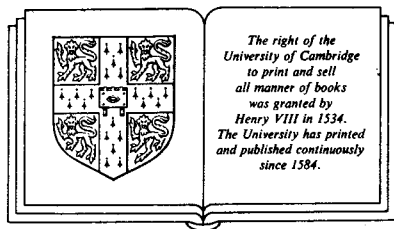


# AUTONOMY AND COMMUNITY

*The Royal Manor of Havering, 1200–1500*

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## INTRODUCTION

The medieval tenants of the English royal manor of Havering, Essex, enjoyed exceptional autonomy. Both as individuals and as a community Havering people reaped the benefits of freedom to a degree seldom found between 1200 and 1500. This unusually large manor, containing 16,000 acres, sheltered nearly 2000 inhabitants in 1251. As residents of a manor held by the crown, the tenants profited from royal administrative neglect. As residents of a privileged manor of the ancient royal demesne, they profited from a series of special rights: free personal status, a form of tenure functionally equivalent to freehold, protective legal procedures, enhanced authority for their local court, freezing of their rents, services, and entry fines as of 1251, and exemption from market tolls. In legal and administrative terms, Havering was encumbered by little outside supervision apart from the workings of the criminal law; the latter intrusion was remedied in 1465 when the tenants obtained a charter which established Havering as a Liberty, complete with its own justices of the peace. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries taxes were levied within Havering at a lighter level than that mandated by law. The residents were thus accustomed to scant seigneurial domination and to minimal interference by other external authorities. When in a few instances individual monarchs tried to exert more effective control over Havering, the tenants resisted. Havering's participation in the Peasants' Revolt was likewise fuelled by the imposition of new demands from outside.

The economic independence of Havering people was equally pronounced. Located at the southern edge of the medieval forest of Essex, Havering was still heavily wooded in 1200. New holdings were being assarted until the end of the thirteenth century. Havering's proximity to London, which lay just 14 miles to the west, and the manor's unrestricted tenure fostered an active market in land. London merchants, lawyers and royal officials recognised the potential of

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Havering land, as did people of lesser standing. By 1251 the size of holdings in Havering covered a broad range, with an abnormally high proportion of large units. More than a quarter of the tenants held at least 30 acres and so were in a position to engage in commercial agriculture. Trade was facilitated by the market held in the town of Romford, situated in the middle of Havering astride the great road which connected London with Chelmsford, Colchester and the coast. By the mid-fourteenth century Romford had become a major source of consumer goods for the capital, especially animals and wood. The manor's commercial focus was extended by the fifty to sixty men who earned their living from craft-work or trade. The economy rested upon wage labour, provided by the lesser tenants. Financial transactions produced an intricate network of credit. Wealth and opportunity were widely distributed in this unregulated setting, and women could lead independent economic lives. Havering's individualistic medieval tenants pursued their own interests on the basis of rational considerations, taking risks in hopes of greater gain.

In the absence of outside control, Havering's dominant families were free to run the political life of their region. This they did through the administrative and legal vehicle of the manor court. The Havering court was a three-weekly assembly of all those who held land directly from the crown, supplemented three times per year by wider meetings focused on public business. Although the court met in the presence of the royal steward or his deputy, the crown exerted virtually no influence over the body's proceedings. Havering's leaders (landholders with 15 to 100 acres and the wealthier craftsmen) used the court to resolve the tensions generated by the manor's complex economy. They provided a forum in which private suits between local people might be heard, encouraging solutions which restored goodwill among the parties. They also maintained order within Havering, forming juries which reported upon and punished anyone guilty of actions which threatened the stability of the community.

Between 1460 and 1500 a group of developments intensified Havering's distinctive attributes. The land market quickened in the mid-1450s. Three prominent Londoners accumulated huge holdings and settled on their estates, triggering economic change. Poor outsiders moved into the community in large numbers. The depth of capitalisation and degree of specialisation in both agriculture and craft production increased. The local laity assumed greater importance within a religious context, hiring their own priests to avoid direct conflict with the established clergy. They experimented with charitable solutions to the

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problem of growing poverty. Because the new economic and social climate accentuated the need for strong local authority, the dominant tenants arranged for Havering's reconstitution as a Liberty. The manor court, working in tandem with the Liberty officers, moved into a remarkable period of activity. Armed with more effective procedures and punishments, it heard a wide gamut of private suits and tried to curb rising violence. The jurors also used the court as a form of social control with respect to the behaviour of the poor, supervising their labour, recreations and sexual morality. People who did not conform to the standards of the leading families were expelled from the manor. During the later fifteenth century Havering displayed many features generally regarded as characteristic of the Elizabethan or Jacobean years.

The intrinsic interest of Havering's history is matched by rich sources. No thorough study of a manor of the ancient demesne which remained in the crown's hands has thus far been written, a gap due in large part to the daunting task of seeking information about one area amongst the vast archives of the central government. Yet the preservation of records concerning Havering in the crown's collections makes possible a far more diverse account than would be possible from local records alone. We have ministers' accounts for Havering as a royal possession together with administrative material from the Exchequer and Chancery rolls. The records of the central courts allow us to examine the involvement of local people with external law. The rolls of the Havering manor court, divided between the Public Record Office and the Essex Record Office, are preserved in good series only from 1382. They contain abundant information, however, about economic matters and the public life of the manor. Wills survive from the 1390s, becoming ample in the later fifteenth century. Valuable manuscripts have been safeguarded in the muniment tower at New College, Oxford, whose original endowment included 1500 acres in Havering. Among these are private land records, accounts and rentals of the college's property, and the extraordinary manorial survey of Havering, its tenants and subtenants made in 1352/3.

Although there are omissions in the records and hence subjects we cannot explore, the rare variety of sources permits us to treat Havering as a multifaceted community. We can observe it both from the outside and from the point of view of the tenants, relating the manor's position *vis-à-vis* external authority to local economic and political factors. A chronological span of three centuries helps us to identify Havering's distinguishing features over the course of time and to recognise change as it occurs. Havering's history illustrates life at one extreme of the



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spectrum of personal and collective freedom during the later Middle Ages. It reveals the kinds of patterns which could emerge when medieval people were placed in a setting of unusual independence. The privileges of Havering's tenants and the economic and political structures which grew up in this manor were by no means characteristic of the English peasantry in general. Nevertheless, while Havering was in many respects atypical, discussion of its experience contributes to our understanding of a number of wider historical issues.

Within a seigneurial, administrative and legal sphere, Havering expands our knowledge of the ancient demesne, offering evidence that the economic advantages and increased local authority accruing to the tenants of these lands were more highly valued than the narrow legal rights which are normally emphasised. We encounter the question of the crown's supervision of its own estates, particularly the closer regulation which is said to have occurred under the Angevin and Yorkist monarchs. Havering suggests that the crown's ability to control what went on within its own lands and to tap the wealth of its estates was far more limited than studies based upon central records alone would indicate. We can also investigate local objections to seigneurial or governmental demands – the reasons which led people to protest, the forms which resistance might take and the success of overt versus tacit rebellion.

Havering's history touches upon many topics of economic significance. We shall discuss the process of differentiation among customary tenants in the centuries after 1066, adding an early example of uneven land distribution and noting some of the factors which promoted heterogeneity. Havering's commercialised economy emphasises the importance of late medieval markets. It also points out the narrowness of much historical debate concerning medieval economic change and the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The pragmatic response of Havering's employers and workers to the post-plague demand for labour and the active participation of women in the economy focus attention on adaptability. The conspicuous individualism and enterprising approach of Havering people, clearly tied to their economic freedom, highlight the absence of 'peasant' characteristics within this manor.

Havering provides a valuable modification of existing studies of the nature of cooperation and conflict in medieval communities. Here we can examine the interactions between local people in a setting in which the power of the lord was minimal. Despite the independent approach of the wealthier tenants in economic matters, they worked together

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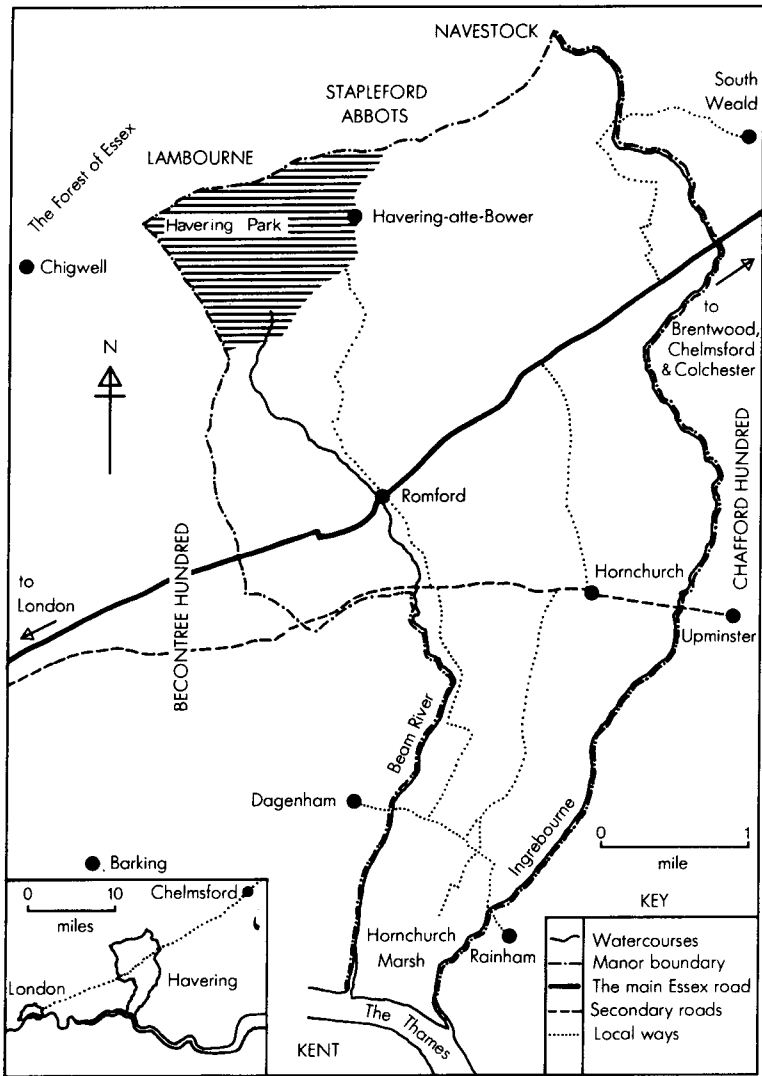


Figure 1 The manor of Havering, c. 1200

effectively through the manor court in pursuit of common goals. We shall consider how Havering's economy both created friction and required that tension be harmoniously resolved, and we shall ask how the leaders of the court made decisions about the maintenance of order.

The period between 1460 and 1500 is of particular interest with

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respect to the rise of early modern forms and attitudes. The agrarian element of Havering's economy foreshadowed many features of sixteenth-century capitalistic organisation. The religious and charitable concerns of the Havering laity force us to reassess the impact of Protestant or Puritan thought. Havering confronted the problem of mobile and undisciplined poor people long before the Elizabethan years. The rise in violence in Havering and differing standards of behaviour between prosperous local families and landless newcomers illustrate the multiple aspects of a divergence between rich and poor. The overt attempt of the leading tenants to enforce morality upon those beneath them reminds us that 'puritanism' as a social ethic might precede the religious form. Nor was social control a Tudor invention. Havering's history thus indicates that our current view of the later Middle Ages must be broadened to include greater diversity of form and wider variation over time.

Before turning to late medieval Havering, we may look briefly at the manor's physical setting and early history. Havering's large area, covering about 25 square miles, lay within an irregular set of boundaries which stretched northward from the banks of the Thames for more than 8 miles (see Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The southern section of the manor, adjoining the Thames, consisted of a strip only a mile across which broadened gradually as it moved north. Havering's northern half was wider, extending more than 5 miles from east to west. Walking from the Thames to the northeast corner of the manor would have taken several hours, as would a trip across Havering's breadth and back.

Havering's size fostered the establishment of three distinct villages within the manor.<sup>2</sup> The village of Hornchurch was situated 4 miles north of the Thames on a rise about 100 feet above sea level.<sup>3</sup> Hornchurch lay in a region of light soil and was the home of the original parish church in Havering. A few miles to the northwest was the village of Romford, located at the point at which the London—

<sup>1</sup> The medieval manor of Havering, coterminous with the parish of Hornchurch, comprised the area later to be divided into the smaller parishes of Havering-atte-Bower, Romford and Hornchurch. Throughout this study the term 'Havering' will refer to the entire medieval area, not to the smaller subunit.

<sup>2</sup> *VCH Essex*, vol. 7, pp. 9, 25 and 56, and ERO D/DU 162/1.

<sup>3</sup> The origin of the name 'Hornchurch' is not clear, although the element 'Horn-' does appear in other Essex place-names. The tower of the parish church in Hornchurch has been decorated with some kind of horn-like emblem since c. 1600, but the horns evidently derive from the name, rather than *vice versa*. Though there was a horned head on the local prior's seal in 1384-5, this was long after the first written mentions of the name in 1222 (in Latin) and 1233 (in English). (P. H. Reaney, *The place-names of Essex* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1935), pp. 112-13.)

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Colchester road forded the river Beam.<sup>4</sup> Romford, at an elevation of 50 feet, was increasing in population and economic importance in the early thirteenth century. A hunting palace belonging to the crown lay in the northwest corner of the manor, built on a hill about 350 feet above sea level, with scenic views to the west and south. The royal compound, set amidst heavy woods, included a small palace, an enclosed hunting park, and a chapel. By 1200 a little village had begun to grow up beside the cluster of royal buildings, a settlement to be known as Havering-atte-Bower. In addition to these main villages, there were a number of smaller hamlets or groups of houses in other parts of the manor, most of them located at the intersections of roads and paths – dispersed settlements common to areas recently cleared from forest. Domesday Book records eighty-seven households in Havering, a figure which had increased four-fold by 1251.

Havering included a variety of soils, deriving from different geological origins.<sup>5</sup> The area which bordered the Thames was marsh, already drained and in use by 1200. To the north of the marsh, in the south-central part of the manor, lay glacial valley gravel, light soil which was easily worked but relatively infertile. The major agricultural area of Havering during the earlier Middle Ages was located on this readily usable land. The northern part of the manor sat atop heavy clay soils, a terrain better suited to wood or grass production than to active crop growing. Northern Havering was still largely covered by trees in 1200, although clearing of land was moving ahead with energy. The diversity of soils within Havering made possible a complex and flexible pattern of land use.

Information about Havering in the centuries before 1066 is limited. Roman remains have been excavated in several places within the manor: at Mardyke farm in the extreme southwest, in the area to the north of Romford, and just to the west of Havering-atte-Bower village. The location of the Roman town of Durolitum is not known but is thought to be at or near Romford. The Roman sites near Havering-atte-Bower contained not only arable fields, buildings and cremation remains but

<sup>4</sup> Romford's name, often spelled and apparently pronounced Rumford, derives from 'the wide (*rum*) ford.' The suffix '-atte-Bower' for the village in the northwest corner presumably comes from the use of 'the Bower' (or 'Bowre' or 'Boure') as a name for the king's house there, a building also known as the king's chamber. (Reaney, *Place-names of Essex*, pp. 117 and 111; Smith, *Hist. of H-a-B*, p. ix.)

<sup>5</sup> V. N. Scarfe, 'Essex', in *The land of Britain*, part 82 (Land Utilisation Survey of Britain, London, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1942), pp. 406–50, *passim*, and Roland Allison, 'The changing geographical landscape of south-west Essex from Saxon times to 1600' (Univ. of London MA thesis, 1958), ch. 2. The author is grateful to Dr Allison for permission to have a microfilm copy of his thesis and to make reference to it.

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also 'a complex of gullies and ditches associated with metal working'.<sup>6</sup> The Saxon settlers from whom Havering took its name ('Haveringas' = the followers or people of Haver) established themselves in somewhat different regions of the manor from those chosen by their Roman predecessors. The earliest Saxon settlements and agricultural lands are thought to have lain on the gravel soil of the southern half of the manor. Hornchurch village forms one of an east-west row of early Saxon communities in southwest Essex which lie at the edge of the flood plain terrace. Romford is one of a second row of villages located about 2 miles north of the first, deriving from a later stage of settlement. In other areas of southwest Essex both sets of villages are named in Domesday Book. Because Havering is described as a single manorial unit in the 1086 survey, neither Hornchurch nor Romford is mentioned, but both were presumably in existence.

The beginning of Havering's association with the crown is unrecorded. The manor seems to have been a member of the Anglo-Saxon royal estate by the eleventh century and perhaps earlier still. Several local legends associate the manor with Edward the Confessor, although in 1086 Havering was said to have belonged to Earl Harold of Wessex prior to the Norman invasion, as did the other royal manors in Essex.<sup>7</sup> The presence of a well-established hunting palace and park at Havering-atte-Bower by the early twelfth century supports the view that the manor was part of the royal demesne prior to 1066 as it was to be later. Havering remained a royal manor until the nineteenth century, from 1262 onward usually granted to the queen in dower. The Liberty of Havering-atte-Bower was sold by the crown into private hands in 1828 but lasted as an independent entity until 1892.<sup>8</sup>

In the sphere of religion, Havering was by 1200 under the control of a foreign monastery, a situation which arose through a pious donation of King Henry II. In 1158/9 Henry gave c. 1500 acres near the village of Hornchurch to the Augustinian hospital of St Nicholas and St Bernard at Montjoux in Savoy.<sup>9</sup> While Henry's motives are

<sup>6</sup> *VCH Essex*, vol. 7, p. 9, and see pp. 25-6 and 56. For Saxon settlements, see Allison, 'Changing geographical landscape', pp. 48-9.

<sup>7</sup> *DB*. For the legends, see Philip Morant, *The history and antiquities of the county of Essex* (2 vols., London, 1768), vol. 1, p. 58, and Smith, *Hist. of H-a-B*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Hist. of H-a-B*, esp. pp. 265 and 272.

<sup>9</sup> For the founding and early history of Hornchurch Priory, see *Hornch. Pr. kal.*, A. V. Worsley, *Hornchurch parish church: a history* (Colchester, Benham, 1964), *VCH Essex*, vol. 7, pp. 22, 46 and 82, and Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'Hornchurch Priory, Essex, 1158/9-1391', *Revue Bénédicte* XCV (1985), 116-38. The 1500 acres included whatever glebe lands accompanied the gift of the parish church in 1163 as well as the original grant in 1158; the latter also conveyed lands worth £8 annually in Chiselhurst, Kent.

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unknown, his gift may have come in thanks for assistance provided by the canons to English travellers crossing the Alps, for the hospice lay at the top of the pass of Great St Bernard, leading from Savoy into northern Italy. Or perhaps Henry saw the donation as a means of cultivating the friendship of the count of Savoy in his conflict with Louis VII of France. The Havering land was held in frankalmoign, exempted from payment of £25 in annual rents to the king. The endowment supported a cell within the manor. A building in Hornchurch village soon housed a small community of never more than around ten members: a master plus a few canons and brethren. The house quickly became known as Hornchurch Priory.

In 1163 Henry II granted to the priory the parish church of St Andrew in Hornchurch, described in the charter as 'the church of Havering'.<sup>10</sup> A papal confirmation of these gifts, issued in 1177, noted that the chapel within the village of Romford was also to belong to the priory. Henceforth, Hornchurch Priory was responsible for providing priests to serve at those churches. The priory took on the further duty in 1274 of furnishing a priest for the larger of two chapels at the royal compound at Havering-atte-Bower, this one used by local village people as well as by the crown's servants. By the late thirteenth century the spiritual life of the entire manor of Havering, as administered through the three churches and chapels which served the parish of Hornchurch, was in the hands of Hornchurch Priory. In 1391 the priory's lands and the spiritual rights which accompanied them were purchased from the hospital of Montjoux by William of Wykeham as part of the endowment of the college he was founding at Oxford.

This study begins by considering Havering's relations with outside authority between 1200 and 1500. An external focus is required in the opening chapters because the earliest surviving records illuminate the manor's contacts with other forms of control. We can also establish immediately the autonomous context within which the community's economic and political patterns arose. Part I looks first at Havering's interactions with the crown as lord of the manor in the thirteenth century, including the growth of its privileges as ancient demesne. We move then to seigneurial, legal and administrative supervision during the later medieval years and to the types of local resistance. In Parts II and III the emphasis shifts to Havering's internal life. Economic questions are addressed in Part II. After examining Havering land-holding between 1066 and 1352/3, we turn to the tenure and transfer

<sup>10</sup> *Hornch. Pr. kal.*, no. 78.

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of land, followed by the size and composition of the medieval population. The commercial economy of the years from 1350 to 1460 is described next. Part III opens with discussion of the way in which Havering's tenants made use of their manor court during the century after 1352. In conclusion we explore the changes of the critical years between 1460 and 1500.