–6, C11/3/7–10; CUL, Vanneck Box/3; KCAR/6/2/087/1/1/HOR/26–41; SA, P314/W/1/1/238–837, 5586/1/257–306; TNA, SC 2/170/6–16.

officeholding. Tasters often served for long terms when chosen, meaning that only fifty individuals are recorded as serving between 1328 and 1405.¹⁵⁹ These men served in continuous blocks. For instance, Roger Hitchcocks and William Huggen served continuously between 1362 and 1368, and it is probable that Adam Swancote and William Heyne did between 1328 and 1336.¹⁶⁰

For tithingmen, as an alternative royal office present at Fordington, the pattern reflects that for the manor's fieldreeves, again suggesting locality rather than type of office was significant in determining the distribution of service. Tithingmen were seemingly freely chosen by each of the eastern and western tithings, as revealed by an occasion in 1366 when the entire western tithing was amerced for failing to choose a tithingman.¹⁶¹ Looking at the pattern of selections, while individuals in the top quartile represented only 34% of selections of those chosen to serve, their share

¹⁵⁹ SA, P314/W/1/1/5–233. ¹⁶⁰ SA, P314/W/1/1/52–68; P314/W/1/1/5–19.

¹⁶¹ TNA, SC 2/169/31, m.9, 21 Dec. 1366.

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jumps to 44% of those who actually served (Figure 2.3e). This concentration was driven by a process of deputisation and professional office-holders again appear at the fore, with Robert Cosens acting as a deputy for one of the two tithingmen in five of ten selections between 1628 and 1639 and John Lawrence in four of seven selections between 1634 and 1640.¹⁶²

An examination of selected officials suggests that local cultures of officeholding, rather than differences in the mechanisms of selection, or whether an officer more obviously served lord, tenants or crown, determined how far office was concentrated in the hands of a few. While no office in any manor was distributed entirely evenly, Horstead saw a relatively equal distribution among those serving as taster and Worfield saw similar patterns among those serving as reeve and taster after 1409. Little Downham, conversely, saw radically unequal distribution of office among those serving as reeve, bylawman and taster. Cratfield and Fordington saw different patterns among different types of office, with the former seeing a relatively equal distribution of service among those serving as taster but a more unequal (if not at the same levels as at Downham) distribution of the office among those serving as reeve. Fordington similarly saw relatively equitable distribution among those serving as reeve, but more inequality in service between those serving as messor, fieldreeve and tithingman, although this was driven by a process of optional deputisation rather than restriction. Worfield also saw slightly more unequal distribution of the beadleship owing to it being provided by a subset of the community. If the patterns outlined defy a simple relationship between selection system or purpose of office and selection patterns, they at the same time demonstrate that tenants themselves seemingly had significant impacts over patterns of selection. Therefore, it was at least possible for subsets of the population to dominate particular offices in a way that prefigures the monopolisation of parochial office by early modern middling sorts.

Empanelled Officials

Examining the distribution of service among presentment juries provides more universal evidence for manorial offices being concentrated in the hands of an elite group. Table 2.3 summarises the distribution of service amongst capital pledges, jurors leet and jurors baron for select five-year periods between 1300 and 1650. The table provides ‘concentration ratios’

¹⁶² TNA, SC 2/170/14–16.

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Table 2.3 *Concentration ratios for presentment jurors*

Period	Horstead	Cratfield	Little Downham	Worfield	Fordington
A Capital pledges and jurors leet					
Early fourteenth century	–	–	0.88 (1310–14)	–	–
Mid-fourteenth century	–	–	0.76 (1365–9)	–	–
Early fifteenth century	0.84 (1400–4)	0.96 (1405–9)	–	0.79 (1400–4)	–
Mid-fifteenth century	0.86 (1450–4)	0.88 (1450–4)	0.90 (1460–4)	0.76 (1450–4)	–
Early sixteenth century	0.87 (1490–4)	0.83 (1500–4)	0.85 (1500–4)	0.58 (1500–4)	–
Mid-sixteenth century	0.83 (1550–4)	0.85 (1550–4)	0.79 (1555–9)	0.71 (1550–4)	0.70 (1545–9)
Early seventeenth century	0.67 (1595–9)	0.87 (1615–19)	0.57 (1610–14)	0.66 (1600–4)	–
Mid-seventeenth century	–	0.81 (1645–9)	0.54 (1645–9)	0.58 (1635–9)	0.73 (1640–4)
B Jurors baron					
Mid-fourteenth century	–	–	0.82 (1365–9)	–	–
Early fifteenth century	0.52 (1410–14)	0.57 (1400–4)	0.88 (1400–4)	0.76 (1400–4)	–
Mid-fifteenth century	0.60 (1450–4)	0.74 (1450–4)	0.66 (1465–9)	0.58 (1450–4)	–
Early sixteenth century	0.59 (1490–4)	0.64 (1500–4)	–	0.60 (1500–4)	–
Mid-sixteenth century	0.78 (1535–9)	0.64 (1550–4)	–	0.71 (1550–4)	–
Early seventeenth century	0.84 (1590–4)	–	0.62 (1605–9)	0.71 (1595–9)	–
Mid-seventeenth century	–	–	0.59 (1645–9)	0.66 (1645–9)	0.53 (1635–9)

Notes: Precise quinquennia used in each case are given in brackets.

Sources: Gibbs, “Open” or “closed”; CUL, EDR, C I I / 8, C I I / 10; SA, 5586/1/257–62, 5586/1/293–98, 5586/1/301–6; CUL, Vanneck Box/3–4; TNA, SC 2/170/3–4, SC 2/170/14–16.

for each of these periods. This is a standardised measurement between 0 and 1, with 0 representing the most equal possible distribution of jury service and 1 representing the most unequal distribution of jury service.

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Thus the higher the number, the less equally acting as juror was distributed among those serving in a given five-year period.¹⁶³

The data reveals two key patterns. Firstly, and most significant, there was consistently a relatively high level of inequality in service among presentment jurors at the case-study manors. In all quinquennia, concentration ratios stood above 0.5, demonstrating that jury service was always closer to the most unequal rather than equal pattern possible. Generally, jury service was dominated by a core group who served in the majority of lists across the five-year period, with other individuals tending only to serve once or twice.

Secondly, there is no universal shift towards a more unequal distribution in the early modern period as the theory of the rise of the middling sort would predict. Within the context of significant variation between periods, the only presentment jury which saw a clear upward trajectory in inequality was Horstead's jury baron, which shifted from a ratio ranging between 0.52 and 0.6 in the fifteenth century, to one reaching between 0.78 and 0.84 in the sixteenth century. However, Downham saw the opposite trend. For capital pledges, there was a fall in ratios from between 0.76 and 0.9 for the fourteenth to sixteenth century, to between 0.54 and 0.57 for the seventeenth century, and for jurors baron, ratios fell from between 0.82 and 0.88 for the fourteenth and early fifteenth century to between 0.59 and 0.66 for the late fifteenth to seventeenth century. Worfield also saw a small fall in inequality for jurors leet between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and for jurors baron from the early fifteenth century. Cratfield saw little change over time, with high ratios for its capital pledges throughout the period studied, while juries baron remained at a more equal level.

OFFICEHOLDING ELITES

The previous analysis has demonstrated that there was a degree of inequality in the distribution of all manorial offices across all manors. This inequality was universal for manorial juries, although there is some evidence for a move to more equality in service in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century. For selected officials, different manors saw different patterns, suggesting an important role for local cultures of officeholding in creating more or less unequal distributions of service in office.

A different perspective is given by examining those individuals that seem particularly prominent across various offices, rather than all

¹⁶³ For a detailed discussion of this methodology, see Gibbs "Open" or "closed", appendix D.

Officeholding Elites

officeholders. Here, the top fourteen or fifteen most prominent men have been studied at each manor for two time-frames, one a period of relatively high numbers involved in officeholding per year, and one a period of relatively low numbers. For each period, the total proportion of recorded services in each type of office held by these fourteen or fifteen men, as opposed to all other individuals, has been calculated.¹⁶⁴ Through contrasting these specific periods, it is possible to see some differences between manors and change over time, but also that generally the most prominent individuals served a disproportionately large number of times.

Beginning with Downham, the periods 1373–1434 and 1552–82 have been examined.¹⁶⁵ The former reflects an era of low annual participation in officeholding. Unfortunately, the second period is less complete, with six years of missing data, but provides a comparator, being an era of significant increase in the number of individuals holding office annually. The picture for 1373–1434 is one of domination by a small set of individuals of all offices excepting that of taster, with these fourteen men taking more than half of services as bylawman, messor, reeve and juror baron. Interestingly, while men could serve across all offices, the reeveship and messorship seem to have been split up between two groups, with prominent men specialising in one of these offices, although John Lovechild and Simon Kede do buck this trend. While lists of capital pledges were only made infrequently in this period, the fact that nine of the fourteen most prominent men appear in this role suggests the possibility of monopolisation.

The picture for 1552–82 is slightly different. Even though the number of offices to fill had reduced to three, meaning that even more concentration in the remaining offices might be expected, the most prominent men in this period held a smaller 36% of the total juror baron services, and an only moderately larger 38% of capital pledge services. More significantly, this group did not dominate the, admittedly slight, nine selections of fenreeves. However, this reduction in the number of services held by the most prominent group was relatively minor, and in absolute terms, the greatest-serving individuals were still serving disproportionately despite increases in the total number serving per year.

For Worfield, the same exercise was performed for 1400–40 and 1559–1600, again encompassing a period of lower and higher numbers of individuals per year in officeholding, respectively.¹⁶⁶ For 1400–40,

¹⁶⁴ This measure expresses the number of times the most commonly named officeholders appear in each office as a proportion of the total number of opportunities to serve in each office ('services') recorded in a specific time-frame.

¹⁶⁵ CUL, EDR, C11/1/2–3, C11/2/4–6, C11/3/10–11.

¹⁶⁶ SA, P314/W1/1/215–292, P314/W1/1/725–838.

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a similar pattern to Downham for 1373–1434 can be seen in terms of jury service, with the top fifteen individuals again holding more than 50% of juror baron services, and exactly 50% of juror leet services. However, the pattern for the reeveship is very different, with only five of the fifteen appearing and only making up 10% of services, reflecting the contrast in the distribution of this office between the manors (Figure 2.1). Furthermore, in the admittedly small sample of six selections to the beadleship, only William Wermod and Roger Gerbod appear, with the other four services held by men not in the top fifteen.

As at Downham, the growth of the number of those serving as officials does seem to have reduced the share of the most prominent men, with the top fourteen for 1559–1600 holding 43% of jury baron services and 33% of jury leet services, a reduction on the previous period. Conversely, however, this group's service as reeves and tasters was significantly higher (at 15% and 17%, respectively), though still well below that of Downham at the turn of the fifteenth century. Only one of the fourteen, Richard Rowlowe, served as beadle; however, he did serve in nearly 30% of opportunities to hold this office. Thus, much like at Downham, the increase in the number of individuals serving seems to have had a very modest effect in reducing the influence of a core group of officeholders.

Cratfield provides a picture of less dominance of office than at Downham and Worfield. In the first period examined, 1402–50, the most prominent individuals held a slightly smaller share of jury services, at 31% of capital pledge services and 45% of juror baron services.¹⁶⁷ In a similar picture to that of fifteenth-century Worfield, these men also did not dominate the reeveship, and the nine prominent men who served in this office only accounted for 19% of services, reflecting the wide distribution of this office (Figure 2.1). Interestingly, even though Cratfield saw the opposite trend, with a reduction in the number of men serving per year in the sixteenth century, the period 1530–85 saw a modest decline in the share enjoyed by the most prominent men. While the share of capital pledge services remained similar for the most prominent men, their share of jury baron services dropped to 35%. No prominent men served as taster before the office disappeared in 1531.

The two periods examined for Horstead, 1442–94 and 1510–61, differ from the patterns seen previously owing to the existence of the separate juries baron for the Horstead and Coltishall fees.¹⁶⁸ No individual was able to dominate both juries in either period, and the only man whose prominence was a result of service across both was William Mowtyng.

¹⁶⁷ CUL, Vanneck Box/3

¹⁶⁸ KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/36–41, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/45, KCAR/6/2/87/1/1/HOR/48–51

Officeholding Elites

Contrasting the two periods, a decrease in the total numbers serving per year caused a greater proportion of services to be held by the most prominent individuals. This increase is most drastic in terms of the jury for the Coltishall fee, rising from 29% to 37%, which suggests that this office was becoming considerably more concentrated in a few hands. However, the picture for capital pledges and Horstead jurors is again one of modest change, with increases in proportion of only a few percentage points (from 38% to 40% and from 34% to 35%, respectively).

Fordington apes Horstead in that there was some movement towards greater dominance of office by prominent officials over time. However, this occurred in a period of increase in numbers serving per year between the two periods of 1537–79 and 1625–48.¹⁶⁹ The proportion for jurors leet climbed modestly from 43% to 50% and the prominent individuals moved from holding 43% of suitor services to more than half of juror baron services. While only two of these men served as fieldreeves in 1537–79, fourteen served in this position in 1625–48, leading them to control a significantly larger share of services. However, the proportion of reeve and tithingman services held by this group did decline modestly (from 29% to 23% and from 27% to 19%, respectively).

The data presented here reinforces the clear difference between Downham, where in the earlier period significant jury baron service was strongly correlated with monopolisation of other annually selected offices, and Worfield, Cratfield and Fordington, where service as reeve by these elites was far more modest. However, in other ways it suggests commonalities. At all manors, being a taster was a less attractive office, with the most prominent officeholders seeing relatively low service in this office, even when they monopolised other positions.

A more striking similarity provides a valuable corrective to some of the approaches seen above. At all manors in all time periods, there was a core group who did serve a disproportionate number of times in office. The fourteen or fifteen most prominent individuals, who made up between 6% and 13% of all individuals serving in office in these periods, never held less than 30% of available services as juror baron, juror leet or capital pledge. Increasing participation at Worfield and Downham did reduce the dominance of this group, which saw its share drop by 10–20%. However, this seems to signal a potential moderate reduction in influence rather than a sea change, and at Fordington, as numbers serving increased, so did the elite's share of services. Thus, even as a large proportion of adult males served as part of the manorial officeholding group, the internal dynamics of this group retained a strongly unequal character.

¹⁶⁹ TNA, SC 2/170/2–10, 14–16.

CONCLUSION

Detailed examination has revealed that a single designation of 'participatory' or 'restrictive' cannot be applied to manorial officeholding in the late Middle Ages or early modern period. Even though selection practices varied between rotation, free choice and hybrid systems, communities of tenants typically had significant power over who they selected as officials. This was rooted in systems of collective responsibility which made tenants nominally responsible for the failures of demesne managers working for lords and adult males responsible for breaches of the peace by men from their tithing. Who in the community actually had power in these decisions is harder to uncover: it seems likely that juries whose responsibilities stretched beyond sessions and were characterised by low rates of turnover had some sort of corporate and exclusive identity, while descriptions claiming that the 'whole homage' or 'all the customary tenants' chose officials must be treated with care. Thus, it is likely that an elite group had some capacity to monopolise office through controlling selection systems.

Examination of actual patterns of selection reveals that officeholding regimes defy simple characterisation as open or closed, but instead combined both elements in a two-tier system. Officeholding was undoubtedly restricted to a narrow segment of the population owing to the exclusion of the landless (as many offices were tied to specific landholdings) and the very limited participation of women even if they held land. However, among adult men, officeholding looks to have been relatively open in the post-Plague era, with at least one in eight men serving in office in any given year and one in five over five years. This supports the observation by members of the Toronto School that many families were represented in manorial offices and compares favourably to estimates for early modern parochial officeholding and medieval trustworthy men, suggesting a participatory governing system.

However, within the relatively high proportion of adult males who served in manorial office, there was significant inequality in the amount of times each man served, creating polarisation between an elite of frequent servers and a wider group who served far fewer times. For selected officials, this varied significantly between locations and was seemingly due to differences in cultures of officeholding rather than whether these offices, at least nominally, met signiorial, communal or royal functions. While selection practices played a part in explaining differences, with processes of deputisation increasing restriction while rotation among landholdings could increase dispersion, ultimately it is hard to find obvious patterns. The evidence for empanelled jurors is clearer cut, with

Conclusion

a consistent pattern of inequality in service. Moreover, in any given period, a small elite of fourteen or fifteen men served disproportionately, paralleling the dominant men found by Wrightson and Levine at Terling. This evidence thus supports the recent 'toughening up' in historians' attitudes seen in studies of medieval governance, showing that a core of elites could dominate village political institutions.

However, this two-tier system also reflects some of the limitations on village elites imposed by manorial structures which worked against the outright domination of office and the wider village community more generally. On the simplest level, as Dyer has previously highlighted, there were simply a lot of positions to fill with a markedly reduced population after the Black Death, meaning that a substantial proportion of men, and likely a large proportion of tenants, were required in order to maintain manorial governance structures.¹⁷⁰ More fundamentally, monopolisation was constrained to some extent by social expectations and late medieval political culture. The pioneering work of John Watts has emphasised the 'pressure of the public' in English politics, highlighting the wide spread of political ideas and engagement among lower social groups, and the way this shaped the activity of ruling elites.¹⁷¹ Johnson has suggested that this phenomenon can be seen 'in microcosm' within rural courts, as institutional conduits that allowed villagers beyond officials to contribute to court processes meant that elites had to justify their work as acting in the wider interests of the village community.¹⁷² Moreover, the high degree of tenant choice in the selection of officials had its origins in collective liability as imposed by crown and lord, and this likely again fostered a popular element to officeholding. The two-tier system thus perhaps worked as a compromise between two impulses: on the one hand, that of a set of 'chief inhabitants' to monopolise office and, on the other, a need for genuinely wide participation among the community. Many adult males had the opportunity to contribute to manorial governance through holding office, but through frequent service, a few elites could still ensure they shaped this governance towards their own objectives.

This system, moreover, seems to have survived relatively intact into the early modern period. In terms of manorial office, the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century cannot be seen as a period of transformation, when office increasingly became restricted to a few 'chief inhabitants'. By c.1600, officeholding had seemingly become *de facto* more closed than any period since the Black Death at several of the manors studied here, if one measures closure in terms of the proportion of the

¹⁷⁰ Dyer, 'Power and conflict', 7; Gibbs, "'Open" or "closed"'.

¹⁷¹ Watts, 'Pressure of the public', 164–79. ¹⁷² Johnson, *Law in Common*, 44–5.

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total male population involved in officeholding. However, this was not a universal trend, with Downham and Fordington seeing increases in the proportion of men serving. Moreover, only at Horstead did numbers serving decline, while at Cratfield and Worfield declines in the proportion serving were driven by demographic increase. Similarly, there was no universal pattern of greater inequality in jury service, with Downham and Worfield seeing small declines in concentration ratios over time. Such a picture may not apply to parochial officeholding, but it does fundamentally question the novelty of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the age of great social stratification, and the limited evidence for the pre-Black Death era suggests this may have been a far more closed period. This comprehensively challenges any simple narrative of the rise of the middling sort which both simplifies the political structures of medieval village communities and mischaracterises the degree of change between medieval and early modern.