

Conclusion

A picture of farming methods and conditions of the times could be built up from rich sources of contemporary reports by such agriculturalists as Edward Laurence in the early eighteenth century, Arthur Young to the early nineteenth century, and Primrose McConnell later in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. A more definitive picture is given by land agents, and the reports to the Agricultural Commissioners. The balance is achieved by comparing the ideal with the actual.

The Essex farmer, with his large area of arable land has always been particularly vulnerable to climatic conditions. This, together with nationwide economic trends, and outside influences - wars not being the least - have combined to make the general troughs even more depressed. At the times in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when farmers could not even pay their rents, ran up debts, or found themselves unable to check the dereliction of their land, they were fortunate to be tenants of a large estate belonging to a progressive landowner. The two farms studied were fortunate that their landlords, the Petres, were businessmen whose financial interests were not entirely tied up in the land.

They were not so totally liberal as one of their agents lead us to believe. Frank Coverdale at the end of the nineteenth century, reported that his employer used capital for buildings and general improvements on his farms during the depression, when he could have invested his money more profitably. This was true, but it was in Lord Petre's interest to improve his property in the long term, so that he or his successors would benefit by higher rentals when agriculture again became economically viable. The Petres also had

sufficient capital available to tide over their farmers in difficult times. Again, this was to their advantage rather than have a farm in hand. It is possible that in some cases a farm could be returned to a more fertile condition by injection of capital while in hand, so that it would be easier to satisfy a new tenant, and charge a higher rent. This may have been the case with Fristling Hall farm before the Scottish tenant took over.

The relationship between the agents and the tenants of the Petre estates during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries appears to have been one of mutual trust. The agents seemed to have been able to balance the interests of their employers with those of the tenant farmers. One such farmer² remembers Frank Coverdale, when he used to visit his father's farm. The agent was labelled a 'character' and was very popular with all the farmers in the district, as they found him always willing to listen and try to solve any problems. They trusted him to act in their best interests.

The two farms under consideration both have difficult soil which has required expert husbandry as well as a high level of expenditure on manures and fertilizers. They have, therefore been more prone to be affected by the weather, and economic trends than most. Their history is a fairly accurate barometer of English farming in general, and of Essex in particular. It is noticeable, however that until the depression of the nineteenth century neither of these farms succumbed quite as easily and quickly to adverse conditions as did some of the others on the estate. Michael Mason is the exception in the 1830's, but it is possible that he had other commitments.

It is here that we come to the greatest variable in farming - the farmer himself.

With more research into newspaper reports, and articles in journals, as well as contact with descendents of farmers in this study, it should be possible to understand something more of their lives and characters. Had there been time, it would have been interesting to delve into the mass of manorial documents for the two manors, where there are many scraps of evidence referring to the manor farms and their tenants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Some simple receipts and memoranda are purely connected with the farms rather than manor courts.

Without earlier evidence, there are three men who stand above the rest - The two Thomas Bridges of Fristling Hall in the early nineteenth century, and Robert Craig in the late nineteenth early 20th century. It is true that their farming activities are more fully documented than most, but even without this, their record from available farming accounts for the Thorndon Estate, show them to be men who could stay the course, even when the going was rough.

Thomas Bridge emerges as an exceptional farmer, keeping the best of the old methods, yet all the time willing to experiment with new ideas and form his own unbiased conclusions. His farms were kept impeccably, and his son appeared to have benefited from his father's training, and prospered accordingly. Perhaps Thomas Bridge Jnr. lacked the judgement of his father - but then perhaps he, too, would have been tempted to take on more land in the boom years of the nineteenth century.

Robert Craig, later in the century, was altogether a different character. University educated (he was going to take Holy Orders until circumstances forced him to carry on his fathers farm in Scotland) he always had his passion for the horses he bred.

Unlike most immigrant farmers, his interests widened his circle of associates, and one tends to think that although he was business-like in his approach to farming, that he farmed with a feeling for the land, and was in touch with current ideas.

There is little one can say of the earlier farmers without much more research, although for the most part they seemed to hold their own as well as others in the district, if not better than some.

Of the last Masons to farm Crondon, there are many questions raised. As neighbours of the Bridges, and with marginally better land, would they not have farmed in a similar manner? It is true that they did not appear to have as much capital available, but they had more assistance from the Petres owing to the Catholic interest. Perhaps the last Michael Mason to farm Crondon had too many other interests to absorb him.

The interim tenants of Crondon Park in the late nineteenth century seem to be classic casualties of the depression, with too little capital to work the land.

Thomas Osborne was probably the exception, having been the executor to the estate of the previous tenant before taking on the farm in his own name. It almost looks as if it was done as a favour to the Petres the farm being kept on as a shoot. Osborne was to become M.P for Brentwood by 1896, and also a president of The Essex Agricultural Society.⁴

Wilson of Fristling Hall was more of a businessman than a farmer, and prospered later on with a more speculative approach to buying up farms. He was reputed to have a very tight control of expenditure, and never really integrated with the farming community of the district.

There can be no firm conclusions about any one small district.

National economic trends must be reflected, but the reasons for variations from district to district come down in the end to weather and economic conditions together with the human element.

Which brings me back to the statement made by Richard Jefferies quoted at the beginning of this study..

References

Conclusion

1. F.Coverdale (agent to Lord Petre) Report to Royal Commission 1893 E.R.O. D/DP F17
2. Mr. A.J.Smith of Fristling Hall - his father farmed neighbouring farm of Imphey Hall.
3. Mrs. W. Orr, grand-daughter of Robert Craig

A. PRICES OF WHEAT, 1646-1926.¹

(i) STATEMENT OF THE ANNUAL AVERAGE PRICE OF WHEAT PER IMPERIAL QUARTER AT ETON, FROM THE YEAR 1646 TO 1770.

Years.	Average Prices.		Years.	Average Prices.		Years.	Average Prices.	
	s.	d.		s.	d.		s.	d.
1646 -	44	0	1688 -	42	1	1730 -	33	5
1647 -	67	5	1689 -	27	6	1731 -	30	0
1648 -	77	10	1690 -	31	8	1732 -	24	4
1649 -	73	3	1691 -	31	1	1733 -	25	11
1650 -	70	2	1692 -	42	8	1734 -	35	6
1651 -	67	2	1693 -	61	11	1735 -	39	4
1652 -	45	4	1694 -	58	7	1736 -	36	11
1653 -	32	5	1695 -	48	6	1737 -	34	9
1654 -	23	9	1696 -	65	0	1738 -	32	5
1655 -	30	6	1697 -	55	0	1739 -	35	2
1656 -	39	4	1698 -	62	7	1740 -	46	5
1657 -	42	8	1699 -	58	7	1741 -	42	8
1658 -	59	6	1700 -	36	7	1742 -	31	1
1659 -	60	6	1701 -	34	5	1743 -	22	9
1660 -	51	8	1702 -	26	11	1744 -	22	9
1661 -	64	1	1703 -	33	0	1745 -	25	2
1662 -	67	9	1704 -	42	7	1746 -	35	9
1663 -	52	3	1705 -	27	6	1747 -	31	10
1664 -	37	1	1706 -	23	9	1748 -	33	10
1665 -	45	2	1707 -	26	1	1749 -	33	10
1666 -	33	0	1708 -	37	11	1750 -	29	8
1667 -	33	0	1709 -	71	11	1751 -	35	2
1668 -	36	7	1710 -	71	6	1752 -	38	3
1669 -	40	7	1711 -	49	6	1753 -	40	10
1670 -	38	1	1712 -	42	5	1754 -	31	8
1671 -	38	6	1713 -	46	9	1755 -	31	0
1672 -	37	6	1714 -	46	1	1756 -	41	4
1673 -	42	8	1715 -	39	4	1757 -	55	0
1674 -	62	10	1716 -	44	0	1758 -	45	9
1675 -	59	2	1717 -	41	10	1759 -	36	4
1676 -	34	9	1718 -	35	6	1760 -	33	5
1677 -	38	6	1719 -	32	0	1761 -	27	7
1678 -	54	0	1720 -	33	10	1762 -	35	9
1679 -	55	0	1721 -	34	4	1763 -	37	2
1680 -	41	3	1722 -	33	0	1764 -	42	8
1681 -	42	8	1723 -	31	9	1765 -	49	6
1682 -	40	3	1724 -	33	10	1766 -	44	5
1683 -	36	7	1725 -	44	5	1767 -	59	1
1684 -	40	3	1726 -	42	1	1768 -	55	5
1685 -	42	8	1727 -	38	6	1769 -	41	10
1686 -	31	1	1728 -	49	11	1770 -	44	10
1687 -	23	0	1729 -	42	10			

¹ The figures for 1646-1770 are taken from *Returns Relating to the Importation and Exportation of Corn, etc.*; Parliamentary Paper 177 (1843), p. 17. Those for 1771-1910 are taken from *Agricultural Statistics*, 1910, vol. xlv. pt. 3 [Cd. 5786, pp. 232-35]. Those for 1911-26 are taken from *Agricultural Statistics* for the years in question.

PRICES OF WHEAT, 1771-1935

STATEMENT OF THE ANNUAL AVERAGE PRICE OF BRITISH WHEAT PER SERIAL QUARTER IN ENGLAND AND WALES, FROM 1771 TO 1935.

£s.	Average Prices.	Years.	Average Prices.	Years.	Average Prices.
	<i>s. d.</i>		<i>s. d.</i>		<i>s. d.</i>
-	48 7	1826 .	58 8	1881 .	45 4
-	52 3	1827 .	58 6	1882 .	45 1
-	52 7	1828 .	60 5	1883 .	41 7
-	54 3	1829 .	66 3	1884 .	35 8
-	49 10	1830 .	64 3	1885 .	32 10
-	39 4	1831 .	66 4	1886 .	31 0
-	46 11	1832 .	58 8	1887 .	32 6
-	43 3	1833 .	52 11	1888 .	31 10
-	34 8	1834 .	46 2	1889 .	29 9
-	36 9	1835 .	39 4	1890 .	31 11
-	46 0	1836 .	48 6	1891 .	37 0
-	49 3	1837 .	55 10	1892 .	30 3
-	54 3	1838 .	64 7	1893 .	26 4
-	50 4	1839 .	70 8	1894 .	22 10
-	43 1	1840 .	66 4	1895 .	23 1
-	40 0	1841 .	64 4	1896 .	26 2
-	42 5	1842 .	57 3	1897 .	30 2
-	46 4	1843 .	50 1	1898 .	34 0
-	52 9	1844 .	51 3	1899 .	25 8
-	54 9	1845 .	50 10	1900 .	26 11
-	48 7	1846 .	54 8	1901 .	26 9
-	43 0	1847 .	69 9	1902 .	28 1
-	49 3	1848 .	50 6	1903 .	26 9
-	52 3	1849 .	44 3	1904 .	28 4
-	75 2	1850 .	40 3	1905 .	29 8
-	78 7	1851 .	38 6	1906 .	28 3
-	53 9	1852 .	40 9	1907 .	30 7
-	51 10	1853 .	52 3	1908 .	32 0
-	69 0	1854 .	72 5	1909 .	36 11
-	113 10	1855 .	74 8	1910 .	31 8
-	119 6	1856 .	69 2	1911 .	31 8
-	69 10	1857 .	56 4	1912 .	34 9
-	58 10	1858 .	44 2	1913 .	31 8
-	62 3	1859 .	43 9	1914 .	34 11
-	89 9	1860 .	53 3	1915 .	52 10
-	79 1	1861 .	55 4	1916 .	58 5
-	75 4	1862 .	55 5	1917 .	75 9
-	81 4	1863 .	44 9	1918 .	72 10
-	97 4	1864 .	40 2	1919 .	72 11
-	106 5	1865 .	41 10	1920 .	80 10
-	95 3	1866 .	49 11	1921 .	71 6
-	126 6	1867 .	64 5	1922 .	47 10
-	109 9	1868 .	63 9	¹ 1923 .	42 2
-	74 4	1869 .	48 2	¹ 1924 .	49 3
-	65 7	1870 .	46 11	¹ 1925 .	52 2
-	78 6	1871 .	56 8	¹ 1926 .	53 3
-	96 11	1872 .	57 0	¹ 1927 .	49 3
-	86 3	1873 .	58 8	¹ 1928 .	42 10
-	74 6	1874 .	55 9	¹ 1929 .	42 2
-	67 10	1875 .	45 2	¹ 1930 .	34 3
-	56 1	1876 .	46 2	¹ 1931 .	24 8
-	44 7	1877 .	56 9	¹ 1932 .	25 4
-	53 4	1878 .	46 5	¹ 1933 .	22 10
-	63 11	1879 .	43 10	¹ 1934 .	20 9
-	68 6	1880 .	44 4	¹ 1935 .	22 2

¹ Converted from the ascertained price per cwt.

EXTRACT FROM THORNDON ESTATE ACCOUNTS E.R.O. D/DP A381 FROM CRONDON HALL AND FRISTLING HALL a/c

Abstract of cash accounts from 6th. September 1884 to 29th. September 1885.

Receipts

	£	s	d
To value of livestock sold	1042	2	6
Farm produce sold	19	6	6
Poultry and eggs sold	61	10	4

To balance due to Messrs, Sparrow,
Tuffnell and Co. £115 . 8s. 10.

£2282 . 8s. 2d

Expenditure

	£	s	d
By general farm labour	788	10	7
tradesmen's bills	126	15	11
Corn, seeds, cake etc.	423	17	1
Livestock bought	544	17	0
Rates, taxes	123	15	5
Threshing - chaffcutting	87	3	10
coals purchased	13	19	0
Manures	61	16	6
chalk	10	0	0
miscellaneous	1	12	10
Mr. Marriage on account-salary	100	0	0

Entered on summary folio 2

£2282 . 8s . 2d