

# CHESHAM AFTER THE BLACK DEATH

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*In the wake of the Black Death Chesham was in dire straits. Its population had been reduced to a low level, civil society had broken down and the infrastructure was ruined. The situation was so bad that, in retrospect, it seems remarkable that Chesham survived. Yet survive it did, mainly through peoples' ingenious, and seldom lawful, efforts to help themselves. The lord of the manor, through the manor court, attempted to encourage recovery by, for example, attempting to get the roads and bridges repaired, but without success. At the same time, the court ensured that the land market continued, and the one sign that recovery might occur was its persistence and occasional vibrancy. It is possible to trace the market's changing trajectory in the twenty years immediately after the Black Death as Ashley Green assumed greater importance and links with Berkhamsted increased. It is also possible to track the beginnings of the recovery of the population. The reasons for recovery, rather than the more likely collapse, seem to lie in Chesham's looking outward to develop relationships with Berkhamsted's merchants and market, as well as in its attractiveness and openness to incomers who, while looking for opportunities themselves, also brought inward investment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Chesham's manorial records for the years following the Black Death reveal in detail that the town was displaying the symptoms of terminal decline. In particular, the records for the years of the two decades following 1350 that are listed in Table 1 show that its population had diminished to a level that was barely sustainable, the infrastructure was in total disrepair and the housing stock was in a state of ruin. Yet Chesham survived and, indeed, made its recovery more quickly than most places in England (Aberth 2001, 131).

The population of Chesham, which had been falling since the beginning of the fourteenth century, was further reduced by approximately one half by the Black Death. The number of people in the town itself became so small as to make the town's persistence problematic. Some of the smaller hamlets lost all of their occupants. Among those who remained, there was a continual ferment of social unrest. The infrastructure, which had been in poor condition before the arrival of the Plague, had decayed further. The roads were blocked, the bridges broken and the water from the river had turned the bottom of the valley into a swamp. The houses, which, again, had not been in good condition before, had deteriorated further, and most were in urgent need of repair.

Chesham, of course, was not alone in its predicament, but its isolated location at the head of a valley in the Chilterns, put it in a worse position than most places. This makes it all the more remarkable, not only that it should survive but that it should make such a comparatively rapid recovery.

The records of the manor court show that court sessions were held with much the same regularity in the years following the Black Death as they had been before. They also show that the lord of the manor made repeated efforts to try to improve the situation while, at the same time, continuing to attempt to extract money from his manor and its occupants in the usual ways. The records also show that the market for land continued throughout the period and occasionally thrived, to the point that it could be said to have been vibrant. So, while providing an account of Chesham's decline, the manorial records also contain indications of the reasons for its survival and recovery.

The court records that provide the primary sources on which this work is based are listed in the appendix, giving the dates when the courts were held and the identifying codes for the membranes on which the courts were recorded. This allows each court to be referred to by its date in the main text of this article, while a cross reference to the appendix will give the code for the membrane. The

membranes are all held at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies.

The aims of this article are, first, to provide an account of Chesham in the years of its lowest ebb after the Black Death, and, second, to draw out the reasons for its survival and recovery.

## CONDITIONS IN THE YEARS AFTER THE BLACK DEATH

### Population

The population of Chesham had been falling since the beginning of the fourteenth century as, in common with the rest of the country, it suffered from the terrible weather and the consequent bad harvests and shortages of food. The decline is illustrated by the curve on the left-hand side of the graph in Figure 1: the graph itself is based on the capitage payments noted in the manor court records, which consisted of a payment of three

farthings from each male member of the manor aged twelve or more as explained in Marshall (2013). The data set for the graph is essentially the same as that for the graph in that reference but with the addition of two items representing subsequently discovered payments.

There is convincing evidence to show that the population was more or less halved by the depredations of the Black Death in 1348 and 1349 (Marshall 2012). This is reinforced by the capitage payment recorded in 1364, which, for all of Chesham, consisted of contributions from 41 people. Since the last payment recorded prior to the Black Death came from 77 men in 1338, the intervening continuing fall, halving, and recovery from that low point may be interpolated. Indeed, as the number of males had only grown to 41 in the fifteen years following the Black Death, their number at the lowest point may have been very small indeed.

In the circumstances, it is not surprising to find



FIGURE 1 Graph showing the population decline before the Black Death and the recovery after it

that the survivors showed signs of being under stress. Each of the relevant courts (the views of frankpledge) held in the 1350s and 1360s recorded cases of civil disorder. At some, there were as many as twelve. The cases recorded that the hue and cry had been raised; that one person had struck another, and sometimes that they had drawn blood; that they had committed *homsoken*, that is, they had forcibly entered someone else's house, but see Muller (2005); and various other matters. That the same names recur is another indicator that the population was small. All in all, there is no shortage of evidence to show that the occupants of Chesham were small in number and that their lives were hard and stressful.

### Infrastructure

The woeful state of the infrastructure was made clear by the proceedings of several courts. Two examples are sufficient to make the point. The court held in 1356 recorded that:

*John Halem and John Baker had obstructed the river at Chesham,*

*The bridge at Chesham was broken in part,*

*Henry of Leicester had his dungheap in the road,*

*Robert Chowne had blocked a ditch that Richard Haukesherd used, and*

*The same Robert had dug two pits in the road.*

Matters had only become worse by 1364, when the court record showed that:

*Walter Mayn had not repaired the broken bridge,*

*Henry Gardener had not unblocked the river,*

*Stephen Webb had not unblocked the road,*

*Richard Dorneye had his wood pile in the road, and*

*Thomas Cornwall had not repaired the ditch at Amy Lane.*

Clearly, the roads were in complete disrepair. It is understandable that they had not been repaired, but the people of Chesham had made their condition worse by digging holes in them and storing their wood and dung on them rather than on their own land. More than one person had incorporated

a part of the road adjacent to his holding into it. It would seem that the roads were not just unusable but unused. All the same, the lord of the manor, perhaps with an eye to the future, was trying to get them cleared and repaired. The same was true of the bridges, and it is obvious that there was no point in improving the roads if the bridges were not repaired as well. The court had initially placed the onus for mending the bridges on the community, but when this failed to produce results, the onus was shifted to individuals and especially to the millers, for the bridges usually crossed the river by a mill. In 1368, the repair of the lord's mill was assigned to the miller and, at the same time, it was noted that the road there was part of the mill, implying that its repair was also his responsibility.

The river also presented a problem. It flooded the town, largely because it had been blocked by various people, as had some of the ditches leading water to and from it. Again, the people of Chesham had contributed to the decline of their infrastructure with their own selfish behaviour, which, as the court often noted, was a cause of inconvenience to their neighbours.

### Housing

A concern for the state of the housing stock appeared in the aftermath of the Black Death along with attempts to do something to improve the situation. This first manifested itself with the inclusion in the conditions imposed when a tenant took a dwelling of the requirement that it be kept in good order. Thus, in February 1352 Ralph Pirkes agreed to keep a messuage 'in a good state', while in 1356 Stephen Webb promised to keep a messuage 'from damage and destruction' and William Pirkes promised the same for a cottage.

From the beginning of the 1360s, attempts were made to do something about the condition of all the dwellings, and not just those taken by a new tenant. In April 1361, the court charged that:

*The homage must account openly and faithfully at the next court for all the damage to the houses in the manor*

This had no apparent effect and the court was soon threatening to fine individuals if they did not repair their dwellings. To give an example, in December 1361 Alexander atte Hull was one of those recorded by the court as having a 'worn out

and ruinous house': he was ordered to repair it before the next court under a penalty of 40 pence. He did not do so, for in July 1367 he was ordered, 'as he had been at other times', to repair his ruinous house. On this occasion, the penalty, although unchanged, was said to be 'half a mark'. At the next court, held in the following year, patience had run out and he was deemed to have incurred the penalty, although one must doubt that he paid it.

The court records show directly that a considerable number of dwellings were in a ruined state. These were, of course, the occupied dwellings. There must have been almost as many that were unoccupied as a result of the deaths of their previous occupants, and they would have been in an even worse condition. In any case, the lord of the manor, through his court, was trying to get some of the houses repaired, but was not having much success.

## SUBSISTENCE AND SURVIVAL

### Self-help

Even while living with the failed infrastructure, there were signs that people were trying to help themselves. Their houses were decaying, but it is difficult to imagine, as the court records often implied, that it was entirely their fault. The houses had undoubtedly been well used, but probably no more than one might reasonably expect. There were signs of attempts to repair them, notably in that a number of cases came to the court concerning the cutting down and taking away of trees. At a court held in December 1361, for example, successive cases record that John Morynge acquired a message and that he cut down some oak trees. This rather suggests that he had come by a dwelling that was in need of repairs and had prepared to set about them. Oak would be the proper timber from which to make a new beam to replace an existing structural member that had decayed. Further, and tellingly, at a court held in January 1359 the homage, that is, all the members of the manor, were told that the court was aware that trees had been cut down and the wood sold, and that they were expected to pursue the matter (to find the culprits) and come to the next court with their findings. This shows, at least, that there was a certain amount of illicit tree-felling, that the perpetrators were not always informed on, and that timber was available

that could have been used for house repairs. Any of the people whose houses needed repair, and even those who had been ordered by the court to make repairs, could have made use of it.

Some of the banks that blocked the river and the ditches that were themselves blocked were likely to have been boundaries. The point of making new boundaries and of removing old ones would have been to mark the limits of newly acquired land and to take away old boundaries that had become internal barriers. In the aftermath of the Black Death, opportunities to acquire land abounded. The land should have been taken through the manor court, but there is evidence of attempts to bypass it in the form of cases where people were brought to the court to account for how they had taken over a holding. There is also evidence for the removal of old boundaries and the creation of new ones.

In August 1351, Reginald atte Thorne was presented to the court for having cut down 'thorn bushes standing at the place of the boundary'. Now the medieval Latin word used for a thorn bush, *spina*, is also the Latin word for 'thorn', and is intimately connected with the derivation of the name of the manor known as The Thorne. A boundary planted with thorn bushes would have been an effective barrier to entry and an identification of the place to which entry was being prevented. It would seem that the subtext to this case was that the holder of The Thorne was removing part of his existing boundary while consolidating an expanded holding. Sure enough, somewhat later, his son Thomas was ordered to return six acres of land that had been detained from the lord and to restore some hedges. In April 1359, Simon Alefonder was found to have offended against Reginald Haleman by ploughing out and removing the division between their lands. Perhaps Simon intended to take the land adjacent to his and Reginald thwarted him in some way. In any event, this kind of removal is exactly what one would expect if the holder of, say, a strip in a common field were to acquire an adjacent strip. John Grym was one of those required by the court to show both how he had entered the manor and why he had removed a hedge. As a newcomer to the manor, he may simply have moved onto a piece of vacant land and then have proceeded to acquire more and to consolidate his overall holdings. In 1364, as had happened with the ruined houses and the tree-felling, the homage was given until the

next court to account for the hedges that had been removed.

Other ways in which people tried to help themselves to improve their lot were also, by and large, illegal. They included the obvious illegality of poaching, the dubious practice of retaining the goods of a dead person when they were supposed to be disposed of for the benefit of the lord, and what the court euphemistically referred to as ‘finding’, which almost certainly meant the taking of the possessions of a dead person from their house.

The poaching of rabbits and hares was common before the Black Death but less so in the twenty years following it. One of the few cases recorded related that John Clerke ‘hunted in the lord’s warren without permission and took hares and rabbits’. It may be significant that the most prolific poachers of the earlier period, the Partrych brothers, were unheard of in the later period and were almost certainly victims of the Plague. Wild boars were poached, though. In December 1361, Walter Richolt, Amicia Grace and Lora Grym were all fined for having a dead wild boar that had strayed into the lord’s domain. They were fined different amounts, sixpence, eight pence and four pence respectively, which suggests that they each had a separate boar: the valuations would indicate that they were young ones. Two years later, John du Broc acquired another stray wild boar. The account is somewhat unclear, because it says that the boar was dead although he took it from the pound at the same time as other people were acquiring live animals. However, as it cost him only a penny and the account was annotated to the effect that the boar was incapacitated, it seems more likely than not that it was dead, and that it had died while impounded.

In 1368, Roger Ysshe, Agnes Loverynge and Petronella, the daughter of Robert Holendene were fined for trespassing in the lord’s fishery and pond. They must have been fishing. Just as the Partryches used to take the lord’s rabbits from his warren, they were taking his fish from his fish ponds. The offence was not regarded as particularly serious, though, for Roger was fined only tuppence, Agnes four pence and Petronella nothing at all.

The practice of agreeing to dispose of the goods of a dead person and then hanging on to them, or to the payment obtained for them, was widespread. In 1350, the court reported that, among others, John Clerke had delayed in settling for the goods of

Walter Gambon; John Haleman and John Tydy for those of Walter the Tailor; and John Kynnes for those of Roger Whyting. In 1368, a jury presented that someone they failed to name had not disposed of the goods of Richard Carter. Other instances were scattered throughout the intervening years. This pursuit seems to have been condoned by the court up to a point, almost as if it acknowledged that the goods in question, or their cash equivalent, were needed more in the community than they were by the lord.

Two of the instances mentioned are of interest in another way because they list the belongings in question. Roger Whyting had owned a lead plumb bob, an old brass pot, a run-down cart with unbound wheels, a cart with an iron chain, three vats or tubs and three spades or shovels. Richard Carter’s possessions had included a chest containing eleven shillings and sixpence, two table cloths and two towels, a certain amount of cloth, a sheepskin and a set of bed clothes. The two dead men clearly came from different ends of the social spectrum.

At the beginning of the 1360s a small outbreak of ‘finding’ things came to the attention of the court. The court’s awareness was rather surprising, for it must have been informed of the luck of the ‘finders’ despite the lack of collaboration concerning ruined houses, felled trees and destroyed hedges. The court required, among other things, that Ralph Hykebyd, who had found a knife in the road, pay its estimated value of twelve pence, that John Adam, who had acquired a plough beam, pay recompense to the widow of its one-time owner, and that Walter Mayn, the finder of three shillings and four pence that the court deemed treasure trove, act to satisfy the lord, which probably meant that he had to hand over the money. The outbreak soon came to an end, perhaps halted by the court’s hard line, which in turn may have been taken because it was apparent that the items had not been found in the road or anywhere else but inside buildings abandoned as a result of the deaths of their holders.

Against the gloomy backdrop of destruction and decrepitude, then, the court records show that people were making ingenious efforts to improve their lot, and that, although the lord of the manor was trying to stimulate recovery, he was not unwilling to benefit from their ingenuity and attempts at self-help.



## PERSISTENCE AND THE BEGINNINGS OF RECOVERY

### Population

Although the population did recover eventually, the recovery in the twenty years following the Black Death was gradual, as shown by the curve on the right-hand side of the graph in Figure 1. The early revival stalled somewhat at the end of the 1360s before taking off again. It took until the middle of the fifteenth century for it to climb back to the level it had had at the start of the fourteenth. Even so, the recovery was quicker than in most of England (Aberth 2001, 131).

### The land market

During this time, the market in land carried on through the court continued much as usual, with a low level of transactions as a persistent background to the occasional burst of activity occasioned by an external stimulus. The transactions that did take place involved, for the first time, tenants who came from Berkhamsted. They included Henry Berkhamsted who was required to account for a holding he had acquired, and Isabell atte Nash who had to account for lands she held in Berkhamsted and in Chesham.

There were two spurts of activity in the period under consideration. The first took place in April 1352 when, in the aftermath of the Black Death, nine cases were recorded on the back of the membrane after the court had taken place, as described and illustrated in Marshall (2012). With one exception, holdings where the tenant had died in the Plague were taken by a surviving member of the manor. The exception was Joan de Grace of The Lee, which was nearby but came under a different jurisdiction. The second occurred in December 1361, at a court held soon after the new lord, Thomas de Vere, had inherited the manor following the death of his father, John, the seventh Earl of Oxford. In the course of more than twenty cases, a considerable backlog of matters of inheritance, including the payment of heriots, was tidied up and, in addition, some outstanding cases where land had been transferred between the living were legitimised. Again, the vast majority of new tenants were members of the manor.

In the mean time, another court through which land transfers were made had emerged at Ashley Green. There is, as far as I know, no evidence that

Ashley Green was ever a manor apart from the few manor court records now held at The Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. The earliest of these is dated 1355 and, although it refers to an earlier court, it does appear that these courts began after the Black Death. The records do not say who held the court, but there are strong indications that it was John Syfrewast. First, the parchment and the style of recording differ significantly from those of the Chesham Higham court, making it unlikely that this court was held by the Earl of Oxford. A bundle of the membranes is illustrated in Figure 2. It shows the whiteness of the parchment and the smallness of the membrane typical of the Ashley Green material and in stark contrast to that of Chesham, where the membranes are large and yellowish. The second indication is that the cases at the early Ashley Green courts were presented by two tithing men, which each hamlet had at this time (Marshall 2013), with one for Chesham Higham and one for the Syfrewast's manor. If the court was not held by the Earl of Oxford, the Syfrewasts were the only other possibility. In support of this assertion, the court held in 1355 shows signs of having been controlled by the Syfrewasts in that several cases involved the transfer of land to Roger Syfrewast, who was too young to hold it himself. In consequence, the lands were placed in the hands of the lord who, it was implied, was his father, John. By the next court, the manor had been rented out to Edward Mordaunt and his wife Elena. This was in accordance with the usual practice of the Syfrewasts, but if they had rented the manor before the court of 1355, the holdings of Roger Syfrewast would have been held by the tenant until Roger came of age, and not by his father.

The Ashley Green court records also show that connections between Chesham and Berkhamsted were growing closer. One of the holdings taken by Roger Syfrewast was rented from the Maudeleyn, a manor in Berkhamsted; John Cous took an acre at the Maudeleyn; while Stephen Couch of Berkhamsted held three tenements from Ashley Green. To cap it all, and perhaps to explain something of the developing closeness, the Mordaunts were described as the 'Mordaunts of the Maudeleyn'.

Lying midway between Chesham and Berkhamsted, Ashley Green was a natural base from which to establish connections between the two places

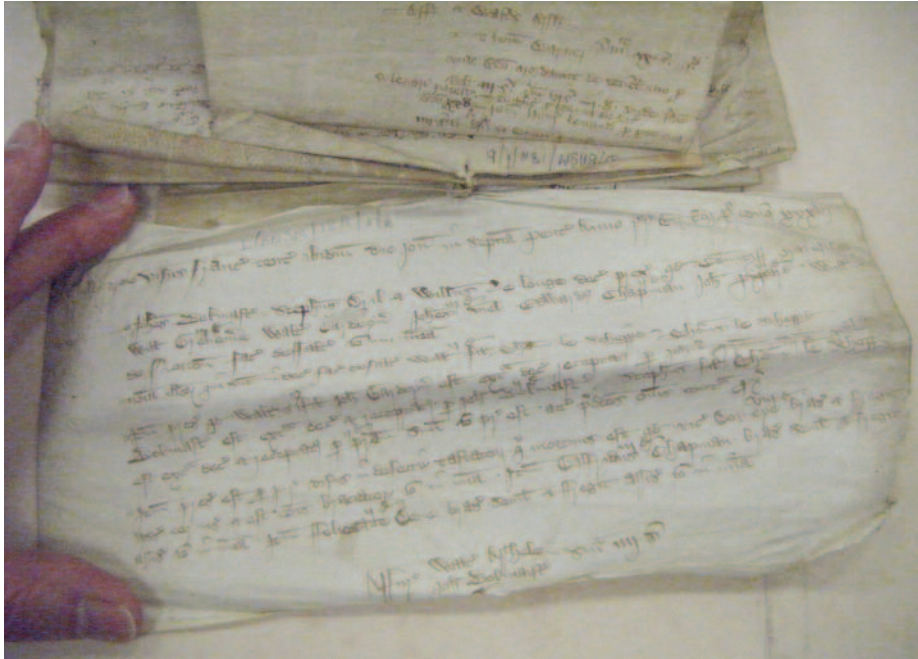


FIGURE 2 Ashley Green membranes

and, as we shall see, there were good reasons for making these connections at this time.

The first Ashley Green court held by Edward Mordaunt in 1356 was a rather mundane affair at which the new lord seemed to be struggling to come to grips with his acquisition. By the following year he had decided on a money-making strategy, which was to crack down on the grazing: the court of 1357 was almost entirely devoted to this. Individuals were grazing sheep in numbers much greater than the usual one or two: John Somerton had 53 sheep in one field while John and Alice Shepherd had 29 in two groups one of which was in the woods. Cows and pigs were also being grazed but not in such large numbers. At much the same time, in April 1361 in fact, the Chesham court was fining people specifically for grazing their animals at Ashley Green for the first time: William Harvey's sheep had grazed there and Richard Partrich's had been in the wood there. It is clear that in the late 1350s and early 1360s grazing land had become available at Ashley Green and had been well used.

Trees were being felled at Ashley Green, and their fellers fined, in the years around 1360. For

example, Egidius de Pateshull was fined for cutting down trees in 1355, Henry Partrich for felling ash trees in 1357 and Robert Morynge for felling more of the same and carrying them away in 1368. It may be that clearings that could be used for grazing were being deliberately created to meet a demand. It may also be that Edward Mordaunt, from familiarity with what went on in Berkhamsted and with an awareness of the potential of Chesham to contribute to it, encouraged such enterprise.

#### THE CAUSES OF RECOVERY

Just as wool was the basis of the medieval English economy, so it formed the basis of relations between Chesham and Berkhamsted. In turn, these relations contributed to Chesham's recovery by giving it access to Berkhamsted's greater wealth and connections to the wider world. Chesham also had its own attractions for outsiders in the form of land and an unconstrained system of agriculture. These brought inward investment as another contribution to recovery.

### **Exploiting external advantage**

The driver of Berkhamsted's wealth was the castle, at which there was a royal presence throughout the fourteenth century (Remfrey 2000, 162). It was held at various times by the king or the queen but of more significance here, in the years either side of the Black Death, in fact from 1337 to 1376, it was held by the son of Edward III, the Black Prince. He repaired the castle in 1358 and in 1360 had more work done to make it a suitable prison for King John of France, who had been captured at Poitiers. This suggests that the castle may not have had much direct royal use prior to its being given to the Black Prince, although it would still have been occupied by a royal retinue, and also that from 1358 at the latest, there was active and continual royal occupation. It is known, for example, that Edward III stayed there during this time: items of his correspondence sent from the castle have survived (Cobb 1883, 19–20).

Berkhamsted, then, prospered by serving the castle and its occupants. It also prospered from wool. The merchants of Berkhamsted in general had benefited since the twelfth century from royal charters exempting them the payment of tolls and dues (Cobb 1883, 13). The wool merchants had prospered to such an extent that they were among the king's correspondents, and the subject of the correspondence was loans (Birtchnell 1972, 69).

Chesham was in a position to take advantage of what Berkhamsted had to offer. It could sell its wool to the merchants and sell its other agricultural produce in the market. In both cases, good quality products would be in demand so that flexibility of production was paramount.

The wool was probably not all sold in the market, as wool merchants often employed middle men to deal with the owners of small numbers of sheep (Power 1941, 25). This was a benefit to all who owned sheep, but especially to those with a small number, as it eased the problems of making a sale (Dyer 2002, 206–8). The produce sold in the market, particularly when grown to meet its specific demands, would have been more lucrative than if sold in the market at Chesham, which was not attractive to outsiders and essentially provided for the redistribution of local produce among the local population.

### **Attracting inward investment**

Chesham's main attraction for investors was its land, although most of the land that became avail-

able as a result of the Black Death was quickly taken by members of the manor, not surprisingly, since they would have been the first to hear of its availability. At the same time, there was a steady influx of new tenants from Berkhamsted. They brought investment, initially with their payments of entry fees and rents, and subsequently with expenditure on the supplies they needed and on maintenance. If they, or anyone else, had taken a newly cleared piece of land, it would have been well known that the best thing to do was to put sheep on it as they would fertilise and consolidate the land while, at the same time, producing wool (Power 1941, 15).

An encouragement to outsiders to take established land was that agriculture was open and unconstrained. There was no crop rotation system in operation, and the tenants of a land-holding, whether it was a single strip or a field of tens of acres, could grow whatever they wanted. The people of Chesham had customarily grown what they felt best either for their own needs or to sell, so that they were adept at responding to changing conditions and to the demands of the market. This attitude provided a heartening environment for newcomers both in its support for freedom of action and in the assurance that appropriate advice would be available.

None of this is to suggest that a deliberate policy was being followed in order to achieve recovery. It is merely an attempt to indicate the likely means by which recovery came about.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Chesham was in a poor state even before the arrival of the Black Death, but the Plague itself and its aftermath made matters much worse. The size of the population had been falling since the beginning of the fourteenth century and the Plague halved it again, taking it to an alarmingly low level. The 'head penny' payments recorded in the manor court records allow the trajectory of the population change to be tracked with some accuracy. The infrastructure, too, was far from perfect before the Black Death but subsequently deteriorated further as a result of neglect. Whereas beforehand bridges were in need of repair, afterwards they had fallen down. The roads went from being occasionally blocked to a state of unusability because of the numerous wood piles and dung heaps on them and



the pits in them. Clearly, the roads were unused. The broken bridges impeded through traffic using Chesham, to the detriment of its trade. It was, in effect, isolated. In addition, the houses had become more derelict, even ruinous, from the same lack of attention. In retrospect, Chesham seemed to be heading for oblivion.

The lord of the manor, through his manor court, was trying to prevent this by requiring the surviving inhabitants to mend the roads, bridges and houses, but to no avail. Clearly, it was in his interests to do this, but he did have the interests of his community at heart and never employed the punitive measures invoked on occasion elsewhere. The account of the plague years at Walsham in Suffolk given by Hatcher (2009) provides an interesting contrast by recounting events that took place in different agricultural conditions and under a less tolerant regime.

Those who lived through the Black Death survived the following years with a combination of initiative and selfishness. They cut down trees to obtain timber to sell, material to repair and rebuild dwellings, and firewood to burn. The felling also made clearings in wooded land. They removed boundary fences and ditches with a view to expanding their holdings and, with them, their ability to produce food. They went poaching. They found ways to benefit from the belongings of the dead, whether by delaying their disposal when acting as executor or by 'finding' them in the road.

A lot of this behaviour was selfish. Blocking a lane could cause inconvenience to others who could no longer reach their land. Blocking a stream could stop the supply of water to others who made use of it. But desperate times call for desperate measures, and the first rule of survival, then as now, is to look after yourself.

Thanks to the resilience and robustness of its people, Chesham did survive. The population began to increase, although the recovery stalled after about ten years. Eventually, it picked up to reach once again the level of the beginning of the fourteenth century. All through the years from 1350 to 1370 the manor court dealt with a steady trickle of land transactions with occasional bursts of greater activity stimulated by an event outside the land market such as the accession of a new lord. Land was almost always taken soon after it became available. Two new factors affecting the land

market emerged during this time: one was the continuing appearance of a small number of tenants from Berkhamsted and the other the availability of land at Ashley Green, which was mainly used for grazing sheep.

One of the new tenants from Berkhamsted was Henry Berkhamsted. Now the Black Prince's marshal at this time was Henry of Berkhamsted: he and some local archers went with the Black Prince to fight at Crécy (Cobb 1883, 21). It is tempting, particularly as the court showed him some deference, to think that the new tenant was the marshal.

Reasons for Chesham's recovery may be found, at least in part, in the link with Berkhamsted and the new grazing for sheep at Ashley Green. The Berkhamsted connection brought access to its merchants and market: the merchants included rich wool merchants who would buy wool, and the market, stimulated by the demands of the royal occupants of the castle, provided a better opportunity than did that of Chesham. The new land at Ashley Green supported the production of more wool. The practice, customary in Chesham, of producing to meet the demands of the market, had prepared them to take advantage of the newly obtained access to the market in Berkhamsted.

Chesham was also open to outsiders as tenants of its land, and the lack of constraint on the use of the land was attractive. The new land at Ashley Green may have been cleared specifically to meet a demand from Berkhamsted. Neither the outward-looking links nor the inward-attraction of tenants were deliberately conceived to promote recovery but, all the same, that is what they did.

It remains only to point out an irony. One of the very few institutions that continued to operate throughout the period examined here was the manor court. Furthermore, it carried on as if nothing unusual was happening. In this, its behaviour was unrealistic, and yet it is due entirely to the records of the manor court that we know as much as we do about what was really happening at the time.

## APPENDIX

### The primary sources

The Chesham court records that provide the primary sources for this article are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Chesham court records.

<i>BAS code</i>	<i>Dates of courts</i>
D/BASM 18/42	13 November 1350
D/BASM 18/44	5 August 1351; 31 October 1351; 21 February 1352
D/BASM 18/45	14 April 1352
D/BASM 18/48	16 October 1356
D/BASM 18/51	21 January 1359; 27 April 1359
D/BASM 18/53	28 January 1361; 4 December 1361
D/BASM 18/54	14 April 1361
D/BASM 18/56	6 November 1363
D/BASM 18/57	30 March 1364
D/BASM 18/61	29 April 1367; 20 July 1367
D/BASM 18/62	11 January 1368

TABLE 2 Ashley Green court records.

<i>BAS code</i>	<i>Dates of courts</i>
D/BASM 18A/1a	25 May 1355
D/BASM 18A/1b	16 June 1356
D/BASM 18A/1c	6 June 1357
D/BASM 18A/1d	24 May 1358
D/BASM 18A/1e	9 June 1362
D/BASM 18A/2	1 June 1368
D/BASM 18A/3	29 May 1371

There are gaps in the sequence as the condition of a number of membranes is so poor as to prevent their production for inspection.

The Ashley Green court records referred to are listed in Table 2.

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