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A methodology for assessing the comparative wealth of towns in the early fourteenth and in the early sixteenth centuries was established some years ago by R. S. Scofield (1). This involves contrasting the amounts raised by the Lay Subsidy of 1334 with the receipts from that of 1524, supplemented by a similar comparison of clerical wealth, as given in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas of 1291 and the Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1538. There are distortions in all such sets of figures, but the latest opinion seems to be that these cancel one another out, and that the comparative figures are in general meaningful. (2) For the parish of Warrington the sums work out as follows: Lay Subsidy of 1334 £7 4s 0d; Lay Subsidy of 1524 £8 2s 6d; Clerical Tax of 1291 £1 6s 8d; Valor Ecclesiasticus £6 7s 10d (3).

This would represent an increase in lay wealth of 13 per cent, in clerical wealth of 379 per cent, and (perhaps the most significant figure) in lay plus clerical wealth of 234 per cent. The slow growth in lay wealth comes as no surprise considering the disturbed conditions of the fifteenth century when for a long period the bridge across the Mersey lay in ruins. Nor does the increase in clerical wealth, for in this same century the Augustinian Friary was in a flourishing condition, and three new chantries were founded in the parish. What is significant is that between these two dates the economy of Lancashire, uniquely among the English counties, apparently went into reverse, lay wealth declining by about 17 per cent and clerical by about 1½ per cent. Warrington, or perhaps the entire prosperous West Derby Hundred at whose eastern end the town was situated would seem to have moved against this county-wide trend. If so, the decline in other Hundreds must have been even sharper than Scofield's overall figures suggest.

(1) R. S. Scofield, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1334-1649', in *Ec.H.R.*, N.S. Vol. 18, (1965).

(2) See S. H. Rigby in *Urban History Year Book*, 1979.

(3) J. P. Rylands (ed.), *Exchequer Lay Subsidy Roll, Lancashire, 1332* (Rec. Soc. Lancs. & Ches. Vol. 31, 1895) and R. E. Glasscock, *The Lay Subsidy of 1334* (1975), 149f; P.R.O., E 179/130/96; *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Auctoritate Papae Nicolai IV* (Rolls Series, 1802), 249; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Vol 5 (1825), 29. Of these four sets of figures only the second seems suspect, as the 1524 returns for Warrington omit all persons with goods or lands of less than £2 value i.e. all craftsmen, husbandmen and wage-earners. This would imply quite a considerable underestimation of lay wealth in that year.