THE FAMINE OF 1527 IN ESSEX

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Recent work by economic historians and demographers has emphasised
the frequent shortage of food which afflicted England during the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries.¹ This led not only to rising prices but also, it
is alleged, to widespread starvation and death. At times of such crisis,
various attempts were made to control the movement and price of grain,
and by means of special commissions the central government undertook
surveys of the stocks of food in threatened areas. The results of these
investigations were enshrined in corn certificates, some of which still
survive. Sir William Ashley drew attention to these documents as long
ago as 1928, but curiously they have not been used as widely as might
be expected.²

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to a corn certificate of
1527 which survives for a block of ten parishes in the north-west of Essex,
part of the largest hundred in the county called Hinckford.³ These ten
parishes lie within a large bend of the river Stour, opposite the Suffolk
towns of Clare, Melford and Sudbury. The certificate is complete and
systematic, and therefore seems an obvious candidate for detailed
analysis.

John Stow in his Annales confirms that 1527 was indeed a year of crisis
and dearth.⁴ Heavy rain during the previous winter had ‘destroied corn-
fields, pastures, and beasts.’ To make matters worse, it rained every day
from 12 April until 3 June ‘wherby Corne failed sore in the years
following.’ So, after a run of five good years, the harvest of 1527 was
disastrous. The price of wheat rose higher than it had ever been since
1450, ‘with an average price for the harvest year fully two-thirds above
the norm.’⁵ The inevitable result was widespread discontent which some-
times, in Norfolk for example, erupted into violence. To contemporaries
the winter of 1527-8 must have seemed the worst and most dangerous
within living memory: indeed only two other harvest years in the entire
sixteenth century (1556 and 1596) exceeded 1527 for the scarcity of
wheat.

The commissioner appointed by the Crown to survey this piece of Hinck-
ford Hundred was William Clopton, Esq. of Liston Hall. He was the second
son of Sir William Clopton of Long Melford, and grandson of the cele-
brated John Clopton who had been largely responsible for the grand
rebuilding of Melford Church during the years 1460 to 1495. This
distinguished landowning family had lived at Kentwell Manor since the later 14th century, but William Clopton as a second son established a new branch at Liston where it remained until the eighteenth century.

Clopton's commission began its work on 15 December 1527, when the situation was already critical.' The certificate records how much grain was available in each parish, and how much extra was needed, in order to support the population over a period of thirty-eight weeks: until, that is, the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady on 8 September 1528, when presumably the next harvest, or most of it, would already be cut and new supplies of grain therefore available. This dramatically illustrates the historical significance of the 'harvest year.' The commission's calculations were based on the assumption that in a week six persons would consume a bushel of 'breadcorn' and a bushel and a half of 'drinkcorn.'

We are told nothing of the actual methods by which the information was gathered, but there seems no reason to doubt that, as in Staffordshire and Yorkshire, the commissioners organised a search by constables and other local officials of all barns, garner, stacks, ricks, mows and 'other suspicious places in the same to have hydde corne.' Other commissioners working in Wiltshire and Northamptonshire distinguished three kinds of corn: that needed by householders for 'the fynding of their houses;' that needed for the 'sowing of their grounde;' and finally their surplus which could (and should) be sold. After a survey had been made, steps could be taken to control local markets. For instance, Robert Chauntrell of Northamptonshire commanded those with surpluses to send 'to the market Townes adjoyning to them weekly Corne to sell to them that have nede.' He claimed that since his first inspection the local situation had improved, and that 'the markettes have ben sufficiently furnishshed with Corne able to suffise all byers commyang thether and more.' The main concern was for 'pore pepull that hathe no maner of Corne growing' and therefore must buy or borrow.'

In Hinckford, William Clopton's stated task was to certify the amounts of 'corn sold and unsold,' again excluding the seed needed for the following year. For each parish, the following details were given, in this order:

- Total population including men, women and children
- Total quantity available of wheat, rye and maslin
- Total quantity available of barley and malt
- Total quantity available of peas, oats, and 'harres' (probably vetches)
- Amount of breadcorn needed for the next 38 weeks
- Amount of drinkcorn needed for the next 38 weeks
- Amount of breadcorn lacking
- Amount of drinkcorn lacking (or in surplus)
- Surplus, if any, of peas, oats or 'harres.'

A full transcript of the general introduction, the conclusion and a typical parochial entry will be found in the appendix. As however the main interest of this document is numerical, the full details for all ten parishes are given in columns (Table 1). The information is given in a slightly different order from the original, to make comparisons between the villages easier.
### Table 1  Hinckford Hundred, Essex: the corn certificate of 1527.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Breadcorn needed</td>
<td>Wheat, rye &amp; maslin (stocks)</td>
<td>Breadcorn lacking</td>
<td>Drinkcorn needed</td>
<td>Barley &amp; malt (stocks)</td>
<td>Drinkcorn lacking</td>
<td>Peas, oats &amp; 'harres' (stocks)</td>
<td>Surplus peas, oats &amp; 'harres'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballingdon</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>153.59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>138.59</td>
<td>220.81</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>153.81</td>
<td>16$^3$</td>
<td>16$^3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp Otten</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>88.38</td>
<td>26.38</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>196.25</td>
<td>84.25$^3$</td>
<td>63.63</td>
<td>63.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp St. Paul</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>103.66</td>
<td>16.25</td>
<td>77.41</td>
<td>134.5</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>113.5</td>
<td>10.63$^3$</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp Walter (Belchamp Will'm)</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>83.66</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>59.16</td>
<td>105.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>13.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borley</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>82.53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>63.41</td>
<td>103.25</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63.25</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brundon (Brondon)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.03</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>22.56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27.44$^2$</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxearth</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>99.44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>89.41</td>
<td>126.5</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>10$^4$</td>
<td>10$^4$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liston (Lyston)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>70.38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.38</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton (Medilton)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>71.03</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>61.53</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3$^3$</td>
<td>3$^3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentlow</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>67.03</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>1055</td>
<td>811.85</td>
<td>179.63</td>
<td>652.04</td>
<td>1124.50</td>
<td>721.25</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>124.01</td>
<td>113.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals quoted in certificate</td>
<td>1055</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>119.63</td>
<td>572.12</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>451.88</td>
<td>(112.83)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$ All quantities in quarters.

$^2$ Surplus.

$^3$ Peas.
In attempting to interpret these figures, one must first establish how particular crops were used. It is an historical fact that malt and ale were made from several kinds of grain, and not necessarily barley, while bread too was made of any grain, as well as peas, beans and other pulses. Fortunately however, this certificate does not seem to be based on the assumption that the drinkcorn was barley, and that the breadcorn was wheat or rye. This is made clear by the fact that one can usually add the quantities in store to the quantities 'lacking,' and arrive at the figure 'needed.' Where surpluses existed, the excess can be taken from the stock, to give the amount needed. However, there are several exceptions, most of which have one figure wrong and seem to be the result of scribal or mathematical errors.\textsuperscript{12}

There is no doubt that breadcorn was in desperately short supply. A comparison of columns B and C shows that on average these ten parishes had only 22 per cent of the wheat, rye and maslin which they needed — 180 quarters instead of 812 (unfortunately the individual kinds of grain, here and elsewhere, are not distinguished but lumped together). Only Brundon with its tiny population of nineteen had sufficient. Faced with this massive deficiency, the commissioner also investigated the stocks of peas, beans and other pulses which, though normally grown as provender for animals, could if necessary be put into bread. William Harrison, himself an Essex rector, commented on this practice in Elizabethan times: 'poore neighbours in some shires are inforced to content themselves with rie or barleie, yea, and in time of deearth, manie with bread made either of beans, peason, or otes, or of altogether and some acornes among ...'.\textsuperscript{13} In Hinckford, the certificate records both the stock of pulses and the surplus: in most parishes the two figures are the same. The normally low quantities may mean that the amounts needed for animals had already been excluded. At Foxearth, one can only make the figures tally by assuming that the surplus of peas was reckoned as part of the breadcorn — surely a significant discrepancy. Even with the stocks of peas, beans and vetches, these ten parishes of Hinckford could on average only raise 37.4 per cent of what they needed for 'the staff of life.'

Although the brewing of ale demanded half as much grain again as the making of bread, supplies were not so alarmingly short. The harvest of barley in 1527 had clearly been better than that of wheat, rye and maslin. Indeed, Foxearth nearly had sufficient for its needs, Brundon this time had twice what it needed, and Belchamp Otten had a surprisingly healthy surplus. On average the ten parishes had 64 per cent of the drinkcorn they required.

The crisis assumes another dimension if we add together all the stocks mentioned for each parish, and compare them with the total requirement of that place (see Table 2). Brundon and Belchamp Otten each had a reasonable surplus and were in a class of their own — even though the second village was about six times larger than the first. The other eight parishes were all short of food and drink: seven of them had less than 50 per cent of what was needed, and four had less than 40 per cent. In total, in spite of some surpluses, the ten parishes could only raise 53 per cent of their requirements. Not surprisingly the shortage was most severe in Ballingdon and Belchamp St. Paul which had the largest populations
But the depth of the crisis did not simply reflect the number of inhabitants. For example, Foxearth and Belchamp St. Paul had roughly the same populations, yet the first had 62 per cent of what it needed, and the second only 28 per cent. These intriguing differences must be related to variations in geography, farming, social structure and manorial custom.

Table 2 Total crops as a percentage of needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank order</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Crops as a % of needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. (10)</td>
<td>Brundon</td>
<td>172.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. (4)</td>
<td>Belchamp Otten</td>
<td>142.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (3)</td>
<td>Foxearth</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. (9)</td>
<td>Liston</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. (7)</td>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. (6)</td>
<td>Borley</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. (8)</td>
<td>Pentiow</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. (5)</td>
<td>Belchamp Walter</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. (1)</td>
<td>Ballingdon</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. (2)</td>
<td>Belchamp St. Paul</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: These figures ignore the proportion of breadcorn to drinkcorn.

The numbers in brackets give the rank-order of parishes by size of population.

On the basis of William Clopton’s figures, the 131 inhabitants of Belchamp St. Paul were hit the hardest. If the rates of consumption quoted in the certificate are accurate, their stocks of breadcorn and drinkcorn would have been exhausted in another ten weeks or so, at about the end of February 1528. They would still have had to wait another five months before the next harvest was due. And that in its turn was to be poor.\textsuperscript{13} By the beginning of March, all the villages, except Brundon, would have run out of breadcorn; by the beginning of May six of the ten would have no drinkcorn either. Unfortunately we have as yet no evidence from the Hinckford parishes as to what happened after the survey was made. To what extent was consumption reduced to eke out supplies? Were the better-off willing to sell or give grain to their poorest neighbours? Were new stocks of food brought in by the authorities? How many people, unable to find sufficient food, actually starved and died?

Fortunately, information at the level of individual households is supplied in a Wiltshire certificate for the fragmented hundred of Elstub-cum-Everley. For example, in the parish of East Overton, six people had corn to sell. One of these, Thomas Goddard, was presumably lord of the manor with a large household of twenty-eight persons. He had twenty quarters of wheat for sale, but no barley. The other five landholders, whose households averaged 7.2 persons, had for sale seven quarters of wheat between them, and 4\frac{1}{4} quarters of barley. In the same parish six other households contained thirty men, women and children: they had no corn or grain at all.\textsuperscript{15}

Of course the crops mentioned in the certificates were not the only kinds of food available. In spite of the risks involved, villagers would have been
tempted to dig into their precious supplies of seed-corn, that is, the barley, oats and pulses which were due to be sown in the spring. Indeed the possibility is recognised in the introduction to the Hinckford certificate, where Clopton warned that seeds were ‘to be sown as nygh as all the same cornes cowde or myght be,’ which presumably means as large an acreage and as thickly as in normal years. Furthermore, because Hinckford had a predominantly enclosed landscape with a balance between arable and pastoral farming, animals must have yielded unknown quantities of food, such as cheese, beef, mutton and pork. Also, in all probability, various kinds of poultry and eggs were available, and perhaps stocks of vegetables and fruit. Even when people finally faced starvation, they always had the chance of catching wild animals, and of gathering the edible leaves, roots and fruits of wild plants. William Camden illustrated this possibility with his story of the famine at Aldeburgh in Suffolk, caused apparently by a very late harvest in 1555: ‘there grew pease miraculously among the rocks [that is, sea-peas on the shingle beach], without any earth at all about them …, and brought downe the price of corne.’ Nevertheless, for the majority of the population, bread and ale formed the staple diet — as the certificates themselves vividly testify. William Clopton’s figures seem to be based on the premise that the average person needed about 2½ lbs of bread a day, and at least two pints of ale.

One other major aspect of the certificate remains to be discussed: the number of inhabitants quoted from each parish. The majority of the surviving certificates of 1527-8, for the other areas, either do not mention the population or they give the numbers of people in the poorer households only, who were especially vulnerable in these years of crisis. Several returns of this kind relate to three hundreds in Wiltshire. A return for Amesbury Hundred in Wiltshire gives figures for ‘men and women,’ presumably excluding children, while for two parishes in Middlesex the numbers of ‘housling people’ or communicants are recorded. Only for four areas do we have certain figures for total population: for ten hundreds in Kent (not the constituent parishes) for the hundred of Elstucum-Everley in Wiltshire, for six parishes in Middlesex, and for the ten parishes in Hinckford. This kind of information is particularly rare at such an early date; for rural areas it may indeed be unique. Normally historians can only calculate the approximate size of local populations, either from parish registers which may survive intermittently from 1538 onwards, or from other sources which mention groups within communities — such as taxpayers, manorial tenants and adult communicants. By contrast, these corn certificates contain what amounts to a local census of men, women and children. The Hinckford figures appear to be much more than rough estimates: we must therefore hope that they are accurate, although our confidence is to some extent undermined by the number of errors in calculating grain. The ten communities range from Ballingdon which was a poor suburb of the important manufacturing town of Sudbury and had 223 inhabitants, to the decayed village of Brundon with only nineteen souls. In between these extremes, those parishes which were most nucleated on Chapman and Andre’s map of Essex in 1777 had the highest populations in 1527 (for example, Belchamp St Paul and Foxearth), while those which were more scattered had fewest inhabitants in 1527 (for example, Pentlow and Liston).
Table 3  Population and structure, 1527.

Parishes are arranged by size of population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Population 1527</th>
<th>Tax-payers 1524</th>
<th>Multiplier 1524</th>
<th>Tax paid 1524</th>
<th>Tax (1524) per person (1527)</th>
<th>Percentage payers of 4d (1524)</th>
<th>Acres 1527 per person</th>
<th>Population 1811 (with rank order)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ballingdon</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>50$^1$</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>£2.09.04</td>
<td>2.5d</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>532(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Belchamp St. Paul</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>£8.13.10</td>
<td>15.9d</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>496(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Foxearth</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>£3.13.10</td>
<td>7.0d</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>328(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Belchamp Otten</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>£4.00.02</td>
<td>8.5d</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>259(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Belchamp Walter</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>£4.08.00</td>
<td>10.0d</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>459(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Borley</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>£2.05.10</td>
<td>5.3d</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>190(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Middleton</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>£0.18.10</td>
<td>2.5d</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>90(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pentlow</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>£5.11.06</td>
<td>15.9d</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>254(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Liston</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>£2.06.00</td>
<td>9.2d</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>64(9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Brundon</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$ Institutional payments from colleges and gilds have been omitted.

$^2$ The multiplier is the figure required to convert tax-payers (1524) into total population (1527).

$^3$ Acreages are taken from William White's History, gazetteer and directory of Essex (1848).

$^4$ In the Lay Subsidy of 1524 and in the 1811 Census, the figures for Ballingdon and Brundon are added together.
On average the ten parishes had 105.5 inhabitants. If one takes out the rather exceptional 'suburban' population of Ballingdon, the average drops to 92.4. Such figures may seem low, but conversely these parishes are not particularly large — on average only about 1,300 acres. Moreover, we are here dealing with the reduced population of late medieval England, which had only partially recovered from the disasters of the fourteenth century. John Patten calculates that in the 1520's Bury St. Edmunds was the largest town in Suffolk with a population of only 3,550, and that several market towns in the same county, such as Needham Market and Halesworth, had fewer than 500 inhabitants. In the light of that, the figures quoted in the corn certificate for ten predominantly agricultural parishes seem quite acceptable. It is a fascinating but unexplained paradox that the Essex side of the Stour Valley remained far more agricultural than the Suffolk side with its string of manufacturing and commercial towns like Clare, Glemsford, Melford, Sudbury, Bures and Nayland.

The figures for 1527 obviously lend themselves to a comparison with the well-known Lay Subsidy of 1523-5, in spite of changes which will have happened in the intervening years. The Lay Subsidy has often been used to estimate total populations, but there has always been uncertainty about the numbers of people exempted from the tax, and about the average size of families and households in the early sixteenth century. Table 3 gives the total population for each parish in 1527 against the number of taxpayers in 1524, with other details which help to define the social and economic character of each community.

Naturally the number of taxpayers crudely reflects the total population, but in detail surprising discrepancies are visible. For example, Belchamp Walter and Borley had almost the same number of inhabitants, yet the first paid almost twice as much tax as the second, and had more than twice as many taxpayers. Other interesting differences of a social kind are apparent. Of the large taxing population of Belchamp Walter, 67 per cent were only able to pay the basic 4d (the lowest amount that could be paid), as compared with Borley's 47 per cent. So although Borley had proportionally fewer taxpayers than any of the other ten parishes, it had a significantly larger proportion of better-off people among them: 40 per cent of its taxpayers paid 2s. or more, compared with Belchamp Walter's 24 per cent. This may help to explain why Borley had 10 per cent more food than Belchamp Walter in 1527. Here and elsewhere the total amount paid in tax has to be seen against the total number of taxpayers, and against the proportion within that total of middle- and upper-level taxpayers, those whom in other contexts we might call yeomen, clothiers or gentry (see Table 4).

Another interesting comparison can be made between the two villages of Liston and Pentlow. They both had low populations, but no fewer than 80 per cent of Liston's taxpayers paid at the basic 4d whereas at Pentlow only 37 per cent did so. Therefore, Pentlow paid more than twice as much in total. It seems to have been a more prosperous and graded community, with the highest proportion of taxpayers to total population: 33 per cent of its taxpayers paid 2s. or more, compared with 7 per cent at
Table 4  Numbers of taxpayers in 1524, divided into five exclusive groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>4d.</th>
<th>5d.</th>
<th>2s.</th>
<th>£1+</th>
<th>£2+</th>
<th>2s.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballingdon¹</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp Otten</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp St. Paul</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belchamp Walter</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borley</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brundon¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foxearth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liston</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleton</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentlow</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ In the Lay Subsidy of 1524, the figures for Ballingdon and Brundon are added together.

Liston. Yet Liston had the greater reserves of food in 1527. Most of it probably belonged to William Clopton himself, who was principal landowner and paid a staggering 87 per cent of the tax raised in the parish.

No obvious connection can be demonstrated between the social composition of the parishes and their ability to feed themselves in 1527. Perhaps the more populous parishes, those which had high proportions of middle- and upper-level taxpayers, tended to survive the crisis better than most. For example, Belchamp Otten and Foxearth each had a fairly high proportion of better-off inhabitants: the first had more than enough food in 1527, and the second had 62 per cent of what was needed. Yet on the other hand, Borley, which had an even higher proportion of people with wealth, could only find 42.5 per cent of its required food. A slightly less risky generalisation can be hazarded about villages with small populations: there the contribution of one outstandingly wealthy individual, as at Liston and probably Brundon, may have boosted the totals of crops in store (whether or not this food was made available to the poorer inhabitants). Yet Pentlow which had relative prosperity and a high acreage per person is a clear exception: in 1527 it could only provide 36.9 per cent of its needs.

The multiplier in Table 3 expresses the proportion of taxpayers to total population. The highest multipliers represent those parishes with proportionally few paying tax. Middleton is a good example, which indeed shows poorly on all counts. It had relatively few taxpayers, paid less in total than any other parish, and had the second highest proportion of those paying the basic 4d; only two people paid more than 2s. and nobody more than 6/8d. Curiously, it was by no means the worst affected place in 1527.

The levels of population in 1527 can be profitably compared with those recorded in the census of 1811 (see Table 3). Although at various times during those three centuries the populations were probably static or even declining, most of the parishes, by 1811, had doubled, trebled or
quadrupled their size. Only two villages, among the least populated in 1527, were roughly at the same level. Also interesting is the fact that, in spite of the considerable growth of population, these ten parishes remained in almost the same rank-order. There were, however, two exceptions. Pentlow, which had ranked eighth in 1527, climbed to sixth position in 1811 by trebling its population; similarly Belchamp Walter, previously fifth, more than quadrupled its size and became third. Significantly these two parishes were the least densely populated in 1527, and were therefore particularly good candidates for later expansion.

At present, this seems about as far as analysis can usefully go. It is hoped that future work in this part of Essex on manorial records, wills and other sources will reveal more of the events of 1527, and enable us to see greater meaning in William Clopton’s intriguing statistics.

Notes

2. Sir William Ashton, The bread of our forefathers, 1928, pp. 37-41 and App. 1V.
3. PRO: SP1.45. ff.191-2. It is curious that Ashton does not mention the Hinckford returns, though he mentions others in the same volume.
7. It was also at Christmasdale that ‘great scarines of corne’ was reported at Norwich; see Francis Blomefield, History of Norfolk, 111, 1806, p.198.
10. Maslin is a mixed grain, usually wheat and rye.
11. ‘Harres’ were a kind of pulse, probably vetches or tares; see R. E. Latham, Medieval Latin word-list, 1965, p.221. P. D. A. Harvey suggests a mixture of peas and vetches, in Manorial records of Cuxham, Oxfordshire, c.1200-1359, 1976, p.786.
12. Twenty sets of figures are given for breadcorn and drinkcorn. In twelve cases the figures tally; in six others, a mistake was apparently made. At Foxearth, the surplus of peas was apparently included in the breadcorn. Only the drinkcorn at Belchamp Walter seemed to reveal no relationship between the figures quoted.
15. PRO: SP1.45, ff.202-8. In the whole hundred of Elstub-cum-Everley the average size of households was 5.30 persons.
16. The wheat and rye seed was, of course, already in the ground.


18. William Camden, *Britannia*, translated by Philemon Holland, 1610, p.466. The uses of wild plants for foods, particularly in times of shortage and famine, is a fascinating subject, but so far local historians have contributed little to it. It is known, for example, that the roots of cow parsley and dandelion were eaten during the winter, while in the spring the fresh leaves of hawthorn ('bread and cheese tree') or the young shoots of bracken could supplement a meagre diet. A useful introduction is Mrs. M. Grieve, *A modern herbal*, reprint of 1974.

19. These calculations are based on several assumptions: that a bushel of wheat weighed the standard 63lbs, though customary bushels may have been in use; that bread weighs 1.5 times the weight of its flour (mainly because of water which is added and partly driven off by baking); that one bushel of malt produced 7 galls of ale, as it did in one Suffolk household in the 15th century (*Household book of Dame Alice de Bryene*, 1412-13, *Suff. Inst. of Arch.*, 1931) — though ale may have been also much thinner, especially in times of shortage.

20. The figures for the ten Kentish hundreds are in PRO: SP1.59, fl.274-5; for the five Middlesex parishes in PRO: E163.16/9.


22. The figures for drinkcorn and breadcorn involved certain mathematical calculations (see Note 12); so did the summary figures for Hinckford which are also flawed (see Appendix and Table 1). In these cases there was probably a higher chance of mistakes creeping in, than with a straightforward count of inhabitants.


24. This calculation is based on figures in William White. *History, gazetteer and directory of Essex*, 1848.


28. On balance, most of the multipliers in Table 3 (including the overall average of 4.32) can be regarded as the minimum average size of household(s): the true figures are probably higher. Only Borley and Middleton seem to have had fewer taxpayers than heads of households, so Hinckford seems to have had comparatively few exemptions from tax in 1524. Indeed, the likelihood is that some households contained more than one taxpayer.

The average household size for other areas covered by corn certificates in 1527 is as follows: Elstow-cum-Everley Hundred, Wilts., 5.3: Branch and Dole Hundred, Wilts., 5.14; Underditch Hundred, Wilts., 3.86; Alderbury Hundred, Wilts., 3.00. In all save the first, the figures refer to relatively poor families, with no reserves of food. (PRO: SP1.46, fl.127, 131 and 133) Laslett's work on a hundred communities in pre-industrial England, from Elizabethan times until the early nineteenth century, suggests an average household size of 4.75 or a little less. See Peter Laslett and Richard Wall, *Household and family in past time*, 1972, pp. 125-58.

29. The 'allowance' is presumably the grain needed to supply each household until the next harvest was due. In other words, it is for 'the fynding of their houses' (see text).
Appendix

THE CORN CERTIFICATE FOR THE HUNDRED OF HINCKFORD IN ESSEX, 1527
A transcript of selected parts

(PRO: SP 1.45, f.191-2)

(f.191)

The Certificat of all the Corn sold & unsold in all the townes underwritten within the hundred of hynkford in the Countie of Essex, Serched & veyed by William Clopton esquier, oon of the Commissioners of our soverayn lord the King, over and above the allowauce (29) and Sufficent Sidd of Barlie, peces & otes & harres to sowe the londes of every husbandman ther this next Sidd tyme, to be sowne as nygh as all the same cornes cowde or myght be, by me extemly & numberid with the numbr of pepull inhabitaunces that are to be fownd & susteyned within every of the said townes undernamyd. The same vewe & serch begynnynge the xv daie of Decembre in the xix yer of the reygn of our soverayn lord Kyng Henry the viijth. In maner & forme as hereafter ensuyngly doth appare.

Belcham oten
In men women & Children ther

Cixij
In whete myxteron & Rie
Cxxvj quarters iiij bus [hels]
In barly & malt
Cxxxxvj quarters iiij bus
In peces otes & harres
Lxiiij quarters v bus

Accompted to serve & sustayn the said numbr of pepull in bredcorn after the rate of a busshell for every vj persons a weke during the space of xxxvij wekes, that is to saie, from the xv daie of Decembr to the Natvynte of our lady next coming Summa tot [alis] Lxxvij quarters iiij bus Accompted lykwise to sustayn the pepull in drynkcorn after the [dimidium=half] rate of every vj persons for a weke to a busheil & di [midium] duryng the said xxxvij wekes amownyth to the Summa of

Cxij quarters

and so apperith in lak of bredcorn after the rate aforseyd to fynd the said town
Lxiiij quarters

Summa of the drynkcorn after the rate aforsaid in Surplusage
Lxxxiiij quarters iiij bus

Summa of the Surplusage in peces otes & harres
Lxiiij quarters v bus

Brandon

In men women .......................... (etc)

.................................

...........................

........................

(f.192)

Summa of all the [?pepull] Within the townes abovesaid
Mlij lv

Summa of all the bredcorn Within the said hundred
vxxx xix quarters v bus

Summa of all the drynkcorn within the townes abovesaid
DCCxxxij quarters

Summa of the lak of bredcorn after the rate abovesaid
Dlxiiij quarters j bus ij pecks

Summa of the lak of drynkcorn after the rate & tyme abovesaid
CCClipj quarters vij bus

Summa of all the peces otes & harres within the said townes
vxxx xij quarters v bus

Wyllyam Cloptun