From: Trade, Urban Hinsterlands and Market Integration c.1300-1600, ed. James A. Galloway
(Centre for Metropolitan History Working Papers Series, No. 3; Institute of Historical Research, 2000), pp. 83-101

5. Norwich, London, and the regional integration of Norfolk's economy in the first half of the fourteenth century

PAMELA NIGHTINGALE

The central-place theories used by geographers to explain the integration of markets are increasingly popular with medievalists, and the growth of Norwich in the first half of the fourteenth century, coupled with its connexions with London, raises the possibility that this period did indeed see the integration of markets into regional economies which matured into what James Masschaele has called 'a rudimentary national economy'.[1] He concluded that regional economies had already evolved in outline in England by about 1250 through the creation of a hierarchical constellation of markets round a leading town which became the specialised hub of the network and its chief link with other regions.[2] As the most commercially progressive of English counties, Norfolk should offer the most convincing evidence of these developments. By 1349 at least 121 weekly markets had been founded in the county, over 80 per cent of them before 1300.[3] There were also many rural fairs, such as those held three times a year at Hanworth in North Erpingham Hundred, at Horsham St Faith in Taverham Hundred, and four times a year at North Creake in Gallow Hundred.[4] But how far by the mid-fourteenth century had Norfolk's markets become part of an integrated regional economy of the kind described by central-place theories? How much did they revolve hierarchically round Norwich, and did Norwich effectively link the county's economy with London? Most importantly, does the growth of Norwich in this period reflect greater commercialisation of the county's economy as a whole, or does it, even before the Black Death, reflect economic decline through rural impoverishment?

Hitherto, the evidence which has been available to historians has been too sparse and disconnected to permit any detailed analysis of the ways in which leading towns

[1] I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trustees for their financial support for calendaring the Certificates of Debt (Public Record Office (P.R.O.), C.241), and to the Economic and Social Research Council for its award (No. R000271010) given to analyse the economic, political, and social influences on levels of credit in late medieval England. J. Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants, and Markets: Inland Trade in Medieval England, 1150–1350* (New York, 1997) pp. 6–7, 231.

[2] Masschaele, *Peasants*, pp. 230–1.

[3] R. Britnell, 'The proliferation of markets in England, 1200–1349', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 34 (1981), table 1, pp. 210, 215. See also, M. Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 145.

[4] For the fairs at Hanworth see, P.R.O., C.131/6/22; for the fair at Horsham St Faith, see D. Sherlock, 'Discoveries at Horsham St Faith Priory, 1970–3', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 36 (1976), p. 203. For North Creake, see G.A. Carthew, 'A cellarer's account-roll of Creak Abbey, 5–6 Edward III', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 6 (1864), p. 322; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1292–1301* (London, 1895), p. 376.

ISBN: 1 871348 55 2

developed their hinterlands and how these were influenced by wider economic forces.[5] But the Statute-Merchant certificates, when used with care, can throw some statistical light on these questions. The certificates are only a sample, but an extensive one, complete in itself, of the credit which was registered under this system in every county in England. They have the limitations of a sample, but the virtues, too, because they are far more likely to indicate the normal scale and density of trading relations than the incidental pieces of information which historians of internal trade have had to rely on hitherto. Comparisons between the certificates of unpaid debt and surviving Statute Merchant rolls of recognisances from London at the end of the thirteenth century and from Coventry between 1392–1416 indicate that, despite varying economic circumstances in these periods, the rate of default remained steady at about one-fifth of the credit which was originally registered.[6] This was because most credit was short-term and creditors reacted quickly to any threatening circumstances by refusing loans. Therefore, although by modern standards the rate of default was extremely high, reflecting an economy in which, even when the money supply was at its most abundant, there was insufficient liquidity, the consistent level of default means that if the certificates are analysed according to the date when the credit was first registered then large numbers are evidence of expanding credit arising from a higher level of economic activity, and small numbers of its contraction. In this way the certificates uniquely combine information about marketing structures with evidence about the economic influences which were shaping them.

Norwich began to register recognisances of debt later than London, and since it took time for the system to become popular, it is only safe to analyse them from 1300. Before this the lay subsidies indicate that Norfolk's wealth was accelerating in the late thirteenth century. For the fifteenth of 1275 it raised £6,560, but for the fifteenth of 1290 it raised £9,782, which made it the wealthiest as well as the most populous county in England.[7] Coin obviously circulated freely in the countryside to sustain its commercialised agriculture and active land market. The Lynn customs accounts uniquely show how Norfolk's profitable overseas trade was bringing coin and bullion to its ports. Since much of it was either English sterlings brought back from the continent, or foreign gold coins, it did not have to be exchanged in the London mint and could pass immediately into local circulation to boost Norfolk's economy.[8]

One would expect from this evidence that the integration of markets would have gone furthest in Norfolk and that Norwich's influence would already be clearly

[5] C. Dyer, 'Market towns and the countryside in late medieval England', *Canadian Journal of History*, 31 (1996), pp. 17–35.

[6] P. Nightingale, 'Monetary contraction and mercantile credit in later medieval England', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 43 (1990), p. 566. The rate of default found in the Coventry rolls for 1392–9 was 21.7 per cent, and for 1400–9 19.3 per cent; the rate of default for the London rolls was 19.3% in 1291–2, 18.8 per cent for 1293–4, 20.1 per cent for 1295–6, and 22 per cent for 1298–9: Corporation of London Record Office, Recognisance Rolls, II–V.

[7] S. Jenks, 'The Lay Subsidies and the state of the English economy (1275–1334)', *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 85 (1998), pp. 1–39. Professor Jenks has printed as an appendix to this article his new and more accurate transcription of the figures in the enrolled accounts (P.R.O., E.372).

[8] Foreign gold coins were increasingly used by merchants from the 1330s: M. Prestwich, 'Early fourteenth-century exchange rates', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 32 (1979), pp. 475–6.

established over the marketing structure. The city can only have profited from the decline of St Botolph's and the other eastern fairs, which had begun after the expulsion of the Flemings in 1270, but became more pronounced after the outbreak of war against France in 1294.[9] Whereas the Prior of Norwich had sent his servants in 1283 to St Ives' and St Botolph's fairs to buy cloth and spices for the priory, the decline in the numbers of overseas merchants visiting those fairs meant that by the early fourteenth century he was more likely to make these expensive purchases in Norwich.[10] Changes in the average numbers of Norwich's deeds suggest that the city was closely following the county's pattern of growth. They reached a high average of eighty-two a year between 1285–90,[11] and they then fell in the 1290s by 32 per cent as bad harvests, war with France, and high taxation brought economic contraction from 1294 onwards, causing the county's wealth to plummet.[12] In 1301 Norfolk raised from a fifteenth only £5,263, indicating a drop in wealth of 46 per cent from 1290.[13]

This correlation between the pattern of the county's and the city's growth makes it no surprise to discover that creditors who lived in Norwich dominated the 224 certificates of unpaid debt which were registered there in the five years 1300–4. Norwich creditors accounted for one-third of the total. There was, of course, a possible bias in the system which might exaggerate their importance. Since both debtors and creditors had to go to Norwich to register their loans the aspiring borrower might seek a creditor there in preference to other places on the grounds that someone who had only to step down the street to record his loan was more likely to oblige him. On the other hand even distant creditors had the strongest incentive to use the system because of the high rate of default.

However, if there is such a bias it can only reduce the danger of underestimating Norwich's influence over its county. Yet what emerges from the certificates of 1300–4 is that twelve out of the thirty-four Norfolk hundreds (counting Norwich and Yarmouth as two of them) produced no evidence of indebtedness to its citizens. The ancient division between the twenty-three populous small hundreds of eastern Norfolk, and the eleven more thinly-populated large hundreds of the west, dominates the analysis: only six men from the western hundreds were indebted to creditors in Norwich compared with fifty-three in the east. The western hundreds obviously communicated much more easily with Lynn, by way of the Great and Little Ouse.[14]

9 P. Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers' Company and the Politics and Trade of London, 1000–1485* (New Haven and London, 1995) pp. 82–4, 97–100, 103–7.

10 W. Hudson, 'The camera roll of the Prior of Norwich in 1283 compiled by Bartholomew de Cotton', *Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society,* 19 (1917), pp. 280, 285–6.

11 E. Rutledge, 'Immigration and population-growth in early fourteenth-century Norwich: evidence from the tithing roll', *Urban History Year Book* (1988), p. 17. For this present article the author has analysed the deeds from W. Rye (ed.), *A Short Calendar of the Deeds relating to Norwich, 1285–1306*, and *1307–41* (Norwich, 1903 and 1915).

12 B.M.S. Campbell, 'Population-pressure, inheritance-customs and the land market in a fourteenth-century peasant community', in R.M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship, and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 113.

13 Jenks, 'Lay subsidies', p. 31.

14 Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 147, 149; T.S. Willan, 'River navigation and trade from the Witham to the Yare, 1600–1750', *Norfolk Archaeology,* 26 (1935–7), pp. 296–309.

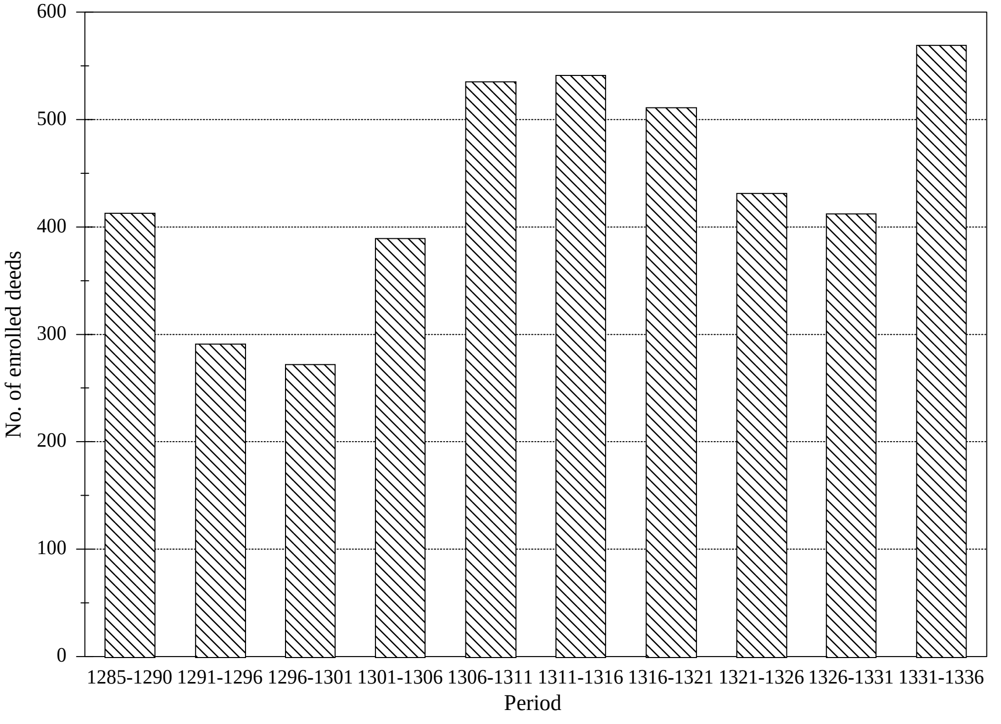

Fig. 5.1. Number of enrolled Norwich deeds in five-year periods, 1285–1336

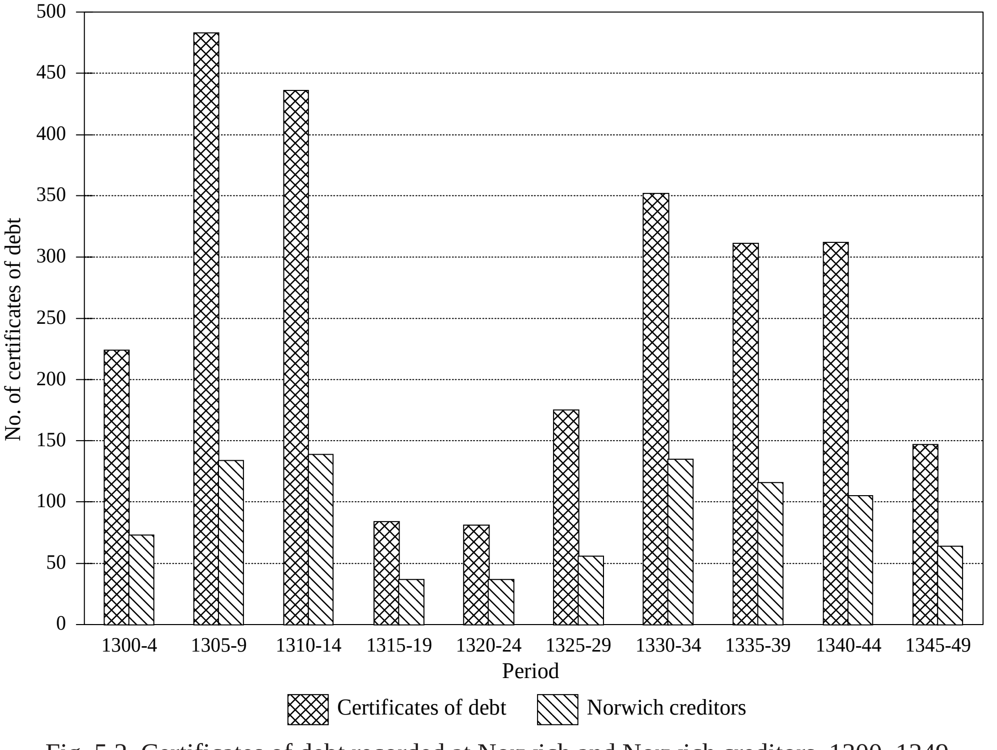

Fig. 5.2. Certificates of debt recorded at Norwich and Norwich creditors, 1300–1349 (Merchants only, 1311–22)

Such a pattern accords with James Masschaele's conclusion that a radius of about twenty miles marks the effective limit of a town's regional influence.[15] But more surprising is how thinly spread was Norwich's influence even in the east. It was strong only over its immediate neighbouring hundred, Forehoe. One-fifth of all those in the county who were indebted to the city lived there. Forehoe was importing corn from neighbouring hundreds,[16] and it is possible that it concentrated on supplying Norwich with the skins used in the leather trade which was then the dominant craft in the city.[17] It was also the hundred where fragmentation of lordship had gone furthest by 1316, which indicates that it had early developed an active market in peasants' land.[18] That market was undoubtedly encouraged by the money which peasants could accumulate from their commercial connexions with the city, and by the readiness of urban merchants to invest in nearby rural property.

Norwich itself drew supplies of corn from the rich soil of its eastern neighbouring hundred, Blofield, where one corn-merchant, William Baudechun, dominated the trade.[19] The wealthiest men in Norwich appear to have been drapers who dealt mainly at this time in imported Flemish cloth. The Lynn customs accounts (unfortunately there are no similar ones for Yarmouth) show alien merchants importing 1,109 cloths in 1303–4, and 2,236 in 1304–7, while eighteen drapers appear in this period in Norwich's deeds.[20] The certificates of debt confirm the wealth of the Norwich drapers, and one of them, Robert de Holverston, the creditor in twenty-three certificates, had debtors in nine hundreds.

By contrast Norwich's influence appears slender indeed over the hundred of South Erpingham, which contained the linen-manufacturing towns of Aylesham and Causton. Creditors who lived in South Erpingham appear in no fewer than forty-one certificates, and its debtors in forty, compared with the seventy-three certificates for creditors and eighteen for debtors who lived in Norwich. No other hundred approached South Erpingham's level of economic activity. This confirms the earlier predominance of the linen industry, which was concentrated round Aylsham, over the worsted industry which seems to have developed later in the neighbouring hundreds of Tunstead and Eynesford.[21] But of all South Erpingham's forty debtors only four were indebted to citizens of Norwich. Otherwise local creditors financed its industry. The rector of the church of Bampton was the creditor in twelve certificates, and Peter de Bampton in another twelve in which the sums extended to 32 marks. Another South Erpingham man lent £60. Local autonomy, and a defiantly self-confident attitude is what characterises the

15 Masschaele, *Peasants*, p. 82.

16 P.R.O., C.241/80/257; 85/31; 101/3; 102/178.

17 S. Kelly, 'The economic topography and structure of Norwich *c.* 1300', in U. Priestley (ed.), *Men of Property: An Analysis of the Norwich Enrolled Deeds, 1285–1311* (Norwich, 1983), pp. 22–3.

18 B.M.S. Campbell, 'The complexity of manorial structure in medieval Norfolk: a case-study', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 39 (1986), pp. 228–9.

19 P.R.O., C.241/35/203; 36/28, 31, 262, 267, 312; 42/28; 62/107. B.M.S. Campbell, 'Complexity of manorial structure', pp. 228–9, 244.

20 P.R.O., E.122/93/1, 3. Rye, *Norwich Deeds, 1285–1306*, pp. 75–99.

21 A.F. Sutton, 'The early linen and worsted industry of Norfolk and the evolution of the London Mercers' Company', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 40 (1989), p. 207. Worstead, which gave its name to the cloth, is in Tunstead Hundred.

linen and worsted weavers in this period, and it is clear that they had enough local capital to be independent of Norwich.[22]

Norwich's prosperity at this time depended on its usefulness as a market for people who could walk there and home again within the day, as a centre of craft production for their everyday needs, and as a distributive centre for alien imports, and possibly for locally-made linen. But apart from Forehoe and South Erpingham, only two other hundreds had four or more debtors to Norwich, and these two, Holt and Tunstead, were some distance from the city. Despite Norfolk's wealth and commercial development over many decades, the certificates of debt give no sign that local markets had coalesced by the opening of the fourteenth century into an integrated economy dependent on Norwich. There was no obvious sphere of influence round the city, apart from the absence of local markets within a radius of from eight to ten miles.[23] The ports of Yarmouth and Lynn appear in the certificates of these years to be largely independent. Neither produced any debtors to Norwich although two Yarmouth men went there to register recognisances. Throughout the county one-quarter of all debtors borrowed from men who lived in their own hundred. Moreover, no Londoners feature in the credit recorded at Norwich and a mere four men from Norfolk appear in debts registered in London. Only one of these was a merchant of Norwich.[24]

The next five years, 1305–9, were years of dramatic economic growth, not just in Norfolk, but throughout the kingdom. This was a period of high wool exports at high prices, and of equally large imports of coin and bullion from overseas. The circulation of coin reached its late medieval peak in this period. Norfolk took a leading part in the economic expansion, although wool cannot have financed it since its own was of inferior quality and wool exports from Lynn and Yarmouth were falling.[25] Almost certainly this was because more was being used in the manufacture of local cloth and worsted. A large number of creditors in the coastal hundred of East Flegg indicates increased exports of barley and wheat. Since Norfolk barley made the best malt and ale, and commanded higher than average prices, it was the main cash crop and its production, processing and sale was largely for the market, although it was also received in payment of rents and dues.[26] There was an increased demand to feed the English army in Scotland, and Norfolk men were accused, undoubtedly with good reason, of supplying the Scottish rebels as well.[27] The Lynn customs accounts record that alien merchants alone were exporting corn, malt and no less than £1,800 worth of ale in 1303–4, mostly for the Flemish or German market.[28] In return, between 1304–7 they brought in through Lynn

[22] Sutton, 'Early linen and worstead industry', pp. 207–9.

[23] D. Dymond, 'Medieval and later markets', in P. Wade-Martins (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1993), pp. 76–7.

[24] P.R.O., C.241/37/10.

[25] E.M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, *England's Export Trade, 1275–1547* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 40–1.

[26] Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 209–13, table 4.2; pp. 238–40, table 4.10; and pp. 136, 140, 168–9, 218–19, 237, 259; Hudson, 'The camera roll of the Prior of Norwich in 1283', p. 298; B.M.S. Campbell and J. Power, 'Mapping the agricultural geography of medieval England', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989), p. 31 table 2A, show that barley accounted for about 40 per cent of Norfolk's crops.

[27] *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1302–7*, p. 522; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1307–13*, pp. 244–5.

[28] P.R.O., E.122/93/1.

cloth, £321 worth of sterlings, 46 lb. weight of silver bullion, and gold coins worth about £325.[29]

Domestic credit expanded hugely in response to the growth of trade and the supply of coin. These five years, 1305–9, produced an unparallelled number of certificates, both in Norfolk and the kingdom as a whole. Such conditions naturally favoured the integration of local and regional markets. Norwich clearly gained from the general economic growth as the rise in the number of property deeds enrolled in the city indicates. They increased by 27 per cent between 1305 and 1309 to an annual average of 107. The number of dyers in them more than doubled and it looks from the corresponding decline in drapers that this was the period when Norwich changed from being principally a market for imported foreign cloth to become more of a centre for the dyeing and finishing of the local product. It was by no means all linen or worsted. Four fullers appeared in the deeds, and since worsteds were not fulled there was obviously considerable local production of the pannus anglicanus which features as exports in the Lynn customs accounts. The expansion of Norwich's industry helps to account for the fact that its own debtors more than trebled in these years, indicating a surging demand for commercial credit.

The number of certificates from creditors who lived in Norwich also nearly doubled and they now extended their influence over Yarmouth. One reason for this was that Norwich gained more control over the wool trade. This is illustrated by the new wool merchants who appear in the Norwich deeds.[30] The woad merchants of Amiens also appear in the customs accounts as wool exporters because they used the trade to remit their profits.[31] They were prominent creditors at Norwich in these years, and it seems that they were increasing their sales of woad because the cloth industry was expanding. Their demand for wool as a return investment, coupled with the increasing needs of the local cloth industry, must have helped Norwich to become a nodal point in the trade. By 1320 the prominent Norwich wool exporter, Robert de Aula, was buying up most of the demesne clip from Lakenheath in Suffolk.[32] Wool was assembled at Norwich before it was shipped down the River Yare to Yarmouth for export.

This wool had to be paid for and the new prominence of herrings in Yarmouth's debts to Norwich suggests that Norwich merchants were extending their distribution of fish inland in exchange for purchases of wool.[33] Herrings were an important part of the staple diet and, as James Campbell has pointed out, fishmongers headed the list of Norwich trades in the 1270's, and fish likewise was at the head of the list of tolls on goods brought to the city in the early fourteenth century.[34] It was by no means all for local consumption. Since Yarmouth was not on the network of main roads it was easier to send herrings by boat up the Yare to Norwich than for carts to go directly to the

[29] P.R.O., E.122/93/3.

[30] Between 1290 and 1295 two wool merchants appear in the Norwich deeds; between 1295 and 1300, three; between 1300 and 1305, three; and between 1305 and 1310, seven.

[31] P.R.O., E.122/148/1, 10, 11, 36; E.122/149/5: John de Sorchy, Thomas le Fruter, Simon le Queynte, Gerard and Peter le Mouner, John Pirimund, James le Pameyler.

[32] Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, p. 149 n. 148.

[33] Of the thirteen debts due from Yarmouth men to those of Norwich, 7 were for up to 17 lasts of herring each.

[34] J. Campbell, 'Norwich', in M.D. Lobel (ed.), *The Atlas of Historic Towns*, II (London, 1975), pp. 13–14.

coast. From Norwich they were distributed to the villages and inland towns, as far even as Leicester.[35]

It is noticeable that in their dealings with Yarmouth it was the Norwich men who gave most of the credit, even though the evidence of the lay subsidies indicates that the merchants of Yarmouth in this period were considerably richer than those of Norwich. The 1332 Lay Subsidy shows that £83 in tax was paid by 417 people in Norwich. This indicates that their taxable movables, including their stock-in-trade, were on average worth £2 a head. By contrast 281 people in Yarmouth paid £102, which indicates that their taxable movables were worth an average of £3. 13s. 4d. a head.[36] One should be very cautious, though, before assuming that these figures accurately reflect the relative wealth or trade of the two towns. Cash and plate were rarely taxed, and, more importantly, credit in the form of debts due, was never taxed.[37] Therefore, although the certificates of debt indicate in these years that Norwich merchants were eight times more likely to be creditors of Yarmouth men than the reverse this would not be reflected in the lay subsidies.

Furthermore, the tax was levied on goods where they lay, not where their owner lived, and this alone distorted the pattern of wealth. For example nearly half the men named in the Mancroft section of the Norwich lay subsidy roll in 1332 cannot be identified in the Mancroft tithing roll, which suggests they were not resident in the leet.[38] Even more would it be true for a port like Yarmouth that the goods taxed in its warehouses and ships might belong to merchants from its hinterland. Since the tax was always assessed at Michaelmas when exporting merchants were most likely to be heavily engaged in selling the season's wool and crops, they had to come to an arrangement with their shippers over who was to pay the tax on their goods lying in the port. It would not be difficult for Norwich's exporters, who habitually dealt with Yarmouth men, to settle prices or terms of credit which allowed for the latter to pay the tax. Despite the conflicts which occasionally disturbed their relations, Norwich and Yarmouth were each essential to the prosperity of the other and it makes sense to follow James Campbell's view that they were so complementary 'that they should be regarded almost as together constituting one town' rather than rival centres of overseas trade in the regional economy.[39]

In these prosperous years, 1305–9, Norwich's creditors also increased their sphere of influence inland (see Fig. 5.3). The four hundreds to the south of Norwich, Forehoe, Humilyard, Henstead and Depwade, each produced four or more certificates of debt to Norwich. So too did five hundreds in a neat block to its north: Taverham, Eynesford, South Erpingham, Tunstead and Holt. But more surprisingly, so too did Freebridge in the west, the hundred which contained Lynn, a port forty miles distant from Norwich. Freebridge's marshlands, though, were the home to large flocks of sheep, and it looks as though Norwich's demand for wool was giving its hinterland a new if extended shape.

35 A. Saul, 'The herring industry at Great Yarmouth, *c.* 1280–1400', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 38 (1981), pp. 37–8.

36 W. Hudson, 'Norwich and Yarmouth in 1332: Their comparative prosperity', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 16 (1907), pp. 179–80.

37 Jenks, 'Lay subsidies', pp. 6–7.

38 Rutledge, 'Immigration and population-growth in Norwich', p. 19.

39 J. Campbell, 'Norwich', p. 14.

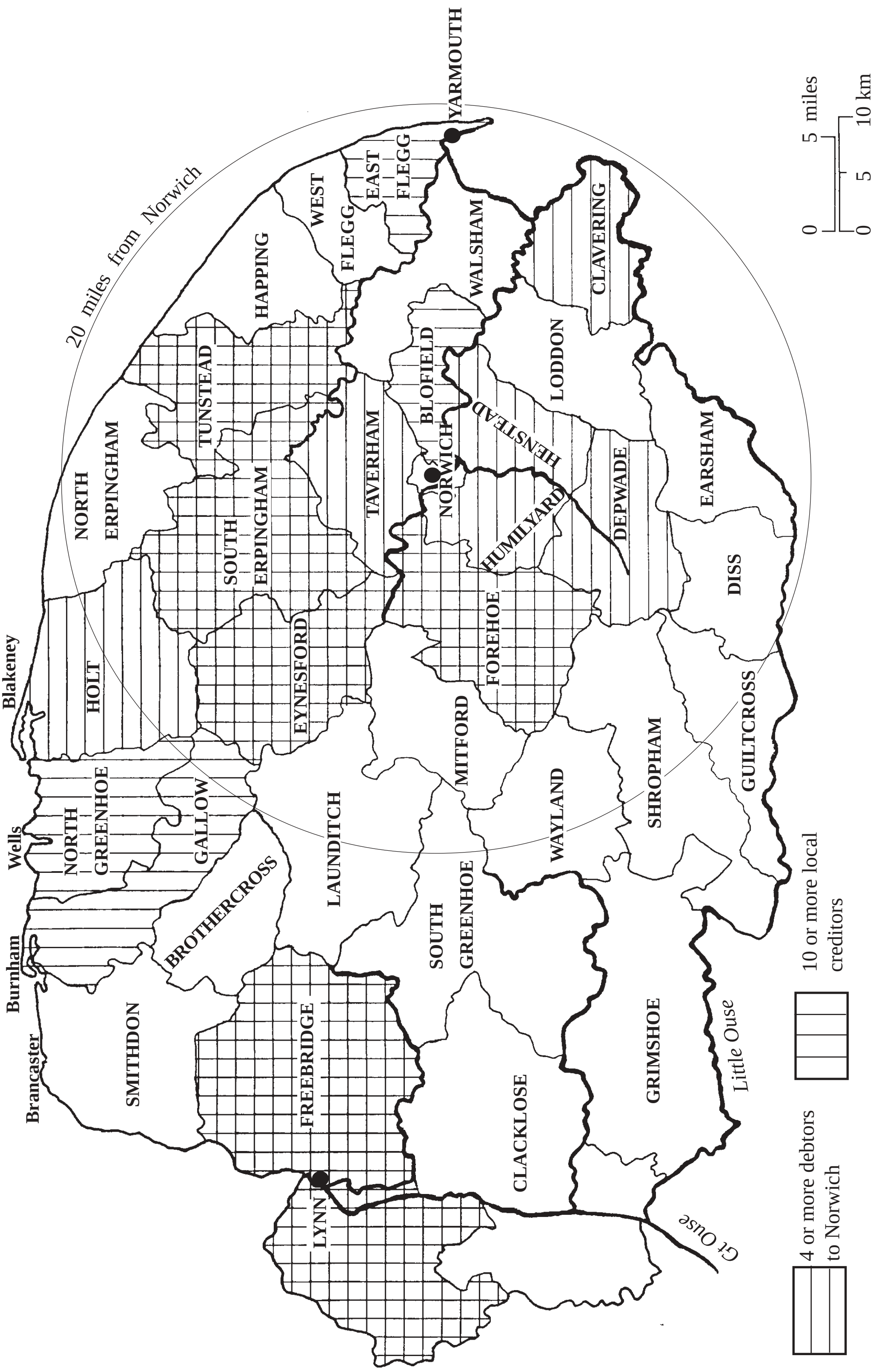

Fig. 5.3. Debtors to Norwich and local creditors, 1305–9

Norwich's growth in these years might suggest that it was belatedly evolving into a central place. But there is one reservation; the city's share of the county's creditors in the certificates actually decreased between 1305–9 from 32.5 to 27.7 per cent, because there was a more rapid rate of growth in Norfolk's countryside. This can be seen in the rising number of rural creditors. Eight hundreds, besides Norwich and Yarmouth, had more than ten certificates recording local creditors. Two of these hundreds, Forehoe and Blofield, were neighbours of Norwich, but the others formed an arc of rich hundreds round the coast from East Flegg next to Yarmouth, to Freebridge in the west. They included Tunstead and South Erpingham, North Greenhoe and Gallow. The creditors in this outer ring of hundreds had little more than ten per cent of their debtors in Norwich; the rest were in their neighbouring hundreds. This analysis indicates that some, at least, of the county's new wealth was earned by trade through the smaller northern ports of Burnham, Wells, and Blakeney. One of the major wool exporters in this period, for example, David de la Doune, lived at Blakeney.[40]

The hundred of Gallow most clearly illustrates this burgeoning of new rural enterprise and credit. All but one of its thirty-nine certificates record creditors from South Creake. Nearby in North Creake there was an abbey which had its own flock of sheep, and was entitled to hold four fairs a year, which attracted considerable trade.[41] This explains the commercial success of a group of merchants and landowners who lived in South Creake. The most prominent of them were the Athelwald family, one of whose members also lived in neighbouring Egmere.[42] They appear in the customs accounts as minor, although consistent wool exporters over several years, mostly from Lynn, and they had debtors in nine hundreds, sometimes specifically for wool.[43] It seems that they traded chiefly as middlemen, and since they were well placed at South Creake and Egmere to send wool either to Lynn, to Burnham, or to Yarmouth, which the customs records show they were doing, they, rather than Norwich merchants were forging important links between eastern and western Norfolk in these years.[44] Through middlemen of their kind the wool from Freebridge's rich marshlands was brought eastwards to the cloth hundreds and to Norwich, as well as to Lynn.[45]

This is a period when there was more credit flowing between hundreds and less exclusively within them. No longer did South Erpingham stand out as the only major centre of enterprise outside Norwich. Debtors proliferated in Tunstead and Eynesford

[40] P.R.O., E.122/148/6, m. 6, refers to David de la Doune of Snettisham (Blakeney). He exported wool from both Lynn and Yarmouth: e.g., 64 sacks from Yarmouth in 1308–9 (E.122/148/8), and 29 sacks from Lynn in 1312–13 (E.122/93/8). E. Rutledge, 'Medieval and later ports, trade, and fishing, up to 1600', in Wade-Martins (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, pp. 78–9.

[41] Carthew, 'A cellarer's account-roll', pp. 322, 344. The abbey received over 44s. in rents and fees from the fairs in 1331–2.

[42] Carthew, 'A cellarer's account-roll', pp. 326, 332, 334, 336–7, 342–3. William Athelwald was rich enough to have his own chaplain.

[43] For their exports of wool from Yarmouth, see e.g., P.R.O., E.122/148/36 (1303–4), and from Lynn, see E.122/93/8,9,10,11 (1312–16).

[44] M. Hesse, 'Fields, Tracks, and Boundaries in the Creakes, North Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeology,* 41 (1992), pp. 305–24.

[45] Campbell, 'Complexity of manorial structure', pp. 248–50, describes the sheep-corn husbandry of North-West Norfolk.

which suggests that the worsted industry was expanding there. The first reference to 'Worthstede Row' in the market at Norwich belongs to the period, 1310–20.[46] In 1308 there is the first evidence in the certificates that Londoners, albeit with Norfolk origins, were coming to Norwich to trade, probably to buy the worsteds which alien merchants were exporting from London at that time.[47] William de Hethersett, a London mercer, advanced £40 in Norwich to John de Poringland, a prominent Norwich merchant, and in 1311 another London mercer recorded in Norwich credit of £37 which he advanced to a Norwich merchant. But these Londoners were outnumbered by the fourteen men from Norfolk who registered debts in London between 1308–10. Five of the knightly class were there borrowing money;[48] one went to sell barley,[49] and two to sell herrings.[50] What is remarkable, though, is how limited this contact was: it is represented by sixteen certificates, a mere 3.3 per cent of the 483 unpaid debts recorded in Norwich in those years. The incipient national economy was a long way off.

In the next five years, between 1310 to 1314, there is every reason to expect a sharp decline in the number of certificates since legislation enforced by the Ordainers between 1311 and 1322 restricted the use of the statute merchant system to merchants only. Despite this, the number of certificates for the county falls only by 10 per cent from 483 to 436, and there is no significant increase in the amount of indebtedness to Norwich. This shows how commercialised Norfolk's whole society was compared with other areas of the kingdom, and how two-thirds of the county's merchants had their own commercial networks which did not rely on Norwich creditors.

The critical fall in the certificates, as might be expected from such a richly agricultural county, came in the next five years, 1315–19, the years of famine. The total for the county shrank to 84, and they record no mercantile creditor for 25 out of Norfolk's 32 rural hundreds and no debtor in 15. The fall in credit began in 1316 when the number of certificates shrank from 21 to 15.[51] This is in spite of the fact that barley suffered less than wheat from the incessant rains, and a London merchant actually came to Norwich to buy barley worth £32 in 1317.[52] But in 1318 and in 1319 the number of certificates sank again to 9 each year as cattle disease struck. Norwich, Yarmouth, and Gallow were the only hundreds to maintain much credit, indicating that what survived was supported chiefly by the wool trade.

It is not surprising that in these years of rural crisis Norwich increased its share of the county's creditors from 33 to 53 per cent. This was not because the city's merchants came to the rescue of the impoverished countryside. Half of their debtors were fellow merchants who lived in Norwich itself. No hundred apart from Yarmouth had four or more debtors to Norwich, and no hundred apart from those two towns, had ten or more

46 Sutton, 'Early linen and worsted industry of Norfolk', p. 207.
47 P.R.O., E.122/69/2.
48 P.R.O., C.241/67/35; 74/249; 79/95; 83/99; 110/307.
49 P.R.O., C.241/91/22.
50 P.R.O., C.241/70/113; 86/18.
51 Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, p. 201, refers to the exceptional number of land transactions at Lakenheath in 1316–17. There was a similar exceptional number at Hindolveston in 1316: W. Hudson, 'The Prior of Norwich's manor of Hindolveston', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 20 (1917–19), pp. 202–3.
52 P.R.O., C.241/82/97.

creditors living in them. Commercial links with London also diminished. Only three merchants from Yarmouth appear in the London certificates for these years, with one from Norwich, and one other merchant from Norfolk.[53]

There was little recovery in the next five years, 1320–4. In fact 1321 stands out as the most critical year for Norfolk. Nothing illustrates better how these certificates reflect the local economy than what happened that year when the barley-harvest failed and there was also sheep murrain; there are only three certificates for the whole county. At Coltishall, seven miles north of Norwich, the sales of peasants' land reflected a crisis far greater than that of 1314–17 or of 1293–4.[54] Twenty hundreds produced no creditors of their own in these five years, and twelve hundreds had no debtors. Although Norwich maintained 40 per cent of the county's creditors it had no debtors in eleven of the eastern hundreds. The number of deeds enrolled in the city also sank steadily from 1316 throughout the 1320s, even though its population was apparently growing.[55] The newcomers, though, seem to have been mainly refugees from an impoverished countryside looking for work.[56] The city provided the best hope of employment, but the local markets which had made it a regional centre of trade had lost all their vigour. Norwich was a central place much as an oasis is in a desert.

The seriousness of the economic depression is most obvious in 1325–9 by which time the certificates are again unaffected by the restriction of the system to merchants only. Since the previous period when this was so, the expansionary years of 1305–9, the number of Norfolk's certificates had diminished by 64 per cent from 483 to 175, and what is immediately obvious is the shortage of creditors in every hundred except Gallow. Yet Norfolk's certificates account for no less than 36 per cent of the national total. In 1305–9 when the whole kingdom was prosperous, Norfolk's share was only 12 per cent. It had survived the agrarian crisis better than other counties because of its barley and wool, and because of the strong overseas demand for its malt, ale, and cloth. But in 1325–9 it was the leading supplier of credit also because London had lost the pre-eminent financial position it had begun to claim in the first decade of the century. The political crisis which led to the deposition of Edward II had contributed to factional conflict in London which undermined its trade and credit. There are no certificates from Londoners at Norwich in the 1320s, and there are none from Norfolk men in London. Moreover, the purchase by two London pepperers of a property, probably a shop, in St Peter Mancroft in 1322, suggests a rather desperate attempt to escape from London's troubles by taking their spices directly to the provincial market.[57]

It was not just the fear of violence and disorder which reduced contact with London. Some of that violence had wider economic causes as appears from the fall in London's

[53] P.R.O., C.241/82/97; 84/83; 85/82; 102/152; 109/154.

[54] Campbell, 'Population-pressure', pp. 114–15.

[55] The number of deeds registered were:
Oct. 1311–Oct. 1316: 541;
Oct. 1316–Oct. 1321: 511;
Oct. 1321–Oct. 1326: 431;
Oct. 1326–Oct. 1331: 412.

[56] Rutledge, 'Immigration', pp. 25–6.

[57] Rye, *Calendar of Norwich Deeds, 1307–41*, p. 110. When one of them died, the shop was sold to a Boston merchant in 1331: ibid., p. 160.

population that decade, and from the radical political agitation of a group of London mercers with Norfolk origins.[58] Their prime motive seems to have been hostility to alien competition, and their agitation coincided with the disappearance of linen-drapers from Norwich's deeds, and with a steady fall in the amount of English cloth and worsteds, and even of ale, exported by alien merchants from Lynn in the 1320s.[59] This period saw the failure of Norfolk's linen industry to compete with imports of the finer product of the Low Countries, Flanders and Northern France. By 1332 the inventory of the London mercer of Norfolk origin, Richard Elsing, was composed mainly of continental imports, and by the middle of the century Lyndraper Row in Norwich market had changed its name.[60] In 1334 the same woad merchants of Amiens who supplied Norwich, and lived there as citizens, made a new agreement to return to London, after a long absence, to sell woad.[61] This suggests that the Norfolk woollen and worsted industry, as well as the linen industry was going through a difficult time in the 1320s.[62]

Monetary factors contributed to a fall in overseas demand for Norfolk's cloth and worsted. Gold commanded a higher price relative to silver in England than at the continental mints. This encouraged the importation of gold into England and the illegal export of silver. Gold florins were already imported through Lynn in 1304.[63] By 1314 the Crown was alarmed that merchants were no longer bringing silver to the mints, and throughout Edward II's reign there was a steady flow of foreign gold coins into the kingdom.[64] The export of over £165 worth of English sterlings from Lynn by alien merchants in 1322–3, despite the prohibition against it, indicates that they expected a much higher profit from silver coins than from exporting English cloth or worsteds. Only the hope of such profits can have induced them to run the risk that their silver coins would be confiscated.[65] The more effective enforcement of the ban would explain the lack of subsequent records of this drain of silver coin from the domestic economy, but it may well have continued illicitly. Certainly from 1323–4 the Lynn customs accounts record a severe slump in alien exports of cloth, worsteds and ale. This suggests that English exporters, too, might have found it difficult to sell these goods overseas

58 Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community*, pp. 124, 126, 129–30, 142–52.

59 After 1320 only one linen-draper, apparently a widow, appears in the Norwich deeds, whereas five had done so in 1310–15, and nine in 1300–5. In 1322–3 alien exports of *pannus Anglicanus* worth £1,160 were exported from Lynn; in 1323–4 its value was only £597, and it continued to fall in subsequent years. Alien exports of worsted were worth £278 in 1323–4 and fell thereafter. Alien exports of ale were worth £1,052 in 1323–4, but only £477 in 1325–6: P.R.O., E.122/93/17, 18, 24, 28.

60 Sutton, 'Early linen and worsted industry', pp. 202–3, 207.

61 W. Hudson, 'Notes about Norwich before the close of the thirteenth century', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 12 (1895), pp. 64–6.

62 On the general decline of the export trade in cheaper types of northern cloth in this period, see, J.H. Munro, 'Industrial transformations in the north-west European textile trades, *c*.1290–*c*.1340: economic progress or economic crisis?', in id., *Textiles, Towns and Trade* (Aldershot, 1994), p. 111.

63 P.R.O., E.122/93/1 shows gold coins worth over £104 imported, and E.122/93/3 shows gold worth over £325.

64 M. Prestwich, 'Early fourteenth-century exchange rates', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 32 (1979), pp. 475–8.

65 It was profitable to export silver sterlings, even though they also paid customs for them: P.R.O., E.122/93/17.

this decade.[66] Since there was little silver coming to the mints to replenish the domestic currency, a shortage of coin, coupled with the long-term effects of the famine, must also have depressed domestic demand.[67]

Inevitably this had an effect on Norfolk's cloth industry. This decade saw the certificates for South Erpingham in sharp decline, and the fall of a third in the number of dyers in the Norwich deeds. Norwich's own creditors and debtors were less than half the number they had been in 1305–9, which indicates that its own trade was badly hit. Its influence over the surrounding countryside contracted; only West Flegg, Eynesford, and Henstead had four or more debtors to Norwich. Rural credit also shrank; only Gallow, Yarmouth and Norwich had ten or more creditors of their own. Although there was the flickering of revival in some rural hundreds with the return of a good harvest in 1326,[68] falling agricultural prices before long affected investment and productivity. The managers of the Lakenheath demesne in Breckland reduced the proportion of arable they manured from an average of 60 per cent throughout the 1320s to 41 per cent in 1329–30.[69]

However, after another two bad harvests in 1330 and 1331, much real recovery did come to Norfolk with good harvests for the rest of the decade. The certificates of debt doubled in the years 1330–4, indicating a rapid expansion of credit. At Coltishall this was a period of reconstruction. In Breckland the size of flocks increased, as did the number of brewers, and the areas of demesne under cultivation were often higher by the 1340s than in any previous recorded decade.[70] There were also increased wool exports from Yarmouth and Lynn once the overseas wool staple was abandoned in 1326 and Norfolk men could compete in the trade on more equal terms. Yarmouth's creditors reached their highest number of eighteen in the years 1330–4, but they still numbered only 13 per cent of Norwich's creditors. By contrast Yarmouth had twenty-nine debtors, nearly half of whom were indebted to merchants of Norwich.

Wool most likely accounts for the high tax payments from the marshlands round Lynn in the 1334 subsidy, and for the number of men from Freebridge and Holt who were debtors to Norwich.[71] It is most certainly the reason why the only rural hundred which had ten or more local creditors was North Greenhoe, where eleven out of the twelve certificates were issued by the wool brogger and exporter, William Athelwald of Egmere. Norfolk's higher exports of wool, assisted by a slight fall in the English exchange rate for gold, must have brought more coin back from Flanders to revive the county's economy, and also the peasants' demand for land.[72] Even though the price of wool fell this would have made Norfolk's worsted and woollen cloth more competitive

[66] P.R.O., E.122/93/18, 24, 28. The value of alien exports of English cloth from Lynn fell from £1,160 in 1322–3 to £597 in 1323–4; then to £296 in 1324–5, and to £176 in 1325–6. Exports of ale and worsteds also fell from 1324 onwards.

[67] C.E. Challis (ed.), *A New History of the Royal Mint* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 678.

[68] Campbell, 'Population-pressure', p. 112.

[69] Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, p. 42 table 2.3.

[70] Campbell, 'Population-pressure', pp. 114–15; Bailey, *A Marginal Economy?*, pp. 203, 259.

[71] R.E. Glasscock, *The Lay Subsidy of 1334* (British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, new ser., 2: London, 1975), p. 197.

[72] Prestwich, 'Early fourteenth-century exchange rates', p. 477 table 1; Campbell, 'Population-pressure', p. 115.

since it appealed to the lower end of the market. This could account for the marked recovery of local credit in Eynesford and South Erpingham.

The expansion of Norwich's own cloth industry most easily explains the 28 per cent rise in the number of Norwich's deeds in the 1330s. The dyers in them rose from eight in 1325–30 to seventeen in 1335–40 and the number of fullers increased in the same period from one to five. At the same time Norwich creditors increased their hold over the cloth hundreds, since two-thirds of Eynesford's twenty-one debtors were indebted to them in 1330–4. The previous period of rural crisis, followed by the decline in overseas trade had obviously reduced the sales of Norfolk's cloth and sapped the industry's capital, so that now it needed a closer financial partnership with Norwich. The strategy worked for South Erpingham, at least in the latter part of the decade, when its creditors again multiplied to the high number of twenty-eight, but they no longer had the reserves of capital which could preserve their independence from Norwich.

Norwich's own creditors rose from 32 to 38 per cent of the county's total in the 1330s. However, the city's financial influence did not expand geographically much beyond Launditch and South Erpingham to the north, and to the three hundreds immediately south-west of the city, Forehoe, Humilyard and Depwade. In the latter two hundreds the numbers indebted to Norwich shot up. Several were debtors of the wool merchant, John Hardgrey, but others were debtors of bakers, skinners, and cordwaners. It looks as though the city was making new demands on the surrounding countryside for food and raw materials.

Whether its population had climbed to the suggested figure of 25,000 by 1333 is more questionable, since this figure has been calculated by doubling the numbers of adult men on the tithing rolls to allow for women, and then by increasing the number by a further 45 per cent to allow for children.[73] But since Norwich grew mainly through immigration, and the evidence indicates that most of its immigrants were young, mobile, and too poor to acquire property,[74] and, therefore, to marry and have children, this calculation would seem to be an overestimate. Evidence from a later period, 1359–60, shows that eighty-eight male servants, presumably unmarried, then accounted for nearly one-quarter of the militia in the leet of Wymer in the city. Since Wymer had little trade compared with the leet of Mancroft, the proportion of unmarried servants living in the Mancroft properties especially, and therefore in the city's population as a whole, was likely to have been much higher than one-quarter.[75] Furthermore, since there seems to be some relationship between the number of specialised occupations in a city and the size of its population, the sixty-eight occupations recorded for Norwich by 1311 indicates a population then nearer in size to that of Winchester, which had seventy occupations for a population of about 10,000, rather than the 17,000 suggested for Norwich at that date.[76] Since there was a growth in the number of adult males in the leet of Mancroft between 1311 and 1333 of 76 per cent it seems that Norwich's

[73] Rutledge, 'Immigration', p. 26.

[74] Rutledge, 'Immigration', pp. 25–7.

[75] W. Hudson, 'Norwich militia in the fourteenth century', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 14 (1898–1900), p. 276.

[76] D. Keene, 'Continuity and development in urban trades', in P.J. Corfield and D. Keene (eds.), *Work in Towns, 850–1850* (Leicester, 1990), p. 7; Rutledge, 'Immigration', p. 27.

population may not have been much larger at the latter date than the 18,000 estimated by Hollingsworth.[77]

Norfolk's recovery in the 1330s had little to do with its links with London. No Londoners appeared as creditors or debtors at Norwich in the 1330's, although in 1334 a Londoner acquired a shop in Worsted Row in Norwich's market place, presumably in part to supply his London business with cloth and worsteds. [78] Norfolk men were a little more active in London, although they were principally from Yarmouth, selling fish or wool.[79] The exception was Alan de Heghe of Norwich who gave credit of £40 to a Heacham-born mercer of London.[80]

However, in the next decade there came a dramatic change. In 1342 London capital in the person of its former Mayor, Sir John de Pulteney, a draper and wool exporter, arrived in Norwich.[81] Between August and October he made large advances of credit to men from six hundreds which could have been for cloth but were more likely for Norfolk's wool, since in July 1342 exports of wool were allowed again after a lengthy ban, provided that the merchants paid an extra subsidy in cash.[82] Norfolk's wool merchants could not compete with the cash reserves of the Londoners, and so men like Pulteney could elbow their way into Norwich's market. Even so, he was probably acting on behalf of a cartel of wool merchants which included some Norfolk men. The manipulations of William de la Pole seem to have been behind the new connexions made by London wool exporters with the Lynn wool-merchants and corn-exporters John de Wesenham and Thomas de Melchbourne.[83] The prominent part which Wesenham and Melchbourne played in monopolist wool syndicates from 1343 suggests that there was little profit in the trade for Norwich merchants that decade, unless, as the certificates indicate, they were willing to throw in their lot with the schemes of the Londoners.[84] Between 1344 and 1348 Norfolk's wool merchants, including some prominent Norwich men like William Butt and the Hardgreys, appear frequently in certificates of debt registered in London, sometimes in association with Wesenham and Melchbourne.[85] But the likelihood is that most of the profits from these connexions did not find their way back to Norfolk. One could argue that this is evidence of the merging of two regional economies, but in this case it was short-term and political, and could not survive the return to a free market in wool.

[77] Rutledge, 'Immigration', p. 22; T.H. Hollingsworth, *Historical Demography* (1969), pp. 363–4.

[78] Rye, *Calendar of Norwich Deeds, 1307–41*, p. 183.

[79] P.R.O., C.241/105/157; and 111/356. Both Benedict le Shipwright and his creditor in London, William Box, dealt in wool: C.241/112/125.

[80] P.R.O., C.241/110/327.

[81] P.R.O., C.241/115/3, 5, 6, 428, 453; 117/388.

[82] T.H. Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 184–5.

[83] Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 163–4, 185, 198–9. The initial connexion between William Pole and Melchbourne and Wesenham seems to have been made in their earlier activities in supplying the armies in Scotland with corn and other victuals: N.S.B. Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn-Market from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), pp. 172–3.

[84] E.B. Fryde, 'The English farmers of the customs, 1343–51', in id., *Studies in Medieval Trade and Finance* (London, 1983), pp. 9–11.

[85] E.g., P.R.O., C.241/121/159, 169, 238; 123/111; 123/159; 126/211; 130/23; 131/14; 131/14, 142; 134/189.

The manipulations of the wool trade probably contributed to the pronounced fall in the certificates of debt from Norwich which began in 1344 and which showed no recovery before the Black Death. But since wool exports had never dominated Norfolk's economy,[86] it seems more likely that this deep trough was also a consequence of the poor harvest of 1343, and of more monetary troubles, including a renewed shortage of silver coin.[87] The uncertainties caused by the introduction of an English gold currency in 1344, which first overvalued and then undervalued gold, reduced the confidence of creditors, and the effects on the economy were felt as much in rural Coltishall as in Norwich. By 1345 the number of land transactions in Coltishall had fallen to their lowest level since the famine, and at Horsham St Faith Priory the payments for the priory's farms and tithes were in arrears.[88] The economy of the most commercialised county in England was shaken, and between 1345 and 1349 the number of Norfolk's certificates halved. On the eve of the Black Death Norwich's influence was marked only in its two neighbouring hundreds of Forehoe and Humilyard, and also in the cloth hundred of South Erpingham. The purchase by the city's bailiffs of the Castle Fee for more housing in 1345 indicates that once again rural depression may have been driving a new flood of unemployed emigrants into Norwich.[89]

This analysis has not revealed in the fifty years 1300–50 the steady integration of Norfolk's markets in hierarchical fashion under the leadership of Norwich and ultimately of London. Instead it has revealed a process of considerable fluctuation which, when the Black Death struck, found Norwich's financial and commercial dominance marked only over three hundreds — no more than in 1300–4. Moreover, at no point can it be said that London made any significant impact on the development of Norfolk. Rather, for most of this period the influence ran in the opposite direction, with emigrants from Norfolk contributing their mercantile talents and connexions to the growth of London. Sixty-one of those who paid the Lay Subsidy of 1319 in London had Norfolk names, and several of them reached aldermanic rank. Between *c.*1270 and 1360 Norfolk was surpassed only by Essex and Middlesex in the number of immigrants it contributed to London, and it provided possibly up to one-third of London's mercers.[90] The difficulty of precisely dating the pattern of immigration makes it unclear whether Norfolk men moved to London because they saw opportunities there to expand the market for worsteds, or whether they were pushed into emigration because of the decline of the East Anglian fairs, and the failure of Norfolk's linen industry to compete with alien imports.

However, for those who stayed in the county there can be little doubt that the markets of Flanders, and even those of northern England and Scotland, were more important to

86 Although Norfolk contributed more than any other county to the wool-tax of 1341, this was because the tax was assessed by requiring each county to produce an amount of wool equal in value to two and three-quarter times the product of one-fifteenth. Where counties could not produce enough wool within their own borders they had to buy it in from elsewhere. This happened in Norfolk: Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 160–4.

87 Lloyd, *Wool Trade*, pp. 185, 196–8.

88 Campbell, 'Population-pressure', pp. 115–16; Sherlock, 'Discoveries at Horsham St Faith Priory', p. 203.

89 Rutledge, 'Immigration', p. 17.

90 E. Ekwall, *Two Early London Subsidy Rolls* (Lund, 1951), p. 60; Sutton, 'Early linen and worsted industry', pp. 205–6.

Norfolk's economy than those of London and the south-east. Overseas demand for Norfolk's crops, hides, and wool help to explain the precocious commercial development of the county's agriculture, its dense population, and high circulation of coin. The latter contributed to the development of a free land-market which enabled Norfolk's peasants to develop their own commercialised and progressive agriculture.[91] The influence of overseas demand was visible still in the fourteenth century in the arc of wealthy hundreds with numerous creditors which skirted the coastline from Yarmouth to Lynn.

By comparison Norwich was slow to extend its influence over the county's economy. The first fifteen years of prosperity, 1300–15, show how limited the city's hinterland was, even after decades of economic growth, compared with the centres of rural enterprise and capital whose influence was actually expanding at a higher rate than Norwich's in the most prosperous years, 1305–9. The linen and cloth industry probably did most to increase Norwich's influence because the city early became a centre of distribution for the woad of Amiens, and also for the sale of South Erpingham's linen manufactures and imports of foreign cloth. As the worsted industry developed, its demand for wool diverted supplies from as far west as Freebridge to Norwich, and brought more herrings up the River Yare to pay for it. Ultimately Norwich became the finishing as well as the financial and distributive centre for the linen and worsted of the cloth hundreds. But essentially the cloth industry was the product of rural enterprise and rural capital, and it is questionable whether it would have come under Norwich's control if the protracted years of bad harvests, disease, and shortage of coin between 1315–30 had not sapped rural demand, impoverished local markets, and drained away a significant amount of the countryside's capital, credit, and manpower.

The history of Coltishall shows that even a later run of good years, such as those in the 1330s, could not fully restore the capital and resilience of the countryside. Meanwhile the years of hardship had built up Norwich's force of cheap labour, and the contraction of the rural economy had left Norwich's merchants, its dyers and artisans with more capital, and easier access to alternative markets than their rural rivals. In the same way that years of agrarian crisis enriched the wealthier peasants at the expense of the poorer to whom they leant money and from whom they bought land, so Norwich gained from the sufferings of the countryside.[92] The consequence was that when the Black Death came to Norfolk, forty-three per cent of the county's creditors lived in Norwich, compared with twenty-seven per cent in 1310.

Some economic historians might describe this process as one of the progressive restructuring of an economy, and they might cite Norwich's rise as a classic example of a central place which made the regional economy more efficient, more commercialised, and more prepared for integration into an incipient national economy. But it is difficult to argue this case when Norwich's hinterland was considerably smaller in 1348 than it was in 1310. The county's wealth essentially was created in the countryside, and when that, or the trade through which it was exchanged, was

[91] B.M.S. Campbell, 'Population-change and the genesis of commonfields on a Norfolk manor', *Economic History Review,* 2nd ser., 33 (1980), pp. 187–8.

[92] P.R. Schofield, 'Dearth, debt, and the local land market in a late thirteenth-century village community', *Agricultural History Review,* 45 (1997), pp. 10–15.

undermined, no amount of restructuring could replace it. There might be a greater concentration of wealth in the city, but it was not enough to support the economy of the surrounding countryside or to sustain the degree of commercialisation which had been built up in the affluent years 1305–10. When the pattern of lay wealth in the county in 1334 is compared with that in 1525 it had declined by 17.2 per cent. Moreover, those areas which had maintained or increased their wealth did not form a neat ring round Norwich.[93]

One must conclude that the degree to which Norwich did develop some concentration and specialisation of functions in the Middle Ages was the consequence more of economic contraction than of economic growth and commercial integration. That process of contraction, begun in 1315–30, and renewed again just before the Black Death, depressed the commercial activity of the countryside, and in doing so it cut away part of the broad base of the pyramid which was needed to support a central place.

93 Campbell, 'Complexity of manorial structure', pp. 246–7.