

NOBLE CONSUMPTION IN THE 14TH CENTURY: SUPPLYING THE HOUSEHOLD OF ELIZABETH DE BURGH, LADY OF CLARE (d.1360)

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ELIZABETH DE BURGH was one of the most prominent members of the higher nobility in Suffolk and the eastern counties in the 14th century, and is still remembered today for her foundation of Clare College at Cambridge. She was a cousin of Edward III, and the youngest of the three coheiresses to the lands of the Clare earls of Gloucester which were partitioned in 1317; this gave her extensive estates in East Anglia, Dorset and Gwent. As a widow from 1322 until her death, Elizabeth rarely visited Dorset, though she made periodic visits to Usk down to 1350. Her main residences were in East Anglia, at Anglesey in Cambridgeshire into the 1340s, Great Bardfield in north Essex which became increasingly favoured, and principally Clare castle which was the centre of her East Anglian lands. For much of the 1350s she spent part of the year at her house in London, in the outer precinct of the convent of the Minoreesses outside Aldgate.¹ As a member of the nobility she maintained her standing and reputation through the splendour of her residences and her hospitality, as well as through the effective administration of her lands and her religious benefactions. Her household acted as the centre of her power in the locality, and it probably numbered about 100 people in the 1340s. Meeting the household's needs for its inmates, guests and casual visitors was a major and complex operation.

It is fortunate for the historian that Elizabeth de Burgh's household accounts provide a detailed description of household provisioning over a considerable period before and after the Black Death. Over 100 household accounts of various types survive for the period 1326-59, covering most of the years of her widowhood. After some experiment in the early years over what details should be included, the wardrobe accounts, which recorded the provisioning of the household, came by the late 1330s to provide information as to the nature and cost of the supplies, the date when they were acquired, the name of the provider/seller and the place of purchase, the household official involved, and particulars of transport. Eight of the surviving wardrobe accounts give this amount of detail for a full financial year from Michaelmas to Michaelmas: for 1338-41, 1344-5, 1349-51, 1355-6, and 1358-9.² Each account opens with a Charge or Receipts section, listing and costing what has been received from each demesne manor over the course of the year. The Discharge or Expenditure section gives each type of provision in turn, distinguishing in the case of grain and livestock between what was obtained from the manors and what was bought in the region, *in patria*. The stock account was entered on the dorse of the roll. Inevitably there were times when certain details were omitted, but the business done with individuals, and at ports, markets, and fairs, comes out clearly for a period of over twenty years. Not every type of provision was listed in the wardrobe accounts, notably the perishable goods which could not be stockpiled, and for these the diet accounts detailing daily expenditure provide valuable information.

The amount of detail in the household accounts means that we can gain information about merchants and markets in Suffolk and the adjacent counties as well as about the household's patterns of consumption. Purchases reflected the household's hierarchical organisation, the Lady and her high-ranking servants and officials having a more varied diet than the grooms and pages. Purchases also mirrored the Church's year, with its pattern of fasts two or three times a week and throughout Lent, and its feasts on the great festivals. It is possible to trace the links between place of residence and provisioning patterns, the extent to which small local markets were used, or bypassed in favour of regional centres, and the Lady's willingness to look beyond the locality in order to get what she wanted. In particular, London became increasingly important as a source of specialist and expensive household supplies.⁴

STAPLE PROVISIONS

Grain, meat and fish were the main staples needed by the household and were either obtained from the Lady's demesne manors or by purchase. The household's bread was made from wheat; loaves weighed about two pounds each, about 250 being baked from one quarter of grain.⁵ Usually, the household could obtain most of the wheat it needed when residing in Eastern England from the demesne manors; of these, Clare and Hundon were especially geared up to supply the household, and the clay soils in that region were generally better for wheat. Thus in 1350-1 Clare and Hundon supplied 229½ quarters, 42 per cent of the wheat secured from the demesne manors.⁶ Increased supplies of wheat were obtained from Standon in Hertfordshire during the 1350s when the Lady was spending part of the year in London. Barley has traditionally been grown on light land, as the less fertile soils gave the low nitrogen content of the grain which was needed for malting. The eastern demesne manors provided a higher proportion of barley once the Lady was using the Breckland manor of Freckenham in 1344-5.⁷ Horses were essential for transport, whether for pleasure or on business, and the provision of oats for the stables could pose a considerable problem; usually more had to be purchased than was supplied by the demesne.

The bulk of the grain supplies were secured in September and October. When grain was bought outside the demesne the purchases were made locally, depending on the place of residence, and increasingly from individuals rather than at local markets. In 1336-8, references are found to the markets at Clare, Haverhill, Great Bardfield and Bishops Stortford. The market which was outstanding, especially for oats, was Wisbech in Cambridgeshire. In 1350-1, Wisbech supplied 65 per cent of the 533 quarters purchased, at prices which compared favourably with those elsewhere; the demesne manors supplied nearly 251 quarters. John Gough, the avener, spent the first half of October at Wisbech, purchasing 251 quarters, and arranging for its transport to Anglesey by water. He returned to Wisbech three times the following summer to purchase nearly 98 quarters of oats.⁸

During the 1350s, however, it became rare to use local markets other than Clare and Great Bardfield. Direct purchases from individuals in varying quantities and at different times of the year were increasingly important. In 1339-40, the 46½ quarters of wheat obtained outside the demesne were made up of four individual purchases in Stebbing, Weald, Yeldham and Birdbrook, all in Essex. Nearly 367 quarters of barley were bought, the purchases ranging from 100 quarters from two lessees at Swaffham, Cambridgeshire, down to one quarter from a man of Bartlow. Purchases were made from churchmen who were probably selling their tithes; 10½ quarters were bought from the parson of Ashen, and 10½ from the vicar of Finchingfield. With the oats there was a similar range of purchases from local sellers, such as 43½ quarters from Sir Richard Talworth and 105 quarters from Walter de Greneville. The Ferrers manor of Stebbing supplied wheat, barley and oats; there was a family connection here since the Lady's elder daughter had married Henry de Ferrers. The officials responsible for grain purchases, such as John Gough, built up a wide knowledge of local farmers, churchmen, and supplies, and in all probability there was a considerable amount of local networking and gossip.

There are several possible reasons for the variations in figures from year to year, but as grain supplied the basic foodstuffs of bread, ale and provender for horses it would be difficult to make economies if prices were high without cutting back on the size of the household. Prices inevitably fluctuated according to the state of the harvest, regional factors, the extent of demand and the time of the year. The Lady's officials were well aware of this, and therefore acquired the majority of grain supplies soon after harvest. Purchases before Michaelmas could be used in the following year, as

happened in 1338-9. The wardrobe accounts reflect the appreciable rise in prices after the Black Death. In 1338-9, for grain bought from the demesne manors and in the locality, the household paid between two and three shillings a quarter for wheat, between 2s. and 2s. 8d. for barley, and between fourteen and twenty pence for oats. In 1349-50, it paid between 6s. and 6s. 6d. for wheat while residing at Usk from Michaelmas until April, but only four shillings in eastern England at the end of the financial year.¹⁰ During the 1350s when the household remained in East Anglia or London wheat cost between 6s. and 6s. 8d. a quarter; oats in 1350-1 cost between 2s. 2d. and 5s., although in 1355-6 the price had fallen to 2s.-2s. 8d. The variation in the price of oats in 1350-1 may conceal the purchase of small as against great oats, but the range of prices in that year was unusual, and may well have been due to disruption resulting from the Black Death. At Wisbech, John Gough paid 2s. 2d. a quarter on 7 October, 2s. 6d. on 13 October, 3s. 4d. in May, and 3s. on 29 June. In December, 4s. 8d. a quarter was paid for oats from the rector of Stradishall, and five shillings at Thurlow on 20 April. The quantity bought at Wisbech may have contributed to the lower price.¹¹

The higher prices of the 1350s are probably part of the explanation of household retrenchment, although other factors may also have contributed and will be considered later. Some idea of a changing lifestyle can be gained from the figures for consumption of bread, ale, meat and wine, given in the stock accounts on the dorse of the wardrobe rolls. The high point of consumption came in 1339-40, whereas by the 1350s things had changed. In 1339-40, the household consumed 135,933 loaves, 47,124 gallons of ale, 7,335 horse-breads, thirty tons of wine, 198 oxen, 395 pigs and 474 sheep. In contrast, in 1358-9 it consumed 86,791 loaves, 27,832 gallons of ale, 47,071 horse-breads, 22 tons of wine, 148 oxen, 248 pigs and 247 sheep. A marked change is apparent in the horses' diet. The number of horses belonging to the household fell from 42 in 1339-40 to 34 in 1358-9, a fall which may reflect more limited travelling. The household however remained responsible for the horses of officials and visitors. There was a considerable drop in the consumption of oats, from about 1,670 quarters in 1339-40, to 968 in 1350-1 and about 766 in 1355-6. At the same time the number of horse-breads increased dramatically. These comprised loaves handed over from the Pantry, and breads made from a mixture of maslin, peas and beans.¹² Analysis of the grain and meat consumed points to a smaller household in the 1350s than in the late 1330s and 1340s.

Looking at the purchase of livestock, the preference for fresh meat mirrors what has been found in other households, and is reflected in the stock accounts where few carcasses were listed at the end of the year as against considerable numbers of live animals. This was especially the case with oxen where there were always over 100 live animals remaining. The numbers of live pigs and sheep at the end of the financial year varied, from none as in 1349-50, to 107 pigs and two boars in 1350-1, and ninety-eight sheep in 1338-9.¹³ Livestock came from the demesne manors and their locality, but from much further afield than grain. The underlying acceptance of agricultural specialisation, reflecting the desire to get hold of the best possible produce, is apparent with the purchase of both livestock and grain. It became increasingly the practice to buy oxen and pigs from the demesne manors in the midlands and south Wales. In 1340-1, eight oxen came from Lutterworth, Leicestershire, thirty-one from Gwent, and only eight from Hundon and Great Bardfield. Twelve pigs came from Usk, 114 from demesne manors in the midlands, and ninety-three from eastern England. Sheep were the only animals which from 1344-5 came exclusively from the demesne manors, with no outside purchases, and this reflected the build-up of demesne flocks.¹⁴

Livestock purchases outside the demesne saw a change of policy at the end of the 1330s, along the same lines as the demesne supplies. In 1338, livestock was purchased from places in eastern England reasonably close to the Lady's residences, and presumably from markets, at places like Great Bardfield, Braintree, Royston, Bishops Stortford and Huntingdon. Within a year, however, cattle were purchased in Wales and the midlands, and the same became increasingly usual for pigs.¹⁵ In all probability, officials on the Midlands and Welsh demesne manors were deputed to organise the purchases in their locality, but there is no indication as to whether they did this at markets or by private bargains with individuals. In 1350-1, the majority of livestock purchases *in patria* were made by Henry Motelot, receiver of Usk.¹⁶ Officials sometimes found that prices were lower than in the eastern counties, and even with the expense of driving the animals to the household they remained an economic proposition; driving ninety oxen from Lutterworth and Brandon to Clare in 1338-9, including the cost of pasture en route, amounted to £2. 19s. 9d., just under 8d. each.¹⁷

The numbers of animals purchased show a decline from the later 1340s. As far as consumption was concerned, the high point came in the late 1330s and early 1340s, and less was eaten in the 1350s. Prices always varied according to the quality of the stock. Officials were paying between six and twelve shillings a head for oxen in 1338-9, 2s.-2s. 6d. for pigs, and between nine and twenty pence a head for sheep. Prices remained comparable for oxen in the 1350s, but rose for pigs and sheep. Pigs cost between four and six shillings a head in 1358-9, and sheep between fourteen and twenty pence.¹⁸

Other types of meat were consumed in the household but in smaller quantities, and were probably only served to the Lady, top officials and elite visitors. Much was obtained from the demesne manors and from gifts. Quantities consumed varied from year to year. The account for 1338-9 shows the range of meats involved. Most of the venison came from the Lady's parks, and 45½ beasts were eaten, together with thirteen does from the park at Great Bardfield. Twenty-two swans were consumed, two bittern, fifteen herons and eighty capons. Of the 129 rabbits, fifty-three came from the demesne manors, fifty-three from gifts, and twenty-three from Stebbing. The falconer caught forty-five mallards, seventeen pheasants, and 539 partridges; eleven pheasants, and twenty-nine partridges were gifts to the Lady.¹⁹

By the time Elizabeth de Burgh died in 1360, household purchases of grain and livestock were smaller than they had been about twenty years before. Purchases of grain still had an impact on trade in the locality of the residence, but much was done outside the framework of local markets. Purchases of livestock had a much more limited impact on the neighbourhood of residences in eastern England, although they would have an effect on the area around the demesne manors in the Midlands and Wales because of the pattern of specialised purchases. Officials were concerned to secure quality provisions, and had the knowledge, money and resources to secure them.

WINE AND FISH

Similar considerations applied with provisions which the demesne manors could not supply, such as fish, wine, salt, iron, spices, cloth and furs. There was however no policy of procuring all these items from a single centre. Little use was made of small local markets; instead, the officials frequented regional centres, fairs, and London. The place of residence was a major determinant in purchasing patterns but by no means the only one, as is apparent in the case of wine, a specialist and bulky item. Most of the wine was Gascon, and was purchased in the autumn and winter; in 1338-9, sixteen tons were acquired in January, and in 1350-1 two tons were bought in February and six in March out of a total purchase for the year of 15½ tons. Greek wine is occasionally mentioned, and small quantities of Rhenish wine were purchased, often in May. Merchants sometimes notified the

household of the arrival of the wine, as John atte Forde of Colchester did in January, 1359. It was only in 1330 that the Lady sent her butler, Roger de Medfeld, to Gascony to buy wine.²⁰

The main sources of supply were Ipswich, Colchester, King's Lynn and London. King's Lynn was used when the Lady was at Anglesey, as supplies could be transported by water.²¹ The use of London when the lady had her house there in the 1350s is again understandable, since it was easy to take the wine from the Vintry to her residence outside Aldgate. However, it is not clear why London was used earlier; it was more distant from the eastern residences than Ipswich, yet it supplied seventeen tons out of the twenty-four purchased in 1339-40. Colchester was even nearer to Clare and Great Bardfield but was not used until 1344-5 and later, and was never the sole source of supply.²² Clearly there were factors at work here other than the location of the residence.

Many of the merchants, and not only the suppliers of wine, were used by the household over a considerable period. The merchant's reliability and the quality of his goods were presumably taken into consideration by the household officials, as well as his status and resources. The officials had to be confident of building up a good relationship with him. Things could go wrong, sometimes for reasons beyond the control of official or merchant, as seen in the problems facing the wine convoys during the Hundred Years War; in 1344-5, a groom was dispatched to Colchester, Ipswich and Orwell to discover if the wine ships had arrived. Changes of residence could also complicate purchases.²³ On the whole, once a relationship was forged with a merchant, it lasted. Between 1338 and 1345, Thomas Coteler of Ipswich sold the Lady wine, and also salt, white herring, iron and spices. John atte Forde of Colchester supplied her with wine in the 1350s; he was a member of the town elite which emerged after the Black Death, serving as bailiff of the town in 1356-8 and later.²⁴ It is noticeable throughout her life that the Lady in her business dealings chose 'top people'.

The amount of wine purchased and consumed varied from year to year. The largest amounts were purchased and consumed at the end of the 1330s and in the early 1340s. Forty-two tons were purchased in 1340-1, and over thirty-eight tons consumed. Purchase and consumption dropped markedly in 1350-1, but subsequently rose. Prices increased substantially by the 1350s. In 1338-9, one ton of Gascon wine cost between £4. and £4. 10s., in 1350-1 between £7. 10s. 10d. and £9, and in 1358-9 between £5. 15s. 9d., and £7. 6s. 8d.²⁵ Transaction costs then had to be added and these will be considered below.

In the case of fish, it was usual to go to the best source of supply rather than to markets nearer the residence. The household consumed a great amount and variety of freshwater and sea fish. The wardrobe account of 1350-1 listed red and white herring (smoked and salted respectively), stockfish, cod and conger, salmon, pike, lampreys and sturgeon, while other accounts added eels, mackerel and porpoise. Some fish could be obtained from demesne manors, notably herring from Southwold on the Suffolk coast, and salmon from Usk. London was a useful source of supply for the more luxury fish, and besides salmon, sturgeon and lampreys were regularly bought there. Lampreys were also obtained from Gloucester; no matter where the Lady was residing.²⁶

For the bulk supplies of herring, stockfish and cod, the officials travelled to the appropriate ports, using inland markets if they needed extra quantities. A regular visit was made to Yarmouth in the autumn to make a large purchase of herring and to arrange for its transport. In 1336-7, 6,000 white herring were obtained at Kirkley, and were then salted and transported, John Botte claiming seven days' expenses for the operation. In addition he was engaged for twenty-four days over the purchase of 5½ lasts of red herring costing £21. 13s. 4d.; a groom was sent to get the five carts needed for transport, the total cost of the operation coming to £23. 7s. 10d., giving a transaction cost of 6s. 3¼ d. per last.²⁷ Stockfish were bought at both Boston and King's Lynn, mostly in the summer and autumn, the advantage being that they could then be transported partly by water either to Lakenheath or the neighbourhood of Anglesey. In 1338-9, Robert Pulleter and John Botte bought

1,200 stockfish at King's Lynn which were then brought with a barrel of white herring and 2,030 pounds of Spanish iron by water to Reach in Cambridgeshire whence they were carted to Clare.²⁸ Cod was obtained from a number of places, including the Norfolk ports of Blakeney and Wells, mainly in the summer and early autumn. Of the inland centres, purchases of fish were often made at Bury St Edmunds, as in 1341 when Robert Pulleter bought 500 stockfish for £3. 10s., and paid 7d. for their carriage to Anglesey via Newmarket.²⁹

Prices rose between the late 1330s and the 1350s. There was always considerable variety in stockfish prices, as a number of different fish were subsumed under this heading. Down to 1344-5, the household paid between 2d. and 6d. each for cod, but were paying between one shilling and 1s. 6d. in the second half of the 1350s. The price of one last of herring rose from between £1. 16s. and £2. 5s. in 1338-9, to between £3. and £5. 10s. in 1355-6. The fall in the amount consumed in the 1350s mirrors what has been found with grain and meat. The household normally used between about eight and ten lasts in the years between 1338 and 1345, but the figure in 1358-9 was about four lasts.³⁰

THE FAIRS AND LONDON

During the 1240s, Robert Grosseteste recommended the countess of Lincoln to buy the goods which she needed for her household from the great fairs.³¹ By the fourteenth century, the international fairs were in decline, and, although Elizabeth de Burgh made some use of them, this was only in the 1330s and early 1340s. Even then, the fairs were not the sole source of supply for cloth, furs and spices, and it is not always clear in the accounts if the purchases were actually made at the fairs. In 1336-7, forty cloths were bought at St Ives fair for the liveries of knights, clerks, ladies and esquires, while in 1340-1 the cloth for liveries was bought at Boston, St Ives and London, with the furs being purchased in London, apart from some lamb at Stamford. Spices were bought at St Ives in 1336 and at Boston in 1339-40. From the mid-1340s, however, references to the great fairs were rare.³² However, Stourbridge fair at Cambridge, held in September, continued to be frequented. It was a useful source for miscellaneous purchases, often for salt, but also at various times for furs and lambskins, red herring, cod and stockfish, rice and almonds.³³

London largely took the place of the great fairs for the supply of quality cloth, furs and spices, and the Lady's policy of going to top suppliers is again evident. Of these men, Bartholomew Thomasin stands out, providing the Lady with spices from 1336 to 1352, and receiving her livery as an esquire in 1343. He was a native of Lucca, but made London his home during his adult life; he is first mentioned in London in 1319, and became a citizen of London before 1346. He supplied Edward III's household with wax and spices, and also made loans to the crown.³⁴ The heading of Spices in the accounts denoted a wider range of goods than the modern meaning would suggest. In addition to spices, wax and canvas, sugar, almonds, dried fruit and rice were all included. In looking at the actual spices purchased, the gulf between a gentry and a noble household is immediately apparent. Quantities purchased by the Lady were far in excess of those bought by the gentry, such as the twenty pounds each of ginger and pepper, and the thirty-four pounds of cinnamon purchased in 1350-1. In 1419, Alice de Bryene of Acton bought four pounds of pepper, and two pounds each of ginger and cinnamon.³⁵

The Londoners who supplied the Lady with cloth and furs belonged to the City elite. John de Bures and Stephen Cavendisshe represented the Drapers on the Common Council in 1351-2, and

both served as sheriffs of the City. John Not who supplied canvas and spices in the 1350s also served as sheriff, and was a master of the Grocers' Company in 1357-8. Robert de Eynesham, Adam Aspal and Walter Forester supplied furs, budge and lambskins. Robert received the Lady's livery as an esquire in 1343, and William Eynesham, who was probably his son and supplied spices in 1358-9, became an alderman under Richard II. Walter Forester became a sheriff of the City. Three suppliers served as mayor: John Hamond in 1343-5 at the time when he was supplying the household with spices, Stephen Cavendisshe in 1362-3, and John Not in 1363-4.³⁶

Cloths and furs were purchased for the Lady herself, for gifts, and for livery for the household, estate officials and retainers. The pattern of purchases is similar to the trends in food supplies, with the high point reached in the late 1330s and 1340s, and a fall after the Black Death. The household was having cloths made for the livery in the late 1330s, but otherwise normally purchased cloths, grading them according to the importance of the recipient. Some prices remained stable, and the household was paying similar prices for some of its Baltic squirrel and for budge and lamb in the 1350s as in the early 1340s. Some cloth prices also remained stable in the 1340s and 1350s, although they obviously varied according to quality; about 30 shillings a cloth was normally paid for the grooms' and pages' livery, and about £2 a cloth for the yeomen. In the same period, a cloth for the esquires' livery cost between forty-eight and fifty-five shillings. The livery of the clerks and ladies was however more expensive in 1358-9 when some of the cloths purchased cost over £3 each.³⁷

The number of cloths allocated to particular groups gives a clear indication of the slimming down of the household, although it has to be borne in mind that cloths varied in length from 22 to 27 ells.³⁸ The household hierarchy is listed in the livery roll of 1343 which starts with the knights, ladies and clerks, and then works through the esquires, serjeants, yeomen, grooms and pages. Retainers were included from outside the household, notably knights and clerks, but also including household suppliers among the esquires, and bailiffs of demesne manors among the yeomen. Thomas Coteler, Bartholomew Thomasin, Robert de Eynesham and Nigel Tebaud of Sudbury all received livery as esquires.³⁹ The actual size of the household is difficult to calculate, but it probably numbered about 100 people in 1343. There is no sign in the wardrobe or diet rolls of mortality due to the Black Death. There was little change in the numbers of cloths for clerks and ladies in the 1350s, but very few references are then found to livery for knights. The numbers of esquires, yeomen and grooms probably fell in the 1350s, but the number of pages may have increased in the Lady's last years.

Two other commodities – salt and iron – were mainly obtained from regional centres and London. Salt was regularly purchased at Stourbridge fair, and also at Ipswich, Bristol, and Reach, Cambridgeshire, and in 1350-1 from King's Lynn, Colchester and Wisbech as well. In the same year Thomas Coteler of Ipswich sold the household 80 quarters of 'Poitevin' salt. Thomas Coteler also supplied Spanish iron, and Swedish iron was bought at King's Lynn in 1349-50. From 1355, Spanish iron was purchased in London.⁴⁰

The picture which emerges from the purchases of wine, fish, spices, cloth and furs, and salt and iron is one of concentration on the best sources of supply and on larger and specialist centres. The reliability of merchants was a significant factor, and, once a merchant was found to provide quality goods, he continued to be used for several years. London became of increasing importance for household supplies during the Lady's lifetime, but it never became the sole source of supply for expensive and luxury goods. Regional centres continued to be frequented and large-scale purchases made.

LAST MINUTE SUPPLIES

No matter how carefully officials planned their purchases, certain items had to be secured at the last minute. This applied to perishable goods as well as to extra supplies needed for visitors or when stocks had run out. The diet accounts give a fuller picture of daily consumption, even though some foods, notably vegetables and fruit, are rarely mentioned. Often it was local traders within a few miles of the residence who supplied the extra goods, and the Poultry was the household department most likely to be involved with this type of marketing. Unfortunately, it is not possible to quantify the amount of this local trading, since the diet accounts do not name the traders and do not always give the place where the goods were bought. The traders were not necessarily those closest to the residence, although they were within relatively easy reach. It was not the usual practice to shop for everyday needs in Clare or Great Bardfield, but to go to Bury St Edmunds, Sudbury or Great Dunmow. One can only speculate as to whether the latter places had better-quality goods, or whether the officials were again frequenting traders whom they knew well and regarded as reliable.

For the funeral of the Lady's half-brother, Sir Edward Monthermer, at Clare in December, 1339, meat, fish, poultry and dairy products had to be purchased, some being bought in Bury St Edmunds; the account also refers to Robert Pulleter going to divers places at divers times to make purchases (the details are not given), and one groom was away from the household for a week with one of the Poultry's packhorses. Cups and dishes were made from the Lady's timber, but dishes were also bought at Withersfield. For the king's visit on 27-28 May, 1340, fish was purchased, together with eels, crabs, crayfish and whelks, probably from Sudbury, 300 cups were bought at Withersfield, poultry at Bury, and eggs, milk, cream and cheese were also purchased.⁴¹

OVERALL EXPENDITURE

The securing of supplies from a number of towns and fairs as well as scouring the country around the residence for grain supplies meant that several of the officials spent a considerable amount of time away from the household. In 1338-9, when the Lady was at Great Bardfield, Anglesey and Clare, Robert Pulleter had to make frequent journeys to secure fish. In October, he travelled from Great Bardfield to Blakeney, King's Lynn and Yarmouth, making a substantial purchase of cod at Blakeney, and arranging for its transport in three carts. December saw him at Yarmouth, buying five lasts of red herring, and John Botte was employed to take him £12 in cash for the purchase. In the same month he and John Botte were in King's Lynn and bought 1,200 stockfish. In April he was recorded in Bury St Edmunds buying 128 cod and 290 stockfish, and he was again in Bury in June for the purchase of cod, and in September for 1,000 stockfish. In July he bought 1,000 stockfish at Wormegay in Norfolk, and 368 cod at Blakeney, a groom being paid for two nights to guard the fish as it was laid out on the sand to dry. At the end of September, Robert was at Wells, Norfolk, buying cod.⁴² Further purchases of fish were made by other officials, but just looking at Robert's itinerary makes clear the complexity of the provisioning operation, and how essential it was to have good organisation and trustworthy officials.

The reliance on more distant centres for wine, fish cloth, furs, spices, iron and salt meant that transaction costs inevitably added to the price of goods. Presumably the Lady was happy to pay these costs in the interest of getting high-quality provisions. Transport was a major item in the transaction

cost. Transport by water was used whenever possible for at least part of the journey, as seen by the use of the river systems from Boston, King's Lynn and St Ives, or by sea on occasion from Yarmouth to Colchester. Otherwise, roads and carts were used, and there were wide variations in costs according to whether the household used its own carts, or made use of peasant labour services, or hired the carts needed. The transaction cost included the expenses of officials and servants, according to the length of time they were away from the household, and sometimes miscellaneous items like barrel repair or rope as well.

The purchase of wine illustrates the costs incurred. For two tons bought at Colchester in 1338-9 at £4. 10s. each, the transaction cost added a further 5s. 10½ d. to the cost of a ton, largely because two carts were hired for four shillings each. In contrast, the cost of purchasing and bringing seven tons from Ipswich to Clare in 1340-1 amounted to 15s. 5d. or about 2s. 2½ d. a ton. This was achieved by using the Lady's carts, with five horses to a cart, for five of the tons, five horses of the prior of Stoke by Clare priory for the sixth, and hiring a cart at the cost of 5s. 4d. for the seventh; the expenses of Roger of the Pantry for six days amounted to 2s. 9d., going from Clare to Ipswich twice, and taking three tons on to Anglesey. Although wine prices had gone up appreciably by 1358-9, transaction costs remained about the same, and the cheapest method of transport continued to be the use of the Lady's horses.⁴³

Would it have been worth the Lady's while in some cases to have purchased nearer her residence? A revealing comparison can be made over fish in 1338-9. Robert Pulleter bought 1,200 stockfish at King's Lynn for a total cost of £7. 14s. 0d. They were brought by water to Reach in Cambridgeshire and then carted to Clare along with a barrel of white herring and a quantity of iron; the transaction cost came to 6s. 10d., and therefore the total price per 100 stockfish works out at 13s. 4d., discounting the iron and the herring. 1,000 stockfish bought at Bury St Edmunds cost 13s. 6d. per 100.⁴⁴ Getting supplies from a distance was not necessarily more expensive than obtaining them nearer the residence.

Payment for purchases was made in cash or on credit, but the wardrobe accounts give little indication as to the form of payment used. Where goods were purchased from demesne manors and the purchase price entered in the manorial account, this was simply an accounting device, and the reeve or bailiff of the manor was able to claim it as a justifiable allowance on his account. Some goods purchased in towns or fairs were paid for in cash on the spot, and there are occasional references to a groom being sent back to the household to collect the necessary money. In other cases a bargain was sealed with 'a penny given to God', and full payment was made later. For instance, much of the wine purchased in 1339-40 was bought on credit, as on 20 February when three tons were bought in London from John Fynch for £13. 6s. 8d., with one penny given to God, and a further two tons from him on the same day for £4. 13s. 4d., again with a penny given to God. Credit was used for other provisions as well, as when John de Lenne made two purchases of herrings at Yarmouth in November 1350, both of them on credit.⁴⁵ It is probable that accounts were settled at the end of the financial year, but there is no information on this.

The household appears to have been paying its way, and arrears on the account were generally small or non-existent. In 1344-5, the wardrobe account ended with a surplus but it was noted that some bills were still unpaid. Occasionally, problems arose, as in 1350-1 when debts in excess of £250 were owed by the last clerk of the chamber, William de Oxwik; the chamber served as the central financial office. Totals for items written off ('sold on account') were generally small. The account for 1339-40 ended with a list of pardons by the Lady for various debts amounting to £50. 14s. 9½ d. The principal pardon for nearly £44 was issued by the Lady in the presence of her steward and council to officials of several household departments for items sold on account since 1335. The sums

which were written off were small in comparison with total consumption. Taking the account of 1340-1, the stock written off comprised 2,340 loaves worth £2. 3s., 691 gallons of ale worth £2. 8s., 6³/₄ pigs and bacon worth 16s. 10 1/2 d., thirty mackerel worth 7 1/2 d., and nine capons worth 13 1/2 d.⁴⁶

Annual expenditure on provisions, according to the wardrobe and household accounts, fluctuated between £1,200 and £1,350. These figures include supplies for the whole household, together with the expenses of the stables. The fall in expenditure in 1350-1 to £1,211, as compared with £1,275 in 1344-5 and £1,329 in 1355-6, possibly points to some disruption as a result of the Black Death; there were certainly administrative problems that year. The figure for 1355-6 reflects the combination of a smaller household and the rising cost of provisions, as seen in most areas of household supplies. To these figures has to be added the expenditure recorded on the diet roll for purchases made as needed by household departments. The totals from the diet rolls illustrate more clearly than those for particular commodities the rise in prices in the 1350s; whereas the total amounted to £473 in 1339-40 and £485 in 1344-5, it rose to £580 in 1355-6 and £752 in 1358-9.⁴⁷

The percentage of household expenditure devoted to particular items fluctuated to some extent from year to year, depending on the stock remaining at the end of the previous year, places of residence, and household needs, but the overall proportions of the principal commodities remained broadly similar over a period of about 20 years. What the expenditure figures largely conceal are the smaller quantities purchased owing to the slimmed-down household of the 1350s. Why this occurred is a matter for speculation. There may well have been a policy of conscious retrenchment in the face of rising prices, as when a quantity of dredge (a mixture of barley and oats) was purchased at Standon in preference to oats because it was cheaper.⁴⁸ Changes may also have been due to the Lady's advancing age; she was about fifty-five years old when she returned from Usk in the spring of 1350, and may have suffered a serious illness in 1355 when she drew up her will. Travelling in the 1350s was limited to Eastern England and London. Religious concerns may have been of growing importance. Elizabeth de Burgh became a vowess by 1343, and the building of her London house in the outer precinct of the Minoreesses' London convent points to a desire for close religious contact as well as a wish to be near the court and her noble friends.⁴⁹ The Lady continued to enjoy her social life, and to entertain her friends and relations until at least within a year of her death.

Although Elizabeth de Burgh's household was typical of the fourteenth century in its lavish consumption, her provisioning policies reflect a time of transition. Supplies from demesne manors were used as far as possible, but there was no way in which the household could be self-sufficient, even in basic commodities such as bread, meat and ale. Purchases had to be made, using the locality, regional centres and London. Although increasing use was made of London during the Lady's lifetime, it was by no means the only source of specialist provisions.

Comparisons with other households pose difficulties. The households of the gentry and lesser nobility spent far less on provisioning, as, for instance, the household of Alice de Bryene at Acton. Such households do however bear witness to the importance of securing supplies in the locality, and the use of regional centres.⁵⁰ Household accounts after the Black Death reflect changing patterns of estate management and the effects of leasing the demesne manors. Margaret de Brotherton, spending much of the year 1385-9 at Framlingham, bought wheat, malt, oats and meat as needed, relying on Framlingham itself for many of her supplies, and also making use of local fairs. Although she held widespread estates in England and South Wales, the provisioning of her household was much more concentrated than that of Elizabeth de Burgh.⁵¹

Provisioning Elizabeth de Burgh's household was a complex and highly organised operation, involving the Lady's demesne manors in England and Wales, towns, markets and local farmers within

easy reach of her residence, several of the more important provincial towns, and London. During the period covered by the accounts, the main developments centred on specialisation on the demesne manors, the decline in the use of the great fairs, and the increasing importance of London. Business dealings in the locality were mainly with the individual farmer or trader, rather than with the local market or fair; the use of local markets seems to have declined, and references to local fairs are very rare throughout the period. It is likely that a farmer who was known to have grain for sale, or a trader with a good reputation in a place like Bury St Edmunds or Sudbury could do good business with the household. The pattern of purchasing had its own specialisations, and even though a town like Ipswich or Colchester could have provided most of the household's needs the traders only supplied certain goods. The Lady's wealth and status meant that she could afford to search out the provisions she wanted over a wide area, and the transaction costs did not necessarily add appreciably to the price.

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NOTES

¹ For Elizabeth de Burgh's activities in London and at Usk, see Ward 1994, 29-45, and Ward 2002, 13-22.

² The National Archives: Public Record Office (subsequently TNA:PRO), Exchequer Accounts Various, E101/92/9 (1338-9); E101/92/11 (1339-40); E101/92/13 (1340-1); E101/92/27 (1344-5); E101/93/6 (1349-50); E101/93/8 (1350-1); E101/93/19 (1355-6); E101/94/2 (1358-9).

³ *Ibid.*, E101/91/25; E101/92/2, 12, 22, 24; E101/93/2, 4, 9, 13, 18, 20. These rolls cover years within the period 1330-58. The nature of household accounts is discussed by Dyer 1989a, 306-22; Dyer 1989b, 92-5; Woolgar 1992-3, I, chapters 1-4. Elizabeth de Burgh's accounts were first discussed by Musgrave 1923. Excerpts from Elizabeth de Burgh's accounts are printed in translation in Ward 1995, 81, 162-85, 188, 220-2.

⁴ Marketing structures and the changing relationships of large towns and local markets are discussed by Masschaele 1997, 57-161, and by Britnell 2000, 1-21.

⁵ Dyer 1989b, 57.

⁶ TNA:PRO, E101/93/8, m. 1, 4; E101/93/19, m. 3; E101/94/2, m. 2. I would like to thank John Ward for agricultural advice.

⁷ *Ibid.*, E101/92/27, m. 1, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, E101/92/4, m. 3; E101/92/7, m. 1; E101/93/8, m. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.* E101/92/11, m. 2, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, E101/92/9, m. 3, 4; E101/93/6, m. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, E101/93/8, m. 5; E101/93/19, m. 5. Farmer 1991, 446.

¹² TNA:PRO, E101/92/11, m. 2d, 6d; E101/93/8, m. 2d; E101/93/19, m. 1d; E101/94/2, m. 2d. I would like to thank Sandra Roe for help over the horses' diet.

- ¹³ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4d; E101/93/6, m. 3d; E101/93/8, m. 3d.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., E101/92/13, m. 4, 5; E101/92/27, m. 4.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. E101/92/7, m. 3; E101/92/9, m. 4, 5.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., E101/93/8, m. 6.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4, 5; E101/94/2, m. 5.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4d, 5d.
- ²⁰ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4; E101/93/8, m. 5; E101/94/2, m. 5. *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1330-4*, 1. The ton contained 240 gallons, the pipe 120.
- ²¹ TNA:PRO, E101/92/13, m. 4.
- ²² Ibid., E101/92/11, m. 4; E101/92/27, m. 4. Ward 1994, 33-5.
- ²³ TNA:PRO, E101/92/27, m. 4.
- ²⁴ Ibid., E101/92/7, m. 2; E101/92/9, m. 4, 5; E101/92/11, m. 4, 5, 7; E101/92/13, m. 4, 6; E101/92/27, m. 4; E101/93/8, m. 5; E101/93/19, m. 5-6; E101/94/2, m. 5. Benham 1907, 62, 65-6, 70; Britnell 1986, 110-11.
- ²⁵ TNA:PRO, E101/92/9, m. 4; E101/92/13, m. 2d; E101/93/8, m. 1d, 5; E101/93/19, m. 5, 6; E101/94/2, m. 5.
- ²⁶ Ibid., E101/93/8, m. 3d, 4d, 6, 7; E101/94/2, m. 6. Ward 1994, 33.
- ²⁷ TNA:PRO, E101/92/4, m. 5, 6; Saul 1981-3, 33-41; *ibid.*, 34, defines the last as containing 13,200 fish.
- ²⁸ TNA:PRO, E101/92/9, m. 5.
- ²⁹ Ibid., E101/92/3, m. 5.
- ³⁰ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4d, 5; E101/92/11, m. 4d; E101/92/27, m. 3d, 5; E101/93/19, m. 3d, 6; E101/94/2, m. 3d. Saul 1981-3, 37.
- ³¹ Lamond 1890, 144-5; Oschinsky 1971, 398-9.
- ³² TNA:PRO, E101/92/3, m. 5-6; E101/92/4, m. 11; E101/92/9, m. 10; E101/92/13, m. 8. Moore 1985, 206, 214-22.
- ³³ TNA:PRO, E101/92/9, m. 5, 10; E101/92/11, m. 5; E101/93/6, m. 5; E101/94/2, m. 6.
- ³⁴ Ibid., E101/92/3, m. 5-6; E101/92/23, m. 2; E101/93/12, m. 3. Ward 1994, 35; Ekwall 1951, 297.
- ³⁵ TNA:PRO, E101/93/8, m. 7. Redstone and Dale 1931, 120.
- ³⁶ TNA:PRO, E101/92/23, m. 2; E101/92/27, m. 5; E101/94/2, m. 6-7. Johnson 1914-22, I, p. 93; Grantham 1907, 6; Thomas 1926, 209; Sharpe 1904, 284-5; Sharpe 1889-90, II, part 1, 313-14; Thrupp 1948, 329, 339, 348, 358.
- ³⁷ TNA:PRO, E101/92/13, m. 8; E101/94/2, m. 9.
- ³⁸ The lengths of the cloths were entered in a subsidiary account of 1344; *ibid.*, E101/92/26. The ell measured forty-five inches.
- ³⁹ Ibid., E101/92/23, m. 2.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., E101/92/13, m. 5, 8; E101/93/6, m. 7; E101/93/8, m. 6; E101/93/19, m. 9; E101/94/2, m. 9.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. E101/92/12, m. 9, 16 December, 1339, and m. 7d, 27-28 May, 1340 (it is not clear whether dishes were bought at Withersfield, Suff., or Wethersfield, Essex).
- ⁴² TNA:PRO, E101/92/9, m. 5.
- ⁴³ Ibid., E101/92/9, m. 4; E101/94/2, m. 5. Masschaele 1993, 266-79.
- ⁴⁴ TNA:PRO, E101/92/9, m. 5.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., E101/92/11, m. 4; E101/93/8, m. 6; E101/94/2, m. 6. Farmer 1991, 422-3.

- ⁴⁶ Ibid., E101/92/11, m. 14; E101/92/13, m. 2d-5d; E101/92/27, m. 8; E101/93/8, m. 3.
- ⁴⁷ These figures are taken from the wardrobe and household rolls to which the totals on the diet rolls were transferred.
- ⁴⁸ TNA:PRO, E101/94/2, m. 2.
- ⁴⁹ Bliss and Johnson 1897, 113. Ward 1992, 76-8, 144; Ward 1994, 37-40. The vowess took a vow of chastity before the bishop and lived a modified religious life in the world, and she continued to be responsible for her household and estates.
- ⁵⁰ A comparison can also be drawn with the household expenditure of John de Multon of Frampton, Lincolnshire, in 1343; Woolgar 1995, 18-30.
- ⁵¹ Ridgard 1985, 86-128.

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