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**Social Roles and Status of Women in a Norfolk small market Town**  
**Heacham 1276-1324 ca.**

In contrast with other medieval serial sources concerned mostly with men English manorial court rolls recorded a high proportion of women appearing in court as plaintiffs or defendants in various misdemeanours and trespasses, in cases of conflicts with neighbours or the lord's bailiffs. The court sessions showed women litigating about credit and debt, selling and buying land, paying merchet and heriot fines, etc. The publication, in 1996, of *Medieval Society and the Manor Court* emphasized the unique wealth of manorial court rolls for the study of legal and demographic history and other facets of the social structure of medieval rural society<sup>1</sup>. Studies on the roles of women in medieval society have relied especially on the use of manorial court rolls<sup>2</sup>.

The 43 Heacham annual Leet court sessions, on which this paper is based, between 1276 and 1324, listed the women selling ale and bread on the market, paying the licensing taxes due to the Prior of Lewes, lord of the «soke» of Heacham, for the assize of bread and ale. They also listed chief pledges and elected manorial officials, tenants of the manor, who upheld the manor court proceedings and the

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<sup>1</sup>Zvi Razi and Richard Smith (eds.), *Medieval Society and the Manor Court*, Oxford Un. Press, Oxford, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Judith M. Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside, Gender & Household in Brigstock before the Plague*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1987 ; Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Autonomy & Community The Royal Manor of Havering 1200-1500*, vol.1, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1986 ; Eadem, *A Community Transformed The Manor and Liberty of Havering, 1500-1620*, vol.2, Cambridge, 1991 ; Eadem, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 2005 ; Zvi Razi, *Life, Marriage and death in a Medieval Parish, Economy, Society and Demography in Halesowen 1270-1400*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1980.

agrarian and commercial economy of Heacham<sup>3</sup>. Associated rentals and terriers provided names of tenants, appearing also in the *curie baronis* as litigants, pledges or manorial officials, and, combined with the *curie lete*, these allow an examination of the roles and status of the women of Heacham at the end of the thirteenth and in the early fourteenth centuries<sup>4</sup>. The objective of this paper is to measure the involvement of women in the Heacham local food and drink market and to assess the social differentiation among these working women mentioned in the 43 leet courts (1276-1324 ca.) taken as significant sample of the Heacham female population. It attempts to appraise their « status » in relating these women to the manorial 'official elite', and to its tenant population at the end of the medieval economic and demographic expansion<sup>5</sup>.

## I

The fortunes of Heacham as a port and a market borough, long established on the eastern shore of the Wash rose markedly during the thirteenth century<sup>6</sup>. In 1272,

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<sup>3</sup> NRO, le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls, DA1-DA8 (1275-1327).

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Beauroy, 'Offices Manoriaux et Stratification Sociale à Heacham (Norfolk) 1285-1324' in *Les Communautés Villageoises en Europe Occidentale du Moyen Age aux Temps Modernes* (Flaran 1982), Auch, 1984, p. 237-244 ; Idem, 'Analyse quantitative d'une seigneurie anglaise : offices manoriaux, activités marchandes et structure sociale dans le Norfolk occidental à la fin du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Histoire & Mesure*, 1988, III-4, 515-525.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Smith, 'Demographic developments in rural England 1300-48 : a survey' in Bruce Campbell (ed.), *Before the Black Death Studies in the 'Crisis' of the early Fourteenth Century*, Manchester Un. Press, Manchester, 1991, p. 25-77 ; Bruce Campbell, 'Population Pressure, inheritance and the land market in a fourteenth-century peasant community' In Richard Smith(ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-cycle*, C.U.P., Cambridge, 1984, p. 87-134 ; Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition ? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Britnell, 'The Proliferation of Markets in England 1200-1349', *Economic History Review*, XXXIV, no. 2, May 1981, 209-221 ; Idem, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500*, Cambridge Un. Press., Cambridge 1993 ; Rodney Hilton, 'Lords, Burgesses and Hucksters', *Past & Present*, no. 97, Nov. 1982, 3-15 ; Idem, 'Medieval Market Towns', *Past & Present*, no. 109, Nov. 1985, 3-23 ; Richard Britnell and Bruce Campbell (eds.), *A Commercialising Economy : England 1086 to c. 1300*, Manchester, 1995.

Heacham was granted by royal charter a weekly market on Wednesdays and 3 days during the mid-August Fairs (14, 15, 16 August) which confirmed the growth of its market active since the eleventh century at least. The *Little Domesday* mentioned in its entry for Heacham a fishery, salt-pans and a mill, and a rare early twelfth century custumal, using the pre-conquest anglo-saxon social nomenclature, prescribed a day's work for the clearing of the river banks to enable the transport of goods to the port and the smooth functioning of the 3 water-mills<sup>7</sup>. The indications of the *Lay Subsidy of 1334* left no doubt as to the fact that Norfolk was, two decades before the Black Death, the wealthiest English County. Heacham was one of 35 localities of the fertile Fens of Western Norfolk and of Lincolnshire on the shores of the Wash taxed over £. 225 : this was the region of England where the concentration of wealth was most marked in the first half of fourteenth century<sup>8</sup> (cf. Map 1). Heacham was a prosperous fishing port : the *Inquisitio Navium* of 1337 mentioned 12 Heacham tenants who owned fishing ships : the richest, Simon Lambriht, had 7 ships gauging from 5 tons to 32 tons<sup>9</sup>. Heacham Leet court sessions were regularly taxing a number of fishmongers as *forstallatores communes*.

There was some long-distance trade, importing wood from Scandinavia as in Holkam, or woollen cloth from Flanders, stone from Normandy, but the bulk of the Heacham traffic was made with other Norfolk ports, and especially with Bishop's Lynn where Heacham exported fish, salt, corn in bulk or flour sacks (as it had 3 water-mills and 1 wind-mill), and sacks of wool. Heacham was the maritime outlet for a number of land-locked manors in North West Norfolk and the Heacham demesne accounts mentioned that its horse-drawn carts transported often its harvest surplus as far as Fakenham to the East. The port of Heacham imported from Bishop's

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<sup>7</sup> PRO C 53/61 M.3, *Charter Rolls*, 10 June 1272, Heacham, grant of a weekly Market and annual Fairs ; NRO, Le Strange Collection, Heacham DH5, *Copia cujusdam Rentalis Antiqui de Redditibus Domini Prioris de Lewes pertinentis Manerio suo de Hecham*, 14 fos., s.d., ca. 1150-1200.

<sup>8</sup> R.E. Glasscock, *The Lay Subsidy of 1334*, R.E.S.H., n.s. II., British Academy, O.U.P. Oxford, 1975 ; Idem, 'England circa 1334', Chapter 4, in *A New Historical Geography of England before 1600* (H.C. Darby ed.), CambridgeUn.Press., Cambridge, 1976, p. 139, 141, 180-4.

<sup>9</sup> PRO, C 47/2/25 no. 19, 1337.

Lynn manufactured and consumer goods for everyday life, particularly for the building trades, and the maintenance of the farm buildings of the demesne of the Prior of Lewes. It imported mill-stones and iron manufactured goods, nails, horseshoes, iron parts for the ploughs and tools, the carts and the mills, leather and wool manufactured goods for clothing and the farming economy, etc.

According to the survey of 1592 and the estate map and fieldbook of 1623, the fields of Heacham extended over 3, 230 acres ca. divided in 19, 333 strips spread over 181 named furlongs. The names and the location of the furlongs and their respective areas were those of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries<sup>10</sup>. (cf. Map 2 ) The large Lewes Priory demesne (350 acres) was situated north of the river and was prolonged by a very large Sheepcourse extending to the north-eastern limits of the parish boundary. The medieval rentals and terriers listed the tenants, their rents and tenures in each of the seven districts constituting the manorial territory : first north of the river, Thorpe or Thorpegate included the village centre and a number of furlongs extending up to the eastern boundary, from Churchcroft (29), the ‘situs manerii’ with its compact demesne grounds to the Sheepcourse . « Marketstead » was furlong no. 31 on the map, south of the Drove, close to the Church and the village centre, and must have been the site of the medieval Market close to the river and Heacham Haven ; to the south-west of the river the four districts of Northmoor, Northrowe , Southrowe, Southmoor represented the territory conquered on the coastal marshes by drainage early in the tenth century : Heacham had started north of the river, on the higher ground, and then settled the area to the south west. To the south-east, Eastgate and Etonegate surrounded the ‘East Moore’. There was only one other very small manor in the parish along the large main manor of the Prior of Lewes, called Caley and it’s lands were situated in Eastgate, south of Thorpe (f. no.67 Caleyard, site of the manor of Caley).

The medieval fields of Heacham were divided into ‘tenementa’ and the tenants, « nativi » or « liberi » , were co-parceners who, as in Redgrave , «had a

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<sup>10</sup> NRO, Le Strange Coll., OB2 and OC2, Heacham Estate Maps, 1623 ; Ibid., DH4 Fieldbook of Heacham, 1623. Heacham, in 1966, extended over 3,754 acres with a population of 2, 248 inhabitants .

joint responsibility to see that all services were performed and rents paid »<sup>11</sup>. The main tenant in the group gave its name to the « tenementum » and was responsible for the services and rents to the lord. Richard Smith, in his study of the socio-economic networks in East Anglian peasant society, emphasized the significance of the « tenementa » in « controlling the manner in which individuals interacted », and the same system operated in Heacham. For the seigniorial administration the « tenementum » was mainly a fiscal unit for services and rents. Heacham tenant society was a mixed society of « nativi » and « liberi » and characterized by interaction and cooperation between the two groups in the manorial court and in everyday life. As in many other parts of East Anglia, the proportion of tenants of free status must have been relatively significant. As to the actual number of the free tenants, the sources allow only some guesses : there is a large discrepancy of numbers of tenants listed between the first rental( c.1280-1300) which counted a total of 382 tenants, among which there were 62 women (17%), and the terrier (DI 6 s.d. c. 1320-30) counting 219 tenants, and among the latter group there were 44 women (20%). It can be assumed that around 1300 there was a total of 300 to 330 families in Heacham (1200 to 1500 inhabitants).<sup>12</sup>.

## II

Between 1276 and 1324, 531 women were trading on the Heacham food and drink market (cf. Graph 1). The same women, in some years, could be brewsters and bakers, and/or regraters, but the brewsters, by their overall number, were the pillars of the Heacham food market. The aleasters determined the level of the licensing fines to be paid by each woman and checked the standard size of the measures used

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Smith, *English Peasant Life-Cycle and Socio-Economic Networks-A Quantitative Geographical Case Study*, unpublished University of Cambridge PhD Thesis, 1974 : vol . 2, p.342.

<sup>12</sup> A first sorting by S.A.S. of 122 court sessions between 1285 and 1295 allowed the identification of 1,605 individuals : among these there were 544 women which places the proportion of the female Heacham medieval 'judicial' population at a relatively high 34%, not too far from the Zvi Razi's Halesowen's female « judicial » population proportion of 40%.

by the brewsters (*lagena, quarta, potellum*), making sure that the Heacham manorial seal was stamped on them. At intervals, they controlled the weight and scales used by the bakers and regraters, and the standard types of bread, allowed by the assize of bread<sup>13</sup>. The bakers were required to have a metal seal to stamp the loaves of bread : at the court session women bakers were fined for not producing their *sigillum*. Medieval ale soured very quickly and each household needed a large and steady supply of ale beyond their own domestic brewing everyday. It was the only liquid consumed by medieval peasants and their average daily consumption must have been close to «the normal monastic allowance of one gallon of good ale per day often supplemented with a second gallon of weak ale»<sup>14</sup>.

On average per year there were 34 women brewsters working for the Heacham market, 17 women bakers and 17 women regraters. Between 1276 and 1324, there were 3 main « peaks » of the women brewsters curve, in the years 1286, 1295 and 1324 when their number was close to the 50 mark (49, 49, 47) ; the curve was close to the 40 mark in 1288, 1290, 1294, 1300, 1305, 1308, 1311, 1314, 1321. The women bakers curve shows a more muted kind of rhythm and its high points (above the 20 mark) correspond to the years 1285, 1290, 1293-1297, 1316-1318, 1322, 1324. The women regraters curve shows mainly that their average number on the market increased substantially from 1304(29) to 1322(35). We have no numbers for the year 1313 and for the year 1315. The relatively higher than average number of women brewsters, bakers and regraters mentioned between 1314 and 1324 could indicate that the impact of the 'Great Famine' crisis years stimulated demand for food and drink on the market at high prices and that more women were driven to offer ale and bread on the market to make some monetary gains in hard times.

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<sup>13</sup> James Davis, 'Baking for the common good : a reassessment of the assize of bread in Medieval England', *Economic History Review*, LVII, 3 (2004), 465-502, p. 471.

<sup>14</sup> Judith M. Bennett, 1987, op. cit., p. 120 and note 49, p.272, : quoting L.F.Salzmann, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 1923, p.286 ; Christopher Dyer, 'Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Ages : The Case of Harvest Workers' In Christopher Dyer, *Everyday Life in Medieval England*, Hambledon and London, 2000, p. 77-99.

The women trading on the Heacham market for ale and bread, between 1276 and 1327, were the wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters of the male tenants of the manor. The commercial ale and bread production for sale on the Heacham market was the result of cooperation between all the household members including servants. There was a sharp contrast between the large number of women (531) and of the smaller number of men(58) working for the drink and food market between 1276-1324, and this contrast reveals the gendered structure of the food and drink local market (cf. Table1). Distinguishing them by trading category, 340 women brewers and only 25 male brewers, 100 women bakers and 30 male bakers, 217 women regraters and only 6 male regraters were identified in the *curie lete* as selling ale and bread on the Heacham market, between 1276 and 1324 . While women were dominant in all 3 sectors, men were relatively more important in the baking sector in terms of numbers : 23% against 7% and 3% in the 2 other sectors. The relative participation of men between 1292 and 1304 was on average 8 men per year, and it decreased between 1308 and 1324 to an average of 3 men per year (cf. Graph 2).

Table 1.- Female and Male brewers bakers and regraters 1276-1324

Trades	Females	%	Males	%	F. + M.
Brewers	340	93%	25	7%	365
Bakers	100	77%	30	23%	130
Regraters	217	97%	6	3%	223

The licensing taxes collected by the lord, from 1276 to 1324, on women and on men active on the drink and food market amounted to £ 126. 3 s. (cf. Graph 3). On this amount the licensing taxes paid by the 531 women identified in the Leet courts represented 89% (£. 112. 10s.), while those paid by the 58 men represented 11%(£ 13. 13s.). The market licensing taxes and other seigniorial rents increased sharply at the turn of the thirteenth century as the total sum for all fines and taxes perceived at the Heacham Leet courts doubled : before 1300, in the 18 years for which we have precise data, the annual Heacham Leet court yielded, on average, a sum of £. 3. 5 s. 7d. After 1300, in the 14 years for which we have precise data, each Leet court

session produced a revenue for the lord, on average, of £. 6. 13 s. 4 d. Graphs 4 and 5 show that the average licensing taxes paid by men was higher than those paid by women, especially after 1300, and that there was a sharp rise of the seigniorial tax for both women and men in 1300 followed by a common decrease of both curves until 1308. After 1308 the rising average yearly licensing taxes curve for men (with « peaks » in 1310, 1318, 1324) distanced itself strikingly from the stagnating lower levels of the women's curve while there were much fewer men trading bread and ale on the market between 1308 and 1324 than from 1292 to 1306, (cf. Graph 5). The strong variations of the 2 curves between 1308 and 1324 has definite connections with the disruptions caused by the « Great Famine » Crisis years (1315-1322).

There were three parallel crises affecting the population of Heacham, since the 1290s, which culminated in the « Great Famine » crisis of 1315-22<sup>15</sup>. First, there was the end since the 1280s of the overall agrarian growth and population rise of the twelfth and thirteenth century. This fundamental crisis was aggravated by a number of years with extreme weather conditions (very cold winters and extremely wet summers), especially between 1310 and 1330, which reduced harvest grain yields and food production<sup>16</sup>. The harvest failures and acute food shortage caused an energy deficit leading to the weakening of human and animal resistance to infectious diseases, epidemics, murrains and pests. The agrarian revenues from grain exports, stock breeding and from wool exports were severely reduced during these crisis years. Heacham was a « polder » community or a « seaward fen » surrounded on its western side by large penetrating coastal marshes or «moors», and the territory, south of the Heacham river, it had conquered by drainage was protected by dykes. While

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<sup>15</sup> William C. Jordan, *The Great Famine Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century*, Princeton Un. Press, Princeton, 1996 ; Ian Kershaw, *Bolton Priory The Economy of a Northern Monastery 1286-1325*, Oxford. Un. Press, Oxford, 1973 ; Idem, 'The Great Famine and Agrarian Crisis in England 1315-1322', *Past & Present*, no 59, May 1973, 3-50.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Alexandre, *Le Climat en Europe au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1987 ; H.E. Hallam, 'The Climate of Eastern England', *Agricultural History Review*, xxxii(1984), 124-32 ; Christopher Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages Social change in England c. 1200-1520*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1989: chapter 10, 'The Weather and Standards of Living', p. 258-273.



we have not found any clear evidence in the court rolls, we can assume that Heacham suffered from inundations and flooding during these years<sup>17</sup>. The third dimension of the early fourteenth century crisis was associated with the crisis of seigniorial revenues since the late thirteenth century leading to an increase of seigniorial rents and taxes imposed by the manorial lords on their tenants. On the Heacham market taxes on the sale of ale and bread doubled from 1300 on. Discontent, rebelliousness, contestation of seigniorial authority became rife, and it took in Heacham the form of defaulting on attendance at the manorial court, of refusal to pay rents or perform services, of acts of violent resistance to the injunctions of the lord's bailiffs, refusal to perform elected manorial offices particularly for the offices with financial responsibility (aletaster, collector, reeve), theft of grain in the demesne's fields especially by women, etc. Graph 6, based on 1340 cases collected in the Heacham courts shows a steady rise of acts of resistance and contestation of seigniorial authority increasing steadily from 1295 to reach its « peak » in 1314 remaining at a very high level until 1320.

Heacham court rolls provide a number of indications on the demographic environment during the crisis years. In the first 25 annual leet court sessions from 1276 to 1312, the average number of chief pledges listed at the top of the membrane was 35. From the 1314 session to that of 1324 their number was reduced to 12, a sudden reduction of 2/3 or 65%. The reduction of the number of Heacham chief pledges listed at the *Curia Leta* of 1314 occurred in the second bad harvest year after that of 1313. The trend towards a fall in the attendance at court sessions notable in Heacham as elsewhere since the early years of the century was thus dramatically accentuated precisely in 1314 as the average number of chief pledges listed as attending the Leet in the 7 years preceding 1314 was 32. In fact, the explanation for the smaller number of chief pledges from 1314 is demographic and political, both

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Bailey, 'Per impetum maris : Natural Disaster and Economic Decline in Eastern England, 1275-1350' In *Before the Black Death : Studies in the «Crisis» of the Early Fourteenth Century*, op. cit., 184-208, p.190.

factors reinforcing the other.<sup>18</sup>. The market place, especially the food market in seigniorial boroughs of the size of Heacham, was the theatre of a «class conflict» between lords and peasants. The seigniorial licensing taxes imposed on food produced and offered for sale on the market by the tenants increased prices, and reduced the tenants monetary retribution for the labour involved in the production of ale and bread and their return of the value of their surplus grain. The seigniorial licensing taxes had the same effect for the tenants who brought fish or any other types of food for sale to the market where they also competed with food produced by the demesne's *famuli*.

The Heacham court rolls provide some evidence of this conflict between lord and peasants over the food market which was exacerbated in times of crisis, high prices and famine. The aletasters, regulators of the market, elected by the tenantry and generally substantial tenants themselves, were under pressure for the performance of their office from both sides, but the lord had the final power to sanction any dereliction of duty. There was a revolt of the Heacham aletasters during the crisis years. It began with the year 1289 when all the 12 aletasters elected that year were fined for negligence 3d. In 1294 the steward, William de Sedgeford, representing the Prior of Lewes, imposed on the Heacham aletasters a harsher sanction removing 9 elected aletasters from office while 6 others remained in charge of regulating the market. In 1310, the rebellion of the Heacham aletasters manifested itself openly as several aletasters elect simply refused to serve and were fined 18d., «quia non fecit officium suum» ; in 1316 and 1317, all the 8 aletasters elected for these two fateful

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Smith, 'Demographic Developments in Rural England', op. cit., p. 41, 55 ; William C. Jordan, *The Great Famine*, op. cit., p. 119-120 ; Bruce M.S. Campbell, 'Population Pressure, Inheritance and the Land Market in a Fourteenth-Century Peasant Community' In *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, (Richard Smith ed.), Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1984 ; Mark Bailey, *A Marginal Economy ? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1989 ; Larry Poos, 'The Rural Population of Essex in the Later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, no.4, Nov. 1985, p.521 ; Idem, 'Population Turnover in Medieval Essex : The Evidence of Some Early-Fourteenth-Century Tithing Lists' In *The World We Have Gained* (Lloyd Bonfield and al. eds.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 1-22.

« famine » years rebelled, refusing to perform their office, and were fined 18d. The rebellion of the Heacham aletasters continued unabated from 1319 to 1322 when all the rebelling aletasters were removed from office and fined.

Some East Anglian localities were more affected than others by the rise of mortality of the «Great Famine » years. The evidence from merchet fines, heriots and entry fines, and from land transactions on the manorial land market suggest that Heacham was seriously affected by a mortality crisis during these years. Between 1276 and 1326, 2,725 land transfer cases were identified in the court sessions. From 1285 to 1314, the five-year average turnover was 260 to 325 transfers, but from 1315 to 1319 there were 750 land transfers, more than a 100% increase in the number of transfers especially numerous in 1316 and 1317, cf. Graph 7. The proportion of women participating to all land transactions was 46% (men : 54%), and women sold parcels of land especially during the crisis years from 1315-1319<sup>19</sup>. The number of heriots collected on a five-year basis indicate that the average number of deaths among the Heacham tenantry doubled between 1315 and 1319 (71) compared to the average number of deaths recorded from 1276 to 1294 (35). There was a natural correlation between the number of deaths and the number of marriages at Heacham between 1276 and 1326. Graph 8 shows that between 1290 and 1305 the number of marriages recorded was slightly superior to the number of deaths. The mortality crisis seemed to have begun between 1305 and 1310 when the mortality level curve began to peak sharply over the marriage curve which fell dramatically between 1310 and 1326.

### III

The Heacham «alewives» worked for the market with other women who were members of their family and household : mothers, daughters, sisters, female servants

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<sup>19</sup> On the question of « the very considerable number of land transactions in the wake of harvest failures in East Anglian manors » : « It remains to be established whether this feature should be interpreted as just another index of the desperate plight of an impoverished tenantry, or whether in this highly commercialised region these 'distress sales' provided a means of remedying liquidity problems and served in some sense to even out consumption streams in these periods of adversity ». Cf, Richard Smith, 'Demographic developments in rural England', op.cit., p.56.

and sisters-in-law; husbands and brothers took, sometime, a part in their market operation. Among the 262 families identified in the Heacham Leet courts thirty three main trading families led by its main 'alewife' were selected, cf. Table 2. Each family group had on average 5 women with the same family name working for the market together or at different times. The same woman could be taxed as brewster and as baker and as regraters, but some women in the family group tended to specialize in brewing or in baking. With only 2 exceptions all family groups included brewsters, but 10 out these 33 family groups did not include bakers while 4 had no woman regrating ale and bread at any time during these years. For the purpose of analysis the sample can be divided roughly in three classes : in the first class 6 family groups paying the highest licensing taxes on the ale and bread market from 3 £. to 12 £. ; in the second class were included 10 family groups paying on average 2 £. in licensing tax ; the third class comprised 17 family groups paying 1 £. or less.

The Peper family led by Cecily Peper paid by far the highest licensing tax. Cecily Peper (also known as Cecily 'Milner') was the wife of Alan Peper who was referred to in the leet court as «communis pistor» : Alan Peper was the main professional baker of Heacham. There were 3 other male members of the Peper family, between 1276 and 1324, who were also baking for the market, Geoffrey, Roger and Peter . Cecily Peper was working with 6 other female relatives, Matilda wife of Geoffrey Peper, Matilda wife of Roger Peper, Christiana, Helen and Olivia, Sara and Agnes, and together these women were responsible for 62 baking licensing taxes, 34 brewing licensing taxes and 29 regrating licensing taxes. Alan Peper and Roger Peper were responsible for 55 out of the 117 baking licensing tax paid by the Peper family.

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Table 2.- Main families trading on the Heacham ale and bread market

family name	name of first « alewife »	no.family members	brewster no. lt.years	baker no. lt.years.	regrater no. lt.years	licensing tax Total	date of 1rst and last year
Peper	Cecily	10	34	117	29	12 £. 8s..3d.	1276-1324
Lune	Alice	8	24	33	1	5 £. 14s. 2d.	1288-1324
Raulin	Alice	5	58	19	6	4 £. 9s. 5d.	1287-1322
Newman	Agnes	6	12	43	1	3 £. 10 s. 4d.	1276-1324
Keye	Alice	5	25	14	1	3 £. 5 s. 5d.	1277-1308
Tortepe	Isolda	3	21	8	6	3 £. 1 s..	1296-1324
Thurford	Helen	6	7	29	--	2 £. 19s. 8d.	1276-1312
Cobel	Matilda	2	15	--	7	2 £. 15s. 6d.	1300-1324
Knith	Muriel	2	14	23	30	2 £. 10 s. 8d	1276-1318
At Church	Alice	5	22	2	19	2 £. 7 s. 6d.	1286-1314
Oldman	Matilda	6	14	24	1	2 £. 6 s.11d.	1276-1324
Hellebule	Alice	5	17	41	9	2 £. 3 s. 8d.	1276-1324
Gulsveyne	Helen	3	24	--	--	2 £. 1 s. 9d.	1285-1317
Dalbon	Matilda	4	33	2	4	2 £. 1 s. 7d.	1285-1317
Hamond	Muriel	4	25	7	1	2 £. 1 s. 1d.	1276-1324
Brice	Matilda	6	6	17	1	2 £. 5d.	1312-1324
Jobin	Margaret	6	34	--	--	1 £. 18 s. 9d.	1277-1324
Chenendon	Matilda de	8	51	--	--	1 £. 18 s. 8d.	1279-1324
Catton	Beatrice de	4	--	--	20	1 £. 18 s. 5d.	1293-1312
Deynes	Helen	3	10	11	5	1 £. 17 s. 8d.	1285-1324
Becces	Felicia	2	24	--	1	1 £. 15 s.	1296-1324
Spineye	Christiana	2	20	--	1	1 £. 10 s.1d.	1295-1324
Orode	Caterina	5	4	7	15	1 £. 6s. 2 d.	1276-1324
Mabilie	Christiana	4	22	--	2	1 £. 1 s. 6d.	1285-1321
Redham	Margaret de	3	25	--	4	1 £. 9d.	1277-1310
Potter	Caterina	3	24	2	1	1 £. 5d.	1277-1316
Tailor	Joan	6	19	3	5	14 s. 2d.	1277-1322
Letton	Goda de	5	21	3	25	14 s.	1285-1312
Skydde	Mariota	3	1	4	18	13 s. 7d.	1301-1324
Gibelot	Matilda	4	11	2	8	8 s.10d.	1277-1324
Smith	Emma	4	5	--	15	8 s. 6d.	1285-1322
Rocelin	Matilda	4	--	2	13	6 s. 3d.	1285-1321
Sutor	Matilda	5	3	1	9	5 s. 6d.	1276-1324

Bread, being the main source of calories in the medieval diet, was much naturally in very great demand on the Heacham market, more than ale which could be more easily produced in each household. The production of bread for the market required also more investment in equipment and labour than the production of ale.

The dominance of the Peper family on the Heacham local bread market had an entrepreneurial character which was helped by the fact that Alan Peper was one of the main millers of Heacham and thus was able to provide the flour needed for making bread. Alan Peper, the *communis pistor* of Heacham, had several aliases and was known under the name of «Alan le Munier», «Alan le Milnere» or «Alanus Molendinarius » as he had taken up, in 1297, the farm of the Heacham mills with 2 other *custodes molendinorum* for the rent of 37 quarters of flour. He had substantial land holdings in Heacham Thorpe and was one of Heacham chief pledges for 27 years between 1286 and 1320. Two other male members of the Peper family were elected aletasters, Nicholas in 1294 and Roger in 1320. Matilda wife of Geoffrey Peper was elected aletaster, in 1322, at the height of the Aletaster's rebellion. Her election to the office which oversaw the market operations and the elections of other Heacham women to manorial offices with financial responsibilities show that in spite of their traditional legal unequal status, in a highly commercialized community like Heacham, at a critical time, women belonging to the richer stratum in the local society could share in equality with men the responsibilities of office<sup>20</sup>.

In the baking sector, Agnes Newman wife of Richard Newman(43), Alice Hellebule wife of Robert Hellebule(41) and Alice Lune, wife of William Lune senior(33) paid the next highest baking licensing tax. Agnes and Alice were working with several other women members of their family, daughters or sisters. Both the Lunes and the Newmans belonged to the Heacham official elite. Richard Newman, husband of Agnes, was elected aletaster from 1276 to 1279, perambulator from 1277 to 1285, chief pledge in 1285. Robert Lune, from 1277 to 1295, William Lune sr. from 1285 to 1302 and his brother William Lune jr. from 1298 to 1312, Alan Lune, between 1296 and 1314, were all chief pledges, and were elected to several other

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<sup>20</sup> Women from Heacham prominent and richer tenants families, thanks to the fourteenth century crisis, partook of the responsibilities of the offices of *Collector extrinsecus* and *Collector intrinsecus* : 2 women with 6 men were elected *Collectores* in 1307, 3 women in 1310 with 5 men, 1 in 1315 and 1320. In 1324, Agnes le Notere was elected *Collector intrinsecus(a)* with 7 men «ad auxiliandum illos cum dimidia marca».

manorial offices : *perambulator* (1277), *custos molendinorum* (1277), *collector* (1298), *tastator cervisie* (1314). Richard Newman had no market activity while Robert Lune paid only 2 licensing taxes for baking (1276-1277), and William sr. and his brother paid 6 licensing taxes for brewing ale (1300-1304). Alice Hellebule with the next highest baking license tax(41), worked with 4 other women on the market and her husband, Robert, was a ‘professional’ baker. Robert Hellebule did not hold any manorial office. The Lune, the Newman and the Hellebule families were substantial tenants with a number of tenures in several districts of the parish.

In the brewing sector, Alice Raulin wife of Lucas Raulin showed the highest number of licensing taxes which she and her co-workers paid over 34 years, between 1287 and 1321. She worked for the market with Anelina, Helen, Margaret and Olivia Raulin. Her personal share of the total brewing licensing taxes of the family was 29 (her partners paid for the other 28) for which she paid 2 £. 10s. 4d, an average of 1 s. 8d. per annual tax. On the other hand Matilda Cobel wife of Peter Cobel who worked with her sister-in-law, Christiana wife of Lucas Cobel who was a regrater, paid 2 £. 13s. 8d. for 15 brewing licensing taxes over 17 years(1307-1324) as her average annual brewing licensing tax amounted to 3 s. 6d. The level of the tax was proportional to the yearly amount of ale sold on the market. The Cobel family was part of the manorial official elite and well-off tenants : a Robert Cobel was custodian of Mormill in 1277, Peter Cobel, husband of Matilda, was chief pledge between 1307 and 1311, and again in 1324. Lucas Cobel, in 1313, and Peter Cobel, in 1318, were elected collectors, and in 1322 they were elected manorial shepherds, Peter for the flock of ewes, and Lucas for the sheep . Peter Cobel was the main buyer on the Heacham land Market and succeeded to purchase 60 acres between 1305 and 1324 to add to his other holdings. There was a «Terra Cobel» among of the 20 traditional tenementa of the *Lancetes* of Heacham which kept the memory of the anglo-saxon settlement and drainage of the coastal marshes (the word meant ‘land settlers’). John and Lucas Cobel headed the group of co-parcenners of «Terra Cobel) which extended over 19 acres 3 roods of land. In parrallel to the 20 tenementa of the *Lancetes* there were the 21 traditional tenementa of the *Toftmanni* where Matilda Cobel had a tenure in the tenementum called « Cone at Cross ». Lucas Raulin, husband of Alice,

on the other hand was a tenant in Heacham Thorpe but the family did not seem to have the standing of the Cobels in the higher stratum of the manorial 'official' elite.

Matilda Dalbon brewed ale for the market between 1276 and 1303 paying 12 brewing licensing taxes and 4 regrating licensing taxes. Her husband Lucas Dalbon replaced her on market from 1304 to 1317 and paid 10 brewing licensing tax and 1 licensing tax for selling bread. Another member of the family group, Helen Dalbon paid 10 brewing license taxes from 1307 to 1321. The leet court session, in 1297, mentioned an Alice Dalbon who brewed, once, for the market while being a servant in Nicholas the Clerk's house. Were they related to the Hester Dalbon elected collector in 1314 and who appears on the LaySubsidy List of 1332 as paying 8 s. and on the *Inquisitio Navium* of 1337 list as the owner of one fishing ship <sup>21</sup>?

Among the leading «alewives», Muriel Knith had the most balanced activity in the 3 sectors : she paid 14 brewing licensing taxes(1285-1316), 23 baking licensing taxes(1290-1318) and 30 regrating licensing taxes(1277-1321). She was the main regrater of ale and bread on the Heacham food market and worked almost single-handed as her partners, Cecily and Helen Knith were responsible for just 3 licensing taxes, 2 baking licensing taxes (1276 and 1285) and 1 brewing licensing tax(1324). She was married to William Knith, chief pledge 16 times between 1297 and 1324. William Knith was elected reeve in 1310, *collector intrinsecus* in 1317 and 1324 and acted as the lord's baillif in 1314 maintaining law and order on the market<sup>22</sup>. Her brother-in law, Thomas Knith belonged also to the manorial elite : chief pledge (15 times 1289-1307), aletaster (8 times 1288-96), *collector intrinsecus* (1289). William and Thomas Knith held 9 land holdings in Southmoor extending over 26 acres, for which they were paying 3 s. 3d. of rent yearly<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> PRO, E/179/149/9, m. 11v, *Lay Subsidy*, 1332-3 ; PRO. C 47/2/25, no. 19, 1337 *Inquisitio Navium*.

<sup>22</sup> « Et quod Matilda Brice fecit rescussum Willelmo Knith ballivo domini de quadam districcione capta in foro». NRO, Le Str. Coll., C.R., DA7, Leta, 15 Sept. 1314.

<sup>23</sup> NRO, Le Str. Coll., *Rentals*, DI 1, DI 2.



### Conclusion

Women belonging to the upper stratum of Heacham tenant families were the leading actors and the driving force behind the Heacham ale and bread market. Even in the baking sector where men had a sizable share especially in the production of bread, women held the dominant role on the market by their sheer number. The market involved women from all the strata of the community, top to bottom, as we identified 531 women belonging to 231 families. The leet court sessions listed numerous women selling ale or bread during these crisis years who were not able to pay the licensing tax and were declared by the aletasters and the steward presiding the court *condonatae causa paupertatis*.

The major participation of Heacham women in the growth of the local market gave them a basis on which to build their other economic and public roles in the community. In late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Halesowen, several women were elected aletasters<sup>24</sup>. Eighty years earlier in Heacham Matilda Peper was elected aletaster (1314). Alice de Redham, Alice Genever(1307), Alice, Isolda and Sabina Elnot (1310), Isabel Rocelin(1315 and 1320), Agnes le Notere(1324) were elected *collectores*. The highly commercialized environment of Heacham, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, favoured earlier than elsewhere in England the progress towards Equality of medieval peasant women.

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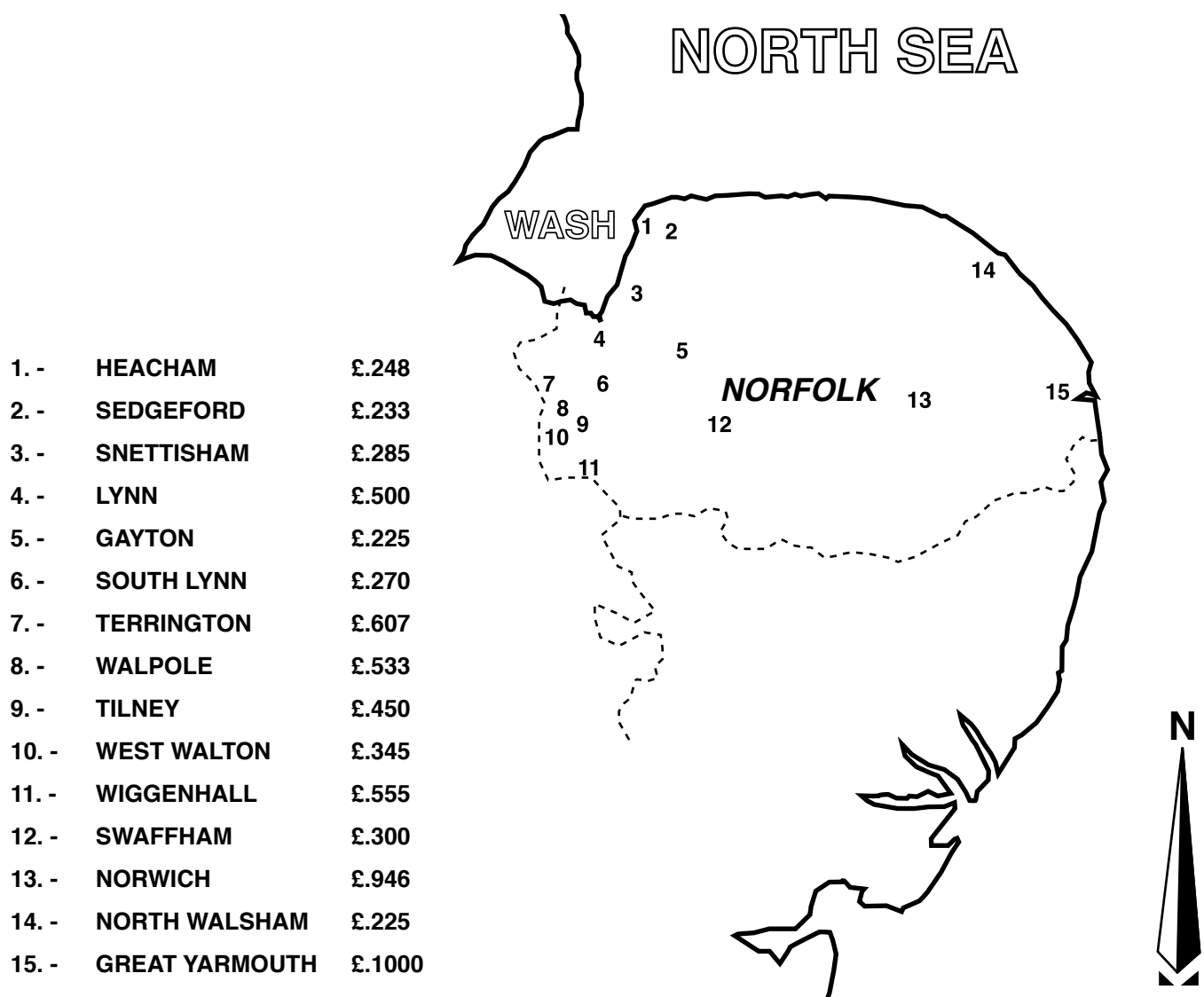
<sup>24</sup> Rodney Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, Ch. VI, *Women in the Village*, p. 105.

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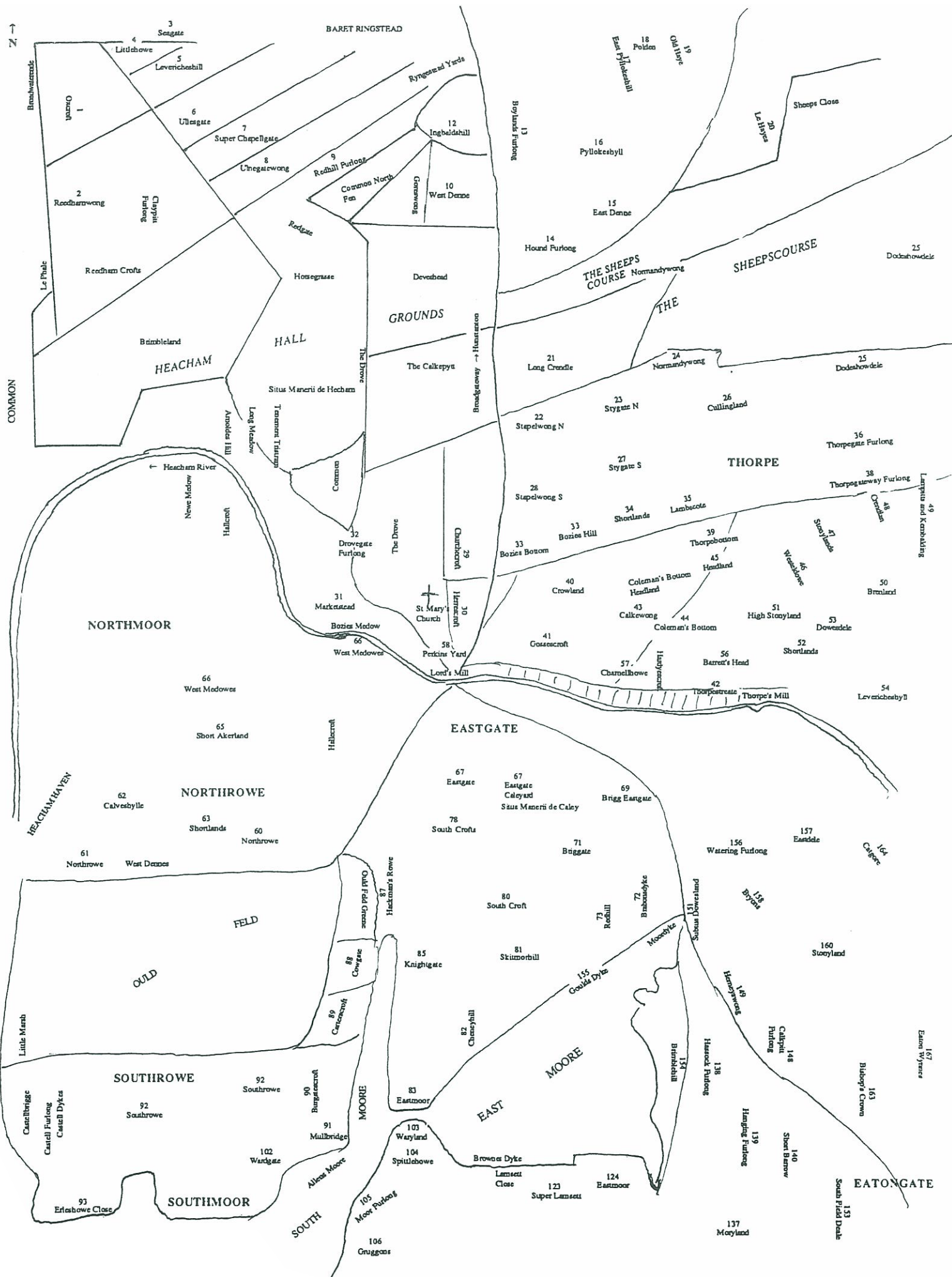
# **Maps & Graphs**

# NORFOLK LOCALITIES TAXED OVER £.225 IN 1334



Source: H.C. Darby. A new Historical Geography of England before 1600, Cambridge, 1973

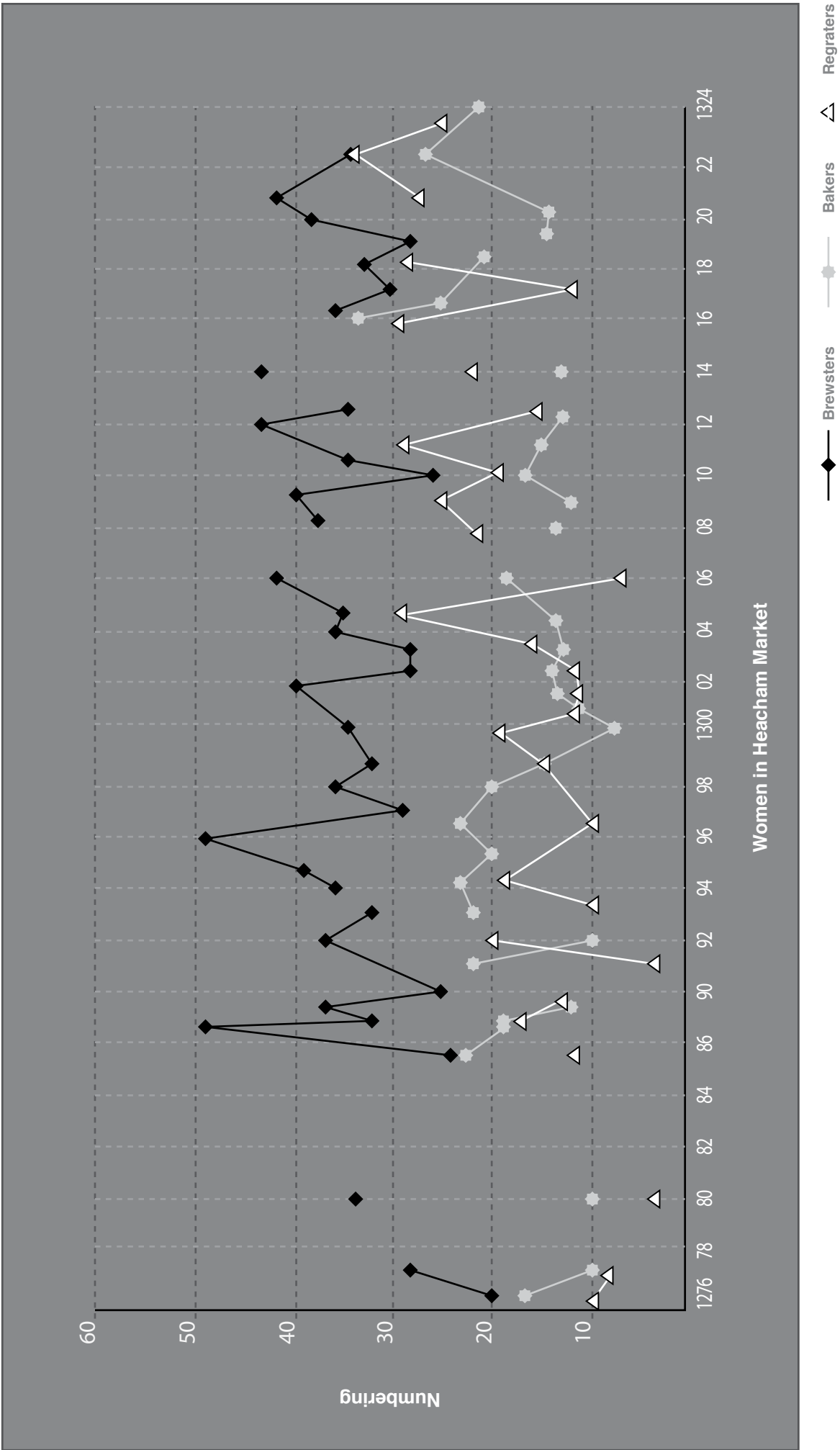
# The Fields of Heacham



MAP 2

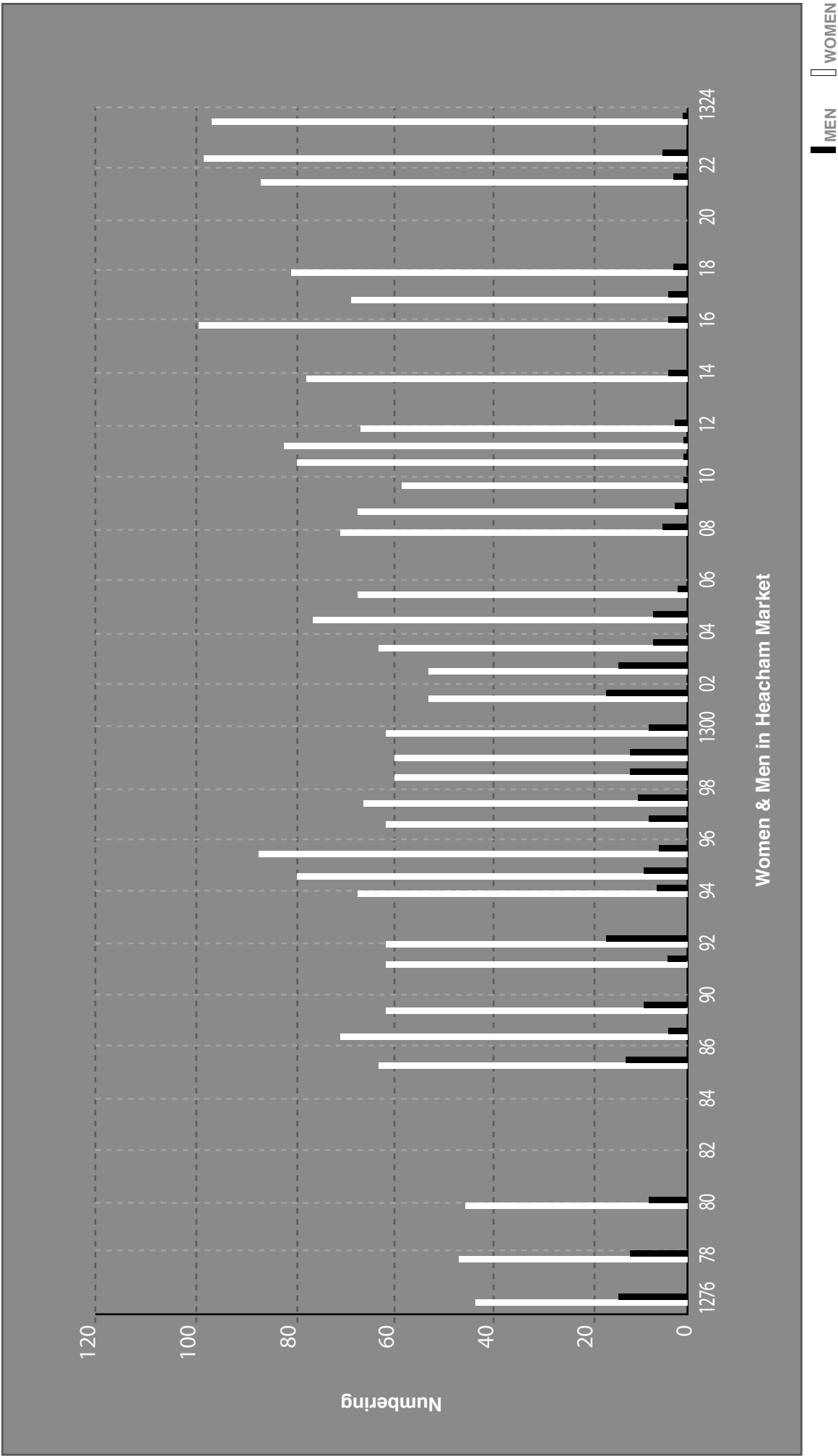
Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., OB2 - OC2 (1627)

WOMEN BREWSTERS, BAKERS & REGRATERS IN HEACHAM 1276 – 1325



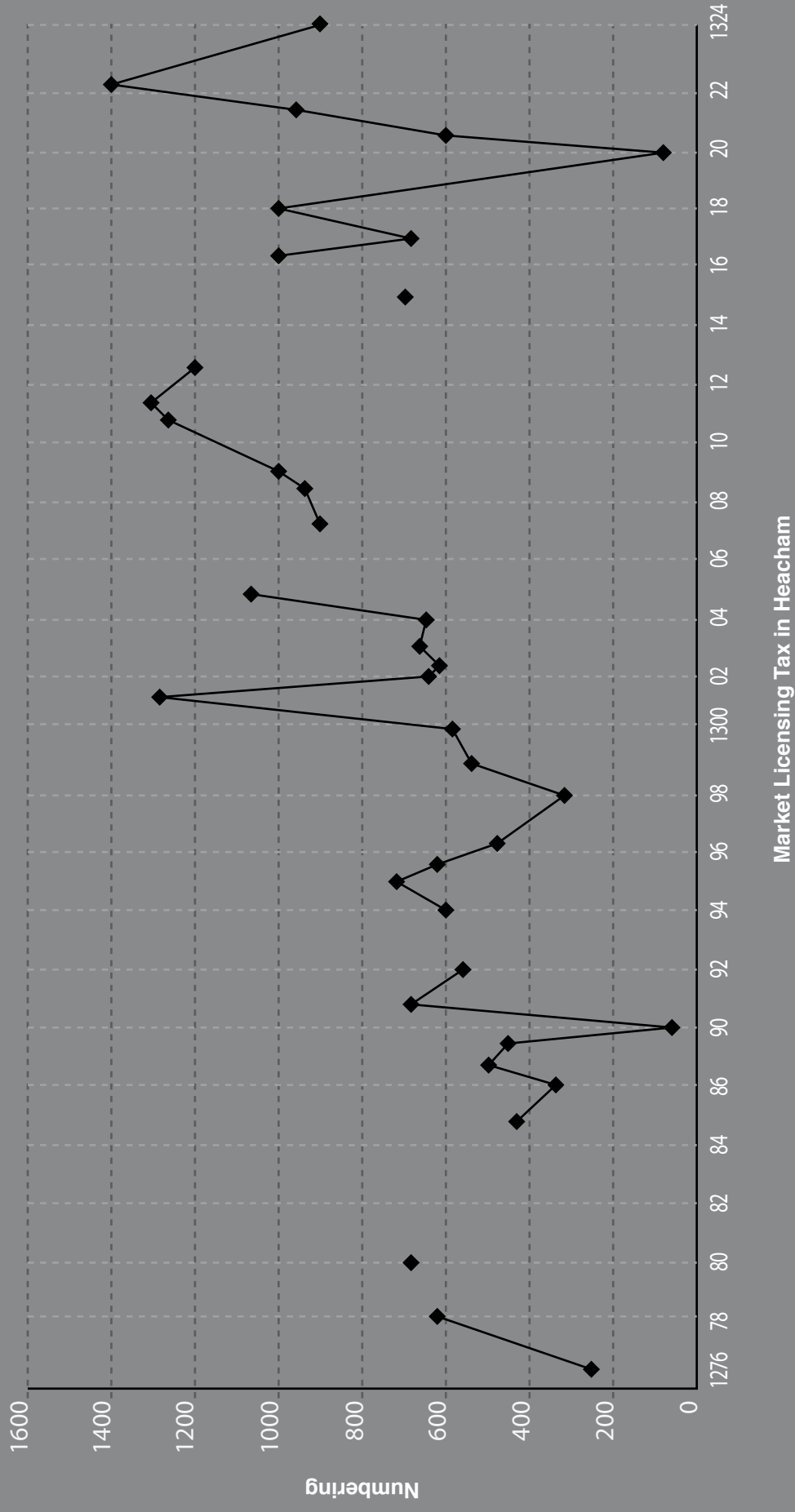
Graph 1.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

WOMEN AND MEN IN HEACHAM MARKET 1276 - 1326



Graph 2.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

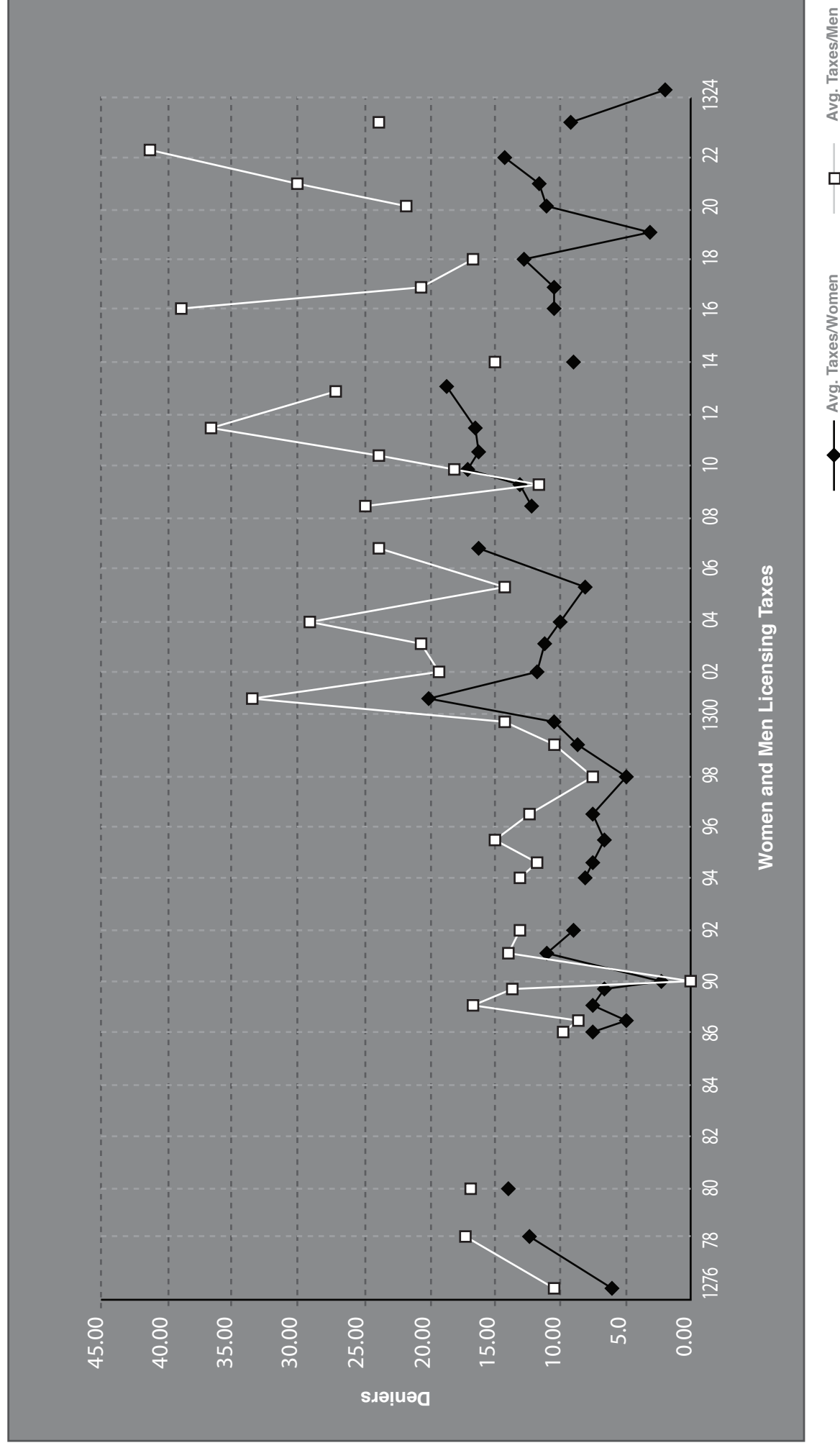
# MARKET LICENSING TAX 1276 - 1326



Graph 3.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

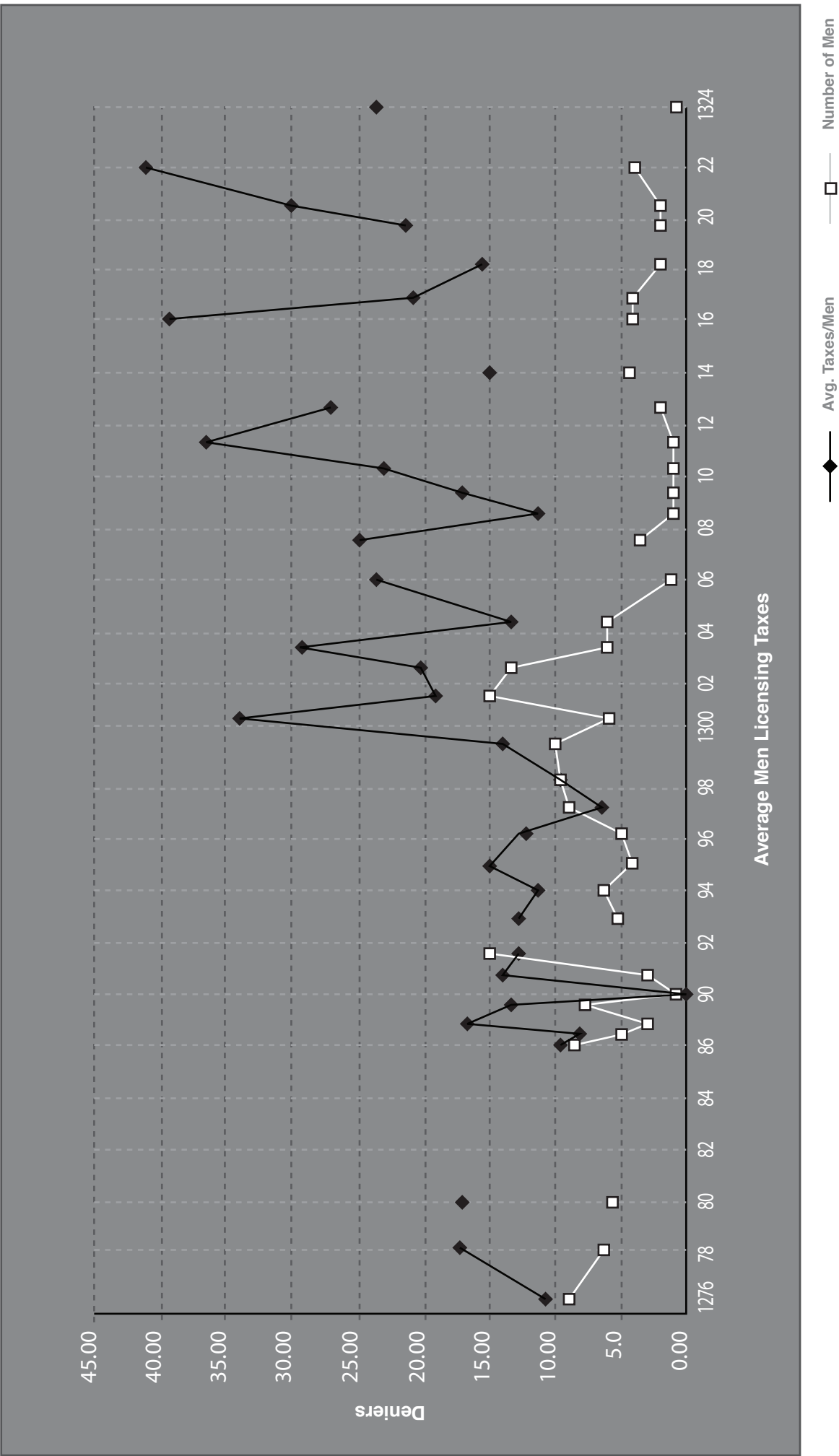


# Women and Men Average Licensing Taxes 1276 - 1326



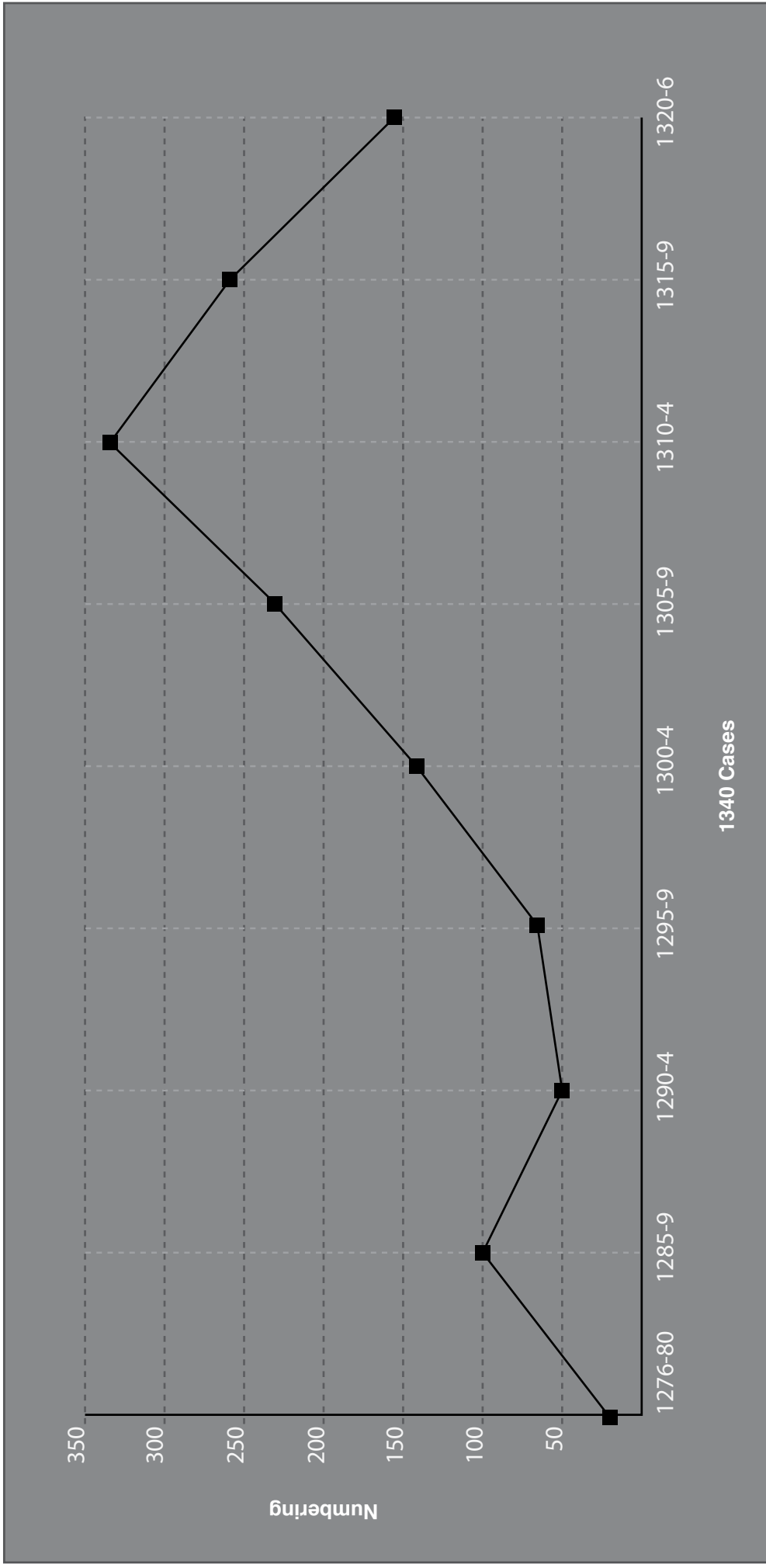
Graph 4.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

Average Men Licensing Taxes 1276 - 1326



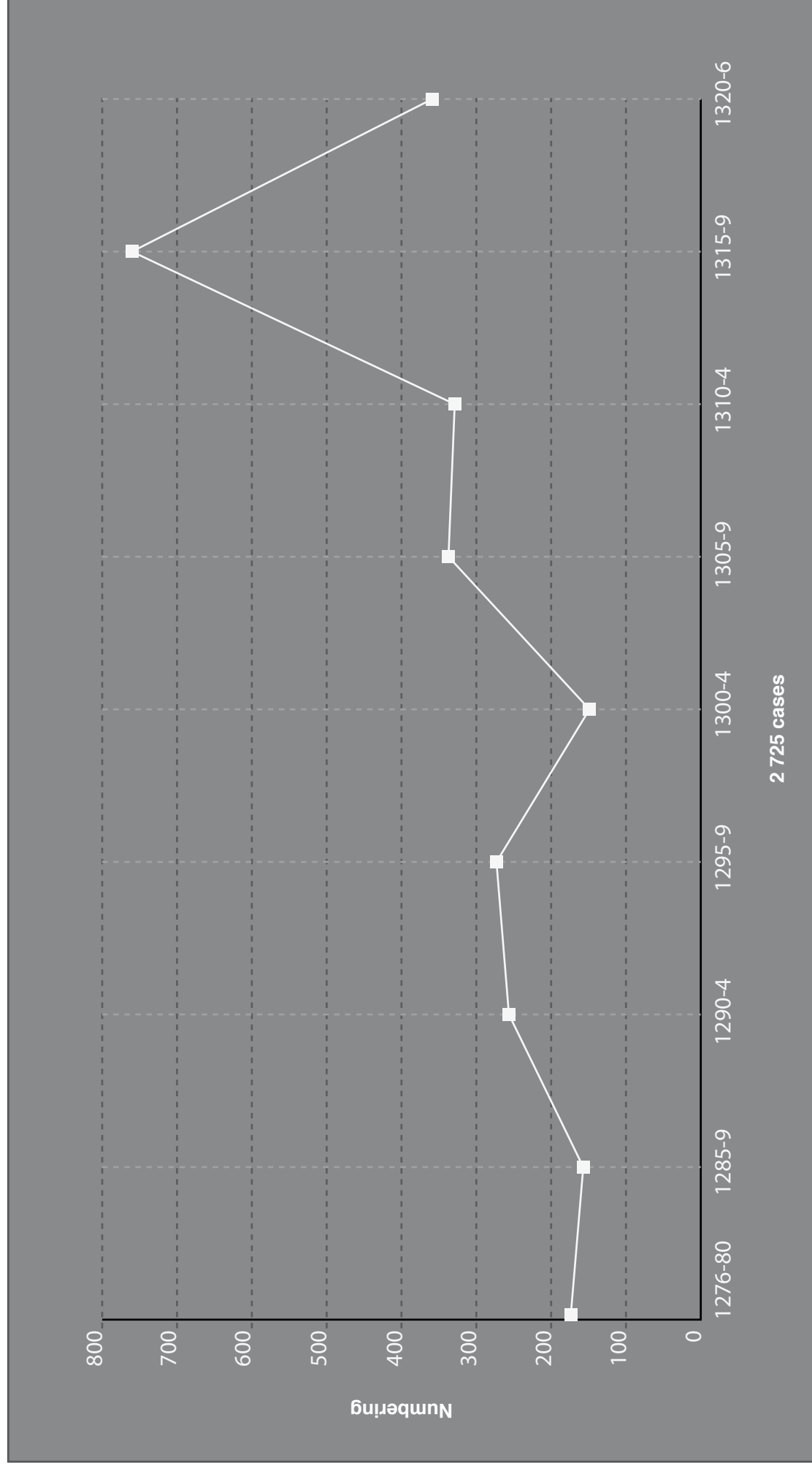
Graph 5.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

## CONTESTING SEIGNIORIAL AUTHORITY 1276 - 1326



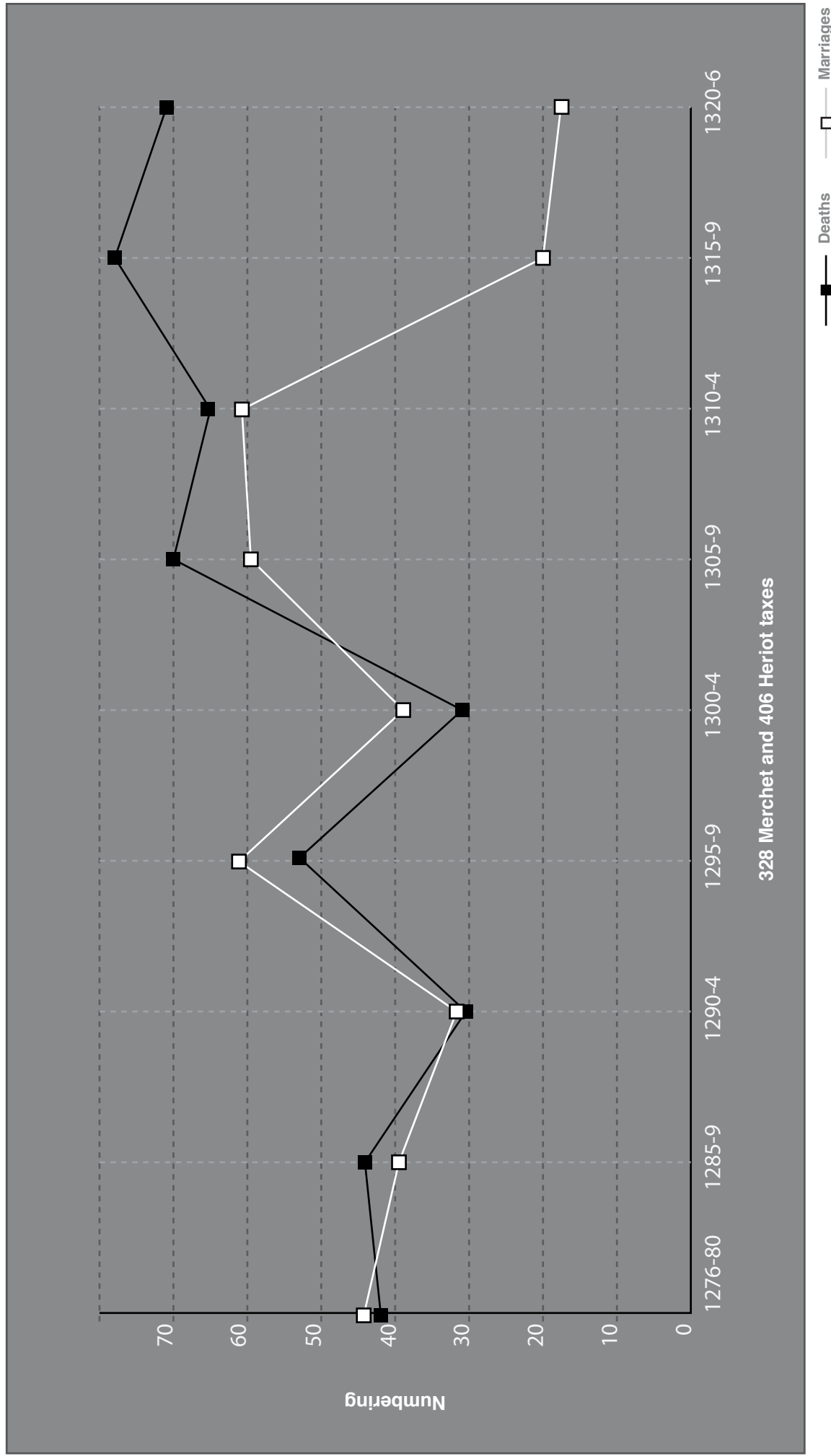
Graph 6.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

## HEACHAM LAND MARKET 1276 - 1326



Graph 7.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8

# MARRIAGES AND DEATHS IN HEACHAM 1276 - 1326



Graph 8.- Source: NRO Le Strange Coll., Heacham Court Rolls DA1-DA8