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has tended to make the frequently more subtle patterns of the southern experience seem pale and uninteresting; one field where this obsession has borne grave results has become only too clear in the comparative dearth of medieval and early modern research recently undertaken on the area.

It is perhaps no small contributor to this pattern that the 'south' often appears as a homogeneous area only in the eyes of those outside it: the difficulties of lateral movement within it and the barrier to travel northwards imposed by the presence of London have tended to enhance local isolation. This journal has begun with no simplistic conception of homogeneity or uniformity, and one of our most difficult problems has been to define 'southern' adequately. As an operating convenience we have chosen to include the historic counties (i.e. those existing before 1974) of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Gloucestershire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Surrey, Sussex and Kent, together with those parts of Oxfordshire, London, riparian Essex, the Channel and Scilly Isles which can be shown to have formed part of the region in the past. The choice was dictated less by notions of empire-building than by a realisation that the boundaries of regions and sub-regions are infinitely flexible over time: the south has been both a part of northern France, an entity in itself and a collection of planners' jargons in the last thousand years.

The papers and other features in the present and future issues will reflect the changing concerns of historiography and the fresh insights given by other disciplines. Urban growth and decline, the role of the gentry and popular movements are a few of the themes that articles in early numbers will explore; in addition, we shall publish a series of surveys of the state of regional and local studies and the provision for them within our area. It is hoped that the research published in each number will foster similar and comparative studies elsewhere within the region. In many senses this has involved considerable risks, in terms of capital investment, personal reputations and the planning and encouragement of lines of enquiry. This issue and those that will follow owe a considerable debt to the help and goodwill of many scholars both inside and beyond the boundaries of our area; as board members, referees and, by no means least, contributors. We hope that the journal will become a centre for cooperation and encouragement for considerable growth, but without creating 'southern history' as yet another compartment in an already heavily subdivided discipline.

J. R. Lowerson

Rent and the Urban Economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the Later Middle Ages

A. F. BUTCHER

Such has been the neglect of the place of towns in the history of medieval England that only a tentative chronology of their economic development has yet been constructed for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Since Dr Bridbury wrote his iconoclastic tract *Economic Growth*,¹ however, and under the stimulus of a group of historians more specifically concerned with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century problems² there has been a relative flurry of discussion of this aspect of English society and recent summaries have begun to suggest possible lines for new investigation.³ In particular, Professor Dobson's recent survey⁴ has identified the most important areas of evidence, most of the major problems and, drawing upon what he concedes to be 'highly impressionistic' evidence, has even suggested an outline of the main periods of fifteenth-century development. Considering the evidence of the decay of building fabric, the decline in municipal and ecclesiastical building, pleas for the remission of fee-farms and exemption from parliamentary representation and even involvement in the civil strife of the period, he argues, for the 'forty or so English towns, not including London, known to have had a tax-paying population of 1,000 or more at the time of the 1377 Poll Tax', that the period of

¹ A. R. Bridbury, *Economic Growth—England in the Later Middle Ages* (1962).

² E.g. P. Clark and P. Slack (eds.), *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700* (1972); P. Clark and P. Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500–1700* (Oxford, 1976); and, more recently, D. M. Palliser, 'A Crisis in English Towns? The Case of York, 1460–1640', *Northern History*, xiv (1978), pp. 108–25.

³ E.g. S. Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Medieval Towns* (Oxford, 1977); C. Platt, *The English Medieval Town* (1976); J. Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348–1530*, *Studies in Economic and Social History* (1977); and C. Phythian-Adams, 'Urban Decay in Late Medieval England', in P. Abrams and E. A. Wrigley (eds.), *Towns in Societies, Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 159–85.

⁴ R. B. Dobson, 'Urban Decline in Late Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, xxvii (1977), pp. 1–22.

manifest decline may have set in after 1450 (at different times in different places in the twenty-year period between 1450 and 1470) and may have reached crisis proportions in the early Tudor period (in the fifty years between 1480 and 1530).⁵

The more systematic and statistical investigations which test the chronology against the experience of individual communities and attempt to produce a more precise description have yet to come. Dobson, indeed, identified four areas in which evidence might be amenable to statistical treatment, viz., (i) freemen admissions, (ii) customs records, (iii) rent values, and (iv) taxation assessments, while indicating that 'research in these increasingly technical spheres is still genuinely in its infancy'. The concern of this present discussion is with the third of these areas, and here Dobson is far from encouraging. The likelihood 'that historians will ever be able to interpret the acquisition and management of real property in the fifteenth-century English town as a genuinely dynamic feature of its economy' seems to him remote. Similarly, he warns against facile generalisations on the basis of the declining rent rolls of so many fifteenth-century urban corporations and religious bodies.⁶

While such warnings are, no doubt, salutary the pessimism may well be premature. Detailed work on the property holdings of individual townsmen may yet prove productive, albeit time-consuming in the compilation, and a greater awareness of the extent of non-corporate property ownership in particular towns may serve to redress some imbalance in current considerations of the urban economy. As for the rent rolls of fifteenth-century urban corporations and lay and religious bodies, it is argued here that detailed investigation of these may provide the most sensitive indicator of economic and demographic change in urban society in the later middle ages, an indicator which, inevitably reflects both agrarian and urban conditions.⁷ Detailed comparison of successive documents of this kind, where they have not become fossilised by the mere repetition of formulae, by supplying evidence of the changing demand for urban real property provides vital information for the dynamics of population, degrees of prosperity, and, perhaps also, for changing levels in the money supply.

Undoubtedly the most elusive aspect of the role of rent in urban

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁷ For a limited attempt at such investigation see A. F. Butcher, 'Rent, Population and Economic Change in Late-Medieval Newcastle', *Northern History*, xiv (1978), pp. 67–77.

society is its importance for the economies of individual townsmen. Such consideration as there has been of this problem has tended to conclude that 'there was little concentration of real property in the hands of individuals'.⁸ Considering the evidence of the tallage of 1312 for Bristol, Professor Hilton pointed out that of the six landowners who possessed income from urban property greater than £10 per annum three were ecclesiastical institutions and the three citizens who remained had rent incomes of £12, £16, and £22 respectively. 'These were fairly substantial incomes,' he argued, 'but they were not large enough individually, and there were not enough of such rent incomes to provide for a significant contribution to capital formation.' The same would seem to be true for Coventry and Warwick in the late thirteenth century and for Gloucester in 1455.⁹ Writing of English provincial towns in the early sixteenth century, Professor Hoskins had earlier identified the same tendency: while William Canynges in Bristol with fifty-five urban messuages in 1474, William Crugge with nineteen messuages yielding £20 per annum in Exeter in 1520, and Richard Marler with fifty houses in Coventry in 1522 giving an annual income of £41 3s 8d might prove exceptions, in general there was a 'lack of any widespread or sustained interest in urban property investment' though, noticeably, this picture may have changed in Exeter later in the sixteenth century.¹⁰

Just how typical these examples are needs to be tested as, indeed, does the possibility of significant changes in property accumulation over time. Further, beneath the surface of the discussion lurks the problem of sub-leasing. For Oxford and Canterbury it is possible to make some limited contribution to the problem of the economic significance of townsmen's property investment, though the question of sub-leasing remains obscure. The survival of the 1312 tallage for Oxford¹¹ makes comparison possible with that for Bristol. In Oxford the number of citizens taxed in 1312 was 268, perhaps some 5 per cent of the total population. Of these, 81 drew income from rent and their total annual income from this source amounted to about £310 or some 25 per cent of the total taxed income from rent.

⁸ R. H. Hilton, 'Rent and Capital Formation in Feudal Society', in R. H. Hilton, *The English Peasantry in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1975), p. 209. See also R. H. Hilton, 'Some Problems of Urban Real Property in the Middle Ages', in C. H. Feinstein (ed.), *Socialism, Capitalism and Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1967).

⁹ Hilton, *The English Peasantry*, pp. 210–12.

¹⁰ W. G. Hoskins, 'English Provincial Towns in the Early Sixteenth Century', in W. G. Hoskins, *Provincial England* (1965), pp. 86–114.

¹¹ P(ublic) R(ecord) O(ffice) MS E.179/239/250.

The distribution of rent income among this group of perhaps less than 2 per cent of the total population is set out in Table 1.

TABLE 1: *Distribution of taxed annual income of property-owners in Oxford in the tallage of 1312*

£0 ≈ 5	58 (72%)
£5 ≈ 10	13 (c. 16%)
£10 ≈ 15	8 (10%)
£15+	2 (c. 3%)

In both Bristol and Oxford, then, the citizens' rent income was concentrated in the hands of a very small percentage of the urban population, and in both the number of citizens with rent incomes in excess of £5 was extremely low.¹² Here, however, the similarities end for, even allowing for the population of Bristol being twice that of Oxford in 1312 (say 10,000), the numbers drawing on rent income in Bristol were proportionally substantially larger than those in Oxford (perhaps as much as twice). Again, the town with the larger population and greater number of property owners with taxed rent income was also the town with the smaller number of persons possessing rent income in excess of £5 per annum. The overwhelming numbers of those taxed on rent income in Bristol in 1312 were taxed on incomes of £5 and below. In Oxford about 30 per cent of those taxed on rent income possessed such incomes of £5 and above as against about 5 per cent in Bristol. Compared with Bristol, Oxford seems to have possessed a significant group of citizens enjoying moderately large incomes from urban rent. Thirteen of the group had rent incomes of between £5 and £10 and the other ten of between £10 and £20. The largest single income of this kind was of £20 held by Lucy de Kingeston and, noticeably, six other women, probably widows, were among the twenty-three with rent incomes of £5 and over. Among the men the Wormenhale brothers were first, Robert being assessed on £17 10s and Phillip on £13. Arriving in Oxford late in the thirteenth century, this family seems to have risen to prominence by means, in part at least, of marriage alliances with leading families among the urban elite. Others too were relatively recent arrivals but most had come to play an important role in town government.

Significantly, however, there was no precise correlation between those with the most substantial incomes from rent and those paying

¹² Twenty-three in Bristol, though that number probably includes three ecclesiastical houses. See Hilton, *The English Peasantry*, p. 209.

the highest assessments on moveable wealth. Of the twenty-three with incomes from rent of £5 and over, seven were not taxed on moveables at all. Among the most prosperous of townsmen, measured by ownership of moveable wealth, there were those who had no income from rent and others, such as John de Beverle who was assessed on moveable wealth to the value of £37 19s 4½d but on no more than 15s rent. Nonetheless, there were also those with a more balanced distribution of rent income and moveable wealth, and about half of all those assessed on rent income were also assessed on moveable wealth: Robert and Phillip Wormenhale topped the list with assessments on £70 4s 8½d and £50 respectively. It is clear, moreover, that such accumulations of rent income in Oxford were not confined to the early decades of the fourteenth century. The chance survival among the archives of New College, Oxford,¹³ of accounts, charters, and other muniments concerned with Oxford properties and rents acquired by the college from the confiscated estates of the one-time Chief Justice, Sir Robert Tresilian, enables the history of a small urban holding to be traced to its origins. The holding consisted of 46 messuages, 20 shops, 6 solars, 12 cellars, 34 acres of arable land, 16 acres of meadow, and 160s rent in the town and suburbs of Oxford, as well as a fishery in the Thames and the advowson of Stodley's chantry in the church of All Saints. Tresilian had acquired the holding, it seems, from Richard and Agnes Preston of London, and Agnes had inherited it from her former husband, John de Stodley of Oxford, who had been responsible for gathering together this urban estate.¹⁴ The total annual value after the deduction of rents due (*summa clara per annum*) was reckoned by the inquisition into Tresilian's estates to be £31 12s 6d, though in 1385-6 the rent-collector's account for Tresilian's Oxford possessions recorded the total annual value of his rents before due payments and expenses as £56 19s 3d,¹⁵ and, in March 1389, William Wykeham, bishop of Winchester, was prepared to pay the king 240 marks (£160) for the forfeited property, reserving an annuity of 40 marks (£26 13s 4d) to Stodley's widow, Agnes.¹⁶

Little is known of John de Stodley before his mayoralty of 1348-9 and he may have been a wealthy, recent immigrant. He was

¹³ See especially New College MSS 6700-6711. I am grateful to the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford, for the use of their documents, to F. W. Steer, New College Archivist, for producing them, and to Mrs Fenely, the Assistant Librarian, for making them available to me in the College Library.

¹⁴ *Cal(endar of) Inq(uisitions) Misc(ellaneous)*, 1387-93, vol. v, pp. 84-6.

¹⁵ New College MS 6700.

¹⁶ New College MS 'Registrum Evidentiae', vol. i, p. 205.

involved in town government, owned a tavern, and may have been active in the cloth trade but most of what is known of him is contained in his will.¹⁷ Alderman, bailiff, and eight times mayor between 1348–9 and 1371, how he came by his holding is unclear though it seems unlikely that inheritance played any significant part in its acquisition.¹⁸ His will was the orthodox statement of a prosperous Oxford burgess with bequests distributed among the religious orders and particular attention given to his parish church of All Saints and especially to the chapel of the Holy Trinity. More remarkable was his concern to ensure that his property should remain as a consolidated holding owned by his family, initially, by his wife, Agnes, after her death, by his son, John, and his heirs, and, after John, by his sister Alice, and her heirs. Such a concern was probably only possible in a wealthy man who had no need to sell off his property to clear his debts but the attempt to establish and maintain a family holding was unusual.

Certainly the properties were potentially valuable. Most of them were situated in the business quarters of the town and included inns and substantial tenements. In the central parish of St Martin, among many other tenements, he held his two most valuable investments, 'Pates Inn' (formerly 'Somonours Inn') and the shops attached to it, and the towered 'Gyngevers Inn' with its shops, as well as rents from 'Maugerhall' and a shop with cellar and solar. In the parish of All Saints he held 'Stodley's Inn' and a number of shops near the Apothecary Row, and other tenements; and there were more tenements in St Aldates, St Ebbe's and St Peter's-le-Bailly. At a time when business failure and high mortality were forces strongly disintegrative of merchant and artisan accumulation the chance survival of Stodley's holdings warns against too ready an assumption that a lack of evidence is indicative of an attitude of mind among English townsmen prejudiced against the adoption of the role of urban *rentier*.

Though no 1312 tallage exists for Canterbury there does survive a survey of urban real property drawn up to assess murage in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, and while this survey does omit important suburbs of the city it seems justifiable to consider it as a reasonable guide to the commercial and trading community and to

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 201–2.

¹⁸ In 1354 Joan Bloxham granted him her tenement on 'le Montis' near Oxford castle 'for the expenses about the sepulture of my body, and also for other alms for the good of my soul'. *Liber Albus Civitatis Oxoniensis*, ed. W. P. Ellis and Rev. H. E. Salter.

suppose that the rent-holdings may be taken as fairly representative.¹⁹ Some 920 holdings were assessed and, according to the survey, of their total rentable value of a little over £697 about 60 per cent of rent income was in lay hands, a striking reversal of conditions in early fourteenth-century Oxford. Once again, however, the ownership of property and rent income was relatively concentrated, with 250 separate individuals assessed or, perhaps, about 5 per cent of the total population. The more substantial holdings are considered in some detail in Table 2.

TABLE 2: *Leading holdings of townsmen in late fourteenth-century Canterbury (of total rentable value over £5 per annum)*

	Messuages & tenements	Shops	Inns	Other
John Bonyngton	6	8	1	1
John Chyrche	3	10	0	2
Robert Cowpar	5	2	0	2
John Dygge	3	9	0	0
Thomas de Hothe	5	20	0	3
Thomas Ikham	9	16	0	4
Thomas Lane	6	2	1	3
William Lane	9	3	0	1
Nicholas Lyncolle	(4)	(?)	0	0
William Mason	6	7	0	2
William Morton	2	1	0	1
Adam Prophete	2	12	0	0
John Prowde	3	6	0	0
Simon Salysbery	3	4	0	0
John Scheldwych	5	7	0	2
Stephen Sellynger	7	0	0	0
John Sextayn	5	12	0	0
Richard Water	2	5	0	0

Eighteen of Canterbury's citizens may be seen to possess a potential rent income in excess of £5 per annum and were involved in leasing their property. Hothe, Mason, Scheldwych, Sellynger, Prophete, Chyrche, Cowpar, Dygge, Lyncolle, Morton, Prowde, Salysbery, and Water all had property of a rentable value of between £5 and £10. Sextayn's property was valued at over £11, William Lane's at more than £12, Thomas Lane's at more than £13, Ikham's at over

¹⁹ C(anterbury) C(athedral) L(ibrary) MS B/A/D/1. Consideration of this survey is included in a full study of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Canterbury and its region currently in preparation.

£17, and Bonyngton's at more than £20. In Canterbury, therefore, a town of similar size to that of Oxford, only 7 per cent of those assessed in the murage survey possessed property of rentable value greater than £5 per annum, proportionally greater than the similar category in the larger town of Bristol but significantly smaller than that in Oxford.

Whether in Oxford, Canterbury, or Bristol the number of individuals drawing on urban rent income is clearly small and the volume of that rent income hardly such as to form the basis of mercantile fortunes. Nevertheless, the recognition that in English provincial towns rent income played little part in contributing to merchant capital formation should not obscure its very real importance. During the later middle ages the numbers of genuine merchants in provincial towns of the size of Oxford and Canterbury was probably very small. The trade and craft activities which occupied the majority of townsmen in this period served a limited and frequently uncertain regional market. For many, therefore, the rent incomes described above (including some smaller than £5 per annum) must have represented a vital contribution to their prosperity and status. The active participation of townsmen in the urban property market might be read as one indicator of buoyancy in the urban economy. Considered collectively, the degree of control of urban rent income by the townsmen must affect any interpretation of the overall development of particular towns. The inability of individuals to maintain their real property and industrial stock at a time of high mortality and falling demand, such as that experienced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, must have contributed largely to conditions of urban decline. The investigation of such indicators, however, needs more case studies and at this stage the rent rolls of urban institutions provide a more ready guide. It is the intention of what follows to investigate such materials for the two most important institutional landlords in Oxford and Canterbury—Oseney Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral Priory.

In Oxford in 1312 ecclesiastical landlords held some 75 per cent of the town's total assessed income from rent (i.e. £698 17s 11d of £934 9s 3d). At this time, before the encroachments of the colleges, four institutions commanded this dominant position: Oseney Abbey, Godstow Abbey, the Priory of St Frideswide, and the Hospital of St John the Baptist. It was a dominance achieved, for the most part, in the thirteenth century, when sales, grants in return for corrodies, and gifts swelled the urban rent rolls of these houses.

Among these Oseney Abbey's holding was the largest and represented about 20 per cent of all the rents assessed in 1312. Its properties were to be found in all fifteen of Oxford's parishes though there were particular concentrations in St Michael's at the Northgate, St Mary the Virgin's, and St Thomas' (later St George). Though they included academic halls they were generally properties representing a good cross-section of dwellings, shops, and inns. In tracing the movement of rent levels for Oseney's urban holdings, therefore, it is argued that the evidence is such as to encourage generalisations about the whole of Oxford.

The Rev. H. E. Salter, writing in 1936, considered that 'the decay of Oxford can be abundantly proved from the cartularies and rentals of Oseney and the Hospital of St John. We can notice in the rentals the decrease in the rents of the tenements; by 1340 it can be seen, and houses were falling into decay even then. After the Black Death it was very marked.'²⁰ He went on to suggest that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tenements were being pulled down and that rebuilding began in the early sixteenth century.²¹ Similar arguments had been proposed earlier in the introduction to his edition of the rentals of the Hospital of St John.²² Working from his printed editions of the rentals Salter envisaged fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Oxford as a depopulated city of crumbling tenements, and its decay as the physical collapse of the city's buildings. Unfortunately, Salter omitted to publish much of the financial material written on the rentals. 'Many of these rentals have rough notes of the amounts which were collected,' he wrote, 'but they are not worth printing; sometimes more was received than was due for the year, because the rent had been in arrears, but generally less than was due; for in the Mediaeval Ages bad debts were common.'²³ When he came to use the rentals to illuminate Oxford's late medieval history, therefore, they were given without vital details of the terms of payment, adjusted rents, and termly payments. In the light of these details Salter's chronology and conclusions need substantial modification.

Evidence of 'decay' is to be found even earlier than Salter imagined. In the rental fragment assigned a date of between 1283

²⁰ Rev. H. E. Salter, 'Medieval Oxford', *Oxford Historical Society*, vol. c (1936), p. 87.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87–8.

²² Rev. H. E. Salter (ed.), 'A Cartulary of the Hospital of St John the Baptist', vol. III, *Oxford Historical Society*, vol. LXIX (1916).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

and 1316²⁴ the phrase *in decasus* is to be found written against some tenements, while in the rental of c. 1300²⁵ *decidit* is written against another. From this time on *in decasus* is a commonplace in Oseney rentals throughout the period under discussion. The only rentals free of this 'decay', indeed, are those of 1260, 1266, c. 1270, 1277-8, 1280 and c. 1285, only six of the thirty-one surviving.²⁶ These six rentals, however, were not free from signs of difficulties. In 1260 one tenement, at least, had been in arrears for twelve years,²⁷ in 1266 two tenements in St Ebbe's parish had been in arrears for many years,²⁸ while one in Mary Magdalen parish had been in arrears for six years.²⁹ In c. 1270 altered parochial totals indicate the volume of arrears, the total for Mary Magdalen being changed from the declared value of £4 6s 10d to £1 12s 4d and the grand total of arrears being set at £22 15s 5½d.³⁰ The rental for 1277-8 possesses a *debet* column whose parochial totals are set beside the declared values: St Mary the Virgin rents had a declared value of £36 2s 7d but debts of over £29 7s, St Peter's in the East had a declared value of £19 10s 8d but debts of £16 12s 5½d, St John's had a declared value of £5 8s ()d but debts of £3 17s 10d, St George and St Thomas' had a declared value of £7 13s 2d and debts of £6 10s 2½d; the total of declared values for all parishes amounted to £143 11s 2d while debts amounted to more than £92 8s.³¹ In 1280 two tenements in St Ebbe's are once more said to have been in arrears for many years,³² while in the rental of c. 1285 the *recto* of the membrane reveals payments insufficient to meet the declared values and the *verso* bears a *debet* column which has sums against most holdings ranging from 25s to 1d.³³ Any signs of financial difficulty met in Oseney's early fourteenth-century rentals would seem to have had a considerable history.

Scyén Oseney rentals survive for the early fourteenth century

²⁴ Bodl(eian Library) MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 551; for the dating of the rentals see Salter (ed.), *Oxf. Hist. Soc.*, vol. xix.

²⁵ Bodl. MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 549.

²⁶ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 52, MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 548, MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 53, 54, 55 and 56.

²⁷ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 52: 'Domus que fuit Pille . . . ar'. xij. annorum'.

²⁸ Bodl. MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 548: 'retro per multos annos'.

²⁹ Bodl. MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 548: 'Tenementum Walteri Fabri per Goderidum . . . retro per vj annos'.

³⁰ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 53: 'Summa Summarum arerag' xxij li. xv s. v d. ob'.

³¹ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 54.

³² Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 55: 'Dom' Leticie le Palm' and 'Dom' (. . .) ach per Henr' Punchard', probably the same two as in 1266.

³³ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 56.

before the Black Death of 1348-9,³⁴ and it is here that Oxford's 'decay' is first encountered. What is clear from a study of the financial evidence of the rentals is that this decay is an administrative convention applied to rents, making tacit acknowledgement of privately negotiated rent levels agreed in advance of the official alteration of the declared value. Thus in 1324 Mag. J. de Nassington held 'Domus Lucie de Wurthe' in the parish of St Mary the Virgin of declared annual value of 42s for which he paid 40s in five instalments and against which payments on the rental was written 'In decasus ijs.' followed by the abbreviation for *quietus*, indicating that the tenant had discharged his obligations.³⁵ Some time between c. 1285 and c. 1300, when 'decidit vj d hoc anno' was written on the Oseney rental,³⁶ in the abbacy of Roger de Coventry or John de Bibury, an administrative decision was taken, possibly in the face of mounting arrears, and at a moment when financial and administrative reform was being widely considered by owners of estates, to alter the Abbey's rent policy. Such decay as appears in the early fourteenth-century rentals has nothing to do with rotting fabric and does not indicate a change in urban landscape but it does mark an important first stage in the changing fortunes of this late-medieval town.

Six rentals cover the fourteenth century following the first visitation of the Black Death.³⁷ The new rent policy did not cure the problem of debts and arrears. The rental fragment for 1353 shows altered parochial totals for Mary Magdalen and St Edward's despite substantial decayed rent adjustments.³⁸ Of the twenty-one holdings discernible for Mary Magdalen four have rent adjustments involving decays of 3s, £2 16s 0d, 24s, and 9s 4d, notably from those holdings carrying the heaviest rent burdens, holdings which nonetheless sustained arrears in excess of 25s. In St Edward's parish there seem to have been two similar adjustments, in All Saints' three and at least two in St Martin's. The total of these decays recoverable from this rental fragment is £6 9s 10d. Not all the adjustments, however, were of decay, and one shop in All Saints' had its rent altered from 8s to 10s.

³⁴ Bodl. MSS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 551 (1283-1316), 549 (c. 1300), MSS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 57 (1317), 59 (1320), 58 (1324), and 80 (c. 1327).

³⁵ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 58.

³⁶ Bodl. MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 549.

³⁷ Bodl. MSS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 60 (c. 1353), 73 (pre-1366), 62 (c. 1370), 66 (c. 1389), MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 553 (c. 1391), and D.D. Ch. Ch. O.R. 90 (c. 1387).

³⁸ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 60.

By the second half of the fourteenth century it had become usual accounting practice in the Oseney rent rolls to refer to the expected rent after the declared value and following the rubric 'hoc anno'. The expected rent was then followed by the payment and, where appropriate, an arrears clause. Following this method the surviving fragment for the pre-1366 rent roll³⁹ shows eleven reduced or decayed rents producing a total of £1 7s 8d by way of reduction and arrears on these 'decayed' rents of £1 11s 8d. The returns for St Mary the Virgin do not survive in full but decays may be recovered of £5 13s 10d supporting arrears of £2 3s 7d. In the parish of St Mildred there were decays of as much as £5 4s 4d on only five of the twelve properties held there with arrears of £1 6s 10d on these five properties. What little survives for St Peter in the East confirms this picture, with decays of at least £1 10s 0d and associated arrears of 12s. As in 1353, some rents showed adjustments of rent increases, an administrative fiction to be known in the fifteenth-century Oseney rent rolls as 'incrementum redditus' and indicating payment of arrears. Only three such arrangements to pay arrears were made in this rent roll and none was completely fulfilled, although two of the payments were greater than the declared value of the rent.

The rent roll of c.1370⁴⁰ preserves only the returns for St John's, St Edward's, All Saints', and St Martin's, in full. No record of payments or arrears were made on this roll, or succeeding rolls, only adjustments and vacancies being entered. In St John's parish there were decays of £2 2s 2d on four of the eight properties held there, in St Edward's £1 13s 8d on three out of eight properties, in All Saints' £2 6s 4d on two out of sixteen properties, and in St Martin's 10s on two out of fourteen properties. The fragment for St Peter in the East shows £1 11s 8d on two out of twenty-nine properties, and that for St Peter in the Bailly £1 14s 11d on five out of fourteen properties.

The next surviving roll for c.1387⁴¹ shows decays of £3 19s 4d in the parish of St Peter in the East on ten of nineteen properties (excluding thirteen 'infra colleg' Wint'), of £2 8s 10d in St John's on four of eight properties, of £3 17s 8d in St Edward's on four of eight properties, of £1 8s 0d in St Martin's on three of sixteen properties, and of £2 15s 0d in St Peter in the Bailly on nine of nineteen properties. In St Ebbe's there were decays of £2 6s 0d on two of nine properties, in St Aldate's 4s on one of three properties, in St Michael's at the Southgate there was none, in St Giles' 12s on the

³⁹ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 73.

⁴⁰ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 62.

⁴¹ Bodl. MS D.D. Ch. Ch. O.R. 90.

single property, in Mary Magdalen £2 1s 0d on four of twenty-one properties, and there were decays of £5 18s 2d in St George's parish on thirty-nine of seventy-eight properties. In the fragment for St Mary the Virgin there were decays of £7 11s 8d on twenty-one of forty-seven properties. Numerous 'incremental' adjustments are also to be found in this roll: six in All Saints' (£2 18s 6d), four in St Martin's (£1 10s 8d), three in St Peter in the Bailly (6s 8d), five in St Mary the Virgin (£1 3s 4d), and two in St George's (5s 4d).

In c.1389⁴² twenty-one of thirty-six holdings in the parish of St Mary the Virgin carried decays of £10 13s 8d while 'increments' on three holdings amounted to 10s 8d. Of sixteen holdings in St Peter's in the East eight were in decay to the sum of £3 16s 4d, of eight in St John's three were in decay to a total of £2 9s 8d, and four of eight holdings in St Edward's held decays of £2 10s 4d. In All Saints' one property was in decay of £2 0s 6d while 'increments' on six holdings amounted to £2 19s 0d. St Martin's knew decays of £3 15s 8d on seven of the twenty properties held there but also carried 'increments' of £1 2s 0d.

The final fourteenth-century fragment of c.1391⁴³ shows complete returns only for St Ebbe's, St Aldate's, St Michael's at the Southgate and St Giles'. St Ebbe's has decays of £2 10s 0d on three of nine holdings, St Aldate's 4s on one of three, and no decays are recorded in St Giles' or at St Michael's at the Southgate. The fragments for St Peter's in the Bailly and St Mary Magdalen's give decays of 13s 4d on five holdings and 9s on one holding respectively.

The best evidence for the decay of rents in this period comes from the rental of c.1387 where 98 properties out of 229 are seen to be in decay. There is, however, insufficient material in the late fourteenth-century rentals to indicate increasing or declining numbers of decayed rents. The evidence for vacancies is scarcely more revealing, though there is a slight suggestion of a rise to the thirty-seven of c.1387. With vacancies, as with decayed rents, it was St George's parish which carried the greatest burden, with twenty-two vacancies in c.1387 and twenty in c.1389.

In view of the fragmentary nature of the evidence the best method of ascertaining developments in this period is to trace the movement of individual or groups of rents for which materials may be found in all or most of the rentals. There is sufficient evidence for five parishes to make some kind of generalisation possible. What is immediately noticeable is that between the first visitation of the

⁴² Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 66.

⁴³ Bodl. MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 553.

plague and the end of the fourteenth century there seems to have been no alteration of the declared value of rents. Measuring the movement of negotiated rent levels, however, the lowest point in St Martin's, St John's, Mary Magdalen, St Edward's and All Saints' for most of thirty-seven holdings came in c.1353 and was followed by some recovery later in the century. Thus in St Martin's, 'tenementum primum Hosarii', bearing a declared value of 46s 8d, received negotiated rents of 30s in c.1353, and 40s in c.1370, c.1387 and c.1389; in St John's, 'tenementum Johanni de sancto Johanno', with a declared value of 38s 4d, received 13s in c.1353, 33s 4d in c.1370, 26s 8d in c.1387 and 20s in c.1389; in Mary Magdalen two cottages of Eylmer and John Rusi with separate declared values of 3s and 11s received together 10d in c. 1353, while the cottage of John Rusi received 2s in c. 1387 and c. 1391; in St Edward's, 'tenementum Alicie Salleys', with a declared value of 24s, received 8s in c. 1353, 5s in c. 1370, and 14s in c. 1387 and c. 1389; and in All Saints', 'tenementum secundum Swetyngcadica', with a declared value of 30s, received 20s in c. 1353, 40s in c. 1370, 30s in c. 1387 and 40s in c. 1389.

The movement of declared values and negotiated rents in this post-Black Death period, however, must be set in the context of the movement of rents from the date of the first surviving Oseney rental. Concentrating on those five parishes for which late fourteenth-century evidence is best, the movement of declared values between 1260 and 1353 is of a decline which seems to begin some time between 1266 and 1277-8, that period for which the rentals of c. 1270 and 1277-8, as was shown above, record a substantial accumulation of debts. The decline of rents is most clearly seen among these parishes in that of St Edward. Between 1260 and 1266 declared values in the parish were unchanged but by 1277-8 five of the eight Oseney properties here, carrying rents of 56s 8d, 46s 8d, 30s, 53s 4d and 30s, had been reduced by 15, 14, 30, 17, and 40 per cent. By 1316 further reductions of 10 per cent had been made on two of those five properties, amounting to total reductions of 40 and 27 per cent. The complete rental of 1317 shows also an increase, which may have been present on the damaged rental of 1316, altering an early reduction of 40 per cent to one of only 20 per cent. No change was indicated in 1324 but by c. 1353 two further reductions had been made which brought total reductions on the five declared values to 24, 14, 47, 27 and 20 per cent over the 93 years.

Where the evidence is sufficient for other parishes it confirms that

pattern already described. In St Mildred's between 1260 and 1280, and in St Mary the Virgin's and St Peter's in the East between 1266 and 1277-8, the first significant reductions of declared values were made. From c. 1280 until 1317 some further reductions were made, including three in St Peter's in the Bailly, but there is a tendency towards a stability which despite occasional reductions persists until the mid-fourteenth century, except in St Ebbe's where two large reductions of 25 and 50 per cent were made between 1317 and 1324. Some reductions occur in the second half of the century but, where they can be detected, after 1324, even in the parish of St Peter in the East, they were few.

Such movement of declared values however, is no more than a measurement of administrative response and decision. More important is to determine how far the movement of declared values corresponded with the movement of negotiated rents and how far the recoveries of negotiated rent levels in the late fourteenth century brought payments to their pre-Black Death level.

The absence of specific indications of negotiated rents before c. 1300 makes the real levels of demand difficult to estimate for the thirteenth century. The accumulation of arrears, however, in the 1260s and 1270s is suggestive of a level well below that of the declared values. In 1266 payments towards the declared value of 40s for 'tenementum Johanni de sancto Johanno' amounted to 20s and in 1277-8 on a reduced declared value of 32s for the same tenement the same amount was paid. In 1270 arrears for the year of fifteen out of twenty-four properties in St Mary Magdalen's were at 25 per cent of the declared value and above, and in 1285 arrears for the year on selds in St Michael's at the Northgate seem to indicate payments of only 50 per cent.

Seven rentals survive for the early fourteenth century, all giving evidence of reduced rents and debts⁴⁴ and two of which, of 1317 and 1324, are complete. The fragment dated between 1283 and 1316 concerns St Thomas' parish only. While incomplete the parish shows fifty-two holdings for which only three 'in decasus' clauses can be distinguished, involving two reductions of 1s from a declared value of 3s and 2s from a declared value of 5s. Many debts are shown but most seem to have been paid later. Two holdings are said to have been in arrears for eight years and two others are said to have the whole rent outstanding though one of these was later partially paid. In general, where debts remain outstanding they are not substantial. There is, moreover, no indication of vacancies.

⁴⁴ See above n. 35.

The fragment for *c.* 1300 is badly damaged and yields financial material for only three parishes—All Saints', St Martin's, and St Peter's in the Bailly. In All Saints' there is financial evidence for only four holdings and in two of these three stalls with declared values of 8s and 6s 6d carried debts for the year of 2s and 3s 6d. Full payment is made, however, for 'Domus Sweting' and 'Tenementum Ricardi aurifabri'. The best evidence survives for St Martin's parish where no decays or vacancies are recorded but where the year's debts have been totalled at £1 1s 6d against the total declared value of £6 10s 8d. The heaviest debts seem to have been enjoyed by the shops here, with 'Selda Wythull' paying nothing, though two stalls only were completely exempt from arrears. Except for one reduced rent previously mentioned there is little visible financial material of use for St Peter's in the Bailly though two houses and one shop do have fully paid rents.

Five parishes supply materials for the fragment of *c.* 1316 and give the first clear evidence of serious difficulties in the first half of the fourteenth century. The eight visible holdings for the parish of St Mary the Virgin contain at least one vacancy while in St Peter's in the East there are eight vacancies for twenty-seven holdings, in St John's three for ten holdings, in St Edward's none for five holdings, but in St Thomas' nine for fifty-eight holdings. With the majority of Oseney holdings absent from this fragment the total of twenty-one vacancies must be considered large.

Damage to the margins of the membrane makes comprehensive calculation of the year's debts impossible but in St Peter's in the East where vacancies were high the whole declared value of 34s was outstanding on 'Domus Martel', 21s was owed of 26s for 'Domus Radulphi de Hayles', 8s 4d was owed of 53s 4d for 'Aula Wyleby', and, as far as can be detected, only one or two rents were paid in full. With 'Domus Communis', St Nicholas' Hall, the Hall of the four sons of Edmund, and le Bole Hall all vacant, and 'Domus Couele' probably vacant for part of the year, besides three other vacant houses, the signs of economic dislocation are considerable in this parish.

In St John's, where three halls were vacant, no properties seem to have had fully paid rents and there were debts of £1 5s 6d on declared values of £3 4s 0d. Information for St Edward's parish is insufficient but in St Thomas', where a substantial fragment survives and vacancies affected most kinds of holdings, one rent was wholly in arrears and at least twelve of the fifty-eight holdings showed debts for the year to a total of more than £1 3s 11d on declared values in

excess of £2 12s 8d. The house of Traise, the house of Jordan the baker and the house of Gilbert the tailor, moreover, with declared values of 12s, 5s and 12s all paid no more than 50 per cent.

The first complete rental, of 1317, is unfortunately so obscured by repair-work that it is difficult to interpret. This probably accounts in part for the decline of the number of vacancies from those twenty-one in the fragment of *c.* 1316 to no more than ten in 1317. Where comparison is possible between the rental of *c.* 1316 and that of 1317, however, there are some indications of improvement. In the parish of St Peter's in the East three houses, the Hall of the four sons of Edmund and le Bole Hall remain vacant but St Nicholas' Hall and 'Domus Communis' were now occupied and paying rent, as was 'Domus Martel'. In St John's at least five rents were now paid in full and three Halls, previously vacant, were now occupied. One house in St Thomas', previously vacant, was now occupied though apparently only paying 2s of a declared value of 8s. Some evidence of previous difficulties may, however, be detected. The three Halls in St John's, though now occupied, were paying decayed rents which, in the case of St Andrew's Hall brought the negotiated level 20 per cent below the declared value. In St Ebbe's two tenements were in decay: 'Domus Hattere' reduced by 80 per cent and Grove, or Bolle Hall by 12½ per cent. Three holdings previously in arrears in St Thomas' are in decay of 6d each, in 1317, of declared values of 5s and are nonetheless in arrears. It may also be significant that a number of entries indicate that some tenants were being asked to provide sureties, both financial and personal, before entering into holdings and that this rental records many allowances ('allocationes') for rents among which are an unusually high number made against rents for goods provided for the Abbey.

The rental fragment for 1320 only provides materials for part of Mary Magdalen and the whole of St Thomas'. The Mary Magdalen fragment shows at least one vacancy and there are eight in St Thomas'. For twenty-six holdings in Mary Magdalen parish there were debts for the year of £3 2s 2d on twelve holdings with five others fully in debt for unspecified amounts while the total declared value for Oseney's twenty-eight properties in the parish stood at £11 1s 5d. In the same parish 'Domus Bost' was said to have been fully in arrears for many years and 'Domus Bast', with a declared value of 13s, was in decay by 5s.

Debts for the year in St Thomas' amounted to at least £5 16s 5d as against the total declared rent value of £21 13s 1d, with ten out of eighty-two properties wholly in arrears, two of which had been in

arrears for many years. Nine holdings in this parish were now in decay, including five cottages, two houses, and St George's Hall, although only 'Domus Cementarii', whose declared value of 16s had been reduced to a negotiated level of 6s, managed to pay in full.

Where comparisons with the rental of 1317 are possible, in St Thomas' parish, it seems that annual debts persisted on individual holdings while some others whose rents were being paid in 1317 had fallen vacant by 1320. Decays of 6d each on one house and two cottages in 1317 were no longer present in 1320 but the declared value of 5s for the house was underpaid by 3s 9d, one of the cottages was only occupied for half the year and the other was in arrears.

The best evidence for the early fourteenth century comes in the full rental of 1324, and this indicates the worst conditions yet encountered in this period. The total number of vacancies was now forty-three: three in St Michael's at the Northgate, one in St Mildred's, seven in St Mary the Virgin's, eight in St Peter's in the East, one in St John's, two in All Saints', three in Mary Magdalen's and eighteen in St Thomas'. The total loss from vacancies amounted to £13 13s 4d, with the burden shared principally between St Thomas' (£4 9s 7d), St Peter's in the East (£4 2s 7d), and St Mary the Virgin's (£2 13s 8d). The volume of decays was now more than £5 7s 11d on forty-nine holdings, fifteen of which were in St Thomas', ten in St Michael's at the Northgate, eight in St Mary the Virgin's, five in St Peter's in the East, two in St John's, St Ebbe's, and Mary Magdalen's, one in St Mildred's, St Edward's, All Saints', St Peter's in the Bailly and St Giles', and none in St Martin's, St Aldate's and St Michael's at the Southgate. The debts for the year amounted to £31 10s 6d, with St Thomas', St Michael's at the Northgate, St Peter's in the East and St Mary the Virgin's, once again carrying the greatest burdens, though totals were high in All Saints', St Martin's and Mary Magdalen's. If debts, decays, and losses from vacancies are added together the total of £49 17s 9d indicates that income fell some 29 per cent below the declared value of £170 11s 1d in 1324.

Comparison with the rentals of 1317 and 1320 demonstrates the deterioration of conditions. Where declared values were being met in 1317 at least eleven holdings had decays in 1324 in St Mildred's, St Peter's in the East, St John's, St Edward's and St Thomas', and many such decayed rents also supported arrears. In St Peter's in the East 'Domus orientalis sub muro', the Hall of the four sons of Edmund and Bole Hall were vacant in 1317 and 1324, but elsewhere vacancies had sprung up where there had been none in 1317

despite newly introduced decays of rent. In St John's, St Martin's, St Peter's in the Bailly and St Ebbe's, 'Domus Angularis', 'Selda Wythill', 'Domus Lanbyn' and 'Domus Willelmi de Montibus', and 'Terra Newet', fully paid in 1317 were completely in arrears in 1324. Since 1320 vacancies and decays had risen in Mary Magdalen's and St Thomas', though the total of debts was reduced in each case, from £5 16s 5½d to £4 8s 1d in St Thomas'. St George's Hall, in St Thomas', which in 1320 had a declared value of 33s, was in decay by 2s and owed 7s 5d for the year, was fully paid in 1324 but on a declared value of only 9s. 'Domus Trasse', in the same parish, with a declared value of 12s was no longer vacant as it had been in 1320 but now was in decay by 4s 4d and owing 6s 9d for the year. Elsewhere in Mary Magdalen's and St Thomas' the same tendency is to be observed, with deterioration most severe in the latter parish.

On the membrane fragment for c. 1327 it is possible to detect twenty-one vacancies in the seven parishes for which information survives even though, because of the condition of the rental, such a total must be considered a low estimate. There were at least four in St Mary the Virgin's, eight in St Peter's in the East, three in Mary Magdalen's, and six in St. Thomas'. Some thirty decayed rents are similarly distinguishable: six in St Mary the Virgin's, five in St Peter's in the East, one in St John's, two in All Saints', and sixteen in St Thomas'.

Comparison with the rental of 1324 suggests that many vacancies may have persisted. In the parish of St Mary the Virgin two cellars remained unoccupied as did 'Scole inferiores (ubi bos depingebatur)'; in St Peter's in the East two houses, three cottages, the Hall of the four sons of Edmund and le Bole Hall were all recorded as vacant in both rentals; and three cottages in St Thomas' were also empty. In many cases where holdings were in debt or vacant in 1324 decays had been introduced by 1327. One solar and 'scole inferiores Pilett', in the parish of St Mary the Virgin, both vacant in 1324 were in decay in 1327, and the same is true of 'Domus Roland' and 'Cotagium Willelmi le Messenger' in St Thomas'. 'Domus Johanni Mabbe' and 'Domus Henrici le Scattare' in St Thomas', wholly in debt in 1324, were in decay in 1327. Elsewhere, for 'Scole superiores ubi bos depingebatur' and 'Domus Balehorn' in St Mary the Virgin's, and 'Aula cum ulmo' in St Peter's in the East, despite payment of the declared values in 1324 decays had been introduced by 1327. In all, comparison confirms the impression of the enduring difficulty suggested by the Abbey Proctor's account for 1326/7

which gives the total value of decayed rents as £5 14s 10d and £9 6s 4d outstanding 'In divers dom' vacant propter non inhabitantes',⁴⁵ compared with decays of £5 7s 11d and vacancies of £13 13s 4d in 1324.

No other Oseney rental survives for the early fourteenth century after that of *c.* 1327 and discussion of this period from rental evidence and comparison with conditions in the late fourteenth century can only be based on approximately the first thirty years. The outlines of developments up to *c.* 1327, however, may be broadly defined. Following the cumulative growth of arrears declared values were reduced in the 1270s but the failure of these and subsequent reductions to correspond to real levels of payment and demand prompted the introduction of an administrative technique at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries whereby rents were temporarily reduced by small amounts to conform more closely to real levels. The use of this technique tended to freeze the level of declared values for the rest of the century, making them an unreliable guide to economic conditions. The number and size of the reductions grew as payment and demand fell particularly during two periods of extreme difficulty recorded in the Oseney rentals in *c.* 1316 and in the 1320s. In the 1320s real rent levels seem to have fallen to about one third of the declared values which themselves had fallen by about one-third since 1260.

Comparison of real rent levels in the early fourteenth century with those after 1353 produces striking contrasts. The early period is one of decline and the late one of recovery. In the late period the number and size of decays is larger and the size of debts smaller than in the early period. Comparison of the rental of 1324 and the fragment for pre-1366 for the four parishes possible—St Michael at the Northgate, St Mary the Virgin's, St Mildred and St Peter's in the East—shows that the total of decays, arrears, and vacancies in the later rental of £20 4s 0d, though probably an underestimate, did not exceed the total of £22 14s 0d for the same parishes in 1324. Moreover, the highest number of vacancies recorded in *c.* 1387 was six less than the forty-three of 1324. It would seem that while the size and number of decayed rents in the later period were more accurately adjusted to demand, recovery from the depredations of plague was sufficient to bring real rents above or at least level with those of the 1320s by the late 1360s and, by the end of the fourteenth century, to show marked improvements over previous fourteenth-century conditions. The notion that there is evidence in

⁴⁵ Bodl. MS D.D. Ch. Ch. c. 44.

the Oseney rentals that the Black Death did enduring damage to the demand for property in Oxford would seem to be false.

There are thirty-four surviving rentals for the fifteenth century of which twenty-four are complete.⁴⁶ Only three complete rentals, however, exist for the first half of the century and there is no rental for the period between 1435 and 1449. In the second half of the century the most serious gap in the rental sequence comes between 1479 and 1497. All the fifteenth-century rentals record the declared rent values, 'hoc anno' payments, total debts and vacancies. The difference between the 'hoc anno' payment and the declared value is entered in the rent-collector's account as 'decasus redditus' but it seems now that 'hoc anno' payments are real records of amounts paid rather than an adjustment of rent levels toward market realities.

The declared rent values of most Oseney properties remained frozen at late fourteenth-century levels at least as late as 1435. By 1449, however, extensive revaluation had taken place and a new rental had been written. After 1449 the rest of the century saw few changes.

Where there were alterations of declared values recorded before 1449 they were upward revaluations. 'Tenementum Rogeri Come-nore' in St Peter's in the Bailly had a declared value of 12s raised by 50 per cent to 18s in 1412 and in St Michael's at the Northgate revisions increased each of the declared values of eight selds by 25 per cent and of their solars by 8d each to 10s 8d.

The extensive revaluations recorded in the rental of 1449 were, by and large, reductions. From a total of declared rent values of about £201 11s 9d in *c.* 1435 the total fell to about £170 4s 8d in the rental of 1449, a reduction of about 15 per cent. Only in two parishes were the new totals greater than the old—All Saints' (£11 6s 4d, £12 8s 6d) and St Thomas' (£20 7s 8d, £24 16s 4d). Among other parishes reductions in St Mildred's were most drastic with the total of declared rent values falling from £12 10s 0d to £6 15s 0d.

Though most revaluations were downward in six parishes some declared values were raised. In St Michael's at the Northgate 'Tenementum Segrym' had its declared value raised from 20s to 33s 4d while three selds underwent increases of 50 and 33 per cent.

⁴⁶ Bodl. MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 63 (1402), 64 and 70 (1406), 67 (1410–11), 71 (1412), 78 and MS Charters Oxon. (Oseney) 552 (1413), MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 79 (1417), 84 (*c.* 1420), 68 (*c.* 1422), MS D.D. Ch. Ch. O.R. 91 (1428), MS Rolls Oxon. (Oseney) 65 (*c.* 1430), 81 (*c.* 1435), Wood MS F. 10 (1452–97), Wood MS F. 15 (1498).

There was a noticeable upward revaluation of the schools in St Mary the Virgin's, together with a slight rise in the declared value of the two tenements comprising 'Glasinhall', from 51s 4d to 53s 4d. The declared values of selds in St Peter's in the East had risen and one cottage of John Bybury rose from 5s to 16s 8d while three more each rose from 5s to 6s 8d. In St Edward's the declared value of 'Solerhalle' was trebled and in All Saints', on four selds, declared values rose by amounts varying from 25 to 150 per cent. The declared rent value of 'Tenementum secundum Hosarii' in St Martin's was raised from 36s 8d to 53s 4d and that of 'Tenementum Thomas de Hanneye' from 15s to 20s. St Thomas' saw the most upward revisions, with as many as twenty-seven tenements and cottages having declared rent values raised, five of which were trebled and six of which were doubled while others varied between 10 and 60 per cent additions. Such alterations suggest the continuing recovery from the depths of the fourteenth century already noticed as beginning after 1353 and, together with reductions in declared rent values, represent yet another attempt to bring declared values closer to market levels.

Of those changes made after 1449 the large majority were upward revaluations. In St Mildred's, for example, where earlier reductions had been most severe, there were increases of between 12½ and 35 per cent on four tenements in 1455/6 and one further addition by 1457/8, bringing the total of declared rent values for the parish from the £6 15s 0d of 1449 to £7 5s 8d. 'Tenementum Litelmore', in St Mary the Virgin's, was raised from 2s to 2s 4d in 1464/5 and 'Blakhall', with a declared value of 13s 4d in 1449, was revalued upward in 1457/8 and downward in 1458/9, finding a stable level of 20s from 1459/60. By 1498 two selds in All Saints' achieved declared rent values 60 per cent above their 1449 valuations and 'Tenementum Angetil Pikerynge' was raised from 40s to 46s 8d in 1457/8. In St Peter's in the Bailly one declared value was doubled in 1465/6 and there were rises of 66 per cent and 33 per cent in 1479/80 and 1498. Small additions were made to two shops in Mary Magdalen's in 1457/8 and larger additions to two tenements later in the century, 'Welhall' and an adjacent site rising from 5s 2d in 1449 to 12s in 1467/8 and 'Tenementum secundum Johanni Plumbarii' changing from 16s 8d to 21s 4d by 1498. Changes were most numerous in St Thomas', with eighteen properties involved in twenty-two increases. Thirteen of these increases took place between 1455 and 1459, one occurred in 1477/8 and eight were recorded in 1498. The early revisions on tenements and

cottages ranged from 5 to 75 per cent with one change of 11 per cent four of 20 per cent and two each of 25 per cent and 33 per cent. In 1477/8 the revision was of a similar order of 25 per cent. Those increases of 1498 included two which trebled previous declared rent values of 9s and 26s 8d on one house and the tenements 'Hosarii'. Less spectacular were three upward revisions of 11 per cent, two of 20 per cent and one of 30 per cent, although three of these combined with earlier revisions to carry declared values to levels 33 and 50 per cent above those of 1449.

The few reductions after 1449 were confined to six parishes while in St John's, St Edward's, St Peter's in the East, St Martin's, St Aldate's and St Giles' there were neither reductions nor increases. In 1456/7 two 'selds' in St Michael's at the Northgate had their declared values reduced from 30s to 26s 8d and from 13s 4d to 10s, and Whythalle was altered from 30s to 26s 8d. 'St Thomas Hall' in St Mary the Virgin's fell from 40s to 36s 8d in 1453/4 and to 26s 8d in 1478/9, and in St Ebbe's Grovehall fell from 14s to 9s in 1457/8. In All Saints', St Michael's at the Southgate, and St Thomas' three tenements also had declared values reduced.

The net result of all these revisions together with the 'ideal' rents of tenements newly added to the rent roll in this period was to raise the total of declared rent values from the £170 4s 8d to which it had fallen in 1449 to £196 18s 3d by 1498. Such a rise, however, is again no guide to real rent levels or movements though it bears directly upon their calculation. It remains to establish the relationship between declared values and real rents in the fifteenth century and to test Salter's assumption that depopulation brought about the physical collapse of urban property.

Before 1449 only two rentals give sufficient reliable evidence to permit comparison of the volumes of decayed rents: in 1417 the total stood at £49 3s 5d and in 1428 at £59 1s 3d. A few parochial totals permit comparisons over longer periods, which seem to confirm the deterioration suggested by the rise in total from 1417 to 1428. St Michael's at the Northgate possessed decayed rents of £4 4s 4d in 1402, £5 9s 10d in 1417, and £10 17s 0d in 1428. In St Mildred's totals rose from £4 11s 0d in 1406 to £5 10s 8d in 1417 and fell to £5 3s 8d in 1428 and £4 7s 8d in c. 1430. In St Mary the Virgin's there were totals of £16 3s 4d in 1406, £19 3s 4d in 1417 and £17 1s 5d in 1428. St Peter's in the East, with the best run of reliable totals, fell from £2 18s 0d in 1402 to £2 15s 0d in 1406 and to £1 18s 4d in 1412, rising again to £2 15s 9d in 1417, falling to £2 0s 8d in c. 1420, moving to £2 5s 0d in c. 1422 and falling to £2 1s 8d

in 1428. While the total for St Aldate's remains fairly static, the totals for St Michael's at the Southgate, St Giles', and St Mary Magdalen's, in 1406, 1410/11, 1417 and 1428 show rises in the second half of the period. Totals for St John's move from £2 13s 6d in 1412, to £1 4s 6d in 1417, £2 8s 6d in c. 1420, and £1 19s 6d in c. 1422, to £2 14s 2d in 1428. Insofar as it is possible to generalise from such evidence it seems that the momentum of recovery from the late fourteenth-century was sustained into the first decade of the fifteenth, was checked in the second decade and reversed in the third. When the decayed rent totals are amended by the addition of debts and the value of vacant tenements and the subtraction of 'increments' the totals stand at £47 12s 2d and £62 19s 8d, suggesting real rent levels 24 and 31 per cent below 'ideal' levels.

The total of decayed rents for 1449 is unfortunately inadequate as many figures are illegible and the £18 14s 8d which remains must be regarded as a low estimate. The rent collector's account for 1445/6, however, supplies a total of £26 19s 0d.⁴⁷ Comparison of individual decayed rents in this account with those of 1449 suggests strongly that the account was compiled after the new rental had been written and revaluations made. As an early guide to real rents after revaluation this figure is limited by the absence of debt totals and values of vacant tenements, though a total of increments of £1 10s 0d is included. It would seem reasonable, nonetheless, to argue that following a devaluation of declared rent values of about 15 per cent real rent levels stood at least 15 per cent below declared values and that before devaluation the downward drift of real rents had continued into the fourth decade of the fifteenth century until reaching two-thirds of the total of declared rent values. If this is so then the fourth and fifth decades of the fifteenth century saw a rent crisis for Oseney Abbey as serious as that of the 1320s. The successful petition by the town in 1442 for the reduction of its tax quota from £91 7s 10d to £80 0s 8d further indicates the extent of economic hardship at this time.

The problem for Oseney Abbey was not one of a failure of demand brought about by the abandonment of properties as the town's population shrank, for in this first half of the fifteenth century vacancies were never higher than fourteen and were no more than four in 1449, but, more probably, one of a chronic inability to sustain rent levels in the face of declining prosperity and a falling rate of immigration as the complex process of economic and social restructuring took place in town and urban region at the prompting

⁴⁷ Bodl. MS D.D. Ch. Ch. O.R. 99.

of a general depopulation. The downward drift of payments may be traced on all kinds of property. In All Saints', where many declared rent values were below market level before revaluation, payment on three selds of John Bybury fell by 50, 45, and 25 per cent between 1412 and 1428, and on 6 selds and 'tenementum primum Swetyngatica' by 15 per cent. Payments on 'tenementum Alberti Greylyn', in St Michael's at the Northgate, with a declared rent value of 20s, fell from 18s in 1402 to 16s in 1412, 13s in 1417 and 11s in 1428. Two selds in the same parish, whose declared rent value was jointly 20s, received payments of 16s in 1402 and 1406, 13s in 1417 and 15s in 1428, while for 'tenementum Engericii' and a declared value of 20s payments fell from 16s in 1406 by 25 per cent to 12s in 1430. In St Peter's in the East payments on the two tenements of John Bybury, possessing a combined declared rent value of 19s, were 20s in 1402, 1406, and 1412 and fell to 17s in c. 1420, 16s in c. 1422 and to 13s 4d. in 1428, an overall fall of one-third. Payments on six cottages in the same parish with declared rent values totalling 24s moved from 35s in 1402 and 1406, to 24s 6d in 1412 and 1417, to 32s in c. 1420 and c. 1422 and to 20s 4d in 1428. Between 1406 and 1430 payments on three tenements in St Mildred's fell by about 20 per cent and in St Martin's on 'tenementum secundum Hosarii' payments fell by 25 per cent to 40s between c. 1420 and 1428, having held steady at 53s 4d. in 1406, 1410-11, 1412, 1417, and c. 1420, even though at their lowest they exceeded the declared rent value by 3s 4d. In St Ebbe's payments for a declared value of 60s on 'Aula Pauli' fell by about 14 per cent between 1417 and 1428, having remained stable at 46s 8d in 1406, 1412, and 1417, and 'tenementum Lucie de Botele' with a declared value of 18s brought payments of 12s in 1406, 1410-11, 1412, and 1417, with a 25 per cent fall in 1428. On single tenements in St Michael's at the Southgate and St Giles' there were, similarly, 50 per cent and 25 per cent falls in payment over the same period. In St Mary the Virgin's there were falls in payments of between 11 and 50 per cent on tenements, selds, and schools. Payments on the declared value of 13s 4d for 'tenementum secundum Pylet', for example, fell 16 per cent between 1406 and 1428 from 8s to 6s 8d; payments on a combined declared value of 66s 2d for ten schools declined from 21s 8d in 1406 to 16s in 1428; against a declared rent value of 10s on one seld 8s was paid in 1402, 7s in 1406, 6s 8d in 1412 and 1413, 5s in 1417 and c. 1420, 6s 8d in c. 1422, and 4s in 1428. Elsewhere, in St Peter's in the Bailly, for a declared rent value of 9s 'tenementum Galfridi Molendini' 2s was paid in 1406 and 1410-11, and 1s 6d in

1428, and in St Mary Magdalen's 'tenementum Ailrici Pally' received payments of 28s in 1406, 1410-11 and 1417, falling to 20s in 1428 on a declared rent value of 36s. Only in St Thomas', where most upward revisions of declared rent values had been made by 1449, did payments show any general tendency to rise over the period. Even here, however, a few holdings showed falls in payments of between 5 and 45 per cent.

After 1449, when surviving evidence is more complete, the movement of rents may be followed annually in some considerable detail, as indicated in Table 3.⁴⁸ The second half of the fifteenth

TABLE 3: *The movement of urban rents of Oseney Abbey, Oxford, 1452/3-1497/8*

	Total declared rent values	Decayed rents	Arrears
1452-3	£181 13 8	£39 13 4	£286 4 0
1453-4	181 13 8	44 14 10	268 6 10
1454-5	181 13 8	82 19 2	282 5 5
1455-6	182 6 6	116 15 5½	233 17 3
1456-7	182 6 6	44 17 5	135 2 2½
1457-8	183 10 6	42 12 5	133 4 6
1458-9	183 10 6	45 13 5	132 11 7
1459-60	183 10 6	—	156 15 6
1460-1	—	—	157 16 7
1461-2	183 10 6	46 12 5	180 18 0½
1462-3	184 10 6	47 13 6	188 10 11½
1463-4	184 0 6	55 19 8	209 19 3½
1464-5	—	—	—
1465-6	184 0 6	—	208 18 7
1466-7	184 0 6	66 2 1	210 1 6
1467-8	—	—	—
1468-9	184 10 6	53 16 2	225 2 0
1469-70	184 10 6	59 6 10	238 0 9
1470/1- 1475-6	—	—	—
1476-7	187 5 8	65 14 8	31 11 0
1477-8	188 15 8	71 5 11	39 0 0
1478-9	—	—	—
1479-80	190 5 8	—	—
1480-1	190 12 4	68 7 7	21 11 2
1481/2- 1495-6	—	—	—
1496-7	196 18 13	—	—
1497-8	196 18 3	—	—

century saw only small changes in the total of declared rent values, a gentle upward movement reflecting small revaluations, improvements to properties, and occasional new building. Negotiated rent adjustments seem to have experienced two distinct phases: between

⁴⁸ Bodl. MS, Wood MS F. 10 and F. 15.

1452 and 1456 real rent values fell very sharply, encouraging financial adjustments which reduced the apparent level of decays only to see these climb steadily from about 25 per cent in the mid-1450s to about 36 per cent at the end of the 1470s. The movement of arrears confirms this general picture: sustained high levels in the early 1450s with some repayment led to the wholesale writing-off of a large backlog of arrears in 1456-7, but arrears continued to accumulate despite repayments, and a significant rise in 1459-60 and 1460-1 was followed by another which continued to be recorded until further writing-off took place after 1470. Vacancies, though apparently never a severe problem, were present throughout the period and were, perhaps, particularly persistent in the late 1450s, 1460s, and early 1470s. All the signs are that the slump of the fourth and fifth decades of the fifteenth century noticed above deepened during the second half of the century. What is more, analysis of rent movements by parish in this period indicates that although there were fluctuations of rent levels within parishes and distinctive patterns of change according to area within the town the general direction was uniform and no parish seriously distorts the picture. By 1509-10, though the declared value of Oseney's Oxford rents was set at £200 15s 10d, following the writing of a new rental in that year, decayed rents now made up some 56 per cent of that total and property values stood at their lowest recorded level in the period.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, though property values might fall, houses stand vacant, and arrears mount, Oseney Abbey continued to spend substantial sums on maintenance and improvement. Between 1452 and 1481 the average annual outlay for these purposes measured as a proportion of the total declared rent value was about 14.5 per cent, with a tendency for such expenditure to fall off proportionally quite sharply after 1458. Measured as a proportion of real income the same trend is reflected in much larger percentages so that as late as 1477-8 the abbey was still providing some 25 per cent on maintenance and improvement.

In late fourteenth-century Canterbury some 39 per cent (c. £269 of c. £697) of all rents recorded in the murage survey was in ecclesiastical hands. Of the nineteen religious institutions drawing on rents in the city Canterbury Cathedral Priory was by far the most important, controlling a rent income from these sources which represented

⁴⁹ Rev. H. E. Salter (ed.), 'The Cartulary of Oseney Abbey', vol. vi, *Oxf. Hist. Soc. CI* (1936).

c. 27 per cent (c. £188) of all rents assessed for murage, an income derived from at least one-third of all properties included in the survey. The priory received payment from 156 messuages and tenements, 123 shops and five inns as well as other property in the town and although its holdings were especially concentrated in the Westgate and Burgate Wards no ward was neglected. Once again this holding may be used to speak for the whole town.

By the early fourteenth century the prior's income from Canterbury rents was probably about £145 per annum, although in the absence of details of arrears and 'allowances' it is not entirely clear from the prior's treasurers' accounts whether the sum recorded is the amount received or the declared value for the year.⁵⁰ Regular entries in the treasurers' accounts from 1300 to 1337 permit the movement of rent payments to be followed annually. These payments seem to show a slight but persistent fall from the first decade

TABLE 4: *Total annual payments from Canterbury rents to Canterbury Cathedral Priory, 1300-1337*

1300-1	£144 18 4	1319-20	£150 9 10½
1301-2	150 8 7	1320-1	133 5 2
1302-3	138 11 1	1321-2	140 5 2½
1303-4	137 17 5	1322-3	144 0 5½
1304-5	147 0 10	1323-4	135 18 2½
1305-6	141 17 9½	1324-5	139 14 3½
1306-7	125 16 6	1325-6	140 16 8
1307-8	139 11 11	1326-7	138 12 8
1308-9	153 9 6	1327-8	146 2 2½
1309-10	157 13 1	1328-9	138 2 1½
1310-11	157 14 5	1329-30	129 17 3½
1311-12	143 4 5	1330-1	129 5 7½
1312-13	148 7 3	1331-2	132 17 1½
1313-14	151 5 9½	1332-3	139 17 1
1314-15	160 6 4½	1333-4	147 8 0½
1315-16	143 3 0	1334-5	166 16 4½
1316-17	149 13 7½	1335-6	150 0 7½
1317-18	147 5 10½	1336-7	153 8 2½
1318-19	147 8 9		

of the century through to the early 1330s, a fall which might, if anything, be minimised by the inclusion of payments of arrears in the totals. The last three or four years, however, suggest a recovery which, though no accounts survive for the next thirty-four years, seems to be picked up in 1370-1 with the record of receipts of £161 12s 10½d. During the next decade such a level was maintained

⁵⁰ Probably the former. For Canterbury rents in the first half of the fourteenth-century recorded in the treasurers' accounts see C.C.L. MS MA/1 and 2.

and bettered, being c. £170 per annum on average and as high as £181 5s 3½d. These figures, indeed, make the total of c. £188 recorded in the murage survey seem no great exaggeration and, if the early fourteenth-century figures show the suspicion of a reversal, those of the 1370s and early 1380s give no sign of post-plague stagnation.

By 1407, however, when more detailed treasurers' accounts become available, the picture seems to have changed. The declared value of the city rents is stated as £161 18s 7½d and 'allowances' stand at £29 7s 5d, or c. 18 per cent of the declared rent value. All eleven treasurers' accounts surviving between 1407 and 1521 indicate a sustained and profound fall in income from urban rents.⁵¹

TABLE 5: *City rent income of Canterbury Cathedral Priory as recorded in the Treasurers' Accounts, 1407-1521*

	Total declared value	'Allowances'	Arrears
1407-8	£161 18 7½	£29 7 5	£22 16 6½
1408-9	161 8 5½	39 19 11	19 2 8½
1410-11	161 19 0½	31 18 11	31 12 7½
1432-3	(161 19 1½)	38 0 3½	53 10 10
1448-9	173 13 3½		45 16 0
1457-8	172 3 1½	34 9 4½	90 2 3½
1463-4	169 10 3½	32 5 10½	25 0 0
1471-2	174 5 11½		22 ()
1483-4	196 15 3½	85 3 5½	130 6 5
1512-13	200 0 1	100 17 1½	?
1520-1	200 0 1	101 15 4½	?

Without the detailed knowledge of negotiated rent adjustments such as that given above for Oxford the precise course of the changes in rent levels and demand for real property is difficult to determine, but what is clear is that the declared value of the city rents to the Cathedral Priory increased between 1407 and 1521 by about 25 per cent (a substantial part of which increase was derived from newly acquired and improved properties) while the proportion of that declared value accounted for by 'allowances', the total of decays and unpaid income from vacant properties, nearly trebled. When it is also appreciated that downward adjustments were made to declared rent values during this period, the depth of the real decline of rent values may be more fully understood. The

⁵¹ C. C. L. MS Treasurers' Accounts 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22.

consistent tendency for accumulating arrears to point in the direction of necessary change gives further emphasis to the struggle the Priory faced to maintain income from city properties.

The aggregated totals, however, need further investigation. The totals of declared rent values are composed of gavelkind or quit-rents and rents 'de domis et scoppis', of which the former tend to remain static through the period, though with a small rise recorded in the last three accounts, while the latter carry most of the indicated rises. From about £124 in 1407-8, 1408-9, and 1410-11, the house and shop rents rise to c. £140 in 1448-9, fall back to c. £134 in 1457-8, and c. £132 in 1463-4, thereafter moving up to c. £137 in 1471-2, c. £158 in 1483-4, and c. £161 in 1512-13 and 1520-1. It is, moreover, the changing proportion of 'allowances' on house and shop rents which supply the characteristic direction of Canterbury's falling values given here. Except in 1512-13, indeed, when 'allowances' for gavelkind rents are unaccountably exceptionally high (representing c. 82 per cent of the declared annual value of such rents) their inclusion in the aggregated totals tends to distort real levels by softening the profile of change. Any attempt to determine distinct phases of development in the fifteenth-century town from the evidence of these house and shop rents is fraught with dangers, but it may be tentatively suggested that the rise in the level of allowances recorded in 1408-9 represented a distinct shift in demand and that if recovery came subsequently, and bearing in mind that downward adjustments to declared values took place—in this period, it was probably insufficient to restore the conditions apparent at the turn of the century and was no more than a period of stagnation at new low levels before the veritable collapse of rents in the last quarter of the fifteenth century and first quarter of the sixteenth.

The accounts of 1512-13 and 1520-1, indeed, record instances of properties in ruins. In 1512-13 'allowances' of 2s 4d of gavelkind rent were granted to William Germyn 'quia domus est in ruina', and, in the same year gavelkind rents of £3 12s 0d were 'allowed' on a house formerly inhabited by one John Carhyll for the same reason. In 1520-1 1s 6d of gavelkind rent on Nicholas Bradkyrk's tenement, 2s 4d on Richard Roger's house, 4s on John Carell's (probably the same as Carhyll), 4s on Thomas Wohope's house, 9s 2d on Edmund Payable's house in the parish of St Mildred, and 6s 8d on Richard Bayle's, were all 'allowed' 'quia domus est in ruina'. Such entries do not occur in the earlier surviving accounts for the fifteenth-century but they come on top of decades in which the

problems of dealing with prolonged vacancies and lapsed rent-payments seem to have created some disorder in the process of rent-collection.

Examination of the response of rent levels within individual parishes provides important modification of the overall phases of development suggested earlier. The parishes for which the best evidence survives are All Saints, Mary Bredman, St Alphege, St Andrew, and Mary Magdalen. It was in these parishes that the Cathedral Priory held most of its properties and these same parishes were at the commercial heart of the town where property values tended to be highest. The accounts of 1407-8 and 1408-9 both indicate that vacancies were already a problem in all five parishes, especially in Mary Magdalen and St Andrew's. These persist into the 1430s and seem to increase in number in most parishes. Only in St Andrew's does the problem appear to diminish but probably as the result of adjustments in the declared values in this parish. In most parishes there seems to have been a significant fall in demand between 1409 and 1432 and this is as true of the less central as of the central parishes. The 1450s and 1460s see little alleviation though rent adjustments may disguise the depth of the problem. Even so a dramatic fall in demand is recorded in the parish of St Andrew in the account of 1457-8 which may indicate a more general crisis. For most parishes, with the notable exception of Mary Magdalen, the account of 1483-4 records another major reduction which may reflect changes in the late 1460s and 1470s. Vacancies and decays are recorded in almost every parish and the negotiated reductions in rent values in the parish of St Andrew represent about 25 per cent of the declared values for the year. As has already been suggested, it is in the two accounts for the early sixteenth-century that the most severe reductions are recorded. In 1512-3 negotiated reductions in St Andrew's now stand at about 40 per cent of declared values and vacancies have multiplied in many parishes. If anything, the picture in many parishes was worse by 1520-1. Though the experience of these parishes, precisely because they did lie at the commercial centre of the town, may in some respects be atypical, it seems unlikely that they greatly exaggerate the direction of change. Furthermore, the evidence of small rent incomes from less central parishes confirms both the persistent reduction of rent levels and the broad phases of change. Though no parish moves precisely like any other and the sensitivity of the suburbs may prove to be different from the commercial centre the overall picture is fairly clear.

Once again, however, the expenditure on improvement and

maintenance by the religious house is remarkably high even when rents are plummeting. In the opening 37 years of the fourteenth century the expenditure on maintenance expressed as a percentage of annual rent payments was, on average, 34 per cent, ranging from 25 to 47 per cent. In the same period substantial amounts of new building work were carried out in the second, third, and fourth decades. In the 1370s the average percentage of maintenance expenditure fell to 25 per cent though new building work continued throughout. The evidence of the treasurers' accounts suggests that maintenance expenditure as a proportion of declared rent value was on average c. 35 per cent. Measured as a proportion of real rent income it was substantially higher and, by 1520-1 over 60 per cent. There is, however, no mention of expenditure on new building after the 1408-9 account.

In Canterbury and Oxford the changing demand for real property as indicated by the movement of rent levels during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries bears witness to the complex process of realignment which took place between these two provincial centres and their hinterlands. The testimony is sensitive to both short- and long-term change. The process of negotiation of rents, as revealed in the fluctuations of agreed payments, is a process which indirectly records the subtle changes of bargaining position between landlord and tenant. Regional comparison of these changes may reveal much about the variety of responses which made up the English adaptation to economic reversal in the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries.

For both towns it seems it was not the fourteenth-century which set in train wholesale decline. Oxford, it is true, seems to have experienced difficulties in the late thirteenth century and undoubtedly suffered during the second and third decades of the fourteenth century, presumably directly and indirectly affected by the agrarian crises of these years. Canterbury, however, seems not to have experienced any decisive change at this time. After the Black Death the remarkable experience of both towns seems to have been one of resilience and even buoyancy, and neither showed signs of contraction at this stage though both knew high rates of mortality. Rapid immigration, a redistribution of wealth and changed patterns of consumption probably sustained levels of demand and may even have increased them. This buoyancy, in Oxford's case at least, seems to have lasted until the fourth decade of the fifteenth century. For Canterbury the turning point may have come earlier, and certainly by the 1420s and 1430s a distinct change of direction had

taken place and, in this period, there was no subsequent recovery. In Oxford and Canterbury the second half of the fifteenth century saw conditions worsen. At Canterbury the nadir may have been reached in the last quarter of the fifteenth century and first quarter of the sixteenth. In Oxford the early sixteenth-century may well have seen new depths.

What is striking about the comparison is that although each town possessed a distinct character and different supporting region, despite small variations in the chronology of change which probably relate to unique regional factors, in the post-Black Death period the late fourteenth-century buoyancy and the persistent fifteenth-century decline show clear similarities. These similarities suggest that there is, at least, a common stimulus to the adaptations in these towns and it seems likely that, whatever the exacerbating contribution of monetary factors, it is to the cumulative effects of endemic bubonic plague that attention should be directed, and all the more so since when the full apparatus of urban analysis is brought to bear upon Canterbury and Oxford, where it is available, both 'highly impressionistic' evidence and other more statistical materials tend to confirm the picture gained from a consideration of rents and place the presence of epidemic disease at the centre of the argument. This being so urgent consideration is required of the turning-points which seem to have been identified not only in Oxford and Canterbury but in other towns too.⁵² And, finally, to return to the place of rent in the life of individual townsmen, it seems probable that, lacking the bargaining power of the greater landlords and unable to manipulate cash surpluses to the maintenance of empty properties, it was their property above all, away from the main commercial centres, which first fell empty and then into ruins and gave an air of dereliction to many early Tudor provincial towns.

⁵² E.g. J. N. Bartlett, 'The Expansion and Decline of York in the Later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, xii (1959-60), pp. 17-33, and see also *Victoria County History: City of York*, ed. P. M. Tillott (1961), pp. 84-5; R. B. Dobson, *Durham Priory, 1400-1450* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 45-6, 285; P. Heath, 'North Sea Fishing in the Fifteenth Century: the Scarborough Fleet', *Northern History*, iii (1968), pp. 53-69; Butcher, *Northern History*, xiv, pp. 67-77.