

PREFACE

Although I 'escaped' from London many years ago, the countryside has never lost its fascination. This was an opportunity to study farming in some detail.

This study has encompassed so many issues, that much of the research material has had to be omitted in order to keep to the terms of reference. The two farms were chosen for their similarity for agricultural purposes, as well as both having been owned by the Petre family; they also had Scotch immigrant farmers in the late nineteenth century. I wished to find out how they followed or diverged from general farming trends in Essex.

Having done this, I would find further interest in the early history of both manor farms which gives scope for investigation. I would also wish to find out more information about the history of the farmers. This in turn opens up speculation about the relationship of these and other farms. It would be interesting to compare the fortunes of the large tenant farmers and the small owners of under fifty acres.

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My thanks, too, to Mr. J. Holmes and Mr. L. D. Jarvis for lending a listening ear and for making helpful comments.

I am also indebted to the Essex Record Office for the use of facilities and for the help of the staff.

CAMBRIDGE SHIRE

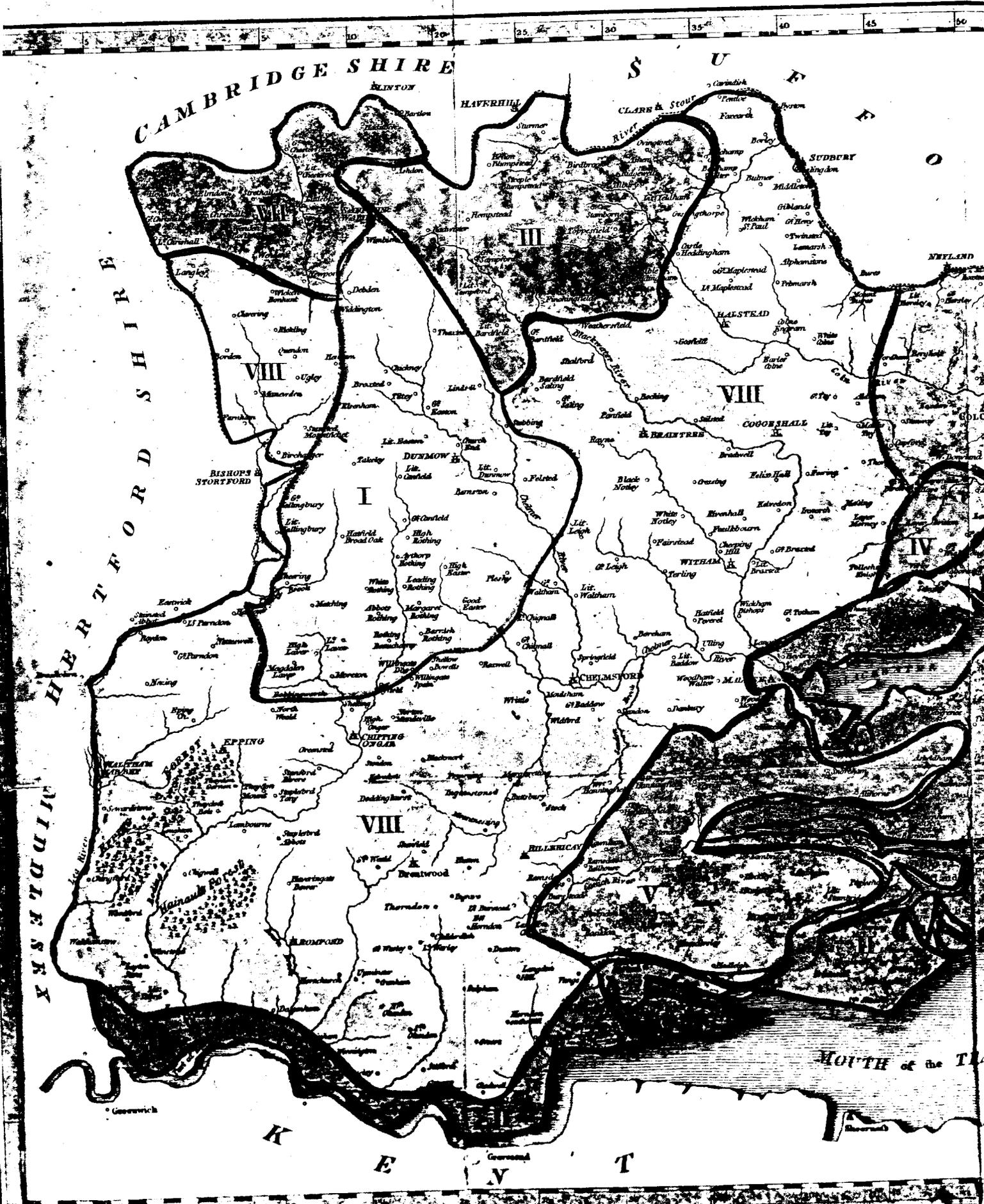
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Chapter 1.

Agricultural Trends and Influences.

'The farmer .. is not independent and self-sustained, but is at the mercy of many masters. The weather and the seasons are one master; the foreign producer is another; the markets which are further influenced by the condition of the trade at large, form a third master'.

So wrote Richard Jefferies in the nineteenth century. It is not enough to generalize on trends in agriculture without taking these points into consideration. Jefferies also indicated in his description of farming 'types' how much the background, character, education, and training of any farmer could add a further set of variables to those of outside influences.

Also of primary consideration was the relationship between landowners and tenant farmers. It was usually a good partnership involving mutual interest and respect. However, while some landowners only made allowances to farmers for expediency during times of hardship, others, such as the Petre family, still ploughed in capital for such items as building projects, drainage and general improvements to the property of the tenants of their farms. Such large landowners had both the capital and the foresight to make land-term project investments in their estates, even when it was not apparently advantageous to themselves.

At the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, most farmers were very hard-pressed. The years of disastrous harvest, attacks of sheep rot and cattle plague, especially from 1693-1700, had ruined many. In addition, after the revolution of 1688, and during the war

return of high taxation, which together with a considerable fall in agricultural prices, caused hardship to farmers and difficulties for owners of small estates who often could not carry on. J.P. Kenyon describes this as a concealed long-term effect of the Civil Wars.² Since about half the income of the country was derived from agriculture, this constituted a serious problem.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, agriculture was already far removed from that of the Middle Ages when a harvest yield of 4-1 in seed was regarded as highly satisfactory whereas at the middle of the eighteenth century, a contemporary writer on corn production took the basis as 10-1.³ The progress in improving both the quality and quantity of crops and livestock had been an ongoing process. The rise of the yeoman farmer, and the relationship of landlord, agent and tenant, gave impetus to this advance. Often, too, a farmer who owned his land, may also have rented other farms as a tenant.

In the main, Essex has been a corn growing county, with its low rainfall (averaging under 25 inches a year) and its mixed soils,⁴ ranging from chalk in the north-west, to the varying types of sand, gravel, and clay loams of the rest of the county. This has led to variations in methods of cultivation, with cereal growing predominating in the type of farming which characterized the region. It was only at times when corn-growing was not economically viable that this course has had to be modified.

As most of the land of the county has been enclosed since the Middle Ages, farmers were able to cultivate as best suited their needs. Apart from restrictions contained in leases to tenant farmers in order to promote good husbandry, they were able to farm as need and conditions dictated. In heavy clay lands it

was often stipulated that only two crops be taken together without a fallow. In general, a three course rotation was followed in the early eighteenth century, but one crop and a fallow was quite usual on heavy, wet land.⁵ Wheat, barley, oats, beans, and peas were the most usual crops grown in the county, as well as tares, rye grass and clover. Hops were grown in some districts in Essex, but many a farm had one 'hopgarden' in the earlier period. Turnips were also being advocated, but these were mainly grown in lighter soils. It was being realised that clover and legumes supplied nutrients to the soil.

Manures included dung from cattle and sheep, the latter being folded with hurdles on fallow ground or stubble.⁶ Chickens, pigs, horses and oxen also provided manure.

Other forms of fertilizers much valued included marl for putting 'body' into light soils, sea-coal ashes for meadow and pasture, soap ashes and potash. On heavy land a great deal of chalk and lime was applied, much of which came from the patch of chalk at Purfleet on the Thames.

During the eighteenth century, livestock on Essex farms was generally a collection of non-specific breeds.⁷ The influence of Bakewell and the Collings Brothers on animal breeding had yet to make itself felt. It was not until the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century that the advances in breeding heavier and more quickly fattened animals became general practice. There were progressive farmers in Essex as elsewhere, such as a Mr. Western of Maldon who bred the Essex half black hog, 'a breed pretty general in this county, but little known elsewhere.'⁸ Thomas Bridge is mentioned by Arthur Young, too, as keeping Yorkshire shorthorn cattle.⁹

With the spread of convertible husbandry farms became stocked with more sheep.

It was estimated that the output of agricultural produce in England and Wales must have increased by about 40% in the eighteenth century.¹⁰

With the growth of population from about six million in 1701 to about nine million in 1801,¹¹ agriculture kept pace. The greater acreage of corn grown was partly due to enclosures, (although Essex was not affected to any great degree) and by increased yield per acre.¹² Waste land was cultivated, and land drainage expanded productive acreage.

As always, the weather played its part in the short-term price fluctuations. While heavy land could not withstand cold rainy seasons, during dry weather the crops did not suffer as much as those on lighter soil. Good harvests lowered prices, while in poorer years prices were higher. During the first few years of the century, agricultural prices were low, until the disastrous years from 1709 to 1710 when price of wheat rose by about 200%. The next dry years culminated in that of 1714, when the recorded rainfall at Upminster in Essex was only 11.2 inches for the year.¹³

Until the 1730's, weather conditions were comparatively stable, and wheat prices averaged about 37/-. Although prices fell in the thirties, there was a rise in grain exports. Owing to improved husbandry, and increased productive acreage, low prices ruled for animal products and corn until the 1750's.¹⁴ Allowing for some bad seasons (some of which seriously affected parts of Essex) prices gradually began to rise with the increasing population, and consequent demand for food and by-products such as wool, tallow, and hides. Until about 1766 more wheat had been exported, even in the difficult years. Thenceforth, more was imported.¹⁵

The years of the Napoleonic Wars from 1793 saw prices forced up, and this rise was further increased by some exceptionally bad seasons. When bounties were being put on imports after riots caused by high food prices, consumption requirements were exceeding output.¹⁶ Farmers were prospering, despite the fact that expense of cultivating arable land nearly doubled, and wages rose.¹⁷ It was now that the innovations of Jethro Tull, Lord Townshend, Arthur Young and Thomas Coke being more widely put into practice, began to make a noticeable impact.

1815-1837 was a period of agricultural distress. As prices fell, many farmers had to give up their leases, while those who had bought land at inflated prices during the war years, faced ruin.¹⁸ A series of bad seasons, with expensive animal feed, as well as outbreaks of sheep rot, served to make Essex a county where farming was a precarious occupation. Reductions in rent had to be made by many landowners. It was generally realised that farmers bore the brunt of taxation, tithes, Poor Law rates as well as the Highway rates. These anomalies were in part reduced at the end of this period.¹⁹

Essex was one of the counties most affected by the Corn Laws²⁰ introduced in the seventeenth century aimed (by controlling imports) at keeping the price of wheat in English markets stable and high. When these laws were repealed in 1846, and a free market in imported wheat was established, the 'agricultural interest'²¹ foresaw ruin. An Essex land agent was more sanguine:

'Now, as to Protection, I am not one who clings to a high price of wheat as the only hope of the Farmer. I may say that I have given up all idea of it since the very first passing of the Repeal of the Duty. I fully believe that other things will in time accommodate themselves to the price of corn, and that, under

as Pringle commented :

'Only they and the solid well-tutored Essex farmers managed to survive.' ²⁷

Even with the Agricultural Commission Reports of 1881 and 1894 and their recommendations, the depression took its toll.

Many Essex farmers were still in business, but had to cut back in investment in fertilizers and animal feed which led to starvation of the land. Once derelict, the difficult soils of Essex took many years and much capital to return to fertility.

References

Chapter 1.

1. Hodge and his Masters - Richard Jefferies p. 69.
2. Stuart England - J.P. Kenyon p. 188
3. The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880 - J.D.Chambers =
G.E. Mingay p.5. (quoting from Three tracts on the Corn
Trade and the Corn Laws 1766 - Charles Smith.)
4. Victoria County History Vol. 2 p.313.
5. The Duty of a Steward to his Lord - Edward Laurence (1727)
otations he advocated were adopted much later on
heavy land :
 - ' 1. Wheat or barley after fallows.
 2. Pease or beans or rather both
 3. Oats and then 4 summer fallows.'p. 181
6. ibid 'Sheeps dung for cold tillage on clay-lands is the
best of all dungs. I have seen some good improvements
in Essex by this dung, where they fold sheep in
covered folds and mix the dung with ditch earth and
mudd to spread on fallows.'
p. 203
7. General View of the Agriculture of the County of Essex
- 1794 - Messrs Griggs. p. 23
8. General view of the Agriculture of the County of Essex
- Arthur Young - 1807 p341
9. ibid. p. 270
10. The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880 - J.D.CHAMBERS
p.34 G.E.MINGAY
11. British Economic Growth 1688-1959 p.6 PHYLLIS DEANE
W.A.COLE

The estimated population for Essex is stated as being
168 527 in 1701 and 233 664 in 1801 - tables p. 103

12. 'The inclosures which from time immemorial have almost universally prevailed, make Essex preferable to some of the neighbouring counties : here every man enjoys his own the year round and accomodates his course of husbandry to the nature, size and other casual circumstances of his farm.
Gen. View of Ag. in County of Essex -Messrs. Griggs
1794 p.12
13. Agricultural Records A.D.220-1968 - J.M.Stratton p.67 and 68
Average prices for 1708 were 37s. 11d. and in 1710 they were 71s. 6d per quarter.
14. The Ag. Revolution 1750-1880 - J.D.Chambers G.E.Mingay
p. 109
15. Appendix - tables -Lord Ernle. . Exports continued to about 1801, but by that date 10,541,300 quarters were imported from1767
16. J.D.Chambers G.E. Mingay The Agricultural Revolution 1750-1880 p.16
17. ibid p.116
18. Great Britain