INTRODUCTION

THE SUBJECT AND THE SOURCES

Writing forty years ago Mary Coate expressed herself bewildered by the neglect of the history of the Duchy of Cornwall shown by serious historians.[1] But Miss Coate's words fell on deaf ears, and the fruits of her excellent but incidental work on the Duchy in the Civil War period[2] and some stimulating but brief mentions by A. L. Rowse[3] comprise virtually the only scholarly writings on its history produced in modern times.[4] The Duchy of Cornwall formed in the middle ages, as it still does today, a body of royal estates of the first importance and, being centred on Cornwall, its records have much to tell of the history of an area of Britain about which very little has so far been written.

Cornwall was a remote and somewhat forbidding county to most Englishmen in the middle ages. Adjoining the rest of England only by its eastern boundary, Cornwall must have seemed barely accessible by land and, inhabited by 'a strange unfriendly folk' who spoke an alien tongue, it could have offered little attraction to the visitor. John de Grandisson, soon after his appointment as Bishop of Exeter in 1327, wrote despairingly to his friends at Avignon describing the south-west peninsula as 'not only the ends of the earth, but the very end of the ends thereof',[5] and Adam de Carleton in a pathetic letter tendering his resignation as Archdeacon of Cornwall in 1342, after more than 35 years in office, confessed himself unable to communicate with the Cornish, but it was not just a

[1] M. Coate, 'The Duchy of Cornwall: its history and administration, 1640–1660', *T.R.H.S.*, 4th ser., X (1927), 135.
[2] *Ibid.* and *Cornwall in the Great Civil War* (Oxford, 1933).
[3] 'The Duchy of Cornwall', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (January 1937) and *Tudor Cornwall, Portrait of a Society* (1941), especially pp. 77–83.
[4] For an interesting account of the Duchy written in the seventeenth century see: Sir John Doddridge, *The History of the Ancient and Modern Estate of the Principality of Wales, Duchy of Cornwall and Earldom of Chester* (1630).
[5] 'Et ecce, Pater dulcissme, dum nedum in mundi finibus, set—ut ita dicam—in finium finibus consisto' (*Reg. Grandisson*, I, 97–8).

question of language difficulties for he plainly stated that 'the folk of these parts are quite extraordinary, being of a rebellious temper, and obdurate in the face of attempts to teach and correct'.[1] Yet personal opinions and reminiscences, however eloquent, make poor history, and we can counter the charges of Adam de Carleton with the commendation of Richard Germyn, who wrote to his employer Sir William Stonor in 1481: 'And as to your tenaunts in Cornwale, thei be as trew unto you as y can understond as any tenauntes that ye have.'[2] Furthermore, an examination of the records of the Cornish estates of the Duchy of Cornwall reveals that the manors in this remote county, with its notoriously recalcitrant population, were managed with efficiency and equanimity throughout the later middle ages. The relations between the Duchy and its tenants were remarkably cordial, and no examples of serious or concerted opposition are recorded; the absence of compulsion from large areas of manorial life combined with a prompt and apparently fair hearing for most grievances created a most satisfactory working atmosphere.[3] The higher branches of the administration, which were based in London, kept in close and constant touch with affairs in Cornwall, thereby achieving an exceptional standard of management and solvency.

This present study of the seventeen Cornish demesne manors of the Duchy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is based upon a magnificent range of documents, probably unrivalled for lay estates. Almost one hundred years of enrolled manorial accounts survive in the Public Record Office and the Duchy of Cornwall Office for the period between the foundation of the Duchy in 1337 and the accession of Henry VII in 1485, and in addition some 27 accounts exist of the estates under the Earls of Cornwall, from 1287–1336.[4] Furthermore, there are more than eighty receivers' accounts dealing in part with the assessionable manors. But perhaps most valuable of

[1] 'Item populus in illis Partibus est valde mirabilis, rebellis et difficillis ad informandum et corrigendum' (*Reg. Grandisson*, II, 958).
[2] *The Stonor Letters and Papers, 1290–1483*, ed. C. L. Kingsford, 2 vols, Camden Society, 3rd ser., XXIX and XXX (1919), II,120
[3] It must be borne in mind, however, that almost all extant records were drawn up by Duchy officials.
[4] For details of these accounts see below, pp. 298–9.

all is the series of assession rolls. These rolls, the product of the leasehold (conventionary) system by which the bulk of Duchy lands in Cornwall were held, were compiled, with few exceptions, every seven years and they contain the names of all tenants, as well as the size, location, and rent of each holding, omitting only the freeholdings. Although bearing some resemblance to ordinary manorial rentals, the assession rolls far surpass them in value to the historian as they exist in an almost continuous sequence for the whole of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Within the separate categories of free conventionary, unfree conventionary and *nativi de stipite* the holdings of each vill were grouped together. The rolls provide a unique source of information on the Duchy tenantry and on demand for land. They enable the fluctuating rents of each individual holding to be catalogued, as well as the aggregate rental of each manor. The size of landholdings acquired by tenants at different periods in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can be seen at a glance, and the listing of the names of Duchy tenants enables some study to be undertaken concerning the interrelation of agriculture with other branches of the Cornish economy.

THE DUCHY OF CORNWALL IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Duchy of Cornwall was created by Edward III in full Parliament at Westminster in March 1337 for the maintenance of his eldest son who was then seven years of age.[1] Although many of the features of this creation were novel the core of the estates of the new Duchy was the old Earldom of Cornwall as it had existed during the tenure of Earl Edmund (1272–1300), with possessions in almost a score of counties after extensive purchases and exchanges had been made by his father Richard. Under Edmund the estates of the Earldom in Cornwall contained seventeen demesne manors, the same seventeen manors that were later to become the assessionable manors of the Duchy of Cornwall.[2] These manors, which form

[1] Edward of Woodstock was probably created Duke on 3 March. The Great Charter of the Duchy of Cornwall is dated 17 March (P.R.O. Charter Rolls, 124, 11 Edward III, no. 60, m. 28; *Reports touching the Dignity of a Peer of the Realm*, v (1829), 35).

[2] For a full description of the life and estates of Edmund see L. M. Midgley, *Ministers' Accounts of the Earldom of Cornwall, 1296–1297*, Camden Society, 3rd ser., LXVI and

the subject of this study, were well distributed throughout the county.[1] In the south-east lay Trematon, Calstock, Climsland, Rillaton and Liskeard; in the north-east Tintagel, Helstone-in-Triggshire and Penmayne; in central Cornwall Talskiddy, Restormel, Penlyne, Penkneth, Tewington and Tybesta; and in the west Tywarnhaile, Moresk and Helston-in-Kirrier.

Edmund's unhappy marriage left him childless, so on his death in September 1300 the Earldom of Cornwall passed to Edward I, his cousin and next heir.[2] For the remaining years of Edward's reign the Earldom stayed in the hands of the Crown, sometimes helping to provide for Thomas of Brotherton and Edmund of Woodstock, sons of the king by his second marriage. But the death of Edward in 1307 heralded a most turbulent period in the history of the Cornish estates, in which they left and returned to the hands of the Crown with bewildering and disruptive frequency. Soon after his accession Edward II used the Earldom to heap favour upon the feckless Gaveston,[3] but opposition to the favourite limited both his tenure of the estates and his life to five years from the time of the grant, and he was executed in 1312. Ignoring the claims to the Earldom of Margaret, widow of Gaveston, and Sir Hugh de Audley, whom she had subsequently married,[4] Edward granted the Cornish lands in 1317 to his wife, Isabella of France.[5] Once again, however, the tenure of the grant was short-lived and in 1324, as a result of a dramatic reversal of favour, Isabella was deprived of her lands in Cornwall, as well as her other estates scattered over many parts of the realm, on the pretext of their vulnerability in view of the threat of invasion from France.[6] The modest alternative sources of revenue provided by Edward II for the maintenance of her household did little to placate Isabella,[7] and she conspired to engineer the downfall of

LXVII (1942–5), and 'Edmund Earl of Cornwall and his Place in History' (Manchester M.A. thesis, 1930). The article on Edmund in the *D.N.B.* is apparently inaccurate in details.

[1] See map, p. xiv. [2] *Cal. Inq. P.M.* III, 456. [3] *C. Ch. R. 1300–1326*, p. 108.

[4] The claims of Margaret and Sir Hugh were finally settled in 1318 by a grant of lands to the value of 2,000 marks whilst Margaret lived. If she died before Sir Hugh the grant was to be reduced to 1,200 marks (*C.P.R. 1317–1321*, p. 251).

[5] *C.P.R. 1317–1321*, pp. 5, 8, 9, 268. [6] *C.F.R. 1319–1327*, pp. 300, 302, 308.

[7] For an account of the financial arrangements made for Isabella by Edward II see T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* (6 vols, Manchester, 1920–33), V, 274–5.

her husband. This was successfully accomplished with the help of Mortimer and an invasion from France in the autumn of 1326, and within a few months of the accession of her son as Edward III, Isabella's old estates were restored in full, and as a token of gratitude her total dower was almost tripled in value.[1] But Isabella failed to maintain her influence for long over her strong-willed son, and in December 1330 Edward with a show of strength successfully asserted his independence, to the detriment of both his mother and the Mortimer faction, and once again she was deprived of her lands.[2]

John of Eltham, the brother of Edward III, had been created Earl of Cornwall in 1328, but the title remained an empty one until 10 October 1331 when he was finally granted the Cornish lands traditionally associated with the Earldom.[3] John, who was to be the last Earl of Cornwall, did not live to enjoy the estates for long, and he died at Perth in the autumn of 1336.[4] As he left no heirs, by the terms of the original grant the estates of the Earldom once more returned to the Crown.[5]

Possibly influenced by the unsettled history of the Earldom of Cornwall in the previous generation, Edward III contrived to create from it an unchanging, indeed a virtually unchangeable institution, the tenure of which should never be in dispute. By the Great Charter of 1337 Prince Edward was made Duke of Cornwall and granted the seventeen assessionable manors and a number of boroughs and towns in Cornwall, which had also been part of the estates of the Earldom, namely Trematon, Saltash, Tintagel (sometimes called Bossiney), Grampound, Helston, Camelford, Lostwithiel, Launceston and Liskeard. Among the more important privileges also made part of the Duchy of Cornwall were the right to appoint the sheriff of the county, the profits of the county courts and eight and one third of the nine hundred courts, the rights of prisage and custom of wine, the profits of all the ports and havens of Cornwall including 'Ancient and New Customs', wrecks and royal fishes;[6] and the profits of the stannaries, which included the most

[1] *C.P.R. 1324–1327*, p. 346; Tout, *op. cit.* pp. 247, 275–6. [2] *C.P.R. 1330–1334*, p. 23.
[3] *C. Ch. R. 1327–1341*, p. 233. [4] *D.N.B.* [5] *C.P.R. 1334–1338*, p. 447.
[6] For a fuller description of the rights of the Duchy of these fields see Stella M. Campbell, 'Haveners of the Medieval Dukes of Cornwall', *J.R.I.C.*, new ser., IV (1962). It should be noted, however, that the profits of the assessionable manors were

valuable single perquisite of all, namely the right to take a duty of 40s. on each thousandweight of tin mined within the county.[1] In addition the Duke was to have 'advowsons of all churches, abbeys, priories etc., free warren, all knights fees, wards, escheats, reliefs, and services, and all profits liberties and advantages whatsoever appertaining to the aforesaid lands, manors, parks etc.' And it should be remembered that Cornish possessions formed only a part of the estates, and the rights and properties of the Duchy spread far beyond south-west England.

According to the express words of the charter of creation, none of the estates of the Duchy of Cornwall were ever to be dismembered, nor granted other than to the Duke of Cornwall. The Dukedom was to pertain to the eldest son of the reigning monarch, and in the absence of such a rightful Duke it was to remain in the hands of the Crown until such time as a Duke was born. Unlike the Principality of Wales and the Earldom of Chester, which also accrued to the eldest son of the reigning monarch, no investiture to the Dukedom was necessary, for the title devolved upon the first-born son from the moment of his birth, although it has subsequently become customary for the estates to be granted at any period up to his becoming of age.

Thus, the Duchy was created with many built-in bulwarks against change to exist within strictly defined limits, but it did not augur well for its future stability that even the constancy of Edward III towards his own brain-child waned. The Black Prince was allowed to grant various manors and appurtenances of the Duchy to retainers and veterans of his Continental campaigns for the duration of their lives,[2] and on his death in 1376 Edward III created his

consistently many times greater than those of the havenry, and on occasion the profits of the hundred courts also exceeded those of the havenry.

[1] The 'profits of the stannaries' also included revenues from the four stannary courts, the farms of the bailiwicks of the stannaries, revenues from a poll-tax on tinners working with shovels within Blackmore and Penwith-and-Kirrier districts, 'fine of tin', 'dublet', and occasional sums realised from the sale of forfeited tin (see G. R. Lewis, *The Stannaries* (Harvard Economic Studies, III, 1906), especially chapters IV and V). Some lists of the Duchy revenues are contained in Lewis' Appendixes O, R and S, but they are incomplete and contain many inaccuracies. For more complete statistics of the production of tin in Cornwall see below, Appendix C.

[2] For grants made to Walter de Wodeland, Nigel Loheryng and William Lenche, see below, pp. 111, 130, 193.

grandson Richard Duke of Cornwall, giving him two thirds of the estates of the Duchy,[1] whilst the remaining third by value was granted to Princess Joan, widow of the Black Prince, in dower.[2] On becoming king, Richard showed no desire to retain any of the assessionable manors in his possession and, with the exception of a number of deer-parks and castles, the manorial estates were dispersed far and wide in gross neglect of the terms of the Great Charter, effecting the most serious disruption of the Duchy ever made without legal sanction.[3]

With the accession of Henry IV, however, many of the assessionable manors were restored once more to the Duchy, and with the assistance of a Parliament anxious to keep down royal expenses it was established that in the future only life interests could be granted out of the estates of the Duchy.[4] Nevertheless, it was not until Edward of Westminster, son of Henry VI, was made Duke of Cornwall that the complete manorial estates lay once more in the hands of the Duchy administration, where they were to remain for the rest of the medieval period.[5]

The Medieval Dukes of Cornwall[6]

3 March 1337–8 June 1376	Edward the Black Prince
20 November 1376–29 September 1399	Richard 'of Bordeaux', as Duke until 22 June 1377 and subsequently as King
15 October 1399	Henry 'of Monmouth', as Duke until 21 March 1413 and then as King
6 December 1421	Henry 'of Windsor', as Duke until 1 September 1422 and then as King
13 October 1453	Edward 'of Westminster', son of Henry VI
4 March 1461	Edward IV (Henry VI restored 3 October 1470, deposed 11 April 1471)
17 July 1471	Edward Plantagenet, later Edward V
26 June 1483–9 April 1484	Edward, son of Richard III

[1] *C.C.R. 1374–1377*, p. 421.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 407–8; below, pp. 136–7.
[3] Below, pp. 137–8.
[4] *Rot. Parl.* III, 531–2.
[5] Below, pp. 159–60.
[6] This table is for the most part based upon the lists of Dukes of Cornwall contained in the *Handbook of British Chronology*, ed. Sir M. Powicke and E. B. Fryde (1961), p. 423.

I

THE CORNISH ECONOMY AND THE DUCHY MANORS

The economic and social history of Cornwall in the middle ages has been sadly neglected, and our knowledge of her rural economy in particular is extremely limited, being largely confined to an examination of early field-patterns. The necessity to say something of the structure and efficiency of Cornish agriculture in works of a general nature has driven historians into making a series of misleading generalisations. We are told, for example, that Cornish farming techniques were 'rough and primitive',[1] and possibly 'of that backward type which ploughs vast tracts for a poor return';[2] consequently 'Cornish manors were not rich',[3] their lands 'yielded a poorer harvest', and the mass of Cornishmen were so poor that they 'provided no large market for imports'.[4] Tin has been seen as the major source of wealth, and agriculture relegated to playing a minor role in the economy, and what is more, to playing it badly.[5]

This dismal picture is perpetuated by comparative analyses of the population and wealth of English counties, based upon subsidy rolls, which have contrived to reveal Cornwall as a very backward region with only a smattering of persons and a very low level of wealth to each acre.[6] But it is readily apparent that for a county such as Cornwall where the topography leads to a markedly uneven settlement, computations of the average density of population and wealth can be extremely misleading. In the middle ages a large part of the county, perhaps as much as one third, was almost completely

[1] Sir John Clapham, *A Concise Economic History of Britain from the Earliest Times to 1750* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 88.
[2] F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond* (Cambridge, 2nd edn, 1907), p. 425.
[3] Clapham, *op. cit.* p. 138.
[4] M. W. Beresford and J. K. St Joseph, *Medieval England: An Aerial Survey* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 190.
[5] N. S. B. Gras, *Evolution of the English Corn Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), p. 52.
[6] See, for example, E. J. Buckatzsch, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1086–1843', *Ec. H.R.*, 2nd ser., III (1950); R. S. Schofield, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1334–1649', *Ec. H.R.*, 2nd ser., XVIII (1965).

devoid of agricultural resources and scarcely inhabited.[1] Furthermore, the tin-mining population of Cornwall was exempt from all forms of royal taxation, and therefore its wealth is not registered on the subsidy rolls[2] and, what is more, it is evident that many affluent persons managed to evade payment by claiming to have mining interests.[3] A more subtle analysis than has so far been possible on a national scale must be undertaken before the distribution of the population and wealth of medieval Cornwall can be accurately portrayed.

TOPOGRAPHY AND FARMING

Cornwall is, of course, far from ideally suited for the practice of agriculture, and lands of the best quality are rarely found. Much of the inner part of the county is composed of four great granite masses which, owing to a daunting combination of height, exposure and infertile soil, were condemned to be bleak moorland rather than farmland. Upon these and other moorlands one finds only a blackish heath at higher levels and a cotton grass at lower levels; the less wild of such lands in the middle ages were used primarily as rough summer pasture. In contrast, a large part of the remainder of the county, in particular those regions bordering on the sea, could be successfully cultivated; for there the rock structures had frequently broken down into a light well-drained soil of moderate richness which, despite the high level of acidity common in the Devonian soils of south-west England, could prove suitable for the practice of both arable and pastoral husbandry. Nevertheless, many parts are so hilly as to have rendered cultivation extremely arduous, and in some fields upon the steeper slopes draught animals could scarcely have been able to take sure footing. Another hindrance to successful crop-growing was the presence of many rocks and boulders, and it was sometimes necessary to dig over by hand those places which could not satisfactorily be ploughed.[4] A small annual range of

[1] *The Domesday Geography of South-West England*, ed. H. C. Darby and R. Welldon Finn (Cambridge, 1967), p. 304.
[2] J. F. Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property, 1290–1334* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), pp. 118–20; Lewis, *Stannaries*, pp. 164–6.
[3] For attempts at evasion of taxation in both Cornwall and Devon see, for example, *Rot. Parl.* II, 343; *C.P.R. 1338–1340*, p. 71; *ibid. 1343–1345*, pp. 73, 165.
[4] P.R.O. SC.6.1094/14, Helstone-in-Triggshire.

temperatures is a feature of the Cornish climate, and this gives mild winters and relatively cool summers which, coupled with a high annual rainfall, makes a good land for animal husbandry, since grass can grow throughout most of the year; but for arable cultivation the familiar succession of wet days and high winds can bring difficulties, and sudden violent storms can seriously damage harvests.

It would be injudicious to draw any firm general conclusions of the nature of Cornish agriculture in the later middle ages from Duchy records alone, especially as the information they contain is necessarily limited by the almost complete absence of demesne exploitation.[1] Nevertheless our knowledge of medieval agriculture in Cornwall is so sparse as to justify a detailed analysis of the farming methods practised on Duchy manors, as far as they can be discovered, in order to assist in establishing the main outlines for the county as a whole.

The testing environment within which Cornish farmers had to work fostered the evolution of a highly individual system of farming, which sought to compensate for deficiencies and exploit advantages. No trace of classical open-field agriculture can be found on any Duchy manor from the start of records in the late thirteenth century,[2] and throughout the county physical and cultural conditions appear to have combined to ensure that this form of rural organisation was never of more than peripheral importance. Almost without exception the open-fields whose existence has been firmly established in medieval Cornwall were the result of combinations of untypical conditions, amongst which the open-fields of the run-rig type must be counted.[3] Frequently encountered also are the open-fields of a number of boroughs,[4] although even these appear to have been

[1] Some small-scale arable demesne cultivation is in evidence on the earliest manorial account of 1287/8 on the manors of Helstone-in-Triggshire and Calstock, but by the time of the next available account some 9 years later it had ceased (cf. P.R.O. SC.6.816/9 and P.R.O. E.119/1). A final ill-fated attempt to cultivate a demesne, using the Old Deer Park of Helstone-in-Triggshire, was made in 1335/6, but high winds and torrential rains ruined the harvest (P.R.O. SC.6.1094/14).

[2] Before the Duchy was created in 1337 these manors formed part of the Earldom of Cornwall.

[3] H. L. Gray, *English Field Systems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), pp. 412–14; N. J. G. Pounds, 'Lanhydrock Atlas', *Antiquity*, XIX (1945).

[4] Charles Henderson, *Essays in Cornish History*, ed. A. L. Rowse and M. I. Henderson, (Oxford, 1935), p. 67; W. G. V. Balchin, *The Making of the English Landscape, 2: Cornwall* (1954), pp. 46–7; Gray, *op. cit.* pp. 263–6; R. R. Rawson, 'The Open-Field in Flintshire, Devonshire and Cornwall', *Ec. H.R.*, 2nd ser., VI (1953).